Testing for technical proficiency is like testing penmanship to decide whether a person can write effectively. A tech test might yield a surface representation of what an applicant can do but gives no indication of whether he or she is equipped to use technology effectively for teaching and learning.

And I wonder, could we ever agree on what “technical proficiency” looks like, or how to test it? In our era of ever-morphing technologies, would a test yield anything but a snapshot of minimum proficiency with the tools of the moment? What minimum proficiency would we settle for? The entire idea gives me a headache, and I’d like to propose a more holistic alternative that gets at proficiency, dispositions, and plain good teaching.

Application and interview processes give a hiring committee all it needs to select a technically competent teacher—if they pay attention to key things. To begin with, the application process itself is an authentic test a teacher...
We ask our students to take proficiency tests before they can progress to the next grade level. It is only fair to require the educators who teach them to take an aptitude test as well.

A tech test might yield a surface representation of what an applicant can do but gives no indication of whether he or she is equipped to use technology effectively for teaching and learning.

Teachers should be required to demonstrate proficiency in the use of technology for planning and instruction before ever entering the classroom. This will force the improvement of teacher training programs, and schools will be able to focus more on technology programs for curriculum and instructional delivery rather than for basic technology skills. The teachers would become capable technology users who would understand that the opportunities that instructional technology affords can make the practice of teaching more efficient.

—Helena Johnson has an EdS in educational technology and is a former classroom educator who currently works for eChalk, a K–12 educational software company. She has more than 13 years of experience in classroom teaching and instructional technology training.

Copyright © 2010, ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education), 1.800.336.5191 (U.S. & Canada) or 1.541.302.3777 (Int’l), iste@iste.org, www.iste.org. All rights reserved.