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# Administrators' Beliefs Regarding the Effectiveness of Alternatively Certified Teachers

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ADMINISTRATORS' BELIEFS REGARDING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED TEACHERS

By

JACK D. ARRINGTON

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

This study examined the beliefs held by school administrators regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP). The study sought to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with eight public school administrators, four from the middle school level and four from the high school level, in an eastern Georgia county. The interview questions were developed using the categories of evaluation outlined in the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument. A demographic questionnaire was also given to enrich the data in this study.

This study generated data from eight administrators regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the areas of providing instruction, assessing and encouraging student progress, and managing the learning environment. Data were transcribed, organized, and analyzed into emerging patterns and themes to produce the written research.

Study results indicated that administrators believed alternatively certified teachers were strong in content knowledge, student engagement, and use of time. Additionally, they found that alternatively certified teachers brought valuable life experiences to

education. All the participants in this study said that they felt confident in the work of the alternatively certified teachers who they currently employed. The weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers most often identified in this study were a lack of instructional strategies, using assessment to guide instruction, and adjusting to the rigors of teaching. Of the three most glaring weaknesses, only the adjustment to teaching was found to be more of a problem for alternatively certified teachers than traditionally certified teachers. The overall perception of administrators in this study is that success in the classroom is not a function of certification, but a function of individual characteristics.

**INDEX WORDS:** Teacher effectiveness, Alternatively certified teachers, Georgia Teachers Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to several people who have been instrumental in supporting me through my life and the completion of this project. First, I would like to thank God for giving me the opportunities I have had in my life and leading me to where I am today. I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Betty M. Cox and the late Jack Arrington, who have been instrumental in providing me with the opportunities that have made me who I am.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States is ever-changing, and many needs arise within the field that must be resolved in order to equip the unique educational system to which citizens of this country have become accustomed. One such need has been a large number of open teaching positions due in part to high teacher attrition, the coming of retirement age of the “baby-boomer” generation, and the “highly qualified” component of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001.

Horn, Sanders, and Wright (1995) demonstrated that, within grade levels, the single most dominant factor affecting student academic gain is teacher effect. Darling-Hammond (1999), in conjunction with the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, found that teacher quality variables appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than class sizes, overall spending levels, teacher salaries, or such factors as the statewide proportion of staff who are teachers. Many states and universities throughout the United States have offered alternative routes to teacher certification to meet the demands of teacher shortages and the highly qualified component of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2001). There has been substantial discussion debating the effectiveness of teachers prepared by these alternative methods compared to teachers prepared through traditional four-year university programs. While there has been substantial research regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers, there is a lack of in-depth studies to examine the beliefs that administrators in Georgia hold in regard to the effectiveness of these teachers prepared through the Georgia Teacher

Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (formerly called the Georgia Teacher Preparation Program).

### Background of the Literature

In the early part of the nineteenth century, there were few, if any, requirements for entry into the teaching profession. A teacher might have had to pass a local test of morality or even a test of general knowledge (Ravitch, 2003). Pennsylvania, in 1834, became the first state to require teachers to pass a subject matter test. By 1867, most states fell in line by also requiring such tests for state licensure. These tests were locally prepared and varied greatly in breadth of knowledge tested and design (Ravitch, 2003).

By the turn of the century, many pedagogical departments in colleges and universities evolved into departments of undergraduate and graduate schools of education. Before long, the departments began to develop specializations within the schools. Ravitch (2003) stated,

After about 1915, most school reform activities were led by educationalists, and the participation of subject-matter professors and college presidents diminished. Teacher certification eventually came to be identified with the completion of teacher education programs rather than with the receipt of local certificates or the passing of subject-matter examinations. (p. 1)

Since this time, little has changed in the realm of traditional teacher training. Colleges and universities require students being prepared for the teaching field to focus on pedagogy courses with little emphasis on subject matter preparation, especially in early and middle grades education.

According to the University of Georgia Bulletin (n.d.), current education major programs require similar types of classes: core, subject matter, and pedagogy. Core classes are classes deemed by the state or university as basic knowledge in a wide range of subjects that every student who graduates with a four-year degree in teacher education must take. Pedagogy classes are education classes in which the intent is to hone the teaching skills of the student. Fewer subject matter courses have traditionally been required for elementary and middle grades degrees; whereas, more subject matter courses are required of secondary education majors.

It is difficult to define alternative certification, because there is such variance across the states and programs. In general, it is a means by which people of varying backgrounds who do not possess an educational degree can enter teaching. These programs include university-based programs, emergency certification, and local and state created programs of varying requirements. The purpose of the programs has been to encourage people with non-education bachelor's degrees to enter into teaching to alleviate the teacher shortage problem in the United States. Some of these means lead to renewable, permanent certification, and some were permanent alternative certification routes of entry (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

According to the National Center for Alternative Certification (2007), all 50 states and the District of Columbia had implemented some form of alternative certification as of 2007. New Jersey was the first state to begin an alternative certification program in 1984. Texas quickly followed suit with its own program in 1985. Many teachers today have achieved non-traditional entry into education through an alternative certification program. According to Georgia's Professional Standards Commission, "NCLB requires each state



to develop a plan to ensure that all teachers are ‘highly qualified’ no later than the end of the 2005-2006 school year. In general, a ‘highly qualified teacher’ is a teacher with full certification, a bachelor's degree, and demonstrated competence in subject knowledge and teaching skills” (Georgia Title-II Part A).

While there seems to be little information comparing the effectiveness of traditionally certified teachers and alternatively certified teachers in Georgia, there are studies concerning these two populations throughout the United States. Nakai and Turley (2003) surveyed 140 students who completed traditional coursework but skipped their student teaching experience. They found that methods courses were highly valued by beginning teachers and that field experiences were vital to early teacher success.

Pedagogy coursework is what Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) attributed to be the reason why certified teachers feel better prepared than noncertified teachers in their early teaching years. Brewer (2003) agreed with the previous study saying that traditionally certified teachers are better prepared and have lower attrition rates than alternatively certified teachers. Analyzing 24 research studies, Qu and Becker (2003) came to the conclusion that traditional teacher training is at least as effective as alternative training. Baines (2006) took it a step further saying, “Because these programs [alternative programs] vary so extremely in their requirements, they cannot be producing highly qualified teachers.” Starko (2002) made an interesting comparison saying, “sending individuals out to teach with content knowledge only is somewhat akin to sending prospective nurses into the hospital after a series of courses in biology but without any clinical preparation.”

Most of the subject specific studies evaluating the two populations, traditionally prepared and alternatively certified teachers, came to the conclusion that there are not many differences between the two. Goldhaber and Brewer (1999) found that teachers with traditional certification in math have a positive impact on student test scores and alternatively certified teachers did not. In all other subjects they tested, there were no differences between the two. This led the two researchers to conclude that state licensure policies did not have much impact on student outcomes. Wilson, Floden and Ferrini-Mundy (2002) found very similar data in subject specific testing. Again, certified math teachers had a positive impact and noncertified teachers in math did not. These researchers added that there is too little research on policies that improve the quality of pre-service teacher education to make generalizations and that more research needs to be done on modern alternative certification programs.

Tissington and Grow (2007) validated the need for alternative programs, but said that these programs must be of high quality and must train teachers in a time-effective manner. Both Laraway (2003) and Suell and Piotrowski (2006) studied beginning teachers in Florida. Both studies used performance evaluations to determine teacher effectiveness in the first year of teaching. Their conclusions were almost identical, that there was no significant difference between the two groups in effectiveness or performance evaluations. Another study of twenty-nine New York City elementary school teaching fellows showed that new alternatively certified teachers feel competent to work on issues regarding student learning (Malow-Irloff, O'Connor, & Bisland, 2004).

Teacher effectiveness has been a very important part of educational debate. One way of measuring teacher effectiveness has been through teacher observations

traditionally performed as part of an administrator's duties. Most administrators have utilized a uniform observational instrument for teacher evaluations. These have traditionally been locally produced by a system to meet its observational needs.

Duke and Stiggins (1986) identified in an article, *Teacher Evaluation: Five Keys to Growth*, that there were six important attributes of teachers. These included instructional competence, personal expectations, openness to suggestions, orientation to change, subject knowledge, and experience. Danielson and McGreal (2000) gave four domains in teacher professional practice: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Another instrument used by the West Virginia Board of Education (2004) assessed teachers on programs of study, classroom climate, instructional management systems, student progress, communication, professional work habits, and technology standards. Somerton School District in Arizona (2003) used an instrument with the following categories: planning, delivery of instruction, and classroom management. Some teacher observation instruments, such as the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) (2001), evaluate a teacher in the areas of providing instruction, assessing and encouraging student progress, and managing the learning environment. In a study of 242 principals in secondary schools, Torff and Sessions (2005) found that principals perceived lesson implementation, rapport with students, classroom management, and lesson planning as the most frequently observed deficiencies of teacher ineffectiveness.

A school principal usually has a large role, if not the sole responsibility, for hiring new teachers within his/her building. The beliefs that these principals bring to the table potentially could mean the difference between the hiring of one individual preferentially

over another. Several recent studies have shed some light on the perceptions and beliefs of educational administrators in regard to teacher preparation.

Wagmeister (2006), in a qualitative study, interviewed nineteen school staff members, administrators and teachers, and found that traditionally certified teachers had better pedagogy, understanding of procedures, and time management. Shea (2006) took a different perspective by interviewing mentors of new teachers and found that they had more favorable perceptions of traditionally certified teachers than alternatively certified teachers. Taking it one step farther, Bowen (2004) found that principals in Texas would more readily employ traditionally certified teachers over their alternatively certified counterparts.

The literature was not completely one-sided though. Harvey (2005) reported that although alternatively certified teachers rated lower in pedagogical knowledge compared to traditionally certified teachers, there was no significant difference in performance evaluations between the two groups. In a survey of 22 principals in Florida, Torres (2006) found not only that alternative certification programs are producing highly qualified teachers, but also that alternatively certified teachers' performance is equal to if not better than that of traditionally certified teachers.

The Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) was initiated in 2001 to meet the need for certified teachers in the classroom. Persons who held four-year degrees and who could secure a teaching job from a school system were able to enter the GaTAPP program. According to the GaTAPP 06-08 Candidate Handbook (n.d.), the duration of the program was two years, ending with a fully renewable teaching certificate. The GaTAPP program required evidence in both content

knowledge and pedagogy. Teachers began teaching immediately and took the pedagogy classes within the first year of the program. Content knowledge was assessed based on Praxis II test results (National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996). The handbook also informed that the second year of the TAPP program required an internship period for the teachers. During this time, teachers were to hone their skills in teaching in preparation for full certification at the end of the second year.

So where does that leave the state of alternative certification? Through GaKLTAPP, prospective teachers must secure a job offer in order to be admitted to the training. If the perception of school administrators is that teachers entering education via this means are less effective, then the program of alternative certification in Georgia is potentially working against itself. If there is no difference in perception of effectiveness, then this could remain a viable source for teacher entry. Since administrators are the "gatekeepers" of GaTAPP entry, it becomes important to understand the perceptions of this group. So, what are the beliefs of school administrators in Georgia regarding teacher effectiveness?

#### Statement of the Problem

Traditional teacher certification has been in existence for over a century. Prospective teachers in a traditional framework graduate from a college or university with a four-year degree in education. Alternative certification is another means of entry brought on by teacher shortages and expanded by NCLB. These teacher candidates possess a four-year degree, but not in an educational field. A majority of teachers still enter teaching through traditional means, but alternatively certified teachers are filling vacancies across the United States, especially in critical needs areas. The two groups of

teachers in Georgia are evaluated the same way with the GTOI instrument in the areas of providing instruction, assessing and encouraging student progress, and managing the learning environment.

