

Running head: TRANSFORMATION OF ALTERNATIVE

Transformation of Alternative Certification Programs at a liberal arts university

Edward A. Williamson

Associate Director, School of Education and Child Development

Christopher J. Craig

Director, School of Education and Child Development

Drury University

Paper presented at AILACTE Annual Meeting and conference February 17-18, 2012

Hyatt Regency Hotel, Chicago, IL

Transformation of alternative

Transformation of Alternative Certification Programs at a liberal arts university

Edward A. Williamson and Chris Craig

The importance of a liberal arts education in teacher preparation cannot be dismissed. Concurrently, accountability is stressed at both state and national levels, especially with regard to teacher preparation. This paper highlights the transformation of alternative certification programs provided by a small liberal arts university. By providing alternative certification routes in several formats this university addresses high needs areas in challenging geographic areas while preparing future educators who possess the ethos of the liberal arts and the ability to assess learning situations and plan for instruction using data-driven decision making.

The preparation of teachers is in a state of flux. Competing voices are striving to be heard at all levels and in every geographic area of the country. Traditional teacher education programs, the purview of public and private colleges and universities, have enjoyed a monopoly on the process since the establishment of the first “Normal” schools in the 19th Century. Politicians, riding a cresting wave of voter disenchantment over the poor performances of public schools and their students, have inserted themselves into the debate, establishing “alternative” certification programs.

The existence of these two competing streams of teacher preparation results in conflicting claims of superiority. Traditional teacher preparation programs claim that the time tested manner of certification produces teachers possessing adequate pedagogical skills and requisite content knowledge, the art and science of teaching. Alternative certification providers claim that the traditional processes have not focused on “high quality” teaching and fail to produce teachers in sufficient quantities in hard to staff areas (both geographically and in specific teaching fields such as foreign languages and science).

Transformation of alternative

Both types of teacher preparation can be effective. In some cases, colleges and universities have added alternative routes in addition to their traditional programs. It is essential that all stakeholders in the current debate investigate this issue to determine how best to provide teachers for the nation's schools in the 21st Century.

One of the findings of the seminal document, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), was that teacher preparation programs needed substantial improvement. Peterson and Nadler (2009) claimed that alternative certification programs resulted in the qualification of more teachers of minority groups and also raised student scores on standardized tests. Alternative certification programs have even expanded to include those delivered completely online (Denton et. al, 2009). The federal Race to the Top program has also spurred the development of alternative certification routes (Cavanaugh, 2011).

Corbin (1992) identified four issues that created problems for alternative certification programs. These were: definition, purpose, control and evaluation. Focusing on these issues has bolstered the arguments of traditional teacher preparation programs that alternative certification programs are somehow less stringent than their own. Wise and Darling-Hammond even placed the term alternative certification in the same sentence with the word "oxymoron" (1992). While recent disagreements have been heated between the traditionalists and advocates of alternative certification, the tenor of the literature has centered on addressing the real needs of the American educational system.

The writers represent a university which started out as a traditional liberal arts college with a traditional teacher preparation program. Beginning with the first Troops to Teachers program in the early 1990s, this university has subsequently added other alternative

Transformation of alternative

certification programs including one in special education, while at the same time remaining firmly committed to the liberal arts and excellence in the preparation of teachers. This paradigm shift has occurred due to several factors. The proximity of an outreach campus near a large military installation has facilitated the growth of the Troops to Teachers program. The presence of the main university in a growing metropolitan area has enabled the recruitment of teachers from minority groups traditionally underrepresented in the teaching ranks. Also, the existence of numerous outreach campuses across a wide swath of rural areas has impacted teacher preparation in underserved communities. Finally, a focus of preparing special education teachers has emerged coinciding with the advent of technological tools allowing for distance learning.

The traditional and alternative programs at this institution are effective; they integrate traditional and alternative assets to prepare effective instructors and facilitate student learning; these programs represent the “next chapter” in teacher preparation, a dual model; these programs address the prospect of limited resources and constitute positive actions in resolving legitimate problems.

Alternative certification programs at Drury University

Drury University is a small liberal arts university located in Springfield, Missouri. The institution was founded as Drury College in 1873, and has a long, rich heritage as a traditional liberal arts college. Teacher preparation has been a focus of Drury for many years. Drury has also taken the lead in providing access to higher education, including teacher certification at many remote sites located primarily in rural areas of southern Missouri. Beginning with an extension at Fort Leonard Wood after World War II, Drury has expanded its reach to include the

Transformation of alternative

communities of Monett, Cabool, Rolla, Lebanon, Ava, Thayer, St. Robert, and Licking in Missouri.

