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## ABSTRACT

This study compared the attrition rate of 213 alternatively certified (n=51) and traditionally certified (n=162) first-year teachers in a middle Georgia urban school system. The quality of support and mentoring that these teachers received was also examined. A chi square analysis was done on the group of teachers who taught during the 2001-2002 school year and the number who returned to teach in the 2002-2003 school year. The analysis shows that there was no significant difference in the attrition rate of the two groups. A survey constructed for the study was used to investigate the quality and quantity of support given to all new teachers and compare alternatively certified teachers with traditionally certified teachers. Mentors of new teachers throughout the system were also surveyed. The results show no conclusive evidence of overall differences in quality of support, although some differences were shown in favor of both groups in different areas. The survey does show a trend toward decreased support as the school year progressed from August until May. Further study is needed to determine the long-term impact of Georgia's alternative teacher certification program. An appendix contains the teacher survey. (Contains 20 references.)  
(Author/SLD)

Running Head: Alternative Certification in Georgia

ED 472 159

Alternative Certification in Georgia: Does it Work?

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the attrition rate of 213 first year teachers, alternatively certified (n = 51) and traditionally certified (n = 162), in a middle Georgia urban school system. The quality of support and mentoring that those teachers received was also examined. There were 213 new teachers studied. A Chi Square analysis was done on the number of each group of teachers who taught during the 2001-2002 school year and the number of those teachers that returned to teach in the 2002-2003 school year. The analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the attrition rates of the groups. A self-constructed survey was used to study the quality and quantity of the support given to all new teachers and compare alternatively certified teachers with traditionally certified teachers. Mentors of new teachers throughout the system were surveyed. The results of the survey showed no conclusive evidence of overall difference in quality of support, although; some differences were shown in favor of both groups in different areas. The survey did show a trend towards decreased support as the school year progressed from August until May. Further study is needed to determine the long-term impact of Georgia's alternative certification program.

### Alternative Certification in Georgia: Does it work?

There is a critical shortage of teachers nationwide. With this shortage states all over our nation are doing all they can to attract new teachers. The overwhelming majority of states, including Georgia, are turning to alternative certification programs to lure individuals with other degrees into the field of teaching and get these individuals in the classroom fast (National Center for Education Information). Many critics have said that it won't work, that these "teachers" won't be adequately prepared and will not last long.

Georgia's program, Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GATAPP) has several components. To be eligible for the program an individual must have a bachelor's degree with a minimum grade point average of 2.5 on all college work completed, a passing score on PRAXIS I (or Scholastic Aptitude Test, American College Test or Graduate Requisite Exam scores high enough to exempt this requirement), a satisfactory criminal background check and an offer of a teaching position by a participating school system. After meeting the requirements the candidate is assigned a three person support team (including a school based mentor). This team will then develop an individual plan of study. When the individual plan is complete the candidate receives instruction on the *Essentials of Effective Teaching* (Georgia Professional Standards Commission). Finally the candidate, with the assistance of the support team completes a Professional Standards Commission (PSC) information form. This all occurs in the few weeks of summer and is an intense effort to get the candidates ready for the school year. After these requirements are met, the candidate enters a two-year internship

of teaching in the school while doing additional coursework through a local university or Regional Educational Support Agency. At the end of the first semester of teaching, the PRAXIS II, a standardized test to measure one's ability in their chosen area of teaching, teacher certification test is attempted. A failing score results in a modification of the candidate's individual plan of study. At the end of the first year of teaching the principal either recommends continuation or termination of the program (GATAPP, 2002).

The shortage of teachers is apparent- the issue is critical to the success of our schools. The success of the GATAPP program in getting and retaining teachers is essential information for us to use in the future when revising or developing new programs to certify teachers.

A 1999 study reports that between 1986 and 1997 the number of states with alternative certification programs has increased from 18 to 41 (Fiestritzer, 1999). Kwiatkowski (1999) reports that between 1983 and 1996 over 50,000 individuals received certification in alternative programs. In 1998 the number had jumped to 75,000 (Fiestritzer, 1998). Requirements and types of programs vary widely with many variations in duration and requirements. In Georgia alone there are 6 different types of alternative certification available (Kwiatkowski, 1999).

