

A review of two journal articles on the subject of
ALTERNATE ROUTE TEACHER CERTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

I am currently exploring a career as a public school teacher. Since I have previously earned a bachelors degree, one available option is to become a certified teacher via the State of New Jersey's Provisional Teacher Program. I took this course to learn more about teaching and I thought this would be a good opportunity to learn more about alternate route teacher certification. These articles provide insights and experiences of alternate route teachers. The articles also provide information regarding the educational community's findings on and perceptions of alternate route programs. After completing this project I will have a better understanding of the alternate route option available to me.

A review of two journal articles on the subject of alternate route teacher certification

The Birth of Alternate Route Teacher Certification Programs

Nakai and Turley refer to *A Nation at Risk* (the report prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983) at the beginning of their article. This was familiar since we just learned about this extremely significant report in our class. The report was written around the same time as the first wave of modern educational reform which was the strongest of the three waves (Sadker & Sadker, 2005). Since this pivotal moment in educational reform, publicly funded alternate route programs initiated by states, universities, colleges, school districts and independent sources have sprung up nationwide in nearly every state (Feistritzer & Chester, 1998 as referenced in Nakai & Turley). The New Jersey Provisional Teacher Program, started in 1984 as the first alternate certification program in the nation and perhaps the largest and most visible program of its kind, has demonstrated a degree of success achieving some of the stated goals of alternate route advocates (Klagholz, 2000 as referenced in Nakai & Turley). In the Nakai & Turley article, a variety of reasons are given why alternate route programs were developed, but most importantly they address the shortage of teachers willing to teach in under-served geographically areas as well as the shortage of math and science teachers (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996).

Perceptions of Alternate Route Teacher Certification Programs

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Education, as quoted in the Nakai and Turley article, devoted large portions of the first Title II report on teacher quality to a severe criticism of traditional teacher education and has extolled the virtues of alternate route certification as a means of recruiting highly qualified candidates to teaching and breaking the putative monopoly on teacher preparation held by colleges and universities. According to McKibben, 1996, as referenced in the Nakai and Turley article, California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing had historically discouraged emergency permit teaching as a means of entry into the profession.

However, in 1996 a class size reduction initiative paved the way for thousands of alternate route teachers with little or no professional preparation to enter California classrooms. As of the 2000-2001 school year there were 30,000 emergency permit teachers in California classrooms (Sheilds, et al., 2001, as referenced in Nakai and Turley).

Efficacy of Alternate Route Teachers

The research on alternate certification teachers is mixed. Nakai and Turley refer to two reports (Darlington-Hammond & Cobb, 1996; Ashton, 1996) that reviewed several studies that have found that traditionally prepared teachers are generally more highly rated and have higher student achievement. Conversely, another review of studies (Miller, McKenna & McKenna, 1998 as referenced in Nakai & Turley) found that there were no discernible differences between traditionally and alternately prepared teachers after 3 years of teaching. In 1997, Shen as referenced in Nakai and Turley, reported that alternate route candidates had lower academic qualifications; however in 2000, Klagholz, as quoted in the Nakai and Turley article, found that alternately prepared teachers had higher scores on licensing exams and their attrition rates were lower. According to Zumwalt, as quoted in the Jorissen article, there is little evidence that alternate certification teachers are less likely to flee urban schools or that they are more responsive to urban student's needs. There seems to be a lot of disagreement on the subject.

Preparation of Alternate Route Teachers

The length and quality of the alternate route training program seems to be a key factor in determining whether the teacher will be successful or not and whether they will remain in teaching. Blair (2003), as mentioned in the Jorissen article, states that there is a substantial variation in requirements of the programs now offered by 44 states and the District of Columbia. The spectrum ranges from a two week training program prior to entering the classroom to a two year post-baccalaureate program with up to three years of mentoring. As referred to in the Jorissen article, Darling-Hammond, et al. (2002), found that a teacher's sense

of being prepared is a key element to teacher efficacy and teacher retention. Jorissen quotes Darling-Hammond as saying that teachers from short-term preparation programs tend to have difficulty with curriculum development, teaching methods, classroom management and student motivation. So as far as teacher preparation is concerned, longer seems to yield better results.

