

AIMING FOR PROFESSIONALISM:
TEACHER SELECTION *

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During the fall of 1979, the Autonomous University of Chapingo created its language center in the hopes of fulfilling its students' needs and desires for learning foreign languages. This in turn created a need for qualified teachers, both of which are not anything new to our profession. However, as part of our university's policy on hiring new teachers, all applicants are required to submit themselves to an admissions exam. Having very little experience in the field of testing foreign language teachers, we knew what we wanted to test for but not how to do it.

First we divided the test into three basic parts: one, an applicant's knowledge of the material to be taught; two, his knowledge of methodology and the teaching skills necessary to apply it; three, the applicant's motivation or professional attitude towards teaching in general. We found the last one the most difficult to judge. How do you test someone's professionalism?

This paper will describe our efforts in selecting teachers as professionals, as well as evaluating their level of knowledge about the material to be taught. The actual process of selection was divided into five parts.

- 1) Curriculum Evaluation
- 2) English Language Test
- 3) Written Exam on Methodology
- 4) Exposition of a Class
- 5) Interview by a Panel

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1. EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM VITAE

After a group discussion of the five parts of our exam, what they were supposed to evaluate and what we hoped to achieve with them, we came to the conclusion that perhaps the sum total of the parts would not only give us a good picture of a candidate's talents and capacities, but also a broad idea of how professional he or she was. After all, an exam of this scope and complexity is not easily taken in stride if the person is not professionally inclined, especially in the case of new or fairly new teachers.

We also came to the conclusion that a good measure of a person's professional attitude is reflected in the Curriculum Vitae. So we made the director's reading of it a requirement before any candidate could pass on to the other four parts of the exam.

We wanted to be sure our candidates had degrees or "Passantfas" in some university subject (a university requirement, which we're wholeheartedly in agreement with).

The points taken into consideration for the scoring of the Curriculum Vitae fall into three basic categories: Academic level, which includes the applicant's degrees and special teaching/linguistic courses he may have taken; Professional experience, which includes the number of years teaching, publications, designing of didactic material, lectures, workshops, etc.; and finally Command of other languages, (see Table 1). The average score of the Curriculum Vitae is worth 20% of the total score of the exam.

This part of our exam is the easiest to score because the scoring is cut and dry. The interpretation one gives to the information is not cut and dry and usually generates a great deal of discussion among the panel members. Many questions which arise here are sometimes answered by the candidates themselves in the last part of our exam, which is the personal interview.

ACADEMIC LEVEL 40%		PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE 40%				COMMAND OF OTHER LANGUAGES 20%
30% A	10% B	20% C	5% D	5% E	10% F	A. Degrees B. Special Courses C. No. of years teaching D. Publications E. Didactic Material F. Lectures, Work- shops, etc.
Evaluation of Curriculum Vitae						

Table 1

2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST (ELT)

The English Language Test, which evaluates the applicant's reading/writing ability, is the next step in our exam and is usually presented on the same day as the written exam on methodology. Its score is worth 25% of the total score.

In preparing the test we set ourselves two general objectives: one, to create an activity as near as possible to the one a teacher would have to cope with at our center; and two, to try to discover if a person is a teacher by trade and not by accident.

We all had experiences as applicants presenting admission exams for teaching positions and none of us felt that the activities we dealt with in order to pass those exams fit our general objectives: activities such as a multiple choice grammar test, a composition on current events, the answering of reading comprehension questions based on an article, or a cloze test.

We also decided that our activity would have to meet the following three requirements:

- 1) The writer must have something to say.
- 2) He/she must be motivated to write about something that has personal value to him/herself and that the writer would like to communicate.
- 3) The task must be pragmatic in as much as it relates to contexts of discourse that are known to the writer and that the writer is trying to make known to the reader (1).

The activity chosen is to have the applicants write an essay based on an article dealing with some aspect of the teaching field. (2) In the essay the applicants have to touch on certain points specified by the panel. These points were intended to encourage the candidates to express their opinions.