In the 1990s, Drury University participated in the original Troops to Teachers program developed by the U. S. Department of Defense. This program eventually died out at Drury prior to 2000. In 2001, Drury University explored the possibility of reestablishing the Troops to Teachers (TTT) program under the auspices of the U. S. Department of Defense and U. S. Department of Education. This revised program was launched in January 2002, and provides certification in the middle school areas of mathematics, social studies, language arts, and science. The Troops to Teachers program does not result in participants earning a graduate degree, only certification. In 2009, Drury University added two more alternative programs: Drury Alternative Track in Special Education (DATSE), leading to certification in cross-categorical special education and the M.Ed. degree, and the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program providing certification in the middle school areas of mathematics, social studies, language arts, and science along with the MAT degree.

These programs have transformed over time. Originally, seated classes at the main campus in Springfield and the St. Robert branch campus were the only avenues of delivery. This was supplemented in time by the advent of online courses. Drury University has utilized cohort instruction in selected, non-alternative M.Ed. programs. The DATSE program essentially runs on a cohort model. Students enter the program in either the fall or spring semesters and follow a common track of courses based upon their entry point throughout the program. The MAT has the potential to be conducted using the cohort method.

Transformation of alternative

Troops to Teachers

Program overview

The Troops to Teachers program is a post-baccalaureate route to middle school certification in the areas of mathematics, social studies, language arts, and science. Participants in the program are encouraged to register for courses at the graduate level so that they will count both for certification as well as toward a graduate degree. The program consists of ten education courses (four foundational courses and six methods courses) accompanied by a two hour field experience in diverse classrooms and culminated by a student teaching experience. To qualify, participants must either have a degree in their teaching field, or must have at least 21 hours of college credit in that field. This is in accordance with the requirements set forth by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for middle school certification.

Participants are encouraged to obtain employment in a middle school in their teaching field while completing the program. However, they can complete the program without being employed. Participants must also meet the admission requirements of the Teacher Education Program at Drury University and must pass the Praxis II examination in their teaching field.

Impact of program

Since its inception in 2002, the TTT program at Drury University has facilitated the certification of 29 veterans. Two of the program completers have received recognition as the Troops to Teachers Teacher of the Year for the state of Missouri. While several program completers have moved out of state, the majority of program completers are actively teaching

Transformation of alternative

in Missouri middle schools. In the fall semester 2011, a total of 25 participants were enrolled in courses through the TTT.

Future considerations

With the advent of the MAT program at Drury University the future of the TTT program is unsettled. Advantages of the program include fewer courses required for certification, the fact that participants do not have to be employed as teachers while completing it, and that participants have an option to take some of the courses at the undergraduate level, resulting in cost-savings. One additional advantage is that prospective participants can include some of the required courses in their baccalaureate program. In many instances, veterans do not have a baccalaureate degree (therefore being ineligible for the TTT program) and can complete this while still on active duty, including many of the required certification courses. This results in a situation where veterans retire and only lack one or two courses to complete the program.

Since Drury University maintains a presence near a large U.S. Army post, there is a large and growing population of veterans and retirees available. Many of these individuals are eligible for tuition assistance or VA educational benefits. The TTT program provides a needed pathway for those interested in second careers.

Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)

Program overview

The MAT program was approved by Drury University in 2009. This alternative program provides certification in the middle school areas of mathematics, social studies, language arts, and science. The program consists of 36 hours (12 courses) of graduate credit leading to a

Transformation of alternative

graduate degree. The final course in the program is a culminating internship. Participants in the MAT program must be employed by a middle school in their teaching field.

Participants must meet the admission requirements for the graduate program at Drury University. They must also pass the appropriate Praxis II examination for their teaching field. They must also either have a degree in their teaching field or have 21 hours of college credit in that field.

Impact of program

Since its inception, the MAT has had a hard time gaining momentum. Currently, there are a total of 14 participants at various stages of the program. In the spring 2012 semester two MAT participants will complete the program while a third participant must rectify a situation created by receiving a failing grade in one of the MAT courses. They are currently teaching in the following school districts: Crocker, Clever, and Springfield.

Future considerations

The future viability of the MAT will depend upon better advertisement of the program. It will also be dependent upon better administrative support and oversight of policies and procedures. With the current economic downturn, many schools are hesitant to replace retiring teachers.

A possible enhancement of the MAT would be to include secondary certification and expand the subjects to all those currently available in Missouri. This proposal is in the planning stages and must be approved at both the university and state governmental levels.

