

“Faculty are the Backbone”: Quality Control in Connecticut’s Alternate Route to Certification

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Introduction

Recent changes in state class-size policies, teacher retirements, growth in student immigration and teacher attrition rates led experts to project a need for 2.2 million new public school teachers by 2010 (Hussar, 1999). In response to teacher shortages and the anticipated demand, state and district policymakers have implemented policies designed to quickly bring new candidates into teaching. One such approach is alternative teacher certification, which offers training and supervision to candidates with little or no prior teaching experience (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999; Hawley, 1990). Though alternative certification programs differ significantly, most offer abbreviated preparation and expeditious entry into classrooms (Hawley, 1990).

Experts disagree about whether alternative certification programs benefit or harm students (Editors, 2000). Critics contend that teachers who are not conventionally certified compromise the quality of students' education while the new teachers are learning to teach (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Wise, 1991). Proponents argue that alternative certification offers an opportunity for candidates with strong subject matter knowledge and prior professional experience to improve the quality of the teaching force (Ballou & Podgursky, 2000) and fill the depleted teaching ranks (Feistritzer & Chester, 2002). Other researchers maintain that alternative certification does not have negative consequences for students, and question the importance of conventional certification (Goldhaber, 2000; Walsh, 2001).

The debate about the pros and cons of alternative certification often obscures the programs' variety and complexity, treating them as though they are uniform, without considering the particular context, design, and program elements (Dill, 1996), and disregarding the possibility of a "spectrum" of program quality (Zeichner, 2002). Before policymakers and practitioners extol or decry alternative certification programs as a group,

they must understand in greater detail how these programs work – what aspects serve as incentives to attract teacher candidates and what program elements ensure that the teachers who complete the programs will be qualified to do a good job.

This paper is a study of Connecticut's Alternate Route to Certification (ARC), a state-legislated and state-run alternative certification program. In the fall of 2001 and the winter of 2002, I conducted a case study of the program, interviewing the program's director, faculty members, and participants. The following research question guided this study:

How does the Alternate Route to Certification (ARC) program in Connecticut balance the incentives to attract participants with the program elements designed to assure quality?

The case study approach allowed me to investigate these issues of incentives and quality in the context of one, state-directed program.

Context

Alternative certification programs emerged during the 1980s as a response to concern about decreased teacher supply and uneven teacher quality (Hawley, 1990) as well as a need to diversify the teaching force (Pallas, as cited by Stoddart & Floden, 1995). Some policymakers also sought to challenge the perceived monopoly of traditional teacher preparation programs (Dill, 1996; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1992). Advocates promoted alternative certification as a better way to meet the demand than simply issuing emergency certificates, which require no preparation or supervision (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Currently, there are at least 45 states and many districts that offer alternative certification programs (Blair, 2003). In addition to their appeal in addressing the teaching shortage, alternative certification programs have recently become approved nationally through the *No*

Child Left Behind Act of 2002 as a means of meeting federal regulations for “highly qualified” teachers.¹

Alternative certification programs extend to candidates the incentive of rapid entry, allowing them to bypass traditional certification procedures. While alternative certification programs may be attractive to candidates, and could increase the supply of teachers, at the center of the debate about them is the issue of teacher quality. Can these programs adequately prepare teachers to teach children well?

The presence of alternative certification programs has generated a contentious debate about teacher quality and certification. Research comparing the quality of traditionally-certified and alternatively-certified teachers yields mixed findings. Ball and Wilson (Ball & Wilson, 1990) found little difference between alternatively- and traditionally-certified mathematics teachers. Guyton, Fox, et al. (1991) also found that on almost all measures, alternatively-certified and traditionally-certified teachers in Georgia were similar in attitudes, experience, and teaching performance. Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) concluded that 12th grade mathematics and science students whose teachers have emergency credentials do no worse on standardized tests than students who were taught by teachers with conventional credentials. A recent study of Teach For America² (TFA) corps members in Houston, Texas compared the performance of TFA teachers to that of other new teachers in Houston Independent School District who did not participate in TFA, and all other teachers in the district, regardless of experience status. The authors found that TFA teachers as a cohort “show less variation in quality” than the comparison group (Raymond, Fletcher, & Luque, 2001).

¹ Final regulations, part 200.55 *No Child Left Behind*, Federal Register/Vol. 67, No. 231/ Monday, December 2, 2002/Rules and Regulations, p.71729, (“No child left behind,” 2002).

² Teach For America is a non-profit organization that recruits and selects individuals with no prior teaching experience to teach in under-resourced public schools throughout the U.S.

In contrast, Laczko-Kerr and Berliner (2002) compared the academic achievement of low-income, primary school students with “under-certified” teachers and Teach For America corps members, to the academic achievement of low-income, primary school students in classes with “regularly-certified” teachers (p.2). They found that the students with TFA teachers and other under-certified teachers performed lower on standardized tests than the students of teachers who held regular certification (p.2). Further, Darling-Hammond et al. (2001) reviewed several comparison studies of alternatively- and traditionally-certified teachers and found that the studies demonstrated positive effects of teacher certification on student achievement. They concluded that those who have more training in education appear to do better in increasing student achievement.

Some experts have called into question the efforts to quantify teacher quality. Goldhaber (2002) reports that teacher characteristics such as certification status or experience level explain only three percent of the differences in student achievement that are related to teacher characteristics. Other experts criticize this research that attempts to establish a relationship between teacher certification and student achievement as “astonishingly deficient” (Walsh, 2001, p. 1).