Prior Experience of Teachers Entering Alternate Route Certification Programs

A large part of the Nakai and Turley article included their findings on a survey they prepared for 140 emergency permit teachers in California. The survey participants were asked to elaborate on what they felt prepared them most for the emergency teaching position. Teachers identified working as an instructional aide, substitute teacher and methods courses as their most important preparatory experiences. All but one of the respondents reported having some kind of relevant teaching experience. There were a variety of teaching experiences reported including camp counseling, religious school teaching, substitute teaching, assistant teaching and private or parochial school teaching. Nakai and Turley included many excerpts taken directly from the surveys which illustrated the valuable aspects of teaching that were observed and learned while the respondents were assistant teaching/substitute teaching. Excerpts also illustrated the value of methods courses. Respondents also identified areas which they wish they would have had more experience or training. Those areas included reading instruction, classroom management/discipline and science teaching. Other areas of concern that sometimes may be overlooked were communicating with parents, organizing the classroom and understanding school routines. Nakai and Turley also reported that alternate route candidates do not always possess the attitudes and dispositions that make for a successful teaching experience. I know from my personal experience that the school culture is much different than the corporate culture. If an alternate route teacher had previously worked in a corporate environment, he/she might not be aware of this and could quickly alienate fellow teachers and administrators. So it would be valuable if alternate route preparation programs addressed the differences between the two environments.

Benefits of Alternate Route Teacher Certification Programs

Nakai and Turley quote two sources (Dill & Stafford, 1996; Klagholtz, 2000) that agree that induction teaching and professional coursework are best done concurrently. Nakai and Turley write that the opportunity for immediate application of learning is obvious and that the interaction between theory and practice is dynamic and constructive. In the Jorissen article there is a quote from one of the alternate route teachers who was interviewed for her study. The teacher said that it was valuable to be able to immediately apply in the classroom the information that she just recently learned. Jorissen wrote that participants in her study were teaching while attending classes, which made transferring their learning into practice an almost immediate occurrence. This reinforced the relevance of the courses and enabled the teachers to develop a repertoire of experiences as a basis for further learning and reflection. Another significant benefit of alternate route programs is the relationships with cohort members. In the Jorissen study, support of the cohort was described by all of the participants as the most important, as far as developing a sense of collegiality. The cohort model also served as a source of strength for its members in difficult times. The Jorissen article provided quotes directly from the survey regarding the significance of the cohort model. Participants indicated that they talked often, compared notes and provided emotional support especially when a member was overwhelmed. They were all going through this together and they gained invaluable support and strength from each other.

The Future of Alternate Route Teacher Certification Programs

Even though the efficacy of alternate route teacher preparation is in dispute, the programs are not going away anytime soon. Nakai & Turley say in their article that alternate route entry promises to be a feature of the teacher education landscape for the foreseeable future. In the Jorissen article, Blair (2003) states that many teacher preparation institutions are beginning to adapt features of alternate route programs. This was suggested by the U.S. Department of Education in their 2002 report as referred to in the Jorissen article. In regard to strengthening

current traditional teaching models, they stated that a model for tomorrow would be based on the best alternate route programs of today. The study also suggest the strengthening of the alternate route model especially as it relates to career transitions and developing the competence to facilitate others' learning which is a complex process.

Conclusion

I am amazed that after 20+ years of existence, there is still no definitive answer on whether alternate route teacher certification programs are successful or not. Another remarkable point is that although the New Jersey Provisional Teacher Program is the oldest and seen as a comprehensive program, no one has chosen to study it. Academia can disagree on the overall efficacy of alternate route teacher preparation programs, but it would be hard to dispute that the program can provide excellent teachers when looked at on an individual basis. Two teachers that I have worked with closely and that I have a high regard for entered the profession via the New Jersey Provisional Teacher Program.

The articles provided valuable information that will be beneficial to me. The information pertaining to aspects of teaching that the alternate route teachers had difficulty with was enlightening. I can focus on those areas and possibly take additional courses to insure that I will not have similar difficulties. Being able to immediately apply in the classroom what you learned in your training classes at night is also a great benefit. The information about the value of the relationships with cohort members was encouraging. Being able to vent your frustrations with other teachers outside of the school is a great advantage. I know that doing so inside the school where you teach can sometimes be a bad idea. And reading how alternate route teachers valued and called upon their experiences as assistant and substitute teachers was encouraging since I too am gaining experience in this manner.

The job of a first year teacher is very difficult for alternate route teachers as well as traditionally prepared teachers. It would be a mistake for any teacher to enter the classroom if they feel that they do not have the proper preparation. I would prefer to have a more extensive education like that provided in a 4 year teacher preparation program. I am not sure if I will enter the teaching profession via the State of New Jersey's Provisional Teacher Program, but I feel fortunate to have that option available to me. I will probably be receiving my certificate of eligibility within the next two months which allows me to start seeking employment as a teacher. I am not certain what path I will take to the classroom, but one thing is for sure, I will not enter the classroom until I am confident that I can do the job well.

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