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AN ENDURING PROBLEM: LICENSING INCOMPETENT STUDENT TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most pervasive and least studied problems in teacher education is the failure on the part of teacher education faculty to withhold recommendations for licensure from student teachers who are deemed unsuitable for teaching. The salience of this enduring problem in teacher education was given increased emphasis by a well-designed national survey of teacher educators conducted by Farkas & Johnson (1997). They reported that 86% of the teacher educators they sampled believed that their programs need to do a better job in this area. How can this situation be improved?

This paper is divided into two sections. Section I presents an analysis of the problem - identifying some of its contexts that serve to elaborate its complexity. Section II reports a modest proposal for ameliorating the situation. Advanced as an hypothesis, a new language to describe "student teacher" incompetence is advanced to help supervisors and cooperating teachers sharpen their discernments of the practice of student teachers and to give them courage to act on their discernments.

SECTION I: ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM

Improbable nature of the problem.

At first glance, even while conceding that this problem has been "with" teacher education for some time, the mere existence of such a problem seems improbable. Teacher educators, both full-time higher education faculty and cooperating teachers, are committed to graduating excellent teachers. They know, perhaps better than anyone in the field of education, how critical the "teacher variable" is in classrooms. Further, it is

highly probable that their commitments and belief systems led many of them into the field of teacher education. Where does the disposition come from to recommend incompetent student teachers for licensure? The practice is unlikely to be a reflection of the values and beliefs of those deeply engaged in the student teaching process.

There is a second reason to see the problem as improbable. If one were to analyze the mistakes that university supervisors and cooperating teachers can make, we might conclude that the most strategic practice on their part would be to "fail" more student teachers than might actually be warranted, rather than the other way around. Our analysis assumes, firstly, that in making decisions about whether to recommend a given student teacher for a license in the main university supervisors and cooperating teachers "get it right." That is, they recommend for licensure those student teachers who are competent and caring; and they withhold a recommendation for licensure for those candidates who are incompetent. However, the process may yield errors. One error would be to withhold a recommendation for a student teacher who is in fact competent. Let's call this a Type I error. A second error would be to recommend an incompetent student teacher for licensure. Let's call this a Type II error. Which is the worse error? Assuming that every university has an appeals process which would hear and review a decision withholding a recommendation for a license, we see a Type II error as the one to avoid. If a Type I error is made, it can be corrected by a subsequent review with opportunity for the error to be corrected. A Type II error is probably never corrected.

If university supervisors and cooperating teachers held to this analysis, perhaps they would be less wont to recommend incompetent student teachers for licensure.

Explanations for Recommending Incompetent Student Teachers for Licensure

Why is it that there are too many weak student teachers awarded licenses to teach at the close of their university program? We have elected to advance several:

Conflation of summative and formative evaluation. Scriven (1967) advanced a distinction between various roles that evaluation plays in education and instruction that has a telling effect in our understanding of the assessment process. According to Scriven, the first role of evaluation is called "summative." A summative evaluation includes products such as grades, promotion to the next grade, acceptance in a university, receiving a recommendation for a teaching license, merit pay increases, and other similar rewards for efforts well done. A formative evaluation is akin to coaching. Formative evaluations are designed to improve performance or improve the products on which students are working. In the mode of formative evaluation, teachers rarely issue overall judgments about the quality of a performance or a product, but instead point out particular strengths and/or weaknesses and suggest how weakness might be addressed. As evaluation was studied during the 30 years since Scriven wrote about these processes, it became clear

that there is an almost unavoidable conflict of interest when "coaches" make summative evaluations of the performances of their students. A clear example is found in student teaching. Often, a university supervisor, acting as a coach, will say to a student teacher early in the semester, "I am here to help you. If you run into any difficulty, if you have concerns, come to me." About late November, a struggling and perhaps incompetent student teacher may hear a different tune from the university supervisor now acting in the role of a summative evaluator. "I'm sorry, but I don't think you are going to make it through student teaching in a successful manner. Your performances have disappointed me and your cooperating teacher - and I'm afraid that we won't be able to recommend you for a license."

