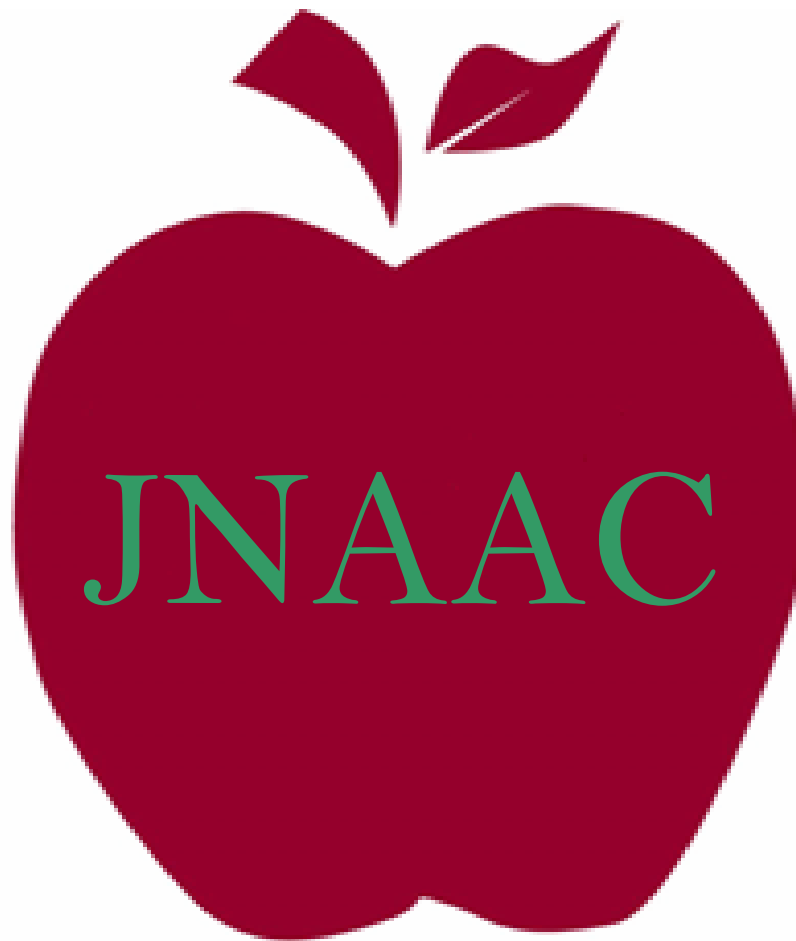


# Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification



Volume 2, Number 2, Fall 2007

Journal of the National Association for  
Alternative Certification

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## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

The Journal of the *National Association for Alternative Certification* was first published in Spring 2006 as a result of planning meetings held at NAAC Board of Directors meetings and at NAAC Annual Conferences organized by NAAC board members Elizabeth Fleming (Simmons College), Belinda Gimbert (The Ohio State University) and Rossana Boyd (Southeastern Louisiana University). Elizabeth Simmons and Belinda Gimbert acted as co-editors to determine the publication procedures and guidelines for publication, and Rossana Boyd agreed to publish the first journal edition. Rossana Boyd (now the University of North Texas) left the NAAC Board after the Spring 2006 semester and Bill Neal (Southeastern Louisiana University) became the managing editor with Elizabeth Simmons and Belinda Gimbert continuing as senior editors of the journal. The Fall 2007 edition of the *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification* marks the end of the second volume which has contained four journal editions and fourteen individual articles. To date, there have been twenty eight manuscripts submitted with fourteen being published for a fifty percent publication rate. In this Fall 2007 edition, in addition to two new research studies, we are publishing an annotated index of the fourteen articles which make up Volume 1 and 2 of this journal.

Bill Neal  
Southeastern Louisiana University

# Evaluating “Quality” Methods of Filling the “Teacher Gap”: Results of a Pilot Study with Early Career Teachers

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*Challenges for meeting the highly-qualified teacher demand, exacerbated by the critical shortage of teachers, have necessitated a variety of preparation routes for those entering the profession of teaching. This pilot study examined teacher confidence and self efficacy related to teacher preparedness within the first three years of employment. Specifically, the study examined preparation experience perceptions of early career teachers. All teachers who were employed three years or less from three Florida school districts were invited to participate. Data were analyzed and aggregated according to teacher preparation type – traditional or non-traditional (alternative) program. Participants indicated their likelihood of remaining in the program, district, and school as well as their degrees of confidence in preparation for the competencies identified. Overall results as well as differences between those who completed a traditional teacher preparation program and those with a non-traditional teacher preparation program are presented. Implications for training priorities and replicating research are discussed.*

Alternative certification programs are not new to teacher education, they are however, unique in the broad range of traditional professional teacher preparation programs and their proliferation since the 1980's has been accelerating at a rapid pace (Legler, 2002; *Alternative teacher certification: A state by state analysis*, 2006.) When other professions faced similar shortages, alternative steps were taken to entice candidates into the professions without changes to preparation. However, in teacher education, the need for increased numbers of teachers is complicated by a variety of factors. Exacerbating the demand are a) assumptions concerning the efficacy of teachers who possess strong content knowledge, b) challenging schools and, c) mandates on teacher quality as outlined by No Child Left Behind legislation.

The increasing need for teachers has often led to erroneous assumptions regarding the kind of preparation that renders a teacher highly qualified. Alternate programs are based on a variety of assumptions (or misconceptions) that if one possesses content knowledge in an area, that person can quickly become an expert teacher in the classroom, the underlying belief being that knowledge of content is the most critical factor in becoming a teacher. Many assumptions have been made about alternative teacher education programs that have yielded mixed results when tested in the limited body of empirical research (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2006; Legler, 2002.)

This study assesses self-efficacy beliefs related to teacher tasks. According to Bandura (1986) self-efficacy beliefs may be strong predictors of related performance; in other words, the confidence people bring to specific tasks plays an important role in their success or failure to complete those tasks.

The goals of the pilot study were:

- To conduct a preliminary study to survey teachers in their first three years of teaching about their confidence in their preparation to accomplish practices aligned with Florida's Educator Accomplished Practices
- To test a preliminary survey instrument
- To identify differences in confidence in teachers in their first three years of teaching based on their route to teacher certification
- To identify areas that require strengthening in teacher preparation and induction programs
- To identify any differences in likelihood of remaining in the field and/or in their district or school based upon preparation path

## Literature

There is no question that there is a national shortage of teachers. This is due to both rising enrollments and impending retirements. As we entered a new millennium, over thirty percent of the nation's three million public school teachers had passed the age of fifty (Young, 2003). Florida's growing shortages have been further expanded by both state-level legislation decreasing class sizes as well as 2002 federal legislation calling for a "highly qualified" teacher in every classroom. Moreover, incentives for early retirement in Florida increase demand too.

In an analysis of the teacher shortage, Ingersoll (2001) reviewed research on "teacher turnover" in general and suggests that efforts to curtail the shortage should focus not only on increasing the supply of teachers through recruitment, but also on retaining teachers currently in the system. When looking at characteristics of teachers

who leave and stay in teaching, Luekens, Lyter, and Chandler (2004) found that the highest percentages of teachers who leave do so within the first three years of teaching.

Nationally, approximately 30 percent of new teachers leave within the first three years; nearly fifty percent leave within five years (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Shortages at schools are not a result of teachers leaving the profession entirely, but also, as a by-product, are the characteristics of schools themselves. Many new teachers leave undesirable teaching positions in search of more favorable jobs at other schools. About half of all teacher turnover is a result of migration, which, does not result in a net loss of teachers to the profession, but does create an uneven distribution of the shortage. The local migration pattern creates somewhat of a revolving door for high-minority, high-poverty schools, which is where newly alternatively certified teachers often find their entry-level positions, in what one would surmise are the most needy environments (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

Traditional teacher education programs cannot fulfill the growing need for teachers, particularly in specific regions and states, and, in specific content areas (Yarger & Kasten, 2001). However, the problem is complex and not simply an issue of supply and demand. The public discussion surrounding alternative certification is best understood in the framework of the two confluent forces that fueled its creation: 1) an unprecedented and well-publicized scarcity of teachers and, 2) growing concerns over teacher quality. Nowhere are these two issues more apparent than in Florida schools.

According to the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fewer than 23% of Florida's 8<sup>th</sup> graders reached the proficiency level in mathematics, compared to 27% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders nationwide.