While studying the impact of alternative certification on elementary and secondary public schools teaching force, Shen (1998) says:

Proponents argue that an alternative route to teaching is a way to improve the teaching force by reducing the teacher shortage, raising the quality of teachers, and diversifying the teaching force, while opponents maintain

that alternative certification policies degrade the professional status of teaching and ultimately hinder student learning. (p.14)

The quality of pre-service teachers participating in alternative certification programs is of concern as well as the quality of alternative certification programs. National and state departments of education do not hold alternative certification programs to the same rigors as traditional pre-service programs. (Boyce, 2001) Boyce also states that some states do have adequate standards and help to fill vacancies created by the national teacher shortage while others do not provide the necessary training in content areas, field experience or pedagogical knowledge. One study showed that teachers from alternative certification programs were less academically accomplished than their traditionally trained counterparts (Shen, 1997).

In a 1999 study, Darling-Hammond found that alternatively certified teachers were more likely to leave the teaching profession than traditionally certified teachers by their third year; there was a 60 % dropout rate as compared with a 30% dropout rate for traditionally prepared teachers. However, in a 1988 study in California the opposite was found with alternatively certified teacher's dropout rate at 20% and first year traditionally trained teachers at 40% (McKibben). Lohmeier (2000) found no statistically significant difference in the performance or opinions about teaching between the two different groups of teachers. There are many factors that may contribute to teacher attrition. Sumison (1998) finds that emotional distress when entering schools may cause traditional teachers to leave programs before beginning their careers or shortly after accepting a position teaching. These may be factors that affect both sets of teachers. Lohmeier calls for more research, broader in base and more tightly controlled to determine if alternative

programs produce teachers who are as effective as those completing traditional college teacher education programs. Kwiatkowski also discussed the need for more research on the topic. Because many programs are not well developed, we don't have data to study. Kwiatkowski indicates that the effects of researching Alternative Certification would have had much more of an impact than spending so much time debating the matter. If we are patient these programs will provide us with larger numbers for longitudinal studies. Shen (1998) concludes that, the results of alternative certification programs are not conclusive, some are positive and some are negative.

Kwiatkowski points out the historical perspective on alternative certification linking "normal schools" that were fashionable in the nineteenth century where each school and then school districts trained their own teachers to our "alternative certification" in the present day and past few decades. He states, "School districts have been and will continue to be ultimately responsible for the quality, and thus, the preparation of its teachers." (pg. 67) He also concludes that while his studies and others have limitations, alternative routes to teacher certification are at least as effective as traditional teacher education programs.

Many researchers and state departments claim that the impending teacher shortage is critical. The teacher shortage dilemma is the pushing factor in many states alternative certification programs. Feistrizer disagrees:

Despite widespread claims that the nation is facing a possible teacher shortage, state officials continue to report somewhat grim prospects for people with varying backgrounds getting hired to teach in their states. When asked, "What is the likelihood that an individual with

the following background could find a teaching job in your state now” only 9 states said that it was “Very Likely” that a recent education major fully certified could find a teaching job now, three states said, “Not Likely” and one said, “Not at all”.

Most states look to fill vacancies while others feel the need to have a broader pool of qualified applicants. Many feel that alternative certification is a great way to get excellent teachers. “In the last decade, alternative teacher certification has evolved as a respectable concept and has spawned many new programs that provide excellent preparation and training for a career in teaching”, (Feistrizer, 1997.p. 5).

New Jersey’s cutting edge program that began in 1985 was established to address teacher quality *not* quantity (Klagholtz, 2001). It now helps with the teacher shortage in the state. In the 15 years of its existence the New Jersey program has greater than doubled the supply of qualified teaching applicants. Studies surrounding the program have shown the alternatively certified teachers have more going for them than traditionally certified teachers. A five year study showed them to be older and more experienced, hold more advanced degrees, receive higher scores on certification exams and have lower first year attrition rates than those teachers traditionally trained (Klagholtz, 2001).

In 1999 a study was done regarding a preliminary alternative certification program in Georgia. The researchers studied 41 alternatively certified teachers after three years in the classroom and compared these teachers to traditionally trained teachers with the same amount of experience. The study found no significant difference in the

two groups of teachers with regard to effective teaching practices (Pituch and Miller 1999). This study was conducted with observations and interviews.

