

Alternative Teacher Certification Programs

A solid blend of theory and practice, an effective training system, and continuing support for new teachers are essential elements of teacher preparation, whether it is provided by a university, a district, or a partnership of the two.

Since the mid-1980s, 21 states have embraced the notion of alternative certification. Programs that place the responsibility for training novice teachers largely in the hands of the districts that employ them are not new. Since 1967, for example, California has allowed aspiring teachers to obtain their credentials in an internship program in which universities and districts collaborate. In addition, 46 states allow some sort of emergency certification, 30 with renewal requirements for university coursework, often leading toward full certification (Mastain 1988).

What is new about many recent forms of alternative certification is the potential role, or, more correctly, the absence of a role for institutions of higher education in the professional preparation portion (foundations, pedagogy, and practicum) of teacher education. In some states (e.g., New Jersey and California) the participation of universities is now optional.

The Growth of Alternative Programs

One reason for the growth of alternative certification is disillusionment with traditional teacher preparation programs. Complaints about these programs emphasize their inability to

attract the best and brightest students as well as fundamental problems with their structure (e.g., insufficient liberal arts courses). The New Jersey Department of Education, for instance, lists "dissatisfaction with the graduates of existing programs" as a primary reason for adopting alternative certification (Rorro 1987).

Joyce and Clift (1984) argue persuasively that university teacher education has not come close to meeting its

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potential. They contend that the strengths of the university system lie in the production of knowledge, the development of sound theoretical instruction, and the use of research on teaching to create powerful training programs. Instead of doing this, they conclude, most teacher preparation institutions have succumbed to the "practicality ethic." Applications have replaced theory. Easily achieved and measured skills have supplanted knowledge of more complex instructional strategies and problem-solving processes. Further, the novice teacher is virtually abandoned during the years of induction even though most teacher educators agree on the importance of a support system for beginning teachers.

In addition to dissatisfaction with university programs, state officials give other reasons for adopting alternative certification programs. Some states are trying to meet shortages in critical needs areas; others want to expand the pool of potential teachers with arts and sciences majors, for example. Still others want to offer an avenue for persons who decide midway through their careers that they want to teach but cannot enter a university program for financial reasons. Figure 1 compares alternative certification

programs in 21 states; the fourth column lists the target groups for the programs.

Most programs have been introduced as parts of larger state legislative reform measures. For example, in New Jersey, at the same time the alternative credential program was created, legislation was passed to preclude the issuance of substandard certificates (emergency credentials). In addition, new standards for traditional programs were instituted, the starting salary for teachers was increased, and assignment of teachers out of their subject field was prohibited. Officials in New Jersey had concluded that these changes were necessary because

of a perception of mediocrity among the teaching work force, supported by the evidence of low student SAT scores and the high percentage of teachers hired on substandard credentials (Rorro 1987).

California's Teacher Trainee Program (later renamed the District Intern Program) was also a part of a major reform effort. Included in the legislation was an increase in starting salaries, creation of a mentor teacher program, lengthening of the school day, and elimination of lifelong teaching credentials. This California program, designed to attract persons into critical shortage areas, was primarily the creation of the state's largest dis-

trict, Los Angeles. (For a more complete description of the California program, see Oliver and McKibbin 1985.) Although the program was open to all districts in the state, only 20 of the more than 1,000 districts participated in the first three years of the program. Ninety-six percent of all participants were in Los Angeles Unified School District. In the first three years of the program, participants taught in the areas of mathematics, biological and physical science, and English. The total number of beginning teachers hired through District Intern Programs is small (less than 1 percent of the state's total beginning teachers hired in 1986), but in Los Angeles 23 percent of