Transformation of alternative

DATSE

Program overview

Building on Drury's approved initial program in special education, which by 2009 had dropped in enrollment to the extent its viability was questionable, the Drury Alternative Track in Special Education (DATSE) was developed. DATSE is a 39 hour program that leads to the completion of the M.Ed. The program began as a targeted initiative to address shortages in special education teachers in the Springfield Public Schools, a large metropolitan district in Southwest Missouri. The inaugural program was offered to 12 participants who held positions as paraprofessionals with an undergraduate degree. All of these students completed their program in December of 2011 and now hold jobs and certification in k-12 Cross-Categorical Special Education classrooms.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education approved this program and expanded its impact to include all school districts in Southwest Missouri. There is a total of 50 participants in the program, all currently are working under a provisional certification or will have completed more than two years of service as a paraprofessional working with children with mild to moderate disabilities. This program was reviewed and approved by the School of Education and Child Development faculty at Drury University and input from faculty from the Department of Special Education at Vanderbilt University was provided during the program development stage.

Impact of program

The program has clearly impacted the identified needs in Springfield Public Schools and larger districts that surround Springfield. Both federal mandates tied to highly qualified teacher

Transformation of alternative

(HQT) and state compliance with No Child Left Behind has impacted the availability of jobs in recent months. To meet the standard for highly qualified teacher, the candidate must (1) pass one or more relevant Praxis exams depending on the nature of the assignment which includes the specific Missouri test for mild/moderate special education; (2) be accepted to an approved alternative certification program; and (3) be assigned a mentor that will help with the induction of the candidate as they are completing their graduate work leading to initial certification.

Future considerations

The next big adventure for the DATSE will be to replicate the program at the St. Robert campus, utilizing some additional distance learning technology, blended course offerings, and adding new faculty to the St. Robert campus which will enable us to carefully monitor the culminating internship experience for each participant.

Assessment of alternative programs

Each of the three programs has its own feature with respect to assessment. Troops to Teachers is assessed using the undergraduate electronic portfolio system used for other initial programs. For each assessment protocol, there are three phases where data are collected to monitor the transitions. For the graduate program, which includes both the MAT and DATSE, there is a complete set of graduate admissions requirements which include interviews with faculty, letters of aspiration, and taking the Millers Analogy Test. Generally, a cumulative undergraduate GPA of 2.75 or higher is required.

The MAT and DATSE assessment system is managed by Foliotek, an independent data Management Company located in Columbia Missouri. An assessment consultant from Foliotek worked with program faculty to identify scoring guides that are linked to each phase of the

Transformation of alternative

assessment plan. To comply with NCATE standard 3 and 4 specifications, proficiencies tied to the Conceptual Framework are measured through the completion of forms tied to diversity dispositions and scoring guides which are used to evaluate the Teacher Work Sample which is a requirement in Phase III of the assessment and other culminating projects such as the comprehensive exam. In addition to alignment too Missouri standards for the preparation of teachers, the programs have been aligned to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the five propositions. A unique feature of the MAT assessment process is the inclusion of the Performance Based Teacher evaluations which are up-loaded and reviewed by a university student teacher supervisor prior to making regular visits to the school to make observations of the MAT teacher and talking with the assigned mentor.

Summary

Drury University has a rich heritage as a liberal arts institution. By providing alternative certification programs in various locations and utilizing multiple modes of delivery, Drury University is contributing to the enhancement of society. Preparing liberally educated classroom teachers impacts the future generations of students for life in a global society. Alternative certification is a robust vehicle for those interested in giving back to their communities. While there are continuing issues facing each of the alternative certification programs at Drury University, the reality is that these programs are a value-added benefit to both the prospective teachers and the communities in which they live.

References

- Cavanaugh, S. (2011). Race to Top funds nurturing grassroots efforts. *Education Week*, 30 (28), 26-28.
- Corbin, W. (1992). Alternative certification programs: Problems and prospects. *Clearing House*, 65 (4), 241.
- Denton, J., Davis, T., Capraro, R., Smith, B., Beason, L., Graham, B. & Strader, R. (2009). Examining applicants for admission and completion of an online teacher certification program. *Educational Technology and Society*, 12 (1), 214-229.
- The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A Nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*.
- Peterson, P. & Nadler, D. (2009). What happens when states have genuine alternative certification? We get more minority teachers and test scores rise. *Education Digest*, 75 (1), 57-60.
- Wise, A. & Darling-Hammond, L. (1992). Alternative certification as an oxymoron. *Education Digest*, 57 (8), 46-49.