

Should Teachers Be Judged by Performance?

by Fred M. Hechinger

Those who can, do; those who can't, teach" is part of the ballast of anti-intellectual foolishness that weighs down American folklore. Neither the Brain Trust's invasion of Washington in the Thirties nor the can-do diplomacy of Prof. Henry Kissinger has been able to put to rest the old "teachers can't do" saw. Silly old proverbs never die; they only prevent the real problems from being recognized—such as the problem of those teachers who, whatever else they may do, can't teach.

Because most teachers are certified on the basis of professionally approved requirements, without any appreciable decline in the number of incompetents, demands have been growing for a change in the certification rules. In simplest terms, the question that is being raised across the country is: How can the profession of teaching be made more effective?

The reason why the question has not been raised sooner but is moving to the top of the agenda now holds no mystery. During the years of acute teacher shortage, it would have been absurd to tighten standards. The shortage of people in the pool simply precluded much selectivity. Within the past two years, scarcity has given way to surplus. When there is an oversupply, it makes sense to pick the best of the available crop. Consumerism, moreover, everywhere is flexing its muscles and demanding better service—and the schools are not immune from such new demands and scrutiny.

The issue sounds innocent. Yet it has already set off some of the hottest debates and counterattacks. Why? Because the existing criteria of teacher certification have been challenged on the grounds that they have failed to provide a valid measure of a new teacher's performance. The battle is between theory and practice.

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Theoretical judgments tend to be objective and, therefore, bureaucratically safe; practical judgments, by contrast, are more subjective and, therefore, more open to distrust.

The objective criteria by which most teachers are licensed are based largely on college credits completed—a variety of required subject areas with some backup courses in educational theory and methods. Critics of the present system say that this approach is too remote from the classroom. For example, a teacher candidate may have completed all the required courses on the teaching of reading, yet may lack the practical skills and/or personal qualities essential for teaching children how to read. Ditto, mathematics and every other subject.

The new proposals, known as performance-based certification, vary in details. However, their common aim is to judge the teacher by what he or she does in the classroom after the completion of certain academic training requirements. The New York State Education Department has introduced a plan that allows the decisions to be made by joint bodies of college professors, school administrators, and teachers who would be fairly free to work out their specific "models" of operation.

Although these proposals sound less than revolutionary, they have already

caused anguished outcries. Daniel E. Griffiths, dean of New York University's School of Education, has portrayed competency-based teacher education as an anti-intellectual movement that "ignores the lessons of history and is attempting to move ahead with no adequate theoretical base."

Albert Shanker, president of the United Federation of Teachers, has long supported the idea of "internship" as part of teacher training. Nevertheless, he roundly condemns performance-based licensing, because "we simply do not know with any degree of assurance what teacher skills, traits or behavior, and modes of performance will 'work' for all children—or for some." Under the circumstances, Mr. Shanker suggests, "It is proper to call for research and experimentation," but not for action.

Behind the scenes, some teacher-training deans and professors have tried to bargain with the state educational authorities. "Let us know what kinds of criteria you want to establish, and we'll provide the academic credit for them," they said in effect.

Supporters of the new approach reject these arguments. They charge that the real meaning of the colleges' under-the-table compromise offer is: "We'll continue to do what we have been doing, but we'll attach new and improved labels to the same old product."

In answer to the charge that certifying new teachers on the basis of on-the-job performance is anti-intellectual, critics of the present system reply that the colleges' responsibility for providing the intellectual rigor in the preparation of teachers will in no way be diminished by the addition of the new, performance-based dimension. (Harsher critics have long charged that many teacher-training courses lack precisely such rigor and thus are, in fact, marred by anti-intellectualism.)

As for Mr. Shanker's assertion of the inadequacy of research on what makes a good teacher, Alvin P. Lierheimer, an associate commissioner in New York's State Education Department, says that despite the research gap "teacher education has proceeded for years without any handicap."

