An Exploratory Survey of Participants in Urban and Suburban Teacher Academy Programs

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Abstract

In an era plagued by teacher shortages, recruitment and training strategies are crucial. One promising early recruitment strategy is the use of teacher academies, pre-collegiate programs for aspiring teachers. Yet precious little is known about these programs or their students, many of whom appear to mirror the much sought-after diversity hoped for in practicing teachers (Darling-Hammond, Berry, Hasselkorn, & Fideler, 1999). This paper reports results of a survey of 133 students enrolled in 11 teacher academies surrounding a large Midwestern city. Data on students' demographics, future goals, and perceived program needs are reported. Results indicate strengths in program experiences and cohesiveness, and the need for greater emphasis on college readiness and program organization. Further research on these programs is imperative.

Introduction

Education professionals and critics alike agree that there is a critical shortage of high quality teachers in this country (Ingersoll, 2004; Levine, 2006). In particular, there is a need for increasing the number of teachers from diverse backgrounds in order to reflect the growing diversity of our nation's population (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Although such shortages are often attributed to the "graying" of the teacher workforce, many forces are at play, including rapid turnover, teacher misassignment, low entry standards, and the low status of the teaching profession in society (Ingersoll, 2004). Many strategies have been employed in order to increase teacher recruitment. Some of these strategies include alternative certification programs, community college programs, financial incentives, and precollegiate clubs and academic programs (Wilson, Bell, Galosy, & Shouse, 2004). Darling-Hammond, Berry, Hasselkorn, & Fideler (1999) outline five "leading-edge recruitment efforts," which include precollegiate initiatives, traditional university-based programs, community college pathways, paraprofessional pathways, and post-baccalaureate alternative certification programs.

Perhaps the least researched of these recruitment efforts is precollegiate teacher recruitment. Although this strategy encompasses clubs, mentoring programs, and stand-alone internships, full-fledged precollegiate teacher recruitment programs are referred to as "teacher cadet programs," "teaching career academies," and "teacher academies" (Wilson et al., 2004). Participants in these programs "are more likely to demonstrate persistence into (the) teaching profession than less intensive approaches" (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000, p. 7). The official purpose of teacher academies is to "nurture and 'grow' prospective teachers committed to serving their schools and communities" (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000, p. 8). Such programs have been described as "teaching-focused,

comprehensive academic programs within larger schools" (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000, p. 8). In 1995, a national survey uncovered the existence of 253 teacher academies involving over 50,000 potential teachers. Further, a full 64% of the participants were young people of color (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). This finding that precollegiate teacher recruitment programs attract disproportionate numbers of minority students has been replicated in several other studies (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). Although most of the better known precollegiate teaching programs have been created as a result of state-level initiatives, many others are locally conceived and implemented (Clewell, Darke, Davis-Googe, Forcier, & Manes, 2000).

Although teacher academy programs are quite diverse, overall they tend to feature "teaching, tutoring, and mentoring experiences in a variety of settings" (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999, p. 201). They are typically contained in the last one to two years of high school. Berrigan and Schwartz (2000) explain that most teacher academy programs consist of three major components: "electives related to teaching, learning, and children; pre-college internships at local elementary, middle, and high schools; and partnerships with colleges/universities that provide a 'pathway' or corridor into college and teacher education" (p. 3). Typical course content is described as "learning theory, classroom management, multiculturalism, child development, and assessment" (p. 3).

Advantages to the student include offering positive images of the teaching profession; a "rewarding sense of responsibility and a powerful connection to the children they work with" (p. 2); specialized courses that present material similar to that covered in college coursework, but in a creative and appealing manner; and an opportunity to clarify their career goals (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). Other reported benefits include a better understanding of the teaching process and its complexities, as well as better preparation for college in general (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999).

Due to the growing popularity of these programs, in 2000 Berrigan and Schwartz produced a guidebook for the development of teacher academy programs, entitled "Urban Teacher Academy Project Toolkit: A Guide to High School Teaching Career Academies." The publication was sponsored by the United States Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. This booklet presents guidelines for program planning and implementation, including how to locate resources, how to create recruitment and retention policies, and how to design courses and internships.