In science, Florida had not participated in the NAEP assessment since 1996, but at that time, fewer than 21% of Florida's 8<sup>th</sup> graders achieved proficiency, compared to 27% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders nationally. If we have learned anything over the past twenty years, it is how much teachers matter to student learning. On this point, the research is clear: the teacher is the single most important factor in whether young people learn or whether they don't. In light of dismal performance statistics and burgeoning enrollment growth in student population, the schools in Southwest Florida now face the challenge of putting in every Florida classroom, well-qualified teachers who are prepared to teach the depth of content necessary to ready students to become productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A number of reports, including the 1996 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, have pointed to the close relationship between student achievement and teachers' skills, knowledge, and practices. In Florida, the Education Standards Commission (ESC) operationalized this relationship by identifying 12 Educator Accomplished Practices (EAP's) that represent a high level of teacher proficiency. The 12 EAP's are based on a continuous quality improvement model that begins with preservice teacher preparation and continues through the educator's professional career, with the intention of promoting student achievement.

Thus, what teachers know and can do is crucial to what students learn. In the end, the classroom teacher becomes the focus in promoting student learning. Although few people debate the importance of staffing American classrooms with "highly-qualified" teachers, much debate surrounds *what* characteristics render a teacher "highly-qualified." Is it subject matter knowledge,

innate intelligence, pedagogical knowledge, or experience? These important questions center the debate about whether alternative certification can address the teacher shortage while simultaneously maintaining high standards for teacher quality.

The models known as “alternative certification” differ significantly. The common thread is that most offer a fast-track preparation and expeditious entry into the classroom (Hawley, 1990). Typically, alternative certification programs also differ from traditional teacher preparation programs in that they give participants access to full-time, paid teaching positions prior to completion of the requirements for certification. The number of states offering such entrée to the teaching profession has grown from eight in 1983 to forty-six as of 2006 plus the District of Columbia has reported some type of alternative means of certifying teachers. The remaining four states have alternative plans under consideration. Thus, the pathways are numerous (Alternative Certification: A state by state analysis, 2006).

In 2003, states reported a total of 144 alternative routes outside the traditional college teacher education program for attaining certification (Feistritzer & Chester, 2003). Historically, the most important goal of alternative certification programs has been to speed up the placement of teachers into classrooms. Because of time constraints, traditional classroom activities, guided pedagogical development and supervised clinical practice have often been eliminated, rendering the intellectual underpinnings of professional teaching the victims of expediency (Yarger & Kasten, 2001).

Because alternative certification programs lack standardization, there remains a lack of large-scale research examining the effectiveness of such programs, with a few notable exceptions, such as

Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002). However, a series of research efforts on smaller scales provide enough data for policymakers to begin to make conclusions regarding the efficacy of alternative models of preparation and the teachers who experience such preparation.

Probably the best-known body of research in this area has been reported by Darling-Hammond (1994, 1996, 1999, 2002). In 2001, the Abell Foundation, based in Baltimore, issued a report suggesting that there is “no credible research that supports the use of teacher certification as a regulatory barrier to teaching” and urging the discontinuation of certification in the state of Maryland. In return, the U.S. Secretary of Education cited the Abell Foundation paper in his Annual Report on Teacher Quality in 2002 as the sole source for concluding that teacher education does not contribute to teacher effectiveness. The Secretary's report recommended elimination of required education coursework from certification standards, and attendance at schools of education and student teaching be made optional.

Darling-Hammond (2002) reviewed the Abell Report and cited many inaccuracies. She concluded other issues facing teacher education need to be more fully addressed if all students are to be provided with highly qualified teachers. She further suggested that not only do alternative certification programs tend to produce poor quality teachers who lacked the necessary preparation to provide high-level instruction; teachers trained in alternative programs were, also, twice as likely to leave the profession within their first three years. In contrast, teachers prepared in traditional programs and extended five-year programs were four to five times more likely to remain in their positions. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) also

noted that traditionally prepared teachers felt significantly better prepared than did those prepared through alternative programs or those without preparation. Gomez and Grobe (1990, cited in Darling Hammond, 1995) had a similar finding: alternatively prepared teachers were demonstrably less knowledgeable about teaching and from two to sixteen times more likely to be rated “poor” in teacher evaluations.

Furthermore, there is growing evidence that alternatively certified teachers are more likely to leave teaching after only a few years than are traditionally certified teachers. Darling-Hammond (1999) found that “type” of preparation for teaching was a predictor of retention; specifically, the average retention rate after three years of service for teachers who were trained in five-year programs was 84%, compared to 53% from four-year programs and 34% for those prepared by alternative licensure (Darling-Hammond, 1999). These findings mirror those of Shen (1997) who found that teachers with no training were three times as likely to leave the profession compared to teachers from traditional programs. An analysis of the reasons that teachers in Florida leave the profession (Feng, 2005) suggested that attrition occurred most frequently in early career teachers. It was also found that attrition was related to the achievement and behavior of students in the classes that teachers teach, which may be directly related to the teacher’s degree of experience and efficacy in classroom management and instructional strategies.

Despite research on various models of alternative certification, researchers understand little about teachers’ beliefs regarding their own competence as a teacher. Nor do researchers recognize the ways those beliefs may affect whether or not an alternatively certified teacher remains in the

profession. Bandura (1986) writes that individuals possess a self-system that allows them to exercise some control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. These self-evaluations help determine how much effort people will expend on any activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in adverse situations. Against this backdrop of current research and thought on alternative certification, the pilot study examined those issues on through an adapted questionnaire that assessed the confidence of early career teachers using the Florida EAP’s.

## Methods

The purpose of this study was to provide a cross-sectional (one point in time) look at the satisfaction of early career teachers with their teacher preparation programs. This descriptive look was based on the various routes to certification currently available to prospective teachers in Florida, including traditional University based preparation programs and alternative certification. The study examined the impact of different methods of teacher preparation (and by extension, different routes to teacher certification) on the confidence and attitudes of early career teachers in Southwest Florida with specific competencies keyed to the 12 Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPs). Another purpose was to estimate the comparative likelihood of these early-career teachers remaining in the profession. Development of a web-based survey accomplished the purpose (Appendix A).

The survey gauged the degree of satisfaction regarding their level of preparation reported by program completers. The survey was adapted from an instrument used for program evaluation and improvement

approved by Florida’s Department of Education. The revised survey reflected the FEAPs, and specific aspects of one teacher preparation program.

Items on the instrument pertained to certification route, type of recruitment source, area and level of initial assignment, nature of assignment, stability of assignment, college/master’s major, level of other experience with children or teaching type activities, and the likelihood of staying in teaching and/or moving to a specialty area (e.g. School Administration, Counseling, Curriculum Specialist). The completed instrument was uploaded to the University’s on-line survey facility along with a cover page of invitation and informed consent.

## Participants

The university serves five local school districts. Each of the districts was invited to participate in the study by providing email addresses for all teachers in their district who were in their first three years of teaching. Teachers who had more than three years total experience as teachers, regardless of location, were deemed ineligible. Four of the five districts responded. The fourth district requested a copy of the invitation with intentions of sending it out to their teachers themselves. Due to end of year scheduling conflicts, they ultimately declined participation. The fifth district, a small area, opted not to provide the email addresses of their very few new teachers. At the end of May 2005, the invitations were emailed to the 1800 early career teachers who were identified as meeting the criteria. Approximately 11% completed the survey.

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS programs to identify descriptive and inferential statistics. Additionally, the results were analyzed to determine overall responses to determine if any differences in confidence existed between teachers who had completed traditional university teacher preparation and certification and those who had achieved certification through one of several available “alternative” routes.

Table 1 shows a total of 194 responses were obtained using an email invitation and web-based data collection system. Of these 114 are fully certified with 5 year professional certificates and one is a licensed therapist while the remaining 79 were certified through one of several alternative routes. Most respondents (177) indicated they were white.

Table 1

Participants based on Routes to Certification	Response Count	Percentage
State Issued Professional (5 years)	114	58.76 %
State Issued Temporary (3 years)	67	34.54 %
Licensed Therapist	1	0.52 %
Expert in the Field (No Cert)	1	0.52 %
District Issued Vocational (5 years)	3	1.55 %
District Issued Temporary (3 years)	8	4.12 %
Totals	194	

Most teachers obtained their jobs by applying directly to the district or through a particular school with a very few (11) obtaining their jobs at statewide career fairs or out of state recruiting activities. No differences in obtaining their position, based on certification route, appeared to exist. It is interesting to note, however, that many identified substitute teaching or interning at a school as a frequent method of “getting known,” for the purpose of influencing the hiring process.