When evaluating the essays the panel members tried not to grade them on the opinions expressed but on how they were expressed, taking into account the following questions: Were they clear, backed up with strong arguments? Did they reflect comprehension of what was read? Were the points specified by the panel covered? Were the lexical, syntactical and semantical aspects in good working order? Were the ideas organized? Was the style appropriate?

The essays are scored on a scale from 1 to 10. Each member

of the panel arrives at a score as he/she sees fit. But all the panel members have agreed to take the aforementioned points into consideration.

All candidates have to present the exam including native speakers. The reason for this is that there are great numbers of native speakers teaching English in Mexico who haven't had pedagogical/linguistical training. Many of these native speakers have the added disadvantage of not being able to use the language as well as professional teachers have to. It's simply not enough to speak English well. A communication problem on the language test usually repeats itself in the classroom demonstration.

We found that there were non-native speakers whose scores are high enough to be accepted for the job and native speakers whose scores weren't.

Up to now, looking at the performance of the teachers who have been hired through our admissions exam, we feel that our language exam has been a fairly good measure of the control they have over the language. But there's always room for improvement and we'll be reevaluating the test and trying to make it more efficient.

The following are samples of the types of questions found on this section of the test:

- 1) HOW WOULD YOU GO ABOUT MOTIVATING A PERSON TO EXPRESS HIMSELF ON AN EXAM?
- 2) WHY WOULDN'T A NATIVE SPEAKER CONSENT TO TAKE AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST?
- 3) WHAT SKILLS WOULD YOU INCLUDE ON THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEST?
- 4) WHAT IS LANGUAGE COMPETENCE?
- 5) WHAT IMPORTANCE DOES THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES HAVE AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL?
- 6) WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY AS A TEACHER IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS? HOW DOES A TEXTBOOK FIT IN WITH THIS PHILOSOPHY?

- 7) NAME 4 TEACHING METHODOLOGIES. WHICH WOULD YOU SUSCRIBE? GIVE YOUR REASONS.
- 8) WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ACHIEVEMENT TEST AND A DIAGNOSTIC TEST? WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A DIAGNOSTIC TEST TO BE VALID?
- 9) WHAT ARE THE FACTORS YOU WOULD TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN DESIGNING COURSE MATERIALS FOR A PROGRAM OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES?

3. WRITTEN EXAM ON METHODOLOGY

Diller states in the introduction of his book, The Language Teaching Controversy, "The discrepancy between the successes and failures in foreign language learning is so embarrassing to teachers that it has made language acquisition the most emotion ridden and controversial aspect of linguistic theory. And the 'new' methods for language teaching which are continually being invented are advertised as if they were patent medicines for some heretofore incurable ailment." (3).

For us, truer words have never been spoken. This brings to mind the countless times we've seen a teacher teach by the book. By what book? By the textbook of course, as if it were a Bible that had to be followed to the letter. How sad to come across teachers who don't know why they're doing a certain activity or why they're doing it the way they are.

Today texts are coming out with better teachers manuals than before, with explanations of the whys and wherefores. But this is not enough. We teachers shouldn't have to depend on a text all the time. A text cannot be counted on to suffice in all situations. We have to know why we're doing what we are, adding to, subtracting from and changing our tests to fit our very particular students and situation.

We should each consciously develop our own philosophies, and methods and techniques. But in order to do this we have to set ourselves within a context of what there is, what's been done before, how it's been done and what the results have been. We have to learn, in order to teach. In our field one can never learn enough.

Teacher training programs are costly and time consuming. We're not equipped for that at our center and so, we look for trained and experienced teachers to hire. We want teachers who know the 'whys' behind what they teach in the classroom. We test for theory on paper and for practice in the classroom. We test for people who want to continue to learn and whose interests are vocational.

Our written exam on methodology consists of two parts: one, the questions on theory; and two, the questions on philosophy. Each section is scored separately on a scale from 1 to 10. The average score of the written exam on methodology is worth 10% of the total score.

On the theory section the applicants must choose two out of three essay questions, to be answered in Spanish or English. The applicants can be as brief or as lengthy as they wish. On the philosophy section the applicants choose four out of seven questions.

