The Impact of Teacher Preparation
A Study of Alternative Certification and Traditionally Prepared Teachers in Their First Year of Teaching

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Introduction

For the youth of our nation to have access to a quality education, it is imperative that prospective teachers participate in excellent preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Tisher & Wideen, 1990). There is, however, discontent with current teacher preparation programs (Goodwin, 2010; Holmes Group, 1995; Milken, 1999; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999). Scholarly reports such as *A Nation Prepared:*

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Teachers for the 21st Century (Tucker & Mandel, 1986), *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996), and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education's report *An Emerging Picture of the Teacher Preparation Pipeline* (Ludwig, Kirshstein, Sidana, Ardila-Rey, & Bae, 2010) have raised concerns about the standards of teacher preparation and the programs that prepare new teachers. Currently there are two major types of teacher education programs that prepare new teachers to obtain teacher certification or licensure: (1) traditional university based teacher education programs that are completed prior to a first year of teaching and (2) alternative certification programs for university graduates who have not gone through a teacher education program while obtaining a degree.

Alternative vs. Traditional Certification

The U.S. Department of Education (2003) has stated that alternative certification has the potential to increase both the quantity and quality of teachers. The National Education Association's Committee on Instruction and Professional Development (as cited in Chappelle & Eubanks, 2001), however, denounced all forms of alternative licensure that lowered standards for teacher certification and that enabled insufficiently trained teachers to engage in the practice of classroom teaching. Of particular concern are alternative certification programs that reduce the amount of preparation teachers have before taking on full time classroom responsibilities because research continues to document that the less preparation a teacher has, the less students achieve (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005).

In 2005, the National Center for Education Information reported that the District of Columbia and 47 other states had 122 alternative teacher certification options provided by 619 programs (Feistritzer, 2005). Supporters of alternative certification point out that these programs appeal to nontraditional candidates, who are typically older and more mature, and have a non-education college degree and experience in non-teaching fields (Dill & Stafford-Johnson, 2002). Additionally some nontraditional candidates are minority males who are members of communities in need of teachers. Alternative certification supporters also point to the intense education sessions before and after a full day at school and two supervisors per candidate as sufficient to produce qualified teachers (Ovando & Trube, 2000). Specifically, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (1999) views traditional teacher education requirements as a "barrier" to becoming a teacher and suggests that on-the-job alternative certification

training is superior to traditional university-based teacher education programs.

The current alternative teacher certification programs often put instructors in classrooms with little to no pedagogical training (Darling-Hammond, 2000, 2010). Yet, those who support alternative certification assume that anyone, even without pedagogical coursework, who has a subject matter degree and some type of professional support can begin teaching and that teaching abilities can be developed on the job (Ovando & Trube, 2000). Much of the research that supports this view is limited to a comparison of scores on teacher certification exams between those in alternative versus traditional programs (Hawk & Schmidt, 1989) rather than a comparison of observations of classroom practice or measures of student achievement. Thus, a solid research base to support the claim that anyone with a bachelor's degree can teach is lacking.

Research over the last 30 years has found that teachers who have completed traditional teacher education programs and enter the classroom fully certified, as compared to teachers with alternative certification who tend to be more successful, receive higher evaluations from supervisors and have students who achieve at a higher level (Ashton & Crocker, 1986; Evertson, Hawley, & Zlotnik, 1985; Greenberg, 1983; Haberman, 1984; Olsen, 1985). Therefore, it may not be in the best interest of students and society, in general, to give a new teacher in an alternative certification program sole responsibility for the day-to-day functions of a classroom prior to the completion of an educational training program. Uncertified teachers who have full responsibility struggle with classroom management, pedagogy, and a teacher's daily responsibilities more than do fully trained teachers (Freytag, 2002). Additionally, underprepared teachers in alternative certification programs often tend to be employed in districts with greater percentages of minority and economically disadvantaged students (Fuller & Alexander, 2003).

The current research base on teacher education programs is inadequate. First, many studies on teacher preparation programs have employed survey research, which relies on self-reported perceptions. Second, the survey research conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics did not take into account the differences between field-based and traditional teacher education programs. As field-based teacher education programs become the norm at universities, it is important to investigate differences between graduates of field-based teacher education programs and those of alternative teacher certification programs in their first year of teaching.

