A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SEVERAL IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS OF A CAREER IN TEACHING

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"I believe the children are our future--teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside--give them a sense of pride..." The chorus of this beautiful song should echo the feelings of teachers everywhere. Teaching young children is surely one of the most demanding and rewarding careers available.

Elementary school teachers are required to be some of the most multi-faceted creatures on earth. They must be able to discipline students, while at the same time earn their respect and encourage their enthusiasm (SIGI 4.9). "In addition to being knowledgeable in their subject, the ability to communicate, inspire trust and confidence, and motivate students, as well as understand their educational and emotional needs, is essential for teachers" (U.S. 155). It is also recommended that teachers possess the qualities of organization, dependability, patience, and creativity (U.S. 155).

While all of these requirements may seem overwhelming, teachers are not expected to be born with them in their genes. In order to receive certification to teach, a person must have a bachelor's degree, and in some states their major must be education. "Most school systems prefer, and some require, that teachers start taking courses towards a master's degree within a certain period after beginning employment" (SIGI 4.6). In addition to the college work, teachers must also participate in a certain amount of classroom observation and teaching with supervision to obtain certification (SIGI 4.8).

"All fifty states and the District of Columbia require public school teachers to be certified" (U.S. 154). Certification is usually given by the state board of education for one of three areas. An elementary education major may become certified to teach either preschool through the third grade, first grade through sixth or eighth grade, or a special subject, such as music or art (U.S. 154). Some experiences that have proven helpful in the certification process are working as "an instructional assistant, volunteering to assist elementary school teachers, [or] any work with young children" (SIGI 6.1).

Of course the "$50,000 question" is: What is the job market like? The answer is "good." The population of five to thirteen year olds is expected to
increase through the year 2002 (SIGI 4.23). Also working to the advantage of prospective teachers is the fact that in the late 1990's a considerable number of teachers will reach retirement age, significantly increasing the number of job openings available. As is customary, mathematics, science, and special education teachers will be in especially high demand (U.S. 155).

Teachers' salaries, although the but of numerous jokes, are not as unrealistically low as people are led to believe. The beginning salary of elementary school teachers is about $24,500 per year. The average income for all public school teachers is $37,500 per year. These figures are usually less for private school teachers (SIGI 4.12-4.13). Any increase in salary usually comes as a result of additional training or increased experience. "Most teachers advance in the sense that they become more expert in the job that they have chosen" (Hopke 496).

Teachers have a fair amount of security in their jobs. "Most states have tenure laws that prevent teachers from being fired without just cause and due process" (U.S. 154). Teachers generally receive tenure status after they have satisfactorily completed three years of teaching (U.S. 154). However, tenure is not an absolute job guarantee. "Even tenured teachers may be laid off if enrollments decline" (SIGI 4.25).

Elementary school teachers must be willing to sacrifice a lot of their time during the school year. During semesters, teachers have about 37 hours of leisure time. However, teachers must use this time for "lesson preparation, grading, committee meetings, and parent conferences" (SIGI 4.19). While teachers do have a higher-than-average amount of free time in the summer months, they may often use the time for work towards their master's degree or earning additional income (SIGI 4.19). While the schedule may look intimidating, it helps to prevent people not dedicated to children from entering the field. "...Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside--give them a sense of pride..." BE A TEACHER!
Works Cited