C. Michail Darcy, a teacher-education specialist at the State University of New York at Albany, counters even more sharply: "If Mr. Shanker really espouses that view [that nobody knows what works in the classroom], then what he must question is, not competency-



"Throw to me. I'm the catcher."

based teacher education, but the whole concept of teaching. If teacher behavior is unrelated to student learning, then we need no trained teachers—anyone will do to keep order.”

Thus far the entire debate seems to have been carried on with more concern for vested interests than for the improvement of education. It is not true, as Mr. Shanker has charged, that the proposals are tantamount to asking the medical profession to “certify doctors only upon demonstrated ability to cure the common cold.” However, it is true and considered quite reasonable that doctors are being certified on the basis of a combination of their theoretical knowledge and their capacity for dealing successfully with real patients.

The teachers’ legitimate fears stem in part from the question: Just how will their capacity for dealing successfully with students be measured? If performance-based certification is to mean that all candidates will be judged, for example, by their pupils’ reading scores—regardless of the youngsters’ capacities and backgrounds—the process will be intolerably unfair. Medical students are *not* judged on the basis of the number of patients they “cure,” regardless of the nature of the disease.

The real issue, currently beclouded by much rhetoric, is over who will wield the not inconsiderable power of controlling both the criteria for teacher education and the gates of certification, and who will gain or lose power in the change-over. At the heart of the controversy, as Mr. Lierheimer makes plain, is a power

struggle between the different forces—the colleges, the teachers (or rather their unions), the state education authorities, and potentially even the legislatures (and the lay pressure groups behind them)—that want to get a hand in the process.

(An earlier proposal that a performance-based review of competence in the classroom be applied periodically to already-licensed teaching staffs has long since been dropped. No reasonable union leader would agree to such a threat to the job security of members who are already licensed by previous rules.)

Mr. Darcy may over-dramatize the fundamental power issue when he says of Mr. Shanker’s objections: “His alternative is to have a union-controlled apprenticeship. Our fellow unionists in the building trades have gone that route.” Spokesmen for the New York State Education Department are somewhat more diplomatic. “My guess is,” says Mr. Lierheimer, “that if the education community cannot coalesce and show significant improvement and increased responsiveness to the educational consumer, we will receive a legislatively mandated program of teacher preparation that can only represent a throwback to the past. There are always legislative forces that will find a quick solution for a complex problem.” He points to Massachusetts, which is already moving toward a certification process that will subject every candidate to scrutiny by three judges whose qualifications the legislature narrowly prescribes.

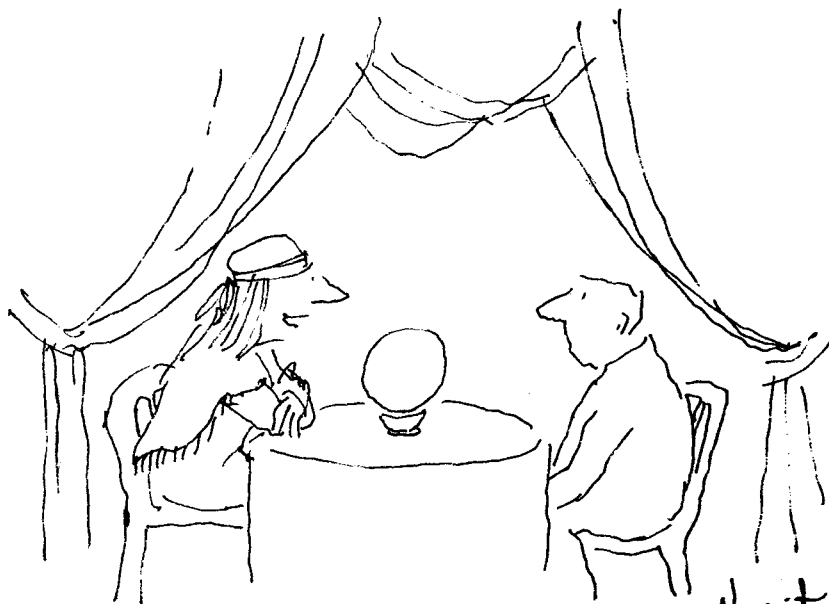
The participants in this academic debate would probably prefer to continue

their sparring match under the cover of professional secrecy rather than in full view of the consumers. Most perilous to the profession, however, is the claim that nobody really knows what constitutes good teaching. Having at long last been persuaded that teaching is a profession entitled to professional salaries and perquisites, the public is not likely to feel kindly toward a confession that the professionals know no more than laymen about their profession’s dos and don’ts.

