

Title

Alternatively and Traditionally Certified Beginning Special Educators: Do They Differ in Terms of Demographic Profile, Teaching Location, and Ratings of Self-Efficacy?

Questions Addressed

- Both within and across states, what are the alternative route (AR) program completion and teacher retention rates?
- Have AR programs. . .
 - reduced the teacher shortage by increasing the number of special educators teaching in urban and rural areas?
 - produced qualified and competent newly certified special educators as measured by SASS and TFS ratings of self-efficacy?
 - diversified the special education public teaching force by recruiting more male, minority and mature people?
 - attracted persons with higher levels of education and broader experiences?

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Description of the Study

In recent years there has been widespread debate and concern over the declining performance of America's schools. In response, there has been no shortage of reform-minded policy initiatives and efforts to improve public education, most notably the recent re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), better known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). In these efforts, a primary reason cited for the drop in performance levels of students in our schools is the current shortage of qualified, knowledgeable, well-trained, and credentialed teachers, especially in such specialized areas such as math, science, and special education. In an effort to provide students with such teachers, the field of special education, in particular, has witnessed massive growth in the number of alternate paths offered to teacher certification and licensure, commonly referred to as alternative routes to certification (AR). Such AR programs have become a growth industry. In 1998, more than 41 states offered over 117 programs for persons who wish to teach, but cannot or do not wish to complete a traditional, 4 or 5-year undergraduate path to special education certification (Feistritzer, 1998).

In addition to the argument that ARs will ameliorate the shortage of special educators, especially in urban and rural districts, two other supporting arguments have been made. First, it is argued that ARs can diversify the teaching force by recruiting more male, minority, and mature persons into teaching (Cook & Boe, 1995). In addition, it has been posited that ARs can improve the quality and effectiveness of the teaching force by recruiting persons who are brighter than candidates who complete traditional programs of certification and who have had a broader range of experiences prior to entering teaching (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, & Terhanian, 1998). Unfortunately, we currently know little about the validity of these arguments and of the overall extent and efficacy of ARs as viable routes for teacher pre-service in special education. AR training can be best thought of as an iceberg—most of the AR enterprise lies hidden below the surface (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001).

By disaggregating the data found in the 1999-2000 and 1993-1994 SASS by elementary and secondary levels for special educators who were alternatively certified, we can determine differences across time in distributions of the following variables: (a) teacher gender, (b) race and ethnicity, (c) age, (d) degrees attained, (e) range of teacher career activities before teaching, (f) locale of assigned school, and (g) percentage of minority students within assigned school. In addition, the 1999-2000 SASS can provide us with measures of how recently (post. 1995-1996 school year) alternatively certified special educators perceive the quality of their preservice training through ratings of self-efficacy provided in the survey. This area of research has great potential for additional study if, in

future versions, the SASS incorporates questions specifying the preservice program components of the ARC. Not all ARC programs in special education are alike, and in the future we can gain and compare measures of self-efficacy from teachers who were prepared through ARC programs of varying degrees of quality.

This study will be based upon an analysis of data from the teacher survey of the Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS) in 1993-94 and 1999-2000. The SASS surveys were sponsored by the United States Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Schools were sampled nationally, proportional to size within various demographic strata. Independent variables for this study will consist of the following sets: teacher demographics (gender, income, race, age, marital status) teacher academic background, degrees held, previous work experience, and specialty field. Dependent variables to be used include a series of questions contained in the SASS and TFS that seek to measure self-efficacy, or ask "how well prepared were you before entering teaching" to handle specific sets of teaching skills. A hierarchical regression equation will be employed in order to test different models, and to gauge the relative contribution of sets of independent variables, including method of preservice preparation (traditional/alternative), as they are entered into the regression equation. By using the hierarchical approach, partial statistical control over antecedent variables is obtained, which will examine whether workplace and demographic variables, over and above other variables, such as type of certification earned predict high or low ratings of teacher self efficacy.

Related Research

Boe, E. E., Cook, L. H., Bobbitt, S. A., & Terhanian, G. (1998). The shortage of fully certified teachers in special and general education. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 21* (1), 1-21.

Cook, L. H., & Boe, E. E. (1995). Who is teaching students with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 28* (1), 70-72.

Feistritzer, C. E. (1998, February). Alternative teacher certification-An overview [On-line]. Available: <http://www.ncei.com/Alt-Teacher-Cert.htm>

Rosenberg, M. S., & Sindelar, P. T. (2001). *The proliferation of alternative routes to certification in special education: A critical review of the literature*. Arlington, VA: The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, The Council for Exceptional Children. Available: www.special-ed-careers.org.

Workplan

1. Analyze descriptive data contained within the SASS from 1993-94 and 1999-2000 to determine the demographic parameters of AR.
2. Analyze survey data contained within the 1999-2000 SASS to determine programmatic differences between AR and traditional routes to certification.
3. Analyze survey data contained within the 1999-2000 SASS to determine AR 's effects, if any, upon teacher reports of self-efficacy and satisfaction.
4. Analyze data contained within the 2001 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), when released by NCES, for measures of teacher retention or attrition.
5. Identify areas in which additional information is needed most, rank them in terms of importance and the feasibility with which the data may be obtained, and develop plan for this line of inquiry in the future.

Timeline

1. August, 2004: Final draft prepared of the report of the results of workplan items 1, 2, and 3 above.
2. August, 2004: Initial analyses of the Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS) completed, pending release of the data from NCES.

Upcoming Accomplishments

Based upon our initial findings and in an effort to better understand the relationship between route of preparation and teacher satisfaction and attrition, these follow-up analyses are recommended and will be investigated using the current data from the SASS:

1. Future research should adopt an operational definition of alternative preparation that takes into account the existence and duration of practice teaching. A definition that accounts for how long its students received classroom preparation before beginning teaching would offer a more meaningful basis from which to compare aspects of preparedness, support, control, satisfaction, and

intent to leave the profession in a structural model of attrition.

2. The role that *specific* aspects of support and control play in predicting job satisfaction, and ultimately teacher intent to leave should be investigated with various groups of teachers as operationally defined in the suggestion one, above.
3. The role that the existence of a helpful mentor plays in predicting satisfaction and intent to leave should be investigated as part of a structural model of teacher attrition.