At the center of this debate about alternative certification is the policy question: Is it possible to use alternative certification programs to attract a sufficiently large and diverse pool of candidates to fill the shortage while maintaining, or even improving, the quality of the teaching force? The first part of this question has implications for the design of program incentive structures and suggests the need to study the characteristics of the candidates, and the reasons participants are attracted to the program. Stoddart (1990) reported that participants in the Los Angeles Unified School District’s alternative certification program offered three reasons for joining the program: financial need, interest in job-embedded

learning, and a reluctance to take more university-based coursework (p. 98). Research has also shown that quick entry is attractive to minority candidates (Shen, 1998), individuals over 25 years old, and those who majored in math, science, and foreign languages (Cornett, 1990; Natriello & Zumwalt, 1992; Shen, 1997; Shen, 1998). Further research is needed to understand individuals' responses to incentives in the current context of the teacher shortage and the increase in alternative routes to teaching.

The second part of the policy question focuses on the program's capacity to ensure quality. The debate is made more complicated by the nature of alternative certification programs, which tend to be uneven in their quality and vary in design. Some include stringent requirements and rigorous selection mechanisms, while others have few established standards. Unlike conventional programs, which often require several years of participation, the alternative programs are usually abbreviated, offering candidates brief pre-service preparation and rapid entry. They may offer intensive pre-service training with follow-up support at the school-site, match new teachers with experienced teachers as mentors, or give program participants reduced teaching loads while they are in the program. By contrast, others offer little to no pre-service training, no coursework, few opportunities to interact with veteran teachers, and little in-school support. Given the precarious nature of alternative certification programs and their struggle to ensure quality amidst the uncertainty of their design and implementation practices, it is critical to examine the elements of the program that are designed to attract participants and the components that ensure that they can teach well.

This study of Connecticut's ARC program provides an understanding of how one program contends with the sometimes competing demands of attracting participants while ensuring quality. In particular, the study will describe participants' responses to incentives,

introduce a conceptual framework for analyzing alternative certification programs' approaches to maintaining quality in the program, and analyze Connecticut's approach to quality using the conceptual framework.

Alternate Routes: Balancing Incentives to Participate with Quality

As alternative certification programs proliferate, the question of how the programs both attract candidates to participate and maintain their quality becomes increasingly significant. Many programs attract participants who may not have entered teaching by the traditional route (Shen, 1998). In order to design these incentive structures, it is important to know what components of the program attract participants. Further, since the programs are often designed to bring candidates into teaching who, for the most part, have never taught and must be trained within an abbreviated time frame, the ways in which the program ensures quality is shaped by these factors. If these programs are to be expanded, it is essential that policymakers and practitioners have a clear understanding of various designs and how they work, particularly the ways in which the program design reflects a specific approach to quality control.

Approaches to Quality

The research on the ARC program presented here was completed under the auspices of *The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers* directed by Dr. Susan Moore Johnson. Prior to initiating the Connecticut study, I conducted preliminary data collection with Dr. Johnson at three alternative program certification sites in California (March, 2001).

We used the data from California and the data from this study in Connecticut to develop a conceptual framework for understanding the ways in which alternative certification programs, which are typically brief, nonetheless seek to maintain quality to

ensure that participants are well-prepared to teach when they complete the program.³ We identified five ways in which those who create alternative certification programs conceive of and provide for quality. The five approaches to quality control include: selective admissions; reliance on expert faculty; program structure; adherence to state requirements; and use of summative assessment(s).

Reliance on Participant Selection: Individual Program Candidates Maintain Quality

Quality is maintained in a rigorous process for choosing participants, those individuals who match the program's criteria and demonstrate potential for succeeding in the program, so the selection process secures the "right" people.

Reliance on Expert Faculty: Master Teachers Maintain Quality

This approach to quality assumes that it is the expert faculty members who ensure quality by overseeing the program and delivering program content. They understand teaching and students, know what candidates need to learn and do in order to be successful, and can wisely select, induct, train, and evaluate program participants.

Reliance on Program Structure: Structured Experiences Maintain Quality

This approach relies on providing a substantive and carefully sequenced set of program experiences. For example, if the program invests heavily in researching and developing a curriculum for preparing new teachers, then the effective use of this curriculum is assumed to produce quality teachers. This approach relies on program elements, such as coursework schedule, curricula, or experiences or materials for quality.

Reliance on State Requirements: Certification Regulations Maintain Quality

This approach assumes that quality rests in designing and implementing a program that complies with state regulations about contact hours or topics. It assumes that state

³ Susan Moore Johnson and I developed the conceptual framework collaboratively, using the data I collected in Connecticut, and the emerging findings in the pilot study. Thus, I describe the conceptual

officials have identified coursework or content that a teaching candidate must complete in order to be qualified to teach.

Reliance on Summative Assessments: Formal Assessments Maintain Quality

Advocates of this approach rely on formal assessments as the means by which teaching quality will be measured and ensured. The assessment tools document participants' competencies, and signal to districts or the state whether a candidate is qualified to teach.

Alternative Certification Programs: Balancing Approaches to Quality and Incentives

After conducting this preliminary research, we have concluded that most alternative certification programs include elements of all five of these approaches. For example, the programs include faculty assumed to be effective, select candidates who one might expect to succeed, institute some type of deliberate structure, comply with certification regulations (state, district, or both), and include a summative assessment of teachers' performance. However, most programs feature one or more of these approaches, which ultimately takes the lead in the program. Further, the approach to quality will drive the program design and implementation. A program's particular approach to ensuring quality contributes to who enters the program, what they experience, and whether they are prepared to teach upon completion of the program.

Connecticut's Alternate Route to Certification

Connecticut offers two alternative routes to teacher certification: The Alternate Route to Teacher Certification (ARC) and ARCII.⁴ The ARC program, established by the CT legislature in 1986, is one of the oldest alternative certification programs in the U.S.⁵

framework as a collaboration.

