

## VIEWPOINT

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION

The teaching of Speech in our Tennessee secondary has not always been what it should be. In too many instances, a principal, usually with very little familiarity with Speech, discovers that there is sufficient demand to run a section or two of a Speech course, and so he may look down the list of current teachers and give someone the good news--"Guess what you're going to teach this semester." Or there may already be some courses being taught at a school where the "Speech teacher" has moved; in interviewing applicants for the position vacated, the thrust of the administrative concern may be towards some other academic area, and then as an afterthought the applicant may be told--"Oh yes, we'd like for you to teach some Speech classes, direct some plays, and run a debate program."

RESULT #1--PANIC!!!! A teacher without sufficient academic training is forced into teaching something outside his area in order to hold a job in a tight job market. Books are read, telephone calls are made, prayers are said, in an effort to get ready to "teach Speech."

RESULT #2--DETERIORATION OF QUALITY!!!! The students suffer. They are not taught by someone with sufficient training, but they are forced to study Speech under someone who has to do it to keep a job.

Why do we allow this situation to exist? Current certification standards in the state of Tennessee are simply too lax and too "easy." I doubt that high school principals would take a prescription from someone with comparable pharmaceutical training, yet they will allow someone to "prescribe" techniques for speaking with just a token training.

Step #1 on our part should be to use our influence--as an association and as educators in a given region to change state certification requirements to where a person would be required to take 30 semester hours in Speech & Theatre before they would be turned loose on our young people. Furthermore, these hours should be courses that will actually train them to meet the varied responsibilities of the High School teacher. Changes in requirements should come at the state level, so that we can have uniform requirements throughout the state.

The benefits will be great. We can have teachers who are more highly trained to teach Speech. Furthermore, we can have people being trained at the high school level who will not be turned off by inadequate teaching, but who may be motivated to continue their Speech training at the college level.

-- d.w.

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Looking at the problems related to the quality of instruction in Speech in Tennessee High Schools, one might point the finger at the high school principal. For he (or she) is the one who makes the decision about who teaches what, and what speech courses, if any, are offered. Because of staffing problems, changing student populations and tight budgets "qualified" speech teachers are often not available.

Those teachers of speech (whether certified or not) in Tennessee high schools have done a fantastic job. Students from their programs consistently do well in college speech programs and as communicators in college and in their careers. The real problem may very well rest with the certification standards. Occasionally, however, the "certified" teacher isn't really the person that does the best job of providing the quality of learning experiences necessary. If the certification standards aren't tight enough, people who really aren't qualified may be eligible to teach speech. So while the issue here may be certification clarification, the real problem is far deeper.

As educators we assume that if a student has taken certain courses that a student could change his strategies and teach a similar course. Oh, we are aware of the problem. We do offer one semester of "methods" to try to re-orient the student into "teacher." We even provide student teaching opportunities where a "practicing" "professional" supervises

the student teacher "teaching." I believe the heart of the issue lies in determining criteria which will help us identify potential teachers. These criteria should be applied to all subject areas. In essence this does relate to the certification standards, but it is more than simply listing the courses the student took as an undergraduate.

For example, does the "teacher" exhibit a mastery of the content, does the teacher have the basic information to share. Does the "teacher" have the motivation to restructure his knowledge to be able to share it in a learning situation. Does the teacher have the communication skills necessary to be able to encode so that the student is motivated to learn? Does the "teacher" care about people (students; those manipulated objects in the learning situation)?

-- Ralph Hillman