

Spring 2008

Skillsets of Traditionally and Alternatively Certified Beginning Teachers in the State of Georgia

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THE SKILLSETS OF TRADITIONALLY AND ALTERNATIVELY CERTIFIED
BEGINNING TEACHERS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA

by

MARTHA J. NOBLE

(Under the Direction of Linda M. Arthur)

ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions held by beginning Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP) teachers, beginning traditionally certified teachers, and their school administrators from three high schools in the Northeast Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) district in the state of Georgia during the 2007-2008 school year. The study sought to identify specific skills and common characteristics of beginning teachers from GA TAPP and traditionally certified teachers that may contribute to beginning teachers' performance in the classroom setting.

A face-to-face interview was conducted with three beginning teachers from the GA TAPP program, three beginning teachers from the traditionally certified programs, and four school administrators from three different high schools in the Northeast RESA district. The data for this study were collected using a self-generated questionnaire for interviewees developed from several components of the *Danielson's Framework for Teaching (1996)*.

This study generated ten case studies to compare responses relating to skills, experiences, and common characteristics of beginning teachers from alternatively and traditionally certified programs. Data were organized, analyzed, and transcribed into emerging themes and patterns to produce the written research.

Study results indicated that beginning teachers' skillsets, characteristics, and the school context affect the performance of classroom teachers whether they are from the alternatively certified program or traditionally certified programs. The researcher also discovered that there are more similarities than differences in the skills and characteristics found among beginning teachers from the alternatively certified program and the traditionally certified program. Each beginning teacher brings to the teaching profession their motivation, previous experiences or lack of experience, knowledge, and aspirations for a long-term career in education. It becomes equally important to provide beginning teachers with the resources, professional development opportunities, and support from mentors, school and district administrators, and policy makers to help strengthen those skills and address the weaknesses to create more effective teachers in our nation's classrooms.

INDEX WORDS: Alternative certification programs, Traditional certification programs

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BEGINNING TEACHERS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2008

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May 2008

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to several individuals who have tremendously impacted and made deposits into my life. First and foremost, I give honor and glory to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is the author and finisher of my faith. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, the late Rev. and Mrs. Elisha Johnson, who were instrumental in my faith. It was because of their unconditional love and unwavering belief in me that I was able to complete this dissertation.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the love of my life, my husband and my friend, Jimmy Noble, who stood by my side and supported me throughout this endeavor. I could never repay the huge debt I owe to him for the many sacrifices he made just for me to accomplish my goals. He is truly a Gift from God.

Also, I dedicate this dissertation to my sisters, Juanita Page and Sutreater Morgan, who spent numerous hours assisting me in countless ways and praying me through this entire process. To all of my family and church members who prayed for me, supported me, and remained patient with me during the most difficult times, I dedicate this dissertation to each of you. To Dr. Angela Pope, my guardian angel, who was there to assist, inspire, and encourage me when I needed her the most, I dedicate this dissertation to her. Finally, to all of my nieces and nephews, I dedicate this dissertation to you to believe in yourselves and as a legacy to pass on to our future generations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with sincere appreciation and gratitude that I acknowledge the following individuals for the major contributions they made to the completion of my dissertation.

Dr. Linda Arthur, my committee chairperson, who was there to support me and assist me throughout this entire endeavor. Thanks for sharing your wit and humor with us during some of the most stressful times. Special thanks to you for sacrificing a weekend to conduct the Writing Retreat which was most productive and time well spent.

Dr. Sonya Shepherd, whose knowledge and expertise in formatting and organizing the research were invaluable. Thanks for the many hours spent in assisting me with gathering information related to my topic. Thanks for your willingness to serve as a committee member.

Dr. Russ Marion, thanks for your willingness to serve on my committee as methodologist. You are incredibly gifted in research methods and processes. It was truly an honor to have someone of your caliber to assist me throughout the completion of my dissertation.

Thanks to all of my professors who shared their wisdom, knowledge and expertise with me to help guide me through this entire process.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The nation is experiencing teacher shortages, especially in specialized areas such as special and secondary education (Madsen & Hancock, 2002). Colleges of Education provide numerous undergraduate and graduate degrees that offer quality training and, in the case of state approved programs, traditional certification. Yet existing teachers leave the profession at a rate similar to new ones entering (Ingersoll, 2001).

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) challenged the nation to embrace the goal of assuring that "all children be taught by teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and commitments to teach children well" by 2006 (p.16). New teachers must meet state and local qualifications, as well as the federal *No Child Left Behind* mandate for highly qualified teachers. As a result, alternative certification programs are rapidly introducing thousands of teachers with careers, knowledge, and experience from outside teaching into the profession (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). Alternative teacher certification programs provide a means for an individual who possesses a bachelor's degree to become a teacher with far less or no previous teacher training compared to that required by traditional certification programs (Stoddart & Floden, 1995). This abbreviated and expeditious route to teacher certification was created to target prospective teachers who come from other careers with considerable life experiences and an interest in the teaching profession (Feistritz, Harr, Henry, & Ulf, 2006). This trend has caused school

administrators and educational policymakers to remain concerned about whether the alternative certification programs are substandard compared to traditional certification programs due to the lack of skills and knowledge of teachers who enter the teaching profession (Newman & Thomas, 1999; Feistritzer, 1999; Nakai & Turley, 2003; Walsh, 2001).

The debate over alternative certification has ignited many assumptions about participants that are based on opinion or limited research (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005). Hawley (1992) has posed the question of whether alternative programs attract people interested in education who have “needed qualities and interests” and would not otherwise have become teachers. Hawley has given examples of “needed qualities and interests” such as intelligence, subject matter knowledge, gender, maturity, race, ethnicity, and commitment to students. Recent literature reviews suggest that this question has yet to be answered (Humphrey, Wechsler, Bosetti, Wayne, & Adelman, 1999; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Zeichner & Shulte, 2001).

The ultimate goal of this study was to identify specific skills of beginning teachers from the Georgia Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (GA TAPP) and traditional certified programs that were recruited for teaching positions that would otherwise go unfilled. This study sought to determine the key characteristics of beginning teachers who entered the classroom through the traditional and alternative certification programs in the State of Georgia.

Background of the Literature

With the current rising shortage of teachers in our nation, states are doing all they can to attract new teachers. It is estimated that in the next decade, American school districts will need to hire 2.2 million new teachers (Feistritzer, Harr, Hobar, & Scullion, 2005). To address this demand, an overwhelming majority of states are turning to alternative certification programs that provide a nontraditional route for candidates to obtain a teacher licensure as they offer on-the-job training and supervision to prospective teachers with little or no prior teaching experience (Feistritzer, Harr, Henry, & Ulf, 2006). According to the National Center for Alternative Certification (2007), all 50 states and the District of Columbia have implemented some type of alternative certification program; in contrast, in 1983, fewer than ten states offered alternative certification programs. In 2004, due to rapid growth in California, Georgia, New Jersey, New York and Texas, these states produced 40% of teachers through their alternative certification programs (NCAC, 2007). During this same period, Feistritzer (2006) reported that approximately 50,000 individuals were issued teaching certificates through alternative routes. In all 50 states, alternative certification now plays a central role in the production of new teachers (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2007). In some parts of the country, nearly as many teachers enter the profession through alternative routes as through traditional routes (Humphrey & Wechsler, 2005). Simply getting more teachers into the teaching profession through alternative routes, however, goes beyond supply and demand issues. There are other concerns about the quality, knowledge and skills teachers possess

to fill those positions. According to Rod Paige, new teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to teach the increasingly diverse array of students in today's classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Fraser (2001) has argued that over the past few years the public has grown dissatisfied due to the increased state testing of teachers which produced "appalling" results. As a result, the public has been increasingly questioning whether traditional routes to certification produce the best teachers. Other researchers, in a comparative study, have discovered that University-prepared teachers were of higher quality and significantly outperformed alternatively certified teachers on several instructional criteria (Jelmberg, 1996; Ovando & Trube, 2000; Glass, 2002; Sindelar, Daunic & Rennels, 2004).

In addition to the disagreement among researchers about which programs produce quality teachers, there are also questions about the need for teachers to have other skills such as extensive subject-matter preparation. Most agree that individuals with strong subject-matter background and pedagogical skills are more likely to make better teachers regardless of whether they are in a traditional certification or an alternative certification program (Brannan & Reichardt, 2001).

The qualifications of the individuals recruited and accepted into teaching is a critical factor in an effective alternative teacher education program (Klagholz, 2000). The most dramatic change in the past few years regarding qualifications has been a shift toward people beginning their preparation to teach later in life and later in their careers. Alternative certification programs attract mid-career professionals, recent liberal arts graduates, retired military personnel, people of

color, candidates with subject matter specialties in critical shortage fields as mathematics, science, special education, bilingual education and others who bring life experiences and, in many cases, maturity to teaching. Haberman (1991) and Feistritzer (2003) agree that the advantages of selecting individuals entering from alternative programs are that they include those who have reached the developmental level of adulthood and are more mature, are more satisfied with several aspects of teaching, feel more competent, and are more committed to the profession. Further research has indicated that teachers in alternative programs are more likely to prefer to teach and continue teaching in urban areas (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993) and are less likely to see inner-city students as “culturally deficient” (Stoddart, 1993). Other advantages reported by several researchers of alternative teacher certification programs were that such programs are generally designed to entice people from various educational, occupational and life experiences to become teachers, thereby increasing the quantity and diversity of applicants, including more men, minorities, and candidates with higher academic qualifications (Feistritzer, 1993, 1998; McKibbin & Ray, 1994; Stoddart, 1993; Wise, 1994; Wilson et al., 2001; Zeichner & Shulte, 2001).

Although alternative certification programs have gained popularity in the past years, administrators and policymakers have remained concerned about the participants who enter the teaching profession in a short period of time to fill the teacher shortage due to questions about their lack of skills and the quality of teachers produced through alternative rather than traditional routes to certification (Feistritzer & Chester, 2003). Despite having met the prerequisites of the federal

No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b) for having highly qualified teachers with regard to credentials relative to content knowledge, teachers from alternative certificate programs generally do not have proper teaching preparation before entering the classroom (Adams & Krockover, 1997). Most teachers from alternative certification programs lack an understanding of pedagogy, instructional strategies, classroom management, and students' social and academic development issues (Nakai & Turley, 2003). Subsequently, principals are often reluctant to hire teachers from alternative certification programs because of the amount of work and support required, and the problems that these teachers may have regarding discipline, lesson planning, student interaction, assessments, and instructional strategies in their first or second year in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hayes-Jacobs, 2004).

In addition, opponents have viewed alternative certification as merely a means for addressing the inevitable teacher shortages by allowing unprepared individuals who have met minimal requirements to enter the classroom (Berry, 2000, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1994). The argument is that when a program's primary purpose revolves around quantity issues, lack of quality can result. Other recent research has suggested that individuals who pursue an alternative route into teaching can demonstrate shortcomings related to intelligence, subject matter knowledge, gender, maturity, race, ethnicity, and commitment to students (Humphrey, Wechsler, Bosetti, Wayne, & Adelman, 1999; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Zeichner & Shulte, 2001).

In conclusion, abbreviated alternative certification programs have been advocated for mid-career changers with subject matter expertise in order to expedite their entry into teaching and provide access for individuals who did not and perhaps cannot enter teaching through traditional routes. Research has revealed that alternative teacher certification programs generally are designed to entice persons from various educational, occupational and life experiences to become teachers. Because alternative certification programs aim to attract a certain population of participants, and because the educational and professional backgrounds of participants influence how they experience the programs, a more careful assessment of the participants' existing skills and knowledge would likely contribute to their success in the teaching profession.

The literature does provide some insights about traditional and alternative certification program participants; however, closer examination is needed to determine the various skills these individuals bring to the classroom. Research on the personal characteristics and backgrounds of individuals who will become effective teachers has been limited. Currently, there is no clear consensus in the research about the contributions these participants bring to the teaching profession and what makes them effective.

This research examines (1) beginning teachers in the traditional certified programs in Georgia and the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program; (2) explores the backgrounds, previous experiences, and classroom skills of beginning teachers and (3) seeks to determine common characteristics of beginning teachers in Georgia.

Statement of the Problem

It is estimated that a substantial number of teachers will be needed in the next decade in our nation's classrooms. To answer this need, alternative certification programs are becoming the catapult for rebuilding the teaching workforce by producing teachers who are more mature, more ethnically diverse, and have college experience, and have experiences in other occupations. In addition, alternative certification programs bring more male teachers into the school systems to balance out the predominantly female faculty. This abbreviated preparation and expeditious entry into the nation's classrooms attracts individuals with little or no classroom experience and individuals who may have never entered the teaching profession through the traditional route. Subsequently, there remains concern by administrators and policymakers that teachers in the alternative certification programs lack the necessary skills and are substandard compared to teachers from traditional educational backgrounds.

With all of the above in mind, it is clear that there is still much to be learned about the beginning teachers who enter schools through alternative certification programs compared to beginning teachers who enter through traditional certification programs. Alternative certification plays a central role in the production of new teachers in almost every state, yet little is known about the background, experience, knowledge, and skills of the individuals who are recruited into the teaching profession. Data from this study on the characteristics of alternative and traditional certification teachers and their impact on the diversity of the teaching force are also mixed. Therefore, the researcher strive to

specifically identify the classroom skills of beginning teachers who enter through the Georgia Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (GA TAPP) compared to beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification program.

Research Questions

Throughout this study, the researcher addresses the following overarching research question: What specific classroom skills do beginning teachers in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Program (GA TAPP) possess compared to the beginning teachers from the traditional certification programs in Georgia? The following sub questions will guide the research:

1. What classroom skills do teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?
2. What are the common characteristics of teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP programs and teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?
3. Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teacher performance in the classroom?

Significance of Study

The perception of the researcher is that beginning teachers from alternative certification programs possess definable skills compared to those who enter through traditional certification programs. The definable skills of beginning teachers may equate to the classroom performance of teachers in the first year of teaching. As a personnel director, this researcher sought to use this study to assist

in making educated hiring decisions when recruiting and selecting teachers for a rural school system. Therefore, illuminating these definable skills may inform and enhance the professional lives of school administrators, personnel directors, and policymakers as they seek to recruit teachers into the teaching profession.

School administrators may find this research enlightening as they struggle to meet the *No Child Left Behind* mandates to fill their schools with “highly qualified” teachers. Knowledge gained from these data would afford beginning teachers in their first year of teaching support from school administrators to create new professional development opportunities to address areas of strengths and/or weaknesses of teachers. Administrators may also use this study to properly schedule beginning teachers with specific skills in schools and/or classroom settings that match their abilities.

The researcher’s recommendations may enlighten policymakers and the public regarding the skills of beginning teachers who seek out alternative certification programs and traditional certification programs and to what extent they match the expectations for qualified candidates. Since policymakers around the country are concerned about the quality and supply of teachers, the findings of this study may prove beneficial as policymakers learn how work experiences, skills, and knowledge influence effective teaching. Policymakers may be able to address parents by reassuring them that placement in a classroom with a beginning teacher-in-training is not a disadvantage to their children. Policymakers may also be able to make decisions to support and improve teacher preparation programs based on clear standards that will promote teacher

effectiveness in the teaching force. Lastly, this study may provide essential information that helps to substantiate that beginning teachers with alternative certification meet state certification standards and are prepared, like traditional teachers, to teach in any district in the state.

Delimitations

The proposed study has the following delimitations:

1. This study is delimited to beginning teachers who have participated in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP) and beginning teachers who have participated in the traditional certification program in the Northeast Regional Education Service Agency District of Georgia during the 2007-2008 school years.
2. The study's participants are confined to public schools in Georgia.

Limitations

This proposed study has the following limitations:

1. Responses to interview questions from beginning teachers participating in alternative certification and traditional certification programs will be based on self-ratings which lend themselves to biased responses.

Procedures

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative methodology which included individual case studies of six beginning teachers and four school administrators. The qualitative case study method was used to gather data through in-depth

interviewing. Case study interviews were conducted to ask the respondents about the facts as well as their opinions about the skills and characteristics of beginning teachers (Yin, 2003).

Qualitative research allows inferences and characteristics to be drawn from a significant population of participants who are knowledgeable about the common characteristics of beginning teachers in Georgia (Creswell, 1994). Moreover, qualitative research is used in areas when only minimal amounts of information are known about the topic (Patten, 2000). Since little research exists that examines specific skills of beginning teachers in Georgia, qualitative research allowed the researcher to generate first-hand knowledge and an in-depth view from the teachers themselves and from individuals working directly with beginning teachers (Bordens & Abbott, 2005). Consequently, qualitative research allowed the researcher to become immersed in the school environment and gain an accurate understanding of the beginning teachers' experiences without preconceived assumptions (Bloom, Fischer, & Orme, 1999; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2006).

Triangulation involves confirming the accuracy of data from one source with data collected from another source (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). The primary data for the three kinds of data collected were interviews, lesson plans, and portfolios from each beginning teacher. A majority of the data collected was generated from the interviews.

Sample and Population

The coordinators of the Georgia Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (GA TAPP) from the Northeast RESA district provided the researcher with a list of existing schools, principals, and teachers that were enrolled in Georgia Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (GA TAPP) at the time of the study. The list included addresses and phone numbers for each GA TAPP participant in the respective area and provided a convenient population from which to obtain a sample. The selected participants were provided with a cover letter soliciting their participation in the study.