Georgia's Title II report indicates that 25 colleges and universities offered alternative certification programs in 2001. Those institutions had 2548 students enrolled and 2439 or 96% successfully completed programs. The Professional Standards Commission in Georgia says, "GATAPP seeks to equip teacher-candidates with the skills to ensure a reasonable expectation of initial success in their classrooms, and to put in place a supervised internship/induction program that will help them move toward subsequent mastery of teaching" p.3. According the Georgia state department of education, in 16 metro and large school districts 433 TAPP teachers were hired. Of that 433, less than 7%, (29) left before the end of the school year. In 2000 15% of traditionally trained teachers did not return for 2001. One hundred twenty TAPP students enrolled at Mercer in Atlanta in the summer of 2001; of those 90 took jobs in the fall (Donsky, 2002). There are now 19 TAPP programs around the state at colleges, universities, RESA's and individual school systems (Donsky, 2002). The purpose of this study is to determine if first year teachers in the Bibb County Public Schools who are trained in alternative programs will have a comparable attrition rate as those first year teachers who were trained in traditional teacher education programs. The study will also examine the mentoring program in place for both sets of teachers and compare them. It was expected that both types of new teachers received equal quality of monitoring from their assigned mentors.

## Method

### *Participants*

There were a total of two hundred thirteen teachers in the population studied. The teachers were all first year teachers. One hundred sixty-two were trained traditionally in college and university teacher education programs and fifty-one were trained in the GATAPP program. Also the mentors of these new teachers were surveyed to determine the level of support they gave to all new teachers and if there was any difference between the level of support traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers received keeping in mind that traditionally certified teachers entered the classroom already certified and alternatively trained teachers will not be hold a clear, renewable certificate for a minimum of one year and possibly as long as three years. There were 149 mentors surveyed and 56 completed and returned the survey. All participants' surveys were included as data.

The group of new teachers was diverse in ethnic areas and in the areas they taught. There were a wide range of teachers Pre-K through senior high and all areas of curriculum. The mentors represented as diverse a population as did the new teachers. No teachers were identified by name. Only the numbers of first year teachers were used and the surveys were completely confidential.

### *Instrumentation*

All Bibb County Mentor teachers for the 2001-2002 school year were surveyed to determine the amount of support given to new teachers in both areas (alternatively certified and traditionally certified) and if there was any significant difference in the amount or type of support given to each group. The mentors were also

given the opportunity to express their opinion regarding reasons any teacher did not return to teach the following year. A copy of the survey is in Appendix A.

The questions on the survey were designed to determine the level/amount of support given to each first year teacher so that the information for the two types of new teachers could be compared. The first three questions determined if the mentor was serving a GATAPP teacher or a TC (traditionally certified teacher) and how many of each.

Questions four through eleven measured the amount of contact and support given to their assigned mentees (new teachers). Questions thirteen and fourteen indicated whether or not the new teachers returned for a second year and the reasons, if any, given to the mentor for their not returning. Demographic data were also collected.

#### *Procedures*

Permission was granted via the Superintendent's office for research to be conducted in the school system with assurances that instructional time was not interrupted, that participants would not be identified and that all participants' identity was protected.

The Bibb County research department was contacted to obtain information on first year teachers of the 2001-2002 school year. The number of first year teachers was obtained including a break down of number of Traditionally Certified teachers (TC) and Alternatively Certified teachers (GATAPP). The research department also provided the data concerning the number of teachers returning for the 2002-2003 school year.

Every teacher serving as a mentor during the 2001-2002 school year was sent a survey through the inter-office mail system. Directions and consent were included with the survey as well as two clean return envelopes (one for the consent form and one for the actual survey) ensuring that their identity was kept confidential.

Data was requested from Bibb County's Research Department for analysis. Data was delivered through inter-office mail in regards to the numbers of first year teacher's employed during the 2001-2002 school year and those that returned. The data regarding the teachers was divided into groups by the type of program the teacher was trained.

#### *Data Analysis Plan*

This was a descriptive study and comparisons between the two groups were done using chi square analyses and t-tests where appropriate. The overall alpha level was set at .05.

#### Results

A two by two chi square analysis was performed on the numbers of teachers in each category who taught for the school year 2001-2002 compared to the number of those same teachers who returned for the 2002-2003 school year. There were 213 total new teachers hired for the 2001-2002 school year. Of those teachers one hundred sixty-two were certified in traditional programs and fifty-one were in the GATAPP program. One hundred eighty-five of the 213 (87%) returned for the 2002-2003 school year, and 141 TCT (87%) and 44 GATAPP (86%). There was no significant difference in the retention rate of teachers with traditional training when compared to teachers with alternative certification [ $\chi^2(1) = 0.15, p = .90$ ].

