

Perceptions of Participants Enrolled in Missouri Alternative Certification Music Education Programs

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Alternative teacher certification (ATC) refers to a variety of routes used to become a credentialed teacher, ranging from emergency certification to outlined programs of study (Feistritzer, 2000). Although the majority of new teachers still earn undergraduate education degrees from state-approved teacher-training programs, ATC programs permit career changers or nontraditional teaching candidates to earn teaching licenses. ATC programs are designed for individuals who already have baccalaureate degrees in areas other than education and have work experience in careers other than teaching. Alternative certification programs provide participants with accelerated instruction, which sometimes coincides with entering the field as a teacher of record.

Approaches to teacher education that allow candidates to earn certification while beginning a full-time teaching position have expanded greatly over the last 25 years (Feistritzer, 2007). Eight states had some alternative to the traditional college teacher education program in 1983. Today, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have some alternate route to teacher certification, representing 130 different programs. The National Center for Education Information (NCEI) estimates that approximately 59,000 individuals were issued teaching certificates through alternative routes in 2005-2006, representing approximately one-third of new teachers hired nationwide.

Educational researchers have devoted attention to examining the effectiveness of alternative certification programs and have reached mixed results. Based on national surveys, researchers have concluded that alternative certification programs served to (a) reduce teacher shortages, (b) increase the racial and gender diversity of teaching force, and (c) reduce shortages in urban schools (Feistritzer, 2005; Shen, 1997). Alternatively certified candidates report that they perceive themselves as competent to teach and expect to remain in teaching (Feistritzer, 2000, 2005), but this has not been demonstrated by the available longitudinal data (Shen, 1997; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). A recent study by the U. S. Department of Education (USDE) found no statistically significant difference in performance between students of ATC teachers and those of traditionally certified teachers (USDE, 2009, p. xviii). Although the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers remains controversial, this is a significant trend in teacher preparation and uncovering the motivations of alternative candidates could provide valuable insights for music teacher educators who work with students in alternative certification programs.

Researchers have found that music, personal identity, and beliefs about teaching and other people are important the factors that motivate people to pursue teaching and music performance (e.g. Bergee et al, 2001; Feistritzer, 2005; Nagy & Wang, 2007; Parkes & Smith, 2009). The results of surveys of both traditional and alternative teacher candidates indicate that candidates pursue music teaching in order to (a) work with young people (Bergee et al, 2001; Feistritzer, 2005; Nagy & Wang, 2005; Roberts, 1993, 2004),

(b) work in music (Bergee et al, 2001; Hellman, 2008; Parkes, 2009; Roberts, 1993, 2004), (c) make a difference (Bergee et al 2001; Hellman, 2008), and (d) do what they were meant to do (Parkes, 2009). Conversely undergraduates intending to pursue music performance has often been inspired by (a) the enjoyment of playing music, (b) confidence in musical ability, and (c) beliefs about the usefulness of music performance, (Parkes, 2009). Some alternative candidates decide to pursue teaching as means to change careers and this may be a reason that alternative candidates are also concerned with practical matters for entering the teaching profession such as salary, benefits, work environment, and a family-compatible schedule (Feistritzer, 2005). Beliefs do play an important role in the path that one takes and understanding the impact of beliefs can help music teacher educators in their work with alternative certification candidates (Doloff, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to examine the incentives for enrolling in, continuing in, and completing Missouri alternative certification programs in music education. Research questions included: (a) What are the backgrounds and current teaching responsibilities of program participants? (b) What are the motivations for enrolling in ATC music teacher education licensure programs? (c) What are candidates' expectations of ATC music teacher education licensure programs and to what extent are these expectations met? and (d) What are the perceived advantages of ATC programs?

Method

In the spring of 2009, data were collected via surveys and semi-structured interviews of music teacher candidates and program completers in three Missouri alternative certification programs. Quantitative survey data were analyzed descriptively. Analysis of qualitative survey data and interview transcripts were guided by the research questions as well as emerging themes. Two researchers analyzed the qualitative data independently and collaborated to discuss differences in codings and emerging themes.

Certification Sites

Three alternative certification sites in the state of Missouri (Southeast Missouri State University, Missouri State University, University of Missouri - St. Louis) were selected to represent a master's-degree-plus-certification and certification-only alternative music education programs of study. Participants included both teacher candidates who were enrolled in these three programs as well as recent program completers.

