

Attitudes Concerning Extended Teacher Education Programs: A Rural/Urban Comparison

KAY S. BULL¹, Michael M. Warner, David Yellin,
Donald W. Robinson and Gay C. Neuberger

Stimulated by changes proposed by the Holmes and Carnegie reports, this study was conducted to assess the attitudes of rural and urban teacher educators and graduate students toward extended teacher education programs. Data were collected from faculty and graduate students affiliated with 44 teacher preparation institutions in the south-central region of the United States. Less than one-fourth of the entire sample expressed consistent support for extending the programs. Less than a third of the sample favored the expansion of the liberal arts component of teacher education programs. Within the framework of extended programs, over half of the sample favored increasing professional coursework and more than seventy percent favored increased field experiences. Less than 10% thought that their own teacher education had been inadequate, again indicating support for existing four-year programs.

Rural/urban comparisons showed that faculty and students in urban areas were generally more supportive of the types of changes recommended in the Holmes and Carnegie reports. Implications for rural education, rural teacher education, and possible outcomes in a time of projected teacher shortages are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 50 years many professions have undergone changes in their entry requirements. Medicine, law and architecture, for example, have adopted new teaching methods (e.g., the case study approach), added additional coursework/training, or shifted from undergraduate to graduate programs. Changes in each of these professions have impacted the availability of their members' services in rural areas. Only the education profession has resisted such changes. The present preparation of teachers looks much the same as it did five decades ago [3], at least in large universities, although the rural educational setting has grown from the small rural school (the one room school house) to the larger consolidated school. Both elementary and secondary school teachers are trained within an undergraduate program that includes a sampling of general education courses, some professional education coursework, a few specialization courses, and the required field-based experiences. All of this is accomplished within the four years of a traditional baccalaureate program.

Today, however, some educators believe that reforms in teacher education are imminent. The cause for this optimism can be traced to a number of nationally publicized reports, particularly *Tomorrow's Teachers*, issued by the Holmes Group [5] and *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* prepared by the Carnegie Forum on

Education and the Economy [2]. Both reports call for the elimination of the undergraduate degree in education as the basic prerequisite for entry into teaching. Prospective teachers would instead major in a non-education area at the undergraduate level. Concomitant with the abolition of the undergraduate education degree would be the extension of teacher education programs to 5 or 6 years leading to a graduate degree. This latter proposal, among many other recommendations outlined in the reform reports, has set off one of the most heated debates heard among teacher educators in recent times.

Since the inaugural meeting of the Holmes Group in January, 1987, the 97 participating institutions have recognized the need for more baseline data to answer their critics. Using a survey instrument to assess readiness for reform among Holmes Group institutional representatives, Hoyt [6] made one attempt to provide such data. However, he presented no specific data pertinent to differences between rural and urban institutions regarding attitudes toward extended programs.

An AACTE Task Force on Extended Programs had previously (1983) surveyed a sample of its 103 member institutions to determine how they felt about the concept of extended programs [7]. Among the findings were the following: (a) The general attitude of faculty members was mixed and the topic of extended programs had not yet generated much discussion. (b) Practitioners from

¹Associate Professor, College of Education, 309 North Murray Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma 74078.

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the field were either generally uninformed or uninterested. (c) When asked to speculate about the future of extended programs, the problems most often identified were allocation of resources, programmatic difficulties, communication within institutions, costs, and skepticism of parents and students about taking on additional study and expense. (d) Most of the institutions surveyed did not think the idea of extended programs was feasible at that time, although public, non-land grant institutions did show the most support. (e) Finally it was generally believed that AACTE should report on those extended programs that did exist but the organization should not take a stand advocating them [1]. These data indicate that land grant institutions, many of which are located in rural areas, did not support the concept of extended programs. No specific data were cited however that represented a deliberate effort to examine any possible rural and urban attitudinal differences.

