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Backgrounds, Teaching Responsibilities, and Motivations of Music Education Candidates Enrolled in Alternative Certification Music Education Programs

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors associated with enrolling, continuing, and completing alternative certification programs in music education. Data were collected via surveys and semi-structured interviews of music teacher candidates from 43 program completers from seven alternative certification programs in three states. In general, participants were attracted by program efficiency, program feasibility, personal support and employment potential. Few disadvantages of alternative certification were indicated, but participants considered balancing a personal life with a new career, and the certification requirements to be a huge challenge. Participants most valued courses in certification programs that were immediately relevant to the practical aspects of teaching; however, the perceived usefulness of specific courses varied, even among students enrolled in the same program. Suggestions are provided for music teacher educators who work with students enrolled in alternative certification programs.

Introduction

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

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

Educational researchers have found that alternative certification candidates rate the effectiveness of alternate certification programs very positively. Research based on student achievement is less conclusive. According to national surveys of teachers across disciplines, researchers have concluded that alternative certification programs served to (a) reduce teacher shortages, (b) increase the racial and gender diversity of teaching force, and (c) reduce shortages in urban schools (Shen, 1997; Feistritzer, 2005). Research on the longevity of music teachers reveals that alternatively certified teachers are more susceptible to attrition than traditionally certified teachers in the first few years of teaching (Hancock, 2010). Alternatively certified candidates report that they perceive themselves as competent to teach and expect to remain in

teaching (Feistritzer, 2005), but this has not been demonstrated by the available longitudinal data (Shen, 1997; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Although the effectiveness of alternatively certified teachers remains controversial, this is a significant trend in teacher preparation. Determining the motivations of these candidates could provide valuable insights for music teacher educators who work with students in alternative certification programs.

Researchers have found that music, personal identity, and beliefs about teaching and other people are important factors that motivate people to pursue teaching and music performance (e.g. Bergee et al, 2001; Feistritzer, 2005; Nagy & Wang, 2007; Parkes & Smith, 2009). Survey results of both traditional and alternative teacher candidates indicate that candidates pursue music teaching in order to (a) work with young people (Bergee et al, 2001; Feistritzer, 2005; Nagy & Wang, 2005; Roberts, 1993), (b) work in music (Bergee et al, 2001; Hellman, 2008; Parkes, 2009), (c) make a difference (Bergee et al 2001; Hellman, 2008), and (d) do what they were meant to do (Parkes, 2009). Conversely, undergraduates intending to pursue music performance have often been inspired by (a) enjoyment of playing music, (b) confidence in their ability, and (c) beliefs in the usefulness of music performance, (Parkes, 2009). Some alternative candidates decide to pursue teaching as means to change careers, which may be why alternative candidates are concerned with practical matters for entering the teaching profession such as salary, benefits, work environment, and a family-compatible schedule (Feistritzer, 2005). Beliefs do play an important role in the path that one takes and understanding the impact of beliefs can help music teacher educators in their work with alternative certification candidates.

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

Method

In 2009, data were collected via surveys and semi-structured interviews of music teacher candidates and program completers in seven alternative certification programs from Missouri, California, and New York. Quantitative survey data were analyzed descriptively. Analysis of qualitative survey data and interview transcripts were guided by the research questions as well as emerging themes. Two researchers analyzed the qualitative data independently and collaborated to discuss differences in codings and emerging themes. A convenient sample of alternative certification candidates at each institution completed the *Alternative Certification/Music Education Survey*, and a small number of survey participants were requested to participate in an interview.

Survey Instrument

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

Interview

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

Results

Table 1 provides an overview of the gender, age, and educational background, undergraduate major, and alternative certification institution of the 43 surveys that were returned. Approximately 62% of the respondents were female, and approximately 70% of the respondents were Caucasian. The average age of participants was 33.8 years, and five of the survey participants did not possess an undergraduate degree in music.

Table 1 *Gender, Age and Educational Background of Survey Participants by Program Type (N = 43)*

Program	Gender		Mean Age	Highest Degree		Undergraduate Major	
	F	M		Bach	Mast	Music	Other
<i>Brooklyn College (n=16)</i>	9	6	28.6	12	3	14	2
<i>Missouri State University (n=9)</i>	7	2	38.9	3	6	6	3
<i>Southeast Missouri Sate University (n=2)</i>	1	1	38.5	0	2	2	0
<i>University of Missouri-St. Louis (n=6)</i>	3	3	43.2	2	4	6	0

<i>University of Southern California (n=8)</i>	5	3	26.3	3	5	8	0
<i>Virginia Tech (n=2)</i>	2	0	39.0	2	0	2	0
Total	27	15	33.8	22	20	38	5

Note. One respondent did not report gender.