Fifty-six mentors completed and returned surveys regarding their experiences with the new teachers. Thirty of those returning surveys (54 %) mentored GATAPP candidates and 26 (46%) mentored traditionally certified new teachers. Of the survey participants, 7% said that their mentees did not return for the 2002-2003 school year. Thus the returning teacher rate for the mentors participating in this survey (93%) was

about 6% better than that reported by the entire county school system. The mentors were 96% female and ranged in age from thirty to sixty with a mean of 44 years ( $SD = 8$  years). They had between one and fifteen years of mentoring experience ( $M = 5$  years,  $SD = 3$  years). Teaching experience ranged from seven to thirty-two years with a mean of 20 years ( $SD = 8$  years). This group of mentors have served anywhere from one to twenty-five new teachers in their careers ( $M = 8$ ,  $SD = 7$ ). The survey revealed several reasons that teachers didn't return including changing schools for a different age group, having personal problems and choosing retirement.

Mentors were asked how many formal meetings they had with their mentees in each month of the school year. These numbers were totaled and showed an average of 26 for both GATAPP participants ( $SD = 18$ ) and TCT participants ( $SD = 14$ ). There was no statistically significant difference in these totals. It is interesting to note that the numbers declined in both groups from a mean of 3.2 in August in the GATAPP group to 1.8 in May at the end of the school year studied. The TCT group showed the same trend; for example, in August the mean was 3.0 and in May, 2.0. Brief face-to-face meetings were another indicator of support given to new teachers. The total number of these encounters for GATAPP teachers was an average of 61 ( $SD = 45.6$ ) for the year, while the TCT new teachers had an average of 97 ( $SD = 78.89$ ) showing a statistically significant difference,  $t(39) = 2.06$ ,  $p = .05$  using a two tailed t-test for unequal variance. The answers to this question also showed a decline in the mean for each month from August until May, with GATAPP going from a mean of 7.9 per month to only 4.6 and TCT going from 11.2 per month to 9.0.

The number of classroom visits to new teachers was also compared; the GATAPP teachers had a mean of 19.6 ( $SD = 15$ ) and the TCT teachers had fewer ( $M = 8.4, SD = 3.7$ ). This also shows a statistically significant difference,  $t(54) = 3.69, p = .001$ . Again, a decline was shown from the beginning of the year until the end. Also, the number of times new teachers were given to opportunity to visit veteran teachers was compared. The GATAPP candidates had a mean of nine visits ( $SD = 4$ ), the TCT new teachers had fewer ( $M = 2, SD = 3$ ). This showed a statistically significant difference [ $t(59) = 7.09, p < .001$ ] using a two tailed t-test for unequal variances. Mentors were asked how feedback was shared with mentees. Fifty-six shared feedback verbally, 32 in writing, 12 used E-mail, and one in a phone call.

New teachers were also given assistance with completing lesson plans, GATAPP had a mean of 5.11 ( $SD = 4.63$ ), TCT teachers had a more ( $M = 14.5, SD = 14.6$ ) showing a statistically significant difference; [ $t(29) = 3.14, p = .004$ ] using a two tailed t-test for unequal variances. In August the mean for GATAPP teachers was 1.5, for TCT teachers 2.57 the numbers dropped to .20 and .846, respectively, in May. Some mentors shared classroom strategies with teachers, GATAPP teachers had a mean of 29 times that strategies were shared with them ( $SD = 24.9$ ); TCT teachers had a mean of 27.12 ( $SD = 15.83$ ). These results showed no significant difference between the two groups of new teachers.

Sometimes new teachers sat with their mentors at faculty meetings, GATAPP sat with mentors fewer times ( $M = 11.93, SD = 10.47$ ) TCT teachers ( $M = 21.77, SD = 12.07$ ). This shows a statistically significant difference; [ $t(54) = 3.27, p = .002$ .] Again, we follow the trend that numbers drop between August and May. In August the GATAPP participants

had a mean of 1.3 and the TCT a mean of 2.5, in May the numbers dropped to .9 and 1.6. Finally, mentors were asked the number of times that their mentee came to them with questions about teaching. The GATAPP teachers had a mean of 24.8 ( $SD=20.7$ ) and the TCT group had a mean of 29.7 ( $SD=26.37$ ). There is no significant difference in this data.

