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ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED TEACHERS: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO
THEIR MOTIVATIONS, APPROACHES TO LEARNING, AND COMMITMENT
TO TEACHING

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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By

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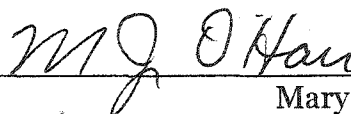DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES
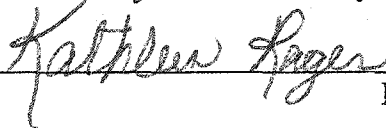

BY

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*The deeper we search, the more we find there is to know and, as
long as human life exists, I believe that it will always be so.*
—Albert Einstein

If the process of obtaining a doctorate taught me anything, it taught me that there is so much more to learn. More than anything else in my educational career, this process taught me *how* to learn, *how* to question, and *how* to seek understanding. This was no solitude endeavor; there were many people who traveled this journey with me.

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I extend special thanks to the 18 alternatively certified teachers who gave of their time and energy to share their stories in order to increase our understanding of their unique gifts, experiences, and needs. Without their willingness, this study would not have been possible.

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Abstract

Alternative teacher certification has evolved over the last twenty years as a response to real and perceived shortages of qualified teachers. The reduction of teacher certification requirements has been viewed by many as a solution to teacher shortage problems as well as a way to improve the quality of the teaching force by recruiting highly-skilled people from the private sector who have developed real-world experience with subject matter. Rather than arguing the merit of alternative certification, this study pursued an understanding of successful alternatively certified teachers in order to inform policy and practice.

In this study, 18 alternatively certified teachers, identified by their principals as successful, were interviewed using a qualitative approach. Although this study reflects only a small sample of alternatively certified teachers in the state of Oklahoma, this study has addressed the questions of what were the common motivations of alternatively certified teachers, what were their approaches to learning how to teach, how were their professional identities developed, what kept them committed to the teaching profession, and to what do they attribute their perseverance and success. The study demonstrated that these alternatively certified teachers were searching for a career in which they could make a difference. They approached learning in a variety of ways but learned mostly from their interactions with colleagues through mentoring and professional development and through their classroom experience. Their professional identity developed over time but was related to their sense of efficacy in the classroom and affirmation from their peers. Many of the factors that kept

them committed to teaching were the same factors that drew them to teaching in the first place—a sense of fulfillment and commitment to students. The major factor contributing to their success and perseverance was school climate, specifically collegiality and administrator support. This study also explored and challenged policy makers' and educators' prevailing assumptions regarding alternative certification.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

In the last two decades, public education has endured the slings and arrows of an angry and critical public. *A Nation at Risk*, published in 1983, alleged a crisis in our nation's educational system (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Its dire, yet unsubstantiated warnings, were followed by several years of criticism by our nation's political and business leaders as Berliner and Biddle (1995) report in their book, *The Manufactured Crisis*. Most recently, *No Child Left Behind* ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2001) was federally mandated in 2001 causing state departments of education to scurry into action to meet a lengthy list of new requirements. Although the court of public opinion has placed the blame for failing public education on many factors, teacher quality has been its most recent target. The *No Child Left Behind* federal legislation has specifically targeted "teacher quality" as an unachieved goal which must be remedied by state departments of education, colleges of education, and local school districts.

Even as nationwide headlines are alleging that teacher quality is a current issue in our schools, new routes to teacher certification have been created (Associated Press, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Jachman, 2002). Throughout the last twenty years, many states have developed "alternative teacher certification" routes. Varying from state to state, legislation has been adopted that allows professionals to enter the teaching profession without completing a traditional teacher preparation program. Over the past one hundred

years, teachers have entered the teaching profession through a certification process which was largely dependent on passing courses in pedagogy and specified content areas in colleges of education (Feistritzer, 1999; Ravitch, 2003; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Beginning in the early 1980's another route for entering the teaching field—what is now known as alternative certification—became possible in many states. "Alternative" refers to a substitute for the traditional bachelor's program in teacher preparation which had been the required route for entry into the profession. Between 1983 and 2002 the number of states with alternative certification programs has increased from 8 to 45 (Feistritzer, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Many states report teacher shortages, especially in the areas of math, science, foreign language and special education. These shortages typically occur in high-poverty areas, areas with rapidly increasing enrollment, and in the recruitment of teachers of color (Hare & Heap, 2001; Jachman, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). As issues of teacher shortages and teacher quality have surfaced over the last ten to fifteen years, nationwide implementation of alternative certification has increased.

In response to the need for highly qualified teachers across the nation, education leaders and policy makers are concerned about both teacher quality and teacher shortages. Teacher shortages in urban areas and in the content areas of math and science are driving changes in certification standards. Although alternative certification is intended as a solution to teacher shortages, recent research indicates a high attrition rate for those who enter the field through alternative certification (Hare & Heap, 2001; Legler, 2002; Shen, 1997; Watson, 2002). At a time when the recruitment and retention of teachers is a high

priority, policy makers and education leaders are also concerned about the level of teachers' content knowledge. By bringing professionals with content expertise and real-world work experience into the teaching field, some also see alternative certification as a solution to the issue of teacher quality (Legler, 2002).

As a result of public concern, as well as political agendas, new federal legislation was signed into law in January of 2002. The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), also known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, consists of five major goals; one of them being a goal to improve teacher quality in the United States. Within this goal and its ensuing regulations, states are required to adopt alternative certification routes if there are none currently in existence ("No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," 2001). Teacher shortages in some content areas, as well as in some geographical areas, have also led to increasing numbers of teachers being alternatively certified (Hare & Heap, 2001). By all indications this trend will continue, which necessitates further research to understand ways in which education leaders can ensure that the alternatively certified teacher candidates with the greatest potential for success are hired for our nation's classrooms.

Although there is great debate about the merits of alternative certification (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; Shen, 1997), there is no doubt there are effective teachers in our nation's schools who would not be there if it were not for alternative routes and licensure programs. Estimates suggest that between 1983 and 1999, more than 125,000 (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001) teachers and possibly as many as 175,000 (Feistritzer, 2002) were certified through alternative certification programs sponsored by state departments of education or school

districts. In addition to these alternative programs, there are at least 290 post-baccalaureate programs sponsored by colleges and universities that prepare teacher candidates who have already earned a bachelor's degree (Feistritzer, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

The policy making surrounding alternative certification is reminiscent of a game of tug of war with quality on one side and quantity on the other, or content versus pedagogy. Traditional teacher education programs, having been under fire and the subject of close scrutiny in recent years, have led to a public opinion that those educated outside of teacher education programs must be better qualified to teach, that is, they are more grounded in content knowledge. Even Secretary of Education, Robert Paige has been advocating the view that the future of teacher training should follow the example of alternative programs rather than traditional education-school methods (Shoichet, 2002). As he stated in a recent U.S. State Department of Education Report, "There is little evidence that education-school coursework leads to improved student achievement" (Shoichet, 2002). Legler (2002) summarized the heart of the issue well, "To be sure, the issue of alternative certification is a political one. Like many controversial issues, ideologies and interests drive much of the debate—and subsequently the research questions and the ways in which they are studied" (p. 6).

Alternative certification, in its current form, has been in existence in Oklahoma since 1990 (Greiner, 1990). The alternative certification process has endured many changes over the last fourteen years. Oklahoma's policy has evolved into a program that allows for individuals with bachelor's degrees to be placed in teaching positions after having passed a series of content specific tests.

A professional education test must be passed before the end of the third teaching year (Watson, 2001a). At most, the alternatively certified teacher will be required to take 18 hours of university coursework within the first three years of teaching. Based on prior work history or coursework, the eighteen-hour requirement may be reduced for some individuals.

Problem Statement

The focus of research and rhetoric on alternative teacher certification has been to argue its merit rather than studying this phenomenon itself in order to understand the people who choose this path to the teaching profession. Feistritzer (2002) of the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) states there is a paucity of research on alternative certification because there is no clear-cut definition, and there are hundreds of unique programs which are all alternatives to traditional teacher preparation programs. Because the literature focuses on the evaluation of alternative certification programs and on various teacher shortages, there is little research on the personal experience of the alternative certified teacher. Zeichner and Schulte (2001) report as a conclusion to their study of various alternative certification programs there must be more focused efforts to document the professional knowledge that alternatively certified teachers acquire and the conditions under which they do so and to use the findings to promote high quality learning for all students. Because teachers will continue to enter the profession through alternative routes, educational leaders must have a clear understanding of this group of teachers in order to make the best hiring decisions and to also support this non-traditional group of

teachers throughout their induction years. Educational leaders, most of whom were traditionally prepared, must understand the unique perspective of teacher candidates or staff teachers who have entered the profession through alternative routes. They arrive at their new teaching positions with different educational preparation, expectations, and needs than their traditionally prepared counterparts. This study investigated the qualities, characteristics, experiences, motivations, learning approaches and commitment to teaching of those teachers who have entered the field through alternative means and are successful according to their supervisors.

Because the research on alternative certification has been criticized for "lumping together alternative programs without distinguishing them from one another" (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001 p. 278), this study will focus on teachers who have been certified through Oklahoma's unique program of alternative certification. Of particular interest regarding Oklahoma's program, is the fact that state requirements for alternative certification do not mandate extensive or prescribed coursework in pedagogy as many other states do. In addition, there are no internship or practice teaching requirements for Oklahoma candidates for alternative teacher certification. Compared to surrounding states, Oklahoma apparently has a "lenient" system—one that relies primarily on testing to ensure competence. Since the burden for learning how to teach is placed on the teacher candidate, this study is of the utmost importance because of what these successful teachers can tell educators about their learning approaches, which may help to support future teachers in their first years. As Shen (1997) so powerfully states, "Who should be certified to teach this nation's children is a very important

issue for the future of the teaching profession and ultimately for school quality and student learning" (p. 282).

Statement of Purpose

This study is based on the premise that alternative certification is a phenomenon of the current educational system and it presents to the educational process advantages and disadvantages as reported in the literature. We know little beyond basic demographics about this group of alternatively certified teachers. Through studying successful alternatively certified teachers as identified by their supervisors, this study aims to uncover the characteristics, experiences, motivations, approaches to learning, and commitment to teaching of these successful teachers. It examines the learning characteristics and the personal and professional development of successful alternatively certified teachers. Their approach to their own learning is examined as well as their motivations to leave the career they prepared for in college to join the ranks of professional educators. Among the questions asked are: Who are these individuals? What are their motivations? What supports them as they enter a new career? What learning activities do they participate in to aid their transition to a new career?

Research Questions

1. What are the factors that motivate alternatively certified teachers to enter the teaching profession?

2. How do alternatively certified teachers obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching?

3. By what processes do alternatively certified teachers develop a professional identity?

4. To what factors do they attribute their success and perseverance?

5. What factors contribute to their continuation in the teaching profession?

This qualitative study investigates the process of becoming and working as an alternatively certified teacher. Through semi-structured interviews, the study explores the alternatively certified teachers' motivations, how they approach their learning to become teachers, the way in which they begin to identify themselves as teachers and their commitment to teaching. As educational leaders are interested in hiring teachers with a high potential for success, this study focuses on teachers who are described as successful by their supervisors. Through the study of successful teachers, one can determine the personal and professional qualities that may contribute to future teaching success as well as establish the professional climate factors that are associated with successful teaching situations for alternatively certified teachers.

Assumptions

This study is based on the assumption that there are successful, effective teachers who have entered the field of teaching through alternative means. Further, it is assumed that through an interviewing process, it is possible to achieve sufficient understanding of the experiences of the participants to gain an appreciation of their motivations, learning approaches and commitment when

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transitioning careers into the teaching profession. By having supervisors identify successful alternatively certified teachers, it is assumed they are basing their recommendations on the profession's accepted standards of quality teaching.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, alternative certification refers to programs or licensing routes which allow persons to enter the teaching profession without first completing a traditional university-based program which includes student teaching. This study does not intend to evaluate alternative certification programs or licensing routes but rather to describe and understand the effective teachers who have entered teaching through alternative routes and licensure and who have established themselves successfully in the field.

Limitations

The findings of this study are limited to the particular experiences of the participants interviewed. Because it is difficult to study teachers who have left the teaching force, this study examines the teachers who have remained in the teaching force for more than one year and are identified by their supervisors as successful teachers. Due to the myriad alternative certification programs in place throughout the United States, this study focuses on Oklahoma's program or alternatively certified teachers currently teaching in Oklahoma.

The researcher's experience as an educational leader is relevant to this study because initial reactions to alternative certification were negative, believing that teacher success was based on education and training in pedagogy. This

opinion was supported by a strong belief that a teacher cannot be successful on the basis of content knowledge alone. As the issue of alternative certification was studied, and the researcher became familiar with a number of teachers who entered the field through alternative routes, previous assumptions were questioned. Though continuing to have some concerns regarding alternative certification policy and its implementation, one cannot ignore the fact that the policy has allowed many highly qualified and gifted teachers into the profession who may not have otherwise had the opportunity to impact our youth so positively.

Significance of the Study

This study identifies the motivations, experiences and approaches to learning of successful alternatively certified teachers. Principals may benefit by gaining an understanding of the factors which contribute to an alternatively certified teacher's decision to continue in the teaching profession. In addition, this study offers assistance to staff developers and teacher educators regarding the professional training that would be of greatest benefit to support teachers entering the field through alternative routes. Prospective alternatively certified teachers may also benefit from these findings as they make decisions about changing careers. The findings of this study should aid policymakers in their decisions regarding teacher quality and most specifically certification issues. And most of all, this study should benefit the students who will learn from these teachers who have entered the field through non-traditional routes.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

The focus of research and rhetoric on alternative teacher certification has been to argue its merit rather than studying this phenomenon to understand the people who choose this path to the teaching profession. Zeichner and Schulte (2001) report as a conclusion to their study of various alternative certification programs that there must be more focused efforts to document the professional knowledge alternatively certified teachers acquire and the conditions under which they do so and to use the findings to promote high quality learning for all students. Because teachers will continue to enter the profession through alternative routes, educational leaders must have a clear understanding of this group of teachers in order to make the best hiring decisions and to also support this non-traditional group of teachers throughout their induction years. This study is based on the premise that alternative certification is a phenomenon of the current educational system, and it presents to the educational process advantages and disadvantages as reported in the literature. We know little beyond basic demographics about this group of alternatively certified teachers.

To situate this study of alternatively certified teachers, a review of the current literature regarding the history of alternative certification, the various programs and requirements which are in place, as well as the socio-political context of alternative teacher certification is explored. Because this study focuses on the individuals who have entered the teaching field through non-traditional

routes, an inventory of relevant adult learning and development theory will be examined, specifically highlighting the areas of transitions, professional identity and reflective practice.

The literature in the field of alternative teacher certification was first reviewed to gain an overview of its history and concepts. Next, the search was focused to identify the theory base which would contribute to the study's research questions: What are the reasons alternatively certified teachers enter the teaching profession? How do alternatively certified teachers obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching? How is the alternatively certified teacher's professional identity developed? To what do they attribute their success and perseverance? And, what would contribute to their continuation in the teaching profession?

A foundation for understanding the context of these questions is provided in this review of the current literature. The review was conducted using electronic database searches in ERIC FirstSearch, Psych INFO, Professional Development Collection, and Dissertation Abstracts as well as through electronic searches of state department of education websites and regional educational laboratories such as SEDL and McREL. Each section below summarizes what was found as it applies to the topic of this study.

Alternative Teacher Certification

A review of the literature on alternative teacher certification reveals much rhetoric, political and ideological bias, and very little objective, peer reviewed research. Zeichner and Schulte (2001) state:

Much of the literature on alternative teacher certification programs

consists of internal evaluation reports and papers presented at national

conferences where the research has not undergone peer review. The major

reviews of the research on alternative certification have usually included a

mixture of work that has been peer reviewed and work that has not. (p.

268)

Similarly, Feistritzer (2002) of the National Center for Education

Information (NCEI) states there is a paucity of research on alternative

certification because there is no clear-cut definition, and there are hundreds of

unique programs which are all alternatives to traditional teacher preparation

programs. Because the literature focuses on the evaluation of alternative

certification programs and on various teacher shortages, there is little research

on the alternative certified teacher as a motivated, perseverant, and future

seeking adult learner. This review of the literature will highlight the history of

and the socio-political context of alternative certification in the United States,

specifically in Oklahoma. Although there is little written about the teachers who

enter the field through alternative routes beyond basic demographics, the small

amount of research that *does* exist will be explored.

Definition of Alternative Certification

Alternative certification has many definitions. It is possibly easier to define

it by what it is not. It is not the result of attending a teacher preparation program

through a 4- or 5-year bachelor's degree. Alternative certification can be defined

as any route to teacher certification other than the traditional 4-year or 5-year

undergraduate teacher education program which usually includes a semester of

student teaching. (Feistritzer, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). The review of literature indicates a lack of clarity over any consistent or narrow definition of an alternative certification program (Feistritzer, 2002; Humphrey, Wechsler, Bosetti, Wayne, & Adelman, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Alternative certification programs seem to be uniquely defined by the 45 states having programs as well as by the various individual programs that are in existence. For the purpose of this discussion, alternative certification will also refer to those post-baccalaureate programs which are college or university-based programs with reduced standards.

History of Alternative Certification Nationally and in Oklahoma

Although the concept of alternative certification is not new, since it was common in the 19th century for school districts to certify their own teachers, it is certainly "new" today after nearly a century of state regulation in teacher licensure (Feistritzer, 2002; Ravitch, 2003; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). In the early 1900's small departments of pedagogy began to expand into undergraduate and graduate colleges of education, eventually resulting in teachers becoming certified solely on the basis of graduation from a teacher preparation program (Ravitch, 2003). Public education is a state and local responsibility in the United States with school districts having the responsibility for recruiting and hiring teachers (Feistritzer, 2002; Roth & Swail, 2000). The United States is unusual in that it is one of the few industrialized nations that does not require a national test for licensure (Roth & Swail, 2000). In traditional programs of teacher certification, the candidate applies to a college or university, takes the required courses, student teaches, passes tests, and satisfies other requirements of the

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state approved program in teacher preparation (Feistritzer, 2002). State approved teacher preparation programs vary enormously by state or institution (Feistritzer, 2002). Throughout the last hundred years of traditional teacher certification, teacher shortages have sometimes prompted states to implement "emergency certification" to bring individuals into the teaching field quickly (Feistritzer, 2002; Roth & Swail, 2000). In the 1980's education policymakers wanted to find an alternative to these emergency procedures (Roth & Swail, 2000).

As one of the first states to take action, New Jersey enacted legislation in 1984 to allow an alternate route to teacher certification. Their program was a response to teacher shortages and dissatisfaction with the emergency route which required teachers to enter the classroom with no training but with a requirement to complete a full teacher preparation program within a specified time period (Feistritzer, 2002). Approximately one-fifth of all new teachers in New Jersey are alternatively certified (Feistritzer, 2002). In 1985 Texas implemented their alternative certification program in the Houston Independent School District (Feistritzer, 2002). When it began, it only allowed for alternative certification in teacher shortage areas but that requirement was eliminated in 1989 (Feistritzer, 2002). There are now 34 separate alternative certification programs within the state of Texas (Feistritzer, 2002). California, another large state, has utilized alternative certification to cope with growth among their school-age population (Feistritzer, 2002). Most of the teachers alternatively certified in New Jersey, Texas, and California teach in urban areas or outlying rural areas where teacher shortages have been greatest (Feistritzer, 2002).

In 1983 there were only eight states that allowed any alternatives to college and university-based teacher education programs (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Nearly twenty years later, in 2002, 45 states reported having some type of alternative teacher certification program (Feistritzer, 2002). In addition, three more states had proposed programs or were considering alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2002). By using the definition for alternative as "whatever states define as alternative" only 7.5% of all teachers certified in the United States between 1984 and 1994 were alternatively certified (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

In a June 1986 visit to Oklahoma City, U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett said that public schools should "dramatically open up the ranks" of potential teachers by no longer requiring education degrees (Killackey, 1986). Bennett believed that the only requirements for teaching should be a strong knowledge of the subject matter, good character and an ability to communicate with young people (Killackey, 1986). Legislation allowing alternative teacher certification was signed in 1990, and the first alternatively certified teachers began their Oklahoma teaching careers in 1991 ("Meteorologist, lawyer qualify for teacher plan," 1991). In 1994, three years into the implementation of alternative teacher certification, Ramona Paul, assistant state superintendent for professional services, indicated that the program had successfully addressed some of the teacher shortages in the state (Killackey, 1994). She also stated that local superintendents were pleased with the program, and the state was having to rely less on temporary "emergency" certificates to address teacher shortages (Killackey, 1994). The new program still had its opponents as The Daily Oklahoman reported, "A longtime Oklahoma City high school teacher said a state

alternative certificate is routinely ridiculed as a 'gift certificate' by veteran educators" (Killackey, 1994).

In July 1997, the Oklahoma Legislature enacted the "Oklahoma Teacher Preparation Act" or House Bill 1549, calling for the development, implementation and administration of a new competency-based teacher preparation system (Garrett, 2000; Oklahoma, 1999; Ruhman, 1998). House Bill 1549 also created the Teacher Competency Review Panel which was to be an independent panel that would make recommendations for the licensure and certification of those who had not graduated from an approved teacher education program. Those certified under this provision had to hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution of higher education, have successfully completed the required competency examination, and have been assessed by and received a favorable recommendation from the Teacher Competency Review Panel (Garrett, 2000). One of the major changes in teacher certification was in the type of examination which teacher candidates were required to pass. New legislation was passed requiring a competency exam to replace the curriculum exam which had been required prior to the change. The change was to take place no later than October 1997 (Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, 2002). It was not until September 1999 that the competency-based system of teacher preparation became fully operational with the implementation of the competency-based teacher assessments (Garrett, 2000).

Current Social-Political Context of Alternative Certification

Alternative certification is one of the most controversial and confusing topics in teacher education over the last 20 years (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

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There is a great deal of conflict between alternative programs administered by states or individual school districts and alternative programs of universities and colleges which control pre-service teacher education (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). This conflict has resulted in frustration on both sides of the issue as Sindelar and Rosenberg (2000) lament:

> Extreme teacher shortages have spawned a plethora of alternative, backdoor, and emergency approaches to certification and licensure, often with the blessing (if not the instigation) of state departments of education. Forty states allow districts to hire teachers who have not met basic certification standards. At the same time, many of these same states have promulgated more rigorous standards for preservice preparation. (p.191)

Proponents of alternative certification believe that it will enhance the profession by bringing academically competent individuals into the teaching field (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). In addition, many believe it provides an avenue for more diversity, stronger content knowledge, and it will alleviate teacher shortages (Jachman, 2002).