The literature is split regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in comparison to their traditionally certified counterparts. Some studies identify one group as more effective, but usually only in one particular area. Most of the literature sides with the higher effectiveness of the traditionally prepared group, but there are a few studies that found no significant differences between the two groups. This debate is no different in Georgia. Alternative certification through the GaTAPP program has been in existence for nine years, and many people in education have formed beliefs about not only the program itself, but the teachers who are part of the program.

Some of the most important beliefs are those held by educational administrators. Many times administrators are the ones hiring teachers to fill teaching vacancies. People trying to enter teaching through the GaTAPP program must win the approval of this population before even being allowed to train through the GaTAPP. The purpose of this study was to understand the beliefs of administrators about the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers (certified through GaTAPP).

### Research Questions

Through this study, the researcher attempted to gain a better understanding of administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI). The following sub-questions guided the research:

- 1) According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?
- 2) According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?

### Significance of the Study

Alternatively certified teachers have recently filled a niche in education. The "highly qualified" mandate of No Child Left Behind has left many school systems wanting in certain teaching areas, especially in that of special education, math, and science. Prospective teachers wanting to enter education through Georgia's TAPP must secure a job from a school system before they are allowed to enter the GaTAPP. These teachers have had to compete with traditionally certified teachers.

School administrators have traditionally had either part or sole responsibility of hiring new teachers. It is imperative they have all of the information regarding prospective teachers and the educational backgrounds of the applicants. If there is a difference in effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through the Georgia TAPP, hiring persons or bodies should be made aware of such differences.

Local hiring policies vary across the country. Some counties welcome alternative applicants, whereas others do not even consider nontraditional applicants. Alternative education programs also vary tremendously in time duration, course requirements, and ease of entry. Education may be well served if it is found that alternatively certified teachers are just as effective as those who are traditionally certified. Conversely, if it is

found that they are not effective, then alternative programs may not only be unnecessary, but also detrimental to education.

Participants of this study gained valuable insight as to their own perceptions about education and their perceptions about the educational backgrounds of their current and prospective staff. They learned about personal biases and tendencies toward teachers of different backgrounds. This knowledge will be useful not only in hiring new teachers, but also in interactions between the administrators and current teachers.

#### Autobiographical Background

This research had personal significance to the researcher. He felt very strongly toward this topic and study. The researcher began teaching as an alternatively certified teacher in the inaugural year of Georgia's TAPP. The researcher truly believed in the value of alternative certification and has seen its benefits firsthand. The researcher also believed that there are negative opinions of the program that persist in education, especially in the eyes of traditionally certified teachers and some administrators. This researcher was not so narrowly influenced as to think that all alternatively certified teachers were effective; however, the researcher also believed that many traditionally certified teachers were also ineffective.

The researcher has immensely enjoyed teaching the past nine years and has been wholeheartedly satisfied with his decision to enter the profession. The researcher has seen the positive impact that alternatively certified teachers have provided to education and believes that this population is an important resource for systems to fill job vacancies, especially in the critical needs areas of science and mathematics. The researcher intended



to shed some light on the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through the eyes of administrators.

## Procedures

### *Research Design*

Given the constructivist nature of the study being conducted, a qualitative approach was used to explore the research questions. Research had established the differences or lack of differences between two populations of teachers, those of traditional entry into education and those with alternative entry. The role of school administrators in the evaluation of newly hired teachers was also evident in the literature. This information begged for a deeper understanding of the experiences of school administrators regarding teacher effectiveness; therefore, a qualitative approach was utilized. The use of a qualitative design to understand the experiences of participants in order to develop themes in the data was supported by Creswell (2003). In particular, the researcher utilized a case study design in gathering interview data.

### *Sample*

The researcher secured permission from the school district from which the participants were selected. The participants of this study were eight full-time Georgia public school administrators from an eastern, middle Georgia county who had experience observing GaTAPP teachers. The administrators had at least three years in administrative experience. Three administrators were selected from both middle and high school settings. Purposive sampling was utilized so that knowledgeable administrators were selected to enrich the data. The administrators were mailed interview solicitation letters. Each letter had an interview acceptance letter for the participants to acknowledge their

willingness to participate in the study. Participants mailed the letters back to the researcher in pre-stamped self-addressed envelopes. The researcher then followed up with the respective interviews of the first four responders from each level.

### *Instrumentation*

The researcher was the key instrument in the study. The role of the researcher in the study was as learner along with the participants (Glesne, 2006). An interview protocol that utilized open-ended questions to deeply explore the research questions in the study was used. The interview questions were guided by the categories in the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument. The researcher created a demographic questionnaire to assess the amount of experience the administrators had with alternatively certified teachers and collected some biographical data for further analyses. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding sex of participant, years of experience, entry mode into education, school setting, school population, number of GaTAPP teachers he/she evaluates, number of traditionally certified teachers he/she evaluates, and highest completed degree of education. The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the interview. A pilot study was conducted involving two administrators to assess content validity of the interview questions and presentation.

### *Data Collection*

This study consisted of qualitative interviews in order to understand the experiences of school administrators in regard to the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers. Patton (1990) suggested that interviews “yield in-depth responses about peoples’ experiences, perceptions, feelings, and knowledge.”

Lofland and Lofland (1984) recommended taking notes so that more comprehensive field notes may be developed later. They also recommended that this occur as soon after the interview as possible. In addition to field notes, researchers may use photographs, videotapes, and audio tapes as means of accurately capturing a setting. For this study, interviews were audio-recorded by the researcher. In addition, the researcher took notes during the interview process so that the interview could run smoothly and wrote more extensive notes immediately after each interview session.

### *Data Analysis*

The audio-taped interviews were transcribed and organized into themes by the researcher. The data were organized categorically and chronologically, reviewed repeatedly, and continually transcribed. They were organized into themes as described by Creswell (2003). The themes were analyzed for a deeper understanding of the beliefs of administrators. A summary of the data and conclusions were presented to the administrators who requested it.

### Delimitations

The study was delimited to eight Georgia school administrators who were experienced in evaluating alternatively certified (GaTAPP) teachers. The study's participants were confined to public schools in an eastern, middle Georgia county, and may not be subject to generalization.

### Limitations

Responses to interview questions from school administrators were based on personal perspective which may lend themselves to biased responses. This study was qualitative in nature and not subject to generalization.

## Definition of Terms

Alternatively certified teachers: Alternatively certified teachers are teachers who have not completed a traditional teacher preparatory program or received a four-year degree in education.

Traditionally certified teachers: Traditionally certified teachers are teachers who have completed a traditional teacher preparatory program and received a four-year degree in education.

Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP): The GaTAPP is a program that was instituted in Georgia in 2001 so that people with four-year degrees may enter the teaching profession as long as they can obtain a job commitment at a school. The program is one to two years in duration involving courses in both content and pedagogy.

Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI): The GTOI is the instrument used by school administrators in Georgia to evaluate the performance or effectiveness of teachers.

Teacher effectiveness: Teacher effectiveness in this study was defined as a teacher's performance on the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) as rated by his/her respective administrator.

## Chapter Summary

Alternative certification routes into education are in effect in most states, but the effectiveness of these teachers compared to traditional teachers remains a very controversial topic in education. Much less studied are the beliefs of administrators in regard to the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the Georgia Teacher

Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP). Since administrators play a vital role in the hiring and support of new teachers, it is important for all stakeholders to understand the beliefs and biases that exist in this relationship.

In order to better understand administrators' beliefs toward alternatively certified teachers, to address the sub-questions of this study, and to gain important information about the participants, a qualitative methodology was used. Administrators in the eastern, middle, Georgia County were solicited and the first responders were selected for the study. A questionnaire and interview were administered to the eight participants who were selected for the study. The eight participants consisted of four administrators from the middle school level and four administrators from the high school level.

Responses from the study participants from the interview were analyzed and organized into emerging themes. The descriptive data that were obtained from the questionnaire was collected and analyzed into patterns and themes based on the answers to the demographic and background information.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This chapter focused on a review of the literature that either directly or indirectly assisted in the understanding of the experiences and senses of effectiveness that administrators hold in regards to alternatively certified teachers in Georgia through the Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP). All states in the United States and the District of Columbia have implemented some form of alternative certification for teachers in order to meet the demands of increasing teacher shortages and the stringent qualifications of No Child Left Behind (2001). With this widespread educational entry, it became extremely important for principals, who are the instructional and educational leaders of their schools, to have a good understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and general effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers. With this in mind, this chapter explored the following topics: background of alternative certification in the United States and in Georgia, key positions in the argument regarding alternative certification, strengths and weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers, and principals' perceptions of alternatively certified teachers

#### Background of Alternative Certification in the United States

The first part of the nineteenth century was characterized by very few requirements for entry into teaching (Ravitch, 2003). New teachers were often subject to moral character evaluations and maybe a test of teachers' general knowledge. In 1834, Pennsylvania was the first state to require new teachers to pass a test involving reading, writing, and arithmetic. Twenty-five years later most were requiring that teachers pass a

more complete test of basic academic knowledge. Some states, such as New York, began to implement their own teacher development programs. By the late nineteenth century, teaching preparation programs were very diverse by state and locale. Teacher College, which was a division of Columbia University, was created for teacher training at the end of the nineteenth century.

The twentieth century was a time of great strides in teacher development. University teacher education departments developed and even specialized into subspecialties such as educational administration, educational psychology, educational sociology, and curriculum. Those in the teaching realm sought to make it a profession with its own specific development programs and its own unique language. The new leaders in teacher training believed that pedagogy was of primary importance. Pedagogical training expanded dramatically at the university level. Eventually this led to the relation of teacher certification and the completion of a teacher education program at the college level as opposed to subject matter tests at the local level.

Little changed in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century in regard to teacher education. Teacher education continued to be primarily a function of university training leading to teacher certification. The 1980s brought about an increased awareness that universities were not preparing enough teachers to fill teaching vacancies in the United States, and a question whether these teachers were adequately prepared to meet the needs of the students. The study that was responsible for the upheaval and questioning of our educational system as a whole was *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). One of its critical findings said, “The Commission found that not enough of the academically able students were being attracted

to teaching; that teacher preparation programs needed substantial improvement; that the professional working life of teachers was on the whole unacceptable; and that a serious shortage of teachers existed in key fields.” (p. 1). This caused quite a disturbance in education, and caused not only educators to question the field, but, more importantly, the public to question education. This drove states to look at and develop other ways to become a teacher. These all became known as alternative certification. Some states began to implement the use of alternative entry into education and emergency certificates to persons wishing to enter the field. New Jersey became the first state to implement a complete alternative certification programs for teachers. This program, the Provisional Teacher Certificate Program, was implemented in 1985 and caused quite a stir in the educational world. Universities began to vehemently oppose not only the New Jersey program, but the whole belief that states could circumvent established university-based teacher education programs and offer their own programs toward state-wide certification. The media emphasized the proposed estimates of future teacher shortages and the debate between proponents of each type of certification.

At first, “alternative certification” meant any way a person might enter teaching other than through the traditional method of earning a pre-service four-year degree in education. This included emergency certificates, which granted people permission to begin teaching without any other requirements (Fideler & HaselKorn, 1999). This began to change in the 1990s into a more refined definition of the term in many states. Alternative certification, in most instances, no longer included entry means like emergency certificates; instead, it was characterized by entrants holding four-year



degrees, completing rigorous screening processes, field-based programs, coursework in content and pedagogy, and higher standards (NCAC, 2007).