Cyphert and Ryan [3] surveyed undergraduates in teacher education (N=60), experienced teachers (N=60), and heads of teacher education units (N=37) in Ohio. Among undergraduates it was found that they favored extended programs only if such programs led to a master's degree or had a paid entry year as the fifth year. The results from the experienced teachers were much the same. Experienced teachers, when given an option, preferred four-year to five-year programs which did not have master's credit or a paid entry year. Faculty generally believed that four-year programs were more viable than five-year programs. If five-year programs were offered, faculty agreed that this would provide more time for field experience, as well as professional and specialization courses. Only private college faculty thought that extending the length of the program would allow for an increase in liberal arts courses. Interestingly, both teachers and teacher trainees felt that their educations did not fully extend them intellectually; that is, the coursework was easy. Again, no data were generated in the Cyphert and Ryan study examining rural and urban differences.

Notwithstanding the apparent lack of enthusiasm for teacher education reform revealed by the above studies, the sameness between present and past teacher education programs has not been for lack of effort at reform. On the contrary, reform has been a constant player on the educational stage, receiving an especially great amount of attention recently. For example, teacher education programs that extend beyond the four year undergraduate program and require prospective teachers to major in an area other than education for their bachelor's degree are already in place in a few institutions of higher education. The University of New Hampshire has had a five year teacher education program in effect since 1974. Similar extended programs also exist at the Universities of Virginia, South Carolina, and Kansas, at Memphis State University and at Austin College (Texas). Several of these programs continue to provide teachers for rural schools.

As additional extended teacher education programs are established as alternatives to traditional four-year undergraduate programs, there is growing recognition of the need for baseline data on the advantages and

disadvantages of extended programs, their implications for colleges of arts and sciences, and their economic feasibility (which may vary depending on the locale and the economic base of the participants). In addition to this program data, there is also recognition in the current round of reforms of the need to collect attitudinal data from the targeted constituencies in an effort to avoid the shortcomings of previous reform efforts where teachers were seldom consulted about ways in which they thought change should be accomplished, or, for that matter, whether change was really necessary. Previous reform movements that failed to give teachers any ownership in the process also failed to make any substantive impact on teacher preparation programs comparable to the improvements made by other professions.

As was mentioned in the above discussion of previous research on attitudes toward extended teacher education programs, there remains a significant portion of the American teaching force yet to be heard from on this matter—rural educators. Yet there is some reason to believe that their attitudes might differ from those of their urban counterparts. It has been hypothesized that teachers in rural settings are either less stressed by the role of teaching (because rural schools are thought to be more homogeneous and to have more parental support than urban schools) or are more conservative and insular, out of the mainstream, etc. In either case resulting attitudes might be the same—rural teachers might perceive less potential for benefit to accrue from a change like extended teacher education programs.

In this paper we present data to highlight the differences between respondents in teacher education institutions located in or near metropolitan areas on the one hand, and respondents in teacher education institutions who teach in rural or near rural schools on the other hand. The present study provides comparative baseline data for rural and urban faculty and public school teachers in graduate school regarding their views of extended programs. These data are offered as a means to better help prepare all educators for the changes in education that the future holds.

METHOD

Subjects

Data were collected from faculty and graduate students (public school teachers) at 44 teacher education institutions in the south-central region of the United States. The institutions surveyed included 19 Holmes Group members; and 6 historically black colleges, 5 Ph.D. granting institutions, and 14 master's granting institutions, none of which were members of the Holmes Group. For purposes of this study, teacher education institutions were categorized as being either rural or urban based on their proximity to a metropolitan statistical area (MSA). All those in MSA's were categorized as urban and the remainder as rural. MSA's were determined using 1980 census data and university locations by zip code. Using

these criteria, twenty-two of the participating institutions were classified as within an MSA and twenty-two were classified as outside of an MSA. Both the faculty sample and the graduate student sample were divided on the basis of the MSA, non-MSA distinction.

