Certification of Postsecondary Career and Technical Instructors: Issues for Debate

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Recently, the long-standing, though relatively low key, debate surrounding certification requirements for career and technical instructors at the postsecondary level has been revived as a critical issue. These discussions have lead to extensive examination of: (1) current credential requirements for instructors; (2) recent changes to state and federal policies; (3) synthesis of available literature; and an understanding of current and future trends (Bartlett, 2002; Olson & Spidell, 2008). Despite the widespread assessment and renewed debate of this topic, a consensus has yet to be reached amongst the decision makers. The following document is intended to add fuel to these much needed discussions. It is important to note that the authors are in no way intending to sway the opinions of any potential reader. Rather, we hope to provide a solid starting point from which further conversation can occur.

It is also essential to this discussion that this document does not provide any specific recommendations on a design that requires certification licenses for career and technical education instructors at postsecondary institutions. For years a number of individuals have advocated for this. Several individuals within the field of career and

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technical education (CTE) believe a certification process similar to the existing regulations for secondary vocational teachers should be implemented, since Tech Prep, School to Work, and Perkins IV have all served to expand the linkage between secondary and postsecondary technical programs. There are also those who disagree with any new initiative for potential certification requirements. They believe implementation of such a policy would be counterproductive to postsecondary CTE.

When attempting to initiate a discussion regarding these different perspectives one must ask the following three questions. (1) What's in the best interest of the students who enroll in career and technical education courses at postsecondary institutions? (2) What's in the best interest of career and technical education instructors at postsecondary institutions? (3) What's in the best interest of the field of career and technical education at postsecondary institutions? Some may argue these questions are the same. In an idealistic world this would be true. However, when dealing with the complexities of education, cohesiveness is virtually impossible.

As previously stated, providing recommendations that choose a side is not beneficial to this debate. Previous meticulous investigation of the issues has provided us with the philosophical awareness that both sides have a legitimate case. With this understanding in mind, the following is organized to assist stakeholders of career and technical education in developing a clearer understanding of the issues that make it difficult to reach consensus on the implementation of required certification for all CTE instructors at the postsecondary level.

Issues related to not adding certification requirements

Enrollment at postsecondary institutions has increased over the past two decades. The majority of the students enrolled at a postsecondary institutions attend one that offers a number of vocational education courses (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Previous research has offered an explanation for this phenomenon. According to Gray and Herr (1998), of the 147 million estimated jobs for the year 2005, only 32 million of those jobs would require a college

degree. These statistics have resulted in a additional accountability of faculty and staff at these institutions to provide their students with the training needed to succeed in their chosen vocation (Gray & Herr, 1998; Hyde, 2007). Scholars of vocational education view this increase as reason for excitement due to the employability aspect (Gray, 1996).

Excitement within the field has caused some concerns related to the availability of CTE teachers. The field of vocational education has experienced a shortage of CTE teachers over the past few years (Walter & Pellock, 2004). This is troubling considering the demand for CTE continues to grow (Hyde, 2007). According to Hyde (2007), there is an ongoing debate as to how great of a demand for career and technical education teachers exist. Hyde (2007) explains this lack of consistency:

One article quoted that an additional 2.5 million additional teachers would be needed throughout remainder of the present decade (Abramson, 2001). Others cited figures that appear to be just as grossly exaggerated. In 2002, the National Education Association (NEA) stated there would be a need for an additional 2 million teachers by 2010. An explanation on how they arrived at this figure could not be found, but their estimate does contradict the 571,000 cited by the U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) in 2002. The U. S. Department of Education's (DOE) 1999 estimate placed the need to be around 500,000 additional teachers through the year 2011. However, in 2001 the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) projected the need to be between 310,000 to 380,000. (p. 26)

Despite the inability to establish an agreed upon number, a shortage does exist. If interventions are not made to correct the shortage of CTE teachers by faculty, staff, and the various legislative educational subcommittee of each state, this will hinder our ability to effectively address this nation's further transition towards a global economy (Hyde, 2002).

The field of career and technical education is also experiencing concern regarding graduate research. Since the 1970s the number of doctorates granted in technical education has decreased steadily (Baltzer, Lazaros, & Flowers, 2007). The lack of emerging scholars in the field leaves a serious research void. Researchers believe this

void has the potential to cause a number of lingering effects (Volk, 1997). According to Baltzer et al. (2007), the growth of the field of vocational education has reached a critical point and steps must be taken to reenergize it. This cannot be done if the number of scholars within the field continues to decrease. Wicklein (1993) believes there is a "need to further identify the working theories and concepts of technology education…in order for the field to move forward as a legitimate academic discipline" (p. 70).