Current Teaching Responsibilities of Program Participants

Nineteen survey respondents were currently involved in teaching. Many were in the midst of pursuing certification and were not employed in teaching. Some who were pursuing certification were teaching on temporary certificates. Teaching responsibilities of participants who were currently employed included a mix of general music, vocal, and instrumental responsibilities. (See Table 2.)

Table 2 *Number of Survey Participants Teaching, Teaching Areas, and Grades Teaching by Program Type (N = 42)^a*

Name of Program	# Currently Teaching	Teaching Areas ^b		
		Gen	Vocal	Inst
<i>Brooklyn College (n=16)</i>	1	1	0	2
<i>Missouri State University (n=9)</i>	7	3	6	3
<i>Southeast Missouri State University (n=2)</i>	2	2	1	1
<i>University of Missouri-St. Louis (n=6)</i>	6	4	3	1
<i>University of Southern California (n=7)</i>	1	1	2	4
<i>Virginia Tech (n=2)</i>	2	1	1	1
Total	19	12	13	12

^aUsable data was not obtained from all participants.

^bSome participants had responsibilities in more than one area.

Motivations for Enrolling in ATC Music Teacher Education Licensure Programs

Survey respondents answered forced and open-choice questions regarding their reasons for entering the teaching profession as well as why they chose the particular alternative certification program. Open-choice responses were analyzed using open coding procedures. Both researchers coded the surveys independently and collaborated to discuss differences in coding. The data were recoded as necessary, and examined for common themes among the codes. Twenty-five codes emerged from these data, and the codes were examined inductively for themes. Themes emerging from these data were musical, pragmatic, people-oriented, socially conscious, and

personal fulfillment. These themes are similar to the results found on reasons why people enter music education in traditional programs.

Personal affinity for music and the pragmatic realities of financial support were common in nearly all respondents' decision to enter the teaching profession. Quoting the text of one survey participant, "I wanted one full-time job in music. I was tired of working seven part-time jobs without any benefits. I wanted a steady schedule in my life..." Participants' ratings of salary, prestige, challenge and support also suggest that these are motivating factors for entering the teaching profession. (See Table 3.)

Table 3 Mean Ratings of Satisfaction with Teaching Profession by Program (N = 43)

Satisfaction Ratings	Salary/Benefits	Prestige	Challenge	Professional Support
<i>Brooklyn College (n=16)</i>	2.0 (0.1)	2.1(0.2)	2.3 (0.2)	2.0 (0.3)
<i>Missouri State University (n=9)</i>	2.0 (0.0)	1.8(0.3)	2.8 (0.2)	2.0 (0.3)
<i>Southeast Missouri State University (n=2)</i>	2.0 (0.0)	2.5(0.5)	2.5 (0.5)	2.5 (0.5)
<i>University of Missouri-St. Louis (n=6)</i>	2.2 (0.3)	1.7(0.2)	2.2 (0.2)	2.3 (0.2)
<i>University of Southern California (n=7)</i>	2.1 (0.2)	2.1(0.2)	2.6 (0.2)	2.3 (0.3)
<i>Virginia Tech (n=2)</i>	2.5 (0.5)	2.5(0.5)	2.5 (0.5)	2.0 (0.0)

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses.

Data on the reasons for enrolling in a particular alternative certification program are reported in Tables 4 and 5. Through both open-response and forced choice items, participants indicated that convenience and cost were important factors. The reasons provided by participants in response to the open-ended item "List the top three reasons you choose to enroll in this alternative certification program" were coded and tabulated. These data are available in Table 4. Survey participants rated the convenience of the schedule, convenience of the location, financial considerations, opportunity to work full time, and family obligations as not important, somewhat important, or very important. All reasons, except for family, were rated highly. A summary of these data are provided in Table 5.

Table 4 Frequency of Reasons Cited by Participants for Choosing a Particular ATC Program (N = 43)

Reasons	n
Convenience	
Family Obligations	3

Location	9
Scheduling	
Accelerated Calendar	18
Times of Courses	3
Fewer	3
Requirements/Prerequisites to Enter Program	
Flexibility of Program	
<i>Financial</i>	
Employment Opportunity	8
Cost	12
Required to keep job	1
<i>Educational</i>	
Program Reputation	9
Liked Institution	6
Support Provided	5
Opportunity for Master's	2
Didn't Want Master's	1
Hands-on Experience	1
<i>Personal</i>	
Unhappy in Present	2
<i>Job/Unemployed</i>	
Become More Socially Aware	1
Already have bachelors	4

Table 5 Mean Ratings of Reasons for Choosing this ATC Program (N = 43)