The student teacher can respond in two ways. First, the student teacher could ask, "Why tell me in late November?" Why not let me know earlier?" And second, "I told you about my concerns in the very areas you cited as my current weaknesses, but you were evidently not effective in helping me. Why should I be punished because of your ineptness as a coach?" To avoid these challenges, student teaching supervisors, acting both in a formative and a summative role, might elect to simply recommend the student teacher for licensure instead of responding to these issues.

Minor roles within the larger teacher education setting. (1)Cooperating teachers are not usually full-time teacher education faculty. They do not hold faculty rank, and where they do hold courtesy appointments, rarely do these arrangements include faculty voting privileges. They also have a full time job teaching pupils in the public schools. They rarely receive adequate coaching to enable them to fully understand the goals, expectations, or conceptual frameworks of the teacher education programs in which their student teachers are enrolled. Almost always they receive a "student teaching handbook" from the university -- but in the main it is unread and not very "user friendly."

University supervisors are also typically part-time faculty members, often without voice or vote in faculty meetings. They spend much of their time in schools supervising student teachers, solving critical and fast-moving "hot-potatoes" that erupt as student teachers make silly, unprofessional, and highly visible mistakes. In those settings where university supervisors are full time faculty, often student teaching supervision is a minor aspect of their faculty roles which might include teaching courses on-campus, conducting research, and providing service to the profession and the field. As a result, the time consuming task of visiting schools to supervise student teachers can be given short shrift.

In sum, the professionals serving in these two key roles in the student teaching process have the responsibility for identifying incompetent student teachers. The process entails complicated due process rights on the part of the student teacher -- with appeals and hearing boards and ultimately, perhaps, law suits. Are these part-time university employees sufficiently invested in the process and supported by the program faculty and administration to decide that a particular student teacher is incompetent?

Uncertainly. On occasions when professionals are deciding whether to recommend a weak student teacher for licensure, they are reminded that the markers to distinguish competent from incompetent student teachers are not distinct, and it is difficult to make a high-stakes judgment about an individual student teacher armed only with abstract, murky decision rules. When a student teacher is confronted with the possibility that a recommendation for licensure will be withheld, arguments are advanced by the student teacher, his/her parents, or their attorney, that the supervision was infrequent; the cooperating teacher was not adequately briefed on the goals of the teacher education program; that the placement itself did not allow the student teacher to demonstrate his/her skills; or the cooperating teacher and/or the supervisor were not fair in their evaluations. With threats of lawsuits and grievance petitions, teacher educators have been known to yield and give the recommendation that is sought. How often this happens is not known -- but an awareness of the possible ugly consequences of withholding a recommendation might be as motivating to the participants as its actual rate of occurrence. Gray (1998) provides a compelling description of the pressures brought to bear in the decision-making process when a student teacher suffers under an adverse faculty decision.

Rhetoric of excellence. Often, the rhetoric of teacher education programs and the language found in their evaluation forms give emphasis to "excellence" and "high quality" in teaching. In many programs, evaluation scales used to describe and rate teaching competence use terms like "excellent" or "superior" to designate the top rating. It is an interesting notion to believe that a 22-year-old with zero years of actual experience in the role of classroom teacher could be deemed "excellent." With the language of program evaluation standards giving emphasis to excellence, it may be especially difficult for supervisors and cooperating teachers to understand what constitutes incompetence. It is difficult to fail someone for "not being excellent." Cooperating teachers and university supervisors want to find room in their programs for student teachers who are operating at a "middle range" and to dismiss students who are incompetent, but the language of the program associated with evaluation is often not helpful.

These contexts described above may account for why incompetent student teachers are so rarely failed from their teacher education programs. Of course, it is a complex process and there may be many other explanations to account for the problem.

An Additional Perspective on the Problem

There is another important perspective on this problem that needs consideration. This perspective underscores the gravity of the problem and the need for teacher educators to address it with substantial effort.