Each program listed specific entrance requirements on their webpage (Missouri State University, 2009; Southeast Missouri State University, 2009; University of Missouri – Saint Louis, 2009). All three universities required a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education, at least a 2.5 grade point average, and a background check as an entrance requirement. Missouri State University (MSU) and the University of Missouri – St. Louis (UMSL) also require an interview. Southeast Missouri State University (Southeast) required applicants to be contracted to teach with a Missouri school district while MSU required letters of recommendation (for the Master of Arts degree only). Missouri State required a degree in the field of study for admission to the MAT program, but a bachelor's degree in any field of study for the post-baccalaureate (certification) program.

Both Southeast and University of Missouri – St. Louis listed two years as their expected program duration (Missouri State University, 2009; Southeast Missouri State University, 2009; University of Missouri – Saint Louis, 2009). MSU provided a program timeline that indicated a sequence of enrollment for each course, and MSU and Southeast indicated whether their courses were delivered on line or face to face. The music courses required for alternative certification were not specified, but the generic pedagogy courses were described in detail for each program.

Southeast began its alternative certification program in the year 2000 (Southeast Missouri State University, 2009). The university lists its requirements as satisfying either a provisional or temporary certification. Table 1 provides the requirements for state provisional and temporary teaching certificates.

Table 1

Southeast Missouri State University Requirements for State Provisional or Temporary Certification

Provisional Course Title (Credit Hours)	Temporary Course Title (Credit Hours)
1. Psychology and Education of the Exceptional Child (3)	Same courses required as a provisional with the exception of:
2. Theories of Learning and Management (2)	*Fundamentals of High School Education OR Fundamentals of Middle School (3)
3. Techniques of Teaching (Alternative Certification, Art, Business, English, Foreign Languages, Math, Physical Education, Science, Secondary Social Studies, Speech, Technology Education, Vocational Home Economics) (3)	*Beginner Teacher Assistance - can be fulfilled through participation in one of several beginning teacher assistance workshops offered throughout the state.
4. Teaching Reading in Secondary School (2)	Various organizations offer these workshops, and verification of attendance must be obtained.
5. Development of the Adolescent (3)	
6. School and Society (2)	
7. Student teaching (6)	
8. Praxis II exam in the content area	*Praxis II exams - one test in your subject area and one test covering teaching and learning.
9. Teacher Work Sample (TWS) completed during student-teaching.	

Note. The temporary certification is intended to be a three-year program of study, although additional course work may be required to meet the nine-credit-hour-per-year requirement (NCEI=www.teach-now.org, <http://online.semo.edu/altcert/intro.htm>)

Missouri State also began its alternative certification program in the year 2000 (Missouri State University, 2009). The professional education courses at Missouri State must all be taken at the graduate level and are strictly sequenced. Students in the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program must begin during the summer. The required courses are listed in Table 2. The MSU website states to consult the secondary education academic program guides for specific music content area coursework.

Table 2

Missouri State Requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching/Alternative Certification

Professional Education Courses (Credit Hours)	MAT Degree Requirements (Credit Hours)
1. Educational Workshop (9)	1. Introduction to Educational Research OR Qualitative Research Methods (3)
2. Internship in Teaching I (3)	
3. Internship in Teaching II (Student Teaching) (10)	
4. Internship in Teaching III (Presentation of Professional Portfolio) (1)	2. Research Seminar in Education (2)
5. Reading in the Content Fields (3)	
6. Human Growth & Development (K-12 Programs) <u>or</u> Psychology of Adolescence (9-12 Programs) (3)	
7. Educational Applications of 3 hours Computers for Teaching (online) (3)	
8. Foundations to Special Education (3)	

(NCEI=www.teach-now.org, www.missouristate.edu/certification/51956.htm)

The University of St. Louis began its ATC program in 1998 with 10 participants (University of Missouri – Saint Louis, 2009). In 2007, that number had grown to 44, with a mission of preparing urban teachers for the areas of high-school and middle-school math and science, music, art, and special education. University of Missouri – St. Louis lists the following as required courses for alternative certification (See Table 3).

Table 3

University of Missouri – St. Louis Requirements for Alternative Certification

1. Foundations and Philosophy – summer one
2. Seminar in General Methods – fall one
3. Seminar in Special Methods – spring one
4. Education Psychology – summer two
5. Inclusion, Special Methods – fall two
6. Special Methods in Reading – spring two
7. Completion of the Praxis II exam and an electronic portfolio

(<http://coe.umsl.edu/projects/ua/ctp/index.html>)

A convenient sample of alternative certification candidates at each institution completed the *Alternative Certification/Music Education Survey*, and a small number of survey participants were requested to participate in an interview.