Ratings	Schedule	Location	Financial	Work Opportunity	Family
<i>Brookly College (n=16)</i>	2.3 (0.2)	2.3(0.2)	2.8(0.1)	2.2 (0.2)	1.7(0.2)
<i>Missouri State University (n=9)</i>	3.0 (0.0)	2.4(0.3)	2.6(0.2)	2.7 (0.2)	2.1(0.3)
<i>Southeast Missouri State University (n=2)</i>	3.0 (0.0)	3.0(0.0)	2.5(0.5)	2.5 (0.5)	2.0(0.0)

<i>Univeristy of Missouri-St. Louis</i> (n=6)	2.3 (0.3)	2.2(0.3)	3.0(0.0)	3.0 (0.0)	1.8(0.4)
<i>University of Southern California</i> (n=8)	2.4 (0.3)	2.9(0.1)	2.4(0.2)	2.6 (0.3)	1.4(0.3)
<i>Virginia Tech</i> (n=2)	3.0 (0.0)	3.0(0.0)	3.0(0.0)	3.0 (0.0)	2.0(1.1)
Total	2.6 (0.6)	2.5(0.7)	2.7(0.5)	2.6 (0.7)	1.8(0.7)

Note. Standard deviations are provided in parentheses.

Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of ATC Programs

Responses to open-ended questions asked participants to identify the rewards, challenges, and “advantages and disadvantages of alternative certification programs.” Following the procedures used to code the open-ended items on motivation, these data were coded and collapsed into themes which are reported in Table 6. In comparison with advantages, survey participants indicated few disadvantages. Considerable overlap was found among all of these questions, and disadvantages appeared to reflect local and personal concerns. The disadvantages that were indicated largely focused on the personal benefits, stressors, and sacrifices associated with completing the program.

Advantages revealed the perceived convenience and support of alternative programs. Responses were mixed as to the quality of pedagogical content preparation in comparison to traditional programs, and some considered it similar or superior to traditional programs, and others indicated weaknesses. No particular trends emerged in the data, but many responses were reflective of interactions with particular faculty members and/or specific aspects of program design that provided authentic teaching experiences in public schools.

Table 6 Participants Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Music Education Alternative Certification Programs

Themes	Advantages/Rewards	Disadvantages/Challenges
Program Organization Components	Fewer courses	Time Schedule of Course
	Practical/Vocational Application Driven (Hands-on)	Heavy Workload
	Cost	
	Timeline of Completion	
Program Quality	Sufficient or Comprehensive	Lacks Musical Pedagogical Content Knowledge
Support	Peer support/friendship	

	Job Placement	
Personal	Finished quickly	Time Management
	Get into classroom	Organization Required
		Stress
		Balancing Employment and Course Load
		Balancing Family and Course Load

Long-term Goals

The long-term career objectives indicated by survey participants revealed that most survey participants considered K – 12 teaching to be their long-term objective. Many participants indicated a desire to continue learning and strive for personal excellence on behalf of their current or future school program. Over 20% indicated that their ultimate objective was to attain a position in higher education. A summary of the analysis of these data is provided in Table 7.

Table 7 Participants’ Long-term Career Objectives by Program Type (N = 43)

Career Objective	<i>n</i>
Higher Education	9
K-12 Teaching	15
Retire from K-12 Teaching	6
Stay involved in music	8

Interviews

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

Discussion

Extreme caution should be used in interpreting the results of this study. This survey used a convenient sample across a variety of programs from different areas of the county. One of the challenges involved in collecting the data for this study was accessing music education alternative certification candidates who were frequently juggling numerous personal, occupational and music-oriented responsibilities. No assumptions about trends should be inferred given the convenient sample and size of the study, but the small size of these types of candidates at each institution may make obtaining this type of data difficult, if not impossible. In several programs, candidates pursuing music certification primarily took coursework that involved prospective teachers in a variety of disciplines. Though the sample is small and unique, the results are informative given the growth in alternative certification programs in music.

The demographic data of the candidates in this study was examined anecdotally for generalities. The respondents in the survey were predominantly Caucasian females in their early to mid 30s who held at least a bachelor's degree in music. This is similar to the background of candidates as documented in several research studies on traditional preservice programs (Bergee et al, 2001; Hancock, 210; Hellman, 2008). The average age of candidates in programs in New York and Los Angeles was lower than Missouri and Virginia, and this could suggest that geographical differences exist in alternative certification candidates. While the majority of participants did have undergraduate degrees in music, five candidates had not completed a bachelor's degree in music.

In some programs, the average age of participants was only slightly higher than that of typical traditional candidates. Perhaps some candidates delay the pursuit of teacher certification until after obtaining an undergraduate degree due to the tight structure of traditional preservice teacher education. Changing majors as an undergraduate may delay graduation, and for some candidates, alternative certification may appear to be a more realistic choice, particularly if they do not enter college as a music education major. Others may choose alternative routes due to the limited opportunities for making a living in other aspects of music. Others may actually find teaching a welcome change from a performing career because it is more compatible with traditional family life. Still others may experience a change in direction and desire to move into teaching in order to make a difference.