Since 2000, alternative certification programs have exploded onto the educational scene. This is due in part by the passage of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 that mandated that every teacher be highly qualified by the 2005-2006 school year (2001). “Highly qualified” in most cases meant that a teacher must be certified in the field in which he/she taught. This mandate meant that many schools would have to reposition many teachers, hire more qualified teachers, and/or see that their “unqualified” teachers gain in-field certification by the deadline. This was especially critical in the areas of science, mathematics, foreign language, and special education. Many teachers of these subjects were not certified to teach in these areas, and there were fewer applicants for those positions who were properly qualified.

Some states had one uniform program for alternative entry, and other states had more than one method of entry with varied standards. California, New Jersey, and Texas had the oldest and most well-established alternative certification programs. These states certified as many as one-third of all teachers through this portal to education. In 2003, there were at least 144 alternative certification programs in the United States (Feistritzer & Chester). By 2007, all fifty states including the District of Columbia had alternative routes to teacher certification in place (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2007).

Statistics of the national scene painted a picture of a need for alternative entry. Even more telling were the Georgia statistics. According to the National Center for Educational Information (2005), there were 11,697 new teachers hired in Georgia for the

2004-2005 school year and approximately 2,281 (19.5%) came through alternative routes. The same database reported that in 2004 there were 10,929 new teachers hired. In that same year, there were only 4,459 people who completed an approved college teacher preparation program in Georgia. This leaves a shortfall of 6,470 available positions in Georgia's educational system if one excluded any other means of certification.

Over the past several decades, Georgia has seen significant student population growth. There remains a lack of traditionally certified teachers to fill vacancies in the critical needs areas of mathematics, science, foreign language, and special education. According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission's Overview of Georgia's Educator Workforce (2009), the student population grew by one percent in 2007, causing an even greater need for teachers in Georgia.

The Georgia Quality Based Education (QBE) Act opened a portal for entry into education by an alternative certification program. The Northwest Georgia Regional Educational Service Agency developed an alternative route that was used as a model for the rest of the state in for the 2001-2002 school year. This program, which became known as the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP), was a one to three year induction program for applicants who met a few criteria. The applicants must have earned a bachelor's degree from an Professional Standards Commission approved accredited university or college, passed the Praxis (or now known as the GACE Basic Skills Assessment—Georgia Assessment for Certification of Educators) or have exempted the GACE with high enough SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) scores, ACT (American College Test) scores, GRE (Graduate Records Exam) scores, or hold a Master's degree or higher, a major in the teaching field or passing score on the GACE

Content Assessment, passed a Georgia GCIC background check, and received a job offer from a school system in Georgia ("GaTAPP," 2009). The criteria were state mandated and a candidate could not enter the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy unless all criteria were met. Once the applicant met the criteria, he/she could apply for an Intern Certificate from Georgia's Professional Standards Commission. The candidate was assigned a Candidate Support Team (CST) that consisted of building level and system level staff to provide support for the candidate during the one to two year induction program ("Innovations in education," 2007).

#### Key Positions in the Argument Regarding Alternative Certification

The literature was quite extensive in regard to alternative certification. The debate between those who supported alternative means of entry into education and those who opposed alternative means of entry was still quite alive in the literature. Starko (2002) said that the country needed alternative routes that encouraged people outside the realm of education to teach. She added that induction programs must be of high quality and focus on both content and pedagogy. Qu and Becker (2003) said that some alternative route programs trained teachers who were equally as effective as traditional programs. One study of six first-year teachers in the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy indicated that the participants felt positively about the program, but the training lacked a "realistic depiction of a teacher's first year in the classroom" (Mallard, 2005, p. 3). A wide range of viewpoints and studies existed that offered opinions on aspects of alternative certification, but two main viewpoints predominated, advocates and opponents of alternative certification. Alternatively certified teachers have been called "warm body fill-ins" (Brewer, 2003, p. 9). Which viewpoint was most accurate in regard to

alternatively certified teachers, those of the proponents or those in opposition to alternative certification?

*Advocates of Alternative Certification*

The advocates of alternative certification were against strict regulations involving teacher entry. They, in general, were in favor of relaxing the strict guidelines that many states had for any means of entering the field of teaching. Ballou and Podgursky (1998) argued that raising barriers and restricting teacher certification programs discouraged older candidates with more practical life experience from entering the field of teaching. Hess (2001) challenged several assumptions that were commonly held by those in education: (1) that the training one received while becoming certified was so useful that uncertified people would not be able to perform adequately, (2) that certification weeded out unsuitable people and keeps them out of schools, and (3) that certification helped to make teaching more professional and thereby boosted its allure. Hess proposed the deregulation of alternative certification. Ruenzel (2002) believed both traditional certification and alternative certification were “torturous routes” of certification. He called for the deregulation of the whole system so that teaching was open to a wider variety of people.

The manifesto, *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them* (Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999) agreed with Hess. This document argued that there had been no evidence that the traditional way of preparing teachers increased teacher quality; therefore, the process should be deregulated, the portal widened, and the accountability for teacher effectiveness should reside in individuals at the local level. Hess (2001) agreed again saying that state licensure will become “moot” if accountability is

transitioned from the state to individuals at the local level or school. One author, Fraser (2001), argued that the public has lost confidence in the educational system and the traditional approach to teacher training. He said, “Let the schools and school districts hire whom they will, certify whom they will. Our role as teacher educators will be to provide programs with such clear and obvious value that the districts will hire our graduates in preference to other candidates” (2001, p. 56). Rod Paige’s report, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge*, said, “In sum, a model for tomorrow would be based on the best alternative route programs of today” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.19). Ballou and Podgursky (2000) and Hess (2001) agreed that by allowing or creating strict guidelines for teacher certification many candidates with strong subject matter knowledge and professional experience will not enter teaching. Roach and Cohen (2002) envisioned an ideal teacher preparation system as one that incorporated multiple routes of entry which were all based on clear standards. This type of system will, according to the authors, attract the best and highest qualified candidates.

Salyer (2003) found in a survey of 38 alternatively certified, novice teachers that the majority of these teachers entered teaching for positive reasons and that their life experiences positively impacted their ability to teach. However, they also reported that the induction programs for alternatively certified teachers were not sufficient in supporting them.

Two studies in Florida found similar results. Torres (2006) found in surveying twenty-two school principals that alternative certification program in Florida are producing highly qualified teachers whose overall performance is equal to or better than that of newly hired traditionally certified teachers. Suell and Piotrowski(2006) compared

recent graduates from traditional certification programs to alternatively certified teachers. The study found no significant difference between the two groups, alternatively and traditionally certified teachers, on any of the twelve Florida Educator Accomplished Practices areas. The findings corroborated the findings of Stone (2000) and Wayman, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, and Wilson (2003) who found that teachers trained via alternative routes have similar levels of competencies as teachers from traditional degree programs. In a study of alternatively certified teachers in New York, Malow-Iroff, O'Connor, and Bisland (2004) found that alternatively certified teachers through New York's teaching fellows program felt that they are competent to work on issues regarding student learning and instruction. Finally, Goldhaber and Brewer (1999) conducted a multiple regression study and found that, overall, there is not a strong relationship between state certification and policies and student outcomes. They went on to say that there is little rigorous evidence to support that student achievement is related to teacher certification. Agreeing with the previous study, Constantine, Player, Silva, Hallgren, Grider, and Deke (2009) studied sixty-three schools with alternatively certified teachers. They found that there was no significant difference between the alternatively certified and the traditionally certified teachers in student performance. Furthermore, they concluded there was no evidence that greater levels of teacher training coursework were associated with the effectiveness of teachers.

### *Opponents of Alternative Certification*

Opponents to alternative certification had opinions that are well-documented in the literature. Some said that raising entry standards to the profession ensured a quality teaching force, which increased the respect of the teaching profession, and eventually

lead to higher status and salaries for teachers (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). Baines (2006), said that “Perhaps only after a generation of children have been schooled under the guidance of this new breed of teachers, (alternatively certified teachers), unencumbered by the rigors of coursework or the difficulties of field experiences, will the value of university-based teacher certification programs become apparent” (p.326). This regard for alternative certification was shared by many. Brewer (2003) said, “...don’t just provide professional entry to warm body fill-ins” (p.9). Berry (2001) added that most alternative programs are substandard and they try to prepare teachers too quickly; therefore, failing to produce qualified teachers. He added that it is the students who ultimately pay for this mistake. Some critics, such as Haberman (as cited in Stoddard and Floden, 1995), disagreed with the creation of a two-tiered educational entry system, one being a system with high standards (traditional system) and the other with no barriers and vague standards (alternative system). He added that alternative certification may be a valuable way to recruit needed teachers, but the standards of such a system should be high (as cited in Stoddard and Floden, 1995).

Adding to the opponents’ viewpoint is Wenglinsky (2000) who found that alternatively certified teachers were outperformed by their traditionally certified counterparts in terms of effectiveness. Several other studies shared this finding. Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow (2002) examined data from a 1998 survey of nearly 3,000 beginning teachers in New York City regarding their views of teacher preparation. They found that teachers who were traditionally certified felt significantly better prepared than those who entered teaching without traditional certification. Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005) did a regression analysis examining fourth and fifth

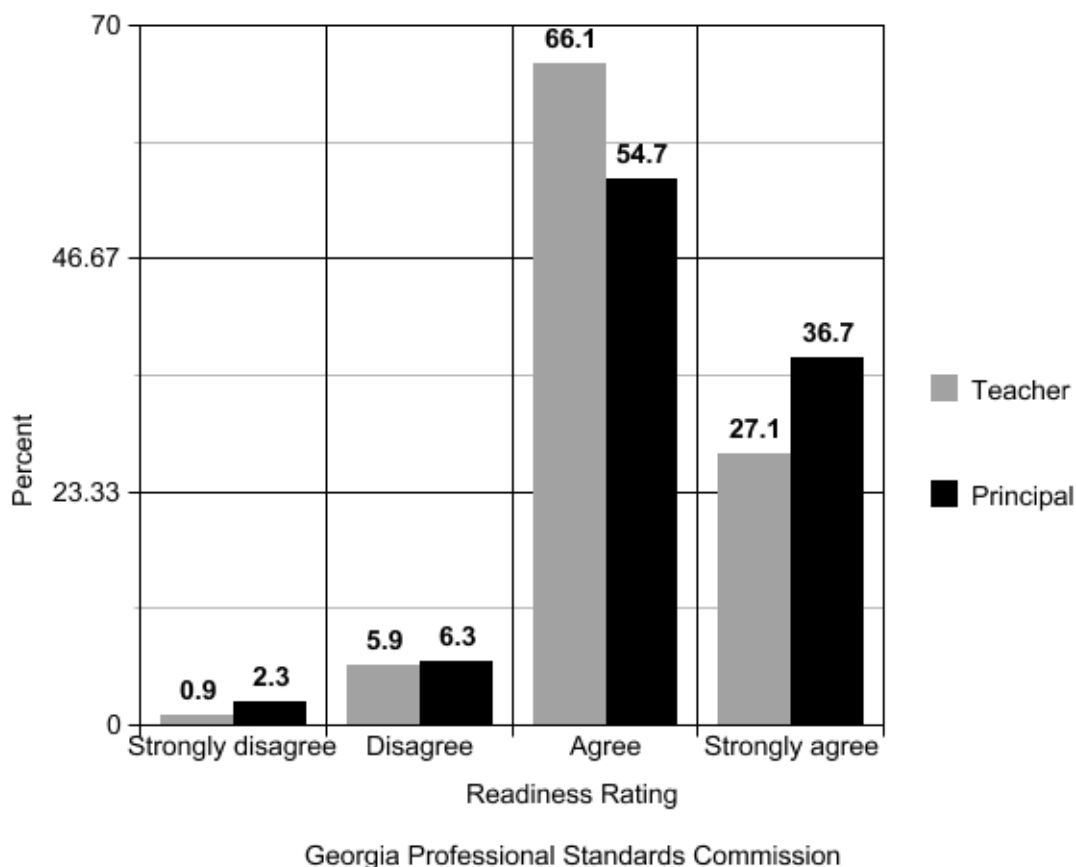
grade student achievement gains in reading and math over a six-year period. The findings were that traditionally certified teachers consistently produce stronger student achievement gains than do alternatively certified teachers. Strong opinions persisted in Shen's (1997) interpretation of his study in which he analyzed data from 14,721 public school teachers. From this data, he concluded that alternatively certified teachers had lower academic qualifications and alternative certification programs failed to recruit experienced personnel from other occupations.