Survey Instrument

The *Alternative Certification/Music Education Survey* was developed to collect the data in this study. The survey consists of forced-choice and open-response items on age, ethnicity, work history, educational background, current teaching responsibilities, alternative certification program enrollment data, motivations for enrolling in alternative certification programs, perceptions of the value of particular courses, and perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of certification programs. Some survey items were adapted from previous studies on the perceptions of students enrolled in alternative certification programs in general (Decker et al 2005; Feistritz, 2003; Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2003; Zintek, 2006).

Interview

The focus of the interview was to explore the personal experience of participants and how they decided upon teaching as a career. A semistructured format was used to explore the following questions: (a) What attracted you to music teaching? (b) How did you first learn about this program? (c) Do you have experiences with children or adolescents? Please describe. (d) Are you currently employed? Please describe your current job (life activities), and (e) When did you decide to major in music education? What factors played into this decision? Follow-up questions were used to explore details of participants' responses and participants' responses to surveys.

Results

Table 4 provides an overview of the gender age and educational background based on the seventeen surveys that were returned. Approximately 65% of the respondents were female, and 100% of the respondents were Caucasian. The average age of participants was 40 years, and three of the survey participants did not possess an undergraduate degree in music.

Current Teaching Responsibilities of Program Participants

Fifteen survey respondents were currently involved in teaching. All program completers who took the survey were currently employed as teachers, and only two who were currently enrolled in certification programs were not employed as a teacher. Teaching responsibilities of participants who were currently employed included a mix of general music, vocal, and instrumental responsibilities. Eleven of those currently employed had at least some responsibilities at the elementary level, and six had responsibilities that spanned K-12 (See Table 5). Two post-baccalaureate and two MAT participants had responsibilities over both instrumental and vocal certification areas. None of the participants in the UMSL program, which is located in an urban area, had both instrumental and vocal responsibilities.

Table 4

Gender, Age and Educational Background of Survey Participants by Program Type (N=17)

Name of Program	Gender		Mean Age	Highest Degree		Undergraduate Major	
	M	F		Bach	Mast	Music	Other
<i>Southeast Missouri State University</i>							
Post Baccalaureate (<i>n</i> = 2)	1	1	38.5	0	2	2	0
<i>University of Missouri – St. Louis</i>							
Career Transition (<i>n</i> = 6)	3	3	43.2	2	4	6	0
<i>Missouri State University</i>							
MAT ^a (<i>n</i> = 8)	2	6	37.3	3	5	5	3
Post Baccalaureate (<i>n</i> = 1)	0	1	52	0	1	1	0

^a One participant was also part of the *Troops to Teachers* Program.

Table 5
Number of Survey Participants Teaching, Teaching Areas, and Grades Teaching by Program Type (N = 17)

Name of Program	# Currently Teaching	Teaching Areas ^b			Grade Ranges			
		Gen	Vocal	Inst	ES/ MS/ HS	ES only	MS/ HS	HS only
<i>Southeast Missouri State University</i>								
Post Baccalaureate (<i>n</i> = 2)	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	0
<i>University of Missouri – St. Louis</i>								
Career Transition (<i>n</i> = 4)	6	4	3	1	0	4	1	1
<i>Missouri State University</i>								
MAT ^a (<i>n</i> = 6)	6	3	6	2	4	1	0	1
Post Baccalaureate ^a (<i>n</i> = 1)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

^aIncludes part time employment at the middle-school level.

^bSome participants had responsibilities in more than one area.

Motivations for Enrolling in ATC Music Teacher Education Licensure Programs

Survey respondents answered forced and open-choice questions regarding their reasons for entering the teaching profession as well as why they chose the particular alternative certification program. Open-choice responses were analyzed using open coding procedures. Both researchers coded the surveys independently and collaborated to discuss differences in coding. The data were recoded as necessary, and examined for common themes among the codes.

Personal affinity for music and the pragmatic realities of financial support were common in nearly all respondents' decision to enter the teaching profession. Quoting the text of one survey participant, "I wanted one full-time job in music. I was tired of working seven part-time jobs without any benefits. I wanted a steady schedule in my life..." A summary of the reasons that participants provided for choosing to enter the profession of teaching are provided in Table 6. Participants' ratings of salary, prestige, challenge, and support indicate that they are satisfied with the support, professional challenge and earnings. These data are reported in Table 7.