Table 2 displays results for items concerning future career and employment

intentions. A large majority (173 or 90%) of those surveyed think it is likely or very likely that they would remain in teaching and in their district (90%). However fewer (76%) thought they would remain in their current school. Almost two-thirds (62%) indicated that they would add another teaching specialty to their certification, with a larger percentage of those alternatively certified seeking to add a specialty than those traditionally certified.

Table 3 presents results concerning degree of confidence overall and by certification route. The table also outlines the degree of confidence aligned with the 12 FEAPS: lesson planning, behavior management, organization, teaching to literacy, time management, using technology, critical thinking, assessment of student learning, and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

learning styles, teaching diverse populations, maintaining a safe environment, promoting FEAPS: lesson planning, behavior management, organization, teaching to learning styles, teaching diverse populations, maintaining a safe environment, promoting literacy, time management, using technology, critical thinking, assessment of student learning, and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT).

In terms of teaching competencies, most respondents felt very prepared or prepared in every area. However, there were variations among these competencies overall and also based on preparation route. In terms of lesson planning, almost three quarters (73%) felt prepared or very prepared, with traditionally certified teachers responding most positively (85% as opposed to 66% of alternatively certified teachers.) As well, 47% of traditionally trained teachers responded with feeling very prepared but only 26% of those alternatively certified indicated

similar confidence. Overall, teachers are less confident about their preparation for long-term lesson planning with only 58% overall and 61% of traditionally prepared teachers feeling confidence.

Fifty-nine percent (59%) overall felt prepared or very prepared to manage behavior with 61% of traditionally prepared teachers and 56% of alternatively prepared teachers reporting feeling prepared.

The questionnaire item concerning organizing learning activities showed 68% feeling prepared or very prepared and a slightly larger percentage (72%) of traditionally prepared teachers indicating confidence about organizing learning activities. Three quarters (75%) of traditionally prepared teachers felt prepared to promote and develop literacy while only 55% of those alternatively certified believe they are prepared to promote and develop literacy. Teachers were positive (63%) about their preparation to teach to a variety of learning styles but there was disparity between the two routes to preparation; 72% of traditionally certified teachers and only 44% of alternatively certified teachers. The differences between the two groups was statistically significant at the .038 level for organizing learning and .000 for both promoting and teaching literacy and teaching to a variety of learning styles. Only one third of teachers overall (33%) felt prepared to teach students who were learning disabled with a disparity between traditionally and alternatively certified teachers of 39% and 24% respectively (which is significant at the .006 level). Seventy-three percent (73%) of respondents felt confident about maintaining a safe environment with the disparity between the two groups at 89% of traditionally certified teachers and 76% alternatively certified teachers feeling prepared (significant at the .014 level.)

**Table 2**  
**Future Career and Employment Intentions Overall and Based on Route to Certification**

	<b>Extremely Likely</b>	<b>Likely</b>	<b>Not Likely</b>	<b>Somewhat likely</b>	<b>Uncertain at this time</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Remain in Teaching?</b>						
<b>N</b>	132	41	3	7	11	193
	68%	21%	2%	4%		
Traditional	81	21	2	5	5	114
	71%	18%	2%	4%	4%	
Alternative	51	20	1	2	6	80
	65%	25%	1%	3%	8%	
<b>Remain in Present School?</b>						
<b>N</b>	99	48	25	5	17	194
	51%	25%	13%	3%	9%	
Traditional	62	26	13	3	10	114
	54%	23%	11%	3%	9%	
Alternative	37	22	12	2	7	80
	47%	28%	15%	3%	9%	
<b>Remain in Current District?</b>						
<b>N</b>	131	43	9	2	9	194
	68%	22%	5%	1%	5%	
Traditional	81	22	6		5	114
	71%	19%	5%		4%	
Alternative	50	21	3	2	4	79
	63%	27%	4%	3%	5%	
<b>Add another specialty?</b>						
	66	55	35	16	22	194
	34%	28%	18%	8%	11%	
Traditional	37	28	23	13	13	114
	32%	25%	20%	11%	11%	
Alternative	29	27	12	3	9	79
	37%	34%	15%	4%	11%	

**Table 3**  
**Cross-tabulations and Comparisons of Means for Competency Areas**

	<b>Very Prepared</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Somewhat Prepared</b>	<b>Unprepared</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Levene's F-Test results</b>	<b>T-Test results Two tailed</b>
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	71	70	40	12	193	3.25	.14	<b>.000</b>
	37%	36%	21%	6%				
Traditional	53	43	13	5	114	3.63		
	47%	38%	11%	4%				
Alternative	18	27	27	7	79*	2.70		
	23%	34%	34%	9%				
<b>Long-term Lesson Planning</b>	47	75	46	25	193	2.74	<b>.001</b>	<b>.000</b>
	24%	39%	24%	13%				
Traditional	35	49	24	6	114	2.99		
	31%	43%	21%	5%				
Alternative	12	26	22	19	79	2.39		
	15%	33%	28%	24%				
<b>Behavior Management</b>	40	73	48	22	193	2.68	.533	.095
	21%	38%	25%	11%				
Traditional	28	41	36	9	114	2.77		
	25%	36%	32%	8%				
Alternative	12	32	22	13	79	2.54		
	15%	41%	28%	16%				
<b>Organize Learning</b>	49	83	51	10	193	2.88	.710	.038
	25%	43%	26%	5%				
Traditional	36	45	29	4	114	2.99		
	32%	40%	25%	4%				
Alternative	13	38	22	6	79	2.73		
	16%	48%	28%	8%				
<b>Teach to a Variety of Learning Styles</b>	57	64	56	16	193	2.84	<b>.050</b>	<b>.000</b>
	30%	33%	29%	8%				
Traditional	41	41	27	5	114	3.04		
	36%	36%	24%	4%				
Alternative	16	23	29	11	79	2.56		
	20%	29%	37%	14%				
<b>Teach Students Who are Learning Disabled</b>	28	53	72	40	193	2.36	.136	<b>.006</b>
	15%	27%	37%	21%				
Traditional	21	35	40	18	114	2.52		
	18%	31%	35%	16%				
Alternative	7	18	32	22	79	2.13		

	<b>Very Prepared</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Somewhat Prepared</b>	<b>Unprepared</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Levene's F-Test results</b>	<b>T-Test results Two tailed</b>
	9%	23%	41%	28%				
<b>Teach Students who are ESOL</b>	22	41	53	67	193	2.09	.121	<b>.009</b>
	11%	21%	27%	35%				
Traditional	17	27	38	32	114	2.25		
	15%	24%	33%	28%				
Alternative	5	14	26	34	79	1.87		
	6%	18%	33%	43%				
<b>Maintain a Safe Learning Environment</b>	75	86	26	6	193	3.20	.688	<b>.014</b>
	39%	44%	21%	7%				
Traditional	51	50	10	3	114	3.31		
	45%	44%	9%	2%				
Alternative	24	36	16	3	79	3.03		
	30%	46%	20%	4%				
<b>Promote and Develop Literacy</b>	61	70	45	17	193	2.90	.111	<b>.000</b>
	32%	36%	23%	9%				
Traditional	47	39	24	4	114	3.13		
	41%	34%	21%	4%				
Alternative	14	31	21	13	79	2.58		
	18%	39%	27%	16%				
<b>Manage Time</b>	48	77	47	21	193	2.78	<b>.048</b>	.062
	25%	40%	24%	11%				
Traditional	31	49	25	9	114	2.89		
	27%	43%	22%	8%				
Alternative	17	28	22	12	79	2.63		
	22%	35%	28%	15%				
<b>Use Technology to Enhance Teaching</b>	40	67	60	26	193	2.93	.124	.149
	21%	35%	31%	13%				
Traditional	22	38	34	20	114	2.54		
	19%	33%	30%	18%				
Alternative	18	29	26	6	79	2.75		
	23%	37%	33%	8%				
<b>Incorporate Critical Thinking</b>	45	96	45	7	193	2.93	<b>.038</b>	<b>.032</b>
	23%	50%	23%	4%				
Traditional	30	60	22	2	114	3.04		
	26%	52%	19%	2%				

