WHERE WE STAND

Alternative vs. Traditional Teacher Preparation

About This Series

"Where We Stand: Alternative vs. Traditional Teacher Preparation" is one in a series of position statements from AACTE on issues of policy or professional practice that are of major concern to policy makers, to educators, and to the public. Each statement articulates AACTE's stance, its underlying rationale, and, as appropriate, recommendations for action or change.

About AACTE

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) is a national alliance of educator preparation programs dedicated to the highest quality professional development of teachers and school leaders in order to enhance PK-12 student learning. The 800 institutions holding AACTE membership represent public and private colleges and universities in every state, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam. AACTE's reach and influence fuel its mission of serving learners by providing all school personnel with superior training and continuing education.

AACTE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION
SERVING LEARNERS

1307 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20005-4701
Tel: 202.293.2450
Fax: 202.457.8095
www.aacte.org

The relative value of alternative vs. traditional teacher preparation remains a highly debated issue, with conclusive answers not immediately apparent. Researchers at SRI International were among the early reporters of the methodological constraints in examining this topic—constraints that, they noted, seemed likely to increase. They reported the blurring of the lines between alternative and traditional routes, finding more variation *within* a single preparation program than *across* programs, in terms of the training teacher candidates are offered, their experiences in their programs, and their effectiveness when they become teachers. They concluded that "program-to-program comparisons make no sense."[1]

These constraints remain true today. Eduventures, Inc. recently noted that "Research comparing 'alternative programs' to 'traditional programs' has yielded murky results, primarily because programs are so diverse and incorporate varying types and intensity of program components, so direct comparisons are incredibly difficult."[2] The Department of Education's latest annual report on teacher quality[3] states that among the three types of teacher preparation programs—traditional, alternative based at institutions of higher education (IHEs), and alternative not based at IHEs—the vast majority (92%) are IHE-based. This means that only 8% of all preparation programs are not higher education-affiliated. These data further illustrate the confounding of efforts to distinguish "traditional" from "alternative" preparation. Perhaps most compelling is the recent report on teacher preparation from the National Research Council, which noted the unlikelihood that there is one best pathway to high-quality preparation for teachers. It concluded, "… there is currently little definitive evidence that particular approaches to teacher preparation yield teachers whose students are more successful than others."[4]

In contrast, research by Eduventures, Inc., through its Schools of Education Learning Collaborative,[5] indicates that university-based programs overseen by schools of education "more commonly incorporate elements linked to increased student achievement." These elements include longer field placements and student teaching experiences, subject- or content-specific course work, field work in a location similar to the teacher's first job, field work in a grade level similar to the teacher's first job, and course work in child development.[6]

AACTE believes it is important to monitor and seriously consider new research findings that may illuminate effective aspects of preparation and ultimately lead to its improvement. Innovation in educator preparation has seen monumental growth over the past decade and continues apace—with new and creative teacher preparation methods including online programs, coteaching models, residencies, apprenticeships, and creative applications of technology, such as the use of student and teacher avatars—to name just a few. Our stance is to encourage well-reasoned innovation and new "alternatives" that have strong potential for improving the quality of teaching and student learning. A compelling example is the widely acknowledged salutary effects of extended clinical

practice offered by residency and other heavily school-based programs.

The following is a sampling of findings from studies that have attempted to differentiate 'alternative' and 'traditional' preparation. However, as just noted, distinctions are becoming increasingly blurred. AACTE is interested in focusing on the most productive models, regardless of their designation.

BACKGROUND

Effects on Student Achievement

A summary of research on the impact of teachers prepared by a major national alternative teacher preparation program, Teach for America (TFA), by Heilig & Jez in 2010 revealed a mixed picture, with results affected by the experience level of the TFA teachers and the group of teachers with whom they are compared. Studies found that, when the comparison group is other teachers in the same schools who are less likely to be certified or traditionally prepared, novice TFA teachers perform equivalently, and experienced TFA teachers perform comparably in raising reading scores and slightly better in raising math scores. The question for most districts, however, is whether TFA teachers do as well as or better than the credentialed non-TFA teachers with whom districts aim to staff their schools. On this question, studies indicate that the students of novice TFA teachers perform significantly less well in reading and mathematics than those of credentialed beginning teachers.[7]