Table 6
Reasons Cited by Participants for Entering Teaching by Program Type (N = 17)

Coding	Career Transitions (n = 6)	Post Bac (n = 3)	MAT (n = 8)
Music			
Spread Music/Inspire Others	2	1	1
Personal Love of Music	2	1	3
Already Have Degree	1	0	0
Natural Talent	1	0	1
Pragmatic			
Financial/Job Security	1	1	4
Scheduling/Family Obligations	1	1	3
Past Success	1	0	1
Provided Opportunity	0	1	2
People			
Love of Children/Young Adults	2	0	3
Desire to Better Society	2	0	3
Love Teaching	1	0	0
Personal			
Sense of Accomplishment	2	0	1
Good Fit	1	0	5
School Experiences	0	0	1
Challenge	2	0	0

Table 7
Mean Ratings of Satisfaction with Teaching Profession by Program (N = 17)

Satisfaction Ratings	Career Transitions (n = 6)	Post Bac (n = 3)	MAT (n = 8)	Total
Salary and Benefits	2.2 (0.8)	2.0 (0.0)	2.0 (0.0)	2.1 (0.4)
Professional Prestige	1.7 (0.5)	2.0 (1.0)	2.0 (0.6)	1.9 (0.6)
Challenge	2.2 (0.4)	2.7 (0.6)	2.8 (0.5)	2.5 (0.5)
Professional Support	2.3 (0.6)	2.0 (1.0)	2.2 (0.4)	2.2 (0.6)

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Qualitative and quantitative data on the reasons for enrolling in a particular alternative certification program are reported in Tables 8 and 9. Through both open-response and forced choice items, participants indicated that convenience and cost were important factors. Based on the collected data, accessibility and enrollment decisions are pragmatic, since that accessibility and financial considerations were important; some participants, however, indicated that they were concerned with program quality as well (See Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8
Reasons Cited by Participants for Choosing a Particular ATC Program (N = 17)

Reasons	Career Transitions (n = 6)	Post Bac (n = 3)	MAT (n = 8)
<i>Convenience</i>			
Family Obligations	2	0	0
Location	0	1	2
Scheduling			
Accelerated Calendar	3	2	2
Course Times	0	2	1
Flexibility of Program			
<i>Financial</i>			
Employment Opportunity	4	0	1
Cost	3	1	2
Required to keep job	0	1	0
<i>Educational</i>			
Program Reputation	1	0	1
Support Provided	3	1	0
Opportunity for Master's	0	0	1
Hands-on Experience	0	0	1
<i>Personal</i>			
Unhappy in Present Job	1	0	0
Become More Socially Aware	1	0	0

Table 9
Mean Ratings of Reasons for Choosing this ATC Program (N = 17)

Importance Ratings	Career Transitions (n = 4)	Post Bac (n = 3)	MAT (n = 6)	Total
Convenient Schedule	2.3 (0.8)	3.0 (0.0)	3.0 (0.0)	2.8 (0.6)
Convenient Location	2.2 (0.8)	3.0 (0.0)	2.4 (0.9)	2.4 (0.8)
Financial Considerations	2.7 (0.6)	2.7 (0.6)	2.7 (0.6)	2.7 (0.6)
Opportunity to Work Fulltime	3.0 (0.0)	2.0 ^a (1.0)	2.9 (0.4)	2.8 (0.6)
Family Obligations	1.8 (0.9)	2.3 (0.6)	2.0 (0.9)	2.0 (0.9)

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Perceived Advantages of ATC Programs

The perceived advantages of ATC align with the data on the motivations for entering the teaching profession and enrolling in ATC programs. Responses to an open-ended question that asked participants to “[d]escribe the advantages and disadvantages of alternative certification program as compared to a traditional program” were examined and coded for themes. Participants indicated that there were few disadvantages in comparison to traditional programs. Six participants provided responses that indicated that the opportunity to earn employment while earning certification was an advantage. Five and four participants respectively identified the compatibility of the schedule and the reduced course load as advantages in comparison to traditional programs. Other advantages that were provided by those enrolled in the Career Transitions Program included the benefits of a support group of peers, committed faculty,

and affordability. Two participants in the MAT program indicated the opportunity of the masters and a more in depth study of educational philosophy was an advantage in comparison to traditional programs. Five participants in the MAT and post baccalaureate programs identified that the music education content in the ATC program contained less breadth in comparison to traditional programs. Three participants indicated that the programs were quite overwhelming. One participant described the immediate opportunity for employment as both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Long-term Goals

The long-term career objectives indicated by survey participants revealed a mix of teaching, personal, and career-position goals. Many participants indicated a desire to continue learning and strive for excellence personally and on behalf of their current or future school program. Others indicated a desire to retire from K-12 music teaching, and some indicated that their ultimate objective was to attain a position in higher education. A summary of the analysis of these data are provided in Table 10.