Reporters who cover the schools have long known that a principal finds nothing easier than to direct them to the classrooms of those teachers whom they could readily certify as effective. Visitors are routinely kept from embarrassing contact with classroom duds. Experience has taught much that research may perhaps not yet have been able to codify. And it is precisely such experience by the new teachers’ peers, professors, and supervisors that underlies the drive for performance-based licensing.

The fact that such experience is available should not block the way to research. The Educational Testing Service, with support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, has embarked on precisely such research, aimed at defining and describing teaching competence and at finding better and more objective yardsticks by which to measure it. It is encouraging, moreover, that many of the spokesmen of the disparate factions that are still publicly denouncing each other, in defense of their vested interests, appear ready to join in that enterprise.

The movement for performance-based certification represents an inevitable demand by consumers and concerned educators for better teaching. The most humane, least punitive way of waging that campaign is to block access to those who are either unsuited or ill prepared for the art of teaching before they become permanently lodged in the system. □



“Would you like the regular or the economy reading?”

ANSWER TO MIDDLETON DOUBLE-CROSTIC NO. 47

(WAVERLEY) ROOT:

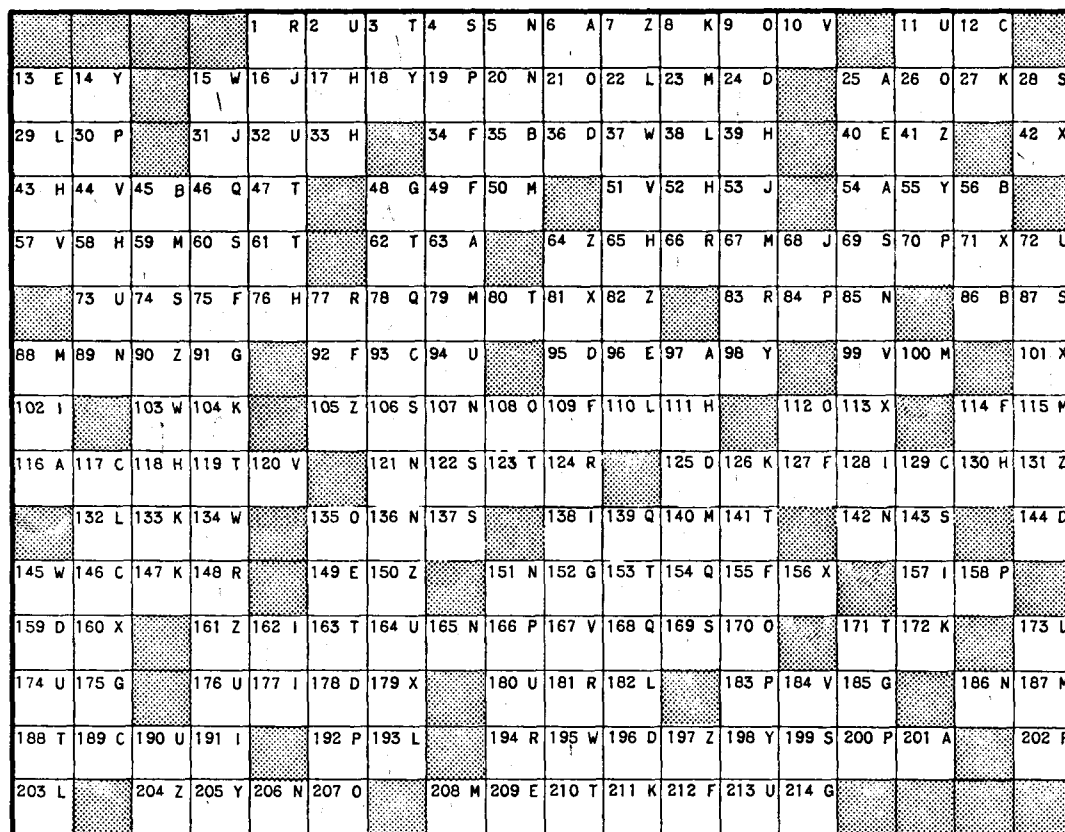
THEY EAT HORSES, DON'T THEY?