The target populations for this study consisted of two groups: six beginning teachers and three school administrators at the high school level. The first group consisted of two beginning teachers (one teacher from the GA TAPP and one from the traditional certification program) from three different high schools in the Northeast RESA district. The second group consisted of three high school administrators (one from each school) from three different schools. The school administrators consisted of either the principal, assistant principal, or curriculum instructor with the responsibility of making recommendations for hiring prospective teachers at their schools and/or evaluating teachers' performance. The selected school administrators were mailed interview solicitation letters. Each letter had an attached interview acceptance letter for the participants to acknowledge their willingness to participate in the study. Respondents mailed acceptance letters in a pre-stamped self-addressed envelope

or faxed acceptance letters to the number listed on the cover letter. The researcher followed up with respondents who did not respond.

Instrumentation

The researcher was the key instrument in this study. The researcher's role was that of a learner who came to learn from and with research participants (Glesne, 2006). The researcher was aware that the appearance, speech, and behavior of the researcher had to be acceptable to the participants. The researcher reflected on all aspects of research procedures and findings before conducting the interview (pg. 111).

Afterwards, the researcher carefully developed interview questions solely for school administrators who had beginning teachers in their schools from traditional and alternative certification programs during the 2007-2008 school years. The second instrument consisted of interview questions solely for the six beginning teachers. The interview questions focused on the criteria currently used to evaluate teacher effectiveness in the state of Georgia derived from the Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP) and Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* which includes four domains: planning and preparation, instruction, classroom environment, and professional responsibilities (see Appendix A). Questions also focused on demographic and background information about the beginning teacher that included but are not limited to previous professional life experiences, training, skills, and working environment (see Appendix A).

The design of the study consisted of gathering information from six beginning teachers and four school administrators. Other pre-existing data were collected, including beginning teachers' portfolios and lesson plans.

Data Analysis

This study generated ten case studies by following the procedures of interviewing and reviewing pre-existing documents to compare responses relating to skills, experiences and common characteristics of beginning teachers from alternatively and traditionally certified programs. Yin (2003) has posed that data for case studies can come from sources such as “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts” (p.83). Patton (1990) has suggested that “the purpose (of a case study) is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest” (p. 384).

The researcher notated important points by hand during interviews to prevent interfering with the process (Glesne, 2005). Upon completion of the interviews by beginning teachers and school administrators, data were organized, analyzed and transcribed into emerging themes and patterns. Once all data were examined, the categories were recombined by the researcher in order to produce the written research. A summary of the data responding to the research questions was presented and shared with the participants who requested it.

Summary

Unequivocally, alternative certification has played a significant role in the production of new teachers in every state, yet there exists little research about the

background, experience, knowledge, and skills of teachers who participate in alternative certification programs. This study sought to specifically identify the skills of beginning teachers who entered public schools through the alternative certification program compared to individuals who entered through the traditional certification program. Illuminating these definable skills may inform and enhance the professional lives of school administrators, personnel directors, and policymakers as they make hiring decisions to fill teaching vacancies in schools with “highly qualified” teachers who have appropriate backgrounds, skills, and dispositions.

In order to address the overarching question and sub-questions in this study and to gain pertinent information from the participants, a qualitative methodology was used. A randomly selected list of existing schools, principals, and teachers participating in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program from the Northeast RESA district served as the sample population for this study. Interview questions were provided to a total of six beginning teachers and three school administrators from three high schools.

Responses from beginning teachers and school administrators to interview questions were organized into emerging themes. The descriptive data were collected and analyzed for common themes and patterns based on the teachers’ demographic and background information.

Finally, it was the desire of this researcher that the results of this study would identify the skills, knowledge, and common characteristics of beginning teachers who participate in GA TAPP and teachers from the traditional

certification routes in the first six to twelve months in the classroom. The results of this study may require a more extensive examination of how school administrators and policymakers may address needs and provide support for beginning teachers as they enter into the teaching profession.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter focuses on a review of the literature that summarizes the existing knowledge, experiences, and common characteristics of beginning teachers who choose to participate in alternative certification programs rather than the traditional certification programs. An overwhelming majority of states, including Georgia, have turned to alternative certification programs to lure individuals with other degrees, experiences, and skills into the teaching profession at an expeditious rate (National Center for Education Information, 2005). Subsequently, it has become more critical than ever to closely examine the background skills of the individuals who enter the teaching profession and to determine the extent these skills are indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom. With this in mind, this chapter explores the following topics:

1. Historical Background of Teacher Certification Programs
2. Differences between participants in Alternative Certification Program and participants in Traditional Certification Programs
3. Common Characteristics of participants in Alternative Certification Programs and Traditional Certification Programs
5. School Administrators' Perceptions of Beginning Teachers

Historical Background of Teacher Certification Programs

In writing about schools and teachers, Hofstadter (1963) has noted that teachers have historically not been well regarded, “a common Anglo-American attitude toward the teaching functions, which is sharply different from that prevailing on the European continent” (p. 312). Hofstadter has traced the problem of finding qualified schoolmasters to colonial times when “there was a limited supply of educated men, and they were blessed with too many opportunities to be content to settle for what the average community was willing to pay a schoolmaster” (p. 312). Teacher retention was a problem even during this period of time, and it was common for communities to employ a number of ambitious young men who were on the way to other careers. Massachusetts was the only colony which had enough college graduates who were willing to serve as schoolmasters (Hofstadter, 1963).

The emergence of the woman teacher did not necessarily bring well-prepared teachers into the schools. Hofstadter (1963) reports that the beginning teachers were characteristically young and poorly prepared, with no public facilities to give them specialized training. To address the problem of teacher preparation, normal schools were established to provide training to those who were already teachers. The first teacher education preparation program can be traced back to the establishment of the first state normal school, which opened in Lexington, Massachusetts in July 1839 (Spring, 2001). The early normal schools prepared teachers to teach in today’s equivalent of the elementary school. The curriculum was directly related to skills and knowledge that were needed in actual

teaching. Normal schools did not require high school diplomas for admittance until the 1930s. Teacher preparation programs continued to progress throughout the early 1900s. Teachers who taught in secondary institutions, high schools, and academies were generally college and university graduates (Spring, 2001).

Normal schools were unable to keep pace with the rapidly growing demand for teachers. By 1933, there were a mere 30 normal schools and 146 teacher colleges (Spring, 2001).

During the twentieth century, teacher certification requirements evolved from the use of oral exams to written exams paired with mandatory completion of a prescribed set of courses (DeYoung & Wynn, 1972). It was also during this time that the certification of teachers was assumed by individual states.

Traditional Certification

In the United States today, certification and licensing of teachers continues to be the responsibility of the individual state (National Center for Education Information, 2003). Typically, the college or university submits a plan for a teacher preparation program for each discipline and/or grade level(s) for which the institution wishes to offer a certification. Individuals wishing to seek certification apply directly to the college or university, take the required coursework, and meet other required criteria such as student teaching and coursework. Upon completion of the program, the candidate is granted certification or a teaching license (National Center for Education Information, 2003).

Conant (1963) studied patterns of licensure in the United States and revealed a lack of consistency between state programs. Conant found that no two states had the same requirements for entry into the profession at either the elementary or secondary level. Conant's main concern was neither the requirements nor the route of licensure. Instead, his major consideration was the effectiveness of teachers. He posited that if pedagogical training is vital to teacher development and effectiveness, then teachers should not receive licensure without such training (Conant, 1963). The lack of standard criteria for teacher preparation led to implications for teacher quality.

The early 1980s raised awareness about equity issues and the inability of industry to compete successfully in world markets due to low education and skills of graduates (Carter & Cunningham, 1977). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was issued under the direction of the newly created U. S. Department of Education. The report's major emphasis stated that (a) American students compared unfavorably to students in other countries and were weaker in inferential skills, (b) science achievement had declined, and (c) a national problem of illiteracy existed (Carter & Cunningham, 1977). One of the recommendations was to strengthen standards in teacher preparation programs. Major initiatives were proposed that focused on the nature of teacher preparation, evaluation, support, and involvement in decision-making, describing elements as key to effective schooling and teaching (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1992).

In 1992, President Bill Clinton reaffirmed George Bush's *America 2000* program, which became *Goals 2000*. The list of goals was expanded to include

better preparation of teachers (Carter, 1997). Continuing with the education reform initiatives, the National Council of Teacher Education (NCATE) developed standards for the clinical preparation of teachers, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards called for intensive teaching internships (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). These reform efforts focused on making major changes and improvements in teacher preparation, licensing, and professional development (Wise, 1994).

The National Commission on Teaching & America's Future summarized its challenge in a 1996 landmark report, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. The Commission concluded that the reform of elementary and secondary education depends first and foremost on restructuring its foundation—the teaching profession. “We propose an audacious goal...by the year 2006, America will provide all students in the country with what should be their educational birthright: access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers” (p. 5). The accountability provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) reauthorization, referred to as the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, outlined provisions for states and school districts to use powerful, innovative tools of education reform that can significantly improve the knowledge and skills of their teachers, including the implementation of alternative certification programs.

According to Angus (2001), the country needs teachers who are broadly and deeply educated, not just teachers who have studied primarily education. State departments of education, colleges and universities, and school districts are seeking innovative programs for supplying quality teachers to the nation's public

school classrooms. The NCLB Act opened the door for certification and licensure through nontraditional routes, removing the monopoly held by the traditional teacher preparation programs on the teaching profession.

Alternative Certification

Alternative certification programs were launched in the mid-1980s, when projected teacher shortages forced many state education departments and school districts to find innovative ways to produce certified teachers to fill every classroom (Dial & Stevens, 1993; Feistritzer, 1993). A growing criticism of the current traditional teacher education practices and concerns about the academic quality of individuals entering the teaching profession provided validation of the alternative certification program (Dill, 1996; Feistritzer, 1998; Feistritzer & Chester, 1998; Stoddart & Floden, 1995). The authors report that teacher shortages in the areas of science, mathematics, bilingual education, and special education reached critical proportions in high-poverty communities. New Jersey became one of the first states to offer an alternative teacher certification program in 1984 (Klagholtz, 2001). Its purpose was to attract applicants who had degrees and careers in the critical areas of mathematics and science, but no experience in the classroom. Klagholtz purports that the new alternative teacher certification program preempted the emergency certification process in New Jersey. Klagholtz was the original architect of New Jersey's Provisional Teacher Program. In the alternate route proposal, Klagholtz stated:

There is a need to provide an alternate route to certification for those who possess a degree but have not completed an internship, and thereby open the doors of the teaching profession to talented persons from all collegiate fields of study.... Therefore, for those who majored in the liberal arts...the

internship could be provided after graduation by a local school district. (Klagholz, 2000, p. 9)

The push for alternative certification continued to grow during the 1990s with 40 states and the District of Columbia implementing over 117 state-run programs (Feistritzer & Chester, 1998, 2000). In addition, the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education listed 328 alternative programs operated by colleges and universities (AACTE, 1996).

Feistritzer (1979) was able to make a very clear description of the evolution of the alternative teacher certification movement by suggesting that it rose out of a need for not only more, but also better, teachers. Even though the number of teachers prepared annually was sufficient to meet marketplace demands (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Ingersoll, 2002), finding and retaining exemplary classroom teachers continued to be a concern for K-12 schools nationwide. Salinas, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2006) argued that our nation is faced with the threat of teacher shortages in critical teaching areas but acknowledged that there was more concern about diversity and the quality of the teaching force. According to the latest teacher supply and demand projections by the National Center for Education Information, the nation needs to hire 2.2 million people to teach in the nation's elementary and secondary schools in the next decade (Feistritzer, Harr, Hobar, & Scullion, 2005). These projections were confirmed by the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future (1996) which cited that "more new teachers will be hired in the next decade than in any previous decade in our history" (NCTAF, 1996, p.76). Although states and education organizations have begun to pursue different ways to recruit high

quality individuals to become teachers, there is an increasing need to examine the characteristics of teachers who enter the teaching profession.

For the past two decades, the fields of math and science have suffered from teacher shortages (Darling-Hammond, Hudson & Kirby, 1989). In addition, there is an influx of special education students which has led to a shortage in special education teachers in schools. There are declining numbers of minority teachers coming through traditional teacher education programs; thus, they represent a declining proportion of the teaching force. Only 9% of teachers, compared to 26% of students, are minorities (Feistritzer & Chester, 1998). Students in the schools with the highest minority enrollments, usually schools in high-poverty areas, have less than a 50% chance of having a science or math teacher with a license or degree in the field in which he or she teaches (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). As a result, America's most challenging classrooms are often forced to employ the nation's least qualified teachers. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education reported the following ethnic composition of college students in elementary and secondary teacher preparation programs: 90% white, 4.4% black, 2% Hispanic, and 1.8% Asian (AACTE, 1987). Furthermore, historically, women have been a majority in the teaching profession. Shortages of male teachers have led to their inclusion as a minority and have provoked the development of programs to attract and license more candidates from male and minority groups through alternative certification programs.

In recent years, much interest in teaching as a career has developed among older, more mature individuals, life experienced individuals from other careers, early retirees from the military and other occupations, former teachers, and individuals who have raised their own families and have a desire to teach (Feistritzer & Chester, 1998; Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Alternative certification programs have increased in demand throughout the nation to respond specifically to the needs of a more diverse pool of applicants.

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b), federal law requires schools to have a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom by the end of 2005-2006 school year. The NCLB Act also requires that every child must be at grade level in mathematics, science, and reading by the end of the school year 2013-2014 (Meyer, 2004). To achieve these goals, school administrators are faced with the challenge of securing and retaining a quality teacher in every classroom through their recruitment and hiring decisions. Alternative teacher certification has become an important source of teachers for school administrators seeking to recruit and retain new teachers (Johnson, Birkeland, & Peske, 2003). The oldest and most established states such as California, New Jersey, and Texas offer the most prolific alternate routes in terms of production of new teachers, and they report that about 40% of their new hires come through alternate routes. Additional states are growing rapidly in producing more new teachers through alternate routes, including Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, Virginia, and Georgia (National Center for Alternative Certification, 2006).

With the rapid increase in student population in Georgia, the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP) developed out of a need to attract certified classroom teachers (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001). In 1985 Georgia responded to the increasing shortage of secondary teachers in the critical areas of mathematics, science, and foreign language by approving the issuing of renewable certificates to individuals who met certain criteria. In order to attract more qualified individuals into these fields, the Georgia Quality Based Education (QBE) Act developed an alternative route to certification. In the late 1990s, a few Northwest Georgia school districts were struggling to attract adequate numbers of certified classroom teachers due to the rapid student population growth. In 1999 almost half of the new teachers came from out of state. To address this critical teacher shortage, superintendents decided to pursue the alternative route to certification. The Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP) was developed as a statewide program model the following year by the Professional Standards Commission. The GA TAPP began as a two-year, research-based program which offered an economical means of bringing fully certified high-quality teachers into Georgia schools.

With higher education programs graduating fewer teachers, Georgia's regional superintendents pushed for an alternative route to certification to address this concern. The Northwest Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA), one of sixteen agencies in Georgia, was one of the first to respond to the superintendent's call to develop an alternative teacher preparation program. In

2000, the Professional Standards Commission facilitated a statewide program using Northwest RESA as a model. This program was later named the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP), which offers a two-year, research-based program at a low cost and has enticed fully certified high-quality teachers into Georgia schools. Currently, there are nine RESA-operated GA TAPP programs, including the original Northwest RESA program, which serves sixteen school districts across eleven mostly rural counties and the Metro RESA, which serves eleven school districts in the metropolitan Atlanta area (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). In 2006, approximately 22% of new teachers were prepared through alternative routes in Georgia, up 2.5% from 2005. With a total of 12,949 new teachers hired into Georgia classrooms, the proportion of traditionally prepared new teachers supplied by Georgia colleges decreased slightly from 24.1% in 2005 to 23.5% in 2006 (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006).

The Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP), which will be used for purposes of this study, has several components. To be eligible for the program an individual must have

- earned a bachelor's degree from an accredited college/university
- earned a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher on all college work completed
- passed the Georgia Assessment for Certification of Educators (GACE) or exempt GACE Basic Skills Assessment requirement with high enough scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test

(combined 1000), American College Test (combined 43) or Graduate Requisite Exam (combined 1030)

- passed a Georgia GCIC criminal background check
- received a job offer as a beginning teacher by a participating school system (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2007).

Although basic acceptance criteria are state-mandated, each RESA has its own variation on the selection process. Once applicants are accepted into a GA TAPP program, they apply to the state for Intern Certification and the program assigns the applicants a Candidate Support Team (CST) made up of school and system-level staff who provide support for the duration of their internship (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Differences Between Alternative and Traditional Programs

A review of the literature reveals that there are several critical distinctions between the traditional certification and alternative certification, most notably, the type of candidates who participate in the two different routes to certification. A study conducted by Stoddart (1993) revealed differences between alternative and traditional certified teachers along several variables, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 2.1

Differences Between Alternatively-Certified Teachers and Traditionally-Certified Teachers

Characteristics Certified	Alternatively-Certified Teacher (%)	Traditionally-Certified Teacher (%)
Age		
Over 26 years		
English	52.8	30.6
Mathematics	57.1	0.0
Gender		
Female		
English	47.6	78.6
Mathematics	33.3	59.1
Ethnicity		
Minority		
English	33.3	0.0
Mathematics	36.1	9.0
Would prefer to teach		
Urban or city		
English	71.4	42.9
Mathematics	69.4	13.6

Natriello and Zumwalt (1993) have examined one alternative program in New Jersey, the Provisional Teacher Program, by surveying teachers completing an alternative route as well the traditional certification program to see if the program was addressing the staffing needs of urban school districts. Background characteristics of both groups were considered to “determine whether one group was more likely to possess characteristics that might dispose or equip them to work in an urban setting” (Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993, p. 52). Finally, the

researchers reported the following findings during the first four years of their teaching careers as reported by the teachers:

- Alternate certification teachers were more likely than traditional certification teachers to come from urban backgrounds, to be members of racial and ethnic minority groups, and to have a facility with a language in addition to English.
- Alternate certification teachers were more likely than traditional certification teachers to express a preference for teaching in urban settings and to express a preference for teaching disadvantaged students.
- Alternate certification teachers were also more likely than traditional certification teachers to be working in urban districts throughout their early years of teaching (Natriello, 1993, pp. 59 & 60).