Critics view alternative certification programs as undermining the attempts to professionalize teaching because they minimize the need for specialized professional knowledge, and they imply that a teacher must only have content knowledge and a brief internship in a school (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Some critics are concerned alternative certification lowers the bar and undermines the professionalization of teaching (Jachman, 2002). Opponents of alternative teacher certification also claim it creates a system in which the lower socio-economic students in urban areas are more likely taught by teachers who

are less qualified than those found in more affluent schools (Darling-Hammond, 2000a; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

The obvious political agenda that overlies alternative certification is supported by the following quote found on a U.S. Department of Education webpage authored by Diane Ravitch, Ph.D. (2003):

> We are talking about the kind of standards that will produce more effective teachers or about the barriers that are simply hoops and hurdles intended to screen people out of the profession who have not taken courses or degrees that have no relationship to being a good teacher. (p. 1)

As a result of public concern as well as political agendas, new federal legislation was signed into law in January of 2002. The reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), also known as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, consists of five major goals, one of them being a goal to improve teacher quality in the United States. "It reflects a commitment to improving teacher quality and backs up that commitment with significant new dollars" (Jachman, 2002 , p. 1). Within this goal and its ensuing regulations, states are required to adopt alternative certification routes, if there are none currently in existence (2001b). This legislation may offer a compromise by supporting alternative certification but holding all teachers to the same quality standards (Jachman, 2002). Teacher quality is clearly a priority of policy makers as demonstrated by recent legislation. However, there exists an interesting paradox between legislation and teacher quality rhetoric:

> The opposition between a movement away from standardized pathways to certification and a greater standardization of state licensure processes is

intriguing, potential proof that the quality of the teaching is far more

important than the method by which the individual became credentialed.

(Roth & Swail, 2000 p. 10)

An examination of alternative certification programs in light of new teacher

quality standards and recent legislation will reveal the inconsistencies.

Alternative Certification Programs

The National Center for Education Information (NCEI), which has been

gathering alternative certification data from state departments of education for

twenty years, has found there is an evolving consensus of the essential

characteristics of an alternative teacher certification program (Feistritzer, 2002).

There are two main reasons for the initiation of these programs. Many programs

have been developed to deal with real or projected teacher shortages (Shockley,

2001; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). They have also been the result of dissatisfaction

with traditional programs (Roth & Swail, 2000; Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2000;

Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Many programs have focused on recruiting teachers of

color, mid-career switchers, retired military personnel, para-educators, aerospace

and defense workers, and recent graduates in subject-area shortages such as

mathematics, science, special education, bilingual education (Feistritzer, 2002;

Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). There are three major types of alternative teacher

certification programs: state instituted, college and university programs, and

those run by individual school districts (Feistritzer, 2002). State-sponsored

programs of alternative certification began in the mid-1980s (Zeichner & Schulte,

2001). Colleges and universities have also begun to respond to the mid-career

professional who wants to pursue a career in teaching. NCEI data indicates that

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65% of institutions surveyed have at least one program for the preparation of teachers at the post-baccalaureate level (Feistritzer, 2002).

Effective alternative certification programs are designed to meet the demand for teachers in geographic areas and subject areas where the demand is greatest (Shockley, 2001). These programs are also designed to meet the needs of their participants, considering their past attainment of a bachelor's degree and experience in other occupations (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001). The speed with which a candidate goes through an alternative certification program should be a function of selecting well-qualified candidates with excellent educational and work histories and not a function of a less than adequate program (Shockley, 2001). According to NCEI data (Feistritzer, 2002), most states have a program which is designed to recruit, prepare, and license talented individuals with bachelor's degrees. The candidates for these programs traverse a rigorous screening process which may include tests, interviews, and demonstration of content mastery (Feistritzer, 2002). In addition, they find the best programs are field-based and include relevant coursework before and while teaching (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001). Mentoring from a trained teacher and high performance standards are also evident in quality alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001).

A thorough review of alternative certification programs would not be complete without a summary of the Troops to Teachers and Teach for America programs. Troops to Teachers is a program in which individuals transition from their military careers to the teaching profession (Feistritzer, Hill, & Willett, 1998; Jachman, 2002). The reauthorization of ESEA provides additional funding for

this program (Jachman, 2002; *A quality teacher in every classroom: Improving teacher quality and enhancing the profession*, 2002; 2001b). Troops to Teachers began in 1994 and by 1998 had ushered more than 3,000 former service members into the teaching field. The legislation which enacted the Troops to Teachers program was a result of military downsizing (Feistritzer et al., 1998). Demographics of Troops to Teachers participants will be reviewed in the section "Description of Alternatively Certified Teachers". Troops to Teachers is described in some literature as a recruiting program rather than an actual alternative certification program (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001) because only half of the Troops to Teachers participants have actually entered the teaching field through an alternative route. The other half have completed a traditional college-based program (Feistritzer et al., 1998).

Teach for America is a program that recruits and selects recent college graduates as members for a national corps who commit to teach in the public schools (*A quality teacher in every classroom: Improving teacher quality and enhancing the profession*, 2002). It is a public/private partnership started in 1990 which provides pre-service and in-service training during the participants' time of service. There is some federal assistance through AmeriCorps by which all teachers in the program are eligible for an AmeriCorps education award of up to $4,000 available over a seven-year period to pay for higher education or student loans (*A quality teacher in every classroom: Improving teacher quality and enhancing the profession*, 2002).

Oklahoma does not have a program per se as other states have but rather a system of application, testing, and approval for certification. Oklahoma's policy

has evolved into a process which allows for individuals with bachelor's degrees to be placed in teaching positions after having passed a series of content specific tests. A pedagogy test must be passed before the end of the third teaching year (*Certification Guide for School Staff Assignments*, July 2002; Watson, 2001a).

Requirements for Alternative Certification

An interesting development, as one looks at the last twenty years of literature on alternative certification, is the increasing variety of requirements for alternative certification. The beginnings of alternative certification in the mid-1980s typically consisted of an individual with a bachelor's degree passing a basic skills and/or a content area test and then receiving a condensed training program in how to teach (Descamps & Klingstedt, 1985). By 1999, 40 states had alternative certification programs (Legler, 2002; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001), and by 2002, there were 45 (Feistritzer, 2002). Although these teachers share the common label of "alternatively certified", their individual experiences with the alternative certification process may be entirely different.

When surveying the alternative certification regulations in each state, it is evident that there is little consistency from one state to the next. In Zeichner and Schulte's (2001) search for peer-reviewed literature on alternative teacher certification, they found 21 studies describing 13 alternative certification programs which were run by state departments of education offered within colleges and universities and organized by urban school districts. The requirements of the 13 programs were similar in that they all required a bachelor's degree, and for secondary teachers they required a major in the subject taught. Most of the programs were one year in length (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

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Several of the programs required passing scores on basic skills exams while coursework requirements in instructional methods and child development ranged from 10 weeks to none. About half of the programs required continuing coursework throughout the school year. Some programs utilized school district staff in supervision, whereas others had university faculty and staff supervise new teachers. Zeichner and Schulte (2001) caution against claims stating alternative certification program content is much like that of traditional programs, differing only in delivery method. Some programs were found to be missing the academic rigor found in traditional programs such as requiring formal assignments and examinations. They found coursework focused on the immediate and practical, neglecting attention to educational theory (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). All the programs studied required a mentor. However, the implementation of mentoring programs seemed to be inconsistent, and there were examples cited that some mentors lacked training and some teachers did not know who their assigned mentors were (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

Having even fewer requirements than some of the programs studied by Zeichner and Schulte, Oklahoma's regulation states that an individual who possesses a bachelor's degree and passes a general knowledge test and a content area test in the area of his or her degree may be certified to teach (*Certification Guide for School Staff Assignments*, July 2002). The newly certified teacher has three years to obtain up to 18 hours of coursework and to pass a pedagogy test. Throughout these three years, this alternatively certified teacher may be teaching in an Oklahoma classroom with full responsibility. Like the programs cited in Zeichner and Schulte's (2001) study, Oklahoma requires one year of mentoring

for all new teachers—traditionally or alternatively certified (*Certification Guide for School Staff Assignments*, July 2002). Following full certification, the teacher may take a subject area or specialty test in any other area and upon passing will be certified to teach in this additional area (*Certification Guide for School Staff Assignments*, July 2002; 2002; Oklahoma, 1999; "Alternate Certification Program," 2001).

Description of Alternatively Certified Teachers

To gain an understanding of the people who are drawn to the alternative certification route, it is helpful to know more about their demographics. It is estimated that more than 125,000 teachers have been certified through alternative certification by the year 2000 (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). More people are turning to the teaching profession later in life, some after having had a successful career in another field (Feistritzer, 2002). A 1999 survey of college- and university-based teacher preparation programs indicated that 28% of prospective new teachers who completed teacher preparation in 1998 began their preparation to teach after they had received a bachelor's degree (Feistritzer, 2002). Only one study of the 21 reviewed by Zeichner and Schulte (2001) indicated that academic qualifications of alternatively certified teachers exceeded those of traditionally certified teachers. Scores on state content examinations and grade point averages were used to compare the two groups.

One of the goals of alternative certification is to recruit more teachers of color (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). The studies reviewed by Zeichner and Schulte (2001) indicate alternative certification programs have been able to recruit more teachers of color, particularly African American and Hispanic, than traditional

programs. The Troops to Teachers program reports 29% of their teachers are from a minority or ethnic group, compared with only ten percent of the general public school teaching force (Feistritzer et al., 1998). The National Center for Education Information data indicates:

> The use of alternate routes gives promise of increasing the representation of minorities in the nation's teaching force. Nationally, state education data show that nine percent of teachers and 26% of students are minorities. In New Jersey, where minorities comprise nine percent of the state's teachers and 33% of students, the state's use of an alternate route has been the biggest source of qualified, minority teachers. Since the program's inception, 20% of the teachers certified through the alternative route and hired by public and non-public schools in the state have been minority. (Feistritzer, 2002, p. 7)

Research has also determined the geographic statistics of alternatively certified teachers. The studies of Los Angeles and New Jersey programs indicate alternative certification program participants are more likely to have grown up in and attended schools in urban communities (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). One in four Troops to Teachers participants is teaching in an inner-city school and 39% of all TTT teachers report a willingness to do so (Feistritzer et al., 1998).

Several studies report the content areas in which most teachers become alternatively certified. Special education is one of the most widespread shortage areas. In a 2001 national study, Study of Special Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE) (*Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers, SPeNSE summary sheet*, 2001), it was determined 7% of special education teachers earned their

certification through an alternative route with teachers of students with emotional disturbance having the largest proportion at 12%. Eleven percent of Troops to Teachers participants were reported as teaching special education as opposed to only 8% of all teachers (Feistritzer et al., 1998).

In addition to the demographics detailed above, an additional study completed in 1997 (Shen) sheds some light on the demographics of alternatively certified teachers as compared to traditionally certified teachers. The data from this study, although important and relevant, is explained separately for a number of reasons. Shen's (1997) study is not included in Zeichner and Schulte's (2001) article of peer-reviewed research on alternative certification because Shen's study included all alternative certification routes and did not distinguish between those that are indistinguishable from traditional college and university programs. Data for the study was collected during the 1993-1994 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS93), a national survey of school teachers conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics in the 1993-1994 academic year. Feistritzer (2002) also warns any studies based on the SASS study are flawed because the questionnaire used in the study asked teachers to check the type of teaching certificate they held in their main teaching assignment field and in their other teaching assignment field. Teachers were given eight options and told to only pick one. Further complicating the matter is most states issue a regular or standard state certificate when a teacher completes an alternative certification program. The actual certificate does not distinguish between the alternative or traditional route to certification (Feistritzer, 2002). This is also the case in Oklahoma, making it

difficult for researchers and even State Department of Education staff to identify alternatively certified teachers through state certification records.

In Shen's (1997) study the following questions were asked: What percentage of the public teaching force was alternatively certified? Did traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers differ in demographics, work experience, academic qualification, career pattern, and what and where they taught? Teachers were compared on the following characteristics: gender, race and ethnicity, age, main activity the year before entering teaching, degree earned, subject specialization for bachelor's degree, what and where they taught, intention to become teachers if starting over again, and plans to remain in teaching. The relative weighted sample for the study was 13,602 traditionally certified teachers and 1,119 alternatively certified teachers. The sample design involved stratification, disproportionate sampling of certain strata, and clustered probability sampling. The results are generalizable to public school teachers who were certified within ten years of the study which would be 1984 to 1994 (Shen, 1997). Shen (1997) found little difference between traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers in their gender composition. Roughly three-quarters of each group were female. There were a higher percentage of non-white teachers in the alternatively certified group (20%) as opposed to the traditionally certified group (12%). Six and one half percent of alternatively certified teachers held degrees in math or science whereas 5.4% of the traditionally certified teachers held those degrees (Shen, 1997).

Additionally, another important demographic is the level at which alternatively certified teachers teach—elementary or secondary. Fifty-four

percent of traditionally certified teachers taught in elementary schools and 45.4% in secondary schools, whereas 47.9% of alternatively certified teachers were in elementary schools and 52.1% in secondary schools. A higher percentage of alternatively certified teachers (20.9%) than traditionally certified teachers (10.6%) worked in large central cities where teacher shortages were severe and teacher attrition rate high. A higher percentage of alternatively certified teachers (37.8%) than traditionally certified teachers (26.8%) worked in schools where 50% to 100% of the students were minority (Shen, 1997).

When teachers were asked if they went back to college would they become teachers again, there was no difference in the response of alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers. When asked how long they planned to remain in teaching, a higher percentage of alternatively certified teachers responded "undecided at this time" rather than "until retirement". Traditionally certified teachers were more likely to treat teaching as a lifelong career than alternatively certified teachers (Shen, 1997).

> Although AC policy attracted a higher percentage of people with experience in occupations other than teaching or education, 51% of AC teachers came directly from college and another 23.8% already held teaching or education-related positions. This not only questions the degree to which AC policy has materialized its promise to recruit experienced personnel from other occupations, but also raises the concern of whether some fresh college graduates took advantage of AC policy to circumvent the traditional teacher education program. (Shen, 1997 p. 281)

Troops to Teachers statistics conflict with Shen's finding, stating for the sample of TTT teachers surveyed, 67% of respondents reported they plan to remain in teaching as long as they are able or until retirement (Feistritzer et al., 1998).

In summary, more males and teachers of color are recruited by alternative programs. This would indicate alternative certification programs are successful in diversifying the teaching force. Conclusions regarding long-term commitment, quality, and academic preparedness appear to be uncertain, necessitating further research in this area. Nationwide research, utilizing a common definition for "alternative teacher certification" would be helpful in better describing the population of alternatively certified teachers in the United States.

Teacher Retention and Attrition

Because descriptive statistics on alternatively certified teachers reveal little about their commitment to the profession, additional studies of alternatively certified teachers have focused on two data points: the teacher's outlook at the end of the first year and the teachers' stated intention to remain in teaching over the long run (Shen, 1997; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Mathematics teachers in these studies indicated the least likelihood of remaining in the teaching profession (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Dr. C. Emily Feistritzer (2002), president of the National Center for Education Information in Washington, D.C., has concluded from NCEI data the reasons alternatively certified teachers give for leaving the profession in the first couple of years are due to the little support and professional development they receive. She states alternative certification

programs may err on the side of having teachers accept full responsibility for a classroom too early.

A study of teacher preparation programs in Texas (Harris, Camp, & Adkison, 2003) compared the effectiveness of three methods used there in addressing teacher shortage problems: alternative certification programs, Centers for Professional Development and Technology, and traditional certification programs. Identifying teachers who completed programs in 1995, researchers examined the teachers' employment records for the five-year-period following completion. "Results indicated that significant differences existed in initial employment and attrition records between the preparation programs, meaning that each program contributed in a unique way to exacerbating the shortage" (Harris et al., 2003 , p. 2). While a greater proportion of alternative certification program completers were employed in the first year, they left the profession at higher rates than the other completers. Results also indicate the teachers prepared through traditional certification were most likely to remain in the profession over time (Harris et al., 2003).

Contrary to Harris's findings in Texas, a study of North Carolina's alternative certification teachers indicates a higher retention rate among these teachers than their traditionally prepared counterparts (Klagholz, 2000). An important note of distinction is New Jersey's twenty-year history of alternative teacher certification. New Jersey was the first state to implement an alternative teacher certification program, beginning in 1984 (Klagholz, 2000). This is yet another example of the inconsistencies found in alternative certification research as definitions of programs vary from state to state.

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Summary of Alternative Certification Literature

Alternative certification programs are designed to attract individuals from various educational, occupational, and life experiences to become teachers whereby the teaching force is increased and becomes more diverse. Proponents of alternative certification claim that by reducing barriers to enter the teaching profession, alternative certification programs will diversify the pool of new teachers by bringing in more men, minorities, mature and experienced adults, and candidates with higher academic qualifications. Opponents of alternative certification assert alternative certification programs do not adequately prepare candidates for the demands of teaching and the programs serve to de-professionalize teaching. The current social-political context demands high standards to ensure quality teachers in our nation's schools and has also determined alternative certification programs are an effective way of addressing teacher quality as well as teacher shortages. There are a number of different alternative certification programs with varying requirements, and they are sponsored by state departments of education, colleges and universities, and individual school districts. Although alternative certification is increasing across the United States, there appears to be little consistency in the programs which are offered and little research to support definitive claims to measure their worth.

Adult Learning and Development

Adult learning theory will provide a foundation for understanding alternatively certified teachers' approaches to their learning as they enter a new profession. Adult development theory has had an enormous impact on the

conceptualization of adult learning (Caffarella & Clark, 1999). Theories which explain stages and phases of development are useful when attempting to understand individuals who are in a period of career transition such as the teachers interviewed in this study. Zemke and Zemke (1995) found learning was often associated with life-changing events, like the loss of a job.

Theories of adult development provide tools for understanding how adults develop, change, and grow, particularly offering insight for those interested in understanding how adults navigate their life experiences. Hudson (1999) describes three stages of adult development theory which have evolved in the last 60 years. In the first stage, adults were viewed as grown up and stable, and upon becoming adults, became consistent and responsible for the rest of their lives. The adult personality was shaped by the childhood experiences. Around 1950, the picture of adult life became one depicting periods of stability and crisis. Erikson, Kegan, Levinson, and Jung are some of the theorists who contributed to this view of adult development in which they viewed a "crisis" as a crossroads that could result in new growth (Hudson, 1999; Reeves, 1999). It was this line of thinking that contributed to the idea of the "midlife crisis" (Hudson, 1999; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Illustrating the linear nature of these theories of adult development is Carl Jung's (1933) comment on old age, "The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning (p. 109). In addition, Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development remains as one of the most influential in stage/phase theories (Reeves, 1999).

The third stage of evolving adult development theory is described by Hudson (1999) as "the current, popular view", one in which adult life is seen as a roller coaster with up and down times that are repeated throughout a cycle of continuity and change. Hudson (1999) states, "Today we view the adult years as a long period filled with positive life chapters and troublesome life transitions. As Henri Bergson wrote at the turn of the twentieth century, 'To exist is to change; to change is to mature; to mature is to create oneself endlessly'" (pp. 38-39). As theory on adult development has evolved, the adult life course is now viewed as cyclical and erratic rather than linear and predictable. The impact of social movements and historical events is acknowledged in the most current theories of adult development which explains the complexity of individuals' differences from a fixed plane of simple linear progression (Tennant & Pogson, 1995).

Kegan was one of the theorists who emphasized the importance of context in understanding the psychology of adults (Reeves, 1999). Further developing the idea of context were Neugarten and Baltes, identifying time as an important influence in adult development (Merriam, 1999). "Historical time" refers to long-term processes such as economic, political, and social events that directly impact the individuals that live through them (Merriam, 1999). Baltes (1987) refers to "history-graded influences" which are the large, evolutionary, biocultural contexts in which individuals develop. He describes two types of history-graded influences—those that represent long-term change, for instance, industrialization, and time or period-specific influences like war.

"Life time" refers to age-graded time which is related to chronological age. This refers most often to biological maturation and graded socialization events

(Merriam, 1999). These biological and environmental determinants are also referred to as "age-graded influences" (Baltes, 1987). It has been suggested by Neugarten and Neugarten that we may be moving into times that are age-irrelevant, when chronological age is not a helpful tool in understanding one's development (Merriam, 1999). "To know someone is forty years old, for example, tells us little else about that person—physically, socially, or psychologically" (Merriam, 1999).

Adult development is also shaped by "social time" which is described as calendar time being divided up into periods of the life cycle in which there are expected behaviors, events, rights, responsibilities (Merriam, 1999). Individuals grow up internalizing social norms—a socially structured timetable, anticipating the appropriate time to get married, have children, attain certain levels of education, and to choose a career (Merriam, 1999).

Baltes (1987) refers to "nonnormative influences" which are not experienced by all people and may be a result of biological or environmental factors. These are unique events like winning the lottery, being in a car accident, or losing a child, and they occur in some people's lives and do not depend on one's age or life stage (Merriam, 1999). These are referred to in some literature as "unanticipated" life events or transitions which can have as dominant effect on shaping a person's life as those normative events which are expected (Merriam, 1999).

The various conceptualizations of time as described by Merriam (1999) and others provide us with a new way of understanding change and development. These theories of time are useful in understanding individuals' behaviors,

attitudes, values, and meaning-making. In this study of alternatively certified teachers, the context of these individuals' experiences, decision-making, and work lives will be an important component in understanding their motivations for changing careers, learning new skills, and contemplating their futures as educators.

Transitions

Transitions are a relevant aspect of adult learning and development when discussing the alternatively certified teacher. Because the sample participants to be studied in this research are experiencing new careers, they are in a state of transition. Within the theoretical base of adult development, there is a significant body of literature discussing the concept of transitions in adulthood. "Transitions are the anticipated events, unanticipated events, and nonevents that alter adult lives" (Reeves, 1999 p. 23). In addition, Schlossberg (1984) adds "chronic hassles" to the list of transition types described by Reeves. Chronic hassles are continuous and pervasive such as concern with weight, health of a family member, or personality conflict with a coworker (Schlossberg, 1984). Schlossberg (1984) includes in her definition of transitions subtle changes to include the loss of career aspirations or nonevents such as not getting an expected promotion. This framework is useful in understanding the transitions that alternatively certified teachers experience in their career changes. Transitions are defined as such by the person experiencing it and his or her resulting perceptions of the change (Schlossberg, 1984). Whether good or bad, transitions provide individuals with the opportunity to learn and grow (Reeves, 1999; Schlossberg, 1984). It is possible to predict an individual's ability to cope with transitions by determining

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the resources for dealing with them that are available to the individual.

Transitions can be catalysts for adult learning and development (Bridges, 2002; Reeves, 1999; Schlossberg, 1984). Bridges (2002) describes three phases of transitions; ending, neutral zone, and new beginning. The beginning of a transition is actually the ending of something else which begins with a period of "letting go" (Bridges, 2002; Reeves, 1999). The neutral zone is the core part of the transition and is a period where old habits are no longer useful and new habits begin to take shape (Bridges, 2002; Reeves, 1999). The final phase of a transition as described by Bridges (2002) is the new beginning which is a time when new learning is most possible and when renewal begins. In the next section, a specific area of adult learning theory will be developed—that of "reflection-in-action".