⁴ CT Department of Higher Education: Alternative Route to Teacher Certification. Website: <http://www.ctdhe.org/dheweb/ARC/ALT.htm>

⁵ The CT legislature approved legislation for the ARC II alternate route program in 1999, a year-long alternative certification program directed by the Department of Higher Education, the same agency that

The ARC program takes place over an intensive eight-week summer session of full-time instruction, and certifies individuals to teach middle grades 4-8, secondary grades 7-12, and special subjects grades K-12.⁶ In the 2001 session, the program included 230 participants, 50 of whom were also participants in the Hartford Teaching Fellows Program.⁷ The Department of Higher Education implements the program, though ARC candidates are certified through the Department of Education. According to the director, at the program's inception, it was intended "to bring an academically different type of teacher from those who were going through four years of the education programs in Connecticut."⁸ These "academically different" candidates were predominately mid-career entrants to teaching. In recent years, the program mission has shifted to a focus on filling shortage areas.⁹

The ARC program includes several components: writing and reading assignments, content methods courses, lectures by consultants, student teaching, and assessments. At the beginning of the program, participants spend half of the day listening to the lectures, then the remainder of the day divided into smaller content specific groups in the methods courses. By the end of the program, participants spend three weeks student teaching (four hours per day) in districts surrounding the program's central location, while also attending the methods courses and lectures.¹⁰

runs the original ARC program, now called ARC I. The ARC II program began in the 2000-2001 academic year. I focused my study on the ARC I program, so for that reason, will not discuss the ARC II program.

⁶ Available: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/cert/FACT102.HTM>.

⁷ The Hartford Teaching Fellows Program is a district-sponsored alternative certification program directed by the New Teacher Project (a private consulting organization) that operated in collaboration with the ARC program. "Fellows" were recruited by the HTF, but participated in the ARC summer program alongside regular ARC participants. The 2002 ARC program will include 150 participants, as the Hartford Teaching Fellows Program is not taking place in 2002, thus eliminating 50 participants.

⁸ Notably, the legislation was enacted at the same time Connecticut was experiencing a decline in public school enrollments (Beaudin, Thompson, & Prowda, 2000).

⁹ Expanding the number and type of alternate routes to certification was one of the CT Department of Education's five recommendations in their report, *Public School Educator Supply and Demand in Connecticut: A Look Toward the 21st Century* (1999), as cited by Beaudin, Thompson, & Prowda (2000), p. 26.

¹⁰ The 2002 ARC program will include four weeks of summer school student teaching, an increase of one week (interview with director).

The methods courses are distinct by certification area. For example, all participants pursuing secondary math certification are in one methods group, while all seeking middle school social studies certification are in another group. Two full-time, ARC faculty members design and implement a curriculum for each methods course area. They design the methods courses based on the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT), a state document that establishes standards of effective teaching.

In contrast, the “core” sessions, as program administrators called them, take the form of lectures by contracted instructors who are, for the most part, full-time consultants in specific instructional areas (i.e. classroom management, multicultural education, etc). The subjects for the core lectures are determined by Connecticut’s certification regulations. For example, in adherence to the certification regulations that require a special education component, one core lecture included special education law (interview with director).

The program assessments include observations of student teaching that the full-time methods faculty and the school-based cooperating teachers complete, as well as a state-wide assessment system, the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program, that takes place after participants have successfully completed the ARC program and have entered classrooms.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate that rapid entry to full-time teaching positions is the primary incentive to participate in the program. Unlike other state’s programs, Connecticut does not offer extensive incentives for participation; there are neither signing bonuses nor mortgage loans for ARC graduates.¹¹ In choosing ARC, participants responded

¹¹ The state of Massachusetts offers \$20,000 signing bonuses, allocated over four years, to some candidates who are selected to participate in the state’s alternative certification program, the Massachusetts Institute for New Teachers.

to the incentive of rapid entry to the classroom and the relative ease of completing certification requirements. While the incentives are an important element of the program, the complexity of the program – and the more nuanced part of this study – lies in Connecticut’s approach to quality. The program has primarily responded to the challenge by relying on expert teachers to ensure quality. The other approaches to quality are present in the program, but it is usually the faculty who implement those other approaches, thus emphasizing their role as experts.

Methods

Site

I conducted this exploratory study through the Connecticut Department of Higher Education, which designs some program content, hires program faculty, selects candidates, assesses their competency at the conclusion of the program, and awards the participants Provisional Teacher Certification.

Data Collection

Documents

I reviewed program documents including state legislation, program description, recruitment materials, course syllabi, state teaching standards such as the Common Core of Teaching (CCT) and the Connecticut Competency Instrument (CCI), in order to understand the context and rationale for the program’s creation, the purpose of the program, the design of incentive structures and quality measures, selection criteria and evaluation mechanisms.

Interviews

The sample of respondents included the director of the ARC program, the assistant director, five faculty members, and seven program participants. I obtained permission from

Some districts, such as San Francisco, offer reimbursement for moving expenses to teachers in shortage

the director to conduct the study. I conducted individual, semi-structured interviews with the program director in the summer 2001 and spring of 2002 in order to understand the program design, structure, and implementation. I interviewed the Assistant Program Director in order to complete my understanding of administrative aspects of the program.

I completed individual, semi-structured interviews with five faculty members whom I selected for variation in subject specialty in order to investigate my research questions about quality and incentives, given the faculty involvement in the program. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

I also interviewed seven ARC program participants from the 2001 ARC program in order to gather information about their reasons for participating in the program, what attracted them to the program, and their assessment of elements of the program. I chose these participants from a list of ARC graduates, selecting them for variation in certification area, gender, race, and teaching position.