When called upon to make hard decisions about incompetent student teachers, some supervisors or cooperating teachers assert that they "refuse to play God." "Who am I to say whether this candidate should be a teacher or not? Let someone else decide - such as the principal who will consider the candidate for a teaching post! If this candidate can convince a principal that he should be hired, well, so-be-it." While this sentiment can be understood and appreciated, it serves to undercut the role that higher education plays in providing "public assurance" about the quality of the teaching force. The framework in teaching for providing public assurance is similar to that in other professions. It is likened to a "three-legged" stool - an image that is supposed to show the interdependence and importance of each leg. One of the legs of the three legged stool of public assurance in the teaching profession is that all prospective teachers are expected to receive a recommendation for licensure from a state-approved teacher education program. If universities refuse to play their screening role in this regard in a responsible fashion, then the prospects of public assurance are considerably dimmed. It is important to note that this role is so important and so widely acknowledged that it comprises one of the current NCATE standards for national accreditation. The standard states:

"The unit ensures that a candidate's competency to begin his or her professional role in schools is assessed prior to completion of the program and/or recommendation for licensure" (NCATE, 1997, p. 23).

The statement of the problem and the research cited by Farkas & Johnson (1997) suggest that teacher educators are not meeting the obligations implied by the three-legged stool model. This judgment, the fundamental assumption of this paper, is further supported by the rather controversial report published by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) urging the teaching profession, including teacher educators, to take "evaluation seriously" (p. 64). This recommendation was probably prompted in part by the concerns identified here as a problem -- namely that rarely are incompetent student teachers prevented from securing licenses to teach.

The faculty of a department or college or school of education must make at least two decisions at the time a student completes his/her teacher preparation program. First, they must decide whether the student merits a university degree - and the faculty formally, though often implicitly by delegation to the dean, recommend to the Board of Trustees that a particular student has met all the standards and expectations of the program and that this individual should receive a university degree. In reality, faculty generally assume that the student's grade-point-average (GPA) is an indicator of the extent to which the degree candidate has met the goals of the program. A student with a GPA of 3.80 has presumably achieved more of the program goals and at a higher level of proficiency than a student in the same program with a GPA of 2.20. In most institutions, the faculty pre-

determines a minimum grade point average needed for graduation. The faculty decision process generally works as follows: If a student presents a GPA of 1.99 or lower, he/she has not demonstrated sufficient proficiency in the program goals, and thus the degree is withheld from this student. In all other cases, the student is recommended for graduation. Using this standard, clerks or computer programs scanning final GPA's of all candidates make the decisions about graduation on behalf of the faculty.

The second decision a teacher education faculty must make is whether a teacher candidate merits licensure as a teacher by the state department of education. In most states, institutions with "program approval" status have been delegated the authority to recommend candidates for licensure with the understanding that a university recommendation is tantamount to receiving licensure. This arrangement, called "licensure by entitlement," comes at some cost. (2) Universities have pledged in return for the "entitlement privilege" that their faculties will make serious and rigorous evaluations of each teacher candidate in their programs - recommending for licensure only those that meet the state's and the university's high expectations for teacher candidates.

Faculty generally use GPA's for making this decision as well. On occasion, if a candidate responds badly to the challenge of student teaching, he/she will be asked to withdraw or re-take

student teaching in a different context. Farkas & Johnson (1997) reported that 67% of the teacher educators in their sample saw this approach as the way incompetent student teachers were handled at their institutions. This process is almost always carried out informally and it is almost never documented, so program administrators in teacher education find it difficult to answer the question: "For how many candidates this year did the faculty withhold a recommendation for licensure?"

To sum up, the problem of recommending incompetent student teachers for licensure is a significant institutional problem since it violates the explicit agreements with state departments of education. As the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) asserted, it is time to address this problem.

SECTION II: ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Of course, there are some systematic ways to address this enduring problem, some more feasible than others. The "solutions" would be hypotheses - with interventions assessed in terms of the increased intolerance for incompetent student teaching. For example, to address some of the contextual issues identified as partial explanations for the problem, universities could see to it that only professors, perhaps only full professors, supervise

student teachers. Even better, policies could be adopted that all student teachers be placed in professional development schools where the contexts thought to inhibit rigorous evaluations described above are, in a sense, inoperative. These and other similar interventions seem infeasible if not dubious. They cost too much money at a time when higher education budgets continue under challenge.