Although teacher academy programs have precipitated some interest in the professional literature, unfortunately, few quality evaluation studies have resulted. The South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program is the only teacher academy program with sufficient scope and longevity to produce data that is even somewhat reliable (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2003). This program began during the 1985-1986 school year, and currently serves over 2200 students each year in approximately 150 high schools throughout the state. The cadet program is supported by 22 of the 30 colleges and universities with teacher education programs, in that they grant college credit for program completion. Outcome data indicates that 35% of program participants report an intent to pursue teaching careers.

Clearly, the question of whether and how these programs contribute to the amelioration of teacher shortages and to the improvement of teacher quality is of utmost importance, and goes beyond intent of graduates to teach. These programs originally grew out of research indicating that individuals make career choices much younger than previously thought, and that those entering the teaching profession are particularly influenced by their own experiences as K-12 students (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). Although research has not shown a clear connection between the use of these programs and the lessening of teacher shortages, we can turn to the large-scale evaluation studies conducted on the South Carolina Teacher Cadet Program. Of the former program participants in 1987-1988 who could be traced, approximately two-thirds were teaching in the state in 1993. About 30% of these were teaching in rural schools, and 29% in what was considered a "critical shortage area" (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999, p. 203). This information appears to be the only existing data regarding the effect of such programs on teacher shortages. However, due to flaws in data collection and large attrition rates, few other claims about impact on teacher shortages, and no claims regarding teacher quality can be made (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999).

Regardless of the gaps in the existing data, Wilson et al. (2004) conclude their review of strategies to increase teacher supply with the statement that among the "most promising minority recruitment programs" include locally-developed programs designed to encourage students of the community to become teachers and to return to their home communities to teach. Yet a thorough review of the literature uncovered almost no data-based studies on precollegiate teacher recruitment in the past decade.

The current study is an investigation of the background and perceptions of some of the participants enrolled in teacher academy programs in 11 high schools surrounding a large Midwestern city. Due to the need for knowledge about the nature of these teacher recruitment efforts, three research questions were addressed:

1. How do student demographics compare to the demographics of practicing teachers?

2. What are students' perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their teacher academy programs?

3. What are students' perceptions of their current and future needs?

Method

A survey instrument was administered to 133 students in 11 "teacher academy programs" at three urban, seven suburban, and one rural high school surrounding a large Midwestern city. The students were participants in one of two one-day university-based programs. Quantitative analysis, in the primary form of descriptive statistics, was conducted on participant and program demographics. Qualitative analysis was conducted on participants' responses to open-ended survey questions.

Instrumentation

Due to the lack of data on these particular programs and their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999), a new survey instrument was designed. It was not based on previous research. The instrument addressed student demographics, perceptions of programs, and perceptions of current needs. Demographics collected included race and sex, as well as the type of teaching career participants planned to pursue (i.e. grade and/or subject). Participants also were asked to report strengths and weaknesses of their teacher academy programs. Finally, the survey instrument included three questions addressing current needs: (1) What skills do you think you need to improve before you start college?, (2) What else do you think you need to know before becoming a teacher?, and (3) How will you choose what college to attend?

Data Collection

Data were collected at two points in time, one in 2007 ($n = 48$) and one in 2008 ($n = 85$). Participants were involved in one of two one-day symposia for teacher academy students whose schools fell within a one-hour driving radius of the hosting institution. The workshop was housed at a public university and designed as a recruitment tool to entice future teacher candidates to attend the university after their graduation from high school. The symposium consisted of various presentations and activities designed by teacher academy and university faculty.

Participants were teacher academy students who had elected to participate in the symposium. All students were

requested verbally to participate in the study by filling out the one-page survey at some point during the symposium. The survey instrument was included in students' packet of materials from the host institution. Surveys were collected by hand at the conclusion of the symposium.

Participants

Participants were 133 high school students, 44 male (33%) and 89 female (67%), from 11 teacher academy programs at high schools surrounding a large Midwestern city. Although the first teacher academy program in the geographic area began in 1991, the majority of the programs included in the current study were less than six years old. Although the majority are two-year programs, some are one year and one is a four-year program. All are two class periods per day. Students in each of the 11 programs are required to take a certain number of teaching-related courses and participate in a set of field experiences, much like student teaching. These experiences culminate in creation of a final portfolio project, many of which are aligned to Praxis standards. Portfolios are scored by a local teacher and by a university professor. Many of the teacher academies in this area have articulation agreements with universities in the region, whereby graduates can acquire university credit for successful completion of the teacher academy program (R. Terrell, personal communication, April 18, 2008).

