



Fall 2009 (9) 4, pg. 9

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Genuine Alternatives

As Paul Peterson and Daniel Nadler (“What Happens When States Have Genuine Alternative Certification?” *check the facts*, Winter 2009) correctly assert, there is considerable resistance to genuine alternative certification in a number of states. The motive for this resistance is simply to preserve the power and influence of a traditional system that is becoming increasingly irrelevant with each passing year.

The traditional route to teacher certification, a college degree that requires

30-plus credit hours of education-related coursework, has created a kind of cult within the teaching profession. Those who acquire their teaching credentials through alternate means tend to be viewed as second-class citizens in the schools where they work.

I have two sons, so I have had considerable interaction with teachers at several different schools over a fairly long period of time. Most teachers have gone through the traditional certification process at one of our states’ public universities. In my experience, it is not unusual for teachers to 1) not really know that much about the test scores they are attempting to explain, and 2) be civil toward me yet completely discount most of the questions I ask and the concerns I raise. I am seen as an “outsider” and therefore my views can be taken with a proverbial grain of salt.

I have also taught a graduate course on testing and assessment for several years, and teachers typically constitute the largest segment of the class. It is obvious that many teachers have been indoctrinated with an exclusive attitude that suggests “unless you have been in the trenches, you can’t possibly know what it’s like, and therefore what could I possibly learn from you?” They believe that the traditional route to teacher certification has provided them with insights into reality to which the rest of us are not privy. This mindset signifies a false sense of competence and confidence that contributes to the gradual decline of the effectiveness of our entire education system.

Far from being the cause of many of the problems associated with our schools, genuine alternative certification programs may prove to be our best hope for putting in our schools trained professionals who can truly make a difference.

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