A total of 1789 faculty questionnaires and 2170 graduate student questionnaires were sent out. Of those sent, 779 faculty and 696 graduate student questionnaires were returned in postage-paid envelopes. Only those faculty who indicated they were currently teaching courses taken by public school personnel were included in the present analysis (N=618). Only those graduate students who indicated that they had been educated as public school teachers were included in the present analysis (N=566).

Faculty demographics. The mean age reported by the faculty was 48.1 years (standard deviation = 8.8). The mean number of years in teacher education was 14.4 (standard deviation = 8.1). Ninety-eight percent of the faculty indicated that they had been educated as public school teachers. Sixty-one percent indicated that their bachelor's degree was taken in teacher education, 32% in arts and sciences, and 7% other. Seventy-nine percent agreed or strongly agreed that they were knowledgeable about issues related to extended teacher education programs. Sixty-four percent of the faculty were males and 36% females. Ninety percent indicated that their ethnic origin was Caucasian.

Graduate student demographics. The reported mean age of the students was 35.5 years (standard deviation = 8.2). The bulk of the graduate students attending non-MSA institutions reported that they taught either in rural areas or in small towns (74%). The majority of students attending MSA institutions indicated that they were teaching in urban or suburban schools (71%). Sixty-nine percent of the graduate students indicated that they had obtained a bachelor's degree in teacher education, 26% in arts and sciences, and 5% indicated that their bachelor's degree was in some other program. Forty-nine percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were knowledgeable about issues related to extended teacher education programs, with the remainder either undecided or in disagreement. Twenty-six percent were males and 74% were females. Eighty-six percent indicated that their ethnic origin was Caucasian, 10% black, and 4% other.

Instrument

In this study, both faculty and graduate students responded to the same set of 39 items concerning extended teacher education programs. Except for the demographic questions, all items were presented in a five-point Likert-type format (1=Strongly Agree; 2=Agree; 3=Undecided; 4=Disagree; 5=Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire had been previously pilot tested and factor analyzed. A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using data from this study and 6 factors were found. These factors were labeled: F1, Desire for Extended Programs; F2, Need for More Liberal Arts; F3, Need for More Field Experience; F4, Inadequacy of Respondent's Own Teacher

Education; F5, Need for Professional Education Courses; and F6, Inadequacy of Standards in Teacher Education Programs. The internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha, based on the graduate student sample) for the factors were F1 (r=.87), F2 (r=.73), F3, (r=.75), F4, (r=.66), F5, (r=.72), and F6, (r=.77). In Table 1, the two highest loading items on each factor are provided.

Data Analysis

The data for the faculty and graduate students were analyzed together. For each group, six factor-derived

TABLE 1
Factors and Their Highest Loading Items

Factors	Items
1 Desire for Extended Programs	-Extended teacher education programs (five or more year programs for a first teaching degree) are desirable. -Extended programs are necessary because there is too much content to be taught in a four-year program.
2 Need for More Liberal Arts	-If I were to change the teacher education program which I was trained in, I would increase the number of liberal arts courses. -Extended programs should increase general education (liberal arts) coursework.
3 Need for More Field Experience	-Extended programs should increase the length of teaching. -Extended programs should increase field experience (more time in the classroom) before student teaching).
4 Inadequacy of Respondents' Own Teacher Education	-The teacher education program I graduated from did <i>not</i> adequately prepare me to teach. -When I received my first teaching assignment I knew a sufficient amount of <i>subject matter content</i> to teach without undue stress. (scoring reversed)
5 Need for Professional Education Courses	-Extended programs should increase professional education coursework. -If I were to change the teacher education program I was trained in I would increase the number of professional courses.
6 Inadequacy of Standards in Teacher Education Programs	-Admission standards for teacher education programs are generally too easy. -Grading standards (the amount of work or skill needed to get a good grade) are too easy in teacher education courses.

scores were generated and a combined multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was computed. The independent variables were location (urban [MSA] or rural [non-MSA]) and group (faculty or graduate student). The six dependent variables were the six factor-derived scores. All analyses were completed using SPSS-X (1983), and the default options therein.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations associated with each of the comparisons to be discussed are presented in Table 2. The results of the MANOVA were as follows. First, the multivariate test associated with the main effect for institution location (urban vs. rural) was significant ($p < .001$), as was the main effect for groups (faculty vs. student) ($p < .001$). The multivariate test of the interaction effect was not significant. Since the above multivariate tests were significant, it was appropriate to consider the univariate tests associated with each of the six factors.