### Discussion

The chi-square analysis showed that the attrition rates for GATAPP teachers and those teachers traditionally trained is not significantly different. This is consistent with the literature found regarding programs of this nature. In studies by Friestrizer (1997), Miller & McKenna (1998) and Klagholz(2001) it was found that alternatively certified teachers fared as well as traditionally certified teachers in the classroom. The survey showed that there were differences in the quality of support given to new teachers in some areas and not in others. GATAPP teachers were observed by their mentors significantly more than traditionally certified teachers and were given a significant amount more opportunities to observe veteran teachers. Traditionally certified teachers were given significantly more support with face to face meetings, lesson planning, and proximity in faculty meetings. No significant difference was shown in the groups in the number of formal meetings with mentees, sharing of classroom strategies and number of questions asked by mentees. Most feedback about teaching was given to all participants verbally.

The reader should note that the month of October was inadvertently left out of the survey and so data is missing for that month. (The mean was substituted for missing data when the monthly data were totaled). However, in all areas surveyed the quantity of

support given decreased in both sets of teachers from August until May. Also, more surveys were returned from mentors of GATAPP participants than traditionally certified new teachers. This was not indicative of the proportion of GATAPP teachers employed compared to traditionally certified teachers. The number of mentors whose mentees did not return is also not proportionate.

The GATAPP program is only one of many programs used nationwide to certify teachers in a non-traditional manner. It is important to consider that there is a wide variance in the amount of support and the quality of that support given to new teachers. It seems apparent that this county school system does a good job of mentoring all new teachers and that the support received by both groups of first year teachers is equivalent.

A longitudinal study of new teachers would perhaps give better data as to the effectiveness of all programs, alternative and traditional. Studying the same participant's attrition rate after three to five years would be better indication of commitment to education and ability to teach. It would also be of interest to compare the same participants with regard to the level taught: Are alternatively certified teachers more likely to be successful at the high school level than the elementary level?

There is obviously a great deal of study left to do regarding this topic. Only time will tell if alternative certification programs will actually permanently fill the vacancies left by the nation's teacher shortage. The current literature indicates that alternative certification is doing an effective job at filling our teaching jobs. Donsky (2002) indicates that the alternative program in Georgia is working and growing by leaps and bounds. This opinion is shared about many other states by Shen (1997) who concludes that alternative licensure policies are making good on their promise to turn out successful

teachers. Lohmeier (2000) studies the same in Georgia and finds that there is no significant difference in the two types of programs.

This study implies that alternative certification is doing as good a job as traditional programs at preparing teachers for the classroom and keeping them there and that there are differences in the quality of support – in many areas. It is not clear which group of teachers has better quality of support only that it decreases throughout the year.

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Appendix A

**Support of First Year Teachers**

**\*If you served as a mentor to more than one new teacher please copy the survey and fill out one based on your experience with each mentee served.**

1. During the 2001-2002 did you serve as a mentor to a ... (circle one)

GATAPP Teacher

Traditionally Certified Teacher

2. How many participants did you mentor? \_\_\_\_\_

3. About how many formal meetings did you have with the mentee in each month?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

4. About how often did you have brief face to face meetings with mentee?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

5. About how many classroom observations did you complete of mentee?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

6. How did you share feedback with mentee after classroom observations? Check all that apply.

Verbally \_\_\_\_\_ Written \_\_\_\_\_ Phone calls \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_ Didn't share  
feedback \_\_\_\_\_

7. About what percentage of the time was feedback shared?

Verbally\_\_\_\_ Written\_\_\_\_ Phone calls\_\_\_\_ Email\_\_\_\_ Didn't share  
feedback\_\_\_\_

8. About how many formal observations of other teachers did your mentee complete?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

9. About how many times did you assist mentee with lesson plans?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

10. About how many times did you share classroom strategies with mentee?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

11. About how many times did you sit with mentee during faculty meetings?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

12. About how often did your mentee come to you with questions?

August	September	November	December	January	February	March	April	May

13. Did your mentee sign a contract to return for the 2002-2003 school year?

YES

NO

14. Please list reason(s) that mentee gave if they did not return for the 2002-2003 school year. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

15. How many years have you served as a mentor to new teachers? \_\_\_\_\_

16. How many new teachers have you served as a mentor? \_\_\_\_\_

17. How many years have you been employed as an educator? \_\_\_\_\_

18. What is your gender?      MALE      FEMALE



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