An analysis of the 2009 national study of alternative certification conducted by Mathematica Policy Research for the U.S. Department of Education[8] found that, compared to matched teachers in their hard-to-staff, high-minority schools (who were less well trained than most teachers nationally), alternatively certified teachers, who were still taking course work while teaching, produced significantly lower student achievement gains. Controlling for experience, alternatively certified teachers did noticeably less well than their counterparts in mathematics across the entire sample. Further, teachers from the "low course work" alternative routes actually *lowered* their students' achievement scores between fall and spring. Those from "high course work" alternative programs performed somewhat better, and their traditionally prepared counterparts achieved the largest student gains—an increase of about two NCEs (normal curve equivalent points)—over the course of the year in reading and mathematics.[9] A more recent review of this study by Eduventures, Inc., noted that it had some "serious methodology flaws which made the findings difficult to interpret"—saying it was based on a biased sample and the findings have been largely oversimplified by the press and misinterpreted by the public. "The data from the Mathematica study actually indicates that teachers from 'high course work' traditional routes impacted student achievement most positively. As a result, it is concerning that this study has largely influenced policy and public perception."[10]

A 2008 study of 3,766 New York City beginning teachers addressed the effects of teacher qualifications on student achievement. Researchers Boyd, Langford, Loeb, Rockoff, and Wyckoff found that students of new teachers who graduated from college-based preparation programs achieved significantly larger gains in reading/language arts in grades 4-8 and in mathematics in grades 4-5 than did students of beginning teachers prepared through alternative routes such as TFA and the New York Teaching Fellows.[11] Although TFA and Teaching Fellows educators who stayed in teaching became more effective in later years as they gained experience and training, most left teaching much earlier than other teachers. By Year 4, more than 50% of the alternative program entrants and 85% of TFA candidates had left, compared to 37% of college-prepared teachers. In a later study using this same data base, the researchers also found that both certification and experience had large, significant effects on student achievement. *Not being certified* at the time a teacher taught a math course to fourth or fifth graders *reduced* student achievement by about two thirds of the large gain attributable to teachers' 1st year of teaching experience.[12]

A well-controlled study conducted in 2005 using longitudinal, individual-level student data from Houston examined fourth and fifth graders' achievement gains on six different reading and mathematics tests over a 6-year period. Researchers Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig found that certified teachers consistently produced stronger student achievement gains than did uncertified teachers including TFA recruits. Controlling for teacher experience, degrees, and student characteristics, uncertified TFA recruits were less effective than certified teachers, and performed about as well as other uncertified teachers. TFA recruits who became certified after 2 or 3 years did about as well as other certified teachers in supporting student achievement gains; however, nearly all would leave within 3 years.[13]

A 2007 study of ninth and tenth grade teachers was conducted by the Duke University team of Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor, again utilizing 10 years of rich longitudinal data on teachers and students in North Carolina. The results of this high school study revealed that increased student performance on state-required end-of-course tests was significantly and positively related to their teachers' having completed a preservice program of preparation—rather than entering through the state's "lateral route"—and being certified in their subject area. The authors concluded, "We find compelling evidence that teacher credentials, particularly licensure and certifica-

tion, affect student achievement in systematic ways and that the magnitudes are large enough to be policy relevant."[14]

Effects on African American Students

A large national study of 4,400 early elementary children from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study examined achievement gaps and teacher qualifications using value-added methods. Released in 2009, the report found that students who had a certified teacher for most of their early school experience scored significantly higher in reading than students with uncertified or alternatively certified teachers. Students with fully certified teachers for at least 2 of the 3 grade levels studied averaged 1.5 IRT units greater growth per year. Teacher certification accounted for 8% of the growth in reading achievement and was particularly influential in predicting growth for African American students. Having fully certified teachers narrowed the academic gap between African American students and European American students across the early elementary grades.[15]

Effects on English Language Learners

A 2011 study in four Texas school districts compared the achievement of students of TFA and traditionally prepared teachers of mathematics and English language arts/reading. Both students at the elementary (grades 3-8) and secondary (grades 9-11) level were included in the study. Researchers Ware, LaTurner, Okulicz-Kozaryn, Garland, and Klopfenstein, in their concluding remarks, voiced concern regarding the fact that lower gains in ELA/reading were evident for elementary and high school Hispanic students of TFA teachers. They encouraged TFA staff to "review their teacher training and support systems to ensure an additional focus on teaching strategies to support Hispanic students."[16]