The data on student gender is relatively comparable to state-level data on the gender of practicing teachers, showing that 29% are male, and 71% female. The majority (64%) of the participants described themselves as "White," which can be compared to data indicating that 93% of the state's teachers consider themselves "Non Minority" (Ohio Department of Education, 2007b). About one-third of the participating students identified themselves as "Black" (33%), one student self-identified as "Hispanic," and three students as "Other" (3% combined). State-level data show that approximately 7% of the state's teachers are Black, and a negligible number self-identify in other racial categories (Ohio Department of Education, 2007b). Future teaching preferences revealed that 38% of the participants planned to pursue elementary teaching careers, 50% planned for secondary careers, 8% indicated a desire to pursue a specialist area (speech/language pathologist or intervention specialist) and 4% selected early childhood education (preschool or kindergarten).

Of the 11 Teacher Academy programs, three were in urban school districts, seven programs were in suburban school districts, and one was in a rural district. Demographic data of participating schools are reported in Table 1. Most of the schools had a Caucasian majority, although percentages ranged from 4% to 93%. Rates of economic disadvantage (as indicated by percent of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch) ranged from 4% to 64%. The ESL population ranged from none to four percent, and the schools' graduation rates ranged from 77% to 99% (Ohio Department of Education, 2007a).

Table 1
School Demographics

High School	Location	Percent Caucasian	Percent FRL*	Percent ESL	Graduation Rate
1	suburban	81%	16%	1%	89%
2	suburban	82%	7%	2%	99%
3	urban	82%	35%	4%	77%
4	urban	4%	64%	2%	91%
5	suburban	84%	7%	3%	95%
6	suburban	24%	52%	0%	89%
7	urban	74%	46%	3%	85%
8	suburban	37%	35%	3%	96%
9	rural	94%	7%	0%	91%
10	suburban	82%	4%	1%	96%
11	suburban	18%	28%	2%	87%

* Free & Reduced Lunch

Data Analysis

Quantitative data in the form of demographics were analyzed through simple descriptive statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed through inductive analysis (Janesick, 2000). Selective coding was used to create categories encompassing each response. Codes were compared to subsequent responses and revised in order to continue to encompass each response. Later, broader categories were developed from the codes in order to develop a reduced list that encompassed the majority of responses. "Other" categories were created to ensure that all responses were included (Charmaz, 2000). As data were added, the categories were revised as needed to continue to encompass participant responses.

Results

Program Strengths and Weaknesses

First, participants were asked "What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of your teacher academy program?" As shown in Table 2, four categories emerged from responses to this question. The themes included positive experiences in the program, affective characteristics, an emphasis on Praxis domains, and a focus on writing/organizing. Nearly half (45.1%) of the respondents indicated that program experiences were a strength of the program, referring to hands-on internships, practica, and tutoring experiences. They used words such as "the amazing experiences we have," "multiple outside experiences," and "real world experience in internships and field experiences" to describe program strengths. Nearly half (42.1%) also rated affective characteristics as a strength. These responses appeared to emphasize the emotional closeness of the students and teachers in the teacher academy. For example, "we're basically like a family," "our teacher is amazing," "all of us are very close and supportive of each other," and "we are all very close and help each other to achieve our goals." Minor categories included knowledge of Praxis domains (6.8%), citing "domain review," "Praxis exposure," "learning the domains," and "well educated on the domains" as strengths of the program. Even fewer (3.0%)

respondents described writing and organizing as strengths, with comments such as "organizing and understanding," and "we get ahead of the game (in writing)." Finally, just under ten percent (9.8%) of respondents listed strengths categorized as "other." These included generic comments that did not point to any specific strengths, such as "we get a lot of knowledge before college," "prepares you for the future," "shows us a wide range of options in education," and "make sure I know I want to teach."

