

# ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

## TO CERTIFY CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

By Kristina L. Sander

Understanding why teachers leave the field is important when developing teacher education programs with conceptual frameworks that counter reasons for teacher attrition.

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Meeting the demand for qualified teachers is a challenge in all areas of education. One solution being utilized is the implementation of alternative certification (AC) programs which give individuals opportunities to earn their teaching certificates in abbreviated periods of time—often teaching while they complete program requirements. There is a growing number of AC and alternative licensure programs across the country, and colleges and universities must determine whether or not aspects of teacher preparation are being sacrificed through these abbreviated alternative programs.

Early AC programs began in New Jersey and Texas during the 1980s. Today, as then, AC programs typically involve some period of intensive, condensed academic coursework or training; a period of supervised on-the-job training; and candidates are typically expected to pass certification tests to become fully certified. For effective programming, educational institutions must ensure that the structure of the teacher preparation program—whether traditional or alternative—implements strategies to counter reasons for teacher attrition, and creates evaluative tools for determining the effectiveness of teacher preparation. Identifying connections between the preparation of the educator, their degree of satisfaction in their teaching experience, and the rate of retention in the field are all critical components for high-quality programming.

### Support for AC Programs

Supporters of AC programs argue that these forms of preparation offer new teachers opportunities to learn in real-world contexts. A 1999 report on AC programs for math and science teachers identified a number of favorable attributes. The first is the ability to diversify the teaching force by recruiting minority teachers. Teacher retention rates appear to be the poorest in schools with a student population that isn't predominantly white. AC programs are able to increase workforce diversity and attract candidates with subject-matter expertise, typically enlisting a greater percentage of minority teacher candidates than do traditional programs. This kind of recruitment and development of minority educators is most effective when urban schools have positive, effective minority role models as educators.

AC programs such as Teach for America are able to give bright college graduates a way

## Principles of Quality CTE Teacher Education Programs

- Faculty are committed to students and their professional development as lifelong learners.
- Faculty use curriculum and instructional techniques to integrate theory with practice, academic and workforce education, professional education and subject matter, and learning theory and workforce preparation.
- Faculty understand the philosophy and effective practice of workforce preparation and development.
- Faculty use dynamic pedagogy based on learning theory and practices appropriate for youth and adults.
- Faculty are partners in learning communities through which they model collaboration and democratic processes for their students.
- Programs are dynamic and change oriented.
- Programs are grounded in academic education, workplace subject matter, technology, professional education, and clinical practices.
- Colleges/universities provide adequate resources to sustain programs at high quality levels.
- Academic and clinical faculty view career and technical educator preparation as a top priority.

into the teaching profession, without them having to go through a traditional teacher education program. AC programs also have the potential to attract teacher candidates who have a broad range of experiences that better meet the needs of learners.

### Opposition to AC Programs

Opposition to AC programs has been due to a desire to maintain high standards in teacher preparation and, to some extent, a denial that a teacher shortage exists on a large scale. Opponents have pointed out that other professions do not question the need for internships, stringent college preparation programs, and high standards in preparing an individual for work in the field. So AC programs are bedeviled by the

stereotype that they are an easy way into the profession, and they do not promote high standards. To promote high standards, frameworks for AC programs must consider pedagogy, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge.

Education researcher Linda Darling-Hammond addressed the issue of AC program effectiveness in a 2002 report, "Teacher Certification Reconsidered." She cited Teach for America participants' high attrition rates, and noted that AC program participants are nearly twice as likely to leave teaching compared to those who have had clinical student teaching experience. Those prepared through an alternative route are likely to lack student teaching experience, she said, and this clinical experi-

ence makes a strong difference in teacher retention.

Additional opposition deals with the effect AC programs have on student achievement. An *Education Week* article "Alternative Teacher Certification" published earlier this year contends that alternative routes to teacher certification do nothing more than put teachers into the classroom before they are adequately prepared; this can negatively impact student learning. However, older studies on student achievement related to alternative or traditional licensure appear to be inconclusive in how they impact student learning.

### Teacher Retention—All Certification Fields

Understanding why teachers leave the field is important when developing teacher education programs with conceptual frameworks that counter reasons for teacher attrition. The fact is that new teachers leave the classroom in high numbers. An August 2005 Alliance for Education issue brief noted that nearly half of all teachers who enter the field leave it within five years; sadly, the best and brightest teachers are often the first to go. There are a number of reasons they leave, including poor working conditions and unrealistic expectations. And while teacher induction and mentoring programs have been implemented to deal with attrition, it seems much more cost-effective to create teacher licensure and certification programs that head off attrition issues before they begin. AC programs may provide opportunities for prospective educators to obtain realistic perspectives on life in the classroom.

### Teacher Retention in Career and Technical Education

In 2004, the Association for Career and Technical Education noted in its recommendations for the reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Act that "Teacher shortages are growing in CTE at the same time that many postsecondary institutions are eliminating teacher education programs,

and many school districts are unable to fill vacant positions.” Clearly, some sort of programming is needed to develop a pool of highly qualified CTE teachers.

While some literature may suggest eliminating quick fix alternatives to licensure, elimination is not the answer; instead, a strong conceptual framework should be designed and implemented to provide strong pre-service training for educators. A 2004 report (Ruhland and Bremer) noted that while research indicates adequate pre-service preparation and in-service support of novice teachers are important to improve both the quality of instruction and the retention of teachers, AC programs vary widely in the amount of pre-service preparation provided.

That report addressed the issue of teacher retention in CTE and the type of pre-service programs they participate in. It said, “For many teachers, the effort invested in gaining certification can be presumed a measure of interest in remaining in the field. Since many CTE teachers have had another career and bypass a great deal of the typical teacher preparation process, they may feel less committed to the teaching profession.” In addition, it is arguable that CTE teachers coming in to the profession from other fields have marketable job skills that are very much in demand.

### Assessing Teacher Preparation Programs in Career and Technical Education

Creating an assessment for alternative licensure programs in CTE can benefit from the work of Richard Lynch (1997). The table at top left reflects what Lynch offered as a foundation for CTE teacher education programs.

### Implications and Questions for the Future

There is currently insufficient data on long-term retention rates for AC teachers because this kind of programming is a relatively new phenomenon. Future research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of AC

in improving retention rates. While some studies have been done to examine the correlation between student achievement and the route of licensure, little data exists to show whether the latter affects teacher retention rates. Therefore, future alternative certification research should be designed to determine the relationship between the structure of the teacher licensure program and teacher retention rates.

### Some Questions that Research Should Address

- How do CTE teachers who complete traditional licensure programs experience teaching as compared to those who completed the alternative licensure program?
- Is there a significant difference in the

quality, preparation and readiness of the CTE teachers who are granted licenses through the traditional route versus the CTE teachers who are granted licenses through the nontraditional route?

- Can we see this difference through measurable student achievement? Can we see this different through teacher retention/attrition information?
- Does the preparation (or lack thereof) affect one’s desire to stay in the profession?
- How does the teacher preparation affect attrition rates?
- Is there a difference between certification routes and teacher retention?
- Can we look at student achievement measurements and draw inferences based on achievement statistics? **I**

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