The above-mentioned 2005 study by Darling-Hammond et al. also found that the negative effects on student achievement of uncertified TFA teachers were most pronounced for limited-English-proficient students who took the district tests in Spanish.[17]

Effects on Teacher Retention

Research shows that traditionally prepared educators stay in teaching longer than those who are alternatively prepared. Findings in 2006 from two longitudinal studies in New York—those of Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff[18] and of Kane, Rockoff, and Staiger[19]—found that New York Teaching Fellows left at rates just over 50% by their 4th year, at which point 80% of TFA recruits, but only 37% of college-prepared teachers, had left teaching. Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, et al. found that an average of 80% of TFA teachers left their jobs in Houston by the 3rd year.[20] Glass found that in the Chicago Public Schools, which hires about 100 TFA teachers each year, fewer than half remained in teaching for a 3rd year.[21]

Effects on Teachers' Sense of Preparedness

Research also points to the salutary effects of high-quality and extensive clinical preparation on teacher candidates' confidence and sense of efficacy as they prepare to become a full-time "teacher of record."

A recent analysis by Kee[22] of federal School and Staffing Survey data examined 1,690 1st-year teachers who had pursued either a traditional or an alternative route to teaching. Her examination of the extent to which program features relate to new teachers' feelings of preparedness revealed that 1st-year teachers who have fewer types of education course work and shorter field experiences feel less well prepared than teachers whose pedagogical preparation is more complete. This means, Kee reported, that teachers whose alternative certification programs allow them to begin full-time teaching without having had course work or field experiences will feel the least well prepared in their 1st year.

A 2011 survey of 2,500 randomly selected K-12 public school teachers from the Market Data Retrieval database[23] reported that 65% of teachers found their preparation program "Excellent" or "Very Good." Another 24% reported it was "Good." Only 1% of the teachers surveyed rated their preparation program "Poor." Traditional-route teachers rated their preparation programs higher than did alternative-route teachers. Nearly one in five (18%) alternative-route teachers indicated their preparation programs were "Okay" or "Poor," compared with just 9% of teachers who entered the profession through college-based teacher education programs.

Humphrey and colleagues found, in their 2008 study of alternative programs, that candidates with prior classroom experience were significantly more confident in their abilities to teach than were candidates with no experience. In fact, 87% of candidates with prior experience said they felt they possessed the necessary skills and knowledge to be effective teachers, compared to similar responses of only 68% of candidates who had no experience.[24] Further, Hammerness et al. described several studies indicating that, when a well-supervised clinical experience precedes or is conducted jointly with course work, teacher candidates report becoming more comfortable with the process of learning to teach and are, in fact, more able to enact what they are learning in practice.[25]

A 2007 survey[26] queried newly placed teachers—who were prepared via four different routes—as to their feelings of preparedness to teach under the challenging circumstances of their high-need public schools. The study included a random sample of 577 traditionally trained 1st-year teachers and 224 respondents from three alternative programs: TFA, New Teacher Project, and Troops for Teachers. Findings revealed that only half of the alternative-route teachers felt they were prepared for their 1st year of teaching, compared with 80% of the traditionally prepared teachers. Further, more than half of the alternative teachers said they had too little time working with an actual public school teacher in a classroom environment as part of their teacher preparation, whereas only 20% of the traditionally prepared teachers reported having that problem. Ninety-four percent of the traditionally trained teachers expressed confidence that their students are learning and responding to their teaching, whereas only 74% of alternative-route teachers so responded.

Endnotes

1 Humphrey, D. C., Wechsler, M. E., & Hough, H. J. (2008, April). Characteristics of effective alternative teacher certification programs. *Teachers College Record, 110*(4). Retrieved from http://policyweb.sri.com/cep/publications/AltCert_finalTCversion.pdf; Humphrey, D. C., Wechsler, M. E. (2006, August 30). Fighting the wrong battle in the teacher-preparation wars. *Education Week, 26*(1), pp. 46-47.

