

For each paper (Paper I, Paper II), answer the following

1. formulate the problem discussed.
2. Decide, what are the main arguments used in each of the papers. Indicate their premises and conclusions. Check for the possible arguments' fallacies in each of the papers (if present).
3. Whose position is the most convincing and why(of the two). Give reasons to support your choice
4. Evaluate the importance of the subject discussed.
5. Formulate your position about the subject and offer an argument in its support.

Paper I

The Ed D. and Other Certification Charades

P. Welsh

The credentialing game in public education may have once been a well-meaning effort to create some measurable criteria to maintain standards, but it has turned into an absurd process that forces both teachers and administrators to waste time jumping through hoops that have little or no relation to their job performance.

Nothing shows how downright phony the game is than the Ed.D.s — the Doctors of Education. I have seen administrators who have had trouble writing clear letters home to parents and who murdered the English language in public go about brandishing their degrees and insisting on being called “Doctor.” On the other hand, the two best principals in my high school — T.C. Williams in Alexandria, Va. — never bothered to get “doctorate” degrees; in fact, one did not even have a master’s when he was first hired. Both were appointed by wise superintendents who knew natural leaders when they saw them.

The credentialing game is even worse when it comes to teachers, because bureaucrats, obsessed with rules and numbers, would rather hire a mediocre but “fully certified” prospect than the brightest, most promising applicant who lacked the “education” courses.

Take the case of a young woman who taught government at our school a few years ago. A Yale graduate, a dynamic teacher and coach loved by kids and parents, she came into the school system on a “provisional certification” policy that gave her three years to take the required 18 credit hours. At the end of the third year she completed all the course work and carried her transcripts to the Alexandria personnel office, only to learn from the district director of human resources that he was terminating her. His reason: The state would not be able to get the piece of paper saying that she was officially certified to the director’s office before the beginning of school in September.

In their defense, school personnel offices have been under pressure from states and the federal government to have what No Child Left Behind calls a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom. Unfortunately, in the bureaucracy’s eyes, a candidate who is not “fully certified” cannot be deemed “highly qualified.”

A few years ago one of the brightest, most dynamic and popular teachers in the school — a young man who had 48 graduate hours in creative writing — was told he would not be certified unless he took a basic composition course, a low-level course he had been exempted from at the University of Virginia on the basis of his Advanced Placement score in high school. Fed up with this and other courses he was required to take to be deemed “highly qualified,” this terrific teacher resigned.

A good start to ensure that schools get the best people in the classrooms would be to stop filtering candidates through personnel offices obsessed with education courses and “certification,” and allow individual schools to advertise for the positions they need, and then allow principals along with panels of teachers to hire enthusiastic candidates who exhibit knowledge and love of their subject and a passion for communicating that knowledge and love to students. The only requirement for “certification” should be that the new prospects accept mentoring by the best teachers in the school.

Will there be mistakes in judgment and some candidates simply not pan out? Of course, but there is an easy solution — get rid of those who turn off kids and can’t get them excited about learning.

Whatever its flaws, such a system would be better than what we have now — a charade that confuses taking mind-numbing education courses with being a “highly qualified” teacher and has ended up filling schools with tenured mediocrity the kids don’t deserve.

Paper II

Two Cheers for Ed Schools

J. Mirel

Attacked for being purveyors of progressive educational snake oil, for providing inadequate instruction for pre-service teachers, and for pervasive anti-intellectualism, schools and colleges of education are among the favorite targets of educational reformers. Indeed the “success” of programs like Teach for America that get young people with strong liberal arts backgrounds into classrooms after only a few weeks of teacher training has led for some critics to call for the abolition of educational schools altogether.

Top teacher training programs are now emphasizing academic content as well as methods.

At a time when, for example, more than half of all secondary students taking history courses are taught by teachers who neither majored nor minored in history, any effort for getting more people steeped in the liberal arts into teaching, as Teach for America does, should be applauded. But the assumption that merely knowing a subject makes one a good teacher is foolhardy. Knowledge of subject matter is unquestionably necessary for good teaching, but it is insufficient for being a good teacher. Ed schools can make a difference.

Teaching is an incredibly complex and difficult enterprise. Little about the job comes to people naturally. Prospective teachers need to learn such mundane but crucial skills as how to keep their classrooms orderly and centered on the topics at hand. Most important, at the same time, they have to learn how to make the subject matter of their content area accessible and worth knowing for their students, no easy task given the increasingly diverse backgrounds of these students. When ed schools are doing their job these are the kinds of things prospective teachers learn so can they start their careers better able to handle the intense and unrelenting demands of teaching.

For a long time educational schools did not focus specifically on how to teach challenging content to all students. But that is changing. Leading educational schools (e.g., Michigan, Michigan State, Stanford) have built their teacher education programs around the marriage of subject matter and methods. This is one of the most promising developments in American education.