The panel is aware that bias can crop up in scoring when they are considering opinions that differ from their own. But they consciously try to avoid this by considering all opinions welcome as long as they are well stated and backed up. Any essay which expresses opinions or makes sweeping statements with no arguments to support them would be given a low score no matter how much the reader agrees with the writer.

At our center we're interested in having colleagues whose philosophies resemble ours but not to the point of committing the error of twinning which is stagnating. We feel a language center, in order to grow and be healthy, needs a variety of personalities and philosophies; complementary yes, but not identical.

In half of the cases, applicants scored higher on the philosophy section than on the theory section. In the other half of the cases, the opposite was true. Generally the mean difference between the written exam on methodology and the classroom demonstration was .08 points in favor of the written exam. This might indicate that "It's easier said than done." But we have to admit that our applicants are under a great deal of tension during the classroom demonstration and that could account for some of those points. The better the written scores the better the scores on the classroom demonstration, and vice versa.

These types of questions are included in our admissions exam because we feel they give us a more complete picture of the candidate and they serve as a back-up to the classroom demonstration.

HOW DO WE SEPARATE QUESTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY THEORY AND PEDAGOGY? ARE THEY CLEARLY SEPARATE FROM ONE ANOTHER? DO THEY OVERLAP IN PLACES? DO THEY HAVE A SUBORDINATE RELATIONSHIP TO ONE ANOTHER?

4. EXPOSITION OF A CLASS

Because it is the most important part of our admissions exam, the score of the classroom demonstration is worth 35% of the total. Aside from being an activity which the center considers important, it's also a university requirement. University law states that all applicants must give a classroom demonstration to be evaluated by the participating students and a panel of teachers in the presence of a representative of the university authorities.

Education today is based on the teaching-learning process, with the emphasis on the learning and the learner. On the teaching side of the process we have several important considerations for the planning of educational tasks. For instance, knowledge of what the students are going to learn, expressed in objectives, definition of contents, selection of methodology and establishment of evaluations. Once the planning is done, the teacher uses his training, talent and knowledge to carry out the tasks. This part of our exam evaluates the applicants on their planning and performing in a classroom situation and through this, their didactic training and their knowledge of the subject matter.

The day before the demonstration the applicants are given a list of themes that have been covered in three different language levels, so that they can familiarize themselves a bit with the students' context. Then on the day of the demonstration, two hours before to be exact, they are told what level they'll be teaching and they're given a list of themes they have to cover. They have to plan material for a 1 hour-15 minute class period. The candidates are always welcome to use any and all of the materials available at the center for their demonstration.

The two questionnaires listed below are used to evaluate the applicants, based on the considerations we listed for the planning and the performing of educational tasks. The students' questionnaire consists of nine items, the teachers' of fourteen. Each item is scored as follows: Muy Bien (10), Bien (8), Regular (6), Mal (4) and Muy Mal (2).

As far as results are concerned, we've already mentioned that the scores for the classroom demonstration are usually lower than the scores on the written exam covering methodology. They are also usually lower than the scores for the English language test. They would probably be even lower if the students weren't included in this section because students grade higher than teachers. This might be due to the fact that the teachers are grading on knowledge of subject matter as well as on aspects of specialized language teaching methodology; and the students are asked to grade on a receptive basis only.

There's no doubt in our minds after looking over the table of the scores for the twelve applicants, that we teachers were hard on them in evaluating their classroom demonstrations. (See table 2.). But that's our biggest responsibility as teachers, to do a good job in the classroom. And we can't complain, the teachers we've hired do just that.

STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE

- INTRODUCCION AL TEMA.
- ORGANIZACION Y SECUENCIA DEL TEMA.
- Claridad en sus explicaciones.
- Actitud frente al grupo.
- ¿Cómo considera Ud. que fue su aprendizaje?
- Manejo de los recursos auxiliares.
- Técnicas para la participación del grupo.
- Uso del tiempo.
- Disponibilidad para aclarar dudas y corregir errores.

TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

- Opportunity for students to practice structures or language items being taught.
- Organization of class activities.
- Handling of these activities.
- Distribution of four skills being taught.
- Demonstration of knowledge of subject matter.
- Selfassurance (relative) etc.

Candidate	Curriculum Vitae 20%	Interview 10%	Language Exam 25%	Methodology Exam 10%		CLASS Exposition 35%		Overall Evaluation
				Theory	Philosophy	Students	Teachers	
1	4.6	8.5	9.3	8.4	8.6	8.7	7.1	7.8
2	7.1	8.5	8.0	7.6	7.5	8.4	6.0	7.6
3	7.0	8.6	9.8	9.0	9.0	8.6	8.0	8.5
4	5.2	6.6*	6.0	6.5	7.2	4.6	5.5	5.6
5	6.4	7.5	7.5	8.6	8.4	8.5	8.2	7.7
6	5.0	8.0	9.0	7.6	8.0	8.6	5.5	7.4
7	4.5	7.4	8.9	6.8	6.5	8.6	6.5	7.3
8	5.3	6.1	6.8	6.0	6.6	4.9	3.3	5.5
9	5.7	8.9	9.7	9.0	8.2	7.8	7.2	8.0
10	7.1	8.5	9.1	8.6	8.3	7.2	8.0	8.0
11	6.6	8.1	7.5	8.1	7.5	8.5	6.9	7.6
12	8.2	9.6	9.3	8.9	9.0	9.0	7.5	8.8

EVALUATION OF TWELVE CANDIDATES

Table 2

5. THE INTERVIEW

We try to make this interview as profitable as possible for ourselves and for the candidate. We feel that the interview allows us to come to know the applicant as a person and evaluate his various facets in both personality and work experience. If he reacts by becoming defensive or aggressive, now is a good time to observe that and decide if we want to live with it.

The interview might also allow the candidate to know and make personal judgements about his interviewers. It wouldn't be unusual for some to say they disliked their prospective colleagues and reject further association.

One interviewer, after completing the process, complained to the director of another department, who had recommended him, "I didn't know they were going to ask me all those questions in English!"

As for the questions themselves, they are chosen to explore attitudes and knowledge of the person. In case the applicant avoids an issue in the written work we can explore it in conversation. Some of the written work can also be discussed in greater detail.

The questions are asked informally with each interviewer handling a general subject in a prescribed order. Some questions have no value except to prepare for another. No question is designed as a deliberate trap.

We have divided the interview into 4 primary sections with 4 or 5 questions in each. They are asked informally, according to the personality of the interviewer.

The four divisions are: group A, Human Relations and Stability; group B, Textbook Planning and Pedagogy; group C, Teaching Objectives; group D, Group Work and Experience. A few samples from group A: "What in your experience is the ideal working relationship between teachers and their immediate authority?" From Textbook Planning is: "If given the opportunity to plan an ESP course, what aspect would you feel the most competent to work with and develop?" This question gives us insight into the candidates adaptability and usefulness in our writing projects.

In section C we lead with the question, "Do you teach by objectives?" This allows us to know the persons knowledge of Mexican Educational

Policies and we seek his reactions and solutions. In the last section D we wish to know if a candidate can work with our basic philosophy of group-help study.

Our questions were written by our own professors after discussion and a mutual sorting out of overall interview objectives. Each chose an area and wrote a series of questions which were then modified into final form by all those concerned. We tried to avoid catch questions and those which expressed covert belligerence on our part. Certain things we sought to avoid such as being too specific and therefore not allow personal broad preference and also direct personal questions. Actually a person's sexual preferences and political leanings are relevant only if they would interfere in carrying out our regular classroom duties or affect the function of our department adversely.

As the group interview is a requirement of our university selection process, we have attempted to use it for what it is ideally proposed, that is, an objective mutual exploration of a candidates qualifications and a furtherance of understanding within our fraternity.

FOOTNOTES

1. Oller, 1979, page 384
2. Crotty Campbell, 1979, page 31
3. Diller, 1969, page 2

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