Attrition

Most teachers who enter the profession through nontraditional routes tend to leave the classroom within three years, while dropout rates among teachers who complete traditional four-year preparation programs are significantly lower. Specifically, the five-year retention rate is 76% for teachers from traditional teacher education training and only 68% for teachers from alternative certification (Fleener, 1998; Fuller & Alexander, 2003). Further, Fleener (1998) and Freytag (2002) noted that attrition among graduates of field-based and extended five-year programs that include a yearlong internship with mentors is negligible. This low attrition rate is logical since other research indicates that many newer teachers leave the profession due to a lack of support and mentoring (Chappelle & Eubanks, 2001).

Evidence suggests that, in the long run, it is more cost effective to hire well-prepared teachers than to hire, induct, and replace underprepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2002). It takes from three to five years for beginning teachers to develop the expertise that more experienced educators possess, and it takes even longer for alternatively certified teachers to gain such expertise (Ovando & Trube, 2000).

Teacher attrition has also been found to have a negative impact on student achievement (Klakamp, 2004). Klakamp's statewide study of Texas teachers and students concerned the relationship between teacher attrition and student achievement in reading, writing, and math over a period of five years The results indicated that teacher attrition affected student achievement of third and fourth grade students in all areas. However, when results for socioeconomic status (SES) were disaggregated, teacher attrition was found to have a more negative impact on low SES and minority students' achievement. Thus, the relationship between a teacher's preparation, quality, retention, and effectiveness is crucial to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Grant & Murray, 1999; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996).

Teacher induction is defined as the transition from student to professional and involves the greatest need for supervision and support. Induction programs providing mentorship, curricular information, classroom support, and professional scaffolding have grown out of concerns related to accountability and attrition during the first years of teaching (Ovando & Trube, 2000). However, there is minimal research investigating the induction year for groups of teachers by preparation programs. This study examines the first year teaching experiences of two groups of public school teachers enrolled in an induction program: One group pursued alternative certification, and the other group had completed a traditional field-based teacher education program at the undergraduate level.

Method

Participants in both the induction group (Group 1) and the alternative certification group (Group 2) were hired in urban and suburban school districts in a large metropolitan area in Texas for their first year of teaching. Although not matched, many participants in both groups worked for the same school districts. Group 1 comprised 8 participants (7 females, 1 male) who had completed a traditional field-based teacher education program and achieved teacher certification prior to being employed. They were part of a yearlong teacher induction program that provided a university course in the evening, mentoring by a teacher on their campus, and field supervision by a university liaison. The instructor was the same for both the induction and alternative certification classes, while mentor teachers and field liaisons from the university varied by site.

Group 2 comprised 14 participants (11 females, 3 males) who were employed as part of a yearlong alternative certification program. These participants, who needed a minimum of a bachelor's degree, were pursuing teacher certification by taking a university course in the evening and receiving mentoring by a teacher in their building and field supervision by a university liaison. Although participants had not yet completed a teacher certification program and were not fully certified, they were considered the teachers of record.

Ongoing data collection from multiple sources occurred throughout the year for both groups. Primary data sources included needs assessments, summative reflections, and instructor interviews. Secondary data sources included instructor field notes, participant response/reaction journals, written responses to class sessions, anecdotal records of university liaisons, and artifacts from classes.

To collect data for the initial needs assessment, the instructor asked students to respond to an open-ended prompt by writing what they needed to know or learn during the yearlong program. Participant summative reflections were collected at the end of the program. Participants also were asked, when they wrote a summative reflection, to review their response/reaction journals and written responses to class sessions and to think about what they learned and experienced during their first year of teaching. At the conclusion of the yearlong program, the two university researchers interviewed the instructor, using a semi-structured open-ended interview that used questions based on the initial coding of the needs assessment and summative reflections.

Primary data were analyzed using the constant comparative method of descriptive analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Two university researchers initially identified codes, categories, and themes for the needs

assessment and summative reflections data. These codes, categories, and themes were modified through consensus as the analysis proceeded (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The instructor independently analyzed the needs assessment and summative reflections to identify codes, categories, and themes. After initial analyses, the two university researchers and the instructor met to compare codes, categories, and themes. The codes, categories, and themes were modified minimally by consensus. During this process, the two university researchers interviewed the instructor to further verify the categories and themes. When consensus was reached on a category, the instructor was asked for supporting data from secondary data sources. The final categories and themes were then verified and corroborated across multiple data sources by one additional external researcher.