#### Strengths and Weaknesses of Alternatively Certified Teachers

In order to understand strengths and weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers, it was necessary to understand strengths and weakness of beginning teachers in general. Polk (2006) identified ten characteristics of effective teachers: (1) good prior academic performance, (2) communication skills, (3) creativity, (4) professionalism, (5) pedagogical knowledge, (6) thorough and appropriate student evaluation and assessment, (7) self-development or lifelong learning, (8) personality, (9) talent or content knowledge, and (10) ability to model concepts. Polk described characteristics of art teachers, but many of the same are true of academic teachers as well. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission funded a study in 2002 of 986 beginning teachers in Georgia that yielded some eye-opening data. While the survey is not unique only to GaTAPP teachers, principals' opinions regarding the characteristics of beginning teachers were part of the study. Both teachers and principals were surveyed and were reported (2003). The teachers' self-evaluation of readiness and the principals' evaluation of the teachers' readiness were very similar, 93.2% and 91.4% respectively. The following graph

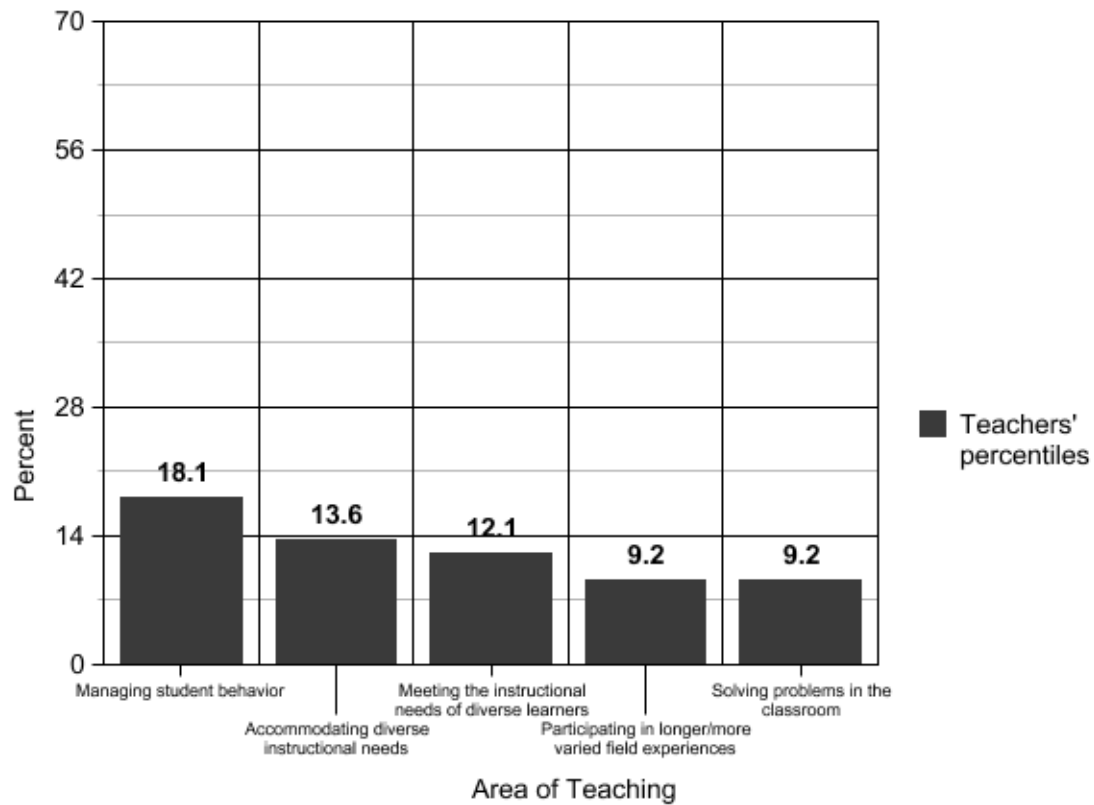


(Figure 1) represented both the teachers' and principals' rating of teacher classroom readiness.



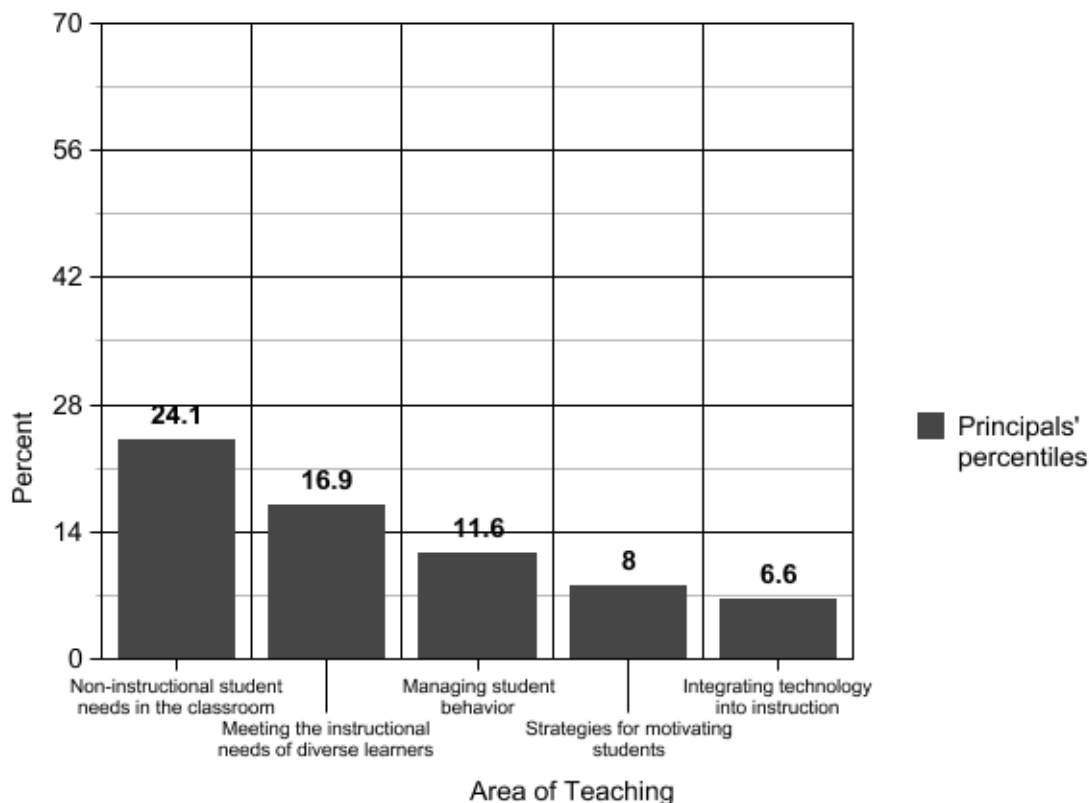
*Figure 1. Teachers' and Principals' Ratings of Teacher Classroom Readiness*

In general, both teachers and principals agreed that teachers in Georgia were ready for teaching. Teachers and principals were also asked in the survey in what areas that they felt like the beginning teachers were most prepared. This data for teachers' ratings and principals' ratings were represented on the following two graphs (Figures 2 and 3).



Georgia Professional Standards Commission

*Figure 2.* Top Five Areas Teachers Felt They Were Most Prepared



Georgia Professional Standards Commission

*Figure 3. Top Five Areas Principals Stated Beginning Teachers Were Best Prepared*

While many of the categories on the graphs are unexpected, most of the categories were not particularly high in percentages. The only one that stood out was that many beginning teachers were proficient at accommodating and dealing with diverse instructional needs in the classroom according to principals.

The following graphs (Figures 4 and 5) represented the top seven areas in which teachers and principals felt that beginning teachers needed additional preparation.

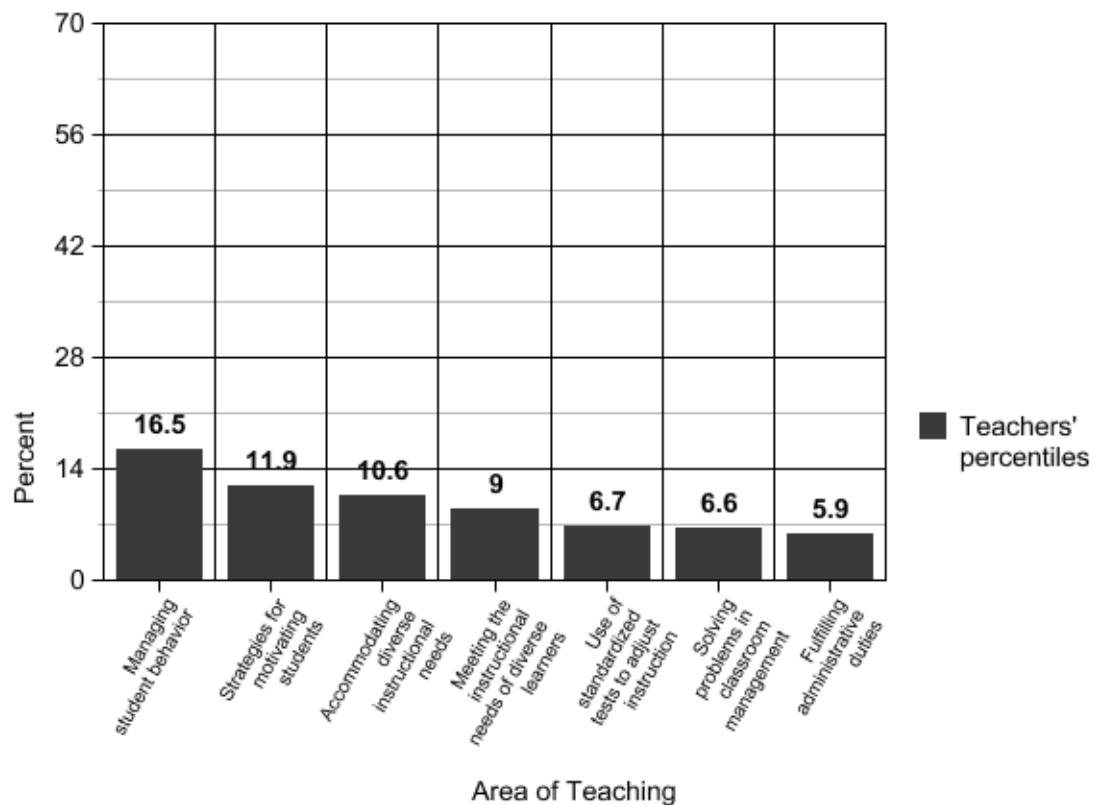
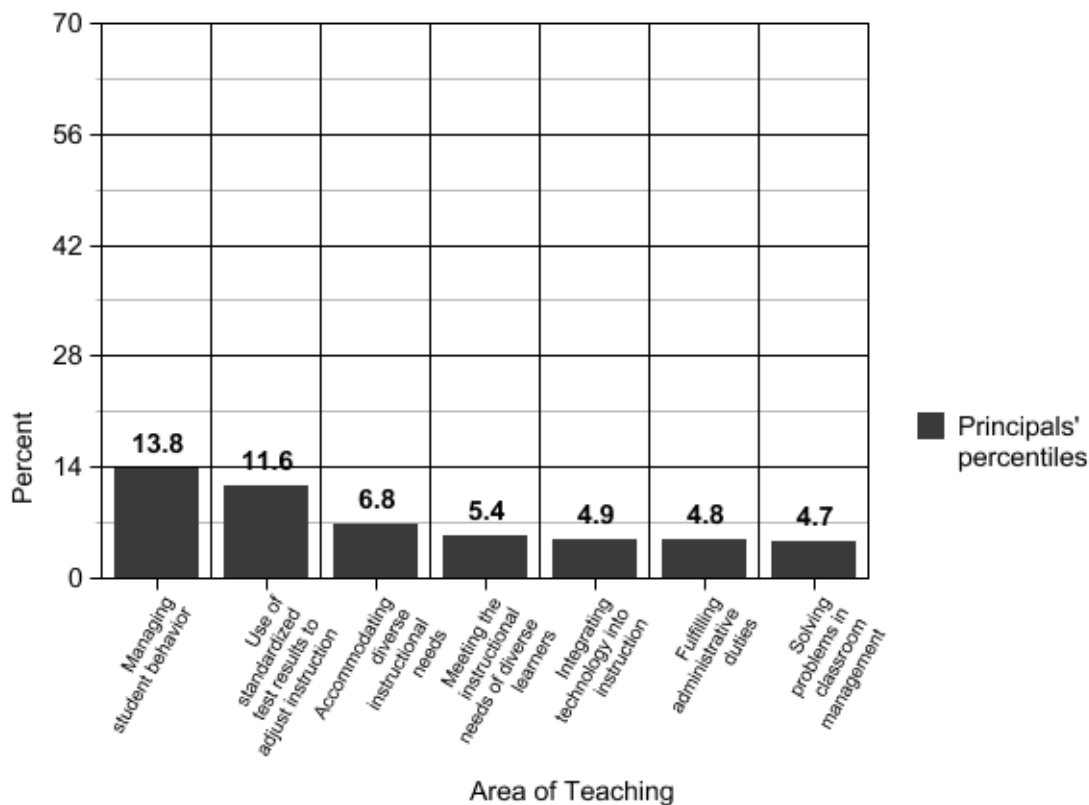


