

One last observation...

Why Teachers is Illiterate

"Why is he not learning or learning so but so little with my help. How comes his past teachers have been passing him from grade to grade without he advancing or progressing academichy.

"I will like to know what is causing the mental blockage."

THIS BARELY COHERENT statement, complete with shoddy grammar and unfortunate spelling, was not, as one might expect, penned by a low-functioning second-grader. These words are taken verbatim from a student evaluation written by a New York City public school teacher.

New York's schools—with 1.1 million students, the largest taxpayer-funded system in the nation—are the shame of a great city. And the dire consequences of this vast education wasteland echo far beyond the school halls. Each year, thousands of teens who have been pushed from grade to grade without mastering the ability to read and write are dumped into the street, diplomas in hand. According to a recent survey of area business leaders, potential employers have little confidence in the value of a New York City high school diploma.

Why can't Johnny read? You won't get the answer from clock-punching bureaucrats. But this past May, as city schools Chancellor Rudy Crew perulantly threatened to quit—for the second time—in the face of harsh criticism from reform-minded Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, I helped shed light on one of the school system's ugliest secrets. As a

Andrea Peyser Reports from New York



columnist for the *New York Post*, I got my hands on evidence of an institutional malady that many have long suspected, but that has rarely been documented: rampant teacher illiteracy.

These examples are culled from notes and evaluations authored by teachers of a Brooklyn elementary school. The writings give a rare glimpse into a problem that many who work in the system insist is widespread. (All spelling and grammatical errors are the teachers'.)

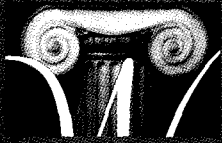
Here, a teacher complains about his student's short attention span and hyperactivity: "He does very little class work. Likes to figh most of the time.

He does not take to many things serious. He's very high proactive." Another teacher writes that her student's "work habits is very poor." One child's "lisp is so handicapped to his school that it upstruck his classwork," observes one educator.

Another child is "esaily distracted," and exhibits "violat behavior, and does not hear to rules and regulations," writes his teacher. "He never spoke of anything against him or exhibit questionable behavior otherwise," jots yet another educator. "At this point, I feel he should discontinued counseling." Addressing her colleagues in the union, a teacher reports, "Reorganization grievances has to be filed within 2 days." One teacher writes about a student's "studdering" problem. Another reports that a child suffers from "incontenance of urine. Please evulate."

The epidemic of teacher illiteracy may be traced to fuzzy-headed 1960s- and '70s-style notions that children learn best from those to whom they can "relate." In their frenzy to achieve racial quotas, many administrators have deemed a teacher candidate's competence to be of relatively little importance, complains a veteran employee of the Brooklyn school from which the writing samples were taken.

"I think the new teaching force coming in over recent years is, for the most part, unqualified," said the employee, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Once absorbed into the institutional fabric, even the least *Continued on page 30*



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