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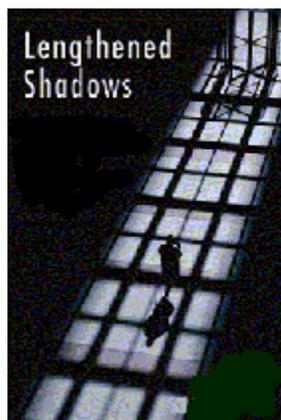


NOTES & COMMENTS

## FIRE to the rescue

What is the biggest swindle in the educational establishment today? A tough question, that: the contenders for the prize are many. But there is a lot to be said—by which we mean “said against”—the whole teacher-training and teacher-certification industry. It nurtures a closed-shop, guild-like mentality, and one, moreover, that is reflexively committed to the entire menu of illiberal, politically correct causes. Consider, for example, the use of so-called “dispositions tests” as one element in judging a teacher’s qualifications. As the indispensable John Leo reported recently in *U.S. News & World Report*, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (how’s that for a mouthful?) has been urging that teachers be evaluated not only on their knowledge and skills but also on their “dispositions.” Which means? Well, according to NCATE, it simply means those beliefs and attitudes that inform a person’s “moral stance.” Well, that sounds okay. But what sort of moral stance? In 2002, a NCATE spokesman said that an education school may require a commitment to “social justice.” You see where this is going. As William Damon, a professor at Stanford, noted, the whole idea of “dispositions tests” has given education schools “unbounded power over what candidates may think and do, what they may believe and value.”

Naturally, NCATE denies any sinister intentions. But, as Leo observes, educational schools—already “a liberal monoculture”—are using dispositions theory “to require support for diversity and a culturally left agenda, including opposition to what the schools sometimes call ‘institutional racism, classism and heterosexism.’” Leo provides several examples, including the case of Edward Swan, a forty-two-year-old student at Washington State University’s college of education. The college threatened to terminate Swan after he had failed four “professional disposition evaluations.” The



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problem? Swan has the temerity to be a) traditionally religious and b) conservative. He actually went so far as to express conservative opinions in class. According to Leo, he even let slip that he opposes affirmative action and doesn't believe homosexuals should adopt children. The last straw came when a teacher espied the statement "diversity is perversity" scribbled in Swan's copy of a textbook.

This fall, Washington State gave Swan an ultimatum: Sign a contract with the university—a contract that stipulated, *inter alia*, mandatory diversity training and the possibility of above-normal scrutiny—or leave the college. The good news is that Swan had the wit to contact the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, the Philadelphia-based civil liberties group that, as Leo put it, "does what the American Civil Liberties Union should be doing but usually won't," i.e., help individuals who are discriminated against because they express opinions that are at odds with the illiberal liberalism that is orthodoxy in today's educational system. FIRE gets results. Almost immediately, a local newspaper reported, Swan's situation changed. The faculty withdrew its demand that Swan sign the confession—we mean "contract." The bad news is that the college of education intends to continue using "dispositions tests." One naughty reporter asked the dean of the college whether Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia would pass a dispositions evaluation were he a student at the college. "I don't know how to answer that," the dean replied. Any guesses?

This article originally appeared in

*The New Criterion*, Volume 24, December 2005, on page 2

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