Observation

I observed two days of the ARC 2001 program, July-August 2001, in order to see the program in action and to better understand the different elements of the program before conducting the interviews. I recorded field notes of professional development seminars and teaching methods course sessions and used these field notes to inform my interview protocols, and my understanding of the respondents' comments and references.

Data Analysis

After each interview, I created a thematic summary of the interview, documenting issues and themes that had emerged during the interview. Throughout the data collection, I developed codes for elements of the program, with attention to incentives and descriptions

of program structures about quality that appeared in the interviews of the faculty members and the program participants. I wrote analytic memos describing patterns in participants' explanations about what attracted them to the program. I engaged in transcript analysis, testing coding categories and developing concepts. As I analyzed the transcripts, I continued to interview program faculty and participants; this allowed me to test and clarify the initial findings, then tested the findings using an iterative process, moving between the codes I had developed and the transcripts and interviews themselves. I analyzed participants' descriptions of their expectations of the program, their experiences in the program, and their reflections on the program now that they are teaching. To ensure validity in the interpretation of the data, I shared my transcripts and data analysis with two interpretive communities – a research group under the direction of Susan Moore Johnson and a peer study group.¹²

Incentives

In order to understand how the incentives work, it is useful to examine the ways in which the incentives attract (or do not attract) candidates, and the characteristics of those who choose to participate in this program. The following questions explore the program's challenge in attracting participants: What incentives for participation are built into the program design? Who is attracted to the ARC program? For what reasons do they join the program?

The data reveal that participants chose the ARC program because it was convenient—the program fit into their career plans, their budget concerns, or their family considerations. Respondents were unanimous in describing their reasons for choosing this program: they wanted to get into teaching quickly in Connecticut; they wanted to avoid the

¹² This peer study group includes Lauren Katzman, Carrie Parker, and Sue Stuebner, advanced doctoral candidates.

costs (real and opportunity) of traditional teacher education; they believed that the program matched their sense of how best to learn to teach; and they wanted to achieve teacher certification.

Quick Entry and Avoiding Opportunity Costs

Justin, a mid-career, middle-school humanities teacher, had completed almost all of the undergraduate coursework required for certification through a university program several years before. In order to become certified, he was obliged to complete a semester of student teaching and one accompanying course. He explained,

It would have cost me a year, going to school one semester, one academic year -- One semester for the class, and then one full semester of student teaching. And I really couldn't afford to do that, because I had already taken off work for the final year of my college. So I was really looking for a way where I could get certified without the full year, without making any money...and at the time, not being in the classroom.

Justin had already committed time and money to preparing to teach, and sought quick entry and low costs, incentives a traditional teacher education program did not offer. At this stage of his career, he “couldn’t afford” to take more time to complete a traditional program.

Patricia, a mid-career entrant from a scientific field, was also attracted to the abbreviated program, which fit well with her family’s needs and financial constraints. She explained,

[T]he fact that I could get my initial certification in one summer and that would let me basically commit three months of my life, as opposed to three years [was appealing]. ...So it just, it seemed to fit with my family's needs and my family's schedule, and our financial situation to have me do it all at once.

According to interviews with the faculty and director, Patricia’s response is typical of other participants in the program. Her mid-career stage, her family obligations, and her professional experience and extensive knowledge of science contributed to the match between her interests and the program’s purpose.

Learning to teach in-the-field

Some participants indicated that they chose not to attend traditional teacher education programs because they believe that learning to teach is an instinctual, natural process, which is better developed on the job than in a lengthy (and possibly costly) program.

For example, Reese decided to enter the ARC program partly because the program supported his philosophy of learning to teach:

My whole idea of teaching is that either you can do or you can't, and nothing has really wavered from that...even going through the program and everything else. My feeling on teaching is that either you have the knack for it or you don't. And you can learn all the theory and the pedagogy and what you should do and what you shouldn't do, but I always thought that it's the kind of a thing that you either you can do it or you can't.

Getting Certified

One of the primary incentives for participating in the ARC program was to efficiently attain certification to teach in Connecticut's public schools. One participant, Brendan, succinctly described his motivation for completing the ARC program:

You are in ARC for two reasons. One is to become a good teacher, and there are a lot of very valuable things that I have learned, where, you know, I would have been flat on my you-know-what had I not been through that intensive crash course. You know, with all these rules that you see out there.... But the other reason why you are in ARC... is to get that piece of paper from the state. And sometimes, you know, ARC throws so much at you, more than you can possibly absorb in eight weeks, that sometimes I would say, am I doing this to get my ticket punched, or is it going to help me in the classroom?

Brendan believed that the program provided him with good information that would prevent him from being overwhelmed as a first year teacher. However, in the midst of the program as he was feeling overwhelmed by information, the twin incentives of learning to teach and gaining certification became blurred. It seems that attaining state certification became the primary incentive for him, while he acquired the "valuable things" in the whirlwind of the program in a catch-as-catch-can manner.

Summary: Participant Responses to Incentives

The faculty described similar participants' responses to the incentives and highlighted the importance of quick entry, particularly for mid-career candidates. The director of the program and some faculty members believed that one of the incentives of the program is its "reputation" for being a program of high quality. Brian, a new faculty member, commented: "I don't say this in a boastful way...but the reputation has always been very good. It's always had a very solid reputation."

Interestingly, none of the participants in the study said that the program's reputation for high quality was an incentive for choosing it. Rather, they had very few expectations about the content and support of the program before entering – their expectations of support seem to be much more clearly focused on the school site, where they would work after completing the alternate route program.