Reflective Practice: Learning from Experience

As this study investigates the process in which alternatively certified teachers learn to teach, Donald Schön's work is one lens through which we may gain an understanding of "reflection-in-action." This is the process by which professionals engage with problems and learn experientially, or more specifically, reflect on experience in the midst of practice (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Like Baltes, in an earlier discussion of adult development, Schön viewed our society as being in a state of continuous transformation (Schön, 1983; Smith, 2001). Schön advocated individuals become adept at learning in order to keep up with changes. Beyond that, he advocated the transformation of institutions into learning systems which could not only respond to changing situations and requirements but be capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation (Schön,

1983; Smith, 2001). Philosopher and writer Donald Schön, describes his complex

perception of professional practice:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard
>
> ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems
>
> lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based
>
> theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems
>
> defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of
>
> the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society
>
> at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp
>
> lie the problems of greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose.
>
> Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively
>
> unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor, or shall
>
> he descend to the swamp of important problems and nonrigorous inquiry?
>
> (Schön, 1987 p. 3)

Schön's views of professional practice are very applicable in the teaching

profession. Through this perception, Donald Schön brings us one of his greatest

contributions—a way to focus on "reflection" as a central element in the

understanding of what professionals do (Smith, 2001). Schön's notion of

"reflection-in-action" is also referred to as "thinking on our feet" (Smith, 2001).

Reflection-in-action is the act of putting our theories to use—our repertoire of

knowledge and skills—and building understanding to inform our actions while

the situation is unfolding (Smith, 2001). To begin an explanation of "reflection-

in-action," Schön (1987) explains "knowing-in-action" in that there are many

skillful judgments, decisions, and actions we undertake spontaneously without

being able to give a verbal description which is almost comparable to our actual performance. Occasionally, when accomplishing a task using "knowing-in-action," something may go awry. This is when "reflection-in-action" comes into play. A person will question his assumptions of his "knowing-in-action," make adjustments, solve the problem, and move on. Schön (1983) writes of the Teacher Project at MIT in which teachers were taught to use reflection-in-action. The teachers discovered, through this process, that they could learn a great deal when trying to work their way through their confusions. In instances of reflection-in action Schön writes:

> He reflects on the phenomena before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation. (Schön, 1983 p. 68)

Schön's work on reflective practice in the professions should prove to be helpful in understanding the learning process of alternatively certified teachers, who typically bring a great deal of content knowledge to their new careers but have much "on the job training" to accomplish.

Professional Identity

In addition to the "on the job" training teachers are faced with, new teachers must also develop their identity as professional educators. The literature on professional identity was examined to identify theoretical frameworks through which to study the process of building professional identity among alternatively certified teachers. Although the studies outlined refer to teachers who progressed through a traditional program of teacher preparation, they are useful in

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developing an understanding of how teachers generally acquire a sense of professional identity. As Danielewicz (2001 p. 35) observed, "Making and living our identities involves action and process, occurs in real time and depends on our connections with others, on what we do and say, and how we feel about it." The development of professional identity is important as, "Teachers' perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional development as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their own teaching practice" (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000 p. 750).

Danielewicz, a teacher education faculty member, conducted a study involving six students who she followed through their teacher education coursework. Considering the development of a student's identity as a teacher, and beyond the typical teacher education courses, Danielewics (2001) identified five features of an ideal teacher education program. The program should be student-centered, focused on engaging students in active participation in the process of becoming a teacher. All parts of the teacher education program should be viewed as a whole, connecting courses with field experience, constructing portfolios and collecting artifacts of their work. The program should be embedded in a discourse community where a group of individuals share practices, conventions, and beliefs. The teacher education students should have extensive opportunity for discourse with practicing teachers. A program rich in relationships where prospective teachers receive attention and feel known and recognized by others adds intensity and dimension to the work of learning to teach. Danielewics' (2001) final recommendation is moral engagement. She states teaching is a moral

act and prospective teachers' intentions and commitment to improving the lives of others must be honored.

Marsh (2002) conducted a study of teachers' professional identity in which a case study approach was utilized. As Danielewics found, Marsh also discovered the importance of discourse in developing teachers' professional identity. She describes teacher thought as dialogic in nature as it is an "ongoing dialogue between one's personal history, present conditions, beliefs, values, and the social, cultural, historical, and political forces that surround groups of individuals in a given time and place. From this perspective, teacher thought is socially constructed yet individually enacted" (Marsh, 2002 p. 333). Teacher educators must be cognizant of the fact prospective teachers' identities are greatly influenced by their teacher education courses. Whereas Danielewics suggested involving pre-service teachers in discourse with practicing teachers, Marsh (2002) suggests involving prospective teachers in examining their own personal biographies to determine how discourses of race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality have shaped their experiences and ideologies and to make connections with social structures. The findings regarding the development of professional identity in traditionally prepared teachers should be helpful in understanding the identity development of alternatively certified teachers.

In Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt's (Beijaard et al., 2000) study of teachers' professional identities they identified three parts, the teacher as a subject matter expert, pedagogical expert, and didactical expert. The study was conducted with 80 participants, experienced secondary teachers, who completed a questionnaire with four sections: a section on demographics; a section in which

they were asked to distribute 100 points between the three aspects of identity according to how they saw the aspects represented in their professional identities; the third section asked for responses on a Likert scale which also correlated with the three aspects of identity; and the fourth section asked for their level of agreement on several items. Their study found most teachers experienced a shift through their careers from gaining their professional identity through subject matter aspects at the beginning of their careers to more of a focus on the pedagogical and didactical aspects later in their careers (Beijaard et al., 2000). In their conclusion, they stated how learning experiences which influence teachers' professional identity is an important issue for future research. The authors also noted that a questionnaire method was limiting in this kind of research (Beijaard et al., 2000).

Summary of Adult Learning and Development

As the motivations and learning approaches of alternatively certified teachers are examined, theories of adult learning and development promote an understanding of this nontraditional group of teachers. Theory of adult development has evolved over the last sixty years to a cyclical view of adult lifespan, alternating between periods of stability and transitions. Adult development occurs within the context of time—historical time, chronological time, and social time. Concurrent with the aspect of time is the process in which the learner is engaged. Donald Schön's work on reflection-in-action is a useful framework for viewing the learning process in professional practice. Throughout the learning process, teachers' professional identity develops in three aspects— subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and didactical knowledge. Teacher's

professional identity development is a social process influenced by professional experience and pre-service coursework but also by personal history, present conditions, beliefs, values, and social, cultural, historical, and political forces.

Summary

This review of relevant literature provides a foundation for examining the motivations, approaches to learning, and commitment to teaching of alternatively certified teachers. The current issues of teacher quality and teacher shortages are relevant but must be studied in the context of the history of teacher certification, particularly the last twenty years of alternative teacher certification. The work of Feistritzer (2002), Zeichner and Schulte (2001), Shen (1997), Jachman (2002), and Shockley (2001) has contributed to our understanding of alternative teacher certification history. Feistritzer (2002), of the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) states there is a paucity of research on alternative certification because there is no clear-cut definition, and there are hundreds of unique programs which are all alternatives to traditional teacher preparation programs. Because the literature focuses on evaluation of alternative certification programs and on various teacher shortages, there is little research on the alternative certified teacher as a motivated, perseverant, and future seeking adult learner. This study examines these adult learners, not through a lens of political rhetoric, but rather the lens of adult learning and development.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Most research on alternatively certified teachers has focused on demographics such as education level, content area, and age, neglecting to probe deeper into the experiences of this growing population of educators. Our present knowledge is limited in that these non-traditionally prepared teachers' motivations, learning approaches, and commitment to teaching have not been thoroughly examined in order to better address adult education programming needs, policy development, and hiring practices in schools. Through the unique perspective of individual teachers, this study revealed the past, present, and anticipated future realities of alternatively certified teachers to increase the understanding of their needs.

Research Design

The qualitative approach permits the study of issues in depth and detail allowing for exploration and discovery (Patton, 1990). The philosophical roots of qualitative research emphasize the importance of understanding the meanings of human behavior in the social-cultural context of social interaction rather than the singular discovery of truth (Eisner, 1981; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). Since experience is the starting point for the study of social sciences, a method that takes account of personal experience was the best method for this study because of its focus on the realities of alternatively certified teachers. Rather than the scientific approach which begins with pre-determined hypotheses, qualitative

research of an artistic nature allows the researcher wider liberties in portrayal of experience not directing and limiting what one looks for (Eisner, 1981; Merriam, 1989). Because this study focused on uncovering the motivations, decision-making, and learning approaches of alternatively certified teachers, the use of semi-structured interviews yielded deeper context-bound data. Semi-structured interviews were used to maximize the prospect of obtaining data relevant to the research questions.

In the last twenty to thirty years, there has been a resurgence of interest in subjective methodologies that ask their subjects to provide accounts or tell stories about their own experience (Birren & Birren, 1996; McAdams, 1996; Warren, 1982) Research on the teaching community should celebrate the use of stories in the quest to understand what teachers do (Doyle, 1997). These methodologies lend themselves to interpretative analysis in which the researcher gains insight into the way life is experienced and interpreted (Birren & Birren, 1996). "A narrative understanding of adult development is grounded in the assumption that narrative is a primary structure through which human beings organize and make meaning of their experience" (Rossiter, 1999 p. 78). It should be a major task of teacher educators, staff development administrators, and principals to understand the day-to-day reality of alternatively certified teachers with whom they work in order to better design educational programs to meet their needs.

Participants

In a qualitative study, participants are chosen by design because of their appropriateness to the study, resulting in a targeted, "purposeful" sample. As

Merriam (1998) states, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). In this study, criterion sampling was used as the participants were selected based on the recommendations of principals or other administrators in three selected school districts. Through contacting principals and district administrators within the state of Oklahoma, 18 alternatively certified teachers were identified. The principals or district administrators were asked to identify successful alternatively certified teachers. For the purpose of identifying this sample, "successful" was defined as consistent with the regionally accepted professional standards. These teachers were then contacted by e-mail or phone to request their participation in this study. This was the number of cases in which the trade off between breadth and depth could be balanced. Saturation or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was reached with a sample of 18 participants.

The participants ranged in age from 28 to 63 years old. The median age was 37. Seven men and 11 women comprised the participant group. Fourteen were Caucasian, two African American, and two Hispanic. Of the 18 participants, they had, on average, completed five full years of teaching experience. The range of teaching experience was from one to 12 years. Seventeen of the participants were at least in their third year of teaching. Two of the participants had obtained a juris doctorate; eight had master's degrees, and one participant having two master's degrees. The remaining eight participants had bachelor's degrees, and one participant having two bachelor's degrees. Nine participants taught at the high school level; six at middle school; and three at elementary. Fifteen teachers

taught in suburban districts and three in an urban district. All three of the urban

teachers went through the Troops to Teachers program. Additional demographic

information will be shared as the participants are introduced in Chapter Four.

It was important to this study to create a depiction of successful

alternatively certified teachers. In purposeful sampling, the goal is to select cases

which are likely to be "information rich" with respect to the purposes of the study

(Patton, 1990). One might expect that it is necessary to study those identified as

"successful" and "unsuccessful" in order to discriminate the salient qualities of

"success". Although it would be possible to survey and study a mixed sample of

successful and unsuccessful teachers, it would only be possible to identify their

category of success on the basis of self-reporting. This creates an obvious

limitation as self-report of effectiveness or success could be unreliable. In

addition, it would be a limiting factor to request a waiver from the participant to

allow the investigator to gain access to the participant's evaluation data. It would

also be inappropriate to request this information from the school personnel

administrators and principals because they are legally prohibited from releasing

evaluation data on teachers. For the purpose of this study it was deemed most

practical and convenient to contact the supervisors and simply ask for

recommendations of "successful alternatively certified teachers" in their school or

district.

Materials

A major characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the

primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Rather than

an inanimate instrument, like a survey or computer, the researcher is a human instrument through which the data is mediated (Merriam, 1998). It is the goal of the qualitative researcher to interact with their participants in a natural, unobtrusive, and nonthreatening manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Advantages to the human instrument concept are the researcher's ability to adapt techniques to the circumstances and ability to respond and react to the nonverbal aspects of the research setting (Merriam, 1998). A list of questions which were used in the semi-structured interviews is found in Appendix B.

Procedure

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommend researchers not study something in which they are directly involved. For this reason, alternatively certified teachers working with the primary investigator of this study were not participants in this study. One was however, used for a pilot study in which interview questions were piloted.

Once approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board and the districts selected for the study, an e-mail was sent to all the principals in the three selected districts. The e-mail explained the nature of the study and requested the principal's assistance in identifying possible participants based on the criteria. E-mails were sent to 87 urban school principals and 24 suburban principals. Only five participants resulted from the initial e-mail sent to 111 principals. Because the initial e-mail was sent over the summer, it was sent again in September after the school year had begun. Some principals responded that they had no alternatively certified teachers on their staffs. Others responded that they had

alternatively certified teachers in the past but they were no longer on staff. Most principals sent no response. Interestingly, some principals responded that they were unsure of who was alternatively certified in their building. At this point, the principal investigator attempted to obtain a list of alternatively certified teachers from the selected districts and the state department of education. Neither the state department, nor the districts maintained records which distinguished teachers as alternatively certified or traditionally certified. Following this news, the principal investigator began a type of snowball sampling by asking the identified participants if they knew of other teachers with alternative certification. The principal investigator then contacted their principals to determine the principal's recommendation of the teacher as "successful". Three more participants were identified in this manner. An additional participant was identified by a principal in another district. Upon recommendation of this teacher, the principal investigator contacted the district superintendent and received approval to conduct research. Institutional Review Board approval was sought to add this additional district. The principal was then contacted and the teacher was identified as meeting the study criteria. Ten additional participants were identified through district office administrators who had either hired or supervised these teachers in the past. The 18 participants were contacted and interviewed over a three-month time period.

Twelve participants were initially contacted by e-mail and seven were initially contacted by phone due to the unavailability of working e-mail addresses. Although all potential participants agreed to the interview, one participant agreed

and then became ill and unable to make the appointment. Attempts to re-contact this participant were never achieved.

Interviews

After each participant was contacted, date, time, and location for the interview were negotiated. A detailed audit trail was maintained to ensure dependability of the data and study findings. An interview is a purposeful conversation between two people which is designed to gain information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In qualitative research, the interview may be employed as the single strategy for data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). An interview begins with a time of "breaking the ice," informing the subject of the purpose, and assuring confidentiality in the interview process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Interviews for this study were audio taped after obtaining specific permission to audiotape the interview. A copy of the informed consent form used in this study can be found in Appendix A. Participants were assured the tapes would be kept confidential as recommended by Bogdan and Biklen (1982).

The interview location was determined at the convenience of the participant. Ten interviews were conducted in the participants' classrooms. Two interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. Five interviews were conducted at the office of the principal investigator. One interview was conducted at a university office. The interview appointment began with a brief overview of the study and then informed consent was obtained.

A non-directive interviewing approach was used to ensure open-ended responses. This approach is adapted from creative writing (Rico, 1983) and has

been used in similar qualitative research studies (Karpiak, 2000) in which participants were asked to recount their experiences. Each participant was asked to complete a cluster responding to the question, "As you think about becoming an alternatively certified teacher, what were the turning points or key events as they relate to your motivation, approach to learning, and your commitment to teaching?" This question served as the stimulus for recording associations that came to mind during the initial interview period (Rico, 1983). Following ample time for the participant to reflect and respond to the question on a sheet of paper, the audiotape player was turned on. The participant was first asked to begin telling the principal investigator about the events and reflections he or she had written on the paper. Once the participant had talked about all the things he or she had written, the principal investigator followed up with clarifying questions and with questions from the interview guide that had not already been addressed.

Data Analysis Procedures

This study seeks to understand the motivations, approaches to learning, and commitment to teaching of alternatively certified teachers. Glaser and Strauss's constant comparative method of analysis provided the means for addressing this task. Interview tapes were listened to thoroughly before transcription was attempted. Brief notes were taken during the initial playing of the tape. All transcription was conducted by the principal investigator to ensure confidentiality and to preserve the integrity of the data source.

As a tool for describing, analyzing, and interpreting the data, this study integrated NVivo, a computer software program, for the purposes of organizing,

coding, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data (Bazeley & Richards, 2000).

NVivo is the sibling of NUDIST, Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing,

Searching and Theorizing, also developed by Richards and Richards (Bazeley &

Richards, 2000). Following a critical reading of the interview transcriptions,

NVivo software was utilized to organize and code the data. Analysis began with

the first interview. A model of the findings was constructed throughout the

coding process. Bogden and Bilken (1982) suggest a somewhat playful analogy to

the development of a coding process used to organize data:

> Imagine a large gymnasium in which thousands of toys are spread out on
>
> the floor. You are given the task of sorting them into piles according to a
>
> scheme that you are to develop. You walk around the gym looking at the
>
> toys, picking them up and examining them. There are many ways to form
>
> piles. They could be sorted according to size, color, country of origin, date
>
> manufactured, manufacturer, material they are made from, the type of
>
> play they encourage, the age group they suit, or whether they represent
>
> living things or inanimate objects. (p. 156)

Through identifying patterns in which certain words, phrases, patterns of

behavior, ways of thinking, and events appear, a coding system or identification

of themes began to be developed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). The data gathering,

coding, analyzing, and reporting of results were carried out in a nonlinear way

which is consistent with the approach that qualitative research validates (Bazeley

& Richards, 2000). As Merriam (1998) writes, "Data collection and analysis is a

simultaneous activity in qualitative research" (p. 151). Analysis begins with the

first interview, as new insights are recorded and tentative hypotheses are formed

(Merriam, 1998). Using the NVivo software, each line of the transcripts was analyzed and conceptual categories known as "free nodes" were defined and constructed. As ideas, themes, hunches, and questions were developed, they were recorded in NVivo, thus being available to use in concept modeling. About halfway through data collection, a preliminary model of the findings was constructed. As data collection and analysis continued, the model was augmented and refined.

Credibility or Internal Validity

Credibility, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), is achieved when the inquiry is conducted in a manner to ensure that the subject is accurately identified and described. The analysis must be "credible to the constructors of the original multiple realities" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 296). Credibility can be established by: prolonged engagement; persistent observation; use of multiple sources (types of information and ways of obtaining the same information); use of multiple methods and multiple theories; and peer de-briefing (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002; Quinlan, 1996). To ensure accuracy, triangulation is the process whereby the researcher corroborates evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection. This ensures the study will be accurate because the information is not drawn from a single source, individual, or process of data collection (Merriam, 1998).

Another strategy for preserving internal validity is the use of member checks. This involves taking data and its initial interpretation back to the participant and asking the participant if the results are plausible (Merriam, 1998). This can be done continuously throughout the study. This strategy was

employed in this study once interview data had been interpreted. Actual quotes used in the final, published study and their accompanying interpretation, were checked for accuracy by the participants from whom they were derived. Each participant was provided with a document of excerpts from the findings chapter. The document contained every reference to the participant to include the researcher's interpretations of their comments. Participants responded with their affirmation or corrections. In most cases, the participants responded with their approval of the quotes and the corresponding interpretation. In three cases, respondents clarified factual details in the researcher's interpretation. Two respondents requested editing of their verbatim quotes because they believed them to be too conversational, claiming that they portrayed an unprofessional image. Each of the participants' clarifications, corrections, and requests for editing were incorporated into the final publication of the study. These changes did not change the meaning of the original interview data.

Dependability or Reliability

Dependability is based on the qualitative researcher's assumption that the phenomenon under study is changing and the researcher's understanding of the setting necessitates adjustments in the study's design (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Reliability refers to the replicability of a study's findings (Merriam, 1998; Schwandt, 2001). Reliability is problematic in the social sciences because human behavior is not static (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Schwandt (2001) explains there is a great deal of conflict over the notion of reliability in qualitative work. He states that some argue reliability can be addressed by conventions in methods for recording field notes and analyzing transcripts. Others argue reliability is not

possible in qualitative research because it is not possible to replicate another

investigator's fieldwork (Schwandt, 2001). One of the best ways to establish

dependability is through the use of the "audit trail". The researcher keeps

thorough notes and records of activities in an organized, retrievable method (Ary

et al., 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). An audit trail of this study was

maintained with all contacts, locations, e-mails, interview logs, developing ideas

and so forth being recorded by the principal investigator.

Generalizability or External Validity

Generalizability, also called transferability, can be achieved through thick

description of the research field, so that an audience can sufficiently identify the

elements of setting and contexts in which the inquiry was conducted in order to

know how relevant the findings are to their own settings (Ary et al., 2002;

Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Quinlan, 1996; Schwandt, 2001). Schwandt (2001)

describes generalization as "...an act of reasoning from the observed to the

unobserved, from a specific instance to all instances believed to be like the

instance in question" (p. 105). Merriam (1998) writes there are strategies to

enhance the possibility of a qualitative study's findings being generalized to other

situations. When the investigator provides adequate, rich, thick description, the

reader is then able to determine how closely situations are similar and whether

findings can be transferred (Merriam, 1998). Another strategy proposed by

Merriam (1998) is describing how typical the case is compared to others in the

same class so readers may make their own comparisons as they see fit. The third

strategy suggested by Merriam (Merriam, 1998) is the "multisite design" in which

several sites or cases are studied to maximize the diversity of a particular

phenomenon which allows the readers to apply the findings to a greater range of situations.

This study utilized the first two strategies put forth by Merriam. First, rich, thick description was generated to allow readers to fully understand the situations described. Secondly, the participants of this study and their situation in Oklahoma were thoroughly described, allowing the readers to determine the similarity of the teachers and contexts studied to their own situations.

Confirmability or Objectivity

Confirmability, also called neutrality, when working within the qualitative paradigm is the same as the quantitative researcher's concept of objectivity. It is the extent to which the research is free of bias in its procedures and interpreted results (Ary et al., 2002). The main strategy for demonstrating confirmability is the "audit trail" which was employed in this study and mentioned earlier. It provides a trail for another researcher to follow and obtain (or not obtain) the same results. Triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity also contribute to confirmability (Ary et al., 2002).

Ethics and Human Relations

Ethics in research with human subjects demands informed consent and the protection of participants from harm (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Merriam, 1998). Ethical guidelines ensure that participants enter research studies on a voluntary basis, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved. In addition, participants must not be exposed to risks greater than the gains they might derive from participation in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

In this study, participants were identified by number and pseudonym on their written autobiographies, audiotape transcripts and on the audiotape labels. The principal investigator personally transcribed all audiotapes to ensure the confidentiality of the subjects. Pseudonyms were used to identify subjects within the research document or other project publications. Subjects are identifiable only on the audiotapes of the interviews only insofar as they identify themselves. Throughout the data collection phase of this study, audiotapes were kept in the possession of the principal investigator or in her home and were not available to non-project personnel. The audiotapes were erased at the conclusion of the research project.

These ethical guidelines were adhered to under the regulations of the University of Oklahoma Institutional Review Board. The Informed Consent may be found in Appendix A.

Chapter Four: Findings

This study is based on the premise that alternative certification as a phenomenon of the current educational system, presents to the educational process advantages and disadvantages. Whereas this study seeks to develop an understanding of this non-traditional group of teachers, much of the literature concerning alternatively certified teachers has focused on the relative merits of the concept. Specifically, this study reveals the experience of alternatively certified teachers as it relates to their motivations to leave other, usually successful, careers to enter the field of teaching. Since these teachers enter the classroom with little or no coursework in pedagogy, their approaches to learning how to teach are of great interest. Since teachers will continue to enter the profession through alternative routes, educational leaders must have a clear understanding of this group of teachers, not only to make the best hiring decisions, but also to support this non-traditional group of teachers throughout their induction years.