Results

Analysis of the needs assessment collected during the first class session indicated that the perceived needs of these two groups of novice teachers were substantially different upon entry into courses. Alternative certification teachers were focused on time management, writing lesson plans, and dealing with perceived problems. Induction teachers were focused on strategies to improve the learning experience of their students and successfully integrate themselves into the context of their specific school. There was some overlap, however, as participants in both groups were concerned with parent conferencing, resources, and behavior management.

Interviews with the instructor of the graduate courses revealed there were substantial differences between the two groups at the end of the semester (see Figure 1). The alternative certification group struggled to survive in the profession, whereas the induction group grew professionally. For example, in an interview, the instructor said:

> As the semester progressed, the alternative certification students continued to perceive me as "the one with all of the answers" and depended on me for advice. I had to draw out possible suggestions from their fellow classmates. The induction group, on the other hand, grew to depend on each other for possible solutions and tended to pose questions and concerns to the entire group. I became one of the class members.

As the researchers and the instructor compared the themes and categories, two distinct themes, with supporting categories, emerged. The overarching theme for the alternative certification group was "Struggle for Survival," and the overarching theme for the induction group was "Professional Growth" (see Figure 2). Although the instructor had identi-
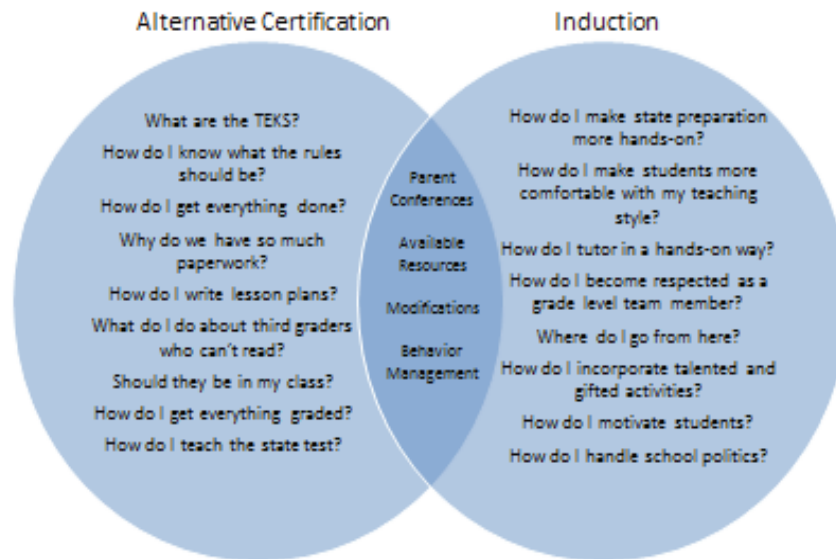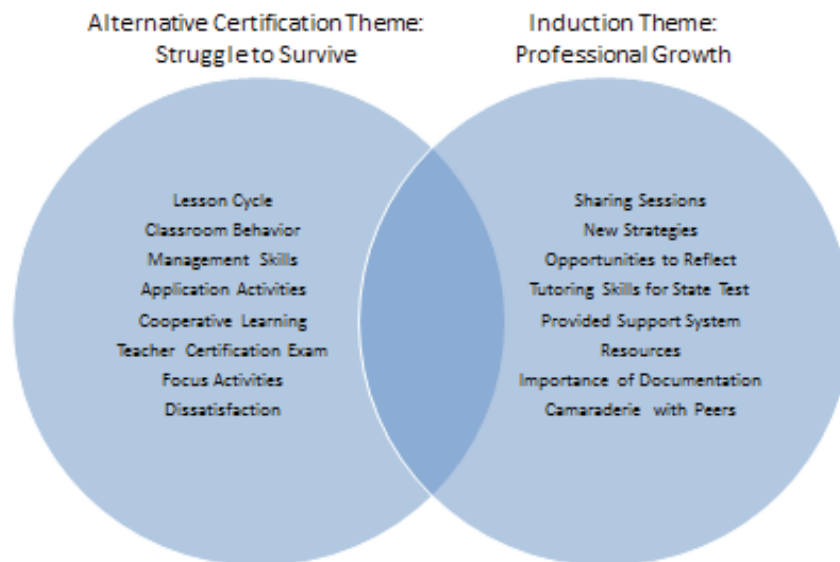
Figure 1
Initial Needs Assessment

Alternative Certification   Induction

What are the TEKS?