The participants experience incentives similarly: they want to get into a program fast, save time and money, and get out to schools.¹³ They do not have high expectations of support from the program – rather, they assume that their main support will come from the school sites where they teach after completing the program. This suggests that candidates approached the alternative certification program without much consideration of its quality, and instead, were attracted to the program because of its brevity. Given participants' expectations about the program, the ways in which the program is structured to control for quality are influenced by these expectations. Since participants were attracted by the incentives of quick entry and the streamlined requirements, ARC must consider how to keep these incentives and simultaneously ensure participants' quality.

¹³ These themes were echoed in interviews with faculty members about why they thought that participants chose the ARC program over other programs.

How does the ARC program maintain quality?

The ARC program invests in the expertise of the faculty, who are described by participants and the director as the “backbone” of the program. The program administrators assume that the expert faculty members provide the best assurance of a quality program, therefore, the faculty are given a great deal of responsibility in managing various aspects of the program, including recruitment of participants, attention to selecting the people who best fit the program, training and evaluation. In order to understand Connecticut’s expert approach to quality control, I will describe the faculty, their selection and hiring. Then I will discuss their role in assuring quality through the recruitment and selection, training, and evaluation of participants.

ARC Faculty: Program Experts and Guardians of Quality

Given that Connecticut relies on the expert faculty to ensure quality, it is important to know who these faculty members are, and how are they chosen. The ARC faculty are hired to teach the methods courses. According to the director, their job is to “teach the pedagogy related to the subject matter” in the specific certification areas. All teach in Connecticut’s public schools, and represent a variety of subject-matter areas and a range of experience.

The director frequently described the faculty members as “experts” or as “top-quality” instructors, and cited their quality as the reason the program produces “top-quality” ARC graduates. He explained, “I think [the ARC faculty] is the backbone of the program...The methods faculty and the methods component of the program truly [are], frankly, the best part of our program. If you have top quality people doing the training, you get top quality people coming out on the other end....” The director’s praise for the faculty is reflected in the program’s reliance on them to carry out the program components.

The program director selects the faculty. There are no regulations in the state legislation about the qualifications of the program faculty. He explained, “We look for—honestly, for master teachers, we’re looking for people who work well with adult learners,

who not only know their craft, but also the art of teaching, and obviously have strong subject matter knowledge.”

Faculty applicants submit a cover letter, resumé, references, and evidence of certification in the subject area. Notably, the selection process for faculty does not include any direct evidence of candidates’ teaching abilities. The director screens the applicant pool and establishes an advisory committee to interview and hire candidates.

If the faculty are the cornerstone of quality control in this program, then they must develop reputations as excellent teachers within the program. Program administrators and participants ascribed expertise to the faculty members because of their status as full-time, public school teachers in Connecticut. They were often described by the director and participants as distinct from those who are not working currently “in the trenches,” such as the program administrators and consultant program presenters and the participants themselves, who had not yet set foot in their own classrooms. Their expertise was directly connected to their knowledge of students; what is best for students, and what “works” in classrooms.

The director values the faculty’s knowledge of students and knowledge of the development of ARC participants as teachers, and according to him, this is what makes the “world of difference” for the ARC participants. The methods faculty also believe that their credibility is directly linked to their status as public school classroom teachers. Holly, a six-year veteran faculty member, explained:

I think there is huge value in that I’m not just standing up here telling these people what to do to be a good teacher. This is stuff I used yesterday, I’m going to use tomorrow [in my classroom].... I’m kind of in the ditches with them, and haven’t lost touch with the reality [of teaching]....I think that gives a lot of credibility to what we are saying, and a lot of sensitivity for their question.

While the program primarily depends upon the faculty members to assure quality, there is no process to evaluate them as they teach, or their teaching practice prior to being hired into the program. The director observed that the evaluation of faculty is a “weak area” with no formal system. He explained that ARC participants complete a student evaluation at the end of the methods program, but this is all “informal.” The director stated that if he noticed a “pattern” of poor teaching, he would “take action,” but asserted that “[O]verall, the quality of our methods people is good.” He observed that there “may be a couple of B minuses in there,” in terms of ability to deliver the program with “enthusiasm” and careful preparation, but he is presently working on a faculty evaluation system. The issue of lack of formal faculty evaluation was also raised by a State Department of Education evaluation report.

The faculty have three areas of responsibility: selection of candidates, training (content methods course instruction), and evaluation of participants. The extent of the ARC faculty responsibilities illustrates the program’s emphasis on the expert as the main lever of quality: they select, educate, and evaluate the ARC participants. While the director steps back and reports that he “lets the faculty go,” the participants have confidence that they are learning the “tricks of the trade” from their experienced mentors.¹⁴

ARC Participant Selection

The program administrators regard the selection process as a key factor in maintaining quality, and it is the faculty who choose participants. The program documents warn that “admission to the program is highly competitive.”¹⁵ Connecticut has specific preliminary requirements for applicants, including:

¹⁴ Several faculty members used this phrase, “tricks of the trade” to describe what they taught ARC participants.

¹⁵ Certification Fact Sheet 102 Alternate Route to Certification. Available: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/cert/facts01/fact102.htm>

- BA degree from an accredited institution, with a major in the intended teaching field
- “B” grade point average
- Passing score on the Praxis I examination
- Passing score on the Praxis II examination

Although these regulations limit the pool of applicants, and suggest a regulatory approach to quality control, many candidates qualify, and it is the faculty who have the primary role in the selection process.

The faculty are the final arbiters of selection, though if there is any unreconciled discrepancy between recommendations of the two faculty members, the program director will assist in making a decision.¹⁶ The selection process reveals the program administrators’ philosophy – that qualified, expert teachers are the best people to decide who is fit to join the teaching ranks and who might occupy the classrooms next door to them in Connecticut’s public schools. The program director explained this philosophy:

[The application] review process really ensures a quality person. We have people who are master teachers in a K-12 situation who are damn good at their jobs, and they know what teaching is about and when they go through [and review applications]...When it goes to the faculty...they are making sure these are the quality-type finalists we are looking for....