Qualitative inquiry, utilizing a semi-structured interview, was chosen as the most appropriate methodology, since it is a study of the ways humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). An examination of the roads traveled by this group of teachers is helpful in developing an understanding of these teachers and the skills, backgrounds and beliefs they bring to the classroom. Through contacting principals and district administrators within the state of Oklahoma, 18 highly successful alternatively certified teachers were

identified as study participants. Using a non-directive approach, each interview began with an opportunity for the participant to respond to the question, "As you think about becoming an alternatively certified teacher, what were the turning points or key events as they relate to your motivation, approach to learning, and your commitment to teaching?" This open-ended part of the interview was followed by a semi-structured interview to ensure all the research questions were addressed in the narrative. NVivo was used in the analysis of the data. Having reviewed the methodology used in this study, it is now helpful to develop an image of the eighteen participants who traversed through this interview process.

Overview of Findings

The personal and professional development of adults is sometimes described through the metaphor of the journey, with its corresponding images of driving, maps, and road signs. As a method of organizing the findings of this study, the journey metaphor will be used to describe alternatively certified teachers' experiences with becoming a teacher, their development of professional identity, their motivations, approach to learning, and commitment to teaching. To begin, each participant will be introduced in terms of the "detours" they made in their career and education decisions. This introduction will provide an understanding of the roads that brought each of these alternatively certified teachers to their current place in life. This section will allow the reader to gain a sense of these teachers as individuals who have made thoughtful decisions and taken decisive action in their careers.

The next section will discuss these teachers in terms of their decision-making processes to change careers, particularly exploring their motivations. As these participants made decisions to change careers, or *change lanes*, they acted under a variety of motivations. The prevailing motivation of "making a difference" will be explored in detail as well as some of the tangential motivations for changing careers.

Once deciding to become teachers, there were many requirements to meet before being allowed to take on their roles as teachers. Traversing the regulations, testing, and coursework requirements was a unique experience for each of the participants. Their experiences with varying requirements will be discussed along with the inconsistencies that existed between similar cases.

Once in the role of teacher, each of the newly certified teachers began to develop his professional identity as a teacher. This will be discussed in terms of "arriving at the destination" or attaining the professional identity of "teacher." This was a very easy process for some and rather difficult for others. The differences between these two groups will be examined.

As a new teacher, each of the participants entered a period of learning how to teach and how to work within their schools' organizational cultures. This period of learning and moving towards effectiveness as a teacher is examined as a "construction zone." The study participants' experiences with learning how to teach ranged from trial and error and coursework to mentoring and formal professional development.

The study participants' commitment to teaching will be examined in terms of the factors that help them to persevere in the teaching field, along with how

they envision their future as a teacher. The experiences of these successful teachers will be examined as they relate to the significance of a positive school climate, particularly administrative support and collegiality.

Finally, the perspective from the *rearview mirror* will be examined. The thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of these alternatively certified teachers will be explored in relation to the path they traveled to their current careers. Their own opinions of the alternative certification process and their personal experience with the concept will be discussed.

This chapter will conclude with a discussion of assumptions surrounding alternative teacher certification. Clearly, education experts and policymakers have their own distinctly opposing views of alternative teacher certification. There are many prevailing assumptions regarding alternatively certified teachers. Some are held by policymakers and the general public and others by members of the teaching profession. Discovering the assumptions held by each of these groups and determining which ones can be supported by evidence and which ones must be challenged is an important aspect of this study. These assumptions will be examined and challenged in light of the evidence presented.

Detours: Rethinking Career Choices

As one begins to think of people who change careers, several images come to mind: the indecisive, impulsive person, the misguided, ill-informed person, the dissatisfied, malcontent person, the creative risk-taker. Are these accurate images of the alternatively certified teachers reflected in this study? A look into their backgrounds will reveal a variety of interesting views. There are six categories

which describe the 18 study participants' detours that they encountered on their way to the teaching field. First to be examined will be the pressure to pursue a career that is considered prestigious—one befitting of the study participant's level of intelligence. Second will be the notion of parental pressure, which for some was the pressure to complete a degree within a specified time period and for others the pressure to pursue a degree field that the parent deemed appropriate. Third will be the case of a teacher who had no career per se prior to entering teaching. Fourth will be a lack of guidance contributing to the sidetracked path they took. Fifth will be a dissatisfaction with the participant's career. Lastly, teaching represented a true second career for some of the study participants. These six categories will not only introduce the study participants, but also help the reader gain an understanding of the journey's starting point for each of the study participants.

The Pressure of Prestige

For high school students like Patty, Frank, and Mary who were intelligent and high achieving, college was not an option—it was a must. Everyone from their parents to their teachers and counselors saw bright futures for them in engineering, law, or science. As bright students, each of them had experiences with tutoring other students or helping their teachers with lessons. These were positive experiences that instilled a love for teaching in each of them.

Patty, now a 40-year-old high school mathematics teacher, recalls teaching her sisters and neighbors while growing up. Always a very bright child, Patty graduated from high school at the age of sixteen and was encouraged to pursue engineering in college. She reflects, "So it was always people saying, 'You're so

smart. You should study engineering.' And me thinking, 'But I want to teach.'"

Once she finished her engineering degree, she knew she did not want to *do* engineering but was interested in *teaching* it. Over the next ten years, she pursued a master's and a doctorate degree in engineering, while teaching engineering at the university level. Finally, realizing her true desire to teach, she quit her advanced studies just short of a doctorate degree to pursue certification in high school mathematics. She has been teaching now for 11 years.

Frank, too, had always been a good student with a particular gift in mathematics. He was frequently asked to tutor less able students and found he was not only good at explaining mathematics to others, but he enjoyed it as well. He recalls a middle school teacher who would often turn the class over to Frank when he needed to leave the room. Frank remembers:

> The teacher would leave the classroom sometimes and say, "[Frank], why don't you teach this concept." And it was great. I learned more doing that . . . that was *my* student teaching which I got to do as a young middle schooler. That is really when it lit the fire that teaching may be a career for me.

Because Frank was such a gifted student in math, he went on to the university to study engineering. He recalls, "I think I felt compelled to go into something that was on a higher plane—most people considered [it] a higher plane." Following his bachelor's degree, and on the advice of his father, Frank completed law school. Once in law school, Frank quickly realized he enjoyed the intellectual pursuit of law but he did not enjoy the work of being a lawyer. Although a successful attorney for five years, he was not happy and then turned

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back to his first love of teaching. Frank, age 42, has been teaching high school mathematics for twelve years.

Similarly, Mary also excelled in mathematics and sciences. Although she was the president of the Future Teachers of America in her high school, she succumbed to the pressure to pursue what was perceived to be a more intellectual degree than teaching—a degree in geology. She worked in the oil and gas industry for two years before responding to a calling in Christian ministry. She then pursued a master's degree in religious education. While working on her master's degree she had the opportunity to teach kindergarten in a private school. This experience reignited her first love of teaching and ultimately was the beginning of a new career. Mary exclaims:

> [I] *absolutely loved it.* Oh my gosh (laughter)—I can't believe it took me that long to decide what I wanted to do. But I mean really, I was president of Future Teachers of America when I was in high school. Really I probably was always a teacher.

Mary, age 41, is now a middle school mathematics teacher. She has been teaching ten years.

The Influence of Parental Pressure

Although Patty, Frank, and Mary had pressure to fulfill grand expectations outside the field of teaching, others, like Olivia and Holly, were persuaded to complete their degrees in areas that would allow them to do "more" than teach. Olivia, age 35, a high school Spanish teacher, had intended to specialize in Spanish literature. As she was pursuing her bachelor's degree, her father was concerned that she would only be able to use her degree for teaching. She assured

him that she was planning to become a specialist in the field of Spanish literature since she had aspirations to become a university professor. As Olivia began to realize how limited her interest had become, she became disenchanted with her narrowly focused field and began exploring her options for teaching where she felt she would have a more global impact. She recalls her decision to teach:

> So if I wanted to have a global impact, what is the most obvious choice for me? The most obvious choice is to use the skills that I have to teach other people to speak Spanish. It's the most useful thing to teach people just to be able to get by with their language skills.

Olivia went on to teach high school Spanish for seven years but has now taken a leave of absence to have her third child. She continues to teach Spanish a few hours a week in her daughter's preschool.

Holly, like Olivia, is a Spanish teacher. She pursued two bachelor's degrees, one in Spanish and one in public relations. She originally wanted to pursue degrees in Spanish and English, but her father was worried she would only be able to teach. Because of her father's concern and her love for writing, she pursued a degree in public relations. Holly wrote a great deal for the newspaper in college but grew tired of the work by graduation. Pursuing her love of Spanish, she worked for two years in the corporate world as a Spanish translator. During a brief absence from work to care for her ill father, Holly worked as a substitute teacher and found great satisfaction in teaching—an interest she'd always had. She recalls, "I remember always wanting to be a teacher, and I mean my whole life that was something that I always knew that I wanted to do." Later, as she became more frustrated with her corporate job, she pursued a career in teaching.

Although she taught middle school Spanish for five years, 32-year-old Holly recently took a leave from teaching to work as a nanny and home school teacher for a family.

No Career Prior to Teaching

Like Holly and Olivia, Quincy, age 29, had not found a steady career following college. Still unsure of career and education plans, Quincy was seeking a job in pharmaceutical sales while waiting for acceptance into a graduate program in health care. In the meantime, she waited tables. When neither the job nor the graduate program had materialized, Quincy decided to use her degree in zoology to obtain a teaching position. She recalls her decision, "Going into it, it was—well, I'm waiting tables now—I might as well use my degree and see how I like it." Now, after four years of teaching high school science, Quincy, a new mother, is very content and cannot imagine working in any other career field.

The Consequence of Poor Guidance

Ginger and Barb, both school counselors, attribute their wrong turns through the career decision-making maze to a lack of guidance as young adults. Ginger, age 37, a middle school counselor, completed a bachelor's degree in public relations and two master's degrees—one in sports administration and one in counseling. Ginger felt pressure from her father to graduate in four years, so once she realized a major of public relations was not what she wanted, she felt it was too late to change. As a result, she entered graduate school immediately upon graduation. With an interest in academic advising, she pursued her degree in sports administration which concentrated on advising athletes. Once she was working in the field, she realized her work focused too narrowly—only helping

collegiate athletes. Wanting to have a broader impact, she returned to graduate school for a master's degree in counseling. She had her sights set on a doctorate in counseling and envisioned herself in private practice. When she was unable to score high enough on the entrance examination to the doctoral program, she re-examined her counseling interests and decided to look into school counseling. As Ginger reflected on her many years of education and searching for the right career, she acknowledges that she neglected to seek guidance and explore her opportunities as a young adult.

Likewise, Barb, age 32, reports a lack of guidance in high school and early college. She initially pursued a degree in elementary education, but prior to her student teaching semester she felt unprepared to accept responsibility as a teacher. Since she had an ongoing interest in psychology, she switched majors to psychology without any real career plan in mind. On the advice of friends, she pursued a master's degree in psychology immediately following graduation. Barb expressed frustration with her course of study because she felt she did not have the life or practical experiences to make sense of what she had been taught in her undergraduate and graduate work. She felt things began making more sense as she started her internship to pursue her license for private counseling. Working for about two years in private counseling, she found the agencies for which she was working were financially unstable. Wanting a more stable job where she could use her counseling skills, she sought alternative certification as a school counselor.

Gradual Dawning of Career Dissatisfaction

Unlike Barb and Ginger, who experienced frustrated searches for the right career, others like Donna, Alan, Rachel, Kevin, and Emma obtained college degrees and worked in their respective fields successfully. Only after a few years of working in their fields did they gradually begin to experience dissatisfaction. Donna, age 44, pursued a degree in public relations and worked in the field for several years before leaving to stay home with her young children. During her absence, she developed a desire to do more meaningful work helping people. When she decided to return to the workforce, Donna responded to an ad for a part-time tutor working with adults in a welfare reform program. Whereas she enjoyed the teaching she was able to do in that job, after ten years of no full-time work, began to miss the benefits of full-time employment. It was at this time that she pursued alternative teacher certification. She has now been teaching middle school computers and mathematics for seven years.

More severe than Donna's experience, Alan's dissatisfaction with his work as a video producer caused him to change jobs frequently, never satisfied with the work itself or the people with whom he worked. Alan never had an interest in becoming a teacher but was now faced with having to make critical decisions regarding his career. His unhappiness led to more self discovery through taking various interest inventory assessments to help guide him in his decision making. One of the assessments indicated that he may be well-suited for teaching. Initially, Alan found the results absurd. With two daughters in elementary school at the time, Alan began to spend time volunteering in his daughters' classrooms.

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He found that he was enjoying himself so much that he was taking vacation days from work to spend more time in the classrooms. He was happy in the classroom setting and received a great deal of affirmation from the students and teachers. Since his wife was in a financially secure job, she encouraged him to quit his video production job and pursue coursework in education. Alan, age 40, eventually became certified to teach and reports he is happier than ever in his role as a teacher. He has been teaching elementary school for six years.

Also dissatisfied in her original career was Rachel, age 32, now a high school journalism teacher. Rachel, whose mother was a teacher, had worked as a marketing manager for a large car rental corporation for eight years. Searching for meaning in her life, the pursuit of more money and climbing the corporate ladder was something she could no longer justify, as she describes below:

> So you realize that the almighty dollar and chasing the next promotion is not the most important thing in the whole world. And if I'm going to do something—and I'm going to spend twelve hours a day doing it—then it's going to be something I *like* and something that's going to benefit others.

Trepidacious at first, Rachel pursued alternative teacher certification. In her second year as a teacher, Rachel now envisions a lifetime commitment to education.

Unhappy with extremely long hours and extended business travel, Kevin, age 28, now a video production teacher at the high school level, enjoys the work he does teaching video production classes and running the school district's video production center. Although similar to the work he did as a television sports journalist, Kevin finds his new career in education more fulfilling. The working

conditions are also more fitting to his family life since he is married and expecting his first child. Kevin saw teaching as a way to combine his enjoyment of working with young people and his interest in sports. Although not coaching football this year, Kevin has coached the past two years.

Emma, age 31, who always enjoyed children and wanted to teach, originally pursued a degree in business to follow in the footsteps of her father and sister. Her parents had assured her she could always go back to seek a teaching degree later if she found herself discontented and mismatched in the business field. Emma worked for a large computer corporation for two years after graduation. As she contemplated her future in the business world, she realized she was not going to be happy. She wanted to revisit her first love—teaching, so she pursued an alternative teaching certification program in Texas where she was living at the time, becoming a special education teacher. Having now taught in three states for a total of seven years, she is currently on a leave of absence after the birth of her first child.

Pursuit of College Degree Later in Life

Although the alternatively certified teachers introduced all had completed degrees and pursued work in various areas, two of the participants in this study worked in non-teaching positions for several years before obtaining their bachelor's degrees. Although not pursuing degrees in teacher preparation, Jane and Nathan had teaching in mind when they completed their degrees. Nathan, age 37, a high school Spanish teacher for the last four years, worked for ten years in the oil and gas field. He was fluent in Spanish and used his foreign language skills often in his work. He attended college after high school but quit just short

of completing a degree in botany. Desiring a career that would have an impact on society, Nathan went back to school to finish a degree in Spanish. Although he intended to go overseas to teach English in a Spanish-speaking country with his fiancé, she died unexpectedly, sending his life plans reeling out of control. After a time of personal restoration, Nathan pursued teaching and is now enjoying the relationships he has with his students. He has recently married for the first time.

Like Nathan, Jane worked after high school. She had been in an intense program in high school requiring many high-level math and science classes. Describing herself as "burnt out" after high school, Jane decided to enlist in the Air Force. She knew the Air Force would also give her the opportunity to pursue a degree, which was very important to her family. Jane had nearly finished her bachelor's degree in liberal studies when she left active military service. She continued her schooling, graduating a year after her active service ended. She began a master's program in secondary education at the same time she was becoming alternatively certified as a math teacher. Now 34 years old, Jane has been teaching middle school mathematics for five years.

Teaching: An Opportunity for a Second Career

Unlike the other alternatively certified teachers who have been introduced so far, there remains one group of three teachers who had full and satisfying careers before entering the field of teaching. Teaching truly represents a second career for these people, each of whom had spent twenty or more years in another career. First is the case of Larry, age 63, a high school history teacher who has taught for 11 years. Larry had a successful career as an attorney for 17 years when he decided to start his own business in the engineering field. An entrepreneur,

Larry discovered after eight years what he really enjoyed about the business was getting it started and making it successful. He was no longer enjoying the day-to-day running of a business and was beginning to feel resentful of the time he could not spend with his wife, who was also a teacher. Having many positive experiences as a teacher in his church, he considered teaching before but found through investigating the possibilities it would require extensive coursework. Not willing to pursue it at that cost, he decided to substitute teach for awhile. About the same time, alternative certification legislation was passed, and Larry was able to pursue a career in teaching with minimal requirements. Although his wife has since retired from teaching, Larry is still enjoying his work.

Carl and Irwin are both retired from the military and each had long-term successful careers. Carl, age 58, a middle school history teacher, was in the Army for thirty years and achieved the highest enlisted rank of Chief Master Sergeant. During his world-wide service, Carl obtained a bachelor's degree in history and a master's in business administration through the Army. Working in law enforcement in the military, Carl quite often found himself in a training role and worked a great deal with young 18-and 19-year-old recruits. He enjoyed teaching and working with young people, so a career in teaching seemed a natural fit for him following his retirement from active military service. Carl was able to use the Troops to Teachers funding to pay for the coursework he was required to take for alternative certification.

Like Carl, Irwin also served in the Army. Irwin, age 48, went into the Army as an officer and served for twenty years in military intelligence. Irwin had many interesting overseas assignments and learned a great deal about other countries'

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governments and cultures. Because of his experience and his great interest in history, teaching seemed a natural fit for him when he retired from the Army. Using the job fair notices from the Troops to Teachers program, Irwin secured a position as a high school history teacher and has been teaching in an inner-city school for five years.

As these introductions have revealed, these individuals are not undecided or impulsive but rather intelligent, thoughtful people who have looked for meaning in their lives, taken risks, and accepted new challenges in order to serve society. This group of teachers came to terms with their natural abilities and true desires and took steps to change their course, sometimes in the face of financial challenges and opposition from peers. They were intentional about their career selection. The next section will delve deeper into their need to make a difference for humanity.

Changing Lanes: Motivation to Change Careers

In the first section of this chapter, the 18 participants were introduced as distinct individuals with unique backgrounds prior to entering the field of teaching. In the following sections, study participants' experiences will be highlighted with regard to their motivations to teach. Participants will be referred to by their pseudonyms, ages, and when helpful to the discussion, the reader will be reminded of their backgrounds or current teaching area. As individuals traverse through life and make major career decisions, they may consider multiple motives before changing their course. The tangential motives for leaving a successful career and entering the profession of teaching were many and varied

for the alternatively certified teachers interviewed in this study. However, a recurring theme in all of the participants' stories was the desire to make a difference in society. Similarly, several study participants exhibited a sense of idealism, the notion that single-handedly, they would be the ones to make a monumental difference in the institution known as public education. In addition to making a difference and idealism, other motives included the desire to have more time with family rather than working long hours or spending time away from home for business travel. A dichotomy of motivations exists for others—a lifelong desire to teach as opposed to those who denied having any interest in teaching until life experiences opened them up to new possibilities.

Yielding to the Need to Make a Difference

Nathan, 37, a former oil and gas worker, had spent years complaining to anyone who would listen that there were problems with our society's youth. He eventually decided he needed to take action. As a part of the solution, he decided to pursue a career in teaching where he could be a good role model for young people. Nathan recalls, "I decided that the most meaningful way I could impact my community and my country was to be a school teacher."

Like Nathan, Patty, 40, who had been teaching engineering at the college level knew there were problems she could address if she were teaching at the high school level. Believing many engineering students did not have the preparation in mathematics that was needed to pursue engineering; Patty decided her contribution should be teaching mathematics at the high school level. After 11 years of teaching, Patty still defends her decision—even to her students. She recounted a conversation she had with a student who thought she could be

making a great impact on society if she were working for NASA instead of teaching high school. Patty explained to the student her greatest impact was teaching 140 students each year to prepare them mathematically for careers in science and engineering. Demonstrating a great deal of passion for her life's work, Patty feels teaching is a calling.

Rachel, 32, who had worked in the car rental industry, had a difficult time finding any meaning or lasting impact in her work, which essentially assured a total stranger of a car for two or three days. She wanted to spend her time and energies in a career that would make a difference in the world.

Like Nathan, Patty, and Rachel, nearly all of the interviewed teachers' desire "to make a difference" transcended their need to make a lot of money. But their desire to make a difference came with a sacrifice. Most of the interviewed teachers had the potential to make more money in other careers but felt they were meant to be teachers. Patty lamented she could make two or three times as much money in engineering as compared with teaching:

> It's tough when you think about the fact that if I didn't teach, my salary would immediately double or triple. So the last day of the month—okay—I cry. But other than that—it's the right thing to do.

Rachel was so ready to have a career that gave her life meaning as opposed to the daily frustration in the corporate work that she laughingly said she would have worked for nothing. Alan, who had been so frustrated in his video production work, claims that although he has not recovered from the financial blow of his career change six years ago, he is a much happier, more fulfilled man today.

The motivation for these teachers to change careers primarily centered, it appeared, on the need for generativity (Erikson, 1959), which in adult development theory refers to the contribution to future generations through creativity and productivity (Schlossberg, 1984). As opposed to stagnation, generativity refers to an individual's need to find a way to support the next generation by redirecting attention from himself to others (Erikson, 1959). These achievements give life meaning and give individuals a sense they have done something worthwhile to leave a lasting mark on the world (Schlossberg, 1984).

Idealism: High Expectations or Naiveté?

Like the desire to make a difference, some teachers expressed a naïve sense of idealism as they made their plans to begin teaching. The notion of idealism is thinking of things in their ideal form rather than as they really are. As several of the study participants expressed early on in their teaching, they believed they would be an exception to the typical teacher by focusing on the content in their subject area and creating a learning environment where all students achieved at a high level. They began teaching with a firm belief that they would be the ones to solve the woes of public education. After a few years of teaching, they still have high expectations for themselves but have tempered their idealism with the reality they have found in the schools in which they work. Nathan recounts his naïve beginnings:

> When I first started teaching, I thought that I would cruise in here on my white horse and save the day. And it was all going to be about Spanish and my kids were going to be the most fluent Spanish speakers *ever*.

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Patty similarly believed she was the one teacher who was going to change things, believing that she was the one teacher that would make a difference in each of her students' lives:

I think I was *just* as naive as *every* single teacher out there that thinks *they are* the *one* that's going to make a *total* difference in everyone's life. If they had *me* as a math teacher they would *of course* understand *everything*. That was obviously very naive. I'm forgetting the fact that *every* teacher before me thinks that and if the first, second, third, fifth, tenth grade teacher didn't make a difference, I probably wouldn't either. So that was a shock.

