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Advantages and disadvantages of alternate route to teacher certification programs.

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Background

In recent years, alternative routes to certification programs have grown in popularity in the United States. They offer districts and students a promising option for the high demand areas of math, science, foreign language, and ESL/Bilingual education programs. Although they have grown in popularity, they are not without controversy. Many are successful and fill the educational gap. Others are not so successful and leave schools and students no better off, and sometimes worse, than they were before. We have worked in the alternative route program at our university for five years and have seen success and failure on the part of both school personnel and students.

Research Questions

A common critique of alternative route programs is that they "water down" professional knowledge and imply that all a teacher needs is content knowledge. Others advocate alternative route programs stating that they enhance the teaching profession by bringing in specialists in other academic areas who would not otherwise enter the teaching field. Our focus was to critique our program and its success and thus success of graduates from the program.

Methods

We conducted interviews with teachers, students, and former students who have gone through our alternative route program. In addition, we conducted a survey of administrators who have hired graduates from the program.

Frame

Surveys were sent out to graduates from the program since its inception 6 years ago. In addition, personal interviews were conducted with students in the program over the last 2 years. In addition to surveys and interviews of students/graduates, administrators who hire and observe these graduates performances were surveyed for their perceptions of the program's success as demonstrated in our graduates' performance and impact on securing teachers in high needs areas. We also requested that they compare and contrast teachers from alternative routes verses traditional routes to teacher certification. Through this qualitative analysis of interviews and surveys, we gleaned themes of positive and negative aspects of the program, experiences and competencies of graduates.

Research findings

Our findings from this study reinforced literature indicating that alternative routes to certification do address a need to fill shortage areas of teachers, especially in the math and science fields. In addition, overall the participants in the study agreed that the program fills essential preparation necessary for a beginning teacher. However, they also provided many suggestions and a few concerns about ways we should improve the process, knowledge base, and experiential supports. Through this we have developed suggestions for others considering developing alternate route programs and would also encourage a sharing of ideas from the audience on various approaches that may be working around the US and in the UK. We offer 3 key contributions to knowledge base in teacher education: 1) A plan for introducing and implementing a successful alternative route program, 2) How to deal with the issues (pros and cons) surrounding alternative route program, and 3) How to include community, school and the university in alternative route programs.

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