One of the reasons why the barbarians bowled over an already tottering Roman Empire so easily was the superior mobility given them by their cavalry; they possessed large numbers of horses and were accustomed to eating them.

From *Esquire*, January 1974

Double-Croctic No. 48

by Thomas H. Middleton



INSTRUCTIONS

If you've never solved one of these puzzles, it will probably look much more difficult than it actually is. If you can answer only a very few of the WORDS correctly, you're on your way to solving the puzzle.

Fill in the numbered blanks of all the WORDS you can guess, and write the letter of each numbered blank in its correspondingly numbered square in the diagram. The letters printed in the upper right-hand corners of the squares indicate from what WORD a particular square's letter comes.

The diagram, when filled in, should read as a quotation from a published work. The dark squares are the spaces between words. If there is no dark square at the end of a line, a word may carry over to the line below.

The first letter of each WORD, reading down, will spell the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

You should find yourself seeing words and phrases taking form in the diagram; so you can work back and forth, from WORDS to diagram and from diagram to WORDS, until the diagram is filled in.

CLUES

WORDS

CLUES

WORDS

A. Prospero's daughter (*The Tempest*)

25 54 63 97 116 201 6

B. Czech religious reformer (1369?—1415)

35 45 56 86

C. Hateful

93 117 129 146 189 12

D. Depressed, degraded, or embarrassed state (2 wds.)

24 36 95 125 144 159 178 196

E. Harlot of Jericho (Josh. 2)

209 13 96 149 40

F. Meddlesome

49 75 92 109 114 127 155 212 34

G. 1942 film for which James Cagney won an Oscar (followed by WORD H)

91 152 48 175 185 214

H. See WORD G (2 wds.)

33 52 58 65 76 118 17 43 130 39 111

I. Parvenu

138 162 102 128 157 177 191

J. Ancient cultural and religious center of South Honshu, Japan

16 31 53 68

K. Complete or perfect (2 wds.)

126 133 147 172 211 104 8 27

L. Labored

29 110 132 173 182 203 193 22 38

M. Separate room, section, etc.

67 115 187 208 23 59 50 88 140 79 100

N. Deafening

165 186 5 107 89 206 20 85 136 142 151 121

O. Devoted or excessive admirer

135 21 112 207 26 108 170 9

P. Triumphant

19 70 166 183 200 30 202 192 84 158

Q. Strike out

46 154 168 139 78

R. Of uncertain outcome or result

124 181 66 83 148 194 77 1

S. Intended to attract notice

199 137 169 4 74 28 60 69 87 122 106 143

T. Complaint of the disguised Edgar (*King Lear*, 2 wds. & comp.)

163 188 210 153 3 62 119 141 171 80 123
61 47

U. At a depth greater than 120 feet below the ocean surface

2 32 180 94 174 190 72 164 73 176 11 213

V. Place of punishment for the dead (Scandinavian myth)

120 167 51 44 184 10 99 57

W. Spanish-American pianist and conductor who appeared in MGM musicals

15 103 37 134 145 195

X. Survey

160 42 81 113 71 101 179 156

Y. Simp; dumbbell

14 18 55 198 205 98

Z. "Yet three fill'd Zodiacs had he been / The _____" Jonson, "Epigrams, cxx" (2 wds.)

82 7 161 131 64 150 105 197 204 41 90

Answer to Double-Croctic No. 47 appears on page 72.