Figure 4. Top Seven Areas Teachers Stated They Needed More Preparation



Georgia Professional Standards Commission

*Figure 5. Top Seven Areas Principals Stated Beginning Teachers Were Least Prepared*

The skill reported by both teachers and principals that needed additional preparation was managing student behavior; however, some beginning teachers (18.1%) stated that managing student behavior as an area in which they felt most prepared. Overall, the study did point out that both teachers and principals felt that beginning teachers in Georgia were ready for the classroom.

#### *Studies that Found Alternatively Certified Teachers to Be As Effective*

Most of the studies in the literature compared alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers. Most of the literature concerning strengths of alternatively certified teachers pointed to the attributes of varied life experiences that this group brings

to the table. Young (1992), in a study of first-year teachers in California, said that alternatively certified teachers were more secure in their abilities than their traditional counterparts. Houston (1993) admitted that alternatively certified teachers have more problems after two months of service, but the differences between the two populations disappeared after the eighth month of service. This implied that in one year there were no significant differences between the two groups of teachers. With all of the available information regarding alternatively certified teachers, one would believe that the effectiveness of this group is well-understood.

A group of alternatively certified teachers in New York believed that they were competent in the areas of student learning and instruction (Malow-Iroff, O'Connor, & Bisland, 2004). A study that Torres completed in Florida showed alternatively certified teachers to be as effective in overall performance. Suell and Piotrowski (2006) agreed in all twelve of the domains that they tested. Another group compared the test scores, attitudes, and teaching performance of twenty-three alternatively certified teachers and twenty-three traditionally certified teachers in Georgia. They found the two groups to be similar in most areas, though traditionally certified teachers were more positive about the profession and said they would more likely to continue teaching than the alternative group (Guyton, Fox, & Sisk, 1991). Sharkey and Goldhaber (2008) found little difference in student scores between students taught by traditionally trained teachers and those taught by alternatively trained teachers.

#### *Studies that Found Alternatively Certified Teachers to Be Less Effective*

On the other side, were the studies that depicted quite a different picture in relation to teacher preparation, classroom readiness, and effectiveness. Novice teachers

without full training showed more ignorance about student needs and differences and about teaching basics than trained beginners (Darling-Hammond, 1992) (Rottenberg & Berliner, 1990). According to Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005), “It is clear that, across the board, Houston students have stronger achievement gains in both reading and mathematics when they were taught by standard certified teachers rather than uncertified teachers” (p.22). This study only examined fourth and fifth grade achievement. Finally, Nakai and Turley (2003) expressed that alternatively certified teachers did not always possess the attitudes and dispositions that make for successful teaching. Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002), in a study of 109 alternatively certified teachers and 109 traditionally certified teachers, found that students of the traditionally certified teachers outperformed students of the alternatively certified teachers by about two months on the grade level equivalency scale in reading, math, and language arts.

#### Principals’ Perceptions of Alternatively Certified Teachers

To gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers, one must consult the literature with respect to the opinions of school administrators. The literature regarding principals’ perceptions of the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers was fairly one-sided. A few sources said that there was no difference in effectiveness, while most principals reported that traditionally certified teachers were more effective or better prepared for teaching. Torff and Sessions (2005) conducted a survey of 242 principals in secondary schools concerning the perceived causes of teacher ineffectiveness for all teachers. According to the study, the most frequent deficiencies in teacher effectiveness are in the areas of lesson implementation,

rapport with students, classroom management, and lesson planning. A deficiency in content knowledge was the least perceived cause of general teacher ineffectiveness

Laraway (2003) completed a comparison of twenty-five alternatively certified teachers and thirty-two traditionally certified teachers and showed that there were no statistical differences between the two groups in teaching efficacy or performance evaluations. Finn (2009) found, in a survey study, that the perception among principals is that the two groups are equally effective in professionalism, resource development, developing and implementing lesson plans, differentiating instruction, and communication. Her data also supported the perceived ineffectiveness of both groups in the area of classroom management.

There seemed to be more studies reporting that traditionally trained teachers are more effective. Mahatha (2005) surveyed principals in New Orleans about the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the areas of content knowledge, classroom management, instructional planning, human relations skills, and professionalism. Her study results concluded that principals perceived that alternatively certified teachers are slightly less effective than traditionally trained teachers in all domains except human relations skills. Ovando and Trube (2000) surveyed 134 Texas principals and found that principals perceived traditionally certified teachers were better in instructional capacity than their alternatively certified counterparts. Birkeland and Peske (2004) suggested that the some of the studies that find principals were more critical of alternatively certified teachers might be due in part to the possibility that principals scrutinized this population of teachers more since they were not of traditional certification. Sasser (2007) evaluated principals' perceptions of alternatively certified



teachers in Texas in seven constructs: organizing instruction, academic achievement, student empowerment, classroom management, addressing diversity, professional development, and overall evaluation. Principals in the study perceived that the prior work of alternatively certified teachers did not impact teacher quality in any of the seven constructs except for overall evaluation. Bowen (2004) surveyed 131 principals in Texas to compare their perceptions of both alternatively and traditionally certified teachers in the areas of instruction, assessment, classroom management, and professional attitudes. Principals rated traditionally prepared teachers higher than alternatively prepared teachers in assessment, instruction, and classroom management. They also reported that they would continue to employ traditionally certified teachers over alternatively certified teachers. In a forty-question survey of 211 principals in Virginia, traditionally certified teachers were overwhelmingly supported as more effective (Nusbaum, 2002). Of the forty statements, thirty-eight were found to have a significant difference in favor of traditionally certified and only two statements showed no difference. The study further demonstrated that administrators overwhelmingly believed that alternatively certified teachers did not possess the requisite content knowledge to instruct in the classroom. And when they did come to the classroom with adequate knowledge, they did not have the skills to impart it to the students. The study relayed this significant message, "If teachers come to the classroom with an inadequate knowledge and ability base and are unable to perform the tasks of teaching in an effective manner, they place their students at risk of educational failure" (Nusbaum, 2002, p.122). In an earlier study, Jelmberg (1996) surveyed twenty-nine alternatively certified teachers and 107 traditionally certified

teachers in New Hampshire. He found that principals rated traditionally certified teachers significantly higher in instructional skills and instructional planning.

### Chapter Summary

The history of education in the United States has taken many twists and turns. Teachers were the instructional specialists responsible for the presentation of information. Most of the past century has been dominated, until recently, by one method of entry into the field of teaching, that of traditional entry. Traditional entry included having graduated from a post-secondary institution with a degree in education. The remarkable criticisms of education in the United States by the report, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), caused massive questioning of not only educational practices, but also teacher preparation. Eventual results of this upheaval were the mandates of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. This legislation called for all teachers to be “highly qualified” by the 2005-2006 school year. Many school systems had teachers teaching out-of-field due to teacher shortages. So there was a major push to attract people from other walks of life to enter teaching. These teachers could become “highly qualified” through alternative certification programs that gained popularity since the 1990s.

The Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (formerly Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program) was formed in 2001 to provide an alternative entry method for people with non-education Bachelor’s degrees. The program was one to two years in duration and included training in both content and pedagogy. The GaTAPP teacher would gain valuable experience while teaching and taking required courses in the

program. The program ended with the teacher applying for a fully renewable certificate at the end of the program.

There were extensive research and opinion articles regarding alternative certification. Proponents of alternative certification pointed out that all the potentially valuable life experiences that these candidates brought to teaching enriched the field and brought new experiences to student learning. They also mentioned that these teachers were filling valuable positions in critical needs areas and in schools with low socioeconomic populations.

Opponents of alternative certification contended that these teachers were missing the valuable coursework and experience in pedagogy that traditional preparation provided. They also warned against opening entry to teaching to anyone and that it might devalue the profession. Many sources gave examples of negligible preparation leading to certification.

The literature was again split regarding teaching attributes of the two groups. A few studies found no significant differences between alternatively and traditionally certified teachers. Several stated that if there were differences early in the first school year, they have disappeared by the end of the year. Opponents found very contrary results. They often found that traditionally prepared teachers outperform alternatively prepared teachers in most areas of teaching.

In general, the literature sided with opponents to alternative certification. Most administrators found that the traditionally prepared teachers rated higher on observations and in all areas on the observation instruments. Most administrators perceived that alternatively certified teachers were not as strong in teaching as the traditionally prepared

group. The proponents of alternative certification made good points in their studies. It seemed as though the question remained—Are alternatively certified teachers effective teachers? More specifically—Are alternatively certified teachers in the Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) effective in the eyes of administrators who are responsible for their evaluations?

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI). Additionally, this study examined the perceived strengths and weaknesses of alternatively certified GaTAPP teachers according to school administrators. This information was ascertained through interviews. Finally, this study gathered demographic information that described the characteristics of the participants. The demographic information was examined for any trends or variables that might relate to the participants' beliefs.

This chapter of the study contains both the procedures utilized to gather the data for the study and the methods utilized for the analysis of the information gained through the study. The chapter describes the following: (a) the research questions, (b) the methodological approach used in the study, (c) the sample and sampling procedures used for the study, (d) the instruments used in the study and the procedures used to determine the validity of those instruments, (e) the data collection and data analysis procedures, and (f) the precautions taken to ensure informed consent and the protection of the participants.

#### Research Questions

The overarching purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (TAPP) as measured

by the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI). The following sub-questions guided the research in order to fully examine the overarching question:

- 1) According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers as measured by the GTOI?
- 2) According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers as measured by the GTOI?

### Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach which included interviews of eight school administrators who had at least three years of experience evaluating alternatively certified teachers. A qualitative methodology in the case study tradition was used to gather in-depth information about the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of the participants through an interview format. Creswell (2003) defined a case study as an exploration of an “in depth program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals” (p. 15).

The case study format was used and was deemed most appropriate in order to fully understand the valuable knowledge gained through interviewing the participants about their experiences with alternatively certified teachers (Creswell, 2000). According to Thomas (2000), important features of qualitative data are their richness and holism, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide “thick descriptions” that are vivid, nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has strong impact on the reader. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to investigate the beliefs of administrators and explore unique characteristics of those beliefs in regards to alternatively certified teachers. This provided more information about the complex

attitudes and perceptions of administrators, those usually responsible for hiring new teachers, as to the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers, so that one may have a better understanding of these relationships.

### Population

The population for this study was school administrators from an eastern, middle Georgia county. The county was representative of Georgia, having a very diverse population both in ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The county had seventeen elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools, and served about 21,000 students in 2009. Some of the county's schools were in suburban settings, and some were much more rural.

### Sample

The specific sample or subset of the described population was eight school administrators who had at least three years experience as school administrators and who had the responsibility for evaluating teachers, including alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (TAPP). The group consisted of four middle school administrators and four high school administrators. The first four respondents to the invitation letter from each of the two school levels were selected for the interviews. The interview questions were derived from the main GTOI categories: provides instruction, assesses and encourages student progress, and manages the learning environment. These were used to obtain the interview information for this study.

## Instrumentation

The researcher was the main instrument in this research study. Glesne (2006) provided guidance for the role of the researcher in this study. As recommended by Glesne (2006), the researcher was a learner and learned from the participants in the study. The researcher actively listened to the participants and became aware of his appearance, speech, and behavior during the interview process as these could have affected the participants. One objective during the interview process was to make the participants feel at ease with the researcher so that they felt comfortable to respond both openly and honestly during the interviews. The researcher reviewed all aspects of proper interview procedures per Glesne (2006) before interviewing the participants.

The second instrument that was used is a self-made demographic questionnaire that provided the researcher with data that added to the richness of the study. The questionnaire consisted of questions regarding gender, years of experience, entry mode into education, school setting, school population, number of GaTAPP teachers he/she evaluates, number of traditionally certified teachers he/she evaluates, and highest completed degree of education. The data obtained from this questionnaire will assist the researcher in understanding answers to the research questions.

The third instrument was the set of interview questions used during the interviews. The interview questions consisted of open-ended questions posed to elicit information from the participants that contributed to the goal of this study, to examine administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP). The open-ended questions were designed to obtain open, honest feelings and to make the



participants feel at ease with the researcher during the interview process. The questions were derived from the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI).

### Data Collection

The researcher used a combination of sources to acquire the information relating to the research questions and provide demographic data to enrich the study. The sources for the information were the interview of eight administrators and a demographic questionnaire given preceding the interview. Patton (1990) described two strategies for data gathering in a qualitative methodology. They were in-depth, open-ended interviews, and written documents.

One of the strategies, in-depth, open-ended interviews, was utilized in this study. Specifically, the data consisted of transcribed interviews and notes taken by the researcher regarding the interviews. This information served to inform the researcher as to the beliefs, experiences, and perceptions that the participants hold about the effectiveness of the alternatively certified teachers at their respective schools.

The interview questions for this research study were based on the categories set forth in the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI). Those categories were as follows: provides instruction, assesses and encourages student progress, and manages the learning environment. Within each of these three categories there were sub-categories that further guided the research questions.

The data collected for this study was obtained from interviewing eight experienced school administrators who were currently responsible for the evaluation of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and

Pedagogy (GaTAPP). More specifically, the data came from four middle school administrators and four high school administrators.

Permission was obtained from the school district in which the study took place. Permission from the Dissertation Committee and the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board was secured before any research was initiated so that the privacy and safety was preserved regarding the participants. After the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board granted permission, a letter was mailed to all perspective participants outlining the study and requesting their permission to be included in the study. The letter included why the person was selected for the study, the anticipated length of the interview, how the results will be reported, and what the researcher will gain from the study (Creswell, 2003). The first four middle school administrators and the first four high school administrators with the responsibility of evaluating teachers, including GaTAPP teachers, who were willing and able to participate in the study, comprised the participants.

The selected participants for the study were guaranteed that their information was confidentially maintained and safeguards protected the identity of the participants throughout the study. The interview questions were assessed for face validity involving a pilot study by two administrators within the same county who were not selected as participants for the study. The two administrators consisted of administrators within the same school system as the participants who had experience evaluating alternatively certified teachers. The administrators examined the questionnaire and interview questions to determine their relevance to the study's research questions.

The pilot study administrators were asked to assess the documents on (a) relevance of the questions, (b) clarity of the questions, (c) length of time for the interview, and (d) the overall presentation of the interview materials. The feedback from this group allowed the researcher to alter the interview materials to ensure content validity. The documents were altered to provide for this aspect so that the appropriate information was gained by the interviews.

Participation by the selected administrators for the study was completely voluntary, and the participants could have chosen to discontinue their involvement in the study or interview at any time. Descriptive data obtained in the initial questionnaire allowed the researcher to build demographic profiles of the participants for analysis.

#### Data Analysis

Responses to interview questions regarding administrators' beliefs about the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed for common and recurring themes. Member check involved allowing the participants the opportunity to review interview transcripts before they were analyzed. Sullins (n.d.) described member check as a way of promoting the authenticity of data and giving participants a sense of ownership of the data. Completed transcripts were sent to participants for member check and adjustments were made based on their input. Ryan and Bernard (2000) have defined qualitative research themes as "abstract, often fuzzy, constructs which investigators identify before, during, and after data collection" (p. 1). The researcher took notes by hand on important points and information during the interview and was aware of nonverbal communicative signals from the participants leaving the possibility to explore unforeseen data that might arise during the interview.

Additionally, participants were informed that they might be contacted by the researcher to provide more information or clarity for the study.

A list of themes was developed by reviewing the information obtained from the interviews. Ryan and Bernard (2000) listed ten ways to identify themes in research. The two types that will be utilized in this study are word repetition and compare and contrast. The themes were consolidated into major themes based on frequency and analyzed across the data. Within-case and cross-case analyses were performed in order to increase the confidence in the findings (Yin, 2003). The within-case analysis examined the prevalence of data at the level of the participant. The cross-case analysis compared the prevalence of data from participant to participant. The findings for the interviews were compared to the demographic data. Once all data were analyzed, the researcher combined the results in order to provide the written research. A copy of the completed research findings were made available to the participants upon request.

#### Chapter Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine school administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP), which calls for a qualitative approach. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews involving eight experienced school administrators who were responsible for evaluating GaTAPP teachers. Interview questions were produced using the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI) as a guide. Data collected were transcribed and analyzed into common themes to generate further information for this study. Specific findings and data will be reported in the narrative in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP . Additionally, the study sought to identify strengths and weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP. Also, the study included a demographic questionnaire that was used to enrich the study by providing personal data of the participants, including school setting, sex, highest completed degree of the participant, years of experience of the participant, entry into education of the participant, number of alternatively certified teachers evaluated by the participant, and number of traditionally certified teachers evaluated by the participant. The overarching research question was as follows: What are administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers through Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument (GTOI)? The following sub-questions also guided the research:

- 1) According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?
- 2) According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?

Participants for the study included eight Georgia public school administrators from the eastern middle part of the state who had experience in evaluating alternatively certified

teachers. Four participants were from a middle school setting, and four were from a high school setting.

Chapter IV represents an overview of the findings and overall results from the one-on-one interviews with the eight school administrators, beginning with the demographic data of the participants. The remainder of the chapter reports the findings associated with the research questions.

#### Demographic Data

The data for this study were collected from eight school administrators who were responsible for evaluating alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP. To add depth to the study, the participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire immediately prior to the interview. The questionnaire included questions regarding school setting, sex of participant, highest completed degree of the participant, years of experience of the participant, entry into education of the participant, number of alternatively certified teachers evaluated by the participant, and number of traditionally certified teachers evaluated by the participant. A table showing the data obtained through this questionnaire is shown below. The table is organized first by school level and then alphabetically.

Table 1

*Participants' Demographic Data*

Participant	School setting	Sex	Highest degree completed	Years of experience	Entry into education	Number of alternatively certified teachers evaluated	Number of traditionally certified teachers evaluated
McFarland (pseudonym)	Middle School	Female	Doctorate	More than 10	Bachelor's in Education	1-2	More than 5
Russell (pseudonym)	Middle School	Female	Educational Specialist	More than 10	Bachelor's in Education	3-5	More than 5
Smith (pseudonym)	Middle School	Female	Educational Specialist	5-10	Bachelor's in Education	1-2	More than 5
Strong (pseudonym)	Middle School	Female	Educational Specialist	5-10	Bachelor's in Education	1-2	More than 5
Dunder (pseudonym)	High School	Female	Doctorate	5-10	Bachelor's in Education	More than 5	More than 5
Jones (pseudonym)	High School	Male	Doctorate	More than 10	Bachelor's other than Education and Completed ACP	3-5	More than 5
Pitt (pseudonym)	High School	Male	Educational Specialist	3-5	Minor in Education	3-5	More than 5
Who (pseudonym)	High School	Female	Doctorate	More than 10	Bachelor's in Education	3-5	More than 5

Six of the eight participants were female and two were male. All four administrators at the middle school level were female. Four administrators had Educational Specialist degrees as their highest degree, and four had earned doctoral degrees. Four people were very experienced with more than ten years of experience in administration. Three had five to ten years of experience, and only one had three to five years of experience. All but two administrators entered education with a bachelor's degree in education. One minored in education and another entered education with a degree other than education and completed an alternative certification program. Three of the participants had less experience evaluating alternatively certified teachers, only having one to two of these teachers in their buildings. Four of the participants evaluated three to five alternatively certified teachers in the past five years, and only one administrator evaluated more than five alternatively certified teachers.

#### Strengths of Alternatively Certified Teachers

The first research question reads, "According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?" Some common themes emerged when the researcher examined the data. The researcher identified and explained some of the common themes through the use of both summaries and direct quotes from the participants' responses. The two biggest strengths of alternatively certified teachers that emerged from the data were 1) the alternatively certified teachers seemed to possess or exhibit better content knowledge than their traditionally certified counterparts, and 2)



the experiences that alternatively certified teachers bring to teaching is an advantage in the classroom.

Several common themes arose in the responses to interview questions regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GTOI categories. All of the participants agreed that alternatively certified teachers are good in content knowledge. Who (pseudonym), a highly experienced high school administrator, even said that the alternatively certified teachers are more knowledgeable than most in content. When asked about the amount of teacher-focused versus student-focused instruction in the classrooms of alternatively certified teachers, Who was the only participant who responded that these teachers did more teacher-focused instruction than their traditionally certified counterparts. However, several of the other participants said that the reason they did not see more teacher-focused instruction was due to the fact that the alternative teachers they had at their schools taught in the areas of science and art, subjects lending themselves to more of the student-focused activities. Seven of the administrators saw this as a strength, even if most qualified it by saying that the courses that the teachers taught lend themselves to more student-focused instruction.

The participants were asked to give the biggest strengths of alternatively certified teachers. All eight of the participants identified content knowledge in their responses. Also, all eight said that these teachers brought real world experiences to education. Strong, a middle school administrator, commented:

Sometimes many of them are able to be more successful because they have a background that allows them to show how knowledge can be applied versus just

what they've heard about certain things that they know. Their experiences, I believe, are very important to the teaching process.

