

all along? I don't know. I only know that after I was offered the job, no one ever asked to see the certificate that made it legal for me to teach those third graders. They just took my word for it.

Looking back, from the perspective of a year's leave of absence, I'm not bothered so much by the hundreds of dollars I had to spend on the reading courses, or the endless wasted hours I spent stalking my new certificate. What upsets me most is the knowledge that I was just one victim of a giant, little-acknowledged conspiracy against the good will and sanity of dedicated, committed teachers. I've talked to several colleagues who've left the profession for good, hounded into exasperation over certification rules. And I'm constantly hearing of new strategies education schools and state bureaucrats have devised to make certification rules more onerous and even less relevant to good teaching than they already are. For example, the state of New York no longer believes that a master's degree in reading is sufficient for children with "learning disabilities." Many who've been teaching these kids—whose major problem is not being able to read—must now take 36 new, improved units in order to keep teaching. Nationally, many well-meaning reformers are offering similar prescriptions. John Goodlad, a noted professor of education and author of numerous tomes that are required reading for education majors, recently urged the creation of a new position called "head teacher." To qualify for this position one can't be just an excellent teacher; one must also have a Ph.D. in—you guessed it—education. Goodlad assures us that the means already exist "for providing a continuing supply" of such persons, and I don't doubt it. Nor do I doubt that the High Priests will rise to the challenge of figuring out how to certify them. Meanwhile, the additional requirements will, I suspect, be one more reason that potentially good teachers steer clear of the profession altogether.

There's one final irony. For all the hassle I've been through, and for all the certification requirements, none of the administrators, union officials, or state examiners that I've mentioned has ever seen me teach. For all they know, I could be the best teacher in New York state—or the worst. If we're truly concerned about improving the profession, then evaluating teachers according to meaningful standards—Do they know their subject? Can they teach it?—is perhaps the most important reform we can make. Unfortunately, that's the last thing that the High Priests and their apologists seem interested in. ■

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