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A Study of Nontraditional Teacher Certification in the Midwest

Phyllis K. Adcock

Introduction

In the next 10 years, there will be a need to hire over two million teachers, due to increases in K-12 enrollment, retiring teachers, and attrition of new teachers. Enrollment in our schools will be greater than at the peak enrollment of baby boomers during the 1950s. As enrollments increase, it should be noted that one quarter of all teachers are over 50 years of age and will soon be retiring (Hussar, 1999). In the editorial section 1998 *Journal of Teacher Education*, the ACCTE stated that “member institutions are not experiencing sufficient increases in enrollment to begin to meet the projected increased demand for teachers” (p. 163).

Whether these shortages are widespread or if they exist only in certain subject matters or geographical areas (Feistritzer, 1998a), educators do not want to fall back on the practices of the 1960. During that time, emergency certification was used to deal with major teacher shortages, particularly in the vocational educational programs (Erekson & Barr, 1985). These solutions did solve the teacher shortage problems then, but at the expense of positive learning opportunities for students (Darling-Hammond, 1999, Wise, 1999). Educators need to find better ways of dealing with teacher shortages to prevent this same problem from occurring again in the future (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1998).

The shortage of teachers places the federal government in a situation it has never been involved in before concerning the certification of teachers (Henke, Rollefson, & Gruber, 1999). The federal government is considering supporting types of alternative certification programs to help with the demand for new teachers. Martin and Shoho (1999) argued that alternative certification, which is one form of nontraditional certification, is one of the most politically popular answers to recruit new teachers. This support is not only for alternative certification programs, but for emergency certification as well.

Certification of Teachers

Traditional certification is defined as any four or five-year undergraduate teacher preparation program that leads to certification. Nontraditional certification is defined as any avenue of certification other than the traditional route, which includes alternative, probationary, provisional, temporary, and emergency. Nontraditional certification

can be found in college and university teacher preparation programs or through other institutions. The State Department of Education may grant certification of teachers directly through local school districts or regional service agencies. Nontraditional certification programs have created a great deal of controversy largely on the question of the quality of teachers prepared through this route.

According to Emily Feistritzer, since 1997, nontraditional alternative certification has become available in 42 states. In 1986 there were 18 programs, which more than doubled to 40 in the late 1990s. Since 1996, the estimate of the number of teachers completing non-traditional alternate certification is over 50,000 (Shen, 1997). Non-traditional alternative programs are attracting a large number of highly qualified, talented and enthusiastic individuals into the teaching profession.

Proponents and Opponents of Nontraditional Certification

Those who support alternative forms of certification claim it will improve the teaching force not only by reducing the teaching shortage, but also by raising the teacher quality and by diversifying the teaching force. It is argued that those seeking alternative certification not only have valuable past experiences, but are more mature, come from minority groups, and are more often male (Stoddart, 1995). Educators favoring alternative certification argue that these non-traditional students do better in alternative certification programs because these types of programs fit the needs of non-traditional students.

Conversely, opponents of nontraditional certification say this type of certification may degrade the teaching profession and ultimately hindering student learning. They reason that programs that offer certification through on-the-job training do not provide a good, professional learning experience for prospective teachers. Specifically, they argue that teachers certified through alternative means, have not learned enough pedagogy and may find managing the learning process more problematic. If this occurs, it will ultimately hurt students, especially those who are disadvantaged and from inner city schools where teacher shortages and teacher turnover is the greatest (Shen, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1990).

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) states “what teachers know and what they do with what they know in the classroom is one of the most important influences on student learning” (p. 6). A great deal of research confirms that teacher knowledge of subject matter, student learning and development, and teaching methods are all important elements which constitute a quality teacher. Educators are concerned that the continued use of nontraditional emergency certification and miss assigned teachers will compromise the quality of education that students deserve (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; NCES, 1996-626; NCES, 1996-040).

Benefits of Nontraditional Teacher Certification

Studies indicate nontraditionally certified teachers usually certify in the areas where teacher shortages are the greatest, namely in math and science, and in inner city and minority classrooms (Shen, 1997). Participants in non-traditional certification are more likely to be older, attract more minorities and males, and those who have had past experiences in other occupations (Martin & Shoho, 1999). On examination of graduates from traditional certification programs, research typically shows that they are Caucasian, female, and from the middle class. Studies indicate these traditionally certified teachers

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usually desire to go back to the type of school they attended, which are usually suburban and middle class schools.