A more feasible approach would be to consider the ideas advanced by Cameron (1984) which suggest that the construct to be assessed is not teaching excellence but teaching incompetence. Cameron's work implies that teacher educators identify the most serious defects presented by student teachers in their practice, and then propose indicators of those defects. The point is to identify signs of incompetence that are clear, obvious, and almost palpable which would serve to prompt university supervisors and cooperating teachers to say: "The indicators are so apparent in John's case that we should withhold a recommendation for licensure for him." To be both fair and rigorous, any judgment would not be that of a single person, but of a collection of individuals who would frame their initial judgments independently before sharing them in seeking a consensus. An approach based on Cameron's work would provide language to university supervisors and cooperating teachers which would focus not on "excellence" as is now the case, but on marginal or incompetent student teaching.

Generating Indicators for Incompetent Student Teachers

Two approaches to this sub-problem were taken. The first was to do a conceptual analysis placing student teaching incompetence in a context ranging from criminality in student teaching to student teaching with "best practices." The second approach was to re-read the research literature on teaching - identifying the concepts that seemed to define good teaching. By giving focus to the opposite aspects of good teaching, it was assumed the dimensions of incompetent teaching would become manifest.

Incompetence in context. In considering what counts as "teacher incompetence," a number of issues comes to mind. For example, if a teacher loses self-control and hits one of his students, is that "incompetence?" If a teacher steals an expensive computer from the school for his own use or for purposes of selling it on the street, is that "incompetence"? If a teacher regularly uses a largely discredited practice, such as "spelling bees," is that a matter of incompetence? This line of inquiry led us to formulate a classification scheme of teaching behaviors -- ranging from the most serious to those representing good practice.

Criminality: Criminality is considered, in our scheme, to be the most serious class of undesirable teacher behaviors because the consequences of being convicted of an allegation of criminal behavior is likely to include a loss of freedom (jail time) and/or a loss of property rights (fines). It is possible that undesirable teacher behaviors in the categories listed below may have more significant and serious consequences in terms of effects on children, but nevertheless, criminality seems clearly to represent a class of behaviors that is most extreme in the teaching context. Examples include sexual assault, robbery, embezzlement, sexual harassment, bribery, extortion, and so forth.

Malpractice: Malpractice is second on our list for much of the same reasons that we placed criminality at its head. Through civil suits, teachers convicted of malpractice can lose

their cars, their homes, and have much of their future earnings confiscated by court orders. Further, the seriousness of malpractice is found in the fact that it almost surely brings harm to students. To reinforce our judgment that malpractice is extremely grave, almost always a conviction for malpractice causes teachers to lose their jobs and their licenses to teach. In many states, the names of teachers found guilty of malpractice are entered into a national data base open to all educational administrators who are hiring teachers --so the fact of conviction is difficult to hide from careful school employment officials. Examples include using improper procedures when classifying students into special education; providing poor advice to students which causes them to not graduate or pass; denying students remediation in basic skills they have not mastered; not teaching to the prescribed curriculum; and failure to implement IEP's. (Essex, 1987).

Unethical behavior: Of course, both criminal acts and malpractice constitute extreme forms of unethical behavior. However, there is a class of teacher behavior that represents a violation of professional ethics while falling short of criminality or malpractice. Examples of unethical behavior include: gossiping about students in inappropriate contexts or with people who have no need to know what is being discussed; cheating on state accountability tests by giving students more than the prescribed amount of time on a test battery, or by giving students clues and/or answers to questions on the examinations; telling untruths in writing recommendations to outside agencies or to school administrators; retaliating against students in class through placement or grading, for alleged slights or offences the students may have committed against the teacher or others; accepting fees for tutoring one's own students; and treating students unfairly. Of course, in certain contexts or in extreme cases, examples of unethical behavior can rise to the level of malpractice or criminality.

