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**Education Week, Bethesda, MD**

**Studies Say Students Learn More From Licensed Teachers**

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A pair of studies out this month represent the latest volley in an increasingly sharp debate over whether certified teachers are more effective.

The new research, published Sept. 6 in the online journal *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, makes the case that students learn more when their teachers are licensed—a requirement that in most states means they have had formal training in both how and what to teach.

Though that notion might seem like common sense to many educators, it came into question last fall when the Abell Foundation issued a report suggesting that there was "no credible evidence" that the lack of a teaching license ought to keep otherwise qualified teaching candidates out of the classroom. (["Research: Focusing In on Teachers,"](#) April 3, 2002.) U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige cited the Baltimore-based foundation's report again earlier this year, when he called on states to streamline their teacher-certification systems by cutting "burdensome" education coursework and raising the standards that would- be teachers have to meet in other areas, such as subject-matter knowledge and verbal ability.

In their papers, however, researchers from Arizona State University and Stanford University suggest such policy changes are wrongheaded and could harm students in poor, inner-city schools.

"Poor kids get a double whammy in this sense," said David C. Berliner, an education professor at ASU in Phoenix who co-wrote one of the studies. "They get all the new teachers, and we have lots of evidence that that makes a difference and, on top of that, they're getting uncertified teachers. And we're holding them to the same standards as kids in wealthier communities who have had experienced, certified teachers."

## **New Fuel for Debate**

Written with former doctoral student Ildiko Laczko-Kerr, Mr. Berliner's study appears in the electronic journal alongside a scathing critique of the Abell Foundation study by Linda Darling-Hammond, an education professor at Stanford and a former executive director of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.

Both studies make an important contribution to the debate, said Andrew J. Wayne, an education researcher at SRI International, a think tank based in Menlo Park, Calif. He has been tracking the research on teacher education for a soon-to-be-published review on the subject.

Still, he added, "There's no way this ends the debate."

For their study, Mr. Berliner and Ms. Laczko-Kerr focused on 293 teachers in grades 3-8 from five Arizona school districts that enroll high percentages of poor students from urban neighborhoods. Half the teachers were fully certified and the rest were what the researchers called "undercertified"—either because they were teaching on emergency or provisional licenses, or because they had come into the schools through Teach For America, a popular national program that recruits new graduates of prestigious universities to teach in hard-to-staff urban and rural schools.

The researchers matched the unlicensed teachers, for the most part, with certified teachers at the same grade level, in the same district, and with similar years of teaching experience. Then they compared the standardized test scores of their students.

Students with certified teachers performed about 20 percent better on the tests than students with noncertified teachers, they found. Converted to a grade-level scale, the researchers noted, the achievement differences amounted to about two months' worth of learning.

And the findings were just as true, the researchers found, for the students of Teach For America recruits as they were for the students of the entire group of unlicensed teachers.

"Teach For America may be a meaningful way for young college graduates to make some money and take a few years out of the ordinary," the study concludes. "But they are hurting our young, vulnerable, inner-city students."

## **Caliber of Students**

That conclusion was dismissed, however, by Wendy S. Kopp, the founder and president of the New York-based organization. Ms. Kopp noted that other research has shown that Teach For America students often get the worst-performing students in their schools. The Arizona researchers, she said, did not account in their study for those and other potential differences that groups of students started out with.

For their part, Ms. Laczko-Kerr and Mr. Berliner said they sought to overcome that potential weakness by doing other kinds of statistical checks to make sure the groups were similar.

"While it isn't the best possible case in terms of matching across districts, it certainly doesn't lead us to believe we are making faulty conclusions based on our data," said Ms. Laczko-Kerr, who is now a research analyst for the Arizona Department of Education.

Numbering 50-plus pages, Ms. Darling-Hammond's companion piece in the same issue of the journal attempts to exhaustively refute the Abell Foundation study.

Kate Walsh, the former foundation policy analyst who wrote the report, appears to use a "double standard" by excluding studies that conflict with her findings because they are not, for example, peer-reviewed, or because they are too small, Ms. Darling-Hammond notes.

Yet, Ms. Walsh cites the same studies later on in the report when their findings support her ideas, she adds.

She also accuses Ms. Walsh of confusing alternative-certification programs, which often require postgraduate coursework in education, with having less than a full license, such as an emergency permit.

Further, she charges Ms. Walsh with ignoring a large body of other work, published and non-published, that suggests that certified teachers are more effective in the classroom than teachers without licenses.

"We're not going to get anywhere by people ignoring findings from studies that exist because they don't like them or presenting findings falsely from studies that do exist," Ms. Darling-Hammond said.

In a rejoinder published on the foundation's Web site, Ms. Walsh acknowledges that her study may give the appearance of a double standard. In subsequent versions of the original report, she notes, she omitted the reports that were mistakenly cited to buttress her own arguments.

Still, she said last week, the corrections do not change her bottom-line conclusion.

"Our main point remains that the evidence is not there that justifies barring teachers from a classroom because of certification," she said.