

Effectiveness of Alternative Teacher Certification

Question:

1. What research exists on the effectiveness of educators entering the profession through alternate pathways?
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Report:

Following an established REL-NEI Reference Desk research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive and policy-oriented briefs and articles in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, several educational research databases, and a general Internet search using Google and other search engines. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as resources on this issue. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations or the resources themselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

It is difficult to generalize about the effectiveness of alternative teacher certification programs overall, as Walsh and Jacobs explain: “While nearly all states now have something on their books labeled ‘alternate route to certification,’ these programs defy standard definition due to their enormous variability. States differ in the types of candidates allowed to apply (e.g., career changers or recent college graduates) and in the academic backgrounds these individuals must possess. The structure of alternate route programs varies enormously, from programs run by schools of education to those managed by school districts or private providers (both for-profit and not-for-profit). The requirements for completing a program run the full gamut as well, along with the support teachers receive once in the classroom” (See Walsh below). The requestor should keep this condition in mind when reviewing the sources cited below.

Question:

1. **What research exists on the effectiveness of educators entering the profession through alternate pathways?**

1.1. An Evaluation of Teachers Trained Through Different Routes to Certification: Final Report.

Constantine, J., Player, D., Silva, T., Hallgren, K., Grider, M., & Deke, J.; 2009; Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Source: National Center for Education Evaluation (NCEE 2009-4043)

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20094043/pdf/20094043.pdf>)

“Research on the effectiveness of AC teachers is not conclusive. A handful of studies have examined the effects on student achievement of specific AC programs, including Teach For America (TFA) and the New York City Teaching Fellows (NYCTF) program, and have reached mixed conclusions (Decker et al. 2004; Kane et al. 2006; Laczko-Kerr and Berliner 2002; Raymond et al. 2001). The more rigorous studies generally showed that students of AC teachers scored the same or higher than students of TC teachers, or that they scored slightly lower during their teacher’s first year of teaching, but scored the same by the teacher’s second year (Decker et al. 2004; Boyd et al. 2005; Kane et al. 2006). When effects have been found, they have typically been described by the authors as small. Some research—case studies or small-scale, nonexperimental observation and survey-based studies—has examined AC and TC teachers’ classroom practices, and also had mixed findings (Lutz and Hutton 1989; Jelmsberg 1996; Miller et

al. 1998). Finally, because of their limited scope, many of these studies appear to have limited relevance to the broad range of AC programs operating across the country. The TFA and NYCTF programs, for example, recruit graduates from top colleges and are quite selective in admission, whereas the entry requirements of the majority of AC programs are less stringent (Walsh and Jacobs 2007; Mayer et al. 2003). Lacking conclusive evidence, principals may be uncertain of the implications of hiring an AC teacher, and policymakers may wonder about the implications of various characteristics of teacher certification programs” (p. xvi, executive summary).

“This study found no benefit, on average, to student achievement from placing an AC teacher in the classroom when the alternative was a TC teacher, but there was no evidence of harm, either. In addition, the experimental and nonexperimental findings together indicate that although individual teachers appear to have an effect on students’ achievement, we could not identify what it is about a teacher that affects student achievement. Variation in student achievement was not strongly linked to the teachers’ chosen preparation route or to other measured teacher characteristics” (p. xxx, executive summary).

WWC Quick Review of the Report “An Evaluation of Teachers Trained Through Different Routes to Certification: Final Report”; July 2009; U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences.

Source: What Works Clearinghouse

(http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PDF/quickreviews/altcert_072809.pdf)

The study cited as 1.1 above received the highest possible WWC rating; that is., the research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards. WWC reviewers described it as a “well-implemented randomized controlled trial,” cautioning, however, that the study “is not designed to answer the question of whether a teacher would be more effective if he or she attended a TC program or an AC program. Instead, it examines whether teachers who choose to attend AC programs are generally more or less effective than teachers who choose to attend a TC program. The authors found that elementary school students whose teachers chose an alternate route to certification scored no differently on standardized math and reading tests from students whose teachers chose a traditional route to certification. Similarly, the authors found no statistically significant test score differences between the students of AC and TC teachers when they restricted their analysis to high coursework AC programs (averaging 432 hours of instruction) or to low-coursework AC programs (averaging 179 hours of instruction)” (web summary).

1.2. Making a Difference? The Effects of Teach for America in High School. Xu, Z., Hannaway, J., and Taylor, C.; 2007; Washington, DC: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (CALDER).

Source: Found through general internet search using Google Scholar

(http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411642_Teach_America.pdf)

The authors found that “secondary school TFA teachers are more effective than the teachers who would otherwise be in the classroom in their stead. While these other teachers are a diverse group in terms of background and training, for policy purposes they are an appropriate comparison group. Other things being equal, the findings suggest that disadvantaged students taught by TFA teachers are better off than they would be in the absence of TFA.” They note, however, that their findings “do not necessarily mean that there is no value to teacher training. It is possible that the teachers that TFA recruits and selects would be even more effective with more pedagogical training” (pp. 25-26).