Rural/Urban Differences

Univariate Fs (for rural/urban differences) associated with five of the six dependent variables were significant: F1, F2, F3, F5 and F6. For four of these variables, the p value associated with the univariate F test was less than .001. For F5, the associated p value was less than .01. As shown in Table 2, the means for respondents from the urban (MSA) institutions were lower on all five variables than the means for respondents from rural (non-MSA) institutions.

In order to provide a more descriptive picture of group differences, data were recompiled in the following manner. If a respondent's score on a given factor was between 1 and 2.5, the score was re-coded as A (consistent agreeing with items making up the factor). If the respondent's score ranged between 2.51 and 3.5, the

score was re-coded as U (undecided or inconsistent). If the score was greater than 3.5, it was re-coded as D (consistent disagreement).

The first significant finding of our study was that the urban group indicated greater overall support for extended teacher education programs on the F1 variable, Desire for Extended Programs. For the MSA group, 29.9% of the respondents were coded A, whereas only 18.8% of the non-MSA group were so coded. Urban subjects were more inclined to favor more liberal arts coursework in extended teacher education programs (F2: MSA = 34.0% coded A; non-MSA = 25.7% coded A), as well as more field experiences in such programs (F3: MSA = 77.7% coded A; non-MSA = 68.4% coded A). Also the urban group agreed that more professional education was desirable (F5: MSA = 58.2% coded A; non-MSA = 54.7% coded A). Finally, the urban group was more inclined to agree that admission and grading standards in teacher education programs are currently too easy (F6: MSA = 46.4% coded A; non-MSA = 37.9% coded A).

Student/Faculty Differences

Three of the univariate Fs associated with student/faculty differences were significant: F3, F4, and F5. For each of these three tests, p was less than .001. As shown in Table 2, for these dependent variables the means for the student groups were lower than the means for the faculty. Compared to faculty, students indicated greater support for more field experience in extended programs (F3: Students = 80.9% coded A; Faculty = 65.7% coded A). The students also rated their own teacher education programs as more inadequate than did the faculty (F4: Students = 51.9% coded D; Faculty = 71% coded D). Finally, the students indicated more support for additional professional education courses in extended teacher education programs (F5: Students = 65.2% coded A; Faculty = 48.4% coded A).

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Faculty and Graduate Students in Rural and Urban Teacher Education Programs

Factor	Group	Faculty			Students		
		M	SD	n	M	SD	n
1	Not MSA	3.27	.83	288	3.33	.72	314
	MSA	2.99	.82	330	3.04	.73	252
2	Not MSA	3.06	.85	288	3.15	.80	314
	MSA	2.88	.88	330	2.89	.79	252
3	Not MSA	2.43	.72	288	2.16	.71	314
	MSA	2.25	.67	330	1.93	.64	252
4	Not MSA	3.80	.78	288	3.52	.77	314
	MSA	3.78	.74	330	3.48	.72	252
5	Not MSA	2.91	1.15	288	2.60	1.01	314
	MSA	2.82	1.11	330	2.34	.98	252
6	Not MSA	3.01	1.17	288	3.19	1.10	314
	MSA	2.79	1.13	330	2.87	1.10	252

Results for All Groups Combined

Combining the data from the entire sample, an initial picture emerges of the perceptions of the participants toward the idea of extended programs and the other factors from the questionnaire. On Factor 1, need for extended programs, there is only weak support. Using the re-coding scheme described above, 24.2% of the sample was coded A, 41% coded U, and 34.8% coded D. These proportions show that less than 25% of the entire sample were in consistent support of the concept of extended programs for teacher education. These data, combined with similar findings for Factor 2 that indicate little support for more liberal arts coursework in teacher education programs (A = 29.8%, U = 45.7% and D = 24.5%), have interesting implications for the degree of support that might be expected for these Holmes/Carnegie recommendations.