	<b>Very Prepared</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Somewhat Prepared</b>	<b>Unprepared</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Levene's F-Test results</b>	<b>T-Test results Two tailed</b>
Alternative	15	37	22	5	79	2.78		
	20%	47%	28%	6%				
<b>Develop Classroom Assessments</b>	43	89	51	10	193	2.86	.198	<b>.001</b>
	22%	46%	26%	5%				
Traditional	34	51	26	3	114	3.02		
	30%	45%	23%	3%				
Alternative	9	38	25	7	79	2.62		
	11%	48%	32%	9%				
<b>Communicate Effectively with all Stockholders</b>	71	86	30	6	193	3.15	.442	<b>.044</b>
	37%	45%	16%	3%				
Traditional	45	54	13	2	114	3.25		
	40%	47%	11%	2%				
Alternative	26	32	17	4	79	3.01		
	33%	41%	22%	5%				
<b>Maintain Standards for Ethical/ Professional Behavior</b>	114	66	11	1	193	3.50	.082	.313
	59%	34%	6%	1%				
Traditional	69	39	6	0	114	3.55		
	61%	34%	5%	0%				
Alternative	45	27	5	1	78	3.46		
	58%	35%	6%	1%				
<b>Match Classroom Curriculum to Standards (FCAT)</b>	28	42	20	15	105	2.79	.534	<b>.046</b>
	27%	40%	19%	14%				
Traditional	22	26	10	8	66	2.94		
	33%	39%	15%	12%				
Alternative	6	16	10	7	39	2.54		
	15%	41%	26%	18%				
<b>Administer FCAT</b>	34	41	18	19	112	2.81	.121	.997
	30%	37%	16%	17%				
Traditional	23	21	10	13	67	2.81		
	34%	31%	15%	19%				
Alternative	11	20	8	6	45	2.80		
	24%	44%	18%	13%				

	<b>Very Prepared</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Somewhat Prepared</b>	<b>Unprepared</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Levene's F-Test results</b>	<b>T-Test results Two tailed</b>
<b>Use FCAT Results to Modify Teaching</b>	20	38	22	27	107	2.47	.489	.1
	19%	36%	21%	25%				
Traditional	15	23	11	15	64	2.59		
	23%	36%	17%	23%				
Alternative	5	15	11	12	43	2.30		
	12%	35%	26%	28%				

\*Note: one respondent among the alternatively certified teachers did not complete sections of the questionnaire concerning preparation confidence.

Almost two-thirds (65%) felt prepared to manage time with disparity between the two groups at 70% and 57%. Only slightly more than half (56%) of new teachers overall felt prepared to use technology to enhance teaching with the disparity between the routes reversed from other responses. Alternatively certified teachers (60%) felt prepared at a greater rate than traditionally certified teachers (52%).

Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents felt prepared to incorporate critical thinking into their teaching with 79% of traditionally certified teachers feeling prepared and 67% of those alternatively certified (the difference of which is significant at the .032 level). Two thirds (68%) of teachers reported they felt prepared to develop classroom assessments. This area has one of the largest disparities with 75% of traditionally certified teachers as opposed to 59% of alternatively certified new teachers (significant at the .001 level).

One area where teachers felt highly prepared was communicating effectively with stakeholders (82% overall) and 87% of traditionally certified teachers and 74% of

alternatively certified teachers (significant at the .044 level). Maintaining standards for ethical/professional behavior was an area of strong feelings for respondents where 93% overall (of which 59% indicated feeling very prepared) and virtually no difference between the groups based on certification route.

Two thirds of all respondents felt prepared to match classroom curriculum with the FCAT standards and to administer the FCAT. Seventy-two percent (72%) of traditionally certified teachers and 56% of alternatively certified teachers confident about matching curriculum (with significant differences at the .040 level) and even percentages regarding administering the testing. Only slightly more than half of the respondents (55%) felt prepared to use FCAT results to modify teaching with 59% of traditionally prepared teachers and 47% of alternatively certified teachers feeling prepared.

The area of weakest confidence was teaching students who were identified as ESOL (speakers of English as a second language) with only one-third (32%) feeling

very prepared or prepared. However, a major difference (statistical significance at the .009 level between traditionally certified teachers (40%) indicating feeling prepared or very prepared) and alternatively certified teachers (25%) indicating feeling prepared or very prepared.

## Discussion

The size of the sample restricts the generalizability of the findings. The small sample and the high level of attrition typically found among early career teachers may reflect early career teachers in general or may be indicative of attitudes among those who are most serious about remaining in the profession. If that is the case, these results are important in addressing the training and initial induction needs of those least likely to leave during their first three years of service. Furthermore, research examining the connection between self-efficacy beliefs and teacher retention might provide a window into the kinds of supports needed to positively influence the rates of teacher retention.

Preliminary conclusions indicate that new teachers in this small sample were generally positive about their feelings of preparedness to perform tasks associated with the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices and that they would remain in teaching and in their districts. For all early career teachers participating in the study, there are several areas that appear to require increased attention in preparation and continuing training/mentoring. They include:

- Teaching ESOL students (32% felt prepared or very prepared)
- Teaching students who are learning disabled (42% felt prepared or very prepared)
- Modifying teaching based on FCAT results (55% felt prepared or very prepared)

- Using technology to enhance teaching (56% felt prepared or very prepared)
- Behavior management (59% felt prepared or very prepared).

There were differences in confidence in preparation between teachers who had achieved their certification by a traditional route and by those who were certified by alternate route. On all but one item, those trained through a traditional route were more positive about feeling prepared or very prepared than their alternatively trained counterparts. On many of these items the difference was statistically significant (using a two-tailed test and a .05 cut-off appropriate for a preliminary pilot study), including lesson planning, long term lesson planning, organizing learning activities, teaching to a variety of learning styles, teaching students who are learning disabled, teaching English language learners; maintaining a safe learning environment; promoting and developing literacy; incorporating critical thinking, developing classroom assessments, communicating effectively with all stakeholders and matching classroom curriculum to state standards. This suggests that alternatively certified teachers require more preparation and/or continuing training/mentoring in these areas.

Based on the initial findings there are several recommendations that come forward:

- Conduct a state-wide large scale study using a similar instrument with all teachers who are in their first three years of teaching.
- Refine questionnaire to target specific competencies and information about preparation.
- Find ways to triangulate results by developing a parallel questionnaire or interview format for supervising administrators.

- Include more data concerning the route to certification/preparation for each type of certification route.
- Strengthen preparation standards and opportunities to develop confidence for new teachers who enter the profession through an alternative route.
- Improve training for all new teachers in several key areas and target alternatively certified new teachers for continuing training/mentoring in areas where their confidence lags behind the confidence in preparation of traditionally trained teachers.

This research contributes to understanding, the development of and the retention of, early career teachers. Furthermore, it contributes to understanding the impact traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs have on teacher success, and ultimately, on student learning outcomes. Finally, expanding this research to a broader sample to verify these results becomes paramount.

### **Appendix A Instrument Early Career Teacher Preparation and Retention Questionnaire**

A comparative look at teachers' views on the efficacy of their various routes to certification, for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year teachers in the 5-county area of SW Florida.

- 1) Please indicate your gender:
  - a) Male
  - b) Female
- 2) Please indicate your ethnicity:
  - a) White
  - b) African American
  - c) Hispanic
  - d) Native American
  - e) Asian
- 3) School District In which district do you work?
  - a) Charlotte County School District
  - b) Collier County School District
  - c) Lee County School District
  - d) Other:
- 4) Route Please indicate your route to teacher certification:
  - a) State Issued Professional (5 years)
  - b) State Issued Temporary (3 years)
  - c) Licensed Therapist
  - d) Expert in the Field (No Cert)
  - e) District Issued Vocational (5 years)
  - f) District Issued Temporary (3 years)
- 5) Certification—What is your area of certification?
- 6) Current Employment—What is the name of the School where you are currently employed?
- 7) Initial Employment—What is the name of the school where you were initially employed, if different from your current school?
- 8) Subject—What is the subject area in which you are currently teaching?
- 9) Initial subject—What is the subject area of your initial assignment, if different from your current assignment?
- 10) Grade level—What Grade level(s) are you currently teaching?
- 11) Initial Grade Level—What was the grade level of your initial assignment, if different from your present assignment?
- 12) Assignment Change—If there has been a change in school or assignment, please tell us how that came about.
- 13) Undergrad Major—What was your college undergraduate major?
- 14) Masters Major—What was your master's degree major, if applicable?
- 15) Recruitment Route—What was the route through which you were recruited into your present teaching position?
  - a) I applied directly to the district
  - b) I applied through a special recruiting fair, locally
  - c) I applied through a special recruiting fair, statewide
  - d) I applied through a special recruiting fair, out-of-state
  - e) I applied through on-line recruiting activities

- f) I applied through a University sponsored program
- g) Other, specify

**Please rate the following 5 statements as they currently apply to you!**

- a) Not Likely
- b) Somewhat Likely
- c) Uncertain at this time
- d) Likely
- e) Extremely Likely

- 16) I plan to remain in teaching
- 17) I plan to remain in my current assignment
- 18) I plan to remain in my current school
- 19) I plan to remain in my current district
- 20) I plan to add another area of certification or specialty
- 21) Career Change—If you are planning a change in career or assignment, please indicate the reason(s) for it.
- 22) Other experience—Please specify your other experience with children or other teaching type activities, if any.

