



TEACHERS CAN'T BE "OVERQUALIFIED"

Case 1: "Well," the interviewer said, "I see you have a doctorate and six years teaching experience. That's nice, but we really need someone with a master's degree. We'll keep your application on file."

Case 2: "No," the assistant superintendent said, "we don't have a pay scale for teachers with doctorates. We already pay above state minimum; I doubt we'd pay you more."

Case 3: "Since you have a doctorate," the personnel director said, "you probably wouldn't want to remain a teacher in the public schools anyway."

Isolated cases? Probably not. Becoming overqualified is the eighth deadly sin—in education at least. And the paradox is at once apparent. No other segment of society pushes advancing one's education as vehemently as the education profession itself.

In education we talk a great game. We offer incentives for persons of limited means to obtain advanced knowledge. We applaud those who finish high school, who go to college, who complete degrees, and we all nod agreement that education is vital to our society and its future. But actions speak louder than words.

The seeming unwillingness of many educators to increase their own educational or technical expertise has caused school patrons to urge legislators to "do something." No longer are college and university professors "safe" from criticism—or legislative actions. The whole

profession is under fire.

Legislative mandates overlook critical aspects of the situation, however, if they do not provide incentives for educators to pursue additional work or credentials—especially when the educator possesses a master's degree. Case 2 above illustrates what can happen to the "overqualified" as far as monetary incentives are concerned.

If an educator earns a doctorate, to what end may he or she apply it in the field of education? The choices are limited: become a school administrator, become an instructor or administrator in higher education, or work for a state department of education. Advanced degrees are often seen as precluding anyone's wish to remain a classroom teacher. They may even spell occupational disaster for elementary and secondary educators.

Ambitious educators are caught between paradoxical extremes: applying for a position without the credentials may result in failure, but obtaining the credentials first may result in unemployment or, perhaps, unemployability. Many administrators are reluctant to hire a teacher viewed as "upwardly mobile." Other administrators feel threatened by the "overeducated."

Is there a solution? Yes, it's one of semantics.

The time has come to expunge the term "overqualified" from our collective vocabularies. Instead, the term "well qualified" should describe educators who attain a master's or doctorate. In the recruitment process, job candi-

dates' advanced degrees must be considered evidence of a belief in and commitment to education.

And, finally, we must stop degrading those who want a doctorate and a classroom position too. We must be willing to reward them with incentives (monetary and other) and respect (not grudgingly, but sincerely offered for their accomplishments). Criticism of colleagues who attain a doctorate reflects poorly on the one who criticizes—and on the education profession as well. ■

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