Strong went on to say that she thought alternatively certified teachers took more risks and have more respect for the educational process than traditionally certified teachers. She added:

I think alternatively prepared teachers understand what sometimes others don't—that the real world is extremely complex. We're in a shielded little place in schools, and traditionally trained teachers that have never done much else and may not have that picture painted for them. So, the life experience and being able to help students understand how this might be able to apply to the real world. I think that is really relevant and beneficial.

Student engagement was another area where most of the participants had positive comments regarding alternatively certified teachers. Five of the eight participants said that they were at least as engaging as traditionally prepared teachers. McFarland (pseudonym), an administrator with more than ten years experience as an administrator in a middle school setting, said:

I find that the alternatively certified teacher has actually brought in sometimes more interesting factors than traditional teachers, especially a retired military person teaching social studies or a person from the business world teaching language arts talking about the job settings and how important writing and technical writing skills are. So, to me, they contribute a little bit more than a regular education teacher because of their life experiences.

Who agreed when she said:

Students think that if you are a teacher, you are here twenty-four hours a day and that's all you've ever done. A lot of times, they are very impressed when they find out you served in the military for twelve years before you came to teach, or you worked in a lab before you came to teach; they like knowing that you did other things, and you haven't always been a math teacher.

Seven of the eight administrators saw alternatively trained teachers proficient in use of time. Of the seven, five said that they were at least as proficient as traditionally trained teachers. Under the same main category in the GTOI is student behavior. Again, seven of the eight agreed that there is not really a difference in student behaviors between students of alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers.

McFarland said that alternatively trained teachers were, in her experience, better organized than traditionally trained teachers coming straight out of college. When asked if there was anything that she wanted to add regarding alternatively certified teachers, Strong observed this about alternatively certified teachers:

I do believe that drive is something that I want to mention. I do believe that I've seen alternatively certified teachers, in my experience, be so driven to do well and they keep that drive. I don't know if it comes from the background that they once had. I can't put my finger on why, but the drive is so different to me.

Finally, the participants were asked if they feel confident in the abilities of alternatively certified teachers. All eight of the participants said that they feel confident in the alternative teachers who they have at their respective schools, and they would hire another one if the applicant was right for the job. Even Smith (pseudonym), a middle school administrator, agreed that she would hire another alternatively certified teacher.

The participants relayed that they do not let certification “get in the way” of the hiring of the best applicant. They insisted that generally the interview revealed which applicant was best suited for the job.

There was general agreement among the participants regarding content knowledge. They felt that alternatively certified teachers were very well equipped with the knowledge of the subject matter that they were hired to teach. Pitt (pseudonym), a relatively new high school administrator, said referring to alternatively certified teachers:

These people, when they make the decision that they want to try teaching—generally they are good candidates. They are good people. They are smart. They are on the ball. If you can take those teachers who want to come into education, they are great for our kids. They have some of the things we said before like they have experience in the business world. They know what is going on. They know how to relate what you are learning and apply it here. If they are willing to learn, they can learn the other components which are easier to teach than content knowledge.

Likewise, there was a positive general consensus regarding student engagement and use of time. And all participants said that they would hire another alternatively certified teacher if he/she were the best candidate.

#### Weaknesses of Alternatively Certified Teachers

The second research question reads, “According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia’s Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?” Several weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers emerged from the data. They were (1) a lack of

instructional strategies, (2) assessment and using assessment to guide instruction, and (3) the adjustment to profession of teaching while having to simultaneously meet the demands of the GaTAPP.

One weakness that many of the administrators noted in alternatively certified teachers is their lack of knowledge in instructional strategies. When it came to the instruction side of the interview question regarding effectiveness in the areas of content and instruction, the responses took on a different complexion. Six of the eight administrators relayed that these alternatively certified teachers are weak in instruction and pedagogical skills. Smith, the most critical, said of the instructional skills of alternatively certified teachers:

They're very effective in content. That means having knowledge of the standards and a strong foundation, I should say. But instructing, they're not—a lot of times they are weak in basic instructional techniques. And even people that go through a traditional educational program, I think they are give a lot of tools to put in their tool belts, but you have to practice those to perfect those. But I think our alternative certified people really are lacking those. And I don't think they've had enough practical experience in the classroom whether observing or doing the in-services or things like that, to be able to take away, really, how all of this fits together.

However, three of the six said that this was the same problem with traditionally trained teachers, adding that the “real” experience of one's own classroom was lacking in both populations. Who was the only participant to say that alternatively trained teachers use

more lecture-based instruction and are sometimes afraid to turn the lesson over to the students through small group learning or student generated inquiry.

Seven of the administrators said that assessment and using assessment to guide instruction is a weakness with alternatively certified teachers. However, most of the participants said that this is a common weakness of all teachers, especially using assessment results to guide instruction. At the ends of the spectrum are Smith and McFarland. Smith said that alternatively certified teachers are much weaker in assessment because they have not had any experience with this in previous pedagogical coursework. McFarland, on the other hand, said that she has not seen any weaknesses in this category.

Only three of the eight administrators believed that alternative teachers are weaker in classroom management than traditional teachers. Two of the three relayed the opinion that this is a weakness of all new teachers, but the alternatively certified teachers may be especially weak in this area. Jones relayed the following regarding a specific alternatively trained teacher:

When you come from industry or when you come like our last GaTAPP teacher, she was an engineer. She is accustomed to working with adults all the time and high school kids range from fourteen years old to as much as twenty years old; so it's a different animal. I think they are not as adept at the start. I think they learn it over time, and at the start I think classroom management is a weak area.

Again, there was some dissent in the group. McFarland said that she saw no weaknesses in management, and Strong and Who found that alternatively certified teachers could often be too strict with classroom discipline.

Another weakness was the sudden adjustment to teaching while simultaneously trying to meet the demands of the GaTAPP and the rigors of teaching with six of the eight participants in agreement. Dunder summed up this feeling with the following:

The thing with GaTAPP is that you're trying to learn classroom management, plan, assess, and manage all the coursework of GaTAPP. So GaTAPP is a drain on time. And, in our industry, time is one of the most valuable commodities you can afford people. It's very hard to be working on the coursework of GaTAPP.

Russell shared that she thought the GaTAPP should be streamlined so that these teachers could have an easier transition into teaching. Dunder summed up the view shared by several administrators in regard to the relationship between certification and teacher success by stating:

My overall impression of alternative certification is the same as my overall impression of certification. It's a shot in the dark. I've been deeply disappointed in some people I've seen come through regular institutions through the education colleges over twenty-some years and scratched my head wondering how in the world they ever got to where they are on a given day. The alternative programs have served us very well, and we've gotten some terrific candidates and teachers from the alternative programs. So, I see them equally strong and weak, the traditional and the alternative programs.

While quite a varied spectrum of responses was given to the question regarding the biggest weaknesses of alternatively trained teachers, there was little agreement across the board among the participants. The biggest revelation was that classroom management was not the top complaint among administrators. Just as revealing was the occurrence of

the most frequent response, the weakness of having to go through such an abrupt educational adjustment while dealing with the demands of the GaTAPP itself.

### Chapter Summary

This study examined administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers. The sub-questions that guided the research were: 1) According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI? and 2) According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?

The researcher conducted interviews of eight school administrators to ascertain their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP. School administrators expressed many similar beliefs regarding the group of teachers. All of the administrators felt confident in the content knowledge of alternatively trained teachers and thought that these teachers brought valuable experiences to both students and the teaching profession. Most participants said that alternatively trained teachers were very good at use of time in an educational setting. And all of the participants said that they felt confident in the alternatively certified teachers who they currently have on staff at their schools.

The adjustment to teaching was the biggest weakness cited by the participants. Most, at least in part, blamed the rigors of the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy for the weakness, not the alternatively certified teachers themselves. The administrators felt that GaTAPP should have better prepared the alternatively certified



teachers for the educational shock of forms, lesson plans, time management, and other routines that would ensue. They also stated that this was the reason for the higher teacher attrition rate in this group of teachers. Other lesser named weaknesses were lack of multiple instructional strategies and classroom management.

Regardless of demographics, consisting of school setting, sex of participant, highest degree completed by participant, years of experience, entry into education, and number of alternatively certified teachers and traditionally certified teachers who they evaluate, participants had positive experiences with alternatively certified teachers. The researcher found no significant differences in findings based on the demographic data. Further discussion regarding the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter V.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter contains a summary of the findings of the study as well as conclusions, implications, dissemination information, and recommendations for future studies. The first section contains a summary of the procedures and the researcher's findings based upon the two research questions. The second section contains the conclusions and implications derived from the data obtained in the study. Lastly, the third section contains dissemination information and recommendations for future studies based on the findings of this study and the researcher's conclusions.

This study examined administrators' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers. The sub-questions that guided the research were these: 1) According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?; and, 2) According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?

The researcher conducted eight face-to-face semi-structured interviews of school administrators in an eastern middle Georgia county to ascertain their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP. The interview questions were formed by the researcher using the three main evaluation categories of the GTOI: provides instruction, assesses and encourages student progress, and manages the learning environment. A demographic survey (Appendix A) was administered immediately preceding each interview. The data obtained from the survey is summarized in Chapter

IV. The demographic data was gathered to enrich the study and used to present a holistic view of the data gathered.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researcher. All of the information regarding the participants, digital audio files, saved transcriptions, and typed transcriptions were stored in a secure location and were only accessed by the researcher. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and the county in which they were employed was unidentified in order to ensure confidentiality. Data were analyzed and organized into themes. The themes were analyzed within the cases and across the cases, and the findings were reported in Chapter IV.

The researcher is hopeful that the findings of this study may enlighten stakeholders in education as to administrators' commonly held beliefs regarding alternatively certified teachers. In addition, it is the hope of the researcher that administrators who are not familiar with alternatively certified candidates might have a better understanding regarding the effectiveness of this population of teachers.

### Analysis of Research Findings

#### *Strengths*

Several strengths emerged from analysis of the research data; namely:

- All eight (100%) of the participants identified content knowledge as a strength of alternatively certified teachers.
- All eight (100%) of the participants agreed that alternatively certified teachers bring valuable experiences to students and to the teaching profession.
- All eight (100%) of the participants said that they felt confident in the current alternatively certified teachers currently employed at their respective schools.

- Most (62.5%) participants had a positive view of alternatively trained teachers in the area of use of time in the educational setting.
- Most (87.5%) said that there were few, if any, differences in student behavior between students of alternatively certified teachers and students of traditionally certified teachers.
- Most (87.5%) said that alternatively trained teachers were proficient at student engagement.

### *Weaknesses*

Several weaknesses emerged from analysis of the research data; namely:

- Most (75%) agreed that alternatively certified teachers are weak in the area of using assessment to guide instruction.
- Six of the eight (75%) had a favorable overall impression of alternative certification.
- Most (62.5%) of the participants said that the biggest hurdle/weakness of alternatively certified teachers in the adjustment to the teaching profession.
- Half (50%) of the administrators identified a lack of instructional strategies/skills as a weakness among alternatively trained teachers.
- Classroom management was only named by three of the eight (37.5%) participants as a weakness of alternatively certified teachers.

### *Other Significant Findings*

- Five of the eight participants (62.5%) identified content knowledge first when asked to give the characteristics of effective, successful teachers.

- Five administrators (62.5%) said at various times that strengths/weaknesses of teachers, alternative or traditional, were a function of personality rather than certification.
- Most of the areas that the participants identified as weak, they qualified by identifying the areas as weak for traditionally certified teachers as well.