WWC Quick Review of the Report “Making a Difference? The Effects of Teach for America in High School”; July 2008; U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences.

Source: What Works Clearinghouse

(<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/quickreviews/QRReport.aspx?QRID=53#go1>)

The research in the study cited as 1.2 is consistent with WWC evidence standards, with reservations. WWC reviewers provide this caution in interpreting the results: “Students may be placed in a course taught by a TFA teacher because of their ability in that subject—and not solely because of their general math and science ability. If so, differences in performance in TFA and non-TFA classes may be influenced by differences in student ability in specific subjects. As a result, the study may not accurately measure the effect of having a TFA teacher. In addition, the data do not link students directly to the teacher who taught their course. Instead, the study matches students to teachers based on test proctor and classroom demographics. This method is

somewhat imprecise, and matching errors could lead to misleading results.” The authors found that “TFA improved student performance on standardized end-of-course tests in math and science—by about one-tenth of a standard deviation. This is equivalent to moving a student from the 50th to the 54th percentile” (web summary).

1.3. What Happens when States Have Genuine Alternative Certification? We Get More Minority Teachers and Test Scores Rise. *Peterson, P.E. and Nadler, D.; September 2009; Education Digest: Essential Readings Condensed for Quick Review, Volume 75, number 1, pp.57-60.*
Source: ERIC (#EJ857712)

Available for purchase (http://www.heartland.org/custom/semod_policybot/pdf/26183.pdf)

To determine which of the 47 states that have adopted alternative pathways to teaching have established genuine alternative certification programs and which have only symbolic ones, the authors compared rules for alternative programs to those for traditional certification. Their research revealed that “alternative certification programs vary considerably, ...[that] it makes a good deal of difference whether alternative certification is meaningful or symbolic, ... [that] minorities are represented in the teaching force to a greater extent in states with genuine alternative certification than in other states, ... {and that there is little} connection with a teacher's classroom effectiveness and certification status..... Their results are consistent with that research and other studies that have found little reason to equate certification with “highly qualified” (abstract).

1.4. Alternative Certification Isn't Alternative. *Walsh, K. and Jacobs, S.; September 2007; Thomas B. Fordham Institute.*

Source: ERIC (#ED498382)

(http://www.nctq.org/p/tqb/docs/Alternative_Certification_Isnt_Alternative_20071113021230.pdf)

To determine the “true trajectory of the alternative certification movement” and examine the extent to which “the original tenets of the alternative certification movement substantially compromised,” the authors interviewed alternate certification program directors. “Because directors are most likely to portray their own programs in a positive light, the responses are remarkably revealing. In sum: (1) most alternate route programs have become mirror images of traditional programs, while others closely resemble what used to be labeled as ‘emergency’ routes to certification; (2) most alternate route programs are remarkably nonselective; (3) many programs show little flexibility regarding candidate background; (4) alternate route programs provide woefully inadequate training and support to their candidates; (5) buyer beware: The cost of these programs varies dramatically; and (6) no program fully meets the original intent of the alternative certification movement. Recommendations from the authors conclude the report.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

- **National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality**

(<http://www.tqsource.org>)

“The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) is a national resource to which the regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.” (web description) An example of an article from TQ Resource Library appears below.

- **Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: Making the Most of Recent Research.** *Goe, L. and Stickler, L.; March 2008.*

(<http://www.tqsource.org/publications/March2008Brief.pdf>)

“Except in the case of the Teach for America (TFA) program, there is little recent research on alternative preparation programs to generalize findings about the quality of the teachers they produce ... a small but consistent body of research indicates that TFA teachers are about as effective as college-prepared teachers in math, but not in English... In addition, Darling-Hammond (2006) finds that once they attain full state certification, TFA teachers are as effective as traditionally prepared, fully certified teachers” (p. 5).

Key words and search strings used in the search:

Alternative AND certification OR effectiveness, efficacy

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Search databases and websites:

Institute for Education Science Sites: What Works Clearinghouse (WWC); Institute for Education Sciences (IES); IES Practice Guides

Other Federally Funded Sites: The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality; National Center for Education Evaluation; Education Commission of the States

Additional Data Resources: ERIC; <http://www.google scholar.com>

Criteria for inclusion:

When Reference Desk Researchers review resources, they consider, among other things, four factors:

1. **Date of the publication**: The most current information is included unless in the case of nationally known seminal resources
2. **Source and funder of the report/study/brief/article**: Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols;
3. **Methodology**: i.e. Random control trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc. Priority for inclusion is given generally to random control trial study findings; however, the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: Numbers of participants (just a few? Thousands?); Selection (did the participants volunteer in the study, or were they chosen?); Representation (were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?)
4. **Existing knowledge base**: Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is slim or non-existent. In these cases we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, etc.

REL Northeast and Islands

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