How do I know what the rules
should be?

How do I get everything done?

Why do we have so much
paperwork?

How do I write lesson plans?

What do I do about third graders
who can't read?

Should they be in my class?

How do I get everything graded?

How do I teach the state test?

Parent
Conferences

Available
Resources

Modifications

Behavior
Management

How do I make state preparation
more hands-on?

How do I make students more
comfortable with my teaching
style?

How do I tutor in a hands-on way?

How do I become respected as a
grade level team member?

Where do I go from here?

How do I incorporate talented and
gifted activities?

How do I motivate students?

How do I handle school politics?

Figure 2
Themes and Categories at the Conclusion of the Semester

Alternative Certification Theme: Induction Theme:
Struggle to Survive   Professional Growth

Lesson Cycle
Classroom Behavior
Management Skills
Application Activities
Cooperative Learning
Teacher Certification Exam
Focus Activities
Dissatisfaction

Sharing Sessions
New Strategies
Opportunities to Reflect
Tutoring Skills for State Test
Provided Support System
Resources
Importance of Documentation
Camaraderie with Peers

fied almost the same categories and themes, the researchers identified an additional category, "Dissatisfaction," for the alternative certification group. The instructor agreed that this was a valid category and provided further supporting data from secondary sources to verify the category.

Findings were consistent and verifiable across primary and secondary data sources. Below are examples of participants' written comments, drawn from multiple data sources, to support the overarching themes and categories.

Alternative Certification Overarching Theme: Struggle for Survival:

• I personally found this course . . . to be extremely beneficial and absolutely necessary for survival.

• This course has helped me survive my first year of teaching. Everything I have learned in this class I have tried in my classroom.

• [This semester] has been filled with moments of despair that were later replaced with gleams of hope. A major entity that aided in my survival of this first year was being enrolled in this class.

Category: Lesson cycle:

• Another thing that was very helpful to me was the presentation of the lesson cycle. My lessons were going okay and I knew to monitor and adjust, but seeing it on paper and having it explained better did wonders! As soon as I implemented it, my lessons ran much more smoothly!

• One very important thing we did in the class was to go over the lesson cycle in detail. This very much helped me to make my own lesson plans. It also helped me to make my periods flow nicer, especially the importance of monitor and adjust.

Category: Classroom and behavior management skills:

• I was very grateful for what I learned in the course about class management. Since I have practiced some of the techniques taught, like moving into proximity and non-verbal communication, my classes have gone more smoothly. The same people end up in ISS [In School Suspension], but they disappear with more dignity and fewer protests.

• The behavior management tools I have been taught have helped me also. Using a non-verbal cue to alert the student at first has really made things easier . . . when I call a parent I can tell them how many warnings their child received and how they responded to each one.

Category: Application activities:

• So much of what you may think is the best way to teach is not, many

times, the best. I have learned new strategies to use in the classroom that I did not know before. As I began to use some of what I was learning, I began to see improvement in my classroom behavior and grades.

• I have learned and recognized that teaching definitely goes beyond the textbooks. As a result, I try to incorporate hands-on activities, utilize manipulatives and teacher-created materials whenever appropriate.

Category: Cooperative learning:

• We were taught that direct teach[ing?] was an okay method and the one most often used by beginning teachers, but that cooperative learning also exists. I had no idea there was such a thing.

• [Name] taught us how to use cooperative learning in our classroom and the benefits to using this teaching technique.

Category: Teacher certification exam:

• The preparation for the teacher certification exam is a major benefit of the class. When it is time for me to take the teacher certification exam, I am confident that I will be ready.

• . . . area of strength is the direction given in dealing with the teacher certification test. The teacher certification exam questions seem on the whole to be pseudo-intellectual, but it is necessary, and the instructor's assistance was outstanding.

Category: Focus activities:

• The biggest thing I have gained from this class is how to use a focus activity. . . . I do see much more interest and retention from my kids as a whole when introducing a lesson in this way; therefore, I will certainly keep doing focus activities.

• Using focus activities and focusing on the students' interests decreases student misbehavior.