Jane also had high expectations of the role she would play in the classroom. She expected a high level of intellectual dialogue in the world of public education. She recalls her noble expectations, "I don't know why I thought this but I really did—I really thought that I would come in and it would be like Socrates and Aristotle." Nathan, Patty, and Jane have all taught four years or more and their views of changing the world have become slightly jaded. Although they each still believe in their calling to teach, they have become more realistic in their approach and cognizant of their own limits. Nathan is frustrated at the many changes that need to take place for public education to improve. He acknowledges there are many people in public education who are smarter than he is, so he cannot understand why there are still so many problems. Reflecting on his initial naiveté upon entering the teaching field he says, "Right about now, I feel like my forehead is pretty darn sore because there's a big, thick wall out there." Nathan has been able to step back from the aggressive approach he took

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upon entering teaching and is learning how to navigate through school culture to make a difference.

Benefits of a Career in Teaching

Although the most common motivation for becoming a teacher is making a difference, as has been discussed, there were secondary motivations common to a number of the alternatively certified teachers in this study. Many participants expressed a value for the "quality of life" they feel teaching has given them. Some of the demands of their original careers are not present in teaching. Time at home, travel and vacations seemed to be major benefits for most participants. Rachel, a high school journalism teacher who had worked in the corporate world, finds her schedule as a teacher more flexible because she is not driving 3,000 miles a month and leaving her house in the dark hours of the morning and returning home late at night. As a teacher, she is able to spend more time with her family. Time was also important to Larry, a former attorney and business owner who wanted to have a schedule coinciding with his wife's teaching schedule. His other careers had resulted in long hours and many vacations cancelled at the last moment. He did not want to live like that anymore.

Kevin, 28, a former television sports journalist, finds teaching afforded him a quality of life he did not have in his previous career. He recalled times when he had worked 115 hours in a two-week period, leaving home for weeks at a time and returning home only long enough to do his laundry. Although he sometimes has long days as a teacher, he no longer travels extensively. He has found he has more control of his time and has more time to spend with his new wife.

Time was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. More than half of the participants specifically talked about the benefits of a teacher's schedule. Although having summers off was not the primary reason for any of the participants' career change, it was definitely an added bonus—even if they hated to admit it. Barb, an elementary counselor, commented, "I think the whole summers off is part of it. I hate to say it, but I think it is."

There were two major reasons for the desire to have summers off. Quincy, a new mother, liked having the time to spend with her child. Her job in education enabled her to balance the home and work spheres of her life. "I really enjoy the scheduling. You know having the summers off and things like that. To pursue taking a class or whatever and, now that I have a baby that will be really helpful." Others pointed out the need for a break from the demands of teaching. Enjoying the cyclical nature of teaching—starting over each year—was a common benefit to many of the alternatively certified teachers. This was something that did not exist in their original careers. Emma, 31, a special education teacher and a new mother, explains her thoughts:

> You need summer break to rejuvenate. I think if I worked all year long I would be just burned out, and I wouldn't enjoy it as much, and I wouldn't come up with new ideas and you have that summer off and you can relax and get your life back to the way you like it. And you get all these ideas and you're fresh to go in again and start a whole new year and start over.

Time factors, like not having to travel extensively and having summers off, were common benefits many teachers talked about. There were other motivations as well for entering the teaching field. For some it had been a lifelong dream.

The Pursuit of a Lifelong Dream: Teaching

For some of the participants, teaching has been a lifelong dream. Alternative teacher certification allows them to realize their dream after having pursued degrees and careers in other fields. Each of these teachers had denied their natural interests and desires when deciding on their college major or first degree. Many expressed being drawn to informal teaching opportunities and viewing teaching as "fun" prior to making the decision to go into it as a career. Discussed earlier in these findings was the case of Patty, Frank, and Mary who had detoured from their teaching interests in favor of the pull toward more prestigious careers. Mary, 41, a middle school math teacher, acknowledges she saw her friends, who were education majors, having fun while she was dealing with the drudgery of difficult coursework:

> I had roommates in college that were all education majors. I'm struggling through paleontology and crystal mineralogy and pre-med biology and they're taking home their 10 kiddy lit books and reading Dr. Seuss and I'm reading chemistry and they're going, "Gosh [Mary], change your major. Go to education, it's so much easier!" And it would have been. That would have been the avenue—and not because it was easier—but it would have been more fun. But I was just bound and determined to go ahead and take that big bite out of life.

Like Mary, Holly, 32, a middle school Spanish teacher, also envied her friends who were in teaching. Holly also detoured from her natural interests and abilities in teaching to pursue a public relations degree because she did not believe teaching was a financially practical option for her. Knowing she would

have many student loans to pay off, she did not see how she would accomplish this on a teacher's salary. Holly remembers:

> [I had] sorority sisters who were doing education-type stuff. I thought, "Oh how fun, you get to be a teacher." You know it just seemed like fun to me but I didn't think of it as a realistic career for me at the time. And I knew I would have student loans.

A different situation existed for Emma, who had always wanted to be a teacher. Emma, with encouragement from her parents, believed it was something she could pursue later if her degree and consequent career in business were not satisfying. Emma's situation is unique in that she was given the freedom of a second chance rather than dealing with parental pressure to make her career choice final. Although some of the teachers had maintained a lifelong desire to teach, a different situation existed for others.

Teaching: An Unexplored and Oft-Denied Possibility

For some, teaching was an unexplored possibility and for others an option that was flatly denied. Four of the teachers interviewed recounted earlier times when they denied any interest in teaching; it was a desire that came later in their lives. Alan recalls his feelings about a career in teaching when he was facing dissatisfaction with his career in video production:

> I was working for the Postal Service at the time and we went on a video production shoot in Phoenix, Arizona, and they had this fabulous employee facility there that was designed to help people have better lives. It was really so *un-* postal. . . . I really hit it off with a lady that was running the thing. [She] was also trying to get a job as a teacher at the time. I did a

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few of the tests. . . . And they all said, "Are you going to be a teacher?" And it was like, "*Oh* right! No, that's the *last* thing that I want to do." When I left high school I said, "No, this is horrible. This is stupid." And people would say, "You'd make a great teacher!" And I said, "No, no, I don't have patience." Anyway they [the tests] all said that and I ignored it again.

Over the next few years, Alan did in fact become a teacher but it was only after spending a great deal of time volunteering in his daughters' classrooms and having many positive experiences with the students and teachers at their school.

An interest in teaching also developed over time for Barb, an elementary school counselor, who had taken several semesters of coursework in a traditional teacher preparation program when she realized she wanted to work in education but not as a classroom teacher. "I knew I wanted to be in the schools but I didn't want to be a teacher. I didn't think I was prepared to be a teacher." She changed her major to psychology, eventually obtaining an advanced degree in psychology and pursuing a career in private counseling. Only after experience with private counseling and becoming a parent did she begin to see her "fit" working in a public school setting. Barb enjoyed counseling but found the hours to be difficult because most counseling with children had to be scheduled during evening hours. She was also working with clients ranging in age from three to 79. This wide range did not allow her to focus and gain expertise in any particular area of counseling. Reconnecting with her interest in working in a school setting, she realized she could specialize in working with children and have better hours working in the school setting. Although Barb had detoured from her original plan

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to become an elementary school teacher, she has now found her niche working in education.

Was a strong desire to teach or having a self-sacrificing motive enough to pursue a career for these 18 people? Although each of these participants possessed a college degree and noble expectations of their ability to make a difference, they each had a convoluted process ahead of them. The process of alternative certification and the unique experiences of the study participants will be examined in the next section.

Navigating the Route: The Alternative Certification Process

Once these teachers began to entertain the idea of becoming a teacher, they faced a process that was not as tidy as they expected. Since state legislation paved the way for alternative certification, one would have the expectation the requirements were specific and rigidly implemented. Although the research questions for this study do not address the quality of alternative certification programs, the researcher found the participants' frustrations with the process to be important in understanding their experiences in becoming alternatively certified teachers. This section will explore the requirements that the study participants were required to meet prior to teaching. First, because the legislation implementing alternative teacher certification in Oklahoma was new in 1990, many of the study participants who were certified in the first few years experienced situations in which they were seeking answers from government, university, and school district personnel who did not understand the new regulations. Later, as regulations continued to be modified, there emerged

further discrepancies in requirements, particularly those requirements of competency tests and coursework. As indicated by the experiences of 18 who have traveled through the process, each of their experiences was unique.

Adhering to Inconsistent Requirements

Throughout the interviews of 18 alternatively certified teachers, their routes to education were many and varied. These teachers gained their certifications between 1991 and 2002. Nineteen ninety-one marked the first year for alternative certification in the state of Oklahoma. Two of the 18 had taught in other states before teaching in their current location. Of the 16 who obtained their original alternative certification in Oklahoma, each was held to very different requirements. Some of them had requirements consisting of passing one subject area test and taking two college courses, while others were required to take 18 hours, pass at least three tests, and interview with numerous people at the state department of education.

In Patty's case, she did not get the correct information about alternative certification and completed numerous semesters of unnecessary education classes. Because of the error, she was then allowed to skip the student teaching required in traditional certification programs. She recalls:

I made this decision to switch out of engineering at the beginning of a summer. *No one* is available over the summer to answer questions and I kept going back to [the] education school and [asking], "What do I do about certification?" . . . I had the right questions but could not find anybody to answer them. All I could get were secretaries telling me, "Before you can do anything, you have to apply to the College of

Education." So I applied to the College of Education which was *Mistake Number One*. At the time, the way the law read, is if you were admitted to a college of education, you were not eligible for alternative certification. So then upon that, I was *not* pleased.

Patty attempted to gain alternative teaching certification when the legislation was still new in Oklahoma. Similar to Patty, Frank and Larry also dealt with the frustration of getting answers from officials for whom the regulations were still unfamiliar. Even Frank, 41, an attorney, who had always entertained the idea of a career in teaching, had difficulty as he "stumbled across the regulations" in the *Oklahoma Bar Journal*. He recalled this experience of obtaining information on the alternative certification legislation:

> I called up to the state department and they referred me to [a man] up there who sat down on the phone with me, and we talked through the requirements of that legislation, and he asked my advice on how to interpret some things so I was quite liberal in how I interpreted that you could be alternatively certified.

Certified only one year after Frank, Larry's frustration arose from talking to personnel in the State Department of Education who were unsure of which regulations they were to follow. Once Larry began to teach high school and had obtained alternative certification, he still had interference from the State Department of Education. Due to confusion with the new regulations, they tried to retract his certification during his first year of teaching. Larry was able to keep his teaching position largely due to the support of his administrator. Larry's

experience occurred when the regulations were new and there was still confusion over their implementation.

Inconsistencies of Competency Test Requirements

During the 1990s, the regulations governing alternative teacher certification went through many revisions. One of the major changes in teacher certification was in the type of examination teacher candidates were required to pass. New legislation was passed requiring a competency exam in addition to the subject area exam required prior to the change. This additional exam was to determine the teacher candidate's ability to write and think clearly. The change was to take place no later than October 1997 (Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation, 2002). It was not until September 1999 that the competency-based system of teacher preparation became fully operational with the implementation of the competency-based teacher assessments (Garrett, 2000).

Changes in testing requirements are evident in the process each of the 18 study participants were directed to follow. Of the 18, only the two most recently certified, Rachel and Kevin, were required to take the basic skills competency test, subject area tests, and the pedagogy test. Only the first two tests were required prior to certification. They each were allowed three years to take the pedagogy test. Teachers were also allowed three years to satisfy their coursework requirements.

Inconsistency of Coursework Requirements

The most inconsistent requirement for the 18 study participants involved coursework. Although up to 18 hours of coursework could be required, Frank, the first of the 18 to be certified, and Quincy, who had no work experience in her field

of zoology, were the only two held to this requirement. The coursework was supposed to be based on the level of education of the teacher candidate. Interestingly, Frank had a juris doctorate degree and had to take 18 hours. Larry, certified only one year later, also possessing a juris doctorate, was only required to take six hours of coursework. The regulations stated there were to be varying requirements for coursework depending on the candidate's level of education attainment and work experience. With the exception of two participants who were required to complete 18 hours, ten of the teacher candidates were required to have only six hours of coursework whether they held a bachelor's degree or master's degree.

Of the 18 study participants, there were three who had taught in another state prior to teaching in Oklahoma. Each of their situations was different. Emma had been certified in Texas, completing a full-time summer program of over 100 clock hours of training followed by an internship during her first year of teaching. Her program also required nine hours of coursework and 50 clock hours of training on Saturdays throughout her first year of teaching. Since she taught for five years prior to coming to Oklahoma, Emma had no additional testing or coursework requirements to complete in order to receive a teaching certificate in Oklahoma.

Mary, like Emma, had taught for four years in Texas prior to arriving in Oklahoma. Because some of her teaching had been in a private school, and she had not completed an alternative certification program in Texas, Mary was required to take subject area tests in Oklahoma but did not have any coursework requirements.

Nathan taught one year in Kansas prior to returning to Oklahoma. With a bachelor's degree in Spanish and one year of teaching experience, Nathan was required to take the subject area test in Spanish and was initially told he would have to take six hours of coursework. When he returned to the State Department of Education to renew his certificate after one year of teaching in Oklahoma, he was surprised to be told he did not need to complete any coursework.

Three of the study participants chose courses of action that were somewhat different than the norm for most alternatively certified teachers. Alan had elected to follow a program of provisional certification that actually resulted in a full standard teaching certificate after three years of teaching and a degree in elementary education. He entered the classroom after taking a prescribed number of hours of coursework and completing student teaching. He then continued to take coursework in education over a period of three years, which eventually resulted in the same number of hours as a traditional teacher preparation program. The difference in his program from traditional certification was his opportunity to obtain a full-time teaching position prior to completing all the required coursework and degree in teacher preparation.

Patty, who had obtained incorrect information regarding alternative teacher certification, took a year of full-time coursework in education prior to entering the classroom as a full-time teacher. Her coursework included field work which allowed her to observe and practice her teaching skills in the school setting. Her first year of teaching was considered an internship, even though she had full responsibility for her class.

Similar to Patty and Alan, Jane had entered a secondary education master's program at the same time she applied for alternative certification. This program provided her with more preparation and coursework than the typical alternatively certified teacher. Due to financial concerns, Jane opted to forego any fieldwork classes or student teaching in favor of alternative certification. This would allow her to obtain a full-time teaching position sooner and not have the added expense of paying for college hours.

A condition of completing initial alternative certification, the search for full-time employment as a teacher was a challenge for most of the study participants. Nine of the 18 study participants were hired within days of the school year starting or after the school year was in session. This presented them with extraordinary challenges in becoming acclimated to their new school and being prepared for students on the first day. Implications for this finding will be discussed in the last chapter. Now that these teachers had obtained certification and secured a job, did they consider themselves to be teachers?

Arriving at the Destination: Professional Identity

Changing careers can evoke disequilibrium in professional identity, a period which involves instability and uncertainty of role and expectations in the new career. The developmental concept of transitions will be explored in the context of these teachers' search for a professional identity. Another idea to be explored in this section, and also related to professional identity, is the notion of pursuing legitimacy; a sense of belongingness and worthiness by virtue of knowledge base or degrees held. Also discussed will be teachers' sense of efficacy

and affirmation from peers which were also found to be factors that contributed to teachers' sense of professional identity. When the alternatively certified teachers were asked to describe when or how they first identified themselves as "a teacher" or "a member of the education profession" they responded in a variety of ways.

Those teachers who had established careers in professional fields seemed to take a more gradual approach to identifying with their new career. They had to disengage from their old career in order to move onto the new one, much like changing out of an old, comfortable sweater into a new one. For them, the transition to a new professional identity was a psychological process that extended over time (Bridges, 2002). Patty, a 40-year-old former engineer, could not identify a specific time but describes this transformation in how she described herself to others:

> I don't know *when* in time but it was when people asked me the question, "What do you do?" and I said, "I'm a teacher" instead of saying "I'm an engineer who's teaching." That's when I thought; okay . . . many years after I was teaching at the high school level, I was still an engineer who taught. And now I'm a teacher. So I cannot tell you chronologically, but, at one point, it was okay with me that I was—and I'm saying this—it's not meant to be derogatory—but in my mind it was "just a teacher." Before that, I have to justify, "I'm a teacher *but* look at all my background. But now I don't care."

Patty has been teaching high school mathematics for ten years. It is only in retrospect that she sees the evolution of her identity as a teacher.

Another example of a more gradual process in identifying with the profession is Larry, 63, a former attorney and businessman who recounted the following thoughts:

I really probably didn't know who I was as a teacher for the first four or five years. What I felt most comfortable doing. . .on the level of what I ought to be doing, plus a picture of what you ought to be. . .my picture was a 30- or 40-year-old picture of what my old teachers had been and stuff like that.

Entering the teaching field in his fifties, Larry's examples of teachers were his own recollections from his childhood many years before. Larry expressed his experiences with calling himself a teacher, rather than an attorney:

I think my wife had more trouble identifying me as a teacher than I did because there's a little more prestige being a lawyer than being a school teacher. . . . I kind of like to introduce myself as a school teacher and kind of watch for awhile and sooner or later they find out I'm an attorney and they go like that (shocked expression) you know, it's kind of interesting to me. I've kind of thought it's kind of neat to be able to tell people I'm a school teacher, and they do just like they do with a lawyer. They'll start telling their bad experiences they've had.

Although Patty had not been comfortable identifying herself as a teacher at first, Larry was proud of his decision to become a teacher, and it showed in the way he described himself. The feelings Patty and Larry had can be explained by an area of adult development theory which focuses on transitions. Bridges (2002) explains that transitions are a psychological process individuals traverse as they

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come to terms with new situations. Larry and Patty have gone through a process of letting go of their old identities as an attorney and engineer, respectively, and they have entered a neutral zone which Bridges (2002) describes as "no-man's land between the old reality and the new. . . It's a time when the old way is gone and the new doesn't feel comfortable yet" (p. 5).

Jane's professional identity also went through a transition period related to the sense of stability she felt in her career. Jane discussed her change in roles from a soldier to a teacher in terms of a "divorce" as she describes:

> Coming out of the military— it really truly is like a marriage—and when you leave the military, it really is a divorce. . . . They call it separation, you are literally separated—you feel a loss. It really, truly becomes, kind of an integral part of who you are, not just, "This is my life and my job." It becomes an integral part of who you are if you internalize the life [of the military].

Transition begins with a sense of letting go of something (Bridges, 2002). Jane had to let go of the sense of stability that the military offered her as she always knew she had a job and a paycheck. Leaving the military and pursuing another career was a scary proposition which threatened her stability. She says her new sense of professional identity comes from her knowledge of the content she teaches and her ability to communicate it. This resulted from her new learning which will be discussed in the next section.

Their Pursuit of Legitimacy

Alternatively certified teachers' identities involve much more than what they *call* themselves but also how they *feel* about their qualifications to teach and

their acceptance within the profession and within their staffs (Danielewicz, 2001). Although most entered the education profession with little or no formal coursework, some have sought to legitimize themselves through the completion of advanced degrees in education. This search for legitimacy is one way these alternatively certified teachers dealt with the neutral zone described by Bridges (2002). The idea of becoming a legitimate member of the teaching profession through learning or obtaining new knowledge is the way these teachers sought to justify their new roles as teachers. As studies on teachers' professional identity formation have shown, most teachers begin their careers gaining their professional identity through subject matter aspects and then later in pedagogical and didactical aspects (Beijaard et al., 2000). Much like the traditionally certified teachers described in the study (Beijaard et al., 2000), Mary, 41, a middle school math teacher, came to terms with her lack of education coursework after about eight years of teaching. Wanting to pursue a career in educational administration, she is now working on a doctorate in education. She describes her pursuit for legitimacy:

> I should just go back to school and get it set straight. You know, I'll just go
> back to school and get it set straight and I won't have to explain, "No, I
> don't have a [traditional] teaching certification. No I'm not elementary
> certified. No I'm not elementary education. No, I don't have secondary
> education. I don't have *any* education."

Also seeking legitimacy, Jane, 34, is teaching middle school math following a ten-year career in the Air Force. She speaks of her concerns regarding her worthiness to teach:

I wanted—to be honest with you—a strong background in education. Because I knew alternatively certified people were looked at, I hate to say it, as "less than." What happens is you get an alternatively certified person who actually knows the subject, the content, but may not have a strong knowledge in pedagogy. And I knew . . . because right now people, when I say I have a master's in secondary education, they assume that I'm the standard certification.

By obtaining an advanced degree in education, Jane felt she had attained legitimate standing in the profession and her alternative certification status could be overlooked by her peers.

Encountering the Stigma of Alternative Certification

Similar to Jane's concern about how other professionals view alternative certification, many teachers expressed self-doubt and a desire to prove themselves as alternatively certified teachers. Several talked about not wanting to let others down, thus giving alternative certification a bad name. An elementary special education teacher, Emma, 31, reflected her perceptions:

I think I was self conscious about being alternatively certified as it was not the routine way of becoming a teacher. The first few years, I felt like I was trying to prove myself—to myself and others. I just think people think you didn't do enough to become a teacher and maybe because, I don't know why, they think, if you tell them everything you did, they'd be like, "Oh yeah, I guess you did all this, or as much." I think that it has a bad rap and it shouldn't and I feel like I kind of did something to change that because everybody said I did a good job even though I was alternatively certified, I

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gave it a good name. That makes me feel good to know that maybe I helped

give it a good name and a positive image.

Emma had completed an alternative certification program in Texas which

required her to attend three months of intensive training prior to accepting

responsibility for her own class. Emma reveals that people did not know she was

alternatively certified:

I don't think anybody at school *knew* I was alternatively certified. I didn't

go around advertising it and I think somebody asked once and so then

people started saying, "Oh really? Wow. I'm surprised." . . . I think it has a

bad connotation.

Throughout the search for study participants, the researcher spoke with

numerous principals who were uncertain of which teachers in their schools were

alternatively certified. In one particular case, a potential participant was

identified by a teacher from another school. When the researcher contacted the

principal to determine whether the teacher met the criteria for the study, the

principal replied the teacher was not alternatively certified. When asked to verify

the certification, he returned to the phone, apologized and stated the teacher was

indeed alternatively certified and would be a great candidate for the study.

Assumptions about certification were particularly common in schools

where there had been numerous changes in administration. Principals seemed

unaware of which staff members had alternative certification. It seemed to be

generally assumed the successful teachers were traditionally certified. I also

discovered the three school districts included in the study do not keep records

regarding alternative certification status, nor does the Oklahoma State

Department of Education. Even though official record keeping was lacking, some of the alternatively certified teachers perceived there was a stigma associated with their status once it was revealed.