**For each of the following statements about what teachers do, please rate the degree to which you feel that you were prepared by your program.**

- a) Unprepared
- b) Somewhat Prepared
- c) Prepared
- d) Very Prepared

- 23) Develop daily lesson plans for classroom instruction
- 24) Develop long-term lesson plans for classroom instruction
- 25) Manage student behavior in the classroom
- 26) Organize the classroom in a manner that will foster learning for all children
- 27) Teach to a variety of learning styles
- 28) Teach students who are learning disabled

- 29) Teach students who speak English as a second language
- 30) Maintain a safe learning environment in the classroom
- 31) Promote and develop literacy using a variety of methods
- 32) Manage time in terms of lesson planning, grading, parent interactions, etc.
- 33) Use technology to enhance instruction and assessment
- 34) Incorporate critical thinking into instruction and assessment
- 35) Develop classroom assessment methods and link them to support student learning
- 36) Effectively communicate with children, their families, and other educators
- 37) Maintain educator standards for professional and ethical behavior

**Please answer the following 3 items ONLY if your area of assignment includes FCAT testing. If not, please skip to the next section.**

- 38) Ensure that classroom curriculum matches the standards being tested by the FCAT
- 39) Administer the FCAT exam
- 40) Use FCAT results to modify or adapt instruction for each student

**For the each of the following areas of teaching, please check in the appropriate column if you believe that you did not receive any preparation whatsoever, or if you did receive preparation but believe it was not helpful (check as many as apply).**

- a) No preparation received in this area
- b) Preparation received but not helpful
- 41) Assessment of student learning
- 42) Communication
- 43) Continuous improvement
- 44) Critical thinking

- 45) Teaching students who have special needs
- 46) Teaching students who have English as a second language
- 47) Ethics
- 48) Human development and learning
- 49) Classroom management
- 50) Technology
- 51) Identifying/using resources in the school (behavior specialist or occupational therapist)
- 52) Please list any areas in which you would like to receive more support from your school.
- 53) Does the way in which a teacher achieves certification affect the way one is received and/or respected by teachers at your school?
- Yes
  - No
- 54) If "Yes" please explain.
- 55) Does the way in which a teacher achieves certification affect the way one is received and/or respected by building administrators at your school?
- Yes
  - No
- 56) If "Yes" please explain.
- 57) If you could do it over again, would you take the same route to the teacher certification?
- Yes
  - No
- 58) If "No" please explain
- 59) Please describe your teaching environment
- 60) If you have engaged in post-certification training through district professional development or university courses, and have found one or more of these especially helpful, please list below.
- 61) If you have any other comments about your teaching preparation and/or initial teaching experience that you would like to share, please use the space below.

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# MENTORING ALTERNATIVE CERTIFICATION TEACHERS: IMPLEMENTING AN ONLINE COLLABORATIVE CONSULTATION COMMUNITY

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*Online discussion boards have the potential to provide significant support to beginning teachers; thus, we designed an online collaborative consultation community to provide mentor support to university students enrolled in an alternative certification program. The results suggest that although students in alternative certification programs will use an online forum in ways similar to those of traditionally trained teachers, students in alternative certification programs need more guidance in some specific content areas such as curriculum and instruction and classroom management. Comments regarding how the use of online discussions might improve participants' education are also provided.*

The transition from pre-service teacher to being wholly responsible for one's own classroom is, in many cases, overwhelming (DeWert, Babinski, & Jones, 2003; Utsumi & Kizu, 2006). Add to that, matriculation through an alternative certification program (ACP) and the challenges are typically even greater. The majority of ACPs place teachers in classrooms following a condensed period of pedagogical coursework and little if any practice in a classroom with an experienced teacher (Utsumi & Kizu, 2006). Not surprisingly, many of these novice instructors immediately struggle with the basic aspects of leading a classroom. One of the first messages posted to the online discussion board presented in this article bears out this point: "Student 'R' is a major distraction, always wants to be the center of

attention. When he is absent (my favorite days) the whole class is on task. As soon as he walks in, the room is in chaos ... Sincerely, Desperate Teacher."

The demand for qualified teachers has led to the proliferation of alternative certification programs. According to Feistritzer, Haar, Hobar, & Losselyong (2004), alternative methods of entry into the teaching profession have been utilized by U.S. policymakers to address growing teacher shortages with 43 states and the District of Columbia having a route that eliminates the need for prospective teachers to attend college with a major in education. It is estimated that the number of teachers who have entered the teaching profession through nontraditional methods has exceeded 200,000 (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). The *No Child Left Behind Act of*

2001 (NCLB, 2002) requires that by 2006 every classroom in the U.S. be led by a teacher with certification in the subject she/he instructs (Tissington, 2006). While ACPs grow in popularity, critics are quick to point out their limitations (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). Certainly, one the most widely reported challenges regards the culture of isolation experienced by induction level instructors (Gold, 1996; Rogers & Babinski, 2002; Singer & Zeni, 2004). Isolation is, arguably, an even greater challenge for the ACP teacher. Many times such teachers are required to be fully independent, often in the most challenging environments with the most disadvantaged students and without the benefit of extended pedagogical coursework and fieldwork experience (Berry, 2001).

Mentorship has been recognized as a critical component of teacher preparation (e.g., National Commission on Teaching and America's Future and Council for Exceptional Children). Effective alternative certification programs attempt to address the support needs of their participants through mentorship experiences (Kais et al., 1998). A mentor is typically assigned to the novice instructor at the inception of the certification program and, ideally, that mentor remains with the teacher throughout the ACP training. However, the assigned mentors may not be available to the new teacher when she/he is in need of advice or assistance. In addition, the hiring school may provide support through administrative channels, which often includes a formally assigned onsite mentor. Though many schools have mentoring programs of this nature, they are often reported to be ineffective (Dow & Webb, 2003; Hobbs, Day, & Russo, 2002). In response to these and other concerns, numerous traditional postsecondary education programs have begun to supplement conventional support

of induction-level instructors through the use of online discussion boards.

Online discussion boards have been used as a potential means of alleviating some of the challenges facing novice instructors. Singer & Zeni (2004) shared an example of an individual who noted that without the online discussion board as a lifeline she would have likely quit teaching. Novice teachers have also used online discussion boards as a means of acquiring practical advice (Klecka, Cheng, & Clift, 2004). For example, Hobbs et al. (2002) shared a story about a first-year teacher who requested guidance regarding how to assist a child who was engaging in self-injurious behavior. Thus, many postsecondary education programs are recognizing the value of online discussion boards as a way of providing social, emotional, practical, and professional support to novice teachers (Dewert et al., 2003).

Rheingold (1993) described the use of asynchronous discussion as an "online braintrust" (as cited in Jetton, 2003). Results of research related to online discussion boards note that they have provided novice teachers with opportunities to clarify complex educational issues and make informed choices regarding professional practice (Kurtts, Hibbard, & Levin, 2005). Further, these online communities have increased emotional support, teacher confidence, enthusiasm, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and reduced feelings of isolation (DeWert et al., 2003; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). Other constructive features include the alleviation of time, geographical, and scheduling issues (Nicholson & Bond, 2003). That is, discussion is not necessarily limited by time, nor is one's location or availability during the day a factor. Last, researchers regularly point to the value added to reflective discourse regarding instruction (Nicholson & Bond, 2003; Hernandez-Ramos, 2004; Pena-Shaff &

Nicholls, 2004; Singer & Zeni, 2004).

Given the recommendation that ACP teacher candidates consult with a quality mentor teacher (Feistritzer, 1999) and the limitations noted earlier regarding access to mentors and the unique needs of ACP instructors, the authors developed and administered an online collaborative consultation community as a means of providing multiple levels of mentor support. The ACP teachers were provided a school site mentor and access to the online collaboration community mentor program. The online community included students enrolled in a university's alternative certification program focused on special education, college of education teaching faculty, and a set of nationally board certified master teachers (i.e., mentors) as participants.

The purpose of this paper is to present several findings related to this pilot project. First, we discuss the types of issues that the university students were interested in discussing with mentors given that many of the students were simultaneously beginning their teaching careers. Although we had previously identified topics that would likely be of interest to beginning teachers, we wanted to ascertain which topics were most critical to the students in this alternative certification program that focused on special education. Next, we compare the types of issues discussed by the ACP students to those discussed by more traditionally-trained teachers who had participated in similar online forums (e.g., DeWert et al., 2003). Last, we identify how asynchronous online discussions might positively impact the education of the online participants.