The entrants to alternative certification programs differ from traditional certification entrants in that they are often older and more ethnically diverse (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). As a result, alternative certification programs are geared toward older candidates. The typical traditional certification candidate receives full certification by completing either an undergraduate or graduate program. In contrast, according to the School and Staffing Survey, alternative certification programs attract those who already possess a bachelor's degree and those seeking to make a mid-career transition into teaching (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002b). In addition, alternative certification candidates undergo no initial teacher training before becoming a teacher and generally engage in only a few weeks of practice teaching. The typical alternative certification program requires candidates to attend workshops or university courses during the first year; however, candidates are not fully certified until one to three years later. In contrast, traditionally certified teachers complete a full series of teacher-related courses including pedagogy, child development, and

classroom management and receive full certification before becoming a teacher (Feistritzer, 1999).

Haberman (1991) asserts that the quality of the candidates recruited is a significant factor in the overall success of teachers prepared through alternative certification programs. Haberman's research parallels the findings of Natriello and Zumwalt (1993), which identifies that other factors in the selection of candidates include the reaching of a developmental level of adulthood and the demonstration of the ability to establish rapport with low-income students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Individual characteristics related to age, maturity, and rapport with prospective student groups are also considered important. Eifler and Potthoff (1998) revealed that students in alternative certification programs attended more than one institution to obtain a degree, have many personal and professional commitments, are financially independent, reflect no predominant socioeconomic status, and represent all racial groups. Turley and Nakai (2000) found that compared to graduates of traditional teacher education programs, students of alternative certification programs tend to be older, more ethnically diverse, have previous experience in other occupations and previous college experience, and usually have family support financial obligations. The authors found that some teachers come from private or parochial schools, bringing experience but no formal credentials. Some are former teachers with expired credentials who are returning to the profession after an extended absence.

Humphrey & Wechsler (2002), proponents of alternative certification, and opponents of traditional teacher preparation, describe alternative certification

teachers as smart and mature individuals: business people, lawyers, scientists, and engineers in search of a second career that they find socially meaningful and personally rewarding. Supporters of this characterization often justify it with the argument that many alternative certification teachers are committed, well-paid professionals willing to sacrifice salary and other benefits to make a difference in the lives of young people (Dahkemper, 2001; Feistritzer, 2001; & Haberman, 2004). These proponents also argue that alternative certification teachers make outstanding educators because of their real-world experience, or in the case of Teach for America, because they represent some of our country's best educated and brightest young people.

On the other hand, Shen (2000) used data from the early 1990s which contradict these studies, noting that these programs result in little difference in the proportion of males to females entering the profession. However, he found a higher percentage of teachers with bachelor's degrees in mathematics, science, or engineering among alternatively certified teachers than among traditionally certified teachers. Further, the alternative certification programs produce, on average, new teachers who are younger than those from traditional teacher training programs, which indicate that the average age of teachers from alternative certification programs has fallen.

Common Characteristics of Participants

Alternative certification programs are generally designed to attract individuals from various educational, occupational and life experiences to become teachers in hopes of increasing the quantity and diversity of the pool of applicants

in the teaching profession (Feistritzer, 1993, 1998; McKibbin & Ray, 1994; Stoddart, 1993; Wise, 1994). In 1999, Haberman argued that alternative certification may be the most effective means of recruiting teachers based on some common characteristics. Some of the reasons for motivation and characteristics of participants in the alternative certification programs are as follows:

- The appeal of alternative certification: Recent research provides some evidence that the prospect of avoiding traditional educational coursework serves as a powerful tool in recruiting potential teachers (Public Agenda, 2000). According to a survey, *Profile of Alternate Route Teachers*, conducted by the National Center for Education Information in 2005, 47% of the respondents indicated that they would not have become teachers if an alternate route had not been available. The data indicated that the older one gets, the less appealing teaching becomes without an alternate route. Only 20% say they would have gone back to college to get a teaching certificate (NCEI, 2005). In the state of Georgia, the alternative teacher certification program called GA TAPP requires that the candidates be hired as regular teachers and receive a teaching salary as they move through the program; as a result, GA TAPP is able to attract a wide variety of applicants (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This finding is consistent with Peske's (2003) finding that the "quick route" to teaching offered by some programs is especially attractive to their participants. Much like the findings in Massachusetts (Liu et al. 2003) and in Connecticut (Peske, 2003), the

participants appreciated the opportunity to enter classrooms quickly, and said that without the program, it would not have been financially feasible to enter teaching.

- Education as a new career: According to Adelman et al. (1990), participants' most common reason for enrolling in an alternative certification program is a personal commitment to go into teaching at some point in time. Nearly half of the participants entering teaching through alternate routes were working in a non-teaching profession before they began an alternative certification program; 40% were working in a professional occupation outside the field of education.

- Age, gender, and race differences: Haberman (1999) indicates that the most effective teachers for urban schools are teachers who did not decide to teach until after college graduation, are between thirty and fifty years old, are parents themselves, and live in urban areas. Shen (2000) contradicts other studies of teacher demographic changes resulting from alternative certification programs, indicating that there is little difference in the proportion of males to females entering the profession. Among traditional certification teachers, approximately 87% were white and 13% were non-white. Shen used data from the early 1990s which reported that alternative certification programs produced, on average, new teachers who are younger than those from traditional teacher training programs. The *Profile of Alternate Route Teachers* indicates opposing views that there are more males and older people than the population of teachers who obtain certification from the traditional route.

- Educational background: Nearly eight out of ten candidates enter an alternative certification program with a bachelors degree or higher in a field other than education. Before taking their first full-time teaching job, alternative certification candidates undergo virtually no training and take minimal to no teaching-related courses, such as pedagogy, child development, and classroom management. Some researchers argue that a lack of initial training for alternative certification candidates is sufficient because applicants are screened for subject matter competence before admission (Stoddart and Floden, 1995). Other researchers found that some teachers come from private or parochial schools, bringing experience but no formal credentials. Some are former teachers with expired credentials who are returning to the profession after an extended absence (Turley & Nakai, 2000). In contrast, traditionally certified teachers complete a full battery of teaching-related courses, participate in several months of student teaching, and receive full certification before becoming a full-time teacher (Feistritzer, 1999).
- Minority attraction: Alternative certification programs have been known to attract a diversified pool of applicants by hiring more men, minorities, and mature or experienced individuals. Some programs appear to recruit retired military personnel, people of color, and candidates with subject-matter specialties (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001; Zeichner & Shulte, 2001). Research published more than a decade ago found that the New Jersey Provisional Teacher Program and the Los Angeles Paraprofessional Program had higher percentages of males, minorities, and people older than 30 than did traditional programs

- Satisfaction with alternative certification: Only 3% of those entering teaching through alternate routes say they would not recommend an alternate route to teacher certification to others interested in becoming teachers (Feistritzer, 2005). Turley and Nakai (2000) concluded in a study of emergency permit teacher candidates and traditionally prepared student teachers in California that nearly all study respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their culminating field experience, and most said they would train as teachers in the same way again. Most reported confidence in their readiness for the classroom. However, there were some disadvantages reported that involved having such a heavy workload, a lack of mentoring, a lack of opportunities to observe other teachers, and the stress of being a full-time teacher. Shoho and Martin (1999) found that alternatively certified teachers felt significantly less isolated than traditionally certified teachers. Houston, Marshall, and McDavid's (1993) findings contrast with Shoho and Martin's, indicating that the problems of alternatively certified teachers were greater than those of regularly certified

teachers in six areas: student motivation, managing teacher time, managing the amount of paperwork, communicating with school administration, lacking personal time, and grading students. However, there were no differences between the alternatively certified and traditionally prepared teachers after eight months of teaching experience.

Buice (2003) concluded that there is much variation in participants' responses to the alternative certification program and their success in the classroom. Dickar (2003) compared the two types of participants in the New York City Teaching Fellows program, the career changers and the recent college graduates, to determine the extent of the variation in their responses. The study found that career changers tended to either exceed expectations or perform well below them, while recent college graduates tended to perform across the spectrum of expectations. Dickar reported:

Career changers performing below expectations tended to lack the flexibility to function in struggling schools, enter the profession casually rather than passionately, and are detached from their students. Those exceeding expectations tend to bring a high commitment to teaching, many professional skills that foster success, and are able to synthesize their teacher education, staff development in their schools, and advice from others into their practice meaningfully. (Dickar, 2003)

In Bliss's work a decade earlier, the findings suggest the importance of taking into account the participants' characteristics, particularly their career stage, and the experiences they bring into the alternative program that may assist or hinder them in learning to teach.

Administrators' Perceptions

One of the first evaluations of alternative certification training reviewed a program in Houston and reported the survey results of principals and

administrators. Goebel (1985) found that interns' abilities were perceived as equal to those of certified first-year teachers. Interns from the alternative certification training planned to return the following year and student achievement scores were similar to certified, first year teachers. However, another study of alternative certification in Dallas showed mixed results, finding that sufficient screening of applicants contributed to intern quality and that the participation of principals, supervising teachers, and advisors was crucial (Lutz & Hutton, 1989).

School administrators previously made recommendations regarding hiring decisions based on education and certification status of teachers (Adams, 1996). According to Nagy and Wang (2006), school administrators were often reluctant to hire teachers from alternative certification programs because of the amount of work and support involved. When prospective teachers were interviewed, school administrators attempted to determine whether interviewees possessed the appropriate knowledge, skills, and commitments to be effective teachers for students in their schools (Salyer, 2003). Consensus was that if an interviewed prospect lacked any or all of these characteristics, they would encounter problems with student discipline, lesson planning, student interaction, assessments, and instructional strategies in their first few years in the classroom. A major concern among administrators, and thought to be the single most important factor in determining student performance, was the quality of his or her teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hayes-Jacobs, 2004). As posed by Anthony and Kritsonis (2006), administrators were very concerned about the expense of replacing teachers for the school districts and the financing of education. Additionally,

there was continued concern about the disproportionately higher resignation rate for beginning teachers than for teachers who have been teaching for a number of years (Darling-Hammond, 2001). This research indicated that teachers left their professions early when mentoring was not utilized at the beginning of their careers. Doubts and fears of administrators regarding the alternative certification program subsided after a Texas Study conducted by Barnes et al. (1990) concluded that alternatively certification teachers had a unique teaching style, were highly motivated, and performed better on the National Exam.

In summary, information provided in this chapter included the literature pertinent to the study of the characteristics of teachers in the alternative certification and traditionally certification programs. In the review of the literature, information relevant to identifying individuals who enter into the alternative certification programs within the context of the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* as well as state responsibilities and requirements was examined. It is clear that there is a need to consider the various backgrounds, skills, experiences, and characteristics of individuals who become certified through the alternative certification programs (Bliss, 1990; Haberman, 1999; Dickar, 2003; Feistritzer, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Kline, 1999). Because alternative certification programs aim to attract a certain population of participants, and because the educational and professional backgrounds of participants influence how they experience the programs and what they get out of their programs, it is important to pay attention to the student population of the program (Klagholz, 2000). As a result, it is crucial to appropriately examine the impact of characteristics of

participants in alternative certification and traditional certification programs to participants' performance in the classroom. This study was undertaken to complement the existing body of knowledge related to the participants in the alternative certification and traditional certification programs so as to offer insight about defined skills that may equate to the performance of teachers in the classroom which may impact the selection and hiring of participants who enter our nation's schools.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The major purpose of this study was to examine the specific skills of beginning participants in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Program (GA TAPP) and the traditional certification program that may contribute to their performance in the classroom setting. This study ascertained the skillsets of beginning teachers in the GA TAPP and traditional certification program through interviews, pre-existing data to include written lesson plans and portfolios. This study also examined beginning teachers in the GA TAPP and traditional certification program regarding their background knowledge, skills, and experiences. Finally, this study gathered demographic information to describe characteristics of the participants in the GA TAPP and traditional certification program to better understand the perceptions and experiences of the participants and how these variables equate to their performance in the classroom.

This chapter presents both the procedures used to obtain data for this study and the methods used to analyze the evidence to answer the research questions. The chapter (a) restates the research questions, (b) presents an overview of the methodological approach, (c) describes the participants of interest, (d) describes the data collection instruments and the procedures used to determine the validity of the instruments, (e) outlines the data collection and data analysis procedures, and (f) summarizes the precautions taken to ensure informed consent and the protection of human subjects.

Research Questions

The researcher addressed the following overarching research question: What specific skills do beginning teachers in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Program (GA TAPP) possess compared to the beginning teachers from the traditional certification programs in Georgia? The following sub questions guided the research:

1. What classroom skills do beginning teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of beginning teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?
2. What are the common characteristics of beginning teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP programs and beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?
3. Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom?

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative methodology which included individual case studies of six beginning teachers and four school administrators. The qualitative case study method was used to gather data through in-depth interviewing. Case study interviews were conducted to obtain information from the respondents about the facts as well as their opinions about the skills and characteristics of beginning teachers (Yin, 2003).

The qualitative research was deemed the most appropriate in order to try to understand with more depth and first-hand knowledge regarding beginning

teachers' skills and experiences by interviewing the participants from the alternative certification program and participants from the traditional certification program in the school setting. Qualitative research yielded multifaceted findings, which proceeded beyond the original focus of the study. Participants revealed unexpected abilities, strengths, and coping strategies when their performances were viewed in natural settings and authentic situations (Bordens & Abbott, 2005). After several interviews, the researcher felt more comfortable with the interviewing process and consciously aware of how to control the researcher's subjectivity. As the interviews continued, the researcher was able to learn more about the researcher's own values, beliefs, and interests in beginning teachers' skills and characteristics.

This researcher used a combination of data sources to obtain information related to the skills, prior experiences, common characteristics, and demographics of beginning GA TAPP and traditionally certified teachers. The researcher anxiously conducted interviews with three beginning teachers from the alternative certification program and three beginning teachers from the traditional certification program to obtain supplementary qualitative information related to beginning teachers' skills and classroom experiences. In addition, the researcher conducted interviews with four school administrators to obtain information about the beginning teachers' performance in the classroom. Initially, the researcher was scheduled to conduct interviews with three high school administrators. However, after discovering that a teacher from the alternative certification program was no longer at one of the schools, the researcher immediately shifted

focus and requested an interview with a beginning alternative teacher and school administrator from another school. Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) observed that data collection may be identified on a “continuum from unplanned to highly planned” (p. 96). Within that continuum, it was noted that traditionally focused/structured measurement procedures such as questionnaires, structured interviews, and observation protocols were formulaic data collection while clinical data collection consisted of “clinical interviews, unstructured observations, and overall evaluations of documents” (ibid). Within these approaches, Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) list the following four general categories or procedures for collecting data:

- asking individuals for self reports, information and/or skills and experiences,
- seeing what people do, recording what they do, or making inferences,
- using data collected and/or documented by others, and
- asking individuals about their relationship with others.

A few procedures from the identified categories were used for this study. Specifically, the design of this study consisted of gathering information from participants constructed primarily from data collected from structured interviews, inferences made about the participants’ skills and experiences from school administrators, information from the participants about their perceptions of their classroom performance, and written lesson plans and portfolios collected from beginning teachers.

The interview questions for the study were based on beginning teachers' perceptions of their performance in the classroom setting and based on informal classroom observations by school administrators. Initially the interview questions were face-to-face and purposefully structured to allow the researcher to control the flow and ordering of the questions asked (Nardi, 2006). All interviews were conducted on the school campuses of the participants. The questions developed for the interview were derived from the four domains of Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996). The major domains within this framework are: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. The interview commenced with two open-ended questions, to see what kinds of issues the participants would describe without the imposition of a pre-conceived framework (see Appendix A). The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. All participants were asked to grant written permission for use of the data from the interviews.

In addition, preexisting data were reviewed and analyzed for the beginning teachers' perceptions of their skills, knowledge, and experiences as they related to the teachers' classroom performance. These included written lesson plans and the beginning teachers' portfolio. Information from these artifacts served to provide further evidence of the beginning teachers' perceptions about their skills, knowledge, and experience and how these data relate to their classroom performance.

Population

The population for this study was from the Northeast Regional Educational Service Agency in Georgia. It was limited to three public secondary schools that employed beginning teachers who have participated in the Georgia Teacher Preparation Program for four or more years and beginning teachers who have completed a traditional certification program.

Sample

The sample or subset of the population consisted of three beginning alternatively certified high school teachers who are currently participating in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program during the school year 2007-2008. The second group consisted of three traditionally certified high school teachers who were beginning their first year in a public school. Selection of the participants was purposeful in that all participants were employed in a public secondary school during the 2007-2008 school year. The third group consisted of four high school administrators who had beginning teachers in their schools participating in the GA TAPP and beginning teachers from the traditional certification program during the 2007-2008 school year. The school administrators had the responsibility of evaluating and/or making recommendations for hiring teachers.