Table 2
Perceived Program Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths*		Weaknesses	
Experiences	45.1%	No Weaknesses	23.8%
Affective Characteristics	42.1%	Behavior Issues	22.2%
Praxis Domains	6.8%	Insufficient Skills	16.7%
Writing / Organizing	3.0%	Insufficient Time for Program	13.5%
Other	9.8%	Place of Program in School	6.3%
		Other	17.5%

*Participants provided more than one response

Weaknesses presented by participants were organized into six categories: no weaknesses, behavioral issues in the classroom, insufficient skills, insufficient time for the program, the place of the program in the school, and other. The largest response category was "none," with 23.6% of respondents indicating no weaknesses in the program. This question was either left blank when all other questions were filled out, or answered with "none" or "n/a." Over one-fifth (22.2%) indicated that behavioral issues in the classroom were a concern, with comments such as "do not listen to each other," "situation resolvement," "due to being close we fight a lot," "kids not getting along," "keeping authority," and "not staying on task." Fewer of the respondents (16.7%) indicated a need for more skills as a weakness of the program. These skills included general academic/college preparation skills as well as specific skills for teaching children. Comments included "not enough about Praxis," "getting in depth on subjects/lessons," and "focus on child behavior." Insufficient time for the teacher academy program was a theme in 16.7% of responses. For example, participants noted "lack of time," "classroom time—little," and "not enough time in the day!" Although a minor theme, 6.3% of respondents described place of program in school as a weakness, in that programs were new, under enrolled, and/or experience a lack of recognition in the school. Representative statements included "our numbers are too low," "we need more people to be interested and join," "not recognized in school; needs more interest," and "understaffed." Finally, 17.5% of the respondents listed weaknesses categorized as "other." These diverse comments addressed their teacher's personal characteristics or specific classroom expectations, as well as thought fragments (e.g. we spend time on).

Skills Needed

Second, participants were asked, "What skills do you think you need to improve before you start college?" Four categories encompassed these responses, which are shown in Table 3. The majority (63.3%) of respondents indicated a need for improved organization/study skills, in that they felt they needed to learn more about managing time, both inside and outside class. Representative comments included "I need to improve my time management skills," "to not wait until the last minute and jump ahead," "my organization and procrastination skills—work on meeting deadline," "scheduling, study/research skills, time management," and "studying skills and completing homework." Fewer (13.3%) respondents indicated a need for improved academic writing abilities with statements such as "writing and reading skills," "writing more developed papers," and "writing skills and expression." Just over ten percent (10.2%) of respondents mentioned a need for improving their own communication and/or social skills. Representative statements included "I need to control my temper more," "attitude readjustment," "getting more comfortable meeting new people," and "public speaking skills." Finally, 13.3% of the respondents noted needed skills categorized as "other." These skills primarily encompassed academic skills in the content areas (e.g. "building foreign language skills" and "I think I would need to improve my math skills," and specific skills related to teaching (e.g. "memorizing my domains more" and "improve on my lesson planning").

Table 3
Skills to Improve

Organization / Study Skills	63.3%
Writing	13.3%
Communication / Social Skills	10.2%
Other	13.3%

Additional Information Needed

Third, participants were asked to respond to the question, "What else do you think you need to know before becoming a teacher?" Many of the responses to this question were too diverse to be organized into categories, as shown in Table 4. For example, 30.7% indicated multiple needs in their responses to this question. These responses included comments such as "a lot," "everything—you can never stop learning about being a good educator," "many different aspects of the classroom," and "pretty much everything." As such, they were difficult to categorize. About one-fifth (20.2) indicated a need for more knowledge about teaching methods and planning. These responses encompassed curriculum and instruction, and the knowledge behind what to use when. Representative statements included "content standards," "necessary curriculum," "how to get every one of your students to understand what you teach and be helpful in more different ways," and "connecting lesson plans and activities to the info being taught." Just over 10% (10.5%) indicated

a need for more knowledge about child development and students in general, with comments such as "I would like to learn more about children's development," "more about child development," and "to learn more about children." Fewer (15.8%) of the respondents indicated a need for either general or specific knowledge in classroom management, with comments such as "just how to handle my own classroom," "more discipline techniques," and "I need to know how to draw the line between friend and authority."

Table 4
Additional Skills Needed

Multiple Needs	30.7%
Teaching Methods/Planning	20.2%
Classroom Management	15.8%
Students/Child Development	10.5%
Other	22.8%

However, over one fifth (22.8%) of responses to this question were too diverse to be categorized. These statements included generic comments about the job market in teaching (e.g. "I want to know the best places in the country to teach" and "how bountiful is the job market"), personal questions about best fit of college major (e.g. "whether I can minor in gifted education" and "which subject I would best teach"), and generic comments not related to any one specific skill, such as "what we need to succeed" and "just the basics").