Table 10

Participants' Long-term Career Objectives by Program Type (N = 13)

Coding	Career Transitions (<i>n</i> = 4)	Post Bac (<i>n</i> = 3)	MAT (<i>n</i> = 6)
Higher Education	2	0	2
K-12 Teaching	3	1	3
Retire from K-12 Teaching	1	2	1
Stay involved in music	0	2	1

Note. Some participants' responses were coded in more than one category.

Interviews

Three survey participants were interviewed as a follow-up to the survey. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed for content. Both researchers coded the interviews and analyzed the codes for themes independently. They collaborated to discuss differences in coding. In general, the interview data coincide with the survey data, but the detail uncovered in the interviews reveal that the reasons for choosing to enroll were quite robust. All three participants in the interviews described private or class teaching experiences prior to beginning the alternative certification program, and entered the certification program so that they could pursue employment opportunities for financial and lifestyle reasons. For example, one participant described her struggles after completing a performance degree. She was disappointed in the results of professional auditions and applications to graduate school. Eventually, she began working in lucrative sales but was very unhappy as her opportunities for involvement in music became quite limited. A former and trusted private teacher recommended that she investigate an alternative certification program. Other participants had similar stories in which they sought to involve themselves more deeply in music and pursued alternative certification as a practical means to improve their lifestyle and financial position simultaneously.

Discussion

The results of the study revealed that candidates entered alternative certification programs in order to have a viable career as full-time music teachers. Similar to the findings of researchers who have studied the motivations of traditional candidates, (a) love of music, (b) feeling called to teach, and (c) working with people were also influences that were common to alternative certification candidates (Bergee & Demorest, 2003; Hellman, 2008). In this study, candidates also viewed the desire to remain in music as a driving lifestyle consideration, and this focus was reflected in their long-term goals, personal motivations, and average age. Participants rated schedule, financial considerations, and the opportunity for full-time work as “very important” factors for enrolling in alternative certification programs, and they frequently cited the timeline for teaching employment as crucial for their happiness, financial need, and family obligations. Other perceived advantages of alternative certification over the traditional undergraduate approach included faculty commitment, recognition of accomplishments, peer network, and timeline efficiency. Although few disadvantages of alternative certification were indicated, participants did consider it a challenge to balance a personal life, a new career, and the coursework involved in alternative certification. To that end, participants in this study most valued courses in certification programs that were immediately relevant to the practical aspects of teaching; however, the perceived usefulness of specific courses varied, even among students enrolled in the same program.

Several survey participants described that most of their coursework for certification did not emphasize the pedagogical content knowledge unique to music. While there is something to be gained from coursework that focuses on pedagogy across disciplines, the lack of music teaching coursework could be a disadvantage to alternatively prepared candidates who may have a strong music background but lack experience with how to adapt those musical skills for teaching as well other types of musical experiences that are needed in specific teaching settings. The subjects in this study indicated that teaching employment, along with the flexibility of class time in order to earn their certification or master’s degree, were pragmatic advantages. However, alternative candidates who do not gain the competencies that facilitate their long-term growth within music teaching might not stay in the profession very long. This could undermine the stated goals of alternative certification programs to expand the diversity of the teaching force and reduce the recurring music teaching shortages that exist in some schools (Fesitritzer, 2005, 2007).

Based on our experience with alternative certification programs and anecdotal evidence from colleagues, the “fast track” curricular format when coupled with the challenges of the early years of teaching presents can be formidable for beginning teachers and limit opportunities for networking with experienced teachers. New teachers benefit from working with experienced teachers and gaining valuable advice concerning lesson planning, classroom management, and the opportunity to expand teaching ideas (Scribner, Bickford, Watson, & Valentine, 2005). Furthermore, the results of our survey found many candidates with a wide range of responsibilities across grade levels. Some candidates in alternative certification programs are simultaneously adapting to school settings, teaching grades and areas of music in which they have little familiarity while they are completing courses needed to earn certification.