Many of the teachers who were interviewed said people did not know about their alternative certification status and were surprised when it was discovered. Donna, 44, now teaches middle school computer classes. She says, "They didn't know *how* I got there, they just assumed that I had an education degree." She recalled a story which depicted this phenomenon, in addition to an underlying distrust of alternatively certified teachers:

> It's amazing how often that will come up when I'm in the room. I'm in the teachers' lounge where there'll be . . . I don't know *why* it comes up. They bring it up. Other people bring it up. They'll talk about "those alternative certified teachers" and things. . . . One day they were talking about that and there were actually four of us in the room, and I'm looking, and we all know who we are, you know, and they're talking and "How dare they think they can come in. . ." and I'm sure they've had some kind of negative experience with someone or they feel like there's *one* path . . . that there's one path in life (laughter) and they're like, "Can you believe that?" And finally, I guess there were three of us in the room we just died laughing. We're like, *"We're those people."*

Although Donna had been teaching for seven years and had even been selected by her peers as their school's teacher of the year, she recalled her insecurities in relation to her status as an alternatively certified teacher during the early years of her career:

I went through periods of that imposter syndrome that, oh I hope they

don't ask me any questions or I hope they don't . . . I was so unofficial that

at first, I didn't, I was afraid to say things in meetings or express ideas.

There is a sense that many alternatively certified teachers perceived a

negative attitude from traditionally certified teachers regarding alternative

certification. This may indicate a sense of betrayal that traditionally certified

teachers feel. Quincy, 28, speculated that the stigma of alternative certification

may be resentment on the part of traditionally certified teachers as a result of

new federal legislation regarding teacher quality. She told of her observations:

People resent us a little now because there are career teachers who are

having to go back and take tests or take coursework. People in the building

would say, "They'd rather have somebody like *you*." But they don't *mean*

anything and they're certainly not attacking *me* but I *do* hear people in the

building or people in the district . . . voicing some concerns about feeling

like they weren't appreciated.

The bias educators have against alternatively certified teachers will be

discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

Gaining Identity through Efficacy

Although there existed some sense of bias against alternatively certified

teachers, most of the teachers who were interviewed gained their sense of

professional identity through the efficacy they experienced in their roles. Jane

recalled the sense of satisfaction she felt when receiving her students'

achievement scores or being in front of the class and having a captive audience.

Kevin recalled the sense of accomplishment he feels when he goes home each day

and knows his students have done a good job with one of their video productions. Larry recalled the sense of being able to influence students by being a good role model. Barb's sense of fulfillment comes from seeing the results in her students' lives. She recalls this experience in her role as an elementary school counselor:

You can see the results; you have longer contact with the students. . . . For example . . . I went to the classroom last week—a 5th grade classroom—introduced myself, talked a little about Red Ribbon Week and what my job was in the school and we talked. And I got two little kids that really wanted to talk to me and they came to my office the next day and one of them needed intervention— needed DHS [Department of Human Services] called—and so if I hadn't gone into that classroom, I don't think they would have known that it's okay to come and talk to me.

To summarize, Irwin's comment regarding teacher efficacy says it all, "The teacher just has to feel that what they're doing is good."

Gaining Identity through Affirmation from Peers

In addition to teacher efficacy, the alternatively certified teachers gained a sense of their professional identity and belongingness to the field of teaching through the affirmation from their colleagues. Alan felt a sense of belonging when experienced teachers began coming to him to ask his opinion on instructional matters. After just a few years as a teacher, he was elected to represent his school as their teacher of the year. Similarly, Carl, Frank, and Donna have all been named teacher of the year at their respective schools. Donna says, "To have the teacher of the year, that's an affirmation from your peers that you're in their club—that they see something in you that they appreciate." Kevin felt like he

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belonged when teachers from other districts began to call him to ask questions about the video production curriculum he had helped develop. Each of the interviewed teachers recalled some experience of being affirmed by their peers. They all felt it contributed to their sense of belonging in the profession. These affirmations came throughout a period of transitioning into a new career; a transition period that created many opportunities for new learning.

Construction Zone: Learning to Teach

With inconsistent requirements for coursework marking the waters of Oklahoma's policies, it is important to develop an understanding of how these successful teachers learned to teach. For some, coursework was helpful, but others considered it a waste of time. Many had very helpful mentors who guided them through their early years of teaching. Although I will explore each of the more obvious methods, many of these teachers believed they had innate teaching ability. Olivia, a 35-year-old Spanish teacher, feels strongly about innate teaching ability:

> So as far as learning to teach, I honestly believe you're born with it. You either know how to teach or you don't. . . And so I think you either know how to break things down and take them in small pieces or figure out different ways of teaching the same concept. I think those are skills that you either naturally have or you don't. I may be wrong. There may be some people that you can teach to do that. As far as being comfortable in front of a class, as far as gaining trust and respect from your students, even the

aspects of discipline, I think those, I think those are hard things to teach people to be able to do.

Patty, recalling her father's words, echoes Olivia's ideas:

And that's something I got from my father I think. He says you cannot learn to teach, you're born to teach. You either know how to or you don't. And if you don't, there's no amount of telling you "how to" that will ever make you a successful teacher. It's instinctive. It's something my whole entire life I was thinking, "How could I explain that to my classmates that they could understand it? Can I build something? Can I draw something? Can I tell a story?"

For the teacher educator or professional development director, beliefs such as these must be considered in planning education programs for alternatively certified teachers or teacher candidates. The implications for practice when dealing with teachers who believe that teaching is an innate skill will be discussed in the final chapter.

Learning through Experience

Some teachers acknowledged more of a trial and error method when learning to teach. Kevin, 28, a former television sports journalist said, "That first year was *all* trial and error because you don't know what's going on. The second year, I really felt like I had a little bit more control, but still trial and error." Larry agreed with the trial and error approach, while Jane recalled her thoughts on a more evolutionary process of learning:

As far as learning how to teach, I think that's just been a slow process. I get better everyday a little bit I think. And serendipity steps in a lot of times.

Each particular class and each particular hour is a little different and sometimes you'll approach something in a certain way and students respond in a way and then the next hour you might approach in seemingly the same way but they respond in a different way. And I make sure I take notes on how people respond to different tacks that I use. And it's hilarious. So many days I'm like, through some weird reaction that I get and another kid responds to another kid and so on and then they feed back to me and through all those different channels I'm like, "Oh, why didn't I think of it that way in the first place?"

Although Jane describes this process as serendipitous, there is really much more at work. The process she describes is akin to reflection-on-action (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Reflection-on-action is often described as the process of thinking through a situation after it has happened. This model demonstrates a cyclical process of continued change and growth. The process Jane describes may be moving toward what Schön (1987) described as reflection-in-action. The difference in Schön's model is that the reflection takes place while the professional is engaged in professional action, rather than after. Schön says, "Reflection gives rise to [the] on-the-spot experiment" (1987, p. 28). Although Jane is the only participant that described this process in detail, it is quite possibly a common occurrence for classroom teachers. Further study would be required to explore this concept. Implications for this type of informal learning will be discussed in the final chapter. More formal types of learning opportunities will be discussed next.

Coursework: Helpful or Not?

Formal coursework has played an interesting role in the learning of these alternatively certified teachers. Though coursework in education was required for most of the teacher candidates, their experiences with the education classes varied. Some found the coursework extremely beneficial and interesting while others found it to be irrelevant and a waste of time and money. For some, it has been an opportunity to "name" what they were doing intuitively. Mary, 41, tells of her experiences with coursework in education:

> I have learned a lot about "naming" what I do since I've started my PhD. . . . I'm conscious of what I'm doing and now I know why I did it. That my philosophy fits within this particular system of philosophies. That my pedagogy fits within this definition of pedagogy . . . what constructivism is and that, "Oh, this is a constructivist kind of activity." And this is a traditional teaching style and some of that causes me frustration because I think if I had known what it was that I was doing, from the beginning, then maybe I'd be farther along the curve at 41 years old. . . . My desire is to go ahead and finish out this PhD and teach at the college level—students who will do the traditional education thing that I never did.

Alan had a similar experience when first confronted with educational research, "It was nice for me to see the research that affirmed what I had figured out through living. The research affirmed what I had noticed about myself and about other adults that I had known and about what I was seeing with my kids."

Alan and Mary brought their life experience and their limited teaching experience into their education classes. They found relevance in their studies.

They could make connections to their experience. Their learning helped them name what they were doing. It affirmed what they knew and believed. However, just as common as positive experiences with coursework were the negative ones. Olivia laments:

> I had a class that was "Technology in the Classroom." You know these are things you can figure out on your own. You know—read a book, read the manual. . . . It was some of those things that were kind of practical applications that to me, you pick up a book and you learn how to do that. I didn't need to be taught that. What I needed to know—I need a really firm knowledge of my *coursework*, you know, what am I going to be teaching?

In Olivia's case, her course seemed to be requiring irrelevant work with lagging technology. Olivia clearly saw it as a waste of time. She also considered this topic as one that would be more suited for learning on her own. Her experience is an example of what Knowles (1980) described as the deep psychological need adults have to be self-directing.

Patty had worked as a graduate assistant at the university teaching and assisting engineering professors. She possessed a number of teaching and presentation skills before taking any of her education coursework. Patty recounted an exasperating experience when she was required to take a course on how to make overheads:

> *That* I was quite upset about because I had been doing *that* kind of work for engineering professors for ten years. I told them, "I can bring you my portfolio of slides, overheads, and computer PowerPoint, anything you want to, and I've done it, as a consultant for other professors for their

professional presentations." And of course, I had to take the course over again.

Although Alan had only taught for a short time, he had been an involved parent with close ties to his daughters' elementary school. He had a great deal of experience as a parent and teacher to bring to the class "Parent/Community Relations." Although Alan generally had positive experiences in his formal education coursework, he recalled this example of his prior experience being disregarded:

> Later, after I had started teaching some of those classes were very, very difficult to go through because I'm sitting here...I'm taking a class, Parent/Community Relations, and I'm thinking OK at this point in my life I've been a teacher for two years, and I used to be a PTA president so what are you going to teach me about parent/community relations? And indeed it was a class that was—there were some things that, "Yep that looks good on paper but it doesn't work that way." There were some things that contradicted.

In addition to needing their life experience validated, these alternatively certified teachers were searching for practical application in their coursework. Frank expresses his frustration:

> I took a course in gifted ed and the special needs child or something and I honestly didn't learn a thing in those courses that I could take with me. I learned so much more in the first two months of teaching *about* those topics than I *ever* did from those courses.

Their complaints are typical for the adult student who faces a disregard for their experience and knowledge base. The teachers interviewed for this study were not the typical 18- to 22-year-old education student who brings little life or work experience to the table. Their needs are different. For coursework to be valuable and beneficial, their experience and knowledge base must be considered and valued. Lindeman (1961), an adult education theorist, says that a learner's experience should be the most highly valued resource of adult education. Another adult education theorist, Malcolm Knowles, also acknowledges the value of experience, calling it "an increasingly rich resource for learning" (1980, p.44). Although many study participants did not find relevance in their coursework, most did find more relevance in another aspect of their learning—mentoring.

Mentoring: Guidance through the Induction Years

Most participants reported learning from other teachers, particularly mentor teachers, was helpful. Although there were few who described their mentoring relationships as perfect, many were positive situations. Most of the study participants were able to point out ways to improve the mentoring program required in the state of Oklahoma for all first year teachers. Jane says, "She laid the foundation for 'this is what it's about, this is good mathematics teaching,' and she would point out to me when I wasn't...and she'd do it this way, 'Ahhh, [Jane], I don't know about that.'" Olivia described some of the specific help her mentor provided:

> She made me think about things I hadn't thought of. You know, from the
>
> classroom management, teacher perspective. You know, how you
>
> directionalize your questions. If you seemed to ask all your questions to

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the boys or to the right side of the class, you know, different things like she would literally map out who I would ask questions from or how I would direct a discussion and things like that. And that was informative. Like I said, it was a perspective I just didn't have and so once you get thinking that way that was helpful.

Since alternatively certified teachers do not experience a student teaching or internship semester with another teacher before assuming full responsibility for a classroom, it is possible that the mentoring process of alternatively certified teachers is of even more importance than that of traditionally certified teachers. More study of this phenomenon would be necessary. As reported by the study participants, the opportunities they had to observe other teachers and to be observed were very helpful in refining their teaching skills. Although the mentor experience was very helpful, many teachers expressed the shortcomings of the program as well. Kevin observes:

> The only problem I see with the mentor teacher aspect is that I didn't get to spend as much time as I would really like. You know I think when you have two people who you know, he's responsible for his own class and you're also responsible, it's difficult to try to meet as often as you can.
> Patty also described ways in which the mentor program could be better:
> We did not have planning periods in common so it wasn't a situation as I hoped it would be where we would have tons of time to meet where we could get together and spend an hour discussing you know, curriculum, management and so on. We had no classes, nothing in common. So she had to get a substitute to come observe my class . . . I don't know that that

was the best situation for an intern teacher. So intern teachers should really and truly have a mentor teacher with a common planning period—if nothing else, a common planning period so they can choose to discuss things at length or work on projects at length instead of worrying about . . . before school, after school, and lunch time which is not always practical.

Critical to the mentoring process was time to observe one another and then meet together to discuss the observations. Unfortunately, some mentoring relationships suffered more severe problems than a time to meet. Carl, 58, a middle school history teacher, remembered his experience, "I think the lady came to my classroom twice in the whole year . . . If I knew what I know now then I'd probably been raising some Cain or something because I wasn't helped whatsoever." Although Holly and her mentor teacher eventually developed a good working relationship and learned from one another, the relationship had an uncertain beginning:

> The first year she told me . . . "I just want you to know, I don't want to be your mentor teacher. I don't have time to be your mentor teacher, but I guess we're going to have to get it done." Because she was the French teacher and she was the only other foreign language teacher. So that's what she told me the first week of school, and I'm like "OK..." and we had extremely different teaching styles but I knew that there was no way I will ever teach like her.

Some of the teachers who served as mentors to these alternatively certified teachers were not their officially assigned mentor, but rather other teachers in the school who offered their assistance and expertise. Nathan describes his

relationship with his informal mentor like this, "I was *hungry* everyday to come soak up what I could get out of her." Alan, who first became interested in teaching through volunteering at his children's school, describes a wide circle of mentors. "I had people who had been my children's teachers and then my friends [and] have now become mentors and now they are peers which has been a neat evolution of the relationship." Ginger, 37, a middle school counselor, says her mentor relationship "was kind of my safety net." Although mentoring provided a learning opportunity for these new teachers, they also benefited from formal professional development opportunities.

The Many Facets of Professional Development

In addition to coursework and mentoring, all the teachers who were interviewed communicated the importance of professional development in their growth as a teacher. The professional development took many forms: personal study, workshops, observing other teachers and school district-sponsored staff development. All of the participants in this study recalled positive experiences with professional development. Most participants believed it was important and highly valued by their school district. Most study participants reported valuing the learning that occurred in their professional development opportunities. Donna highlights the benefits of remaining fresh and current:

> For me it's important that there are always new and fresh and growing edges. So for me, that's why education is a good place for me . . . I've had opportunities. I've had training kind of things all along the way that helped give me new ideas and directions to go.

Alan also said that finding a career where he could be part of a community of learners was very exciting to him:

Well, I want to be around people who want to learn. To be a part of something where people are figuring something out. . . . I still want to learn. Keep my knowledge base as broad as possible and just deepen it all. I want to learn about everything from A to Z and I want it to get as deep as possible.

Holly sees professional reading as a way to stay abreast of the latest research in teaching. She stresses her need to not to be ill-informed or ineffective:

If I want to be an effective teacher to the children that I will be teaching then I have to be aware of materials that are out there and I have to continue to read teaching publications and things like that or what good am I? I'm the old school teacher that I didn't want to be.

As beginning teachers in the classroom, most participants reported they took a slow approach to formal learning opportunities early on, relying mostly on their mentors for what they needed. Common needs the first year of teaching were classroom management or discipline, how to do grades and tests, and, of course, basic questions about the curriculum. Quincy has this to say about her first year, "I don't think I had *time* to research methods too much. . . . That first year, I was basically trying to survive." For the newly certified teachers, the first year of teaching presented unique challenges for which there could be professional development solutions. For example, Larry's experience as a new teacher was not uncommon. He was surprised he did not have more direction in the curriculum and materials he was to be using. Larry was also surprised to find

out he would be a traveling teacher, moving from room to room his first year. He maintained an office area in a corner of the teacher's lounge. He recalled his introduction to his curriculum as:

> Initially I thought that there would be a curriculum established. . . . So I was a little shocked. They gave me a textbook. I didn't even have a teacher's manual. I did have a set of worksheets . . . Anyway; they gave me a pair of scissors with one end broken off, a ruler, a stapler, and a desk in the teacher's lounge.

Another difficulty for new teachers who had not had the benefit of education coursework prior to teaching was the jargon that is used in education. As Larry illustrates, "Yes. I guess my biggest problem is the jargon. I never learned the jargon so I can't remember the terminology, still can't remember the terminology. It changes all the time. (laughter) Like a rubric—what's a rubric?"

Kevin also had problems with the jargon used in education as he recalls his introduction to one of education's central concepts, "What is so funny is that people say the word 'curriculum,' you know, in education that's like— you know— an everyday word. For me—curriculum—[What] does that mean? You know, *what is* that?"

Irwin was also intimidated by educational jargon, particularly the many acronyms used in education, "And I think that was the hardest thing when you sit down with a bunch of teachers you know, they all start throwing out terminology that they just think *everybody* else automatically knows and you're like, 'What's that mean?'" Larry, Kevin, and Irwin's problem with understanding the terminology in education should be expected because their prior experience is not

in the field of education. Recommendations for alleviating these difficulties will be discussed in the final chapter.

Learning from other teachers and having the opportunity to interact with other teachers was the most valuable professional development for most of the participants. When asked to describe their most beneficial professional development experiences most recalled situations, in which they met as departments or with other groups of teachers to discuss new teaching strategies, develop curriculum, address student struggles, and more. Jane attributes her deeper understanding of mathematics to her participation in professional development rather than the courses she took as a master's student. Jane talks about the work she's done in her vertical team, which is a group of teachers who teach the same content but at different grade levels. She explained these specifics:

> I think just participating in stuff like vertical teams with advanced placement college board, going to all of that kind of stuff, meeting with other colleagues, talking—that intellectual life that I was talking about— getting out there, talking to people—talking to people who knew more than I did—frankly about the math. Participating in groups, participating in group studies, reading books. Right now we're reading several books in my vertical team here at the school.

Over time, some participants have become leaders in professional development within their schools or districts. A number of participants told of opportunities they had to train other teachers. Patty, 40, a high school mathematics teacher, has become a professional development leader on her staff. She is eager to learn about new instructional strategies to help her students'

learning processes. She has found she learns so much that after a couple of years she knows more than the trainers; consequently, Patty is frequently put in a training role for other teachers. The other teachers in her school look to her for guidance. If she tries something and it works, they are more willing to learn it, too. Patty has discovered that her approach to professional development is aided by her engineering background. She says:

> I try it. If it works, they try it. If not, we'll try something else. And I don't care about trying things, you know. That's what engineers do, try something, if it works, go with it. If it doesn't, change it.

Jane, who has also taken a leadership role in professional development, had expected a more intellectual environment in the field of teaching. When she did not experience the kind of professional development she wanted at her first school, she transferred to another. There, she has been able to assume a leadership role within her department. She comments on the thoughts she had when she transferred schools:

> And I said, "*Ever* if I get into a leadership position, I'm going to work to provide an environment in my subject area that is very intellectual, that's very standards based, [and] that's looking at learning. And looking at *instruction*, looking at: 'What is it that we're teaching?' 'And how are we teaching?' 'Are we getting it across?' And to really intellectualize about that."

Jane has been able to involve her department in the kind of professional development opportunities she had sought as a new teacher.

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Nathan's professional growth has extended beyond the basics of pedagogy and content. He has learned how to work within the organization of the school as well as learning a great deal about himself as a person. Nathan now understands that he does not have to change everything but instead he can make an impact on the organization by starting within his own classroom, with his own students. He conveys his sense of peace about his role in the organization after four years of teaching:

> When I first showed up, I really was banging the gong and saying, "Hey man, you need to start doing this." And now I look at myself a little more and I try to do what I can by leading through example and doing the best I can with MY kids in MY class instead of trying to change the whole system. I'm just making sure that business is taken care of in my room. And I work on committees and I try to impact change however I can, but through a system of example, rather than word. I still see a lot of those problems existing. . . . But I don't try to change them in the same way. And that's through some growth—personal growth— but I think a lot of my personal growth has been accelerated through dealing with so many children everyday. I found out that I'm a lot more compassionate, nicer person than what I thought I was.

Alternatively certified teachers bring their prior learning, experience, and a unique set of skills to their new jobs as teachers. In planning professional development for this population of teachers, it is easy to overlook the skills and experience these teachers bring to the table. Most alternatively certified teachers have work skills and educational backgrounds very different from the typical

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beginning teacher who has been prepared in a traditional program. Each of their backgrounds are unique. Coming from a military background, Jane articulately outlines the useful skills she brings to teaching:

> Organizational skills, leadership skills, being able to lead people, being able to follow people, be[ing] able to clearly get information across, understand[ing] how information is cross-functional, to look at a schematic and see how what I do fits into the big picture and to have all of that and be able to assess in minutes what a situation might look like or what a situation might be. And *also*, to be able to think tactically, "What am I going to do about right now?" And then to think strategically, "Where do I want *this* to go?"

Rachel said that her work in the corporate world had helped her in teaching because she did corporate training. Carl also had years of experience training young soldiers when he was in the military. Many of the study participants had presentation or training experience which they could relate to their teaching roles.

In addition to training skills, many of the participants had management experience they found helpful in teaching. Managing time, students, and materials are part of a teacher's daily life. As a special education teacher, Emma not only had the regular management duties of a classroom teacher, but was also responsible for special education paperwork and supervising teaching assistants. She found her degree in strategic management and her work experience in corporate management transferred to her role as a special education teacher.

Although the teachers interviewed in this study brought many skills and experiences to teaching, most were surprised by the challenges faced in the day-to-day practice of teaching. They experienced great admiration for their colleagues in the teaching profession. None of them went into teaching because they thought it was an easy job, but they have found it a much more challenging job than they first expected.

Jane discussed the amount of time it takes to do her job well, commenting that she often does not leave her classroom until eight or nine in the evening. She has these thoughts about the job of teaching, "Teaching is not what people think it is. And I think you really don't know until you get this classroom *all by yourself*. . . It takes a lot of energy to do this job, in education, period." The difficulty of various careers may be hard to compare. Larry, who has worked in three careers—law, business, and teaching—has this to say about the teaching career:

> It's many times more difficult than it ever appears from the outside. I would say two or three times [more difficult]. Just the work load—now that doesn't deal with the most difficult part—it's the pressure of the classroom, just being in the environment, the amount of time you spend. . . . That's the issue right there. Some people can hack it, some just can't. I guess it's the same as people out there in the battlefield in a war zone. Some do better than others.

Since these teachers have expressed how much they have to learn and the challenge they face in teaching, what is it that keeps them committed to the field? The next section will explore the factors that keep them coming back each year.

Teacher attrition is a grave concern in education today, as teachers entering the field through traditional and alternative routes seem to be at risk for leaving the field after only a short time. In light of teacher shortages across the nation, educational leaders and policymakers are interested in learning what steps can be taken to keep teachers in education. The alternatively certified teachers in this study had been teaching 1 to 12 years. Seventeen of the participants were in their third year or more of teaching. This sample of successful alternatively certified teachers can help us understand the factors that have kept them committed to teaching.

