

Teacher Education Research Agenda

Developing a teacher education research agenda took a year and a half. We first synthesized literature, identified gaps in existing research, and met with a Research Design Panel, which helped us to identify guiding questions. We used these guiding questions to develop specific research questions, and met with policy makers at a Policy Summit to identify questions of importance to the policy community. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe the process in more detail.

Getting Started: Kick Off Conference

At a Kick Off Conference in March, 2001, Research Teams identified ten topics for the teacher education syntheses. Subsequently, authors were solicited, and papers were written, reviewed, revised, and published, in full length and executive summary formats. Papers and executive summaries may be found on this web site by following the “Publications” and “Research Syntheses” links. Authors were asked to identify key gaps in current knowledge of supply and demand, professional preparation, and certification and licensure.

Research Team leaders then integrated information from the syntheses into a single report. Drs. Deborah Smith and Naomi Tyler from Vanderbilt synthesized the three supply and demand papers; Dr. Mary Brownell, the three professional preparation papers; and Dr. Michael Rosenberg, the four certification and licensure papers. These reports were presented to a Research Design Panel in April, 2002.

Getting Guidance: Research Design Panel

Membership of the Research Design Panel (RDP) was determined in collaboration with OSEP and included experts in teacher education research, special education research, and special education teacher education. Methodological expertise, including qualitative methods, survey methods, and quantitative methods, also was broadly represented on the RDP. The goal of the panel meeting was to identify research questions and design studies to address them. Following the presentations and group deliberation, the RDP presented this list of four questions, which we came to call Guiding Questions.

1. What characterizes efficient and effective practice in initial preparation as measured by beginning teacher quality and retention?
2. How do school and district context influence beginning teacher quality and retention?
3. How does state policy context affect the shortage of qualified special education teachers?
4. How does policy context affect the content and process of teacher education?

Getting Specific: Expanding Upon the Guiding Questions

The RDP had given us guiding questions for our research agenda and some sense of the strengths and weaknesses of the design options available to us. In the next phase of our planning, we sought to specify concrete, researchable questions derived from the four guiding questions and to seek feedback from our primary audience—policy makers—about the relevance and completeness of our agenda. To this end, the COPSSE research team met twice in May and June, 2002, and developed a list of research questions derived from our four guiding questions.

Getting Feedback: The Policy Summit

With the help of Joanne Cashman of NASDSE's Policy Makers' Partnership, we planned a day-long meeting in Washington at which representatives from the policy community provided feedback about our agenda. The Policy Summit was conducted in July, 2002, and 37 representatives from various policymaking organizations attended. At the meeting, policymakers stressed the importance of defining teacher quality in terms of student performance and of convincing a skeptical public of the warrant of teacher education. The policy community also expressed its concern about the NCLB requirement for fully qualified teachers. To address concerns of the policy and research communities, and using the feedback we received at this meeting, we proposed the following questions for our Phase II research.

1. What defines teacher quality in special education teachers?
2. How do skilled novices compare to skilled experienced teachers?
3. What are the key characteristics of initial preparation programs that contribute to the development of skill in novice special educators?
4. How do workplace variables interact with preparation variables to contribute to the quality of novice special education teachers?
5. What are the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act for special education teachers? Will they be held to the "fully qualified" standard? If so, what requirements must special education teachers at middle school and secondary levels fulfill?
6. What are the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act for special education policy and practice?
7. What preparation options have states made available to prospective special education teachers? What are the requirements for these various options?
8. How do state and district policies affect the supply, quality, and retention of alternatively certified teachers?
9. Both within and across states, what are the alternative route (AR) program completion and teacher retention rates?
10. What is the cost of preparing special educators through AR, and how does it compare to the cost of traditional routes?
11. Have AR programs reduced the teacher shortage? Diversified the special education public teaching force? Attracted persons with higher levels of education and broader experiences?