The need for additional field experience in extended programs (F3) was much more positively supported by both faculty and graduate students (A = 73.0%, U = 23.2%, D = 3.8%). In fact, this factor (field experience) has the strongest support of all six factors. For Factor 4, inadequacy of the respondent's own teacher education, there was little support. The proportions here were A = 8.4%, U = 29.6%, and D = 61.9%. This indicates that only 8% of the entire sample believed that their own education was significantly lacking. It would appear that responses to this factor indicate support for the status quo in terms of the need for extending the length of teacher education programs. For Factor 5, need for more professional education courses in extended programs, we found moderate support (A = 56.4%, U = 21.9% and D = 21.7%). Finally for Factor 6, inadequacy of standards in teacher education programs, we found that many respondents believed that the standards for grading and admission are too low (A = 42.1%, U = 27.1%, and D = 30.8%).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Most of the university faculty and the graduate students in this study judged themselves familiar with the Holmes/Carnegie rhetoric. Therefore we made the assumption that most were responding to the questions asked in this study in a knowledgeable manner. We also interpreted the results as being regionally representative.

From the data, we can conclude that less than a majority of regional faculty and graduate students are in favor of the development of extended teacher education programs at this time. Possibly a more acceptable change, based on our findings, would be to increase admissions criteria and raise the grading standards, although the great majority of subjects in our study believe that their own education was at least adequate. If extended programs are to be implemented, our findings suggest the following priorities for program change: first, increase field experience (the most desired); then, increase professional coursework (the second most desired); and lastly, increase liberal arts coursework (the least desired).

Examination of the specific differences between the rural (non-MSA) and urban (MSA) groups reveals the following outcomes. The urban group expressed greater support for extended teacher education programs (F1), for more liberal arts in extended programs (F2), and for more field experience in such programs (F3). The urban group also supported, to a greater extent than the rural group, more professional education in extended programs (F5) and the idea that admissions and grading standards in current teacher education programs (F6) were too low.

When considering the types of responses that would be most appropriate, given that an extended program was implemented, the graduate students in our sample (when compared to the faculty) were generally more supportive of expanding field experiences. They also considered their own teacher education programs to be less adequate than did the faculty.

When differences which are specific to rural institutions or rural teachers are examined, the following pattern emerges. Both faculty and graduate students in rural institutions are less in favor of proposed changes than are their counterparts in urban institutions. Two of the possible explanations for this finding are: (a) People who live in rural areas (or who work at rural universities) are more isolated, less diverse, more inbred, and less well-educated, and therefore are more conservative than their urban (or urbane) counterparts. (b) Alternatively, those who are in rural institutions or teaching placements are more skeptical of calls for radical restructuring of teacher education that do not seem to be focused on benefits for rural children, but more likely would benefit large universities or teachers in urban areas.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these data as they relate to rural teachers and faculty in rural institutions: (a) There is general support for the status quo among those in rural schools and institutions of higher education. (b) If various groups are advocating the implementation of extended programs, they need to do more public relations work in both rural and urban areas, but especially in rural areas to create a climate of acceptance for change. The large proportion of "undecided" respondents on Factor 1 (41%), suggests that such public relations work may pay off. (c) If changes are made, then according to the respondents, these changes should not be in the area of increased liberal arts, but rather in increased field experiences for students.

Two final thoughts on rural education as it relates to change are in order. Most educators in rural areas are supportive of changes in teacher education, but only if they are perceived as directly involving better services to children, as indicated by the desire for more field experience. Furthermore, since rural institutions of higher education often attract students with limited financial resources, what will be the impact on these institutions and their students if teacher education programs are increased to five or more years? Might the specter of teacher shortages in rural communities offset the potential benefits of the Holmes/Carnegie reforms? Only time will tell.

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