2 Eduventures, Inc. (2011, February). *Does the path to teacher certification make a difference in student achievement?* Catalog No. 17SOECRI0211, pp. 2-3.

3 U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. (2011, November). *Preparing and credentialing the nation's teachers: The Secretary's eighth report on teacher quality based on data provided for 2008, 2009, and 2010.* Retrieved from http://www2.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/teachprep/2011-title2report.pdf

4 National Research Council, Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States. (2010). *Preparing teachers: Building evidence for sound policy.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, pp. 61-62.

5 Eduventures, Inc. (2001, February). *What are the components of teacher preparation programs that positively impact teacher performance and P-12 student achievement?* Catalog No. 17SOECRI0211.

6 Ibid.

7 Heilig, J. V., & Jez, S. J. (2010, June). *Teach for America: A review of the evidence.* Boulder, CO, and Tempe, AZ: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/teach-for-america

8 Constantine, J., Player, D., Silva, T., Hallgren, K., Grider, M., & Deke, J. (2009). *An evaluation of teachers trained through different routes to certification: Final report* (NCEE 2009-4043). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.

9 Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). *Educational opportunity and alternative certification: New evidence and new questions.* Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Retrieved from http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/92

10 Eduventures, Inc., 2011.

11 Boyd, D., Grossman, P., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2006). How changes in entry requirements alter the teacher workforce and affect student achievement. *Education Finance and Policy, 1*(2), 176-216. Retrieved from http://www.teacherpolicyresearch.org/portals/1/pdfs/how_changes_in_entry_requirements_alter_the_teacher_workforce.pdf

12 Boyd, D., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Rockoff, J., & Wyckoff, J. (2008, May). *The narrowing gap in New York City teacher qualifications and its implications for student achievement in high-poverty schools.* (Working Paper 14021). Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://papers.nber.org/papers/w14021

13 Darling-Hammond, L., Holtzman, D., Gatlin, S. J., & Heilig, J. V. (2005). Does teacher preparation matter? Evidence about teacher certification, Teach for America, and teacher effectiveness. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13*(42). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n42

14 Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., & Vigdor, J. L. (2010). Teacher credentials and student achievement in high school: A cross-subject analysis with student fixed effects. *Journal of Human Resources, 45*(3), 655-681. Retrieved from http://jhr.uwpress.org/cgi/content/refs/45/3/655

15 Easton-Brooks, D., & Davis, A. (2009). Teacher qualification and the achievement gap in early primary grades. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 17*(15). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/download/17/17

16 Ware, A., LaTurner, R. J., Okulicz-Kozaryn, A., Garland, M., & Klopfenstein, K. (2011, January). *Teacher preparation programs and Teach for America research study.* The University of Texas at Dallas, Education Research Center.

17 Darling-Hammond et al., 2005.

18 Boyd et al., 2006.

19 Kane, T. E., Rockoff, J. E., & Staiger, D. O. (2006, March). *What does certification tell us about teacher effectiveness? Evidence from New York City.* Working Paper 11844. Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from http://www0.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jrockoff/certification-final.pdf

20 Ibid.

21 Glass, G. V. (2008, May). *Alternative certification of teachers.* East Lansing, MI: Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice. Retrieved from http://greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Glass_AlternativeCert.pdf

22 Kee, A. N. (2012). Feelings of preparedness among alternatively certified teachers: What is the role of program features? *Journal of Teacher Education, 63*(1), 23-38. Doi: 10.1177/0022487111421933

23 Feistritzer, E. C., with Griffin, S., & Linnajarvi, A. (2011). *Profile of Teachers in the U.S. 2011.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Information. Retrieved from http://www.ncei.com/Profile_Teachers_US_2011.pdf

24 Humphrey et al., 2008.

25 Hammerness, K., Darling-Hammond, L., Bransford, J., Berliner, D., Cochran-Smith, M., McDonald, M., & Zeichner, K. (2005). How teachers learn and develop. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 385-389). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

26 National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda. (2007). Issue 2: Working without a net: How new teachers from three prominent alternate route programs describe their first year on the job. *Lessons learned: New teachers talk about their jobs, challenges, and long-range plans.* Washington, DC: Authors. Retrieved from http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/lessons_learned_2.pdf