## **METHOD**

### ***Participants***

Participants included 18 graduate students, seven master teachers, and two university faculty. The students were enrolled in an alternative certification program at a public state university. Ten of these students also taught as beginning teachers at local elementary and middle schools. The seven master teachers taught at local elementary and middle schools and were selected based upon their status as nationally board certified school teachers. Because the nationally board certified teacher mentors were required to meet service criteria to remain board certified, they used their participation in the online community as a means of meeting their service obligation. The university faculty included one full-time faculty member (who served as the discussion board facilitator) and one doctoral candidate who also taught courses at the university as an adjunct instructor.

### ***Procedure***

Prior to the start of the project, participants attended a half-day orientation session facilitated by the authors of this paper. The first part of the session included training for the mentor teachers and provided the mentors with an overview of the ACP, discussion of the notion of coaching, and a conversation about the types of responses that might be suitable in an online mentorship environment. Additionally, examples were provided and discussed. The second portion of the session, which included both the mentors and the ACP teachers, provided an overview of the goals of the project, a discussion of participant roles and responsibilities, guideline development for the community, practice in the online community process, and information on how to access the discussion board.

Participants contributed to the project through an asynchronous online

discussion board using the *Blackboard Learning System*. Students accessed the discussion board through the university website available to students anywhere they had access to the Internet. The discussion board was password protected and only participating students, master teachers, and university faculty were provided with access.

Students posted messages on the discussion board from the beginning of the fall semester to approximately one month past the end of the semester for a total of about five months. Resultant data reflect that participation was evenly distributed across the five-month period. As a means of organizing the discussion board, the

facilitator divided it into eight forums at the beginning of the semester. The forum names corresponded to categories that had previously been found to be valuable to beginning teachers, similar to those use by DeWert et al. (2003). Each of the eight forums in the discussion board was identified with a title and a one- sentence description as shown in Table 1. Students could either create a new discussion thread within a forum by posting a new message with a question or comment, or they could respond to an existing message. Participation was entirely voluntary and the ACP teachers determined their own level of actual participation.

**TABLE 1**  
**Forum Titles and Descriptions**

Forum title	Forum description
Community bulletin board	This forum includes issues related to general information, your MAT program (e.g., paying for your textbooks, personal information, or stories about teaching).
Curriculum and instruction	This forum includes issues such as instructional strategies, how to implement literature circles, or information about specific content areas such as fractions.
Professional identity	This forum includes topics such as professional development work (e.g., county mandated workshops or courses) and your identity as a teacher within the classroom context.
Classroom management	This forum includes discussion about managing the classroom and/or individual students.
Individual students	This forum is about addressing the special needs of specific students; for example, how do I work with students who have autism, learning disabilities, or ADHD?
Policy and politics	This forum includes topics such as (but not limited to) school policies, teacher accountability, inclusion, and state mandated testing.
Technology	This forum includes topics ranging from using the discussion board itself to topics related to using technology in your classroom or school.
Working with colleagues/family	This forum includes discussions about working with parents/guardians, teachers, or administrators

## RESULTS

We first sought to determine whether the participants had posted their initial message in the appropriate forum. To do so, the two authors independently read the messages within each forum and using the forum descriptions provided in Table 1, coded the discussion thread as either correctly placed or incorrectly placed. Discussion threads incorrectly placed were shifted to the forum in which we believed that they should have been included. With respect to inter-rater reliability, we were in agreement on 90% of our placements and after discussion, came to a mutual agreement on the remaining 10%. Of the

145 discussion threads, we identified 26 (18%) as incorrectly located and placed them in other forums.

The number of discussion topics and responses from the discussion board is provided in Table 2. Besides the *Community Bulletin Board* forum, the *Curriculum and Instruction* forum generated the most discussion and responses, followed by *Professional Identity*, *Classroom Management*, *Individual Students*, and *Policy and Politics*. In contrast, the *Technology* and the *Working with Colleagues/Family* forums did not generate much discussion.

**Table 2**  
***Number of discussions and responses in each forum***

Forum title	Number of discussions	Number of responses	Mean number of responses
Community bulletin board	69	171	2.5
Curriculum and instruction	20	84	4.2
Professional identity	17	58	3.4
Classroom management	14	53	3.8
Individual students	10	39	3.9
Policy and politics	8	58	7.3
Technology	5	7	1.4
Working with colleagues/family	2	4	2.0
Totals	145	474	3.3

As noted, the topics discussed within each forum are accurately reflected in the forum descriptions provided in Table 1. Here we provide specific examples that represent the tone of the messages posted in each of the forum categories. For instance, students shared personal information in the *Community Bulletin Board* forum, such as “Monday at 10:30 I will be defending my Honor’s thesis in the lounge. If you are on campus, you are invited to attend.” Additionally, students shared entertaining classroom experiences. One such thread involved a teacher’s first experience using a substitute teacher while another, titled “You just can’t win” shared a story in which the student’s asked for more challenging work, but then balked when it was presented. Other messages in this forum discussed information related to their university program such as “When is Dr. Doolittle’s case study due?”

Participants discussed a range of ideas in the *Curriculum and Instruction* forum. One participant described a board game she created for “Commitment to Character.” Other participants asked for support in areas such as math, reading and writing. One participant specifically asked, “Does anyone have any suggestions for books or ideas for my special diploma Language Arts class...My principal told me that I can order books but I have no clue what books I should order.” Another asked, “Would anyone like to discuss lesson plans for special diploma high school math?” Other participants shared resources that they thought would be helpful to others, such as: “If you can get the Sunday New York Times there is a large article in the travel section about our area with pictures, a nice map, and

places described.”

The *Professional Identity* forum included fewer messages related to their identity as a teacher and more messages related to professional development, such as: “How and where do I take CLS classes?”; “Is anyone else going to the professional development workshop?”; and “I highly recommend the math training by Jake Soltys.” Others discussed their coursework in the university program, including: “What courses are you going to take this summer?” and “I would think that now would be the time that we, as a group, plan on what courses that we are going to take during the summer. If we inform the powers that be the intentions for the majority of the students, then maybe we can be accommodated.”

The *Classroom Management* forum was often used by the students who were working as beginning teachers in elementary and middle schools. Examples include: “One student stole something from another in my classroom, but I don’t know who it was. Any suggestions?”; “How do you write a discipline plan for a student?”; “I need some ideas for rewards and consequences in regards to discipline”; and “I’ve thought of these ideas related to behavior management, do they seem doable?” Remarkably, many of the responses provided by the novice teachers were helpful. For example, one suggestion involved using a “common ground” activity. The classroom teacher would ask students to stand based upon specific statements such as, “I share common ground with someone who has gone to the beach.” One mentor teacher suggested locating the “Kagan books” that include team or class building activities.

The *Individual Students* category included discussions related to the needs of specific students. For instance, one participant wanted to know when to allow a student with behavior problems (who was in a small varying exceptionalities class) back into regular classes. Another discussion involved how to handle a disruptive student with Tourette's Syndrome. One participant was unsure how to reach the quieter girls that don't demand your attention, but need it nonetheless. Finally, one participant wrote: I have had very little success with a particular student that has been labeled severely emotionally disturbed (SED). He's easily frustrated, bangs his head on the wall, and flips over tables. I take him on walks around the school just to tire him out and burn off all that latent energy he has. I'm not supposed to restrain him, although I've had to in order for him not to injure his head. Can anyone give me some advice or suggest some strategies?

The *Policy and Politics* category included topics such as questions about assistants and policies related to the curriculum for Special Diploma students. One participant showed how much help she really needed as a new teacher: I am interested in hearing how to more efficiently find out how things run ... I guess my question is really borne out of the day I was having: desks were thrown directly at me, both my assistants were playing hooky, my computer was not hooked up, I did not know how to call within the school, and I had no phone numbers to call anyway...you get the picture.

mentor teacher provided the following response: "Get to know and befriend some key people in your school: the secretary, the head plant

operator, and the cafeteria manager. If a behavior specialist position exists at your school, add him or her to your list."

The questions in the *Technology* forum were very limited. There was a short discussion about the use of the school district's email system and a couple of messages about using the forum which received no responses. Of the two messages that related specifically to teaching, one of them shared an online website and another asked if it was okay for students to take notes with a laptop during classes.

Only two messages were posted in the *Working with Colleagues/Family* forum. One asked, "Any suggestions for talking to a mother who has been confrontational to others in the past?" and the other asked "Any suggestions for interviewing with principals during job interviews?"