Category: Dissatisfaction:

• Professional growth is an area I am hesitant to approach. I taught in public school for the first time, taught low-income children for the first time, attended my first workshops, and took education courses. All of this was very strange for me. I kept looking around and wondering when anyone was going to get to the point, when anything would gel. All I could see . . . was wasted time.

• I really do not like writing these reflection papers. I wish we could have had a more practical assignment.

Induction Overarching Theme: Professional Growth:

• Our ability to open up with each other in earnest conversation in relation to problems we are experiencing within our school settings has helped us all deal with individual problems at our own campuses.

• I feel that I have grown professionally by discussing things that are happening in my school with parents, teachers, or students.

•   This growing experience has impacted my teaching a great deal.

Category: Sharing sessions:

• My teaching style has greatly benefited by listening and incorporating all the wonderful ideas that other teachers have shared. My professor and peers have shared both theme activities and reading strategies. I have shared these ideas with my first grade team and they too have benefited from this class.

• I am also using the ideas of my classmates. I really enjoy our open discussion of ideas every week. Everyone is so eager to help out.

Category: New strategies:

• I am using the endless number of activities I have learned in this class every day in my own 2nd grade classroom!

• I have used many of the ideas that were relayed to us in class for use in my own classroom. My students really enjoyed "What's in the bag . . . Math Scavenger Hunt."

Category: Opportunity to reflect:

• I appreciate having the opportunity to reflect on my experiences this semester, and how they have affected my own teaching style and professional growth.

• I enjoyed . . . the opportunity to try various activities and then reflect back on it, it has all been VERY useful.

Category: State-mandated assessment tutoring skills:

• I have learned many beneficial strategies I can use during [state test] tutoring.

• The class periods where we discussed tutoring games gave me many ideas to use in the classroom.

Category: Provided support system:

• It is so nice to know that I don't have to go through these difficult times alone. I know that I will remember this class and many of the

students for a long time. There is just something about sharing hard times that allows you to build connections with people.

• Most of all, I feel that this class has provided me a great support system. I felt better knowing that other teachers understood what I was experiencing as a first-year teacher. I felt so confident knowing that, when I was struggling, I had a group of people who could offer me their expert advice.

Category: Resources:

• I had trouble locating resources for activities to use in the classroom that covered the specific objectives that I needed to cover. This class, though, has provided me with many options when looking for resources.

• I like the idea of using PowerPoint presentations for games and instruction.

Category: Importance of documentation:

• I did not understand the importance of documentation until this class. This is something that I will take with me throughout my career. I have even enjoyed getting my PDAS notebook together and plan to keep one for my own use (regardless of whether my district or school requires it) in the future.

Category: Camaraderie with peers:

• Teaching is a very challenging job, and it is rewarding to see others face the same kinds of problems that I deal with.

• The rapport with the fellow classmates always remained upbeat and enjoyable.

Discussion

The results indicated there are distinct differences in what teachers need and value based on whether they have completed a traditional undergraduate field-based program or an alternative certification program. An initial needs assessment indicated differences upon entry into the program and at the end of the induction year. For example, at the beginning of the year, alternative certification teachers did not know about curriculum, lesson planning, classroom management, or how to work with students; while traditionally certified teachers were concerned about differentiating instruction and meeting individual student needs. At the end of the year, alternative certification teachers had learned about the lesson cycle, classroom management, teacher certification exam, and many voiced dissatisfaction with the program and reflective process.

However, traditionally certified teachers appreciated camaraderie with peers and the process of becoming a reflective practitioner.

These views indicate differences in perceptions of professional responsibility. Comments made by several alternative certification teachers indicated that they saw reflection and sharing as a waste of time. This lack of valuing of camaraderie and reflection indicate that they may not become reflective practitioners (Schon, 1983). When one focuses only on practical application activities and simplistic behavior/classroom management techniques without the critical knowledge on which to base professional decisions, the result is "cookbook" teaching whereby teachers reify basals and commercially produced programs (Wenger, 1999). These teachers abdicate decision making to "experts" who create educational materials and take little to no responsibility for student learning. Rather than seeking to differentiate, blame is placed on students.

Further shifts in responsibility were noted in results under the alternative certification teachers' classroom and behavior management category. Results indicated that these alternative certification teachers were interested in getting through the day and getting students to comply. When behavior management techniques did not work, teachers shifted the responsibility to school administrators. This scenario may be why teachers who enter the classroom fully certified tend to be more successful, receive higher evaluations from supervisors and have students who achieve at a higher level (Ashton & Crocker, 1986; Evertson, Hawley, & Zlotnik, 1985; Greenberg, 1983; Haberman, 1984; Olsen, 1985).