State	Degree Requirements	Responsible Party(ies)	Teachers Eligible	Testing Requirement	Training Programs	Practicum
Alabama	B.A.	College	Majors other than education	Yes	39 semester hours	300 hours student teaching
Arkansas	B.A.	College	All	State certification	College program	Internship
Arizona	B.A.	College	Majors other than education	Basic skills	College program	Internship
California	B.A.	District	Shortage areas	Basic skills/NTE	288 clock hours in largest district	Internship
Connecticut (planned)	•	•	•	•	•	•
Delaware	B.A.	•	Academic shortage areas	Preprofessional skills	Special institutes	Internship
Florida	B.A.	District	Secondary	Performance	90 hours + 6 semester units	Internship
Georgia	B.A.	District	Critical need	State certification and performance	250 clock hours	
Kentucky	B.A.	•	Shortage areas	State certification	Yes	Yes
Louisiana	B.A.	College/district	Secondary	State certification	Joint development	Internship
Maryland	B.A.	•	All	State certification	•	Internship
Massachusetts (planned)	•	•	•	•	•	•
Mississippi	B.A.	•	All	NTE	12 semester hours/3 years	•
New Jersey	B.A.	District	All	State certification	200 clock hours	Internship
New Mexico	B.A.	College business district	•	State certification	Summer program	•
North Carolina	B.A.	College/district	Shortage areas	State certification	Joint program	Internship
Oklahoma	B.A.	District/college	Shortage areas	State certification	Enrolled in professional education	
South Carolina	B.A.	District/college	Shortage areas	NTE	2-week program	•
Texas	B.A.	College	Shortage areas	Basic skills	1-year program	Internship
Virginia	B.A.	College/district	Secondary	State certification	Demonstration of competency or coursework	Yes
West Virginia	B.A.	College	Shortage mid-career, retired	State certification	University program and demonstration of competency	

Sources: *Chronicle of Higher Education* (1988) and Cornett (1988).

• Indicates data were not available to the author.

Fig. 1. Alternative Certification Programs

the new teachers of secondary English, mathematics, and science had been district interns.

Nature of the Programs

All alternative certification programs in my survey required that candidates have a baccalaureate degree, pass certification tests, and participate in a training program and a field practicum. In most cases, the entry requirements were equal to or greater than the requirements for entry into university teacher education. For example, in California, state law requires candidates in regular teacher education programs to complete a subject matter major *or* to pass the appropriate subject matter examination. But, in the case of the District Intern Program, a candidate must hold a major or minor in the subject area *and* pass the subject matter test.

The training programs range from a rather short orientation or a few courses at a college to extensive offerings that parallel university programs. In some states, such as California, the training design was determined by the local agency rather than through a state-approved program, resulting in great variance in program length and quality. In Los Angeles, the program included 288 hours of activities over a

two-year period. By comparison, the professional development plan of most participating rural districts consisted of occasional meetings with the mentor teacher and participation in district-sponsored staff development. (Fig. 2 compares the components of programs in California, Georgia, New Jersey, and Texas.)

Most states in the survey had some provision for ongoing supervision and/or support from a person like a mentor teacher. In California the interns reported that sources of formal and informal assistance were readily available. In addition to finding the support system helpful in learning to teach, the interns said they did not feel the isolation commonly reported by beginning teachers.

Nearly all alternative programs require evaluation of the candidates. Some, such as Georgia's program, require performance evaluation, while others vary greatly in the thoroughness of the procedures. In California, where most districts used a procedure better suited to the evaluation of tenured teachers, the evaluation process was the weakest part of the program. Many interns reported that they did not understand the evaluation criteria and did not receive specific suggestions after their evaluation.

Relative Strengths and Weaknesses

There are many ways to assess the success of an alternative certification program; for example, whether it reached its stated goals, what graduates say about it, or how the program compares with others on certain criteria.

In the goal areas of meeting critical shortage needs and attracting highly qualified persons into teaching, especially those who would not ordinarily be eligible or interested, New Jersey reports a much higher degree of success than most states. In 1986, 17 percent of that state's new teachers entered the profession through alternative certification, and the new teachers possessed the attributes the state was looking for (Rorro 1987). California reports modest success; shortages in certain areas such as mathematics and physical science continue. Although many of the California interns have met the goal of having academic talent, the number who entered the program was less than one-third of the figure originally projected. Either the candidates did not meet the entry requirements (typically, a passing grade on the subject examination), or the supply of candidates was not available even after expanding the entry pool (e.g., as in mathematics).