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that students in alternative certification programs will use an online forum for receiving mentoring in areas similar to those that have been reported in other studies that examined more traditionally trained teachers. Yet, important differences emerged between the participants in this study and those in other studies. These differences indicate that students in the present study need more help in some specific areas. For instance, the most pronounced difference when comparing the present findings to those of similar studies, such as DeWert et al. (2003), is that participants in that project were less likely to discuss issues related to curriculum and instruction. In contrast, the *Curriculum and Instruction* forum had the most discussions and responses in the present study (besides

the *Community Bulletin Board* forum). We speculate that this difference may be attributed to the amount of teacher preparation that the groups had received. In the present study, the students (many of whom were also beginning teachers) were merely beginning their education courses and had little or no prior K-12 classroom experience. In comparison, teachers in the DeWert et al. (2003) study were bachelor's-level graduates of a traditional teacher education program. As a result, the students in the present study may have needed more advice related to issues of curriculum and instruction. It should also be noted that in the present study the *Technology* and *Working with Colleagues/Family* forums produced very few posts. One might conclude that technology concerns and matters related to colleagues take a backseat to struggles regarding what to teach and how to manage a classroom.

Another difference between our findings and those described by DeWert et al. (2003) is that the *Professional Identity* category was expanded in the present study to include issues related to professional development. Whereas professional development was of little concern to teachers in the DeWert et al. project, students and teachers in the present project often asked questions about professional development opportunities or shared information about upcoming workshops. This focus on professional development is understandable considering that these students had less coursework preparation and were not yet certified.

The fact that 82% of the discussion threads were placed in the "correct" forum indicates that the participants took time in selecting a forum and were able to do so with a good deal of accuracy. The *Community*

*Bulletin Board* forum discussion threads were most likely to be re-categorized because the discussions often included personal or general information that did not relate specifically to the forum that the participant had originally chosen. These results suggest that while participants generally selected the placement of their message carefully, they sometimes decided to share information within a forum in which they were currently reading or writing. This type of misplacement could be problematic if some participants (such as the mentors) only read the discussion in certain forums. In this case, the messages would not be read or responded to by others. However, given the relatively small number of participants and discussion threads, we do not believe that the misplacement of messages was a major problem for the participants in this project.

These findings suggest that the forum titles selected for this project (based on the results of DeWert et al., 2003) were appropriate for this population of participants as well. Induction level ACP special educators used the forum to discuss topics similar to those discussed by first-year traditionally trained general education teachers. The major difference was that the participants in the present study needed more help in some areas; and therefore, they posted messages to those forums more often than had been documented in discussion boards with traditionally trained teachers.

It has been suggested that online conversations can positively impact teaching and learning in at least five areas (Ferdig & Roehler, 2003). First, it may improve interactivity within the classroom setting. Based upon feedback from faculty who taught courses for the

study cohort, topics within the online forum were often transferred to the face-to-face class meetings (Bonnie Braun, personal communication, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003). In fact, the course instructor noted that it was often challenging to redirect discussion regarding online topics back to the class meeting lesson plan. Ultimately, this course instructor requested access to the online forum so that she might better facilitate face-to-face class dialogue in light of the online topics. Second, online discussion may promote active learning. Again, face-to-face course instructors (Bonnie Braun, personal communication, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003; Terry Rose, personal communication, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004) noted that the students were often able to point to online topics and make connections regarding those topics and class lesson topics. More importantly, students reported trying suggestions provided online in their field-based settings. Third, online discussion can lead to stronger relationships between students and faculty. Rather than interacting with faculty only during class time, the collaboration community provided the opportunity to consult with participating faculty members on a much more consistent basis. Fourth, researchers indicate participation in online discussion may improve higher-order thinking (Williams et al., 2001). Students consistently asked for suggestions regarding their practice and sometimes reported whether they had success after the suggestion was implemented in their classroom. When suggestions were not successful, participants sometimes speculated as to why, thus indicating a reach for a deeper level of understanding. It is also worth noting that mentors were not the only community participants making

suggestions; the induction level teachers eventually began making suggestions to each other. Last, asynchronous discussions can provide flexibility. Data in the current pilot study indicated that students accessed the forum every day of the week and most often used the forum on weekends and during nighttime hours (i.e., from 11 pm to 1 am). Thus, the asynchronous nature of the system appears to provide a degree of time independence, so to speak.

## CONCLUSION

Based upon sheer number of posts and the consistency of participation, we consider the online community to be a success. Though participation was voluntary, student posts to the online discussion board began within 48 hours of its inception and continued well into the students' winter holiday from teaching and university coursework. Our informal discussions with participating students suggest that the mentor support was constructive and helpful. It is worth noting that this project was grant funded and has since been carried forward for the current cohort of alternative certification special education students with financial support from the university.

Given the lack of ready access to school site mentors (personal communication, Mark Mullins, September 19, 2003) and the challenges posed by traditional mentorship techniques noted earlier, the online collaboration community provided a consistent and readily available opportunity to correspond with both mentors and university faculty. Rapid and unfettered mentor access is especially important given the lack of

extended pedagogical instruction and fieldwork experience of the participating ACP special education teachers. The collaboration community provided an almost immediate audience available day or night to assist with myriad school-related matters.

While not an intended outcome of the project, we recognized that the online discussion threads might indicate areas for improvement in the university's courses that are part of the program for the alternative certification students. For example, given that classroom management was a common topic of conversation, it became clear that we should consider how we were teaching the subject in our initial preparation course. Examination of online discussion topics can serve as a feedback loop, so to speak, for faculty who develop and deliver alternative certification programs.

As a final caveat, readers should bear in mind that the findings may not be particularly generalizable. The sample size was small and participation was limited to one cohort of alternative certification special education students. However, our findings, on a pilot basis, do suggest that participants were willing to actively and consistently engage in online dialogue with mentors and university faculty regarding the challenges and concerns of first-year alternative certification special education teachers. Further, it suggests that the concerns of ACP instructors are not dramatically different than those who are traditionally trained.

The outcomes of the present pilot examination may offer additional evidence for supporting the use of discussion boards as a means of mentoring induction level teachers, and in particular, alternative certification

induction level instructors. Given that the results of the present examination align, to some degree, with previous studies of traditionally trained beginning teachers, a more cohesive conversation among all teacher educators regarding mentorship may evolve. A literature base that systematically examines the mentorship needs and experiences of all beginning teachers might allow both faculty and future teachers the opportunity to take advantage of the lessons it provides.

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## **Index of Volume 1 and 2 of the *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification***

**Carroll, J., Mercer, D., Neuenswander, B., & Drake, S. (2006). State-Wide Collaborative Partnerships for Alternative Certification: The Kansas Transition to Teaching Program. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 1, (2), 4-18.**

Alternative certification programs continue to increase as school districts, institutions of higher education, and commercial companies share common educational expectations. In Kansas, a state-wide collaborative of eleven partner institutions, governed by an advisory board, designed a conceptual framework, a standards-based program, curriculum, and a structure for managing, implementing, delivering and evaluating a state alternative teacher preparation program. Characteristics of the state-wide program are discussed including: (1) collaborative partnerships, (2) grant funding for candidates in multiple institutions, (3) cohorts of candidates, (4) consortium of institutions, and (5) online delivery model. Selection and support are identified as the key elements of success.

**Dukes, L., & Jones, B. (2007). Mentoring Alternative Certification Teachers: Implementing An Online Collaborative Consultation Community. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2 (2), 23- 33.**

Online discussion boards have the potential to provide significant support to beginning teachers; thus, we designed an online collaborative consultation community to provide mentor support to university students enrolled in an alternative certification program. The results suggest that although students in alternative certification programs will use an online forum in ways similar to those of traditionally trained teachers, students in alternative certification programs need more guidance in some specific content areas such as curriculum and instruction and classroom management. Comments regarding how the use of online discussions might improve participants' education are also provided.

**Esposito, M., Berlin, D. & Lal, S. (2007). Special Education Professional Development Schools: Why Do Candidates Choose to Participate? *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2(1), 4-17.**

Research findings demonstrate that PDSs effectively prepare general education teachers and lead to increased student academic outcomes. Previous studies within the extant literature have investigated the application of the PDS model with traditional credential candidates. Acute teacher shortages and the implementation of alternative credential routes have increased the number of non-traditional credential candidates. This

study reports on candidates' primary reasons for participation in an alternative special education certification program which applied precepts from the PDS model. A questionnaire containing 23 Likert-format and open-ended questions was administered to PDS participants (n=80). Results concerning the factors that lead to PDS participation, perceived program benefits and challenges, and participants' perceptions concerning the differences between PDS and traditional settings are discussed.

