

LETTERS

Dear Editor:

Re: "Conflicting Views of Competency Testing in Florida" [*EL*, November 1978, pp. 99-106], I think it is excellent! The NEA is most appreciative of the attention that ASCD has given to the Independent Panel's report, and the responsible and constructive stand the Association has assumed in a number of ways on the critical topic. I can only hope that efforts to make the profession and the public look more carefully at what competency testing is doing to students will be effective.

Robert M. McClure
Program Manager
Instruction and Professional
Development
National Education Association
Washington, D.C.

Dear Editor:

"The Humanistic Approach to Teacher Education: A Giant Step Backwards?" by Doyle Watts [*EL*, November 1978, pp. 87-90] causes me to express my indignation. The article does not serve to further cooperative efforts for the improvement of teacher education, shows a lack of understanding for the work of Arthur Combs, and is a shoddy personal attack, rather than a professional critique.

This article attempts to foster a "back to basics" mentality for teacher education. Given the current public dismay over schools in our nation, this stand only serves to place another cloud of bewilderment in that bleak sky.

I believe Professor Watts is fundamentally incorrect in his suggestions for teacher education. The work of Combs and others is backed by solid research and verified by my personal experience. I have worked to overcome the effects of teacher education programs that utilize Watts' notions

on student teachers who cannot cope with the classroom as it exists today.

I question the appropriateness of placing this article, which is more of a personal attack on Arthur Combs rather than a scholarly critique, in a journal of this quality. I would hope that Professor Watts will study the research of Combs and others in order to rethink his ideas. I hope that his next piece will have something more to say. This one was not amusing.

Thomas McCully
Graduate Assistant
State University of New York
at Buffalo

Dear Editor:

In the April 1978 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Arthur W. Combs voiced some thoughts on the improvement of teacher education ["Teacher Education: The Person in the Process," pp. 558-61]. In November of the same year, Doyle Watts responded with some sprightly and pertinent criticism of Combs' suggestion ["The Humanistic Approach to Teacher Education: A Giant Step Backwards?" pp. 87-88, 90]. I agree with Watts' remarks about the soft spots in Combs' ideas for the improvement of teacher preparation. I do not entirely accept Watts' seven suggestions for improving Combs' ideas. Just as Watts accuses Combs of imprecise language, I find the meaning of several of Watts' proposals ambiguous. Let me demonstrate.

1. Watts calls for the establishment of "more stringent and selective requirements for entrance into teacher education programs." Exactly what would be the nature of these "more stringent and selective requirements?" Shall they be academic? cultural? social? And more importantly, for what purpose, to what end?

2. Regarding Watts' second suggestion, research simply does not give us the kind of infor-

mation we would like and need if we are to "identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for effective teaching." Does every teacher need them? To the same degree? At the same time? In the same order? Does individual personality affect this?

3. I have no quarrel with Watts' desire to extend the length of the professional educational component to one year, but what does he mean by the "professional educational component?" Is it those college courses in the education department dedicated specifically to teacher preparation, whether methods, psychology, or theory? Or does he refer to student teaching?

4. I find myself in serious disagreement with Watts' proposal for certification based upon competency-based evaluation. Watts has used a term as imprecise as any of those he criticized in Combs. What exactly is "competency-based evaluation?" I view this term with as much suspicion as did the boy who raised the question about the emperor's new clothes. Who today, in the present state of empirical knowledge, is wise enough to predict the competencies, the possession of which are a demonstration of teacher effectiveness? Competency-based instruction is a lovely concept. Unfortunately, it is based on the fallacy that important necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities are positively identifiable. And, if identifiable, then capable of being measured.

With the remaining three suggestions I have no great quarrel. In summary, Watts has made a considerably more realistic set of suggestions for the improvement of teacher education than did Combs, but even he succumbs to the common fault of using imprecisely defined terms to describe his objectives.

I would not like to see an end to attempts to improve the methods of teacher preparation. But I expect much of the improvement must come through the heart rather than through prescriptive

efforts based on incomplete research. If anyone cares to give me three each, in alphabetical order, of skills and abilities *any* teacher must have and use in order to be effective in inducing learning, I'll be happy to pass them on to my trainees. In the meantime, I'll just continue to muddle along aided by my experience, as well as that of others, hoping from it I can bring some sort of inspiration to students to become successful teachers.

Charles W. Miller
Associate Professor of Education
Purdue University Calumet Campus,
Hammond, Indiana

Dear Editor:

As former secondary public school teachers, we agree with Carl Pickhardt [*EL*, November 1978, pp. 107-112] that an element of fear exists in schools, but he did not identify the source of the problem. Frequently it is teachers who plant the seeds of fear in their students by modeling the very fear games described in the article: threats, eye contact games, distancing games, voice modulation, nonverbal communication. Then they become defensive when the seeds they have planted take root and grow.

Even well-meaning teachers produce inappropriate responses by students when they are required to enforce unnecessary regulations mandated by administrators.

Pickhardt failed to emphasize that quality teachers automatically discourage fear games by demonstrating fairness, honesty, respect, genuineness, empathy, humor, and interest in what the student knows and cares about.

This issue warrants greater attention, but what is said should be based on definitive research rather than on personal opinions.

Lyndal M. Bullock, Thomas F. Reilly, and
Sonya S. Wisdom
North Texas State University,
Denton, Texas

Copyright © 1979 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.