The director reports that the “strength of the program” lies in allowing the ARC faculty to select program participants, and in the interdependence between the faculty’s roles as selectors and as program providers: “The more closely related [the] selection process is to the people who deliver the service, the better off we [the program] are.” As Paul, a veteran faculty member, explained, “The point is, if we have really well-qualified people going in, that ... minimizes a problem later on.” Paul emphasizes the importance of selecting candidates who embody high quality who will contribute to the program success and will teach well “later on”.

Selection: What makes a “good” teacher?

Since the ARC faculty are the gatekeepers of selection, it is important to consider the qualities the faculty seek in the applicants. The faculty describe the selection process as “rubric-based,” a rubric that comes from the state, through the program director, and they explain that structures have been established to objectively select candidates. The categories of the rubric include: transcripts, personal statement, references, experience with children, and life experience.

Respondents suggested that faculty use the rubric scale differently, depending upon the individual selector. Brian explained that, in order to establish norms for ratings, they spend time discussing the rating scale: “What we’ve done is that those of us who have read [and] have looked at the rubric and have decided that based on our current understanding and our past experience, a ‘four’ would be this, a ‘three’ would be this, a ‘two’ would be this, that kind of thing, so that we’re all centered.” The faculty may all be “centered” in terms of the rating system, but the interviews indicate that they have different personal priorities for selection. Stuart focused on the mid-career entrants and the importance of their life experience. Although he emphasized that the program does not exclude younger applicants, the existence of the “professional experience” category may handicap them in the selection process. Stuart explained,

Because it’s an alternate route, we’re trying to look for people that have something else to offer that maybe a 22-year-old biology major is not going to have to offer...And so that’s part of the scoring is the whole concept of what did you do with your life?...I want to be crystal clear on that. It’s experience, but if you’re a physicist for 30 years, you’ve got some experience in physics. If you’re a physics 22-year-old graduate, how many points can you get in that?

¹⁶ In the course of the interviews, none of the respondents said that this had happened in the 2001 selection.

Holly is Stuart's teaching partner. She emphasized that as teachers of science, she and Stuart approach the process in a linear, scientific-like way by developing specific criteria they hope to find in the incoming ARC candidates:

Stuart and I being scientists, have very specific things. The first part is the life experience....If they have something that is scientific relative to what they've been teaching...something that will inspire and motivate young children, we rate them there. Again, that's very diverse and hard to standardize, because the experience of the people coming into ARC is tremendous. The other thing we rate them on is their grades from school, their transcripts and how well they did. Then I take the recommendations and rate the recommendations one to five....then we take the personal statement....I rate that one to five.

Holly's use of words such as "inspire and motivate children" and her concession that this process is difficult to standardize because of the individuals who choose this program, illustrate the variation in method of selection, and reinforce the faculty's autonomy in the selection process. The final area she evaluates is the candidate's previous teaching experience. Although this is not an explicit requirement for application to the program, Holly's quotation indicates how much she values an applicant who has some knowledge of the challenges of teaching, a person who may be more inclined to invest in the profession than a person who is naïve about the job.

The selection process in the ARC program is governed by the faculty, who use a rubric and a great deal of their own discretion to select candidates. While the main characteristics they seek in qualified candidates are arrayed in five different areas, the varied descriptions of the selection criteria illustrates the power that individual faculty exercise in making these selection decisions, choosing the "right" people for the ARC program.

Selection Challenges: Pressure from the Shortage

Interviews with the director and the faculty members reveal that they are struggling to maintain a rigorous selection process and high program standards, while also responding to the teacher shortage, particularly in high-need areas such as bilingual programs,

mathematics and science. Paul, a mathematics methods instructor, reflected upon the 2001 selection process, and explained that although the faculty would have liked to have restricted the number of participants in each methods course in order to better serve the students, the faculty and administrators in 2001 yielded to “pressure” to expand the courses and include more prospective teachers. For example, he said that “there is a teacher shortage in mathematics...[so] we’ve been under a little pressure to have larger [graduating] classes.”

The director also reflected on this change in selection of candidates. In response to a question about whether the shortage has influenced the program design, the director responded, “I think sometimes we probably have accepted people that we might not have accepted fifteen years ago...We take a little more risk in accepting some people.” The director revealed the difficulty of attracting candidates to fill shortage areas while ensuring that they are of high quality to enter classrooms:

It’s a tough balancing act to help deal with shortages, to help deal with the cities, and maintaining quality...I could bring in 750 people and train them in one year. I think the balance is getting top quality people and getting them the right [teaching positions] in the right cities. And filling the needs of the community. And maintaining high academic diversity [in the program].

The director’s description of the “balancing act” suggests the tenuous hold on quality in this program, and the program’s dependence on individual participants and faculty to ensure the quality. While the director maintains that he could graduate many more candidates, he worries that expanding the program could compromise the quality. Thus, the pressure from the shortage, the possibility of loosening standards for selection and increased acceptance rates,¹⁷ particularly in high-shortage areas, and the expansion of the program to new sites, may mean changes in the program that could compromise its quality.

¹⁷ Note that the data on acceptance rates comes from interview data. I did not review the program statistics on acceptance and rejection rates in each certification area during the history of the program.

Methods Courses: Educating ARC Participants for Quality

In addition to selection, the faculty is responsible for designing and teaching the methods courses, content area courses taught for several hours each day. The director explained the structure:

The state sets up the regulations and we make sure the methods [courses] match the [state certification] regulations. It really is as simple as that, and that's the only way that the program can operate, because we have to follow the same rules, regulations, laws...they are statutes, really, and we can't mess with them. So, if we mess with them and people don't get certified, then we're out of business. So, we follow the prescribed certification regulations.