The Georgia Regional Service Educational Agencies provided the researcher with a list of participants in the GA TAPP program, the names of the schools where the participants were teaching, and their mailing addresses. This study was designed to acquire information from beginning alternatively certified

teachers and beginning traditionally certified teachers. The interview questions were used to obtain information from the participants regarding specific skills in four competency areas derived from Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (1996): planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professionalism and human relations skills.

Instrumentation

The researcher was the key instrument in this study. The researcher's role was that of a learner who came to learn from and with research participants (Glesne, 2006). Casting the researcher as a learner correspondingly casts the participant as teacher which makes the participant more receptive to being interviewed (pg. 94). The researcher became an active listener and observer throughout the interview. It was important that the researcher was aware that the appearance, speech, and behavior of the researcher had to be acceptable to the participants. The objective was to establish rapport with the participants prior to the interview in an effort to relieve any anxieties and to generate a sense of comfort. The researcher reflected on all aspects of research procedures and findings before conducting the interviews (pg. 111). Being constantly aware of the researcher's own bias regarding alternatively certified beginning teachers allowed the researcher to control the subjectivity of the study.

The second instrument consisted of a self-generated questionnaire for participants developed from several components of the Georgia Framework for Teaching, Georgia Teacher Evaluation Program (GTEP), and the GA TAPP Practicum Competencies (see Appendix A). These instruments are used by

school administrators and mentors to measure the performance of beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and traditional certification program. The researcher carefully constructed the questions in order to gain facts as well as allow for a discussion of both positive experiences and negative ones. The interview questions asked for participants' age, gender, ethnic background, highest degree held, certification route (traditional and alternative), student enrollment, and school setting. The interview questions also included three additional requests: (a) to identify participants' field(s) of work prior to alternative certification, (b) to identify the subject areas they are currently teaching, and (c) to identify the grade levels they are teaching (see Appendix A). The interview questions were generated to obtain the skills and common characteristics of beginning alternatively certified and beginning traditionally certified teachers.

The interview questions obtained the participants' perceptions regarding their competence during their first year of teaching in the following areas: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The items in the interview questions were derived largely from the domains of Danielson's *Framework for Teaching* (1996). The interview questions also incorporated two open-ended questions. Open-ended questions were designed to encourage participants to talk openly about their positive and negative experiences as they viewed them.

A copy of the interview questions is included in Appendix A of this research proposal. All interviews were tape recorded, with explicit conversations about confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, and informed consent. Documentation

on pre-existing data such as lesson plans and the beginning teacher portfolio were reviewed and analyzed. Information from these artifacts served to provide further evidence of the candidates' perceptions about their skills and experiences that may equate to their classroom performance.

Procedures

The data for this study were collected from three beginning teachers from the alternative certification program and three beginning teachers from the traditional certification program. This study produced data from interviewing six beginning teachers and four school administrators, and reviewing pre-existing documents to examine the skills and common characteristics of beginning alternative and traditional certified teachers.

Permission from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was secured and approved to involve human subjects to ensure their safety from immoral acts as a result of the study. After permission was granted, a letter of introduction and consent was sent to the beginning teachers and school administrators requesting their participation in the study. As Creswell (1994) suggested, the letter included why the school was selected for the study, the length of the interview, how the results will be reported, and what the researcher will gain from the study. The letters of consent to beginning teachers and school administrators are included in Appendix C and D.

The participants in the interview were guaranteed that confidentiality would be maintained throughout the research. The interview questions were assessed for face validity by three colleagues and one Regional Educational

Service Agency (RESA) representative. The three colleagues consisted of one principal and one assistant principal, both of whom were responsible for supervising beginning teachers, and one curriculum director who is considered an expert in the field of teacher education as determined by her education and experience. The educators examined the instrument to determine if the questions for the interview were relevant to the research questions and the study. This group of educators was familiar with alternative certification programs and teacher certification practices and performances, which assisted in establishing content validity.

The educators were asked to provide feedback on (a) relevance of the items, (b) clarity of the items, (c) length of time for completing the interview, and (d) overall presentation of the instrument. Upon receipt of feedback and completion of revisions, interview questions were used for each participant of the alternative certification program and traditional certification program at a pre-arranged meeting. Participation in the interview was voluntary, and members of the sample population were free to discontinue their involvement at any time. Participants were asked to provide any additional comments in the open-ended questions. Descriptive data extracted from the questions in Section I allowed the researcher to construct demographic profiles of this particular group of beginning school teachers.

Data Analysis

Responses to interview questions concerning participants' perception of their performance regarding classroom environment, planning and preparation,

instruction, and professionalism were transcribed and analyzed for common themes and patterns. Upon completion of the interviews by beginning teachers, data were organized into emerging themes. A theme is defined by Dutton and Dukerich as a recurring topic of discussion that captured the interview's central ideas (Plowman, Thomas, Beck, Baker, Kulkarni, & Travis, 2007). The researcher notated important points by hand during the interviews to prevent interfering with the process (Glesne, 2005). Additionally, interview participants were told they may be called for clarification of items to prevent ambiguity.

A list of unique themes for each of the ten interviews was developed. The list of themes was consolidated for all ten interviews. According to O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell, categories should be non-repetitive, readable, general, and discriminant (Plowman et al., 2007). This process required the list of themes to be collapsed even further into a list of major themes. The list of major categories served as a way of chunking up the data so that they could be analyzed systematically (Weis & Fine, 2000). The findings from the study were triangulated over the various sources which included interviews, pre-existing data, and classroom observations by school administrators to check the validity. The study established internal validity of the results by using triangulation of data and peer examination (Creswell, 1994). Once data were examined, the categories were recombined by the researcher in order to produce the written research. A summary of the data responding to the research questions was ready to be presented and shared with the participants upon request.

Summary

This chapter describes the methods and procedures that were used in identifying the skills and common characteristics of beginning teachers from the alternatively certified programs and beginning teachers from the traditionally certified programs. This study conducted face-to-face interviews using beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and beginning teachers from the traditionally certified programs along with their school administrators for the 2007-2008 school year. Interview questions were derived from several components of the *Danielson's Framework for Teaching (1996)*. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed into common themes to generate a written report. Specific findings and in-depth data are presented in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions held by beginning alternatively certified teachers, beginning traditionally certified teachers, and their principals regarding the specific skills that may contribute to beginning teachers' performance in the classroom setting. Additionally, the study sought to identify the common characteristics of beginning teachers. It sought to identify demographic variables associated with beginning teachers; specifically, the demographic variables the researcher examined included ethnicity, gender, current teaching assignment, educational background and prior occupational experience. The overarching research question was this: What specific skills do beginning teachers in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Program (GA TAPP) possess compared to the skills of beginning teachers from the traditional certification programs in Georgia? The following three sub-questions also guided the research:

1. What classroom skills do beginning teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of beginning teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?
2. What are the common characteristics of beginning teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP programs and beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?
3. Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom?

Participants for the study included alternatively certified teachers in the Georgia TAPP program and traditionally certified teachers in their first year of teaching in three Northeast RESA Georgia school districts. Other participants were the beginning teachers' school administrators.

Chapter IV presents an overview of the significant findings and reports overall results from the structured one-on-one interviews with beginning teachers and their school administrators, beginning with demographic data of beginning teachers. The remainder of the chapter reports the findings of each research question.

Demographic Data

The data for this study were collected from three beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and three beginning teachers from the traditional certification program. To effectively address the research question regarding characteristics of beginning teachers, demographic data were collected and summarized in the following table by category: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) highest degree, (e) current position, and (f) prior occupational experience and background.

Age of Respondents

Respondents were asked to provide their age in the following categories: 20-24 years of age; 25-35 years of age; 36-45 years of age; 46-55 years of age; and above 55 years of age. The minimum age of the beginning teacher was between 20-24; the maximum age was between 36 and 45. Of the three teachers from the GA TAPP, one teacher was between 25 and 35, and two teachers were between 36 and 45. Of the three teachers from the traditionally certified program,

one teacher was between 20-24, and two teachers were between 36 and 45 as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Age of Respondents

<u>Beginning Teachers</u>	<u>Number</u>
GA TAPP	
20-24 years of age	0
25-35 years of age	1
36-45 years of age	2
46-55 years of age	0
Above 55	0
Traditionally Certified	
20-24 years of age	1
25-35 years of age	0
36-45 years of age	2
46-55 years of age	0
Above 55	0

Gender

Of the six beginning teachers, there were four females and two males. Of the three teachers from the GA TAPP, there were two females and one male. Of the three teachers from the traditional certified program, there were two females and one male (as outlined in Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Gender of Respondents

<u>Beginning Teachers</u>	<u>Number</u>
GA TAPP	
Female	2
Male	1
Traditional Certified	
Female	2
Male	1

Ethnicity

Of the six beginning teachers, there were five Caucasians and one African American. Of the three teachers from the GA TAPP, there were two Caucasians and one African American. Of the three teachers from the traditional certified program, there were three Caucasians (as outlined in Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Ethnicity of Respondents

<u>Beginning Teachers</u>	<u>Number</u>
<u>GA TAPP</u>	
African American	1
Asian American	0
Caucasian	2
Hispanic	0
Native American	0
Other	0
<u>Traditional Certified</u>	
African American	0
Asian American	0
Caucasian	3
Hispanic	0
Native American	0
Other	0

Experience and Background

Of the six beginning teachers, five held Bachelor of Science degrees and one held a Master of Arts degree. Only one teacher from the traditionally certified program held a Master of Arts degree (see Table 4.4). Beginning teachers varied in their current teaching assignments which included two math teachers, one language arts teacher, two history teachers, and one health teacher. Finally, the identification of the beginning teachers' career prior to entering the teaching profession was reviewed. Of the three beginning teachers in GA TAPP, two teachers were in sales/business, and one was teaching social science in another state. Of the traditionally certified teachers, one was teaching fine arts as

a dance instructor, one was practicing medicine and health, and one was in sales/business prior to entering the teaching profession (see Table 4.5 below).

Table 4.4

Experience and Background of Respondents

<u>Beginning Teachers</u>	<u>Number</u>
GA TAPP	
Bachelor's	3
Master's	0
Specialist	0
Doctorate	0
Traditional Certified	
Bachelor's	2
Master's	1
Specialist	0
Doctorate	0

Table 4.5

Teaching Assignments of Respondents

<u>Beginning Teachers</u>	<u>Number</u>
GA TAPP	
Math	1
Language Arts	0
Social Science	1
Science	1
Traditional Certified	
Math	1
Language Arts	1
Social Science	1
Science	

Research Question One

The first research question reads, “What classroom skills do teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?”

In order to answer the first question, the researcher examined the perceptions of beginning teachers by interviewing beginning teachers and school administrators. Information related to this question was obtained through six face-to-face, one-on-one open-ended interviews with beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and traditionally certified program and four beginning teachers’ school administrators. The identities of the participants have been disguised to protect confidentiality. Beginning teachers from the GA TAPP will be identified as G1, G2, and G3. Beginning teachers from the traditionally certified programs will be identified as Teacher T1, Teacher T2, and Teacher T3. The school administrators will be identified as S1, S2, S3, and S4.

Each oral interview was conducted using a series of survey interview questions (Appendix A). The questions were used to guide the conversation related to the four domains of Charlotte Danielson’s *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996). The four domains within this framework were: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. The responses to the interview questions varied slightly. However, some common themes did emerge. The researcher identified and explained the common themes through summaries of and direct quotes from the interview participants’ responses.

In responding to skills under the domain of planning and preparation, the majority of the beginning GA TAPP teachers felt that their prior background experiences had better prepared them for the teaching profession. Two of the three teachers worked with children in some capacity, from elementary schools to senior citizens. As a result of their teaching experiences, they had a working knowledge of developmental age-group characteristics and skills of students. Among the beginning GA TAPP teachers and the beginning traditionally certified teachers, the common theme was that there was an obvious appreciation of the diversity of students. Teacher G1 responded to the question about what specifics about their background made them successful as teachers with the following statement:

When you work as an insurance agent and dealing with adults, you know what some of these kids have to live with and without. When you are exposed to that, you realize that many of these students don't live with moms and dads. They are lucky to have one parent. They live with grandparents or either foster parents. It helps you to understand their situations. I also had the opportunity to work with an Italian Yankee that transferred to Georgia. This experience taught me to appreciate different cultures.

GA TAPP teachers were typically older and more mature, and believed themselves to be well disciplined and able to adapt more readily than traditionally certified beginning teachers. However, the common theme that emerged was that almost all of the beginning teachers struggled with classroom management during

their first year of teaching and each seemed to experience some difficulties relating to the students. The degree of difficulty often coincided with the individual teacher's own background. For example, Teacher T3 came from an affluent background and experienced major difficulties relating to the students in his class who were from the high poverty community he served. On the other hand, Teacher G2, another beginning teacher from the GA TAPP program who also was from an affluent community, felt that she was able to relate and connect with all students. In addition, there were difficulties in learning to engage students and in being creative and actively seeking varied instructional materials to enhance the learning process.

Another common theme was that both groups of beginning teachers believed that they brought a great deal of excitement, enthusiasm, and flexibility to the teaching profession, and each expressed a desire to make a difference in the lives of students. Teacher T2, a beginning teacher from the traditional route, stated:

I also think that just the fact that I enjoy being here (at school) every day is a wonderful asset to have because I don't just want to teach students language arts; I want to teach them how to be better people and let them know that they have a role model or someone to come to if they need somebody.

Most school administrators responded very similarly to the question of what assets beginning teachers bring to the teaching profession. They felt that both groups possessed a solid knowledge of content and of connections with

technology. Beginning teachers bring an enthusiasm that is contagious and sometimes spreads to the veteran teachers. School administrators felt that beginning teachers from the traditional route are younger than veteran teachers and they have been exposed to newer teaching methods in their course work. Compared to the beginning traditionally trained teacher, School Administrator S1 responded that:

Georgia TAPP teachers bring background from another area. She (a GA TAPP teacher) brought with her a lot of content knowledge. She's very confident in who she is as a person based on prior experiences, and she's not fresh out of school—not like your typical first year teacher, who is 22. She is older, more mature, and brings lots of enthusiasm.

The skillset that most beginning teachers felt that they lacked entering the teaching profession was how to complete lesson plans. Teacher G2, a beginning teacher from the GA TAPP program, summarized the question about preparation that beginning teachers did not get before entering the teaching profession by stating:

Okay...I did not get your standard, here's how to write a lesson plan. Or, here is the activating strategy...I'm like, "what the heck is an activating strategy?" I do not know what that is.

Several respondents stated that they had lots of challenges with trying to find time to gather those lesson plans together and with feeling like they were prepared.

The skillset that most beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and traditional route programs stated that they lacked once they were actually teaching

was classroom management. When respondents were asked, “What is your greatest challenge as a beginning teacher?” there was an overwhelming response that it was classroom management. However, because in most cases beginning TAPP teachers are older and more mature, they are able to relate to parents better than the younger beginning traditional teachers. As Teacher G1, a GA TAPP teacher, recalled:

Well, I talk to parents like I would like to be talked to, and when I make phone calls home, which I’ve already started doing, I ask them to be my ally and to help their students see why they need to study and stay on task in class. I usually tell them I’m a parent, too, and that you know, I struggle with one who is a procrastinator, and share with them, so I relate to them as an empathetic parent.

Teacher T3, a beginning teacher from the traditional route, responded:

Ah, classroom management is a big issue, and I don’t know if you can actually teach that. It’s just something that you have to experience...it’s like a gunshot and it hurts.

Teacher G2, a GA TAPP teacher, lamented:

How do I get them to respect me? What am I doing wrong, and what should I expect of my students? How do I do this (classroom management)?

School administrators’ perspective on all beginning teachers’ greatest challenges also included classroom management. They all agreed that most beginning teachers know their content and enjoy teaching it. They further

observed that although beginning teachers appear to relate to the students fairly well, they are a little intimidated by parents due to the lack of experience working with parents and the lack of support from parents, in addition to time management pressures, so they often choose not to engage fully with parents. Interestingly, School Administrator S4 responded to the question about the greatest challenges for GA TAPP teachers by stating:

This teacher worked previously with a wide variety of population, especially special needs students and their families, who can be demanding. So often you are dealing with that first year teacher who has never had a parent conference, or never had a confrontation. This teacher had that experience in dealing with people. So, that's a tremendous asset for her and her ability to relate to students.

School Administrator S2 responded to the question about the greatest challenge for the traditionally certified teachers:

Beginning teachers are very defensive at first to parents because it's very rare a parent comes in and says, "great job." Normally, they want to come in and complain about something, and that scares beginning teachers.

They are young and a little intimidated by parents. Beginning teachers have to be an authority figure with their elders. The parents see them as the authority figure, but they don't see themselves yet as the authority figure.

It was quite evident that most beginning teachers from the traditional route and GA TAPP knew the importance of engaging students from the very beginning

of class by using an activating strategy, warm-up activity, journal entries, or just answering the essential question of the day. Most beginning teachers stated that they used various instructional methods to engage students such as role playing, story telling, review games and video clips, using graphic organizers, making the lessons relevant, and using some form of technology. Many beginning teachers recalled using PowerPoint presentations, ACTIV boards, and SMART boards to enhance their lessons. They felt that they understood the importance of motivating students to learn, and they expressed how they did not want their lessons to be boring and irrelevant. The problem appeared to be in maintaining the students' engagement throughout the class period. They felt that as teachers, they had to be creative and be performers to keep the students' attention. Most beginning teachers stated that they were concerned that students were sometimes off task and became very talkative, especially during classroom discussions or active participation. Every beginning teacher stated that they more or less served as a facilitator of learning in the classroom. They felt that they were not the type of teacher who sat behind the desk but were constantly up moving around and checking students' progress.