The decreases in doctoral education and research are believed to also have a direct link to poor performances of some technical programs at both the secondary and postsecondary level. The declining number of doctoral degrees in technical education has occurred at the same time as the closure of a number of technical programs throughout the nation (Rogers, 2002). Further, concerns exist due to the expected retirement of a number of current CTE faculty at all levels. According Baltzer et al. (2007), the average age of CTE faculty is 50 years old. Many of these teachers are expected to elect retirement by the end of this decade. Thus further creating the potential for a shortage of qualified teachers of bachelor's level career and technical education programs. Replacing this population will not be easy, as attracting new CTE faculty has always been problematic. The initial salary for CTE faculty has discouraged qualified individuals from applying to be faculty members (Goldberg & Proctor, 2000). Many believe the possibility of a postsecondary certification requirement will further discourage individuals from applying. Discouraging individuals from applying at such a critical period is possibly counterproductive.

Establishing a certification process is potentially difficult considering the inability of the field to develop an agreed upon structure. Hyde (2007) cities Lynch's (1996) idea "there is no agreed upon conceptual framework or knowledge base related to education for the workplace and workforce development that professionals or professional associations have codified as important in the preparation of teachers" (p. 26). Considering these afore-mentioned citations the question must be asked. If certification requirements are developed will they be a benefit or detriment to the field considering its current state?

Issues related to adding certification requirements

As previously mentioned there is a growing concern regarding the current and future need for career and technical education teachers (Baltzer et al., 2007; Hyde, 2007; Walter & Pellock, 2004). Yet lowering the standards and qualifications for individuals who teach CTE is not a proactive way of addressing the problem. Hyde (2007) cites the opinion expressed by Roth and Swail (2000) that "teacher shortages should be dealt with in greater detail rather than simply placing a warm body in a classroom" (p. 20). Teachers have a responsibility to teach their students the essential skills needed to succeed in their individual professions. Without these skills students are placed at an extreme disadvantage. Hyde (2007) concluded, "with the advancements and rapid changes in technologies, today's CTE teachers must continuously improve the level of instruction that is being provided because as the technologies change, the skills must be taught to match the current and emerging occupations" (p. 19). This continued improvement is more vital than ever before (Baltzer et al., 2007; Joerger, & Bremer, 2001). Failure to provide dedicated students with the best education possible is unacceptable.

The movement toward programs of study, also known as career pathways, is also contributing to this side of the debate. Perkins IV requires articulation similar to Tech Prep between secondary and postsecondary CTE programs and evaluation of student achievement at both levels as well. Traditionally, postsecondary representatives have typically dominated articulation discussions because of their degree granting status. However, with the emphasis, with financial implications, placed upon highly qualified teachers and student achievement within the federal legislation, will more stringent standards for faculty and programs follow?

As difficult as it is to get all stakeholders to agree to certify postsecondary CTE teachers, that pales in comparison to the difficulty of constructing the framework needed to establish a certification process. While some have suggested adopting the current regulations for secondary vocational teacher certification, this adaptation may not work well on the postsecondary level. A

separate framework may have to be adapted or created to serve the specific needs of career and technical education at the postsecondary level. Creating a long-term model that is stable and enduring is exceedingly difficult considering the assortment of methods of certification that currently exist frequently change (Hyde, 2007).

Although establishing a certification process is difficult, it is not impossible. It is important to note certification of postsecondary CTE teachers does exist in a number of states. These following states have certification requirements for CTE faculty at two-year institutions: Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, and Wisconsin. Certification models such as those adopted by these states could be quite beneficial (Olson & Spidell, 2008). Certification also exists for faculty at community colleges in: Arizona, Alabama, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin (Olson & Spidell, 2008). However, tailoring a single certification model based on these existing models is complicated, particularly since there is a lack of consistency from state to state. Perhaps the time has come for a national certification model or set of standards. Generating such a model will take some time based on the various terminologies, policies, and procedures of each state. However, this obstacle must not deter a serious discussion within the field of career and technical education. If administrators, faculty, industry representatives, and members of the states' boards of education want to truly serve their students such a framework possibly needs to be considered.

Summary

Attempting to provide CTE students with the best education possible without handicapping the field will not be solved in this discussion. This dilemma will exist for the foreseeable future, especially since many in the field view the issue differently. In many respects, it seems as if we are speaking different languages. As we attempt to move forward through intense and meaningful discussion, it is critical that we find a dialect that makes sense. We can't afford to ignore this issue any longer. This is especially true with the current economic crisis. Moreover, the ability of the United States to

remain globally completive hinges on the ability of all career and technical education stakeholders to take action and address these issues aggressively through continued conversations. Taking action is the only hope this field has. So, what is your position in this debate?

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