In general, participants perceived the structural components of programs that eased the difficulties of obtaining certification as advantages. Participants were attracted to the streamlining of programs, the feasibility of program requirements with other economic realities, life and work obligations, and how programs led to future employment possibilities. Similarly, they perceived stressful factors that pushed and overloaded their already busy schedules as disadvantages. The attractiveness of programs seems to be a combination of personal fit and economic feasibility. Part of that fit might be that participants find a level of psychological support that meets their needs as nontraditional students.

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

The motivations for entering teaching for alternative certification candidates are similar to traditional candidates and the fact that so many alternative certification students in this study were less than 30 may suggest that some undergraduate music students could benefit from more exposure to music education as a discipline regardless of their intended major. Music teacher educators primarily focus their recruitment efforts on prospective freshman, and the rigid sequence of music education programs may make switching to music education difficult for some students. In general, music teacher educators express a preference for students to work through traditional undergraduate curricula to obtain certification, and more flexibility in traditional programs could possibly reduce the need and attractiveness of alternative certification programs.

Some survey participants described that most of their coursework for certification did not emphasize the pedagogical content knowledge unique to music. The lack of music teaching coursework could be a disadvantage to alternatively prepared candidates. Some may have a strong music background but lack experience with how to adapt those musical skills for teaching. The subjects in this study indicated that teaching employment, along with the flexibility of class time in order to earn their certification or master’s degree, were pragmatic advantages. Taking what student’s learn in the college classroom to the public-school classroom is the primary concern of music teacher education, and in this respect, alternative candidates express concerns that are similar to traditional candidates. Many recent initiatives have focused on the importance of pedagogical content knowledge, and the integration of content and pedagogy would be as beneficial for alternative candidates as it is for traditional candidates. This may be an even more critical issue for alternative candidates who are pursuing certification while on a temporary certificate and learning about teaching theory detached from music content. The appropriate application of theory to pedagogy is challenging in even the most ideal

situations, and alternative candidates who lack access to higher education faculty without expertise in music education may be missing an important component of teacher preparation.

Most colleges and universities prioritize the instruction of traditional candidates, since they typically far outnumber ATC candidates, and the result is that some alternative programs lack the personnel and resources needed to deliver content-specific teacher pedagogy. The small size of alternative certification programs in music and the lack of integration with traditional undergraduate offerings could result from the location of alternative certification program oversight in education units. Marketing and tailoring programs to the needs of nontraditional students without necessary personnel and resources may negatively impact the quality of teacher preparation. In higher education institutions, music teacher educators are best qualified to structure candidate assessments, design curricular experiences, deliver coursework, and structure learning experiences that provide meaningful preparation for music teachers. Although bureaucratic structures sometimes hinder the usefulness of music teacher educators' expertise, their unique qualifications allows them to design alternative certification programs and strategically utilize available resources.

The lack of authority for alternative programs within some music education units presents challenges and opportunities for music- teacher educators. We can work to build partnerships with colleagues in education units in order to communicate the need for (a) participating in the screening and selection process of alternative certification candidates, (b) providing pedagogical content knowledge for alternative certification candidates, (c) developing courses and curricula that meet the needs of alternative certification candidates, and (d) advocating for mentors and supervision to provide support for candidates who are teaching and simultaneously earning certification. Based on our experience with alternative certification programs and anecdotal evidence from colleagues, the “fast track” curricular format, teaching while engaged in the first few years of employment as a teacher of record, presents an enormous challenge for beginning teachers. New teachers benefit from working with experienced teachers and gaining valuable advice concerning lesson planning, classroom management, and the opportunity to expand teaching ideas (Scribner, Bickford, Watson, & Valentine, 2005). Similarly, fast programs may not allow students the time needed to develop pedagogical skills and pedagogical content knowledge. Some candidates in alternative certification programs are simultaneously adapting to school settings, teaching grades and areas of music in which they have little familiarity while completing courses needed to earn certification.

Suggestions for Further Research

Assessing the effectiveness of ATC programs is complex due to the lack of uniformity across institutions and state departments of education. In our data collection, we found supposedly publicly available information on programs to be absent, confusing, conflicting, and at times, misleading. In addition, terminology such as “methods course,” “student teaching,” practicum, etc., have different meanings both within and across different institutions (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Studies outside of music have compared traditional and alternatively prepared candidates by examining data on teacher retention, candidate content area, and teaching

commitment (J. Shen, 1997; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). An analysis of the data from these studies has revealed mixed results on whether alternative certification programs attract candidates with higher or lower qualifications. We also found a wide range of qualifications among the participants in our study.

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

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