Although the state regulations govern the program, the director explained that he approaches the regulations creatively, as sometimes he has to "stretch" the program components to meet the certification regulations. For example, the regulations require 36 hours of instruction in special education. Given the constraints of the short program, he can only devote "15-16 hours" to special education, and then he asks methods course instructors to include additional hours during the methods courses. Again, this illustrates the complexity of quality control, as the regulations are taken into account, but the faculty have autonomy and flexibility in meeting them.¹⁸

The methods courses are divided by certification area, and are grounded in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT), a document that "defines the knowledge, skills, and competencies that teachers need to attain in order to ensure that students learn and perform at high levels" (Sergi, 2001). The director reported that the instructors "link" the CCT to "every piece" of the methods course. Although these state regulations govern the course content, the regulations are broad enough to serve as guideposts for the course activities, rather than requirements for the specific day-to-day operations of the courses. The course syllabi that I reviewed all had different formats. They all included references to the

¹⁸ Sue Stuebner observed this in an earlier draft.

CCT in the daily course activities, although the specific elements of the CCT did not seem to follow a prescribed sequence. Individual faculty members seemed free to design and implement the courses in accordance with the broad regulations of including the CCT.

The certification regulations dictate that ARC participants must receive training in their certification area, but loosely define the content of that training. For example, an ARC methods instructor who is certified in secondary biology develops his/her course for candidates who seek secondary biology certification. According to faculty, inclusion of the CCT was a relatively recent development that began when the new program director arrived a few years ago. Faculty members have much autonomy in designing their courses. The director “stays out of it” because he “trusts” the faculty members, though he requires that the faculty members present a synopsis or a syllabus of their course that meets the CT Common Core of Teaching and the state curriculum frameworks.

The faculty members use their “professional judgment” to develop the courses, “because that’s what [they are] paid to do,” according to the director. Although the structure allows for time and programmatic commitment to these methods courses, the success of the courses – in the eyes of the director, the faculty, and the participants – depends upon the expertise of the faculty who teach them. In practice, the Common Core of Teaching (CCT) competencies seem to take a back seat to faculty members’ personal decisions about what is important for ARC participants to know. In other words, conveying the CCT is an implicit goal of the methods courses, while the more explicit goal is for participants to learn what ARC methods faculty members deem important for first year teachers to know. This suggests a subordination of the standards-based approach to a program (i.e. complying with the CCT instrument) to the individual expert’s knowledge of what ARC participants need to

know in order to teach well, because of the reliance on individual faculty members to develop the courses.

In contrast to a program that prescribes specific training or lessons, the faculty's autonomy may lead to uneven program quality. While the data indicate that most respondents were satisfied with, and in some cases, very pleased with, their ARC methods instructors, one respondent commented directly on the variation among faculty members. Reese, the only respondent in the study who was dissatisfied with the methods courses, said that they were "surprisingly the least useful" element of the program. He attributed this to the fact that two "new methods teachers" taught his course, a last-minute hiring decision because the more veteran methods instructor who was supposed to teach the course had a personal emergency. Reese wanted the methods instructors to "demonstrate" (and show him) "exactly what to do in class," from the writing of lesson plans to maintenance of grade books. He was frustrated that the two instructors did not clearly explain what "you should be doing." Reese's comments also reflect a misalignment between Reese's expectations of what he would learn in the methods course and the instructor's judgment of what was important to teach – that is, what the instructor believed was important to promote quality.¹⁹ Near the end of the program when the veteran methods course instructor returned to teach, Reese explained:

I learned more from that guy in the two or three days he was there, than I did the whole time that the other ones were [there]. Not that they were bad people. It's just that he was more in tune with what I wanted.

Reese's experience highlights the potential for variation among ARC faculty, and reinforces the idiosyncratic nature of the individual methods courses. However, Reese's evaluation of his experience is still an evaluation of individual performance (one instructor was more "in

tune” with him than another) as compared to an evaluation of the program as a whole.

Perhaps if the program relied on structure to ensure quality, and used a more standardized curriculum, Reese – and other participants – would have experienced more similarity across methods instructors.

Student Teaching: Evaluating the Participants

ARC participants must complete three weeks of student teaching with a “cooperating teacher” at a Connecticut public summer school program. The ARC methods faculty conduct two evaluations of the student teaching, which the participants must pass in order to graduate from the program.²⁰ The student teaching component of the program is included as a requirement of certification, and is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the program, as the only link between the program and the student teaching is the ARC faculty.

The director explained that there is a great deal of variation in the quality of the student teaching experience: “It depends on the cooperating teacher. It depends on the location. It depends on the subject.” The program administrators relied heavily on districts to allow ARC participants to work in summer school classrooms. The program is “at the mercy of the district” in placing the ARC participants in student teaching positions (director interview). Some faculty and the director expressed concern about the lack of training and minimal reward (\$150 honorarium) for cooperating teachers, which offered little incentive to commit much time or effort to the ARC program or to the participants.

Program administrators, faculty, and participants alike describe student teaching as the program component that most needs improvement. They acknowledged that student teaching was unrealistic preparation for the demands and challenges participants would face during the academic school year.

¹⁹ Sarah Birkeland made this point, May 29, 2002.

²⁰ Data from ARC program materials, faculty and director interviews.

The participants echoed the judgments of the faculty and administrators; the experience is loosely connected to their permanent teaching positions, and quality is uneven. Justin, an ARC participant seeking certification in secondary physics, explained that he was teaching high school physical science in the summer school program every other day because there “weren’t enough [teaching] slots...so it was very disconnected for the kids and for me.” Further, Justin’s student teaching experience did not align with his eventual teaching position in secondary “academic and general” chemistry. Justin concluded that in his current teaching site, he now relies on his own school experience in a high school “very much like this one,” more than what he learned while student teaching.