Finally, participants were asked, "What additional information do you need to help you choose the college you will attend?" Responses were organized into four categories, as shown in Table 5. Almost half (48.4%) of the respondents indicated that campus offerings and programs were important to their college decision. These offerings and programs included majors, courses, and extracurriculars, as well as general issues of quality of teacher education programs and of the institution overall. Comments included "programs offered," "more class info," "How good their music education program is," "if I can double major in History Education and Latin Education," "I would like to know if the college meets my needs academically," "I would want to know if the college had a good teaching program," and "the majors and some information of that college."

Table 5
Additional Information for College

Program/Campus Offerings	48.4%
Already Decided	24.6%
Monetary Issues	18.0%
No Information Needed	9.0%

About one-fourth (24.6%) of the respondents indicated that they had already made their college decision. These remarks included "I have already decided," "none, already applied and accepted," and "I will be attending X University in the fall." Just under one-fifth (18.0%) of the respondents indicated that monetary issues were important to their de-

cision. These issues included availability of scholarships, financial aid, and on- and off-campus jobs. Representative comments included "The financial aid and programs offered," "what I need to do to be financially stable," and "education costs and availability of scholarships." Finally, just under 10 percent (9%) replied that no other information was needed, by responding "none," "nothing," or "N/A."

Discussion and Implications

Several themes emerged from the results of this study that point to general strengths and needs of the teacher academy programs included in this study. First, student demographics do point to positive implications for teacher academy programs as a potential recruitment tool for teachers from more diverse populations. Second, strengths appear to be in the areas of practical experiences offered to students and in affective areas such as cohesiveness of program (e.g. feelings of belonging, enthusiasm for teaching). These strengths can be seen as crucial assets to the field of teacher preparation. Third, various program issues point to the possible need for goal setting. Needs appear to be in two main areas: an increased focus on college readiness skills, and increased attention to teaching-related knowledge. Future research should involve content analysis of teacher academy programs and their partners, and in-depth, longitudinal studies of teacher academy participants.

First, although a very small sample from a limited part of one state, the demographics of student participants do look promising. Students show more racial diversity than do practicing teachers in the state, and they are at very least being exposed to the teaching profession, as well as experiencing a college preparatory program. These findings support those from previous studies, even those with large samples (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 1999).

Second, students mentioned repeatedly the importance that practical experience was playing in their program, referring to hands-on, practical internships, field experience, tutoring, etc. This finding also supports previous research indicating the major strengths of teacher academies are in the areas of offering practical experiences that show teaching in a positive light (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). A strength in practical experience is particularly advantageous to future teachers, as critics have long called for increasing number and duration of supervised field experience in all stages of teacher education (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Perhaps traditional teacher preparation programs can learn from the model of the teacher academy.

Another strong aspect of the teacher academy programs, according to students' reports, appears to be in the affective domain of the program. Students' responses about their programs, in terms of their uplifting, active nature, and their descriptions of personal relationships with teachers and fellow classmates appeared quite positive. Again, teacher academy programs have been lauded in the past for their ability to raise teaching as a profession and to privilege the positive

teacher-student relationship (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). The teacher academy programs described by participants appear to be small communities with tight connections. Again, researchers and school leaders have attempted to produce such close communities of teachers for years, believing in their potential to contribute to teacher growth (Ball & Cohen, 1999). This strength offers potential to nurture learning in a variety of ways. It is also possible that these positive affective experiences may be contributing to many participants' reluctance to indicate any weaknesses with their programs.

Third, the needs that emerged from students' responses are also enlightening. Although many of the participants indicated that their teacher academy programs had no weaknesses, the most common response of those who did report a weakness was behavioral issues in the teacher academy classroom. Combined with comments surrounding insufficient time and the place of the teacher academy program in the school at large, it is possible that these programs do not have a well-defined mission or structure. Further, many are new and may not be well established within the larger school context. Perhaps increasing partnerships with other teacher academy and university programs might assist with goal-setting, mentorship, and establishing structure and consistency, as well as legitimacy to outside schools and programs. Similar needs are also reflected in the professional literature. For example, one reported challenge for teacher academy programs is setting and communicating clear programmatic goals (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). Perhaps most important is consideration of teacher academy programs as one part of a holistic preparation for college. Examining teacher academy programs from this perspective shows that themes raised by data collected in this study align well with programs created to encourage and prepare students from disadvantaged populations to attend college (Swail & Perna, 2002).