Of the studies cited by Dial and Stevens, alternatively certified teachers had better GPAs than traditionally certified teachers, and regarding teacher efficacy and performance of first year teachers, there were no significant differences (Dial & Stevens, 1993). Dial and Stevens stated that alternatively certified teachers, in general, are more comfortable in teaching students who are more like themselves and come from similar backgrounds. If teachers go back to teach in schools which are like the communities they grew up in, then the nontraditional teacher may be a better for students of minority and urban backgrounds.

McKibbin and Ray (1994) believe the purpose of developing non-traditional certification is not for replacement of the traditional certification programs, but nontraditional certification offers a way to expand the pool of qualified teachers with individuals who might not otherwise become teachers. The challenges that nontraditional programs, such as alternative certification, have is in addressing conditions such as improving instruction, addressing shortages, and placing qualified teachers in hard-to-staff schools. The benefit many nontraditional programs have is they are market sensitive and can be tailored to address the shortages where they exist.

McKibbin and Ray rationalize that this type of "fast-track" preparation is not appropriate for all prospective teachers, but is suited for students who have spent their careers in learning-by-doing atmospheres. They state "There is no one right way to teach and there is no single teacher preparation program that addresses the particular needs of all individuals who want to enter the teaching profession" (McKibbin and Ray, 1994, p. 205).

Teacher Quality

Traditional and nontraditional certification mean different things to different people. Many nontraditional alternate certification programs are a substantial, rigorous teacher preparation programs (Miller, McKenna, & McKenna, 1998), and should then be looked on with more favor, because they are not programs that offer substandard certification such as emergency or temporary certification (Stoddart & Floden, 1995). Therefore teacher preparation programs, whether traditional or nontraditional should each be evaluated on its own merit (Dill, 1996). Stoddart defends many nontraditional programs not as a quick fix, but as an attempt to upgrade teaching standards already downgraded by teaching shortages. He goes on to say that nontraditional certification programs will help to reduce the need of emergency certification.

Gary Fenstermacher suggests that analysis of reputable non-traditional teacher preparation programs may actually have a healthy impact on traditional forms of teacher preparation. Other education leaders suggest that nontraditional teacher certification programs should be viewed as experimental program design, which could eventually benefit the educational profession as a whole. With this perspective in mind, education has more to gain than lose, than viewing non-traditional programs as competition (Dill, 1996).

Fenstermacher and many other leading teacher educators state there are few assessments on the value of any type of teacher education program on any large scale. Fenstermacher states in the absence of clear evidence of success of traditional teacher education, which would put it above any nontraditional teacher education program, why should the state not permit a quicker, simpler route to certification. As leaders of the NEA, AACTE, and Association of Teacher Educators (ATE)

state, "it looks like alternative certification is here to stay, so let's try to get those who control it to do a good job implementing it" (Fenstermacher, 1990, p 172).

At the 1999 AACTE national meeting, Diane Murphy from Seattle University in her presentation "Scaffolding Professional Certification: Becoming a Professional", states the educational profession must get beyond the question whether one program is better than another, and insist that all programs should have as their goal a greater understanding of how curriculum and instruction is integrated into student learning.

Teacher educators have expressed concern about types of non-traditional programs that focus on specific training and administrative methods and may give little attention to research or theory. It is suggested that programs that have a broader scope on how to teach, and use theory and research; and present a broader range of strategies to use in the classroom, prepare an individual to teach in different contexts. This approach is sounder whether found in traditional or nontraditional programs.

One of the continuing debates in teacher education, centers on preparing teachers for the schools we have versus the schools we need (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Traditional certification programs seem to lean toward the preparation of teachers for the schools we need, whereas nontraditional certification programs seem to lean toward the preparation of teachers for the schools we have. By continuing to improve the different types of nontraditional teacher certification programs, and an overall improvement of traditional teacher certification programs, education may actually end up producing better teachers. If this is the case, then much of the controversy between traditional and nontraditional teacher certification programs may well have been worth it, and is that not what educational reform is all about?

Purpose of the Research

This study looked at traditional and nontraditional certification of teachers in six mid-western states. The decision to use these states is based on the rationale that these states make up a region of the plains states, which represent a combination of traditional and non-traditional certification programs. Also, these states offer alternate programs classifications as defined by Feistritz (1999, 1993), which represent seven out of the nine alternative classification categories which currently operate in America. This study provides a perspective on how some plains states are operationalizing traditional and non-traditional teacher certification programs.

Methodology

A questionnaire was sent to teacher preparation programs in the six states, seeking information related to the types of certification, whether traditional or nontraditional and seeking information to clarify program guidelines. This information was analyzed to determine the entry requirements, and program components such as content, pedagogy, human development, and student teaching/internship experiences.