When one considers that a teacher's view of self-efficacy forms early in the career and is difficult to change, it becomes critical to develop teacher's knowledge and skills early on (Darling-Hammond, 2002). In the above results, alternative certification teachers were exposed to an enormous breadth of information which resulted in a struggle to survive professionally. This type of struggle often results in stress and low self efficacy which can be detrimental to teachers and students. Needle, Griffin, and Svendson (1981) noted, "When the demands of teaching exceed the ability of the worker to cope, stress results" (p. 180). Struggles and stresses experienced by these alternative certification teachers could be reduced with proper training before entering the classroom (Freytag, 2002).

Stress inducers for alternative certification teachers included ignorance of curriculum, teaching strategies, classroom management techniques, and how to cope with student needs at the beginning of the year. This ignorance increased the already-existing teacher anxiety. As noted by Coates and Thoreson (1976), teacher anxiety can lead to student disruptive behavior, student anxiety, and a cycle of teacher reinforcement of the behavior problems that they are trying to manage. As noted

in the results, classroom and behavior management were still issues at the end of the first year for the alternative certification teachers.

In comparison, although behavior/classroom management was a concern for induction teachers at the beginning of the course, it did not emerge as a category at the end of the year. The induction teachers appeared to have a reflective framework in place based on what research has found to be most effective. They had also had a year of consistently mentored practice during which they implemented appropriate techniques as part of their field-based teacher preparation experience. Thus, they could focus on student learning. The alternative certification teachers, in contrast, had to discover how to teach as they went along, drawing from their own limited experiences. Comments at the beginning of the semester, such as, "What are the TEKS?" (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) should raise concern about what students are being taught since the TEKS are the state-mandated curriculum and the basis for the educational accountability system. Overall, the lack of pre-professional preparation of alternative certification teachers results in minimal change in educational practice and perpetuates an ongoing negative cycle for which "traditional" teacher education programs are blamed.

The findings of this study are also consistent with research on principals and their capacity-building strategies for beginning teachers (Ovando & Trube, 2000). The traditionally certified teachers were perceived by principals to have greater capacities than did alternatively certified teachers in their second year of teaching. The principals spoke highly of the field-based experiences of the traditionally trained teachers. They noted that traditionally certified teachers had more experience with school culture and were better able to prepare lesson plans, use curriculum guides, select and order classroom materials, and manage their time and schedules than their alternatively certified counterparts.

Conclusion

The short-term political solution of alternatively certifying teachers is costly and exacerbates the long-term problem. Putting well-meaning people into classrooms with minimal training and supervision is like allowing someone with a bachelor's degree in literature to practice medicine as long as they take a three hour seminar each week, have a mentor down the hall, and have a supervisor visit them once a month. Trusting medical care to someone with similar credentials and professional development is unthinkable, yet we trust the futures of many inner city children to just such people.

A better short-term solution would be to create true mentoring part-

nerships among university faculty, public school master teachers, and alternative certification teachers similar to the mentoring configuration of the best field-based teacher education programs. This would mean pairing an alternative certification teacher with a master teacher to team-teach a large group of children in the same classroom. With this model a mentoring master teacher would always be present to make certain that the best learning situation was in place in the classroom.

The problems presented by teacher attrition, lack of job satisfaction, lack of experienced teachers in low SES inner-city areas, admittance of people to the field who may not become reflective professionals, and high-stakes accountability may seem insurmountable. However, a complex problem requires vision and a long-term plan that is not subject to political whims. Thus, we suggest finding young bright children with an aptitude for teaching in low SES inner city neighborhoods and providing mentors for them throughout their public school careers. When they graduate from high school, a screening device and interview process could be used to determine which candidates have the characteristics of an effective teacher. For those who show promise, a cost-free undergraduate university degree in teacher education could be provided to these preservice teachers, who, at the same time, would work in their own inner-city public schools as tutors. This would help them see education through the eyes of a teacher, rather than the eyes of a student, while preparing them to teach in locations that are considered problematic. Once they are college graduates and certified teachers, this new teaching force would be committed to their community and would provide excellent professional role models for generations to come.

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