**Forsbach-Rothman, T., Margolin, M. & Bloom, D. (2007). Student Teachers and Alternate Route Teachers' Sense of Efficacy and Views of Teacher Preparation, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2 (1), 29-41.**

This study compared undergraduate and graduate student teachers' and alternate route teachers' sense of efficacy and views of their teacher preparation programs. A one-way analysis of variance indicated that student teachers in the undergraduate program had higher teacher efficacy than the other two groups of teachers. Alternate route teachers and graduates student teachers reported similar levels of teacher efficacy. Teachers across all programs valued coursework in instructional methods and classroom management. The undergraduates and graduates also noted the importance of their fieldwork experiences, whereas alternate route teachers highly valued the camaraderie they established with their cohort members.

**Goodwin, W. & Rudkin, J. K. (2006). Lessons Learned from Graduates of an Alternative Certification Program: The Case of the Stanley British Primary School, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 1(1), 12-22.**

The purpose of this article is to review the essential features of the Stanley British Primary School (SBPS) and its Alternative Teacher Certification Program (ATCP). Attention is given to the surveyed reactions of the first wave of graduates from the program, particularly those completing the licensure program between 1994 and 2000. Many areas were examined during the survey—including the demographics of the sample; the nature of effective recruitment strategies and reasons given for selecting the ATCP; graduates' evaluations of the SBPS ATCP components; and teacher retention. At the article's conclusion, major findings are discussed in the form of lessons learned.

**Haberman, M (2006). What makes a Program "Alternative Certification?" An Operational Definition. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 1(1),11.**

This essay presents the background for understanding why defining alternative certification has been made a difficult matter, and proposes an operational definition of the term.

**Harvey, F. & Gimbert, B. (2007). Evaluation of Non-Traditionally and Traditionally Prepared Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Practice Using Performance-based Evidence, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2(1), 42-65.**

This study was designed to compare teachers certified in South Carolina that were trained in two different methods: through traditional college preparation programs and through the Program of Alternative Certification for Educators (PACE). This study explored three research questions. The first question addressed differences in pedagogical knowledge based on the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT) examination. There was a significant difference between the mean scores of the traditionally trained teachers and the alternatively trained teachers. The second question addressed differences in the evaluation of teaching performance based on the Assisting, Developing, and Evaluation of Professional Teaching (ADEPT) school district level evaluator's perception of teachers' performance on the individual performance dimension and the sum of rating on the performance dimensions. There was not a significant difference between any of the mean scores for the individual performance dimensions, nor the sum of the mean scores for the individual performance dimensions. And, the third question addressed differences in performance by teachers certified by the two methods based on demographic variables. There were no significant differences in mean scores based on age, gender, or race at the .05 level. The analysis of the demographic variable highest degree earned revealed there was a significant difference in the performance between teachers who had a master's degree and teachers who had a master's with additional graduate hours or a doctorate. And, this difference was true for both alternatively and traditionally certified teachers.

**Isaacs, M., Elliott, E., McConney, A., Wachholz, P., Greene, P., and Greene, M. (2007). Evaluating "Quality" Methods of Filling the "Teacher Gap": Results of a Pilot Study with Early Career Teachers, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2 (2), 5-22.**

Challenges for meeting the highly-qualified teacher demand, exacerbated by the critical shortage of teachers, have necessitated a variety of preparation routes for those entering the profession of teaching. This pilot study examined teacher confidence and self efficacy related to teacher preparedness within the first three years of employment. Specifically, the study examined preparation experience perceptions of early career teachers. All teachers who were employed three years or less from three Florida school districts were invited to participate. Data were analyzed and aggregated according to teacher preparation type – traditional or non-traditional (alternative) program. Participants indicated their likelihood of remaining in the program, district, and school as well as their degrees of confidence in preparation for the competencies identified. Overall results

as well as differences between those who completed a traditional teacher preparation program and those with a non-traditional teacher preparation program are presented. Implications for training priorities and replicating research are discussed.

**Iyer, N. & Soled, S. (2007). Dispositions and Perceived Preparedness of Teacher Candidates in Traditional Undergraduate Teacher Education, Master's with Licensure, and Alternative Licensure Programs, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2 (1), 66-79.**

This study compares the dispositions and perceived preparedness of three teacher preparation programs: traditional, masters, and alternative licensure. We specifically investigated whether teachers in alternative licensure programs have the dispositions and perceived preparation essential for teaching. Each program was examined to identify predictors of preparation and disposition for teaching. MANOVA results indicated no significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) for perceived preparedness for the three programs. There were, however, significant differences found for program and the construct ethics and justice within dispositions indicating that candidates in master's with licensure program reporting higher levels of ethics and justice than the alternative licensure candidates.

**Karge, B. D. & Glaeser, B., Sylva, J., Levine, J., & Lyons, B. (2006). A Critical Reflection of the CSU Fullerton Alternative Certification Program. *Journal of the National Association Alternative Certification*, 1 (1), 23-35.**

In the past decade the demand for highly qualified and especially trained teachers of students with special needs has exceeded the supply. To meet this deficit, alternative programs have sprouted up across the country. One such program, at CSU Fullerton, is successfully trying to fill that gap. Some 280 students have completed the requirements of a specially designed Intern program of coursework, practicum, advanced seminars, research and directed student teaching and are working in the communities of four, Southern California's local counties. The following article explains and describes the process, procedures, methods and results of these efforts. A highlight of this program is action research; the gathering of data, using scientifically-based interventions and analyzing the outcomes that produce change or progress.

**Myers, S., McMillan, S., Price, M., Anderson, C. & Fives, H. (2007). Partnering with Secondary Schools to Prepare Highly Qualified Teachers: Alternative Certification Through a Professional Development School Model, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 2 (1), 18-28.**

Recruiting Educators through Alternative Licensure (Project REAL) is funded through the Transition to Teaching grant initiative. Project REAL is designed to enable university faculty and classroom teachers to

work collaboratively within a professional development school model in order to provide secondary pre-service teachers with a high quality, fast-track, alternative certification program. Not only does this article document our implementation of a unique project design, but it also analyzes our pilot cohort's perceptions of those characteristics that are necessary for effective teacher preparation and instruction. Emergent issues described within this article include those raised by others as to the quality of alternative certification programs. Data sources collected from the pilot semester suggest that establishing "mentoring mosaics," expanding field experiences, and collaborating with professional development schools hold the potential to ensure that any certification program—even of the fast-track variety—can be of high quality. Implications for further studies are also discussed.

**Tai, R., Liu, C., & Fan, X. (2006). Alternative Certification and Retention of Secondary Math and Science Teachers: A Study Based on SASS/TFS, *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification* , 1 (2), 19-26.**

In light of shortages of mathematics and science teachers, alternative certification was introduced in the mid-1980s. This study examined the effect of alternative certification among math and science teachers who moved to a different school or left the profession. This was accomplished using the national SASS and TFS databases. The results indicated that alternatively certified teachers were comparable in their commitment to their current school and the teaching profession when compared with their traditionally certified colleagues. Findings are discussed with respect to their relevance for education policy makers and school administrators.

**Tissington, L (2006). Mentorship Defined by Alternative Teacher Certification Candidates: A Phenomenological Inquiry. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 1 (1), 36-47.**

National teacher shortages have driven the market for alternative means of teacher certification. This study sought to understand what mentorship means to 27 beginning teachers in a university-district partnership Alternative Certification Program (ACP) in an effort to understand the participants' perceptions. The process included administering and coding self report questionnaires, random selection and focus group interviews, data triangulation, and intense interaction over a 10 month period. Principles of phenomenology guided researchers to realize four interrelated essential core themes exploring the meaning of mentorship (a) school politics, (b) proximity (c) relationship, and (d) classroom management.

**Utsumi, L. & Kizu, J. (2006). Mentoring Alternative Certification Teachers: Perception from the Field. *Journal of the National Association for Alternative Certification*, 1, (1), 48-67.**

In this paper we present two studies that examine mentoring supports for alternative certification teachers from three perspectives: pre-interns, mentor teachers, and site administrators. The diverse sample population allowed us to study the role of race, gender, age, and prior careers in six domains of teacher learning and in their beliefs about students. The results showed differing perceptions of support and the critical need for mentoring across all domains of teaching, regardless of teacher characteristics. The findings suggest several needs: clear mentoring goals, better communication, effective mentor training, and a stronger instructional focus.