Why I Want to Teach

MaryHannah Schwarzen

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To explain my desire to be a part of the teaching profession, I must first start with my understanding of the profession, and then how I believe my career fits within these parameters.

As I understand it, teaching is hard but rewarding work, and is far more than simply teaching a lesson at the front of a class. While this is the typical picture of a teacher in her “element,” I realize there is much behind-the-scenes work that goes into getting her to this point. A teacher must be constantly assessing her classroom, watching the progress of her students, and how they are doing with material that is presented. She must differentiate lessons as she sees students struggling and must help them reach goals as best she is able. A teacher must also create lesson plans, pulling from a great variety of resources to decide on elements that will best help her students increase an interest in learning and a comprehension of the material offered. She must constantly compare her lessons to state standards, to assure excellence for the children in her care. She must offer opportunities to explore and must also model proper social interaction for students in preparation for their entrance into society.

My current plan upon graduation is to pursue a career with the Tennessee State Parks Department as a state park ranger. While this career might not initially appear like a type of educator (perhaps even especially not a history teacher!), it in fact uses all the same skills that a traditional teacher would use in her classroom. The Tennessee State Parks Department strives to educate citizens about the history of our amazing state, and initiate conservation of our resources through promoting awareness and appreciation. This is very similar to a social studies teacher, who is charged with raising the next generation of well-rounded citizens. Just so, a park ranger realizes that she must focus on the children visiting her park, as they are the next generation, and thus need to understand where we have come from, and why it is important to keep telling these stories.

A ranger is charged with creating programs as part of her park’s outreach to visitors. This is one of the ways she can interact with the public and help them learn more. To accomplish this, she must utilize resources to create these programs, and then must be able to present these programs in front of guests. This is incredibly similar to a teacher who creates a lesson plan, and then teaches the lesson to her class. A ranger must be able to read her crowd and choose a control method based on the personalities making up her audience. Similarly, a ranger must be able to help guide and assist visitors in the exploration process. These skills also are reflective of what a teacher might do in her classroom. It is for these reasons that I feel an education degree will best prepare me for the career path I have chosen.

Coming into this major, I already have several years’ teaching experience, both in-person and long-distance via Zoom and Skype. I have taught French for the last 4 years with an online homeschool resource, and taught preschoolers and kindergarteners at a local homeschool co-op for three years. Because of this, I already have experience in many of the skills a teacher needs—classroom management, lesson planning, differentiation, and more. I have also spent time working as a seasonal interpretive recreator at the Sgt. Alvin C. York State Historic Park, engaging with a wide variety of adults and children, and finetuning my presentation skills to a diverse range of audiences through park programs and house tours. I also bring with me an enthusiasm and passion to help kids become lifelong learners. It has not taken long for me to discover that I love teaching. From the aha-moments, to seeing a student who struggles succeed, to having the ability to impact the next generation, the challenges and joys of teaching awe and excite me. There is something special about the relationship between student and teacher, with which I have fallen in love.

Over the next two years, I hope to continue to learn more about what it takes to be an educator of excellence. While I am aware that I plan to use this degree in a rather unique, and perhaps unorthodox way, I feel that Bryan has already prepared me greatly. I am especially interested in learning teaching methods for exceptional children, as I would like to be able to cater my programs at the park even better to their unique learning styles. I would also like to continue my research into historical research methods, as these skills have proven vital in my work at the park already. These skills offer me the chance to perform quality research for the most accurate information, and thus translate into better programs and a more professional ability to answer questions. Finally, I would especially be interested in learning more about how to incorporate cross-curricular standards into lessons and park program outlines (for example, how can I get math into a history program?). I feel that this is something of value that will healthily enforce what students are learning in class and help them make connections to the bigger picture of our world and how it works.