### Discussion of Research Findings

*Research Question 1: According to school administrators, what are the strengths of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?*

School administrators expressed many similar beliefs regarding alternatively certified teachers. Confirming the findings of Shea (2006) and opposing the findings of Nubaum (2002), all of the administrators felt confident in the content knowledge of alternatively trained teachers. Confirming the findings of Salyer (2003), they also thought that these teachers brought valuable life experiences to both students and the teaching profession experience. This directly contradicts the findings by Sasser (2007) who found that alternatively certified teachers' work did not impact teacher quality in six of the seven constructs that were evaluated.

Most participants said that alternatively trained teachers were very good at use of time in an educational setting and student engagement, which agreed with the findings of a study by Finn (2009). Also, most participants said that there were no differences in behavior of students of alternatively certified teachers and students of traditionally certified teachers. And all of the participants said that they felt confident in the alternatively certified teachers who they currently have on staff at their schools.

*Research Question 2: According to school administrators, what are the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers in Georgia's Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) as measured by the GTOI?*

This study also focused on the specific weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers. The most commonly mentioned weakness of alternatively trained teachers was using assessment to guide instruction. This finding agreed with Bowen (2004). However, of the seven administrators, in this study, who identified this as a weakness, six of them identified it as a weakness in the traditionally trained teachers as well.

The adjustment to teaching was the second most identified weakness cited by the participants. Most, at least in part, blamed the rigors of the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy for the weakness, not the alternatively certified teachers. This finding corroborates the opinion of Berry (2001) that alternative certification programs try to prepare teachers too quickly for the rigors of the classroom. Administrators in this study also stated that this was the reason for the higher teacher attrition rate in this group of teachers.

Having too few instructional strategies was another commonly mentioned weakness, even though half of the participants said that alternatively certified teachers were not weak in this area. Two administrators specifically stated that alternatively certified teachers lack practical in-class experience. This finding agreed with Nakai and Turley (2003).

Bowen (2004), Mahatha (2005), Nusbaum (2002), and Sasser (2007) found that alternatively trained teachers are weaker in classroom management than their traditionally trained counterparts; however, this study found evidence to the contrary.

Only three administrators cited this as a weakness, and only one of the three found alternatively trained teachers to be weaker than traditionally trained teachers.

In the opinion of most of the administrators in this study, alternatively certified teachers are just as effective and no weaker in any areas evaluated by the Georgia Teacher Observation Instrument than traditionally certified teachers. This corroborated the finding of Suell and Pitrowski (2006) in a similar study of Florida educators and refuted the findings of Wagmeister (2006) and Shea (2006).

### Conclusions

Alternatively certified teachers come to the profession of teaching with hopes of educating children and sharing their knowledge with those students. They have sampled employment in other areas of the job market. Administrators agreed that these teachers bring a wealth of knowledge that can be a tremendous resource for school systems, especially in areas of teacher shortages.

Teachers dramatically impact, either positively or negatively, the effectiveness of the educational system in the United States and influence a child, forever, regarding education. The strengths and weaknesses of individual teachers and teacher populations are constantly scrutinized by the public and the media. It is of the utmost importance to research the strengths and weaknesses of alternatively prepared teachers so that the best and most effective teachers can be chosen by those in power in order to provide the highest level of education in this country. School administrators are the educators who traditionally have the most influence on the hiring of teachers. They need the most up-to-date information regarding teacher effectiveness so they can be better informed and make informed decisions regarding teacher employment. This study provided some insight

regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP through the eyes of administrators who not only most commonly evaluate this group, but also are responsible for the hiring of teachers.

### Implications

Based upon a thorough review of the available literature and the findings of this research study, the following implications can be drawn:

1. Both alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers have strengths and weaknesses when entering the teaching profession. Most administrators believe that the weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers are attributes shared by new teachers as a whole and are not dependent on their mode of certification.  
  
Administrators should understand that certification plays a minor role in strengths or weaknesses of a candidate and the effectiveness of a teacher.
2. Administrators believe that alternatively certified teachers are well-prepared in content knowledge, but lack some of the instructional expertise characteristic of veteran teachers.
3. School administrators should recognize that one's first year of teaching is stressful and a large adjustment. In addition, alternatively certified candidates in the GaTAPP have a list of time-consuming requirements which they must complete. Often these additional components cause problems in time management, and these teachers need administrative assistance in various areas.
4. All stakeholders should know that most administrators are pleased with their alternatively certified teachers and feel confident in their abilities to educate students.



5. School boards, human resource directors, and school administrators may be interested in the findings of this study when making hiring decisions. They may want to open their doors to alternative entry.
6. The Georgia Department of Education should be made aware that many administrators feel that the GaTAPP is far too involved for a first year teacher and this does not allow a teacher to spend the quality time that is necessary to learn a new profession.

### Discussion of Findings

Based on the review of the literature and the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made with the intent of aiding administrators in choosing the best candidate for a teaching position, easing the transition of alternatively certified teachers into teaching, and improving the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy:

1. Since the findings of this study indicated that most administrators are pleased with their alternatively certified teachers and feel confident in them, administrators should consider all applicants regardless to their certification and leave the door open for the possibility that an alternatively certified candidate may be the best choice.
2. The Georgia Department of Education may want to reconsider the work, in type and amount, that they assign alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP. Most administrators questioned the practicality of the requirements of that program, especially considering these teachers are trying to learn a new profession.

3. Several of the participants said new teachers, regardless of certification, learned more from practical teaching experience than from coursework. College and university based teacher preparation programs may want to reconsider the focus of those programs. This study indicated that administrators felt that more prior teaching experience would be valuable regardless of preparation.

#### Dissemination Information

The researcher feels that it is especially important for hiring bodies and individuals to understand the significance of the findings of this study, one of which is that most administrators do not find alternatively certified teachers to be ineffective. In order to raise awareness and enlighten those concerned with the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers, the researcher will present the findings of this study at local, state, and/or national conference(s).

#### Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the review of literature, the findings of this study, and the conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations for further research are made:

1. This study should be replicated in different parts of Georgia and the findings should be compared to those of this study.
2. This study should be replicated in other states and the findings should be compared in order to compare the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in different regions and other alternative certification programs.
3. Comparative studies should be performed regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

### Concluding Thoughts

As a teacher who entered teaching through the GaTAPP in its induction year, the researcher has had a lot of insight into the recruitment, experiences, and longevity of the alternatively certified teachers in this program. This researcher believes that the program is beneficial in filling teaching positions with people having extensive life experience. This researcher also believes that the opinion persists that one cannot teach effectively unless one is traditionally trained. This study refuted the researcher's opinion that most administrators viewed alternatively certified teachers as second choices and less effective than other teachers. The researcher was pleasantly surprised in the positive comments and attitudes that persisted among administrators in this school system. With this research, the researcher can raise awareness of stakeholders in education regarding the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers in the GaTAPP.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE



## Demographic Questionnaire

- 1 . What is your sex?  
Male  
Female
  
- 2 . How many years of experience do you have as a school administrator?  
3-5 years  
5-10 years  
More than 10 years
  
- 3 . You are an administrator in which school setting?  
Middle school  
High school
  
- 4 . Which one of the following describes your mode of entry into education?  
I received a bachelor's degree in education.  
I received a bachelor's degree in a field other than education and received no other initial training.  
I received a bachelor's degree in a field other than education and completed an alternative certification program, such as Georgia's TAPP.  
I started teaching without a bachelor's degree.
  
- 5 . How many alternatively certified teachers have you been responsible for evaluating in the past five years?  
None  
1-2 teachers  
3-5 teachers  
More than 5 teachers
  
- 6 . How many traditionally certified teachers have you been responsible for evaluating in the past five years?  
None  
1-2 teachers  
3-5 teachers  
More than 5 teachers
  
- 7 . What is your highest completed degree of education?  
Bachelors degree  
Masters degree  
Educational Specialist degree  
Doctoral degree

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

## Interview Questions for School Administrators

- 1) In your opinion, what are the common characteristics found in effective/successful teachers?
- 2) What is your overall impression of alternative certification?
- 3) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the area of content and instruction.
  - b) Do you find any differences between traditionally certified and alternatively certified teachers in the amount of teacher focused instruction versus student focused instruction?
- 4) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the areas of assessment and using assessment to guide instruction.
  - b) How do alternatively certified teachers perform in the area of student engagement?
- 5) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the areas of use of time and classroom management.
  - b) Describe student behavior in classrooms of alternatively certified teachers.
  - c) Do you find that students of alternatively certified teachers exhibit the same behaviors as students of traditionally certified teachers?
- 6) What would you say are biggest strengths of alternatively certified teachers?
- 7) What would you say are biggest weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers?
- 8) How confident do you feel in the ability of alternatively certified teachers?
- 9) Considering all things regarding GaTAPP teachers, how likely are you to consider hiring a GaTAPP teacher for a teacher position at your school?
- 10) Is there anything else regarding GaTAPP teachers that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University  
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Phone: 912-478-0843 Veazey Hall 2021  
P.O. Box 8005  
Fax: 912-478-0719 IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Jack D. Arrington  
371 Barnsley Drive  
Evans, GA 30809  
CC: Charles E. Patterson  
Associate Vice President for Research  
From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)  
Date: March 2, 2010  
Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered H10242 and titled "Administrator's Beliefs Regarding the Effectiveness of Alternatively Certified Teachers", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to 8 subjects.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, whether or not it is believed to be related to the study, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator prior to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a Research Study Termination form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,  
(Signer's identity unknown) Signed by Eleanor <IRB@georgiasouthern.edu> Time:  
2010.03.02 09:50:31 -05'00'  
Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX D  
LITERATURE MATRIX

## Literature Matrix

Interview Questions	Research Question(s)	Sources
1) Describe the characteristics of the ideal teacher in your opinion.	1	(Torff & Sessions, 2005), (Polk, 2006)
2) What is your overall impression of alternative certification?	1,2	(Brewer, 2003), (Baines, 2006), (Nusbaum, 2002), (Sasser, 2007), (Darling-Hammond, Cheung, & Frelow, 2002), (Darling-Hammond, Holzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005), (Berry, 2001), (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1999), (Qu & Becker, 2003), (Starko, 2002), (Mallard, 2005), (Harvey, 2005), (Malow-Iroff, O'Connor, & Bisland, 2004), (Tissington & Grow, 2007), (Laraway, 2003), (Torres, 2006)
3) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the areas of content and instruction?	1,2	(Shea, 2006), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002) (Mahatha, 2005), (Sasser, 2007), (Malow-Iroff, O'Connor, & Bisland, 2004), (Finn, 2009), (Suell & Piotroski, 2006)
4) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the areas of assessment and using assessment to guide instruction?	1,2	(Shea, 2006), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002) (Mahatha, 2005), (Sasser, 2007), (Finn, 2009), (Suell & Piotroski, 2006)
5) Concerning alternatively certified teachers, how effective have you found them to be in the areas of use of time and classroom management?	1,2	(Shea, 2006), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002) (Mahatha, 2005), (Sasser, 2007), (Finn, 2009), (Suell & Piotroski, 2006)
6) What would you say are the biggest strengths of alternatively certified teachers?	1	(Shea, 2006), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002) (Mahatha, 2005), (Sasser, 2007), (Finn, 2009), (Suell & Piotroski, 2006), (Salyer, 2003)
7) What would you say are the biggest weaknesses of alternatively certified teachers?	2	(Shea, 2006), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002) (Mahatha, 2005), (Sasser, 2007), (Nakai & Turley, 2003), (Finn, 2009)

8) How confident do you feel in the ability of alternatively certified teachers?	Overarching Question	(Wenglinski, 2000), (Bowen, 2004), (Nusbaum, 2002), (Goldhaber & Brewer, 1999), (Harvey, 2005), (Malow-Iroff, O'Connor, & Bisland, 2004), (Laraway, 2003), (Torres, 2006)
9) Is there anything else regarding GaTAPP teachers that you would like to add?	-----	----- -----