In contrast, Patricia found herself in a productive student teaching experience, but observed that her ARC colleagues were not all as fortunate as she:

I think it [student teaching] really depended on the school that you were assigned to and the particular personality of your mentor teacher. You know, it was a subjective thing. There were some teachers who were like, “Fine, I have a student teacher. I am backing off. I’m cruising for the next three weeks”...And there were those who kind of still wanted to run the show, and everything in between.

Program administrators hope that participants have a student experience that will be useful, and then, according to the director, “depend upon the methods people [faculty members] to pick up the slack” during the coursework.

The student teaching component of the program represents an approach to quality that complies with certification standards. The program implements this component in order for the participants to become certified, but it is loosely connected to the content of the rest of the program. The program depends upon the faculty to provide the bridge between the student teaching experience and the other program components. The quality of student teaching varies, depending upon individual cooperating teachers. Comparing the roles of the cooperating teachers and the ARC faculty reveals two different approaches to

quality: the cooperating teachers are assumed to be fairly interchangeable and, therefore, illustrate the use of the program structure to ensure quality, while the ARC faculty, who are charged with the responsibility of synthesizing student teaching and methods courses, provide evidence of the expert approach to quality control.

Assessment

The ARC faculty are responsible for completing two evaluations of the participants' student teaching experiences in order for participants to become certified. The assessment determines whether ARC participants have attained the competency standards set forth in the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching, and whether they can graduate from the program. They are also evaluated – along with all other new teachers in Connecticut – at the conclusion of their second year of teaching, by a statewide assessment system, the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program.

Both approaches to quality – the ARC program and the BEST program – assume that quality is evident in outcomes. However, the ARC program depends upon the faculty to make that decision, illustrating again, the primary role of the faculty in assuring quality. Interviews with the director and faculty indicate that very few ARC participants do not pass the assessment. Participants believed that the assessments were not a process of elimination, and explained that their faculty methods instructors were eager for them to succeed.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings of the study demonstrate that participants respond to the incentives of the program fairly consistently. Their primary incentive for participating in the program is quick entry into teaching, and avoiding the opportunity costs of traditional teacher education programs. The participants in this study wanted to begin to learn to teach in the ARC program, though they anticipated that the program was just the beginning of their learning

process. The attractiveness of the quick route to certification, and participants' eagerness to enter classrooms imply that alternative certification programs will continue to struggle to offer these incentives without compromising quality.

As this case demonstrates, the ARC program has primarily responded to the challenge of maintaining quality by relying upon the expertise of the program faculty members. The other approaches to quality are present in the program, but it is usually the faculty who implement those other approaches, thus emphasizing their role as experts. Many aspects of this program are both uncertain and unregulated, such as the student teaching or the quality of the presenters in the core lectures, and the program relies upon the ARC methods instructors to ensure quality.

Connecticut's approach to ensuring quality by relying on the experts suggests lessons for the design and implementation of other alternative certification programs. As this study demonstrates, there are opportunities and constraints in adopting an approach that relies on experts as the source of quality control. There is the potential for excellent mentoring and training by drawing on individual faculty members. Expert faculty may be the best people to select a new cohort of teaching candidates who will carry on their legacy. Using faculty to maintain quality may encourage methods course instruction that combines knowledge of teaching methods with knowledge of students, from a source that is deeply connected to the everyday experience of teaching –teachers themselves.

However, there are also possible constraints associated with this approach to quality. Relying on faculty may lead to unevenness in program delivery and participant experience, depending upon the individual skills and talents of the expert. There is also the concern that depending upon a small cadre of faculty to recruit participants, then granting them autonomy in selection is too informal, and will result in a limited candidate pool that

replicates the demographic and personal attributes of the experts, and may hinder efforts to diversify the participant cohort. Placing the responsibility for quality in the hands of the experts also implies an understanding about who is the expert, and the skills the expert possesses. If the program is undecided about the type of expertise that is needed, then the participants may experience variation and confusion in the program components. Finally, if the program does not have the capacity to evaluate the faculty members, then program quality will almost surely be compromised.

There are implications for the design of a program that relies on the expert to maintain quality, many of which converge on the issue of capacity, that is, the program's ability to carry out this approach to achieving quality. For example, there is the question of whether the program has access to these experts. The approach that relies on experts must consider the recruitment, selection, and evaluation of faculty members. The program will need to develop recruitment strategies that yield master teachers, a selection process that allows program administrators to assess faculty potential, and an evaluation system that determines whether the experts are effectively delivering content to participants.

As policymakers increasingly approve alternative certification programs, and the debate continues about the value of this policy to address the shortage and diversify the teaching force, it becomes important to consider the variation in program designs and individual programs' approaches to quality. By considering this variation in the design of the incentives and the quality mechanisms, we can better understand the ways in which the incentives and the quality work in the program.

The scope of this study was limited to examining one alternative certification program's approach to incentives and quality. Further, the ARC program is a highly-centralized, state-run program implemented in one site. The strategy of relying upon the

expert seems to serve the program well, according to participants, faculty, and administrators. However, it is notable that the centralization of the program supports the informal faculty recruitment, selection, and program delivery. As Connecticut and other programs expand to multiple sites include more program providers, the expert approach may become more difficult as the program implementation becomes more decentralized. Further research across alternative program sites, various models of quality assurance, and different program structures, is necessary to explore the findings from this study, particularly the ways in which various alternative certification programs attempt to ensure quality and attract participants, and the challenges in providing alternatively-certified teachers with the skills they need to teach well in public school classrooms.

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