On the other hand, most school administrators reported just the opposite when visiting beginning teachers' classrooms. According to school administrators' observations, they saw students trying to misbehave and the beginning teacher ignoring the behavior and trying to get through their lessons that they had planned. Some school administrators felt that there was usually not

a lot of interaction, and that beginning teachers have classroom management problems that interfere with learning. As School Administrator S2 commented:

Beginning teachers are teaching how their teachers taught 15 years ago. They stand at the podium, lecture, or use an overhead projector. I think they are a little afraid of the hands-on activities because they are scared they may lose control of the classroom.

A few school administrators (S1 and S4) also felt that there are beginning teachers from both groups who have a handle on classroom management and do an amazing job with the students, and that there is no difference between their skills and the veteran teachers' abilities.

In reviewing professional responsibilities, most beginning teachers are actively engaged in some form of professional development in their first year of teaching. This training included Whole Faculty Study Groups, Learning Focus, Induction Plan, the School Improvement Process and professional development within their department or subject area with their colleagues. In addition, all GA TAPP beginning teachers are required to participate in the orientation and/or training provided by the RESA program during their first two years. Both groups of beginning teachers are required by the state of Georgia to take the Exceptional Children course. The GA TAPP teachers must pass the Georgia Assessment of Certification for Educators (GACE). Teacher T1 participated in the traditional route and is currently enrolled in the master's program at a local college.

Both groups of beginning teachers felt that the feedback they received from their colleagues at school was most beneficial to them as beginning teachers.

As Teacher T3 proclaimed excitedly:

We have department meetings every week, and we get to learn from each other. We go back and forth about what works and what doesn't work, which is really good for me since I've never taught before.

Beginning teachers meet with other teachers at a department or grade level to discuss the lessons and unit plans. During these meetings they are able to develop benchmark tests for the different subject areas, plan activities for the day or week, discuss student behaviors and receive assistance in dealing with the most difficult behaviors. With the new Georgia Performance Standards implementation, beginning teachers get a first hand look at the rollout standards and develop activities into their unit plans.

Most beginning teachers felt strongly that one professional learning opportunity that they had not received but would benefit greatly from was more in-depth instruction in classroom management. Even though most beginning teachers felt that some courses offered strategies for dealing with students, they did not feel they were sufficient. As Teacher G1, a GA TAPP beginning teacher, lamented:

My main difficulty is classroom management. Anything that would prepare me or give me more ideas on how to have a successful environment would be helpful.

Teacher T2, a traditionally certified beginning teacher, commented:

They (school administrators and mentors) give you these ideas to try and you can try every one of them in the book and you still got one or two students, no matter what you try, are going to misbehave, and being a new teacher, you try all the stuff they tell you to do; sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. It's just experience.

In addition to classroom management, two beginning teachers (T1 and G3) from the same school felt they needed extra assistance with importing grades on their school's computer grading system called Campus. They both stated that they received instructions at the beginning of the school year and they are expected to set up their grade book twice a year, and that they find it difficult to remember from one semester to the next. Two teachers from different schools, Teacher T2 and G2, one from the GA TAPP and the other from the traditional route, indicated that they needed more understanding in differentiated instruction because this would assist them in dealing with special needs students and working with the inclusion model.

School administrators shared common professional development opportunities that they provided for their beginning teachers which included Whole Faculty Study Group, Working on the Work, Learning Focus training, technology training, differentiated instruction, common assessments, Teacher Induction training, classroom management, a book study, "Classroom Assessment" by Ann Graves, and Best Practices.

As School Administrator S4 stated:

We cover everything you need to know about surviving as a first year teacher at (name of school).

School Administrator S3 felt that beginning teachers would benefit greatly from classroom observations of veteran teachers. School Administrator S3 stated, “beginning teachers would have an opportunity to see how other teachers are handling the most difficult students both academically and behaviorally.”

Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked, “What are the common characteristics of beginning teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP program and beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?”

Demographics of Beginning Teachers

In this study the characteristics of GA TAPP participants and traditional certification participants were not significantly different. In fact, both groups had more commonalities than differences in demographics and experience/background characteristics as outlined in Table 4.6. The first demographic variable gathered for both groups representing six beginning teachers was age. The average age of both groups was between 36 and 45.

Of the six beginning teachers, both groups represented the same number of males and females. There were two females (G1 and G2) one male (G3) in the GA TAPP participants and two females (T1 and T2) and one male (T3) in the traditional certified program. With regard to ethnicity, only one participant was

African American (G3), in the GA TAPP program. The other two GA TAPP participants were Caucasian (G1 and G2). All three beginning teachers from the traditionally certified program were Caucasian (T1, T2, and T3).

As expected, the majority of participants from both groups held Bachelor of Science degrees, three from GA TAPP (G1, G2, and G3) and two from the traditionally certified (T2 and T3) program. Only one participant from the traditionally certified program held a Masters of Education degree (T1).

Each beginning teacher was asked to identify his or her current teaching assignments. One teacher from the traditionally certified program taught language arts (T2). In math and science, there was one teacher from the traditionally certified program (T3) and one from the GA TAPP in each area (G1, G2). In social science, there was one teacher from the traditionally certified program (T1) and one from GA TAPP (G3).

The final piece of demographic information requested of beginning teachers was the identification of their careers prior to the teaching profession. The participants identified their prior careers as follows: two were from sales and business, one from the traditionally certified program (T3) and one from GA TAPP (G1); two were former teachers, and both of those were GA TAPP participants (G2 and G3). One taught at a community college at a day care center (G2), and the other taught out of state at a public school for two years prior to moving to Georgia (G3). One traditionally certified teacher taught dance and baton (T2), one traditionally certified teacher worked in sales and business (T3),

and another traditionally certified teacher was in the field of medicine and health prior to entering the teaching profession (T1).

Table 4.6

Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	GA TAPP Teacher	Traditionally-Certified Teacher
Age		
Under 25	0	1
25-35	1	0
36-45	2	2
Gender		
Female	2	2
Male	1	1
Ethnicity		
African American	1	0
Caucasian	2	3
Highest Professional Degree		
Bachelor's	3	2
Master's	0	1
Teaching Assignment		
Language Arts	0	1
Math	1	1
Social Science	1	1
Science	1	0
Prior Working Experience		
Medicine and Health	0	1
Sales/Business	1	1
Teacher	2	0
Dance/Baton	0	1

Table 4.7

Individual Differences of Both Groups

	GA TAPP Teachers			Traditional Certified Teachers		
	G1	G2	G3	T1	T2	T3
<i>Previous Background</i>						
Insurance Agent	X					
Baton & Dance					X	
Sales / Business						X
Medicine & Health	X			X		
Education		X	X			
<i>Current Teaching Assignment</i>						
Math	X					X
Science		X				
Language Arts					X	
Social Science			X	X		

The individual differences of beginning teachers from both groups were found in their previous background, their experiences, and their current teaching assignments. As stated earlier, two beginning GA TAPP teachers had previous careers in the teaching profession. There were two beginning teachers, one from the traditional route and one from GA TAPP, who are currently teaching social science.

Table 4.8

Commonalities of Both Groups

	GA TAPP Teachers			Traditional Certified Teachers		
	G1	G2	G3	T1	T2	T3
Classroom Discipline	X	X	X		X	X
Preparing Lesson Plans	X	X	X	X	X	
Use of Technology	X	X	X	X	X	X
Exhibit Positive Attitudes	X	X	X	X	X	
Knowledge of Content	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engaged in Professional Development	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assigned Mentors	X	X	X	X	X	X
Desired to work with children	X	X	X	X		X
Participants included females married with children	X	X		X	X	
Grew up in environments that taught values	X	X	X	X	X	X

There are more commonalities than differences between beginning GA TAPP teachers and beginning traditionally certified teachers in several areas as listed in Table 4.8. Areas that included all participants were the use of

technology, knowledge of content, professional development opportunities, assignment of mentors, and the type of environment that participants grew up in.

Table 4.9

Commonalities and Differences of Both Groups

	GA TAPP Teachers			Traditional Certified Teachers		
	G1	G2	G3	T1	T2	T3
Assigned RESA Mentors	X	X	X			
Additional training by RESA	X	X	X			
Must pass GACE	X	X	X			
Caucasian participants				X	X	X
Held Bachelor's degree	X	X	X	X	X	X
More mature individuals	X	X	X	X	X	
Participants were from middle to upper class families	X	X		X	X	X
Taught in high poverty, low performing schools	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strong support from colleagues & administrators	X	X	X	X	X	X

As outlined in Table 4.9, the only commonality for beginning traditional certified teachers was that all three participants were Caucasians. There were commonalities among beginning GA TAPP teachers which included being assigned a RESA mentor, additional two-year training, and passing the GACE assessment.

The Appeal of the Teaching Profession

Other characteristics considered in this study included the overall appeal of the teaching profession. Beginning teachers were asked to identify the determining factor that led them into a teaching career. The common theme that emerged from this area was that the majority from both groups responded that they had a love for people, a desire to work with children, and an intention to make a difference in their lives.

Teacher G1, GA TAPP teacher responded:

I love the kids. I want to make a difference in their lives. Sometimes they do not understand that or they don't care, but I do. I want them to succeed and I want them to be good. So I just keep trying, and I'm willing to take that personal time with them even when other teachers won't.

On the other hand, Teacher G2, a beginning teacher from the GA TAPP program, stated that the teaching profession appealed to her because of her need for benefits. As she plainly stated:

I was very successful in real estate and my husband was getting his master's degree. My husband had some health issues and neither one of us had any insurance benefits because he had to quit his job due to his

school schedule. I knew I had to go get a job with benefits, and so with a little encouragement from a friend, I decided to go back to the school district. This friend hooked me up with the TAPP program, and the rest is history.

Beginning Teachers' Attitudes

Beginning teachers felt that they bring with them not only their desire to teach but also their motivation for entering the profession, their positive attitudes, energy, open-mindedness, passion, creativity, and excitement. Teacher T2, a beginning teacher from the traditional certification program, summarized the responses of most beginning teachers with these words:

It's just been a wonderful surprise on the good side for me because every day when I get here (school), it is a privilege for me. I just smile, smile and not realize you know, like with any job, there are little things to smile about, but most of all, all the time while I'm here, I'm just so happy, and it feels right.

In responding to the question whether there were any surprises in the first year as a beginning teacher, the response from Teacher T1 was:

My surprise was good because you can see potential in every child whereas I've heard horror stories from some of the other teachers about how bad it was. Well, there are the occasional things, but not, not as bad as I was led to believe.

Teachers T2 and G2, one from the GA TAPP, and the other from the traditionally certified program, felt that the greatest asset they bring to the teaching profession

is their knowledge of the content. However, both beginning teachers were quick to say that knowledge alone wasn't good enough. In the words of Teacher G3, a GA TAPP teacher:

You know, I had some of the most knowledgeable teachers in high school and college that were just absolutely boring. You could tell they did not like teaching. They just wanted to get out of the classroom. Then you had the teacher who might not have known everything but was very passionate and encouraging and really cared about you. And those are the teachers I will never forget.

In the words of Teacher T3, a traditionally certified teacher:

I remember one specific math teacher, very smart, but he could not relate to us. Just, you know, was totally above relating to what we needed. So I feel like sometimes it's not necessarily teachers who contain the most knowledge on the subject matter, but how can they present it in a way that the children feel comfortable and can understand it and bring it down to their level. So, that's what I strive for.

Previous Experience and Backgrounds of Beginning Teachers

The attraction of more mature or experienced individuals to the teaching profession was a common characteristic found in the majority of both groups as reflected in Table 4.6. The age range was between 36-45 years. Two beginning GA TAPP teachers (G2 and G3) had prior teaching experience in the public and/or private sector. However, four of the six beginning teachers (T1, T3, G1, and T2) had experienced other job assignments prior to the teaching profession

which included medical careers, insurance sales, and dance/baton instruction. Due to their real-world experiences, they stressed their commitment to making a difference in the lives of young people. Four beginning teachers were females, married, parents themselves with school-age or teenage children (G1, G2, T1, and T2). In the words of Teacher T2, a beginning teacher who completed the traditional route but did not enter the teaching profession until later:

The reason I feel that I'm a little more ahead of somebody just stepping into the classroom out of college is because I have a few years on them, whereas, you know, I am not 22, 23, or 24. I'm 36. The experiences that I've had working with the children and the parents through the studio and also dealing with the high school students and the parents through the band have made a world of difference in knowing what works and what doesn't work. Because I've been involved with these students and parents whereas a beginning teacher just coming out of college, fresh, has only had that student teaching experience, and especially in high school just knowing how to deal with the problems of students and parents has been the greatest attribute that helped me this year so far.

Teacher T1, a beginning traditionally certified teacher, responded:

I have two teenage children, and I think just being a parent whether they are teenagers or not, it makes you see things in a different way. I had one student who said something to me, and I go, "Oh Brianna, you're lying." She just smiled--she says, "How did you know?" Then she says, "Oh, you

are a parent.” So I think you have a little more experience with kids in general and how they can play you.

Beginning teachers from both groups were typically from middle to upper class, two-parent families. From the responses to questions during the interview, traditionally certified teachers and GA TAPP teachers appeared to share similar values and beliefs. All beginning teachers mentioned that they grew up in environments that taught values, integrity, and self-respect, and they try to instill these core values in their students. Teacher T1 spoke on how she relates to her students:

My biggest thing is that I just try to treat them with respect and I ask the same from them. I’ll say use the golden rule. If I respect you, you need to respect me and we’ll get along just fine. I will also let them know that I will call their parents.

Teacher G1, beginning GA TAPP teacher stated:

My mother had always babysat (while I was) growing up and there have always been different kids coming in and out of the house. I just love kids, no matter what the age, even if they are seniors in high school. Some kids don’t have the opportunities and they don’t have people at home that say, “I love you” every day. The only thing they get is people screaming at them, or they may come home with homework and there is no one who understands or knows how to help them. I want to be that person that helps them. When you are exposed to a good home environment, had a

good childhood, good raising, with both Mom and Dad at home, you know that a lot of these kids don't have Mom and Dad.

Teacher G2, a beginning teacher from GA TAPP, echoed:

I came from a middle school and high school that was in (southeast Georgia). Parents were doctors, lawyers, high emphasis placed on education. I grew up in a household where learning was really emphasized and we went to the library every week.

Teacher T3, a beginning traditionally certified teacher, agreed:

I came from a different county and it's very different from this county. I'm from (northeast Georgia), which is middle to high class, where there is very little farming and some rural parts, but mostly it is kind of upper middle class. These students come from a different world than where I came from. I always thought that when you tell the kids to do something, they would do it. That's been my experience and how it was when I was younger.

Thus, it was noted by the researcher that the beginning teachers' background helped shape their knowledge base and receptivity to the various sources of learning. They all appeared to remain eager to learn and grow in the teaching profession.

Beginning Teachers' School Environment

The teachers' backgrounds and the environments where all beginning teachers taught were similar. All schools had similar student populations, with the exception of one school that served a highly diverse student population. Both

groups of beginning teachers taught in schools that served a primarily high poverty, low-performing student population with very little parental support. However, most beginning teachers experienced strong support from the school administration and colleagues. There was also some form of mentoring provided for beginning teachers. All GA TAPP beginning teachers were fortunate to have the Northeast Georgia RESA mentor assigned to them through the school year in addition to their mentor from school.

School Administrators' Perceptions of Characteristics of Beginning Teachers

School Administrators' perceptions of the characteristics of beginning teachers tend to relate very closely to the statements made by the beginning teachers in some areas. For instance, the first theme to emerge from respondent comments was that school administrators felt that the greatest assets that beginning teachers from both groups brought to the teaching profession were their positive attitudes and their knowledge of the content area. Some of the responses from the school administrators (S1 and S4) were:

I think they (beginning teachers) are very positive. They are very excited to start out with a kind of a freshness that you don't have with your veteran teachers.

Beginning teachers are typically younger, and they have been exposed to newer teaching methods in their course work. So their enthusiasm is contagious and sometimes spreads to the veteran teachers.

School Administrator S3 stated:

Beginning teachers bring a lot of enthusiasm. They bring new ideas to the faculty, and they are not set in their ways, and they are open to suggestions. They are willing to grow and learn. So, just their bright-eyed enthusiasm is wonderful.

Beginning teachers bring different backgrounds from other areas. They bring a lot of content knowledge. This particular (GA TAPP) beginning teacher is very confident in who she is as a person based on prior experiences. She's not our typical first year teacher who is 22; she is a little older, and brings some maturity to the profession.

School Administrator S2 related:

The beginning teachers (traditionally certified teachers) are familiar with the Georgia Performance Standards curriculum coming out of college and how to use standard based instruction.

School Administrator S1:

Beginning teachers bring a lot of good strategies to the classroom usually, the newest out there. They are very familiar with technology and they are not afraid of technology. They are risk-takers. So, it's a real give and take. They share with our faculty and we share with them.

Beginning Teachers' Support System

According to school administrators, beginning teachers from both groups received a tremendous amount of support both externally and internally. All schools have a mentoring program of some sort in place to assist new teachers. Mentors are assigned to both groups of beginning teachers to work with them

throughout the school year. In addition, beginning teachers receive a tremendous amount of assistance from their colleagues, whether it is within their department or grade level. There are several classroom observations by school administrators, assigned mentors and RESA mentors who provide immediate feedback to beginning teachers throughout the school year. As School Administrator S4 stated:

We have a mentoring program in place that's not new but became more structured this year, and the mentors have to observe them (beginning teachers) so many times. They have to document hours of planning with them. They have to check in with a school administrator to let them know how their mentee is doing. In probably 80% of the cases, it has been an awesome match.

