This paper was developed by Andrea Babkie and Val Sharpe, DD Division members, and has been approved by the DDD Board.

DDD Position Paper on Alternative Routes to Certification

Currently, the nation is experiencing a critical shortage of special education teachers (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001). The traditional route for teacher preparation, pursued through university and college education programs, has been unsuccessful in supplying program graduates to meet the demand (Mainzer & Horvath, 2001; Whiting & Klotz, 2000). An attempt to address this teacher shortage has resulted in the development of autonomously designed alternative routes to certification (ARC) programs in both general and special education. As states and local educational agencies (LEAs) are finding the use of ARCs offers a viable and efficient alternative to recruit, train, and get teachers into the classrooms, the popularity and number of programs continues to grow.

As of 2003, there were over 200 special education ARC programs nationally (National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, 2003). Several factors have lead to the increasing development of ARCs. For example, as recently as 2001, thousands of special education positions remained unfilled nationally; while as many as 15 percent of positions were staffed by not fully certified teachers (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System, August 2001). Estimates are that, by 2008, the demand for special education teachers will increase by 59 percent (National Education Association Communications Fact Sheet, 2002). In addition, the shortage of teachers from underrepresented groups poses a significant problem. Early research indicates that ARCs recruit a significantly higher percentage of minority teachers in urban schools (Shen, 1998), making them even more attractive to schools in need of teachers from underrepresented populations.

Thus, ARC programs will continue to be of interest to both those seeking licensure and those doing the hiring,

There is no question that a need to re-evaluate traditional special education teacher preparation practices exists, particularly given the inability of such programs to meet the demand for teachers. However, while DDD supports the need for innovative means of producing teachers prepared to work with students with disabilities and holding licensure in Special Education, and recognizes that traditional programs are not meeting the needs of today's schools, we are concerned that ARC programs lack standardization in terms of candidate entrance, coursework, and performance outcome criteria. ARC programs offer an unregulated approach to program design. They also provide access to a teaching credential that circumvents traditional programs (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2001). The above, coupled with the non-standardized, fast track ARC approach to teacher preparation practices (Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001), including frequently lessening the number of training hours required by state certification regulations, leads to concerns regarding the nature and efficacy of such programs.

Decreasing the number of training hours permits participants to enter the classroom as provisionally certified teachers. It also often reduces content related coursework, thus lessening the potential knowledge based skills and instructional strategies needed to teach children with a variety of disabilities within differentiated settings. Non-standardized teacher preparation programs raise questions concerning the quality of preparation alternative program candidates receive. This is particularly true of those programs addressing special education preparation where the requirements for an emphasis on knowledge of pedagogy, instructional accommodations, behavioral support, and content across a variety of instructional settings are

crucial. Due to the relative newness of ARC programs, especially those in the field of Special Education, current literature lacks information on the quality and efficacy of these programs.

It is the position of DDD that ARC programs based on a general education, content-specific design are not appropriate models for preparation in special education. Furthermore, DDD holds that exit criteria for completers of ARC programs for the preparation of Special Educators be based on the standards developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) that addresses a common core of skills and knowledge all special educators should demonstrate. Additionally, for students seeking licensure in working with students with developmental disabilities, ARC program exit criteria needs to include the Division on Developmental Disabilities (DDD) standards addressing the knowledge and skills considered necessary for individuals seeking to teach students with developmental disabilities, including mental retardation/cognitive disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, and related developmental disabilities. Finally, DDD calls for a research agenda that focuses on the efficacy of ARC programs in Special Education.

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