A follow-up survey was conducted of graduates, from both traditional and nontraditional teacher preparation programs in each state. These graduates were selected by program directors as typical graduates from these teacher preparation programs. Each graduate was asked questions about their demographical background, the type of certification they hold, and their views of their preparedness to perform learning and teaching responsibilities in the classroom.

Teacher Preparation Programs

Entry Requirements. When reviewing the teacher preparation programs in these six midwestern states, the entry requirements of the teacher preparation programs were found to be similar in many ways. However, the general education requirements were higher for nontraditional programs, 83.3%, versus 16.5% for traditional programs. This is because nontraditional programs usually require a bachelor's degree in the candidate's teaching field, or that the preservice teacher can demonstrate a competency in that field. Conversely, traditional teaching preparation program entry requirements are higher for specific classes (92.3%) than in nontraditional programs (77.7%). For example, an institution may require 45 credit hours of specific academic courses before the student is allowed to enter the teacher preparation program, where in a nontraditional program the requirement is to have a bachelor's degree in their field. The fact that the nontraditional student often has a bachelor's degree in their teaching field, or has accumulated a number of college academic courses compared to the traditional student, could explain the lower percentage reported by nontraditional programs for specific classes.

When looking at the minimum competency test, entry requirement a higher percentage was found for traditional programs (92.3%) compared to nontraditional programs (77.7%). Many nontraditional programs recruit students who are older, more mature, and who have had more life experience in the fields of math and science, than those in traditional programs, where traditional students are typically younger with less life experiences. It is possible the lower percentage of this requirement in nontraditional programs is based on the chosen fields of math and science along with life experiences, which have prepared these individuals to be competent in their fields, therefore minimum competency test scores are not required in some nontraditional programs. (See Table 1)

<i>Entry Requirements</i>	<i>26 Traditional</i>	<i>18 Nontraditional</i>
Minimum General Education	16 (61.5%)	15 (83.3%)
Minimum GPA	26 (100.0%)	18 (100.0%)
Minimum Test Scores	24 (92.3%)	14 (77.7%)
Specified Classes	22 (84.6%)	14 (77.7%)
Portfolio	8 (30.7%)	7 (38.8%)
Field Experience	15 (57.6%)	11 (61.1%)
Letters of Recommendation	16 (61.5%)	11 (61.1%)
Teacher Candidate Interview	13 (50.0%)	7 (38.8%)

Program Components. When reviewing components of the teacher preparation programs, the programs in those colleges or universities that offer only traditional programs and those that offer both traditional and nontraditional certification programs appear to be very similar. The major differences in the program components was found in human development courses (traditional 96.1%, nontraditional 77.7%); in student teaching (traditional 96.1%, nontraditional 83.3%); and in internships (traditional 42.3%, nontraditional 16.6%). These differences could be related to how programs, whether traditional or nontraditional, define these components. For example, human development classes are considered psychology classes in some institutions, and therefore the institution will not have a separate

requirement for a human development class, but rather for a psychology class.

Looking at the differences in the program components of student teaching and internship, how institutions define these components could also explain the differences in the percentages of these components in the various programs. For example, at one university, the teacher preparation program has both student teaching and internship. At another university there is a student teaching component but not an internship component. Some will argue that it is the length of the time spent in the classroom that defines student teaching or internships. Again I use these same two universities for examples. The student teaching component is 6 weeks at the first university and 16 weeks at the second university; however the first university has an added 12-week internship. Both of these programs are classified as traditional, however the classroom experience is different at the two schools. (See Table 2)

<i>Program Components</i>	<i>26 Traditional</i>	<i>18 Nontraditional</i>
Content Courses	22 (84.6%)	15 (83.3%)
Pedagogy Courses	22 (84.6%)	15 (83.3%)
Human Development Courses	25 (96.1%)	14 (77.7%)
Student Teaching	25 (96.1%)	15 (83.3%)
Internship	11 (42.3%)	2 (11.1%)
Induction	4 (15.3%)	2 (11.1%)
Mentoring	2 (7.6%)	1 (5.5%)

Certification Type. As was expected, traditional programs reported 100% of standard certification, however nontraditional programs also reported 100% in standard certification. This is because nontraditional certification is viewed as "standard" or "regular" certification, although an alternate route to full certification is followed. The percentage for alternative certification reveals the greatest difference (traditional 0%, nontraditional 72%) which is understandable since traditional programs do not offer alternative certification and the nontraditional programs would be likely to have the highest percentage in alternate certification. On provisional, probationary, temporary and emergency certification, the percentages are much lower for both traditional and nontraditional, with traditional having the lower percentages of these certification types. Provisional, probationary, temporary and emergency certification usually indicates conditions exist to being certified.