Research Question Three

The third research question reads, "Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom?"

In order to answer this question, the researcher reviewed the responses of beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and beginning teachers from traditionally certified programs, school administrators, and pre-existing data which included written lesson plans and the beginning teachers' portfolio. Using interview questions derived from the four domains of Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996), the researcher was able to draw inferences related to the beginning teachers' classroom performance. The

major domains within this framework were: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

Domain 1: Planning and Preparation

The domain of planning and preparation involved beginning teachers having a deep knowledge of the content itself and designing instruction that is appropriate to the diverse learners to be taught. It involved the work of organizing for classroom instruction and designing the lesson or unit plans.

The responses to the question related to beginning teachers' skills in the area of planning and preparation; most beginning teachers felt that they received adequate training for educational experiences to be successful. Both groups of beginning teachers felt very competent to teach their content area to their students. Some beginning teachers (G3, T2, and T3) also felt that they were able to adapt quickly to change on any given day. If the lesson wasn't working, they could very easily change it to adapt to the situation. Others felt that they had a difficult time creating different methods of teaching to appeal to students' different learning styles (G2, T1, and T2). However, most beginning teachers' greatest concern was their struggle to write and prepare lesson plans to engage students in the content and develop good organizational skills.

As Teacher G2, a beginning GA TAPP teacher, stated:

I think because I come from a very science background, science was my favorite subject all through school and college, so I feel very well prepped in the area of science.

Teacher T1, a beginning traditional teacher, stated:

There's so much to do, and I would say that the first semester, not only was I trying to read my content and get all my lesson plans done, I had to attend all the meetings and trainings. It was just overwhelming.

Teacher T2, a traditional beginning teacher, indicated:

I think a lot of the things that I've learned about this unit have been through trial and error. In college, one of my complaints was even though I was in the education program, and we had a lot of the classes that dealt with how to handle the students and teaching strategies, I did not feel we had enough of those. College should have been more focused on strategies in the classroom. There were a lot of classes on literature and grammar which is my area, but not strategies in the classroom.

As the researcher reviewed the lesson plans and portfolios of beginning teachers, most groups (GA TAPP and alternative certified teachers) included basically the same components in each. School Administrator S2 did not require teachers to turn in individual lesson plans but unit plans. According to this school administrator:

We've gotten away from individual lesson plans. Its unit plans. I do not ask them to turn those in. I can learn far more by stepping into their classroom. I can ask them to turn it in and I have no idea that what's written on that piece of paper is actually going on in the classroom. I prefer just to put my head in and I can go around and see what's going on.

It was observed that the Learning Focus strategies for designing a lesson plan were used by most beginning teachers to include the essential question(s), activating strategy, assessment, summarizing activities, etc. The teachers' intentions for a unit or a lesson were reflected not only in the written plans but also in the actual activities and assignments which included worksheets, activity directions, and so on which the teachers gave to students for completion during the class period or for homework. Two schools in the Northeast RESA district were considered Learning Focused Schools and one is in the process of completing the Learning Focused School training.

Beginning teachers in the GATAPP program were in the midst of completing their portfolios. They were able to share with the researcher the criteria for their portfolios which are due by the end of the school year. Two beginning teachers from the traditional certification programs were able to share their portfolios with the researcher (T1 and T2). Unit and lesson plans were included along with examples of students' work. Plans and the student assignments were included in the portfolio.

According to three school administrators (S2, S3, and S4), beginning teachers in both groups were fairly successful in understanding the content and in developing an understanding and appreciation of the students. However, more attention is needed in the area of actively engaging the students in the learning. One of the advantages that most beginning teachers felt that they had was working collaboratively with other teachers in their department to plan the lessons and offer suggestions about how to engage the students. Another advantage that

most beginning teachers felt were beneficial to them was the immediate feedback received from school administrators and mentors during classroom observations.

Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

This domain focused on the aspects of an environment conducive to learning that are not associated with the learning of any particular content; instead it is what sets the stage for all learning. This component established a comfortable and respectful classroom environment that cultivates a culture for learning and creates a safe place for risk taking.

Both groups of beginning teachers were asked how well they relate to their students. Four (G1 and G3, two GA TAPP and T1 and T2, two traditionally certified teachers) out of six beginning teachers responded positively. They have the desire and ability to relate to the students on their levels. School administrators cautioned that beginning teachers need to understand, particularly those just coming out of colleges, that they're not there to be the students' friend but their teacher. School Administrator S4 indicated:

Their (beginning teachers') natural tendency is to start off too easy with them and everybody like them.

Teacher T2, a beginning teacher from the traditional certification program, concurred:

I feel like I really have a good rapport with them, and I feel like most of the students that I have, 95% of them, like me. I'm not here to be liked. I'm here to teach them, but it does help when they do like you because they're going to respond to you better.

It was noted that even though the majority responded to this question positively, beginning teachers from both groups agreed that one of their greatest challenges was classroom management.

Teacher G2, a beginning GA TAPP teacher, in response to the question about the greatest challenge facing a beginning teacher, replied:

Oh, hands down, classroom management. The TAPP program was a huge help in laying the foundation of here's what you do the first day of school, and here's what you, how you set up rules and procedures. If I had not had that one and one half week crash course, I'm not kidding you, I would have died. The great thing is that I have had so much support from this school. I have an assigned mentor in my content area, but then I also have my TAPP mentor, who happens to be the instructional coach at the school, which has been awesome. So every time I meet with them, I say, classroom management and how do I do this, what am I doing wrong, and what should I expect of the students?

Overwhelmingly, school administrators also cited classroom management as the greatest challenge for both groups of beginning teachers. According to School Administrator S1:

Classroom discipline is always an issue. The beginning teachers have actually done remarkably well with classroom discipline. It hasn't been as much of a challenge this time around as it has been with others. It's helping them figure out and taking what they've learned in theory and putting it into practice. That is so hard for them. They've done student

teachings but almost this is pie in the sky and now all of a sudden it comes down to actual theory. So, that's always a challenge.

Another challenge that school administrators felt that beginning teachers have is relating to parents. However, some of the older and more mature beginning teachers felt that they were better able to relate to parents because of being parents themselves. School administrators felt that beginning teachers were hesitant to call home to parents due to the lack of support they receive from home and due to time constraints. As School Administrator S4 stated:

I think a lot of them have good intentions of going home and making telephone calls to parents, and then get home and forget. I mean I know as a teacher I was guilty of that. If I didn't call during the school day, then when I go home, I'm a Mom or for many years I went home, I was a student myself.

On the other hand, School Administrator S2 mentioned organizational skills as another area of greatest challenge for beginning teachers.

Organization and paperwork...just all the little things they have to do outside teaching that colleges do not prepare them for. For instance, class attendance, grades, the 1000 forms a month they have to turn in for in-school suspension and all that kind of stuff I think overwhelms them.

Domain 3: Instruction

The instruction component is the heart of teaching: the actual engagement of students in content. Teachers must prepare and implement plans appropriate to their students that are grounded in deep understanding of the content, aligned with state standards, and designed to engage students in important work.

Beginning teachers from both groups were asked to share with the researcher what would be observed if someone visited their classroom. In almost every school, the students are on block schedules. This simply means the class period lasts for approximately ninety minutes. All beginning teachers stated that they began with a warm-up exercise which may have included bell work, journal entries, essential questions, etc. This would be followed by an activating strategy or review of the previous lesson. Students would participate in a variety of activities throughout this time period. The instructional activities ranged from class discussions to role playing. At the conclusion of the lesson, there would be the summarizing strategy, usually a review of the day's lesson and homework or an assignment to reinforce what was taught. The ninety minutes are broken up into different segments. Teacher T2, a beginning teacher from the traditional certification program, summarized it in this manner:

I divide my class into three different sections... sort of like a little formula that's just a standard thing. So that way they have structure every day.

When they first arrive in the room, they have a journal title. I usually try to apply it to the lesson for the day. After that, we always go to Daily Grammar Practice (DGP) and review it together, followed by vocabulary.

After vocabulary, we go into the story for the day and different literary elements. At the end of the class, I try to give them a little time to begin an assignment that has been given to reinforce the lesson. I rarely have any extra time even with the block schedule.

Contrary to the structured lesson mentioned above, Teacher T3, a beginning teacher from the traditional certification program, made the following comments on classroom observations by a visitor:

Unfortunately, there would probably be some extra talking, some off-task behavior, but then I think there would be some very good classroom discussion and classroom participation. They love to answer questions if I ask questions.

Beginning teachers were asked about their delivery model in the classroom. Most stated that it depends on the lesson, and that while overall they served more as a facilitator than a lecturer, occasionally they served as a lecturer.

Teacher G3 recalled:

I am walking around the room...I rarely sit still. It kind of varies. Either I'm leading a discussion about current events and journals, sometimes giving the information. We may do power point. I try to break it up, and then go through the power point and sometimes they read things or sometimes I read. When we do a review game, I actually let kids come up there, and then I stand back and direct.

School administrators were asked to describe what they have observed when visiting the classrooms of beginning teachers. Their responses differed

from the beginning teachers' responses. Three of the four school administrators (S2, S3, and S4) mentioned that they would observe some off-task behavior by students, and the beginning teacher trying to get through the lesson. The delivery model of beginning teachers from both groups was the same as that of veteran teachers: it involved lecturing, some interacting among students, teachers walking around helping individual students, some technology, and very few hands-on activities. School Administrator S1 stated that they (school administrators) do not see any difference between the beginning teacher's classroom than any other teacher's classroom because the high expectations are the same in every class. According to this school administrator:

I'm going in to look at the student engagement to make sure they are focused on the lesson, and I try to give the teachers a lot of support.

We're in their rooms a lot, and I let them know up front I am not there to watch them, but to make sure that when they are giving instruction, that the kids are following them. I have a learning support strategist (LSS) who serves as an academic coach. This gives our beginning teachers lots of assistance. The LSS will demonstrate lessons for them, they get in there and model for them and co-teach with them.

When beginning teachers were asked to describe a lesson that they felt students really responded well to where they felt good as a result, the responses varied. Beginning teachers from both groups were able to describe class activities that brought complex content to life for their students. In all cases, the students were engaged in the learning. Students were engaged in several ways, including

small-group discussion, teacher-led mini presentations followed by discussion, student-led discussion, role-playing, and hands-on activities. Beginning teachers stated that they provided continuous feedback to students and monitored their progress throughout the lesson. The use of instructional materials included textbooks, readings, films, videos, and manipulative math.

Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

In the domain of professional responsibilities, teachers demonstrate their commitment to improve their professional practice. In this study, the focus of this domain was on beginning teachers having the opportunity and taking the steps to improve their effectiveness as classroom teachers.

Beginning teachers from both groups were engaged in professional learning opportunities at their respective school, within their department, within their grade levels, during faculty meetings, during meetings with mentors, and/or within the Northeast RESA district. Two beginning teachers (Teachers G1 and G2), both from the GA TAPP program, are currently involved in the professional learning community called *Whole Faculty Study Groups* at their school. One beginning teacher (Teacher G3) from the GA TAPP program is involved in the Induction Program at their school entitled *Understanding By Design*. Beginning teachers from both groups are involved in professional learning to fulfill the state's requirements for certification which included the Exceptional Children's course and/or Computer Competency test. One beginning teacher from the traditional certification program (Teacher T3) is currently working towards a

master's degree. All professional learning opportunities provided for beginning teachers from both groups and the number of participants are listed in Table 4.10.

In addition to the professional learning opportunities offered at their respective schools, the beginning teachers from the GA TAPP program will be involved with professional learning opportunities for two full years. According to School Administrator S3, beginning teachers from the GA TAPP have the opportunity to learn new strategies, then come back immediately and apply what they have been taught.

Table 4.10

Professional Responsibilities of Respondents

PLUs Certification	GA TAPP	Traditional
	Beginning Teachers	Beginning Teachers
A Framework for Teaching	3	0
Whole Faculty Study Group	1	1
Learning Focused Training	2	2
Department Meetings	3	3
Understanding By Design	1	0
Induction Program	1	1
GPS Rollout	1	0
Georgia Requirements	3	2
Outside Consultants	1	0
Northeast Georgia RESA	3	0
Master's Program	0	1
Smart Work Training	0	1
Other		

Key

PLU – Professional Learning Units

GPS – Georgia Performance Standards

Beginning teachers were asked to identify professional learning that they have not received that they felt would benefit them as a classroom teacher. Three beginning teachers, two GA TAPP teachers (Teachers G1 and G2) and one traditionally certified teacher (Teacher T3) felt that learning more about classroom management would be most beneficial to them. Although GA TAPP teachers receive effective strategies to use in the classroom, both teachers felt that they needed more. Two beginning teachers from the same school, one GA TAPP and one traditionally certified teacher (Teachers G3 and T1) felt that they needed more training in using their school's computer grading system. In addition, two beginning teachers, GA TAPP (G1 and G2), and one traditionally certified teacher (Teacher T2), felt that they would benefit from learning more about exceptional children and differentiated instruction to help them better teach students with disabilities and students who have emotional problems. Teacher T2, a beginning teacher from the traditional certification route, stated:

I think I need to learn how to deal with the exceptional children. It's really the children that have those issues like bi-polar, behavioral issues, emotional and mental disorders, and abuse at home. I would love to have those classes to learn how to deal with them (exceptional children) a little bit better and how to meet their needs and how to make them feel like they have a safe learning environment here at school.

School Administrators' Perception

According to school administrators, most of the professional learning took place within the school, either within the departments or subject areas, or in

faculty meetings. Teachers met regularly as a team to collaborate and discuss school policies, the grading system, legal issues, graduation tests and end of the course exams, teaching strategies, activities, and the new Georgia Performance standards. Other professional learning that beginning teachers participated in included Learning Focus, Working on the Work, Professional Learning Communities, classroom management, ESOL training, and differentiated instruction.

School administrators felt that beginning teachers would benefit from the following professional learning: Learning Effective Schools, Classroom management, and Georgia Performance Standards (GPS).

Beginning teachers from both groups agreed with school administrators that Classroom Management is the key area of professional learning that beginning teachers would benefit from the most.

Lesson Plans and Portfolios

The researcher had an opportunity to review the lesson plans and portfolios of the beginning teachers. Most beginning teachers were required to submit weekly lesson plans either electronically or by hard copy to school administrators or department chairs. Two beginning teachers, one from GA TAPP (Teacher G2) and one from the traditionally certified program (Teacher T3), were not required to submit lesson plans to school administrators (S1 and S2), but were asked to complete unit plans within their department. Teacher T3, a beginning teacher from the traditionally certified program, commented on the requirements for lesson plans:

They (school administrators) are actually very liberal. They let you create stuff. You do not have to turn in your lesson plans. We do have a calendar that we go by in terms of what you are going to cover on this subject and how many weeks you are going to cover it. In terms of individual lesson plans, it's very open. You are allowed to do anything that you want with technology or whatever, which is...I found is very good. I know how to write lessons plans, but I do not have certain restrictions.

Most lesson plans included the essential question(s), activating strategies, engaging activities, summarizing strategies, and assessment. Two beginning teachers were required to include the Georgia Performance Standards used. Beginning teachers from the GA TAPP program were required by the instructors from Northeast Georgia RESA to include several components that were not required by the traditionally certified teachers or by their respective school. For instance, GA TAPP beginning teachers' lesson plans consisted of the following:

- Oral and written directions and procedures
- Lecture notes, questions used in a class discussion
- Engaging Activities
- Varied Instructional strategies
- Varied Assessment
- Seating charts to show questioning routines
- Examples of games or reward systems
- Assignments

Beginning teachers from the GA TAPP program were required to complete a portfolio by the end of the school year. GA TAPP beginning teachers' portfolios were incomplete and a work in progress. Beginning teachers from the traditionally certified program were able to produce their portfolios which included an extensive overview of the course lesson and unit plans, copies of activities used in the lesson plans, copies of transparencies, handouts, assignments, photos of bulletin boards, photos of students working on assignments, samples of student work, and a behavior management plan. Two teachers (T1 and T2) from the traditional route included a case study on one of their students during student teaching.

Summary

This study examined the perceptions of beginning teachers from traditionally certified programs and the GA TAPP, and the perceptions of their school administrators regarding specific classroom skills, characteristics, and classroom performance of beginning teachers from both programs. The researcher was able to ascertain that the skillsets, characteristics, and classroom performance of beginning teachers from traditionally certified programs and GA TAPP were very similar. Most beginning teachers relied heavily on their prior experiences and backgrounds to relate to students, parents, and to make the transition into the teaching profession. Most beginning teachers from both groups perceived themselves to be very knowledgeable in their subject area, but had some difficulty with classroom management skills. School administrators expressed similar feelings about beginning teachers' knowledge of the content

and their lack of classroom management skills. School administrators also perceived beginning teachers from both groups as being energetic, positive, and enthusiastic about teaching and the learning environment.

This study indicated that the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers are indicative of their performance in the classroom. Each beginning teacher's prior experiences, skills or lack of skills, background knowledge, professional development opportunities and formal training on the job contribute to their success or lack of success in the classroom. Another indicator of beginning teachers' performance in the classroom is the informal training they receive from other teachers and the support they receive from mentors and school administrators.

This study conveyed the perceptions of six beginning teachers and four school administrators regarding the skills and common characteristics of beginning teachers from the traditional certification program and the GA TAPP. All participants were selected from the Northeast Georgia RESA district, and interviews were conducted within the confines of each high school. Further discussion about the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter contains a summary of the study as well as conclusions.