State	Length of Program	University Collaboration Required	Recommended or Required Topics of Training	Support System	Evaluation Process
California	2 years	No	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching and learning processes, classroom management, behavior control, student diagnosis 2. Curriculum development, instructional techniques 3. Planning the classroom environment 4. Working with parents 5. Language development 6. Multicultural education 	Mentor teacher	Site-administered using same system used for all teachers
Georgia	1 year	No	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum and methods 2. Exceptional children and youth 3. Human growth and development 4. Classroom management 	Support team	State performance assessment system
New Jersey	1 year	No	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum and evaluation 2. Student learning and development 3. The classroom and the school 	Support team, mentor, and principal	At 10, 20, and 30 weeks by district or regionally
Texas	1 year	Yes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal and ethical aspects 2. Instructional strategies 3. Planning, organization, and evaluation 4. Language acquisition 5. Child neglect and abuse 	Experienced teacher	Texas teacher appraisal system

Fig. 2. Components of Alternative Certification Programs in Four States

Another measure of success is a district's ability to retain those interns who have demonstrated their ability to teach. In Los Angeles, the attrition rate of interns compares favorably to that of other beginning teachers. The District Intern Program's annual dropout rate was approximately 10 percent per year, compared to a rate of more than 20 percent for other beginning teachers during the same period. Furthermore, 91 percent of the interns who graduated from the program elected to return to that district the next year.

In a two-year study of the overall effectiveness of the alternative program, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing compared the classroom performance of the second-year district interns to that of other second-year beginning teachers and second-year emergency permit teachers. Through observations of their teaching performances, the three groups were evaluated on six criteria of classroom effectiveness. The study found that, on each criterion and overall, the interns as a group were performing at least as well as the other beginning and emergency teacher groups.

The California program has become an excellent recruiting device for participating districts. The program has also enabled the district to experiment with different training mechanisms, thereby improving the entire training program, especially the training offered to emergency permit holders. Participation in the training of novices has energized the entire staff, and many veteran teachers report that the program has caused them to examine their own practices in ways they had never done. In addition, in Los Angeles, the program gave purpose to the fledgling mentor program at a time when the mentor function had not been fully defined.

Ironically, many alternative certification programs suffer from the same weaknesses attributed to traditional programs by Joyce and Clift (1984). In the larger programs, the training resembles the offerings in university certification programs. The alternatives are also steeped in the "practicality ethic" and seldom use powerful training systems in the delivery of instruction.

A critical issue is the availability of resources to support teachers in the alternative certification program in California. The district that employed most of the interns (Los Angeles) has an extensive professional development capability and made a major commitment of money and resources—an estimated \$1,300 per year on training each intern (Wright et al. 1987). However, most participating rural districts were unable to provide adequate training facilities and did not have the ability or the willingness to provide necessary resources. These districts usually employed only one intern each and did not offer much more than the typical staff development offerings to individual interns. In the judgment of the commission administering the program, the training and support systems, therefore, fell short of expectations in these districts. Simply having a critical need for a teacher in a specific subject, then, is not sufficient reason to establish an intern program.

A Variety of Avenues

Alternative programs can serve as laboratories for exploring new methods for the recruitment, selection, training, and support of teachers; but they are not likely to replace conventional routes to certification. These options offer promising avenues for addressing the specific needs of districts and for supplementing the supply of teachers. New Jersey, for example, reports that as many as 10 percent of beginning teachers enter through alternative programs, although California's district interns are less than 1 percent of the state's total of new teachers. In 19 states with alternative programs, about 3 percent of beginning teachers enter through these routes (Cornett 1988).

Also, alternative certification programs can quite acceptably draw on the wisdom of practice as well as provide support to beginning teachers. In states where participants' performances have been evaluated, such as California, interns have performed at least as well as traditionally trained candidates. Further, these programs have been able to retain new teachers at a higher rate than usual.

If teacher preparation is destined to be dominated by a practicality ethic, school districts are in a better position

to offer pragmatic, hands-on training for novices. But universities are in the business of knowledge production; they have the facilities and the expertise to weave theory, modeling, and practice into a coherent package. School districts and universities can choose another option: to become full partners in teacher education, as, for example, Texas has chosen to do. If we really believe that teaching is an extraordinarily important enterprise, we need the contributions of both in a coordinated effort.

Whether the responsible party is a district, a university, or a combination of the two, any alternative program must be based on sound theoretical constructs blended with the wisdom of practice, have a solid training system, and provide an ongoing support network for new teachers. □

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