

A Word of Advice & the Pre-Employment Process for Educators

~ by Michael R. McGough

This research summary is part of a ten-year, and hopefully ongoing, initiative to look at two specific topics related to the teaching profession. These topics are:

- (1) the critical attributes of the professional pre-employment process for teachers and
- (2) advice experienced educators feel is important to share with those new to the profession.

Although both of these topics are focused on the early stages of a teaching career, there most definitely are implications for all periods of the profession.

One's potential as a teacher and one's familiarity with the pre-employment process are not necessarily matched. As a result there is good reason to believe that an individual with great promise as a teacher may never see the inside of a classroom because of difficulties with the pre-employment process. In an effort to address this dilemma, I have sought to thoroughly research all aspects of the pre-employment process. The initial task was to identify and isolate the various essentials of the process. After researching and

examining individuals, my third undertaking was to bring the research findings together as a congruent, interrelated whole. My research process is currently at this point.

This research has been nothing short of fascinating. Resources related to pre-professional practices for educators are numerous. There is, however, significant variance and inconsistency in the techniques and practices that are prescribed and supported. The goal of this research has been, and continues to be, the development of a body of generally accepted techniques and practices associated with various aspects of the pre-employment process. These include, but are not limited to: initial job search, pre-application research, philosophy development, cover letter writing, resume development, interviewing skills, portfolio building, and familiarization with related elements of the application process for teachers. The research sphere has included published accounts of contemporary trends and practices, interviews with professional educators at all levels of practice, observations of various elements of the pre-employment process in school-based settings, informal and formal interviews and surveys, and transcripts from small and large-group seminars offered by experienced educators for those entering the profession.

Although this body of research is neither definitive nor permanent,

there is good reason to believe that it does represent current trends and generally accepted practices in the pre-employment process for teachers. Teacher employment is a dynamic process and as a result, research related to it must be ongoing if it is to remain contemporary. If this research is applied during the pre-employment process, it is hoped that candidates will be better prepared to successfully engage in the process.

Having had the solid fortune of having good mentors throughout my career in public education, my appreciation for the mentoring process is strong. Most states now have a formal mentoring process that serves both the new teacher and the mentor well. Currently, there is a significant body of research regarding these formalized mentoring relationships. My interest is in a different, less formalized, and much broader aspect of the professional mentoring process. Rather than looking at the one-on-one relationships of typical mentoring, my focus is on that body of information, experience, and awareness that experienced educators feel is important to share with those coming to or those new to the profession.

Thus far a number of research tools, formats and techniques have been employed to gather data. These include recorded personal interviews, small group discussions, individual written

surveys, personal phone surveys with written transcripts, e-mail interviews, and “panel of expert” meetings. The “panel of expert” meetings consist of groups of educators who have been called together to work with college students nearing or engaged in their student teaching experience. Both specific and general questions are posed to the panel members, and their responses are documented and added to the data base.

Currently, I am working on analyzing and synthesizing the data gathered thus far to identify patterns, trends and broad similarities in these powerful *words of advice*. Obviously, this is an ongoing research project for which there is no foreseeable end. The ultimate goal of this phase of my research is to make the advice offered by experienced educators available to those considering, about to enter, or new to the profession. Thus far we have developed a video (a rather amateurish effort), PowerPoint presentations, seminars, support materials for lectures, and are currently working on article and book-length manuscripts.

Note from the editor: Dr. McGough will have a more detailed article about this research in a future edition of IEL.

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BA in Education at the University of Pittsburgh, a master's in Liberal Arts at Western Maryland College, his Principal's Certification at Shippensburg University, and D.Ed in Adult Education at Pennsylvania State University. He taught high school social studies for sixteen years before serving as middle school then elementary principal for thirteen years. He currently is Associate Professor at York College of Pennsylvania and serves as Coordinator, Elementary Education and as Director, Professional Development Division. He has written numerous articles published in Pennsylvania education journals as well as a number of books on Pennsylvania history. Dr. McGough can be contacted at drmike3@comcast.net.