As for specific content needed, several important issues emerged from students' discussion surrounding what skills they still need before becoming a teacher. These needs include organization and study skills. Students referred to several skills that have been determined to be crucial for college-level work, such as time management, independent study skills, and writing skills. Many students indicated the need for more time in the teacher academy program. It is possible that the balance between presenting skills for teaching and presenting generic study/college preparedness skills is difficult to strike. Again, explicit goal-setting might provide some assistance in this area.

Although practical experiences appear to be a clear strength of these programs, participants' responses indicated more mixed results in the theoretical, or classroom instruction aspect of the teacher academy. For example, when asked what else they needed to know before becoming a teacher, participants' responses varied too widely to categorize. Knowledge for teaching such as classroom management, student characteristics, etc. appears as though it may be overwhelming for the participants in this study, given the number who indicated multiple needs for learning. It is important to note that a teacher academy is precollegiate; it

is not expected to teach everything a teacher needs to know (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). This result could simply be attributable to students learning about the sheer complexity of teaching rather than to a deficit in teacher academy programs themselves. Interestingly, a benefit of teacher academies mentioned in the professional literature is giving students a view of teaching as a complex profession (Berrigan & Schwartz, 2000). Therefore, this finding may simply be a reaction to this important aspect of the teacher academy. However, development of priorities or standards for inclusion in coursework of teacher academy programs might not only alleviate some issues regarding limited time, and/or place of the program in the school, but might be one way to narrow content to complement the traditional college programs students hopefully will be entering later.

Future research on this topic is imperative (Darling-Hammond et al., 1999). Experts in teacher recruitment agree that precollegiate recruitment efforts hold much promise for increasing teacher supply and diversity, yet few recent efforts have been made even to locate these programs, much less evaluate either their practical or their theoretical components. First and foremost, program models and characteristics should be documented. Content covered and time spent on various activities and coverage of content is also important knowledge for the field. Perhaps most important, longitudinal research could demonstrate the impact of such programs, in terms of which programs are most successful at producing future teachers, particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

However, it is important to note that even the best of precollegiate programs from a programmatic perspective will be unsuccessful if students are unable to attend or complete college or university programs. The teacher academy programs can be seen as an ideal place to explore and implement what the field of education has learned about the importance of field experiences, mentorship, transition to college, and initiation into the culture of teaching. To date, though, little attention has been paid to these efforts in the research literature. Some important questions for further study include:

1. How do teacher academy programs balance preparation for college with preparation for teaching, and allow high school students to explore teaching as a career option without precluding exploration of other career possibilities?

2. How can the various models of teacher academies be categorized, and how are these models tied to student outcomes (e.g., college entrance, college completion, entrance into teaching)? Do teacher academies have a well-described mission?

3. What support systems (e.g., university partnerships, linkages with other teacher or career academies) can help alleviate some of the issues found in this and previous research?

4. How does the use of teacher academies compare with other forms of teacher recruitment?

Limitations and Conclusion

There are several significant limitations to this study that limit generalizability. The first limitation is self-selection, in that participants involved in this study elected to participate in this specific university-based program; therefore, this sample may not be representative of teacher academy students as a whole. In particular, the sample may have been more positive about their programs and their choice of careers than their classmates who did not choose to attend. Further, the fact that this particular university was attempting to recruit survey participants as students and also giving them a survey might have influenced the way students responded.

Additional limitations include a small sample from a small geographic region. Ideally, participants would be selected at random. Further, individual students' perceptions were not accompanied by direct observation or assessment. There is no triangulation of data reported in this study.

In conclusion, despite the relatively small scope of the current study, teacher academies do appear to warrant further study. These programs do seem to be attracting more diversity and an enthusiastic population of students. Perceived program strengths appear to be in the areas of practical experiences and a sense of program unity. These areas have been found to be crucial to the development of teachers, providing another reason why teacher academies deserve more attention in the professional literature (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Perceived needs include more focus on college success skills and knowledge for teaching. However, it is important to note that not all of these skills may be within the scope of the teacher academy.

Goal setting is crucial, particularly in determining what content is most important to present to students at this level. Integration of the teacher academy program within the larger high school academic program should be given further consideration. Further, research is quite weak in this area; some areas of future interest are in identifying and categorizing existing programs and support systems, tying program models to outcomes, and comparing effectiveness of different recruitment models.

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