Lack of basic skills: For reasons that are not at all clear and indubitably embarrassing to college and university officials, licensed teachers gain access to teaching positions without knowing how to write well, speak well, or read well. This category, lack of basic skills, does not include a teacher's misspelling an occasional word or mis-parsing an

occasional sentence. This category of undesirable teaching behaviors refers to systematic, continuing, and habitual practices of poor performance in this area. Examples in a student teaching context include not writing full and complete sentences in professional reports or in communications with students and/or parents; misspelling words in class and/or in communication with parents; and mis-using words in classroom discussions or in parental interviews. So, a teacher may not be criminal, may avoid behaviors that could be characterized as malpractice or those deemed unethical, but still may be considered unacceptable as a professional because of a lack of basic skills. For the purposes of our analysis of teacher incompetence, we have placed the "lack of basic skills" category outside the class of "teacher incompetence" because, in effect, someone without basic skills is not simply inept as a teacher. This person is at a disadvantage in many roles as a citizen of our country.

Teaching incompetence: Teaching incompetence seems to belong about here in the contexts we are describing. A more precise definition follows in this paper.

Controversial teacher behaviors: This class of behaviors, generally deemed undesirable by teacher educators and school supervisors, is composed of "close calls." It includes teacher behaviors that over the years have gained wide acceptance in the "world of practice" but to some seem harmful to children. All teachers are subjected to the second guessing of parents, principals, students, and even other teachers. Specific assignments can be challenged as irrelevant; grading decisions are judged by some as arbitrary and unfair; classroom management routines are challenged by others as mindless. In all these respects, the teacher's behavior is not criminal, nor unethical, nor a case of malpractice. Instead, these actions may reflect poor judgments. Some examples of controversial teaching are: Some teachers use spelling bees to teach spelling; some teachers reward children for reading books by giving "stars" on a chart for each book read; some teachers write the names of misbehaving students on the black board; some teachers give a party at the end of the week, excluding students who have mis-behaved; some teachers give a "zero" for a late assignment; some teachers set up competition within their classes between boys and girls; some teachers group children within a class by ability for the entire school day; some teachers re-arrange the class seating chart after each unit test with the high scorers sitting nearer the front of the room and low scorers sitting toward the rear; and some teachers never give homework, while others give massive amounts. It would be difficult to find that these behaviors, and similar ones, represent incompetence or malpractice. Many familiar with schools and the research literature would object to them. However, teachers might suggest that these practices "work." Further, teachers might volunteer to use other practices, those deemed acceptable in the eyes of their critics, if the new methods worked as well. Finally, there are parents (and students) who find these practices and others in this category as wonderful, helpful, and useful.

Plain teaching: To continue our typology, we include "plain" teaching at this point. Computer experts might term this sort of teaching as "vanilla." It represents "OK"

instruction. While it doesn't meet high standards, represented in the last category below, plain teaching is satisfactory to both school administrators, parents, and students. It is "by the book," routine, and adequate. Teachers who teach "plainly" may have one or two isolated strengths -- they might be wonderful planners, or thoughtful assessors, or magnificent performers, but overall, their work is mediocre, uninspiring, and tedious.

Teaching with "best practices": We have chosen the word "best practices" to characterize our final category that sets out the context of teacher incompetence. We recognize that no practice is ever "best," since not all practices are known, and because no one really ever knows which particular practices are "best" for a given context. However, the term, used as hyperbole in the current (1990ca) school reform movement, seems to capture our sense of this last category. Teachers using best practices seem to have a sense of the "whole" in teaching -- the links between curriculum and child; between teaching and assessment; and between long range and short range goals. Their methods are nicely aligned with objectives, their objectives responsibly chosen, and their demeanor towards students appropriately warm and accepting.

Review of the literature. In one of the first research approaches making use of factor analysis to identify dimensions of teaching, Ryans (1960) advanced three patterns of teacher behavior yielded up from a review of research, a study of critical incidents, and a comprehensive observation of teachers in their classrooms (p.77). His findings included the following three major dimensions:

Pattern X: understanding, friendly vs aloof, egocentric, and restricted teacher behavior.

Pattern Y: responsible, businesslike, systematic vs evading, unplanned, slipshod.

Pattern Z: stimulating, imaginative, enthusiastic vs dull, routine.

These dimensions seemed important in devising a scale of teacher incompetence.