Chapter V is divided into three major sections. The first section presents a summary of the study, the procedures, and the researcher's findings based upon the research questions that were posed. The second section presents the conclusions and implications that were derived from the study as well as the review of the literature. The third section includes the recommendations for further study.

Summary

As described in Chapter II, an overwhelming majority of states, including Georgia, have turned to alternative certification programs to attract individuals with other degrees, experiences, and skills into the teaching professions (National Center for Education Information, 2005). It is estimated that in the next decade, American school districts will need to hire 2.2 million new teachers to meet the increasing student enrollments (Feistritz, Harr, Hobar, & Scullion, 2005). In 2006, Georgia hired a total of 12,949 new teachers in its classrooms. While the proportion of traditionally prepared new teachers supplied by Georgia colleges slightly decreased from 24.1% in 2005 to 23.5% in 2006, approximately 22% of new teachers were prepared through alternative routes in Georgia (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2006).

Compounding the teacher shortage crisis, in 2006, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) challenged the nation to

ensure that “all children be taught by teachers who have the knowledge, skills, and commitments to teach children well” (p. 16). New teachers are required to meet state and local qualifications, as well as the federal *No Child Left Behind* mandate for highly qualified teachers. As a result, alternative teacher certification programs are rapidly fulfilling the demands of the teacher shortages and the highly qualified teacher mandate. This abbreviated and expeditious route to teacher certification has come under much scrutiny by many school administrators and policymakers. The major concern is about whether the alternative certification programs are substandard compared to traditional certification programs due to the lack of skills and knowledge of teachers who enter the teaching profession (Newman & Thomas, 1999; Feistritzer, 1999; Nakai & Turley, 2003; Walsh, 2001).

For the reasons noted above, it is essential to closely examine the background skills, experiences, and characteristics of the individuals who enter the teaching profession and to determine the extent to which these skills are indicative of teachers’ performance in the classroom.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions held by beginning GA TAPP teachers, beginning traditionally certified teachers, and their school administrators regarding the specific skills that may contribute to beginning teachers’ performance in the classroom setting. Additionally, the study sought to identify the common characteristics of beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and the traditionally certified program.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What classroom skills do beginning teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of beginning teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?
2. What are the common characteristics of beginning teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP programs and beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?
3. Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom?

This study was conducted through structured face-to-face interviews and a collection of pre-existing data consisting of lesson plans and portfolios obtained from beginning teachers. The population of the study consisted of three beginning teachers from the Georgia Alternative Teacher Preparation Program (GA TAPP) and three beginning teachers from the traditional certified programs who worked in three different schools in the Northeast Georgia RESA district. In addition, four school administrators who served as the beginning teachers' primary evaluator or mentor, and/or made recommendations for hiring the beginning teachers, participated in the study.

The questions developed for the interviews were constructed from the four major domains of the framework for teaching which included: Planning and Preparation, The Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities.

The interviews were audio taped, stored in a secured location, and transcribed by the researcher. The names of the schools, school administrators and beginning teachers were unidentified to ensure confidentiality to the participants of this study. The data from the interviews were analyzed for common themes and patterns before the findings were reported.

The researcher is hopeful that the information obtained from this study may enlighten policymakers, school administrators, and the public regarding the skillsets and characteristics of beginning teachers from the alternative certification programs and beginning teachers from the traditional certification programs. In addition, findings from this study may help determine whether beginning teachers' skills are indicative of their classroom performance.

Analysis of Research Findings

Several findings emerged from this study; namely:

- There was not a significant difference between the skillsets of traditionally certified beginning teachers and alternatively certified beginning teachers.
- Both groups of beginning teachers reported that they believed they possessed a solid knowledge of the content and connections with technology.
- Both groups of beginning teachers perceived classroom management and lesson plans as their greatest challenges during their first year of teaching.
- School administrators agreed with beginning teachers' perception that both groups of beginning teachers bring a solid knowledge of their content

area to the classroom and the one major skill that they all lacked was classroom management.

- There were more commonalities than differences in the characteristics of beginning teachers from the alternatively certified program and beginning teachers from the traditionally certified program.
- Common characteristics included the demographics of both groups: the ages of beginning teachers ranged from 25 to 36, and the majority of beginning teachers held a bachelor's degree.
- The findings also indicated that beginning teachers from both groups were mostly white and female. There was only one black male beginning alternatively certified teacher and one white male beginning traditionally certified teacher in this study.

Other major findings included the following:

- The skillsets of beginning teachers from both groups are indicative of their classroom performance.
- Beginning teachers from both groups used identical components in their lesson plans and portfolios but expressed that it was a challenge to write lesson plans.
- Beginning teachers had a difficult time implementing differentiated instruction and/or strategies to teach to a diverse culture.
- Beginning teachers from the alternatively certified programs who were typically older and more mature also tended to relate to students better

than the beginning traditionally certified teachers, who were typically younger.

- Overwhelmingly, school administrators reported that both groups of beginning teachers were provided with professional development, mentoring, and feedback to enhance their classroom performance.

Discussion of Research Findings

Research Question 1: What classroom skills do beginning teachers from the GA TAPP possess compared to the skills of beginning teachers from traditional certification programs in Georgia?

This study focused on the classroom skills of beginning alternatively certified teachers compared to those of beginning traditionally certified teachers in the Northeast Georgia RESA district during the 2007-2008 school year. Additionally, four school administrators from the selected schools in the Northeast Georgia RESA district participated in this study. A qualitative analysis using face-to-face structured interviews was conducted with the selected six beginning teachers and four school administrators. All respondents were asked the same questions which derived from the four domains of Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996). The four major domains are: planning and preparation, classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities.

In responding to skills in the first domain of planning and preparation, the majority of the beginning teachers from both groups felt that their prior background experiences have better prepared them for the teaching profession.

All three beginning teachers from the GA TAPP entered the teaching profession with a bachelor's degree in a field other than education, and two of the three had prior teaching experience of some kind. This finding is contrary to the literature from Chapter II that reported that alternative certification candidates undergo virtually no training, and take minimal teaching-related courses before entering their first full-time teaching job (Stoddart & Floden, 1995). The findings in this study were more closely related to the traditionally certified teachers in the study done by the researcher than to alternatively certified teachers. All three beginning traditionally certified teachers' prior background and experiences consisted of practicing medicine and health and sales/business careers. Subsequently, two of the three beginning traditionally certified teachers in this study were older. This finding coincided with the literature that reported in recent years a surge of interest in teaching has developed among older, more mature individuals, former teachers, and individuals who have raised their own families and have a desire to teach (Feistritzer & Chester, 1998; Fidlerler & Haselkorn, 1999).

GA TAPP teachers believed that because of their maturity, they were well-disciplined and better able to relate to students and parents than the beginning traditionally certified teachers. The literature by Humphrey and Wechsler (2002) supported this finding by describing alternative certified teachers as smart and mature individuals who make outstanding educators because of their real-world experience and desire to make a difference in the lives of young people.

The findings indicated that beginning teachers from both groups perceived themselves to be very knowledgeable in their subject areas. The literature

validated that traditionally certified teachers complete a full battery of teaching-related courses, participate in several months of student teaching, and receive full certification before becoming a full-time teacher (Feistritzer, 1999). However, the literature supported findings in the researcher's study that suggested that there were no differences between the alternatively certified and traditionally prepared teachers after eight months of teaching experience (Houston, Marshall, & McDavid, 1993). The researcher's observation of this finding is that the course preparation that beginning teachers received from their respective programs was of a high quality. Also, this finding may be a direct result of the *No Child Left Behind mandate* that required all teachers to become highly qualified by 2006. All teachers who were not considered highly qualified had to demonstrate knowledge in their subject area by passing the state assessment or by meeting other state and local requirements (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b).

School administrators agreed that beginning teachers from both groups were well versed in the content knowledge, but lacked skills in classroom management, which will be discussed in the next domain. The literature in Chapter II indicated that if a prospective teacher lacked the appropriate skills, knowledge, and commitments to become an effective teacher, he or she would encounter problems with student discipline, lesson planning, student interaction, assessments, and instructional strategies in the first few years in the classroom (Salyer, 2003).

In the second domain of classroom environment, the findings from this study revealed overwhelmingly that classroom management was the common

theme that emerged as a major concern for both groups of beginning traditionally certified teachers and beginning alternatively certified teachers and for school administrators as well. However, the literature by Houston, Marshall, and McDavid (1993) revealed findings that indicated the problems of alternatively certified teachers were greater than those of traditionally certified teachers in the areas of student motivation, managing teacher time, managing the amount of paperwork, communicating with school administration, lacking personal time, and grading students. The researcher recognized that it is important to take into account the individual teachers' characteristics, experiences, and personalities that they bring to the teaching profession when considering how beginning teachers relate to students and classroom management.

The third domain involved instruction. The findings in this study revealed that beginning teachers from both groups were very knowledgeable about their content area; however, the major concern was being able to use a variety of instructional strategies appropriately to maintain student engagement. Beginning teachers also stated that they were able to adapt easily to a change in plans during the lesson. It was noted by the researcher that all teachers could articulate the class activities from the beginning to the end of class using the Learning Focused model of effective teaching strategies such as the essential question(s), activating strategies, assessment activities, summarizing strategies, etc. The researcher was unable to determine any significant differences as reported by Dickar (2003), who concluded that alternatively certified teachers tended to either exceed expectations or perform well below traditionally certified teachers in a classroom setting, while

traditionally certified teachers tended to perform across the spectrum of expectations. The researcher agreed with Bliss (1990), whose findings suggested the importance of taking into account the participants' characteristics, their career stage, and the experiences they bring to the teaching profession that may hinder or assist them in learning to teach.

School administrators' responses to beginning teachers' experiences in the classroom in the area of instruction were that there were no observable differences between the two groups of beginning teachers. Common themes revealed that school administrators felt that both groups were very knowledgeable in their content area, but lacked discipline, organizational and time management skills. This finding paralleled with Goebel (1985) who found that beginning teachers' abilities from the alternatively certified programs were perceived as equal to those of traditionally certified teachers.

In the final domain of professional responsibilities, beginning teachers from both groups were involved in a variety of professional learning opportunities offered by their respective schools. However, alternatively certified teachers receive two years of coursework while on the job compared to traditionally certified teachers, who participated in teacher-related courses prior to teaching (as reported by Feistritz, 1999; Eifler and Potthoff, 1998). It was noted by the researcher that beginning teachers from the GA TAPP tended to participate in more courses offered by the Northeast RESA due to their lack of educational background and experience (as cited in the U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

While both groups of beginning teachers stated that they received assistance and support from mentors and school administrators, there was a need to incorporate more professional learning opportunities in the areas of classroom management and differentiated instruction for beginning teachers in both groups. The researcher's study was in direct conflict with the findings which suggested that the problems of alternatively certified teachers were greater than those of traditionally certified teachers in several areas, including student motivation and managing teacher time (Houston, Marshall, & McDavid, 1993). The researcher concluded that while both groups of beginning teachers experienced much anxiety related to classroom management, the beginning teachers and school administrators were optimistic that given more time, more assistance from their mentors, more opportunities to observe other teachers, and more teaching experience, improvement would be noted in these areas.

Research Question 2: What are the common characteristics of beginning teachers who enter teaching through the GA TAPP programs and beginning teachers who enter through the traditional certification programs in Georgia?

This study sought to identify key characteristics of beginning teachers from the GA TAPP program and beginning teachers from the traditionally certified programs. The following key characteristics of beginning teachers were reviewed in this study: demographics, prior experiences and background, interest in the teaching profession, attitude, and knowledge of content. The findings from the three beginning teachers from the GA TAPP and three beginning teachers

from the traditionally certified program suggested arguments that the evidence did not support. Beginning teachers from both groups, regardless of the nature of their preparation, exhibited a few key characteristics. The researcher's findings revealed the following:

- **Demographics** - The majority (4 out of 6 teachers) of both groups of beginning teachers were white, female, older adults whose age ranged from 36 to 45 whose demographics tend to reflect the gender mix of the teaching profession as a whole as well as the racial composition of their school. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (1987) supports the researcher's study which cited that historically women have been the majority in the teaching profession. There was only one African American male out of six beginning teachers. Taking into consideration the small sample population, the results of Zeichner and Schulte (2002), agreed with the researcher's study which stated that alternatively certification participants are often older and more ethnically diverse than participants from traditional certification programs. In agreement with the researcher's study, Feistritzer's data (2005) reported that age, gender, and ethnicity of alternatively certified candidates ranged across states and programs.
- **Prior experiences and background** – Most beginning teachers were more mature and brought prior experiences with them into the teaching profession. Humphrey & Wechsler (2002), described alternative certification teachers as smart and mature individuals in search of a

second career that they find socially meaningful and personally rewarding. The researcher found in this study that traditionally certified teachers were also older and more mature. Most beginning teachers held a bachelor's degree in a field other than education and only one held a master's degree in the field of education. The findings from the National Center for Education Statistics in 2002 agreed with the researcher's study. The beginning teachers from both groups entering the teaching profession had prior working experiences outside of education in various careers which included sales/business, dance instruction, and medicine/health; two teachers from the GA TAPP had prior teaching experience which the literature contradicts the researcher's study. The literature suggested that alternative teachers have little or no training or teaching background (Stoddart and Floden, 1995). Four out of six beginning teachers from both groups were married and were parents themselves. This finding reported by Haberman (1999), indicated that most teachers do not decide to teach until after college graduation, are between thirty and fifty years old, and are parents themselves, support the researcher's study also.

- Interest in the Teaching Profession - Beginning teachers from both groups expressed that their interest in the teaching profession stemmed from a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of children is supported by Haberman (1999). GA TAPP beginning teachers expressed their desire to remain in the teaching profession more readily

than the traditionally certified teachers. GA TAPP beginning teachers felt that their participation in the alternative certification program placed them into the classrooms more quickly than the traditional certification program and they were able to earn a paycheck while they earned their certification. The U.S. Department of Education in 2004, which stated that GA TAPP is able to attract a wide variety of applicants because they are hired as regular teachers and receive a teaching salary, paralleled the researcher's study. Peske (2003) and Liu et al. (2003) also supported this finding.

- Attitudes – Beginning teachers from both the GA TAPP and traditionally certified programs exhibited positive attitudes about the teaching profession. School administrators reported that beginning teachers possessed a willingness to learn and to try different strategies compared to veteran teachers. Barnes et al. (1990) concluded that alternatively certification teachers had a unique teaching style and were highly motivated which supported the researcher's study. Beginning teachers bring enthusiasm and fresh ideas to the school environment. Nakai (2002) concluded in a study of alternatively certified and traditionally certified teachers that both groups reported confidence in their readiness for the classroom.
- School environment – Beginning teachers from both groups were teaching in high poverty and low-performing schools where students were less motivated in the Northeast RESA district. There was strong

support from school administrators, mentors and colleagues. The literature reported that alternative certified teachers were more likely than traditionally certified teachers to work in urban settings and have a preference for teaching disadvantage students (Natriello, 1993). The researcher did not find a significant difference in the school environment or their preference between the two groups of beginning teachers.

Research Question 3: Are the skillsets of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers indicative of teachers' performance in the classroom?

According to Klagholz (2002), the educational and professional backgrounds of participants influence how beginning teachers experience teaching and their performance in the classroom. Klagholz (2002) agreed with the researcher's findings which indicated that the beginning teachers felt they received adequate training and educational experiences to be successful in the classroom. Beginning teachers from both groups felt confident and were well prepared to teach the subject matter to their students based on their training; however, they lacked skills in finding the most appropriate methods of teaching to suit students' individual learning styles. The accountability provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* outlined provisions for states and school districts to use powerful, innovative tools of education reform that can significantly improve the knowledge and skills of their teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b). The researcher found that as a result of the NCLB accountability act, two out of three schools were using some form of research-based programs or strategies to improve teaching quality. In all three schools in the Northeast RESA district,

Learning Focused training was already implemented or in the process of being implemented along with whole-faculty study groups.

The domain of classroom environment was another indicator of beginning teacher's skills and their classroom performance. The majority of beginning teachers felt that they related very well to their students overall; however, they were quick to say that their greatest challenge as a first year teacher was classroom management. Four of the six beginning teachers (two GA TAPP and two traditionally certified) responded very positively about their ability to relate to students, while two beginning teachers (one GA TAPP and one traditionally certified) struggled with the relationship due to their own background experiences. Haberman (1991) asserted that the quality of the selection of candidates include the demonstration of the ability to establish rapport with low-income students of diverse ethnic backgrounds. The literature supports the researcher's findings.

Hawk and Schmidt (1989) conducted a study that reported that the degree of subject-matter knowledge is not significantly different among traditionally versus alternatively certified teachers, though their facility in applying that knowledge may differ. In the area of instruction, the study agreed with the researcher's findings. There was a common theme that emerged with both groups of beginning teachers when asked about their teaching during a classroom observation. Beginning teachers from both groups were able to verbalize the effective strategies to be used throughout a lesson from beginning to end; however, the application of these strategies in some cases presented a concern

when this same question was posed to school administrators. Some school administrators felt that beginning teachers knew their subject matter (*what*) but that there appeared to be a few problems in their delivery model (*how*). The literature supports the researcher's finding, which states that most teachers from alternative certification programs lack an understanding of pedagogy, instructional strategies, classroom management, and students' social and academic development issues (Nakai & Turley, 2003).