Of important note when discussing these 18 teachers is that three are not teaching this year. Emma recently had a baby and decided to stay home with her infant daughter after seven years of teaching special education. Emma plans to return to teaching in a few years. Holly, who taught Spanish for five years, accepted an opportunity to be a nanny and home school teacher for a family. She decided to accept the position because it was a lucrative deal financially, and a situation which would allow her to continue. Olivia, also a Spanish teacher, quit her teaching position after seven years for several reasons. She was planning to have her third child and wanted to spend more time with her family, but she was also upset with a situation in which a teacher in her department had a drug addiction. Olivia believed her administration's action regarding the matter was too slow, thereby causing her a great deal of work stress. Olivia intends to return

to teaching when her children are older. She is currently teaching Spanish in her daughter's preschool a few hours each week. Olivia says:

> I talked about some negative experiences. I don't *blame* those people. I'm not going to blame that for me getting out. I think it was a good time for me to do something different and re-evaluate. Do I ever think I'll go back? Yeah. I think I'll *always* be involved someway or another, like with my kids' school. I'll teach Spanish for free if I have to.

Although a stressful situation prompted Olivia to quit teaching for now, her overall career plan involved teaching for only five to ten years, then doing something else, and then returning to the classroom. Olivia explains her plan this way:

> When they interviewed me [here], they asked me where did I see myself in 5 or 10 years. . . . What was my professional kind of direction? And I told them at that time, you know this is probably the wrong answer but I probably will not be in the classroom because I think to be a classroom teacher, you have to be *on fire*. You just have to be *passionate* and totally committed and really into it. And I don't think that you can do that for longer than 5 to 10 year spurts. And then your passion dies a little bit and you need to be regenerated and re-motivated and I really was hoping that I would spend 5 to 10 years in the classroom and then I would spend a few years in curriculum development and maybe work on a textbook, be involved in administration as far as curriculum and then go back. That was really what my ideal plan was. I don't know if that will happen for me. You know right now my kids are my focus—my kids in my own house.

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Olivia, 35, believes teaching requires a passion that cannot be sustained for decades. She views her life in stages that requires doing different things. Olivia explains her intent to return to teaching:

I *totally* see myself as an older person having that same passion again. I think the sad thing about some teachers, you know, they might teach for thirty years and by the time they're older, they just seem dried up. And it might have nothing to do with their age. But you would be dried up doing the same thing for thirty years. . . . I think if you look toward that and having different stages and steps in your life then it will be a lot more positive experience for everyone. I gave my students everything I had when I was in the classroom.

Although Emma, Holly, and Olivia are not currently teaching full-time in the public schools, they continue to view themselves as teachers and have intentions to resume their teaching careers in the future.

Of the 15 participants who are currently teaching, all of them expressed a desire to continue in education. Although some of them see their teaching may eventually lead to a position in administration or curriculum development, they were all highly committed to staying in education. Mary, 41, emphatically responded, "Forever. I plan to *retire* from education." Frank, 42, equally intense, says, "I'll be teaching until I'm in the grave I'm sure." Ginger, 37, also says, "I'm here for the long haul." Donna is also happy with teaching but she seems unsure of her long-term commitment due to financial constraints:

For me, I could do this for a long time . . . I could be happy for a long time. I need to grow and I think that opportunity is there. . . . For me honestly,

my oldest is in college at a private university, my husband had a major illness [and] hospitalization in the last couple of years and although we have good insurance it didn't cover it all so I have a significant amount of debt. You know I have another one who is a high school sophomore. So for me, I wonder, I don't have any plan, I don't have any plan to leave teaching but every year, I think, "Can I do this? Can I really afford to do this?" It's purely economical.

When asked about their commitment to continuing in the field of teaching, there was a great deal of agreement between the teachers' motivations for becoming teachers and their commitment to staying in teaching. Rachel, who entered teaching to have meaning in her work, says her commitment to continue is related to seeing her students succeed:

I feel like I'm very committed. I can't imagine, unless somebody offered a million dollar job that I only had to work six months out of the year in my lap then I really don't see myself going anywhere. I think it's so fulfilling to have the interaction with the students, you know seeing what works and what doesn't work and being able to motivate those kids that are unmotivated.

Students are also a factor in Patty's commitment. She acknowledges the daily challenge of teaching and sometimes thinks of leaving the field, but she is renewed each year by her students. She has this to say about her commitment:

And every time I say that, "Oh, I'll just quit and do something else," classes start again and I just *love* my students so you know, probably I'll be here forever till we just dig a little hole somewhere and put my little dead body

there because every time I think, I'm just sick and tired of teaching then I see the students again and even when I get sick and tired of teaching, I *love* the students and when the students get on my nerves, then I love the challenge of teaching.

When asked about the things that make her weary of teaching, Patty responded that sometimes the attitudes of other teachers bother her. She feels some of them are apathetic and sometimes unprepared for the work that needs to be done regarding testing and curriculum development. Patty is teaching at her second school now, leaving the first one after several years of working with an authoritative principal who she says asked for teacher input but did not value it. She became frustrated after working on several committees with him and decided to find a different environment at another school. Had she not found another job, she would have quit teaching altogether. Patty's experience leads us to a discussion of school climate and its impact on a teacher's perseverance.

Positive School Climate: A Factor of Success and Commitment

Quincy, 28, is also enjoying her career in teaching after four years. She says, "As far as a commitment to teaching goes, I'm having a great time. I have wonderful students. I work with great people." Quincy and Patty's experiences clearly show the climate at their schools is very instrumental in their desire to continue teaching.

One important aspect of school climate discussed by many of the study participants was the sense of collegiality they felt in their schools. In comparing his school climate to the corporate climate he had worked in for eight years, Kevin says, "Two totally different perspectives . . . [Here] everyone is willing to

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help. I've talked with several teachers who like, 'If you need help here, let me know.'" The collegiality experienced by these teachers was indistinguishable from the professional development so many of them found valuable—that of discussing issues and solving problems of instruction and curriculum with other teachers. Olivia, who eventually left her teaching job partially due to problems with a colleague, had this to say about the importance of working together:

> I think that your core group of teachers in your area—your peer teachers in whatever, whether it's fourth grade, or Spanish or Math— I think those relationships are extremely important because you feed one student from one to the other. You depend on what they're doing in their classroom. It really has an impact on what you're doing.

In addition to collegiality, administrative support was a very important factor in the success of these alternatively certified teachers. Mary recalled her experience with a very supportive principal as well as with her supportive colleagues:

> His office was right across the hall. He'd check on me. Not in a "What's she doing?" but a, "Hey, how's your day?" I mean, he was just really, really good with me. I had an English teacher down the hall . . . she and I became really good friends. I mean, I would have been *sick* to miss school because I would have not only missed teaching, missed my students, but would miss the relationships that I had built in my professionalism.

The support of the principal was discussed by most of the study participants. Most described very supportive principals who had high

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expectations of their teachers. Carl says this of the impact his principal has on their school climate:

> Well, I think the climate here with Mrs . . . , she's a super principal and she really backs us a hundred percent so she sort of lets us out on our own and we have a lot of freedom here as long as we comply with what's expected of a teacher.

Many of the teachers expressed appreciation for their principals and told of experiences where their principals had been helpful and supportive. Mary was very direct in her observations of the importance a principal plays in the school climate. She states:

> Well, I've now had five principals and I firmly believe the school climate is tied to the model of the principal. . . . I have noticed with every principal I have had that the school climate is a direct reflection of how involved they are in the environment of the school.

Holly knew in the interview for her position that she would like working for her principal. She described him this way:

> And then I talked to him and it was like I was talking to one of the twelve apostles or something, just the kindest, most gentle, most wonderful person, and I thought this would be a dream come true working with someone like him.

The school administrators play a key role in retaining teachers in the field. Recent research supports this finding. Ingersoll's (2001) study of teacher attrition and retention indicates teacher involvement in the creation of school policies, and administrator support of new teachers were key factors in improving

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retention of teachers. Similar to Ingersoll's findings, the participants in this study exhibited a high commitment to their careers as teachers as a result of positive school climates. Their students were very important in their decision to remain in teaching. The factors which contributed to their success and commitment were school climate, which included the relationships they had with their colleagues and their administrators. Each of the interviewed teachers expressed a great deal of respect for the professionalism and high quality of their colleagues. Many described their schools as the best school in the state. Since most of the study participants were extremely satisfied with their destinations, we will now look at their satisfaction with the road they have traveled to get to where they are now.

Through the Rearview Mirror

Study participants were asked if they would follow the same path to teaching again. Their response affirmed that whereas alternative certification may not be the right path for everyone, it was a good fit for them. Jane expresses reluctance to devalue the traditional process, which includes student teaching, but sees it as something that was not necessary for her:

> Not to say that student teaching wouldn't have been worthwhile—not to say that getting a standard certificate isn't worthwhile—but I didn't have to do that. Maybe some others do at a different point in their lives.

Jane's comments were consistent with many others who felt they were somehow an exception. Without sounding arrogant, many of the alternatively certified teachers believed they had natural abilities, as well as learned skills, which made a traditional teacher preparation program unnecessary for them.

When Mary was asked, "Do you think it is too easy to become alternatively certified in Oklahoma?" she responded after a long pause:

> Yes. Yes, I still think the standard—the standard for any program, whether you're a doctor, a lawyer, is to go the route that has been set. Now, are there exceptions? Yeah, but I think they're few. Now does that put me in this elite few? Yeah. Do I think everyone who has been a geologist out there ought to come teach algebra and geometry? *No! No!* Not in the least!

Although these teachers saw alternative certification as a good fit for them personally, they had many different thoughts regarding the concept of alternative certification. Larry expressed reluctance to do any extensive work to get into the field of education. He did not want to take extensive coursework or create a portfolio. However, Larry did commit to substitute teaching for a year and a half before accepting a full-time teaching position. He wanted to be sure he could not only tolerate working with young people, but enjoy them as well, because as he reflects, he had many options other than teaching:

> If it required any more of me than it did then—if I had to do any *more* to get in than I did at that time, I wouldn't because I didn't have to. There were lots of other things I could do.

With Larry's law degree and business experience, he had many career options. Teaching was not the only thing he could do. For him, the effort required to get into teaching matched what he was willing to give at that point in his life. Larry's lack of desire to go through any extensive program was not unique. Many participants saw alternative certification as an "easy" way to get into the field of teaching. For some, they did not see value in the education coursework, but for

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most, it was simply a matter of having already obtained a degree and not wanting to start their education endeavor over again in order to change careers. As evidenced by the interviews, these teachers have taken a serious approach to learning how to be better teachers; yet most do not see formal coursework as the means to accomplish that task.

Summary of Findings

Although this study reflects only a small sample of alternatively certified teachers in the state of Oklahoma, this study has addressed the questions of what were the common motivations of alternatively certified teachers, what were their approaches to learning how to teach, how their professional identities were developed, what kept them committed to the teaching profession, and to what do they attribute their perseverance and success. Through the use of a journey metaphor, the study demonstrated that these alternatively certified teachers were searching for a career in which they could make a difference. They approached learning in a variety of ways but learned mostly from their interactions with colleagues through mentoring and professional development and through their classroom experience. Their professional identity developed over time but was related to their sense of efficacy in the classroom and affirmation from their peers. Many of the factors that kept them committed to teaching were the same factors that drew them to teaching in the first place—a sense of fulfillment and commitment to students. The major factor contributing to their success and perseverance was school climate, specifically collegiality and administrator support. The next section of this chapter will explore the prevailing assumptions

surrounding alternative certification. Following this discussion, the next chapter

will discuss the implications for practice and further study of this phenomenon.

Challenging Assumptions

Having presented and explored the experiences of 18 alternatively certified

teachers, these findings will be discussed in relation to some commonly held

assumptions regarding this growing group of educators. The literature indicates

that there are proponents and opponents of alternative certification. Typically,

proponents tend to be outsiders to education—policy makers and the general

public. Consequently, the opponents of alternative certification tend to be those

within the education system. Many assumptions concerning this practice, and

documented in the literature, are held by policy makers and the general public, as

well as by members of the teaching profession. The assumptions held by each of

these groups are sometimes contradictory. In this regard, nine commonly held

assumptions held by these groups, identified through the literature and the

findings of this study, will be explored. Supported by this study's findings, the

commonly held assumptions of *both* groups will be challenged.

Policy Maker Assumption Number One: A Program of Alternative Certification

Exists

Assumption.

A popular assumption held by policy makers and the general public is that

there is a "program" of alternative certification. During the course of this study,

the researcher had the opportunity to discuss alternative certification with many

people—inside and outside the field of education finding that the average person

expects that teachers go through some sort of educational or professional program to be alternatively certified.

Challenge.

Most states have alternative certification programs that consist of some combination of the following; a condensed course of study, interviews, tests, and a period of intense supervision during the first year or more of teaching. In Oklahoma, there is no "program" for alternative certification, but rather a process.

Recalling the 18 participants of this study, Patty and Alan had completed a year or more of education classes prior to accepting responsibility for a classroom. Alan had even completed a semester of student teaching. Emma had completed a condensed professional education program over a three-month period, followed by an intensive internship and continued coursework her first year of teaching in Texas.

For the remaining 15 teachers who proceeded through typical alternative certification in Oklahoma, there were minimal requirements which mandated no prescribed course of study or intensive internship period. Testing requirements were minimal until three years ago—with nearly all of the participants having the requirement to pass only a subject area test. The coursework requirements for the participants were typically only six hours, regardless of the degree or work experience of the candidate. Most participants reported that there were no specified courses but rather a general requirement to take six hours in any education course. These findings do not resemble any of the alternative certification programs in other states.

Although fairly limited, the literature on alternative certification programs recommends effective programs should be designed to meet the demand for teachers in geographic areas and subject areas where the demand is greatest (Shockley, 2001). These programs are also designed to meet the needs of their participants, considering their past attainment of a bachelor's degree and experience in other occupations (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001). The speed with which a candidate goes through an alternative certification program should be a function of selecting well-qualified candidates with excellent educational and work histories and not a function of a less than adequate program (Shockley, 2001). According to NCEI data (Feistritzer, 2002), most states have a program which is designed to recruit, prepare, and license talented individuals with bachelor's degrees. The candidates for these programs traverse a rigorous screening process which may include tests, interviews, and demonstration of content mastery (Feistritzer, 2002). In addition they find the best programs are field-based and include relevant coursework before, and while teaching (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001). Mentoring from a trained teacher and high performance standards are also evident in quality alternative certification programs (Feistritzer, 2002; Shockley, 2001). The participants who were alternatively certified through Oklahoma's program had a much more streamlined process than the aforementioned studies recommended. Although the participants interviewed in this study have been successful, it is reasonable to assume that Oklahoma would experience even more success with alternatively certified teachers if they implemented some of the program elements recommended above.

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Policy Maker Assumption Number Two: Alternatively Certified Teachers Bring Career Experience

Assumption.

As indicated by the literature and the rhetoric surrounding alternatively certified teachers, policy makers and the general public believe alternatively certified teachers bring rich career experience to the teaching field (Feistritzer, 1999, 2002; Legler, 2002).

Challenge.

This may indeed be the case in states having and enforcing regulations which require related career experience in order to be alternatively certified. In Oklahoma, this regulation is interpreted loosely. Only six of the 18 study participants interviewed had career experience that directly related to their teaching field. Barb and Ginger, both school counselors, had worked as counselors in a private setting. Nathan and Holly had used their Spanish on a daily basis in their prior careers. Patty had taught engineering at the university level prior to teaching high school mathematics, and, finally, Kevin, now teaching video production, had been a television journalist. The 12 remaining alternatively certified teachers did not have career experience in their teaching field but rather had a degree in their field or simply possessed enough coursework in a particular area to be given permission to test for the teaching field in which they were interested. Although these 18 teachers are considered successful by their administrators, only one-third of them brought actual career-related experience to their teaching field. Although two thirds of the participants did not have career

experience directly relating to their teaching field, they did bring other life skills gained from their real world experience which contributed to their success in establishing relationships with students and other teachers as well as in the organization of their teaching responsibilities. Salyer's (2003) study of alternatively certified teachers also found that "...possession of practical, real-world knowledge, effective interpersonal skills, and organizational skills will influence both their teaching behaviors and their effectiveness." (p. 7) So although alternatively certified teachers may bring work experience to their teaching, it is not necessarily experience working in the same field as their teaching.

Policy Maker Assumption Number Three: Alternatively Certified Teachers Have Specialized Degrees

Assumption.

Another assumption held by policy makers and the general public is that alternatively certified teachers teach in the area in which they hold specialized degree (Feistritzer, 1999, 2002; Legler, 2002).

Challenge.

Of the 18 study participants, 12, or two-thirds, held a degree in a related field of study. The remaining six who do not hold degrees in their teaching field include Alan, who is teaching elementary school with a communications and broadcasting degree; Donna, who is teaching computers and math with a journalism degree; and Emma, who is teaching special education with a business administration degree. Jane, who eventually pursued a master's degree in education, began teaching mathematics with a liberal studies degree. Mary

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teaches math with a geology degree and after ten years of teaching is now pursuing a doctorate in education. Lastly, Rachel teaches journalism with a marketing degree. These examples refute the commonly held assumption that alternative certification exists to bring content area specialists into the teaching field (Feistritzer, 2002; Legler, 2002).

Policy Maker Assumption Number Four: Alternative Certification is a Solution to Emergency Certification

Assumption.

The final assumption often maintained by policy makers is that alternative teacher certification is a solution to the problem of emergency certification (Sindelar & Rosenberg, 2000). Emergency certification has existed for some time and is typically defined as a type of alternative certification used in specific or emergency situations, such as teacher shortages. It is usually granted on a temporary basis and the teacher is expected to obtain the necessary credentials to become fully certified within a specific time period.

Challenge.

Because Oklahoma's process for alternative certification does not require a specified training program, alternative certification in Oklahoma is really no different than emergency certification. Until recently, a teacher could begin teaching after simply passing a subject area test. The teacher had three years to complete minimal coursework requirements. With the exception of passing a single test, this is much like emergency certification. In the last three years, Oklahoma has required teachers to also pass a general knowledge test prior to the subject area test. Teachers still have three years to teach before having to pass the

pedagogy test or complete coursework requirements. Since alternative certification in Oklahoma differs so slightly from emergency certification, it can hardly be described as a solution to the emergency certification problem.

Educator Assumption Number One: Alternative Certification Erodes Teacher Quality

Assumption.

Contrary to the assumptions of policy makers and the general public, educators often harbor biases against alternatively certified teachers—biases based on faulty assumptions. A commonly held assumption is the belief that alternative certification erodes the quality of teachers in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2000b; Ingersoll, 2001; Legler, 2002).

Challenge.

As evidenced by this study, all of the 18 participants are described by their administrators as highly successful. In addition to their supervisors' recommendations, it is evident in the leadership roles they describe and the personal responsibility they have taken for their professional development. These teachers are committed to high-quality teaching. Their commitment to the students and the enterprise of education is evident as they talked passionately of the work they do. Many have made financial sacrifices to become teachers. As several of the participants noted, they have known of ineffective teachers from both traditional and alternative certification routes. Because traditional programs of teacher preparation have undergone many changes in recent years and alternative certification programs vary, comparisons between traditional and alternative programs' effectiveness are nearly impossible (Feistritzer, 2002;

Legler, 2002). Discussions of teacher quality are hampered by a difficulty in defining the term "quality" or the factors which contribute to teacher quality. Large scale studies have failed to answer the question as well. "Neither education courses completed, advanced education degrees, scores on professional knowledge sections of licensure exams nor, interestingly, years of experience seem to have a clear relationship to student achievement" (Haycock, 1998, p. 6).In other words, the certification route traveled by teachers is no guarantee of their quality in the classroom since certification has no proven connection to student achievement, which is the true measure of a teacher's effectiveness.

Educator Assumption Number Two: Alternatively Certified Teachers are Driven by Content

Assumption.

There is also an assumption held by many educators that alternatively certified teachers are driven by their content rather than a love for teaching. It is believed that because they eschewed the traditional teacher preparation program, they must not value pedagogy but are simply in teaching to promote their favored content area. This assumption has been evident to the researcher through personal experience as an educator.

Challenge.

Patty, as an alternatively certified teacher, explained that a person's passion for teaching—or lack thereof—is evident in the interview. She described an alternatively certified teacher who was not successful in her school. She detected his lack of potential for success in the interview. She recounts this experience:

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We had a teacher hired here recently who just didn't work out. He was

alternatively certified but I saw that at the interview he was just sort of,

"Well, that job didn't work, and that job didn't work and I was bored with

this and I was bored with that so I'm trying this." Well, that person's

probably not passionate about teaching and students.

Several of the study participants could cite experiences with other teachers

who were not successful from both routes—alternative and traditional. Because

the literature focuses on the merit of alternative certification, there is little

research describing the passion alternatively certified teachers have for their

students and teaching. A recent study by Salyer (2003) examined the motivations

of alternatively certified teachers using a questionnaire. She found the primary

motivating factors for alternatively certified teachers included wanting to help

students and making a contribution to society. In addition, she found they had

prior experience with teaching or training, wanted to have more time with family,

and chose teaching because of job availability. Salyer's findings support the

motivations revealed in this study. The findings in this study, as well as Salyer's

findings, refute the assumption that alternatively certified teachers are content-

driven.

Educator Assumption Number Three: Alternatively Certified Teachers were
Unsuccessful in their Other Careers

Assumption.

The 18 study participants interviewed for this study were all successfully

employed when they made the decision to become alternatively certified. This

contradicts the assumption of many educators who believe these teachers are

entering the field of teaching as a last resort because they were out of work or unsuccessful in their careers. This assumption is also identified through personal experience as an educator.

Challenge.

In this study, there was one teacher who had been in a state of transition when she decided to teach. Quincy had graduated from college and was waiting tables as she both searched for a job in pharmaceutical sales and applied for an advanced educational program to be a physician's assistant. In her case, she took the certification tests in science because she thought it would look good on her resume. As neither the job nor the advanced program worked out, she decided to pursue teaching since she had already passed the certification tests. Quincy's experience was very different from the others who had made a conscious decision to pursue teaching while still successfully employed in another career. The experiences of the other 17 participants in this study refute the assumption that alternative certification teachers turned to teaching as a result of unemployment or failure in other careers.

Educator Assumption Number Four: Alternatively Certified Teachers will Leave Teaching

Assumption.

Those in education sometimes view alternative certification teachers as disposable—stemming from the belief they will not last long in education. This assumption also stems from the researcher's personal experience as an educator.

Challenge.

This assumption sometimes results in little or no investment in their

professional development as new teachers. As this study and others show, many

alternatively certified teachers remain in teaching and not only benefit from

induction programs, but need them to be successful.

Educator Assumption Number Five: Successful Teachers Must be Traditionally

Certified

Assumption.

As indicated in this study, many alternatively certified teachers were

assumed to have traditional education degrees. Other teachers were often

surprised to discover their colleagues' alternative certification status—sometimes

after expressing derision for "those" teachers who presumed to teach with no

education degree.