In a paper delivered to urban school superintendents in the midst of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty," Gage (1966) proposed five dimensions of desirable behaviors.

Warmth: The tendency of the teacher to be approving, to provide emotional support, to express a sympathetic attitude, and to accept the feelings of students.

Cognitive Organization: A grasp of the subject matter that allows teachers to identify the key ideas, to differentiate them from trivia, to organize a lesson or a unit, to make distinctions between what is known and how it is known, and to identify links between academic topics.

Orderliness: A systematic approach to the management of the classroom and of the teacher's own plans and implementations. Examples of this category include the following: Records are kept, teaching materials are at the ready, calls from parents are returned, lessons are planned,

Indirectness: A teaching style that provides students with the opportunity to work on problems on their own, to share their own views, and to practice their accomplishments.

Ability to solve instructional problems: This dimension refers to a teachers' ability to plan lessons for the students in their class - and to plan to overcome difficulties experienced by learners in the classroom. Rarely is a lesson "perfect" for all students - and some almost always stumble. Teachers skilled in this dimension are able to address student problems successfully.

Gage's dimensions also seemed relevant to a consideration of what comprises incompetence.

In a more recent effort, Scriven (1988/1993) developed a list of teacher duties that were designed to provide evaluators with an appropriate vision of the aspects of teaching that were available for assessment. Scriven has long held that it is inappropriate to evaluate a teacher's "style" or even his/her methods. Instead, after agreeing upon the duties of a teacher, evaluators can rightly assess them in the classroom. Scriven's five dimensions include:

Knowledge of subject matter.

Instructional competence including communication skills, management skills, and course construction and improvement skills.

Assessment competence.

Professionalism, a category dealing with professional ethics, professional attitudes, and professional development.

Other duties to school and community.

Scriven's list of duties received significant consideration in composing the indicators of teacher incompetence.

Finally, Reynolds (1992) significant synthesis of research informed the development of the ETS Pathwise criteria for evaluating student teachers (ETS, 1994). In her review, Reynolds acknowledged the importance of "personality characteristics" in student teaching (p.5). However, the framework she used to organize her review (pre-active teaching, inter-active teaching, and post-active teaching) apparently did not permit her to develop further the idea of "personality." However, her narrative speaking to the salience of personality was influential in defining indicators of incompetence in student teaching.

Defining Incompetence in Student Teaching

To define the construct, "student teaching incompetence", we identified through our experiences, our analysis of the contexts of incompetence in student teaching, and our reading of the literature seven areas in which incompetence is probably especially obvious. The seven areas include:

Knowledge of subject matter: Some student teachers simply do not understand the material they are trying to teach. They convey false information to the pupils, or they stumble in answering even the easiest of questions, or they can't give examples of important principles or concepts in their lessons. This dimension comports with those of Gage and Scriven.

Instructional problem solving: No matter how strong or weak a student teacher appears during the student teaching experience, there is little hope for his/her professional development unless there are signs that the student teacher is disposed to learn about teaching by addressing and analyzing difficult instructional problems. A first step in this process is for the teacher to take responsibility for problems in the classroom, and to seek out new ideas, critiques from his/her supervisors, and feedback from his/her students. This area links to Scriven's (1988) notion of the duties associated with "professionalism."

Relationships with students: This area might capture what has been called "human relations," "climate," or "good chemistry." It has to do with how well the student teacher gets along with his/her students. Is there some mutual liking? Is the student teacher able to relate to his/her students in wholesome and professional ways? While this area was noticeably absent from Scriven's frame, it is highlighted in both Ryans' work (Pattern X: friendly, understanding) and in Gage's (warmth.) (1960).

Engaging students in active learning: One common error that many student teachers make is to mistake "telling for teaching." Too often, the student teacher attempts to dominate the lesson -- spending inordinate time lecturing. On the other hand, this tendency can be compensated for by engaging students in activities with little educational purpose. The quality of classroom participation is often missing when incompetent student teachers deliver lessons. This dimension in our scheme gives emphasis to what Gage (1965) referred to as "indirectness" and to what Scriven (1988) cited as "instructional competence."