In addition to the lack of pedagogical content knowledge in music, the criteria used to assess alternative program candidates appeared in some cases to be less extensive than the criteria used for traditional candidates. In Missouri, candidates in traditional undergraduate programs must demonstrate competency on the College Basic Academic Success Examination (CBASE), but alternative certification candidates demonstrate this competency simply by possessing an undergraduate degree (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2008). Since traditionally prepared candidates will ultimately complete an undergraduate degree as well, this creates a double standard. Furthermore, some programs allow candidates with any college degree to pursue music teacher certification. We also found that some of these programs did not require an audition or other means to assess the musical skills prior to entering alternative certification programs. A perception does appear to exist, based on the results of this survey as well as anecdotal evidence that some aspects of traditional undergraduate music teacher certification programs do not contribute to the requisite skills for teaching and might serve to detract strong potential candidates from entering teaching. In higher education institutions, music teacher educators are best qualified to structure candidate assessments, design curricular experiences, deliver coursework, and structure learning experiences that provide meaningful preparation for music teachers while balancing convenience and accessibility.

Perhaps music-teacher educators do not have a large enough role in alternative certification as a result of program size. The number of people enrolled in alternative certification was relatively small in comparison to the number enrolled in traditional education programs, and this made the collection of data quite challenging. We were able to identify approximately 30 students enrolled in alternative programs in music education across three institutions. The small size of alternative certification programs in music and the lack of integration with traditional undergraduate offerings could be tied to education units administering alternative certification programs. This in turn may isolate music education faculty members from the planning and development of the music education components in alternative certification programs, and result in a lack of emphasis on the pedagogical content knowledge in ATC programs.

The configuration of music education programs in most colleges and universities prioritizes the instruction of traditional candidates, since they typically far outnumber ATC candidates. The results of this survey indicated that many ATC candidates were attracted to these programs because they could obtain employment immediately, and this might make the support of music education faculty even more crucial. A strategic approach to the development and design of music education alternative certification program partnerships among higher education institutions could provide more unification among programs. More unification might also allow sharing resources and devoting portions of music-education faculty loads to the needs of ATC candidates. Although the notion of inter-institutional cooperation confounds competitive posturing among institutions, the collaboration of music and education units both within and among institutions might provide sizeable pools of ATC candidates that could allow for an appropriate level of emphasis on musical pedagogical content knowledge in ATC programs.

Suggestions for Music Teacher Educators

The lack of authority for alternative programs within music- education units presents challenges for music teacher educators, but meeting this challenge could also provide an opportunity to potentially expand the diversity and stability of the teaching force. Music teacher educators can work to build partnerships with colleagues in education units in order to communicate the need for (a) participating in the screening and selection process of alternative certification candidates, (b) providing pedagogical content knowledge for alternative certification candidates, (c) developing courses and curricula that meet the needs of alternative certification candidates, and (d) advocating for mentors and supervision to provide support for candidates who are teaching and simultaneously earning certification.

Suggestions for Further Research

Assessing the effectiveness of ATC programs is complex due to the lack of uniformity across institutions and state departments of education. In our investigations of Missouri music-education alternative certification programs, we found publicly available information on programs to be absent, confusing, conflicting, and at times, misleading. In addition, terminology such as “methods course,” “student teaching,” practicum, etc., have different meanings both within and across different institutions (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Studies outside of music have compared traditional and alternatively prepared candidates by examining data on teacher retention, candidate content area, and teaching commitment (J. Shen, 1997; USDE, 2009; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). An analysis of the data from these studies has revealed mixed results on whether alternative certification programs attract candidates with higher or lower qualifications and how they impact the long term achievement of their students. There appears to be uncertainty among researchers and policymakers about the effectiveness of teachers whose certification is of a nonstandard type (Wayne & Youngs, 2003).

Miller, McKenna, and McKenna (1998) cite the following reasons to continue researching alternative programs: (a) ATC teachers are not inherently inferior to traditionally-trained teachers, (b) ATC programs have been in place as long as there have been certification programs of any kind (probationary certificates), (c) ATC programs recruit people with a variety of life experiences, and (d) there seems to be no end to the shortage of qualified teachers in the near future. Perhaps instead of prolonging the debate over which training method is better – alternative versus traditional – we should focus on a better understanding of good teacher education components (Zeichner & Schute, 2001). Alternative routes may be best designed to provide late entrants with career opportunities in music education and reduce music teaching shortages. However, there is an important need for more research is needed on alternative certification candidates, curricula, and their effect on music teaching practice in K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

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