A great deal of the literature defines provisional and probationary in similar ways. Basically, these two terms apply to a condition of certification that is ongoing and can be fulfilled by meeting basic requirements of teaching experience or specific class requirements, which could elevate the provisional or probationary status to standard certification after the requirement is met. Temporary and emergency certification are granted on a timed basis, usually for a period of one year, until the requirements can be met to elevate the certification status to provisional, probationary, or standard certification. For example, because of severe shortages, a person with a degree in biology may be given certification by the state to teach biology in the high school. However during that year the teacher must begin work

on or be accepted into a teacher preparation program in which he or she will eventually be fully certified to teach biology.

Graduates' Sense of Preparedness

When considering the individual variables of the sense of preparedness of the graduates from the traditional and nontraditional teacher preparation programs, there was no significant difference found except for the variable of communication with colleagues. Even though the difference was slight, it indicates that those coming from nontraditional programs felt they were better prepared to communicate with colleagues than the graduates from traditional programs, which was noted in an earlier study by Manos and Kasambria (1998). They suggest the difference may be due to the more mature, experienced and usually older student found in nontraditional programs.

In reviewing the combined likert-scale questions regarding the teachers' sense of preparedness, there was no significant difference in the responses of teachers from traditional and nontraditional programs when considering the variables of gender and level of schooling taught. Although some might be tempted to suggest that this lack of difference suggest that there are no substantive differences in traditional or nontraditional programs, there are further issues to consider here. One should look at how each program is designed and the typical student who enters these different programs, regardless of whether these programs are traditional or non traditional, the quality of a teacher preparation program should be determined on an individual basis (Zeichner, 1999). According to Linda Darling-Hammond, the difference between the two types of programs may support the argument that most nontraditional alternative certification programs are actually an alternate route to a sound teacher education program that completely prepares the teacher for the classroom. (See Table 3)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Classroom management	79	-.305	.761
New teaching methods	79	-1.006	.317
Design curriculum & lesson plans	79	-1.869	.067
Implementing curriculum & standards	79	-.968	.336
Integrating technology	79	-.042	.967
Student performance assessment	79	-1.247	.216
Maintaining discipline	79	-.066	.947
Working with colleagues	79	-2.042	.044
Communicating with parents	79	-.295	.769
Addressing diversity	52	-.052	.959
Addressing disabilities	43	-.473	.639

Where research assessments in education, such as surveys and interviews are used, the questions asked and the responses given can sometimes be confusing. Added to these typical communication problems is that fact that many different people, including teacher preparation program departments, educational leaders in the field, and state departments of education may not use the same terminology, or agree on how teacher education programs should be structured. This is what makes research on teacher preparation difficult because of the lack of consistency in terminology and standards used in the many varieties of programs that exist. In an editorial in the 1991 *Journal of Teacher Education*, a statement made from a political perspective suggests that diversity of thought concerning teaching effectiveness is based on a lack of consensus about the nature of effective teacher education. It is precisely these disagreements about the nature of effective teacher education, among educators, which contributes to the public perception that teacher education can be sidestepped without an adverse effect on student.

Implications of the Study

Even though many policymakers do not realize the complexity of recruiting, preparing and retaining teachers, teacher preparation programs, whether traditional or nontraditional, need to be assessed individually and locally because of the great variety of state and local programs and contexts (Zumwalt, 1996). Those who have a stake in teacher education need to determine the difference between dressed up emergency certification programs and nontraditional certification programs which fully prepare the teacher to meet their classroom responsibilities. By determining the levels of certification of non-traditional teacher preparation programs, we may have a better assurance of producing quality teachers for the classroom.

The focus of this study was to determine the types of teacher preparation programs found in six Midwestern states and the sense of preparedness the teachers had who came from these programs. Since it was revealed in this study both traditional and nontraditional programs appear similar, and their graduates are similar in their sense of preparedness, maybe the issue of comparing traditional and non-traditional programs is moot. What might be time better spent is in looking at teacher preparation programs as a whole and what makes a quality program. As stated earlier, there are quality programs and struggling programs, that are traditional as well as nontraditional.

Whether or not teachers complete a traditional or nontraditional teacher preparation program, quality teachers who are ready to fulfill their role are needed. As Linda Darling-Hammond suggests, quality teachers will go beyond the standards and regulations of boards and institutions seeking the effects of their teaching on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 1998b). Teacher educators need to question whether it is the type of certification or something else altogether, which determines whether a teacher will be a quality teacher who is reflective, and a critical thinker, that will help their students to be more productive learners.

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