Managing student behavior and classroom activities: This area is one of the enduring concerns of student teachers and their supervisors. Using a variety of approaches to classroom management - both pro-active and reactive - that accommodates group order and individual needs is a critical aspect of good teaching.

Conscientiousness as a teacher: This area has to do with the effort and the dedication that student teachers are called upon to make during the semester. Incompetent students often are satisfied with "getting by" with minimal effort. The area of "conscientiousness" relates most strongly to Scriven's (1988) dimension of professional attitudes.

Quality of professional judgments: Having good judgment is a crucial quality. Incompetent student teachers often make decisions that are not in the best interests of their pupils.

To further elaborate these seven dimensions of incompetence, a list of indicators was prepared, placing each in a classroom context relevant to student teaching. (See the attachment to this paper entitled, " Indicators of Unacceptable, Persisting Student Teaching Behaviors.")

Uses of the Indicators

The descriptions of the seven areas can be used by cooperating teachers and university supervisors to determine if and how a student teacher is incompetent. Including language in observation forms and check lists to document incidents that reflect the indicators of incompetence found in the attachment, supervisors and cooperating teachers may be more ready to stand firm in making adverse summative judgments about incompetent student teachings. Beyond using our descriptions in a summative evaluation, teacher educators might be use them in several other ways.

1. To share the indicators with student teachers and candidates early in their teacher education programs to convey a sense of what "incompetence" looks like in a classroom. The framework might assist prospective student teachers to decide not to continue in teacher education. On the other hand, the framework might suggest obstacles to overcome and dispositions to avoid - and thus serve an instructive purpose.

2. To give direction to content analyses of cooperating teacher/supervisor comments, written evaluations, and holistic judgments to find if the problems identified in the framework meet empirical tests of their validity as indicators of incompetence.

CAVEATS

It is extremely important to spell out the cautions that must accompany our proposals:

1. In most settings, teachers and student teachers can be sanctioned for three classes of offenses: immorality, insubordination, and/or incompetence. The framework presented here gives emphasis solely to incompetence as a construct.

2. No scale of which we are aware exists for measuring incompetence in precise ways. How many times an indicator of incompetence is observed before it is transformed into incompetence itself is not known. The challenge of making judgments about student teaching is akin to those facing a jury. There is rarely ever tight and precise definitions of what comprises guilt or innocence in a jury trial. Guidelines are provided by judges in the instructions to juries - and the framework is intended to provide analogous guidelines to university supervisors and cooperating teachers. However, the process still calls for informed judgments.

3. Our proposals are untested. They are in the main hypotheses of a sort. Our hypotheses are (1) The language provided here is useful to teacher educators in making summative judgments of student teachers; (2) The framework advanced in the attachment,

encompasses the most common areas of incompetence; and (3) student teachers who are deemed incompetent in one of the areas of our framework do not compensate for this failing by being outstanding in other areas.

We enlist our colleagues in the profession test these hypotheses rigorously.

4. Our descriptions represent very low thresholds for defining competence. Even conceptually, we would not think that a candidate who passes our screens would thereby be deemed competent. The logic is again similar to that of a jury trial. Someone found "not guilty" is not thereby deemed to be "innocent." In the same manner, someone who in effect passes by the criteria for incompetence found in the framework could be said to be "not incompetent" with the full understanding that this judgment is not high praise.

5. The indicators of incompetence listed in the framework are generic. It is assumed they apply with equal force to elementary school and high school teaching; to teachers of mathematics and those of English. Again, this assumption has not been tested.

6. The language of our descriptions of incompetence do not reflect special responsibilities of teachers having to do with students who are identified with special needs. It is our judgment that student teachers do not have much opportunity in a student teaching semester to demonstrate specific competencies in this area.

SUMMARY

An enduring problem of teacher education is the tendency to recommend incompetent student teachers for teaching licenses. This paper shared an analysis of the problem and proposed a solution for it - giving emphasis in the evaluation process to indicators of incompetence. Other solutions need to be identified and explored.

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Attachment: Documentation of Unacceptable, Persisting Student Teacher Behaviors