The researcher concluded that in the majority of cases, the professional responsibilities of beginning teachers were required and provided by their respective schools. As a GA TAPP teacher, many of the professional learning opportunities were gained through the RESA mentoring program. In addition, beginning teachers from both groups were involved in professional learning within their departments or grade level, or through induction programs, faculty meetings, book studies, and state requirements for certification. The researcher's findings indicated that many beginning teachers relied heavily on the support of mentors, colleagues, and school administrators to provide opportunities for professional growth. Research in Chapter II indicated that teachers left their professions early when mentoring and support from school administrators were not utilized in the first year of beginning teachers' professional teaching careers (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Beginning teachers from both groups felt that in addition to the professional learning opportunities offered at their respective schools, more training is needed in classroom management skills and differentiated instruction to become more effective as teachers. School

administrators agreed that more professional learning opportunities are needed in these areas along with additional training in teaching the Georgia Performance Standards.

Conclusions

Beginning teachers from the alternative and traditional certified programs bring with them not only their formal education but also their motivations for entering the profession, career experience, previous experience or lack of experience with children in a classroom setting, and aspirations for a long-term career in education.

Beginning teachers' skillsets, characteristics, and the school context affect the performance of classroom teachers whether they are from the alternatively certified program or traditionally certified programs. Beginning teachers learn from both the formal and the informal contexts of their schools. In most cases, this learning exists beyond the control of the beginning teachers from the alternative certification or traditional certification programs. Formally, they learn from professional development activities, induction programs, adopted curricula, school philosophy, and grade- or department-level meetings. From these sources they learn (or fail to learn) pedagogical strategies and approaches to instruction, classroom management techniques, school and district policies and procedures, and grading procedures, among other things. Informally, they learn from other teachers with whom they interact, the support or lack of support they receive from the school administration, the student population, and the general tone of the school. All of these interactions help beginning teachers from both the

alternatively certified and traditionally certified programs develop either positive or negative perceptions and cause them to grow or to hinder growth in the teaching profession.

In an effort to meet the challenges and demand our nation faces in education in the next decade, emphasis must be placed on attracting, recruiting, and hiring the most qualified and most effective teachers, whether from the traditional certification program or the alternative certification program. The focus must shift to finding and supporting quality teachers who have the knowledge, skills, previous experiences and dispositions to teach the increasingly diverse array of students in today's classrooms. This study provided a small glimpse into the skillsets and characteristics of alternatively and traditionally certified beginning teachers in the Northeast RESA district in the state of Georgia. More extensive research is needed to determine whether these variables or other variables are indicative of a teacher's classroom performance and perhaps how these variables impact student achievement.

Implications

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

1. Regardless of the path to certification, whether it is through a traditional route or alternative route, all beginning teachers possessed specific and unique skills that could enhance the teaching profession and help meet the need to fill our nation's classrooms with more qualified and effective teachers.

2. Most beginning teachers' responses indicated the need for school administrators and mentors to help cultivate those skills and assist in developing the skills they are lacking to become more effective teachers. There is a critical need for mentors to be systematic and to provide support of all beginning teachers during the first year of teaching.
3. There is a need for school administrators to recognize the overwhelming responsibilities of beginning teachers in their first year of teaching and to allow time for professional development opportunities that would help them to address their concerns with classroom management and how they can meet the needs of all students through effective teaching strategies.
4. Georgia policymakers should be made aware of the commonality in work experiences, skills, and knowledge of alternatively certified beginning teachers and traditionally certified beginning teachers as they make decisions to support and improve all certification programs.
5. The literature in this study indicates that there continue to be growing concerns regarding the quality of teachers from alternative certification programs compared to the quality of teachers from traditional certification programs. The findings in the study indicated that there is not a significant difference in the quality of beginning teachers from the alternatively certified program and the

traditionally certified program. Therefore, policymakers and the public should be aware that beginning teachers from the alternative certification program meet state certification standards and are as prepared as traditional certified teachers.

6. Human resource directors, school administrators, and local boards of education may be interested in the findings of this study as they make hiring decisions to fill their schools with highly qualified and effective teachers from alternatively certified and traditionally certified programs.

General Recommendations Based on this Study

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made, with the intent of improving the beginning teachers' experiences in their first year of teaching and subsequently retaining these teachers as they become more effective teachers while improving student achievement:

1. Since the information in this study indicated that there is no significant difference in the skillsets of beginning teachers in alternatively certified programs and beginning teachers in traditionally certified programs, recruitment and retention efforts of individuals should not be focused on the type of certification program but rather on the unique and specific skills each beginning teacher brings to the teaching profession.

2. School administrators and human resource directors should assess each teacher applicant's skills, beginning with their selection and continuing throughout their training. Assessment of each teacher's teaching context and determination of additional supports that may be needed is vital to the success of the beginning teacher. A proper mix of beginning teachers' backgrounds, supports, and school placement can produce beginning teachers who are effective starting on the first day of school.
3. School administrators should focus their efforts on induction programs that provide mentors the time and resources to work directly with beginning teachers in their schools, especially during their first year of teaching.
4. Policymakers should provide support and funding to alternative certification programs to continue to provide this path to certification to help in addressing the teacher shortage in the state of Georgia.
5. Since the findings in this study suggested that beginning teachers have the knowledge base for teaching but lack the application, teacher preparation programs must also focus on certification standards that are performance-based which includes field-based programs where learning takes place in actual classroom settings with special needs and culturally diverse students.

6. Leaders at the school, district, and state levels must work to ensure the credibility of alternative certification both to educators and to the public.
7. Since the findings in this study suggested that alternative certification programs produce a pool of diversified applicants, more efforts must be instituted to offer greater flexibility in program offerings, more diverse approach to candidate selection, and a quicker transition to teaching while maintaining quality of such programs with emphasis on real-world experience, pedagogical skill building and the ability of beginning teachers to relate effectively to the diverse group of students.

Recommendations for Further Research

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

1. This study should be replicated in all sixteen RESA districts of the state of Georgia and findings compared to those found in the Northeast RESA district.
2. This study should be replicated using a larger population in each school district of the state of Georgia as well as longitudinal research to include other alternative certification programs, such as Troops to Teacher.

3. Since the collected data from the sample indicated that there is no significant difference between beginning teachers from the alternative certified program and the traditional certified program, program coordinators, district and university staff should focus efforts, attention, and resources on further study on the development of programs that support all beginning teachers, regardless of certification path.

Concluding Thoughts

As a Georgia Human Resource director who has had the responsibility of recruiting highly qualified teachers for our school system since 2006, the researcher believes that this study has been beneficial in an effort to make recommendations and educated hiring decisions regarding alternatively and traditionally certified beginning teachers. The researcher works in a school system which is located in a small rural community, with a high-poverty student population. Subsequently, it becomes a daunting and most difficult task to attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified teachers in the school system each year. With this study, the researcher has concluded that it is essential to closely examine each applicant's prior experience, background, and skills whether they are from a traditional certified program or an alternatively certified program. After examining these factors, it becomes necessary to assist school administrators in appropriately placing the beginning teachers with specific skills in schools and subject areas that best match their abilities. Further, it becomes equally important

to provide beginning teachers with mentors, resources, and professional development opportunities to address their areas of strengths and weaknesses.

Lastly, as the human resource director, it is the researcher's responsibility to assist school administrators in providing the nurturing and support needed to retain new teachers, especially during the beginning teachers' first years of teaching. This can be done through implementing effective induction and mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, as well as providing time and resources for beginning teachers. An appreciation and more careful assessment of beginning teachers' existing skills, backgrounds and knowledge are likely to contribute to the creation of more effective teachers in our classrooms from the very first day of school through their retirement from the school system.

To raise awareness, this study may be disseminated by the researcher through presentations at local school districts to school administrators and district administrators, RESA district personnel, and possibly at state level conferences. Also, the researcher has plans to present this study at the Conference in May 2008 on Education Renewal and School Development in an Era of Cultural Diversity at Huazhong Normal University in Wuhan, China.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
BEGINNING TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a few minutes to complete the information below.

Part I: Demographics

1. What is your age?
 - 25-35
 - 36-45
 - 46-55
 - Above 55

2. What is your gender?
 - Female
 - Male

3. What is your ethnicity?
 - African American
 - Asian American
 - Caucasian
 - Hispanic
 - Native American
 - Other _____ (identify)

4. Number of students enrolled at your school
 - Less than 300
 - 300-999
 - 1,000 or more

Part II: Experience and Background

5. What is the highest professional degree you hold?
 - Bachelor
 - Master
 - Specialist
 - Doctorate

6. Your current position: (Please write your response)

Grade Level(s) _____, _____, _____

Subject(s) _____, _____, _____

7. Mark an X to best describe your field of work before teaching.

<input type="checkbox"/> Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Ministry
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Manufacturing/Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Sales / /Business
<input type="checkbox"/> Civil Service	<input type="checkbox"/> Medicine and Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Sciences and Math
<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Military (identify specialized training	<input type="checkbox"/> Trades and
<input type="checkbox"/> Homemaker	_____)	<input type="checkbox"/> Construction
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
(Beginning Teachers)

The focus of these questions is to find out about your teaching practices in the first year as a beginning teacher. I am interested in learning about your perceptions of the impact of your teaching strategies and activities and how they impact your classroom performance. To contextualize your thinking about the different aspects of the practice of teaching, I would like you to think about your teaching activities within the last couple of months. You may find it helpful to think and talk about specific instances.

Initial General Questions:

1. What was the determining factor that led you into a teaching career?
2. What do you feel are your greatest assets that you bring to the teaching profession?
3. What did you think went into the making of a great teacher before you started teaching? What do you think now?

Planning and Preparation:

4. What about your background or preparation has made you successful? Describe the situation(s).
5. What preparation did you not get that would have made you more successful?

Classroom Environment:

6. How well do you feel you relate to the students? Explain.
7. What are your greatest challenges as a beginning teacher? Have there been any surprises? If so, please describe the situation(s).

Instruction:

8. If I were to visit your classroom, tell me in details what I would see on any given day. What would the students be doing?
9. Tell me about a lesson that you prepared that students really responded to and that you felt good about.

Professional Responsibilities:

10. Beyond teaching responsibilities that involved your students directly, what professional learning opportunities have you been engaged in this school year?
11. What professional learning experiences you feel would be beneficial to you as a beginning teacher?

Summary Questions:

12. What are the attributes that you possess have better prepared you for the transition to become a teacher?
13. What are your recommendations for developing those attributes that are needed to become an even better teacher?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

(Principals, Assistant Principals, Mentors, Evaluators)

The focus of these questions is to find out how you feel about the specific skills your beginning teachers possess and how they impact their teaching performance in the classroom. I would like to talk with you about your perception of beginning teachers' experiences with different aspects of the practice of teaching during their first year in the teaching profession.

Initial General Questions:

1. What do you think are the successes and possibilities of the beginning teachers?
2. What do you see as the greatest assets that beginning teachers in the GA TAPP program and the beginning teachers from the traditional certified program bring to the teaching profession?

Planning and Preparation:

3. What about the beginning teachers' backgrounds and experiences have made them successful as a teacher? Or unsuccessful as a teacher? Describe the situation.
4. To what or whom do you attribute the beginning teachers' success? What aspect was not so successful?

Classroom Environment:

5. How well do beginning teachers relate to students and parents?
6. What do you think have been the greatest challenges facing beginning teachers? Have there been any surprises?

Instruction:

7. When you visit the beginning teachers' classroom, what do you observe regarding the students and regarding the teacher?
8. Tell me about a visit to a beginning teacher's classroom when you felt excited about the learning that was taking place.

Professional Responsibilities:

9. Beyond teaching responsibilities which involved your beginning teachers directly, what professional activities have they engaged in this school year?

10. What professional development would you recommend for the beginning teachers to engage in if given the opportunity?

APPENDIX C

BEGINNING TEACHER LETTER OF CONSENT



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN DEV.

January 14, 2008

Dear Beginning Teacher:

My name is Martha J. Noble. I am the Personnel Director for Elbert County School System in Elberton, Georgia and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study to identify specific skills of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers in the state of Georgia. This data will be gathered by conducting pre-arranged interviews with school administrators and beginning teachers in the Northeast Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) in Georgia.

Your school was selected from a list of schools in the Northeast RESA district that participates in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP). You were recommended by your principal as a possible participant in this study. Although there is no penalty should you decide not to participate, your assistance with this study would be greatly appreciated. By agreeing to an interview, you will have helped to provide valuable information about the skills of beginning teachers in the state of Georgia from alternatively and traditionally certified programs. If you choose to participate in this study, your responses to the interview questions will remain absolutely confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at (706) 213-4076 or (706) 207-4442. You may also contact me via email at mnoble@elbert.k12.ga.us. Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Linda M. Arthur, at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia 30460 or via email at larthur@georgiasouthern.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, you may also contact the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465. A copy of the results of this study will be available upon request.

Thank you for your assistance in this study to identify specific skills of beginning teachers in the state of Georgia. The contribution of your time and expertise is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Martha J. Noble

APPENDIX D

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR LETTER OF CONSENT



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY & HUMAN DEV.

November 24, 2007

Dear School Administrator:

My name is Martha J. Noble. I am the Personnel Director for Elbert County School System in Elberton, Georgia and a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am conducting a study to identify specific skills of traditionally and alternatively certified beginning teachers in the state of Georgia. This data will be gathered by conducting pre-arranged interviews with school administrators and beginning teachers in the Northeast Regional Education Service Agency (RESA) in Georgia.

Your school was randomly selected from a list of schools in the Northeast RESA district that participates in the Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GA TAPP). Although there is no penalty should you decide not to participate, your assistance with this study would be greatly appreciated. By agreeing to an interview, you will have helped to provide valuable information about the skills of beginning teachers in the state of Georgia from alternatively and traditionally certified programs.

If you choose to participate, please sign the enclosed consent form and return it in the pre-stamped envelope. Your responses to the interview questions will remain absolutely confidential. By signing and returning the consent form, you are granting permission to use your responses in this study. I would appreciate you sending me the consent form by December 16, 2007.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at (706) 213-4076 or (706) 207-4442. You may also contact me via email at mnoble@elbert.k12.ga.us. Additionally, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Linda M. Arthur, at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia 30460 or via email at larthur@georgiasouthern.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant in this study, you may also contact the IRB Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 681-5465. A copy of the results of this study will be available upon request.

Thank you for your assistance in this study to identify specific skills of beginning teachers in the state of Georgia. The contribution of your time and expertise is very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Martha J. Noble

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-681-5465		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-681-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Martha Noble
1021 Founder's Lake Drive
Athens, GA 30606

CC: Dr. Linda Arthur
P.O. Box 08131

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: January 9, 2008

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H08115**, and titled "**The Skillsets of Traditionally and Alternatively Certified Beginning Teachers in the State of Georgia**", 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.

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,



N. Scott Pierce
Director of Research Services and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX F
LITERATURE MATRIX

LITERATURE MATRIX
(Beginning Teachers)

Interview Questions	Research Questions	Research
1. What was the determining factor that led you into a teaching career?	2	Ingersoll, 2001; Stoddart & Floden, 1995; U. S. Department of Education, 2002b
2. What do you feel are your greatest assets that you bring to the teaching profession?	1	NCTAF, 2006
3. What did you think went into the making of a great teacher before you started teaching?	2	Hofstadter, 1963
4. What about your background or preparation has made you successful?	1	Feistritzer, 1999
5. What preparation did you not get that would have made you more successful?	3	Dill, 1996; Feistritzer, 1998; Feistritzer & Chester, 1998
6. How well do you feel you relate to the students?	1	Dahkemper & Feistritzer, 2001; Haberman, 2004
7. Have there been any surprises to you regarding students' behavior?	2	Natriello & Zumwalt, 1993
8. Tell me what I would see if I visited your classroom.	3	Darling-Hammond, 2002
9. Tell me about a lesson that you prepared that students really responded to and you felt good about.	1	Buice, 2003; Dickar, 2003

10. What professional learning opportunities have you engaged in this school year?	1	Hawley, 1992
11. What attributes that you possess have better prepared you for the transition to become a teacher?	2	Zeichner & Schulte, 2001
12. What are your recommendations for developing those attributes that are needed to become an even better teacher?	3	NCLB, 2001

LITERATURE MATRIX
(School Administrators)

Interview Questions	Research Question	Research
1. What are the successes and possibilities of your beginning teachers? Concerns and Challenges?	1	Goebel, 1985; Salyer, 2003
1. What are the successes and possibilities of your beginning teachers? Concerns and Challenges?	2	Goebel, 1985; Salyer, 2003
2. What is the difference between the beginning teachers in the GA TAPP program and the beginning teachers from the traditional certified program?	2	Bliss, 1990; Haberman, 1999; Dickar, 2003
3. What about beginning teachers' background or preparation has made them successful?	1	Salyer, 2003
4. To what or whom do you attribute the beginning teachers' success?	3	Lutz & Hutton, 1989
5. How well do beginning teachers relate to students and parents?	1	Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hayes-Jacobs, 2004
6. What do you think has surprised the beginning teachers about student behavior?	2	Darling-Hammond, 2000; Salyer, 2003
7. When you visit the beginning teachers' classroom, what do you observe with the students, teachers?	3	Nagy & Wang, 2006
8. Tell me about a visit to a beginning teachers' classroom when you felt excited about the learning that was taking place in the classroom.	1	Barnes et al. (1990)

9. What professional activities have beginning teachers engage in this school year?	2	Lutz & Hutton, 1989
10. What professional development would you like for the beginning teachers to engage in if given the opportunity?	3	Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hayes-Jacobs, 2004