Challenge.

Oftentimes, people are biased against those groups of people with whom

they are not familiar. This new knowledge was met by disbelief, surprise, and a

new understanding of "those" teachers. As indicated by this study, although these

teachers did not go through the traditional preparation to become a teacher, they

are just as committed, knowledgeable and effective as many of the best teachers.

Because alternative certification is here to stay, members of the education

profession must attempt to understand, support, and accept these teachers.

Acknowledging and challenging these nine assumptions held by

policymakers and educators suggests a number of problems with the concept and

implementation of alternative teacher certification. The next chapter will discuss

the implications for policymakers, school administrators, staff developers, and program providers.

Chapter 5: Summary and Discussion

Alternative teacher certification has evolved over the last twenty years as a response to real and perceived shortages of qualified teachers. The reduction of teacher certification requirements has been viewed by many as a solution to teacher shortage problems (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). It has also been considered as a way to improve the quality of the teaching force by recruiting highly-skilled people from the private sector who have developed real-world experience with subject matter (Legler, 2002). Rather than arguing the merit of alternative certification, this study pursued an understanding of successful alternatively certified teachers in order to better serve the needs of policymakers and educators.

In this study, 18 alternatively certified teachers were interviewed using a qualitative approach to address the following questions: Who are they? What are their motivations for changing careers? How have they approached learning to teach? How are their professional identities developed? What are the factors that contribute to their success and perseverance in the field of teaching? This chapter addresses implications regarding those questions based on the experiences of 18 alternatively certified teachers who shared their stories. In this final chapter, a summary of findings from this study is offered. Implications for practice are suggested, as well as areas for further research.

Summary of Findings

Motivations

This study sought to reveal the common motivations of alternatively certified teachers. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this study has taken a retrospective stance in order to examine the motivations for these teachers' career changes. From an adult development standpoint, the significance of a decision or event is not recognized until after the fact (Rossiter, 1999). Whereas it is only after one has arrived at a better psychological place that development can be said to have occurred, adult development is retrospective in nature (Rossiter, 1999). By asking study participants to think retrospectively about their decisions to enter teaching, they were able to articulate their motivations and the circumstances and feelings surrounding their decisions to change careers. The alternatively certified teachers interviewed in this study were searching for a career in which they could make a difference. They felt that they had something to offer young people. Many believed that they had knowledge that was useful to society's youth and that by teaching they could help young people. Others, also wanting to help youth, believed they could be good role models. The motivations of these alternatively certified teachers is best described by the term—generativity (Erikson, 1959). Each stage of development in Erikson's model involves two opposing outcomes—one positive and one negative. Typically experienced during middle adulthood, generativity versus stagnation is Erikson's (1959) seventh developmental stage, where the major concern is to assist the younger generation in developing and leading useful lives (Reeves, 1999). The

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feeling of having done nothing to help the next generation results in stagnation (Erikson, 1959). Erikson's model of stage development is useful in understanding these teachers' need to give back to society by making a difference for young people, thus preventing future stagnation.

Approach to Learning

The decision to change careers and enter the field of teaching presented a time of transition to these 18 alternatively certified teachers. Consistent with the literature in the area of adult transitions (Bridges, 2002; Reeves, 1999; Zemke & Zemke, 1995), the experiences of the teachers described in this study indicated that these periods of career transition were associated with learning opportunities. While most adults learn in order to cope with change in their lives, the more life-changing an event, the more likely it is to be associated with learning opportunities (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Reeves, 1999; Zemke & Zemke, 1995). The teachers interviewed in this study approached learning in a variety of ways but learned mostly from their interactions with colleagues through mentoring and professional development and through their classroom experience. The experiences of these alternatively certified teachers validated Knowle's assertion that as adults mature, they become more problem-focused in their approach to learning, focusing on the immediate relevancy of their learning (Knowles, 1980). The study participants' learning focused on their immediate needs as new teachers such as, how to set up a grade book, how to manage disciplinary issues and how to write a test or plan instruction. The teachers who were interviewed expressed more interest in learning the practical elements of day-to-day classroom teaching rather than the theoretical basis for instruction.

Most relied on innate knowledge of the teaching act or on the knowledge they had gained through years of studying teacher behavior when they themselves were students.

A discussion of alternatively certified teachers' approaches to learning would not be complete without mentioning the role of experience and prior knowledge. Dewey, Knowles, and Caffarella have all written extensively about the role of experience and prior knowledge in the adult learning process. All of the study participants brought content expertise, work experience, or both to their teaching positions. Although not all were experts in their teaching field, they brought experience or knowledge that was not typical to the beginning teacher who has been traditionally prepared. As indicated by the experiences of the teachers who were interviewed, their experiences and knowledge bases varied a great deal from one to another. One could conclude that no single approach was evident but rather each alternatively certified teacher had unique experiences and expertise which must be considered when assisting them in planning their professional development or when planning an induction program for this population of teachers.

Professional Identity

Developing over time, these alternatively certified teachers' professional identities were related to their sense of efficacy in the classroom and affirmation from their peers. Identifying themselves as teachers was more difficult for those who had long-term careers in other fields or were in highly professional fields. This seemed to be more related to letting go of their old career identities rather than identifying themselves as teachers. In fact, as Bridges (2002) discusses,

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these teachers had to travel through a period of ending, or letting go, of their former career or professional identification before identifying themselves as teachers. Once they had traversed the period of letting go of their old identity, teachers identified affirmation from peers and a sense of efficacy as being critical factors in their identity or feeling of belongingness in the profession. When other teachers began to seek their advice or opinions, these alternatively certified teachers began to believe they belonged.

Success and Commitment to Teaching

Recent research indicates that teacher shortages are largely due to teacher turnover, particularly new teachers leaving the profession early in their careers (Ingersoll, 2001; Salyer, 2003). Whereas there is a growing body of research indicating the need for more supportive programs for beginning teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Salyer, 2003), principals, in particular, play an important role in determining the quantity and quality of support for beginning teachers and for setting the tone of the school climate (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Salyer, 2003). Supported by the current literature, this study suggests that the major factor that contributed to the success of these 18 alternatively certified teachers was a positive school climate, specifically collegiality and administrator support.

Whereas the factors that kept these teachers committed to teaching were some of the same factors which drew them to teaching in the first place—a sense of fulfillment and commitment to students—also indicated by the findings was the idea of control over time. Most of the participants valued the daily schedule

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and yearly calendar of their teaching careers because it allowed them more time with family with less travel and time away from home.

Implications for Practice

Although this study was not to be an evaluation of alternative certification programs, the experiences of the 18 participants indicated program shortcomings as well as weaknesses in the induction and support of alternatively certified teachers. Implications for policy and program development as well as implications for supporting alternatively certified teachers will be discussed in this section. These implications will be organized by the groups responsible for implementation of these recommendations, primarily policy makers and program providers, staff developers, and school administrators. A final section will outline this study's implications for alternatively certified teachers.

Implications for Policy Makers and Program Providers

As indicated by the experiences of these 18 alternatively certified teachers, Oklahoma does not currently have a *program* for alternative certification but rather a checklist of tasks to be completed within three-years of taking full responsibility in the classroom as a teacher. Although the participants of this study were successful teachers, their experience indicates a limited screening process currently in place in Oklahoma. There should be high standards and proper screening of candidates to enter alternative certification programs (Haycock, 1998; Legler, 2002). There appears to be an emphasis on the subject area test results rather than a systematic review of the candidate's skills, abilities, and general disposition toward teaching. Although Oklahoma had a Teacher

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Competency Review Panel in place in the late 1990s, this panel was disbanded

after only a couple of years due to political issues. The findings of this study

suggest that a panel of this type would serve a useful purpose if political issues

could be resolved. Also indicated by the findings of this study is that the onus of

ensuring teacher quality is on the hiring administrator rather than state

certification officers.

These findings suggest that a state program for alternative teacher

certification would be in the best interest of Oklahoma's educational system.

Because effective programs should be market-driven and designed to meet the

needs of particular regions or subject areas, it is recommended that that state

departments of education, colleges and universities, and local school districts

work together to provide effective programs (Feistritzer, 2002). These programs

should be tailored to meet the specific needs of the participants who are already

college graduates and possess content expertise, work experience, or both

(Feistritzer, 2002). The programs should offer instruction in pedagogy, subject

matter, classroom management, and child development—preferably before the

candidate begins teaching (Legler, 2002). Effective programs are field-based,

allowing the teacher candidates to experience a classroom setting and observe

experienced teachers prior to accepting responsibility for their own classrooms

(Feistritzer, 2002; Legler, 2002). Because adult learners are focused on the

immediate relevancy (Knowles, 1980) of their new learning, coursework needs to

have a practical application element. Field work, which allows a teacher

candidate to spend time working in a classroom with another teacher could also

be an effective learning activity. Although this study's findings suggest a need for

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a program of alternative certification in Oklahoma, there are also implications for those who are currently working with newly alternatively certified teachers. These implications will be discussed next.

Implications for Staff Developers

Because staff development literature has focused on the needs of traditionally certified teachers, this study is helpful in addressing the needs of the unique group of teachers described in this study. As staff developers prepare programs for alternatively certified teachers, they must be aware of the belief, held by some, that teaching is an innate skill. In addition, most alternatively certified teachers do not believe that the coursework offered in traditional teacher preparation programs is valuable or necessary. The staff developer must ensure that the learner's beliefs and prior experiences are acknowledged and engaged at some point in the learning process.

Because many new alternatively certified teachers are hired immediately before the school year starts or even after the school year has started, their immediate needs will focus on the day-to-day survival as a classroom teacher, such as knowing what materials to use, understanding the school's policies and procedures, and generally becoming familiar with working in a school setting. These immediate needs must be dealt with before the newly hired teacher will be ready for any staff development that is of a more theoretical nature. Staff developers and school administrators must also be aware of alternatively certified teachers' unfamiliarity with jargon that is used in the education profession. Alternatively certified teachers would benefit from an initial orientation of terminology, curriculum and materials to be utilized, as well as an overview of

school policies and procedures to include disciplinary procedures and grading and assessment practices. Depending on the school district's structure, these needs may be addressed by district staff developers, principals, or by mentors.

Whereas many of these issues can be addressed through a mentoring situation, as these findings indicate, the school administrator or staff developer must be aware that successful mentoring situations are dependent upon a good match between the new alternatively certified teacher and the mentor. The mentor must not only be interested and committed to the mentoring process but also have the time to observe and meet with the first-year teacher. The mentor must be a staff member who is a successful teacher and suited to the task of mentoring.

Implications for School Administrators

Also indicated in this study, school climate is a key factor in teacher retention. Because principals are critical to the establishment of a positive school climate, there are a number of implications for practice that school administrators must recognize. Principals, partnering with their professional teaching staffs, create the professional culture in their schools. Most of the study participants attributed the principal's influence to the creation of a positive and professional school climate. To ensure the development of a professional learning community, school administrators must arrange schedules to accommodate collegial interaction. Johnson and Birkeland (2003) described three types of professional cultures found in their study of teacher retention. The first, called "veteran-oriented professional culture" was characterized by membership and norms focused on experienced teachers who valued professional autonomy

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(Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Next, the "novice-oriented professional culture" was dominated by youth, idealism, and inexperience. Finally, the "integrated professional culture" valued the engagement of teachers from all experience levels (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Comparing Johnson and Birkeland's classifications to the experiences of the 18 participants in this study, the teachers who identified collegial relationships that were helpful to them described situations that would most closely resemble the "integrated professional culture" which valued engagement of teachers from all experience levels (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Principals are advised to create situations that promote integrated collegial environments by establishing schedules and venues for teachers of varying experience levels to have meaningful professional interaction.

There are many factors involved in establishing a positive professional climate in a school. Principals must create conditions that support teachers in their classrooms by ensuring that teachers have appropriate teaching assignments that are matched to their experience and expertise. They must be given a manageable workload. Several teachers interviewed in this study discussed situations that occurred in their first year when they "didn't know any better." These were situations in which they were given extremely large classes or many different classes for which they had to prepare lesson plans. Some dealt with situations in which they had no classroom or they were not given adequate materials or curriculum from which to teach. Most of these situations were overcome through experience and the support of their colleagues. Principals should be aware of these hardships on new teachers and take steps to maximize new teachers' success.

Implications for Alternative Certification Candidates

Throughout the 18 interviews, many participants commented on the surprises they encountered as new teachers coming into the teaching field from careers outside of education. Whereas there were many unexpected issues to deal with in their teaching jobs, they were not insurmountable. The unexpected situations dealt with low teacher pay, the daily challenge involved in the teaching act, as well as a lack of materials or curriculum with which to teach. Many of the teachers did not understand the jargon in the education field, nor did they understand the organizational cultures of the schools in which they taught. The results of this study indicate the need for alternative teacher candidates to be well-informed about teacher pay and about the responsibilities they will have in their new jobs. These findings suggest that individuals considering alternative certification talk with other teachers, particularly teachers who are alternatively certified and visit schools, spending time in classrooms to become more familiar with the school setting. A number of the study participants had spent time volunteering, observing in classrooms, or substitute teaching. They found these activities helpful as they began their new careers. Also indicated by the study findings and suggested to potential alternative certification candidates, many of these successful alternatively certified teachers went above and beyond the minimum requirements for certification by taking additional coursework or aggressively pursuing staff development opportunities as new teachers.

Research Recommendations

This study suggests several areas for further research. Although the merit of alternative certification was beyond the scope of this study, it appears to be central to the conflict that is currently being waged between education experts and policymakers. Because quality teaching has yet to be defined, the evaluation of the various routes for entering the field of teaching will continue to be difficult. An area for further study that is related to the question of merit is the comparison of alternative certification programs that are currently in existence. A study of this nature will have to wait for the definition of teacher quality to be decided and how it is measured to be established, as well as a singular definition for an alternative certification program. Also related to the merit of alternative certification, a study surveying principals' experiences with alternatively certified teachers compared to traditionally certified teachers would be of great interest.

Aside from the question of merit, there are still more questions to be addressed regarding the issues surrounding alternative teacher certification. Although mentioned in this study, further study is warranted regarding the relative importance of mentoring in the absence of student teaching. It may be reasonable to assume that mentoring is of the utmost importance to alternatively certified teachers in the absence of prior field experience or prior student teaching. However, this assumption is based on the premise that student teaching is critical to a teacher's success. Further study would have to be conducted comparing student teaching, mentoring programs, and the absence of both.

Although mentoring and induction programs for traditionally certified teachers have been the subject of a number of studies, the significance of these programs for alternatively certified teachers would be useful, since these teachers typically bring relevant real life work experience to their new teaching careers.

Schön's work on reflection-in-action is highly provocative and worthy of additional study in the setting of teaching. The prevalence of reflection-in-action as a process that naturally occurs in the classroom, as well as its benefits as a process which teachers can be taught, would be an interesting study with implications for staff developers, teacher educators, and school administrators.

Because of teacher shortage problems, retaining teachers in the field is of utmost importance. To continue the questions addressed in this study, further study of those who have left teaching after only a short time is warranted to include an examination of the reasons for leaving teaching as they relate to the teachers' motivations for entering the teaching field in the first place. As this study indicated, a positive school climate is suggestive of a successful teaching experience which warrants further study of school climate issues in the face of teacher attrition problems.

In examining the motivations of alternatively certified teachers to enter the teaching field, this study focused on successful teachers within a limited geographical area. Acknowledging economic variances across geographical regions of the United States, a comparison of regional differences in motivations would also be valuable to the study of this phenomenon.

Summary

This study reflects the experiences of only a small sample of alternatively certified teachers in the state of Oklahoma. An understanding of their experiences was limited to those teachers who were successful, and findings suggest some characteristics necessary for successful career change. This study has contributed to the fields of adult education, teacher preparation, and staff development by identifying the characteristics of this group of teachers' motivations, approaches to learning, professional identity development and commitment to teaching. Additionally, this study informs policy makers as they continue to prescribe legislative solutions to problems in the education arena. By utilizing the findings of this study and others surrounding this issue, policy makers can write better informed policy and principals can hire more qualified teachers, while supporting them to ensure their success. Staff developers and teacher educators can plan for programs that meet the needs of this growing group of alternatively certified teachers.

Additionally, clearly evident in this study is the reality that there is no single solution to the issues of teacher quality or teacher shortages. Whereas alternative teacher certification could be part of a solution, there are many unanswered questions and many variables involved in the matter of alternative teacher certification. As the findings in this study indicate, knowing more about this important and growing group of teachers can make efforts to support these teachers more successful in the future.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH CONDUCTED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA – NORMAN CAMPUS

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled: Alternatively Certified Teachers: A Narrative Inquiry into Their Motivations, Approaches to Learning, and Commitment to Teaching. Shirley A. Simmons is the principal investigator and Dr. Irene Karpiak is the OU faculty sponsor.

The purpose of this research is to examine the learning characteristics and personal and professional development dimensions of exemplary alternatively certified teachers who have been teaching for at least three years. Their approach to their own learning will be examined as well as their own personal and professional development process that led them to leave the career they prepared for in college to join the ranks of professional educators.

Alternatively certified teachers who have been teaching at least three years and recommended by their supervisor will be asked to participate in an audio taped interview. The interviews may last 1-2 hours. You have the right to refuse to allow such taping however this will exclude you from participation in the study. Follow-up interviews will be conducted to clarify responses given during the initial interview and to verify with you any direct quotations that will be used in the research document.

I, _____, hereby
☐ consent   ☐ do not consent   to be identified when I am directly quoted within the research document.

No foreseeable risks beyond those present in everyday life are anticipated. Participants may experience a variety of feelings as a result of the interview process. No specific benefits are anticipated to be associated with this study; however participants may experience insights into their personal and professional development

You are free not to participate in this study. Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. To participate in this study, you must be currently employed as an alternatively certified teacher with at least three years of experience as a teacher. No compensation is provided.

You will not be identifiable by name or city in any project publications. You will be identified by a number and pseudonym on the audiotape transcripts and on the audiotape labels. Shirley A. Simmons will personally transcribe all audiotapes to ensure confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used to identify all participants within the research document or other project publications. The list of participants and their pseudonyms will be stored in her home in a locked filing cabinet. You will not be identified by school name or district name. You will be identified by your age, gender, type of school (urban, suburban, or rural), and level of school (elementary, middle school, or high school). You will be identifiable only on the audiotapes of the interviews and only insofar as you identify yourself. Shirley A. Simmons will keep the audiotapes in her possession or in her home in a locked filing cabinet. The audiotapes will not be made available to non-project personnel. The audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept in her possession or in her home in a locked filing cabinet and will not be available to non-project personnel. The audiotapes will be destroyed following transcription and transcriptions will be destroyed at the conclusion of three years after the completion of the research project.

I, _____, hereby
☐ consent   ☐ do not consent   for my interview to be audiotaped.

I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. I have been informed of the above-described research study with its possible benefits and risks and I have received a copy of this description.

_____
Signature of Participant or Representative   Date

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the committee that protects human participants, at (405) 325-8110. If you have any questions about the research you may contact Shirley A. Simmons at (405) 447-8471 or (405) 226-0439 or shirleysimmons@cox.net, or Dr. Irene Karpiak at (405) 325- 4072 or ikarpiak@ou.edu .

The Principal Investigator has explained the nature and purpose of the above described research study and the benefits and risks that are involved in this research protocol.

_____
Signature of Principal Investigator   Date

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Research Question		Interview Question
A. Demographic Information	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.	Gender Age Years in Teaching Degrees held Content area of degree Describe your work or career history Marital Status and number of children
B. What are the factors that motivate alternatively certified teachers to enter the teaching profession?	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	How did you decide to be a teacher? How did you come to the realization that you wanted to be a teacher? Did anyone ever tell you that you'd be a great teacher? Tell me about it. What did you feel and believe about yourself as a prospective teacher? Tell about events that shaped your motivation to become a teacher. Describe the stepping-stones in your career.
C. How do alternatively certified teachers obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching?	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.	Tell me about some of your significant learning experiences (formal & informal). Tell about your early experiences with teaching. How did you determine what you needed to know to teach? How did you go about learning to become a teacher— formally and informally? Tell me the significance of formal coursework in your preparation to be a teacher? Did you have a mentor relationship that was particularly helpful? Describe it. How do you continue to grow professionally as a teacher?
D. By what processes do alternatively certified teachers develop professional identity?	1. 2. 3.	Tell about important people in your life and how they contributed to your teaching career. How did you decide at what level and what content you wanted to teach? Describe how or when you began to view yourself as a "teacher".
E. To what factors do they attribute their success and perseverance?	1. 2. 3.	Describe the school climate where you have taught. What factors contribute to your success as a teacher? *Did you have a mentor relationship that was particularly helpful? Describe it. (From C above)*
F. What factors contribute to their continuation in the teaching profession?	1. 2. 3.	*What factors contribute to your success as a teacher?(From E above)* What factors contribute to your desire to remain in teaching? What is your anticipated commitment to continuing your career as a teacher?

Table 1: Participants' Teaching Experience and Previous Career Experience

Name	Age	Current Position	Years Taught	Previous Career	Years in Previous Career
Alan	40	5th Grade Teacher	6	Television & Video Production	12
Barb	32	Elementary Counselor	3	Private Counseling	2
Carl	58	MS Social Studies Teacher	7	Military	30
Donna	44	MS Computer Teacher	7	Public Relations	12
Emma	31	Elementary Special Ed	7	Business	2
Frank	42	HS Math Teacher	12	Law	5
Ginger	37	MS Counselor	3	College Advising & Counseling	5
Holly	32	MS Spanish Teacher	5	Business	2
Irwin	48	HS Social Studies	5	Military	20
Jane	34	MS Math Teacher	5	Military	10
Kevin	28	HS Video Production Teacher	2	Sports Journalism	8
Larry	63	HS Social Studies	11	Law & Business	17 & 8
Mary	41	MS Math Teacher	9	Oil & Gas Ind & Religious Ed	2 & 5
Nathan	37	HS Spanish Teacher	4	Oil & Gas	10
Olivia	35	HS Spanish Teacher	7	Motivational Speaking	1
Patty	40	HS Math Teacher	11	Teaching Industrial Engineering	10
Quincy	29	HS Science Teacher	4	Waitressing	1
Rachel	32	HS Journalism Teacher	1	Corporate Marketing	8

Table 2: Participants' Educational Attainment

Name	Age	Bachelors Content	Masters Content
Alan	40	Communications & Broadcasting	NA
Barb	32	Psychology	Psychology
Carl	58	History	Business Admin
Donna	44	Journalism	NA
Emma	31	Business Admin	NA
Frank	42	Engineering	Law
Ginger	37	Public Relations	Sports Admin & Counseling
Holly	32	Public Relations & Spanish	NA
Irwin	48	History	Adult & Vocational Education
Jane	34	Liberal Studies	Secondary Education
Kevin	28	Journalism	NA
Larry	63	History	Law
Mary	41	Geology	Religious Education
Nathan	37	Spanish	NA
Olivia	35	Spanish	Spanish Literature
Patty	40	Engineering	Engineering
Quincy	29	Zoology	NA
Rachel	32	Marketing	NA