

“What’s the Appeal, Again?”

Jackie Fuller

To me there is no profession that goes unappreciated or over looked more than teaching. I have always found it amazing that these individuals who are shaping the lives of America’s youth and future leaders salaries, per year, cannot even purchase a luxury car and may possibly be not even one percent of what Julia Roberts or Brad Pitt get paid to stand on the set of a movie. With that in mind, I set out to discover what attracts people to this profession. Is it the fact that it is perceived as family friendly career? Or is it because teachers have a passion for reaching out to kids? Does money not matter as long as they have touched one student’s life?

To find these answers I took to the halls of my alma mater, Canton South High School, that I had walked so many times before. The two interviewees each had an effect on my high school career, although in different ways and at different times. This being said, I couldn’t have thought of two people more perfect as subjects for this paper.

Mr. Chris Bergert, the husband of a lawyer and father of two young children, had a completely different view of his career than Mr. Clay Breedlove, who is single, has one car payment and lives in the apartment above his parent's garage. I had the privilege of having Mr. Bergert for three years as my art teacher. Not only did he serve as an educator but was also my outlet for frustration and the person who pushed me to see how far I could really go.

Since the time he entered my Sophomore Art II class as a first year high school teacher until the last day when I walked out as a weathered AP Art IV senior, I wondered what made him get out of bed every morning? As we walked into the brightly fluorescent lit white bricked walls, that question still loomed in the air.

"I have a feeling that I am going to be very depressed when I go home tomorrow. Those seniors have known about this project for three weeks now. And I know that half of them won't have it finished," he announced.

I was able to slide into the room undetected while he

was venting. Once he was finished I jokingly broke in, "So, what's the appeal, again?"

"Having students like you. And the rest of your senior class last year." With that being said, I began to question as to whether teachers change their approaches from year to year due to the students they must teach, and does he blame himself for the kids not turning in work?

"I don't think I change my approach, so to speak, as much as I adapt. Each day I have to adapt. There are days I question why am I doing this? Why am I here? And then there are those days when kids do what I ask and all assignments are turned in. I know that I said I enjoyed your class a lot last year but that doesn't mean your class has any more potential to do great works than this class does," he explained.

Mr. Bergert is a teacher who anyone could go to with any kind of problem. He is a shoulder to lean on and he befriends his students. I began to wonder if that might possibly be the reason as to why students are not turning things in on time. If a teacher is viewed by his students as a friend does that

teacher lose respect?

“Right now I have to adapt to the fact that this senior class isn’t going to show respect to me as an authority. But then again this class doesn’t show much respect for anything. I think that respect is necessary to any job, but right now it’s not something I’m worrying about,” he explained. If lack of respect isn’t what he views as the problem then what does he blame it on? Does he look to himself first?

“When kids don’t turn in their work first and foremost I question my ability. I ask look at what I’ve done and ask and what am I doing wrong? My job is to make you guys better and make you ready for the next level,” he replied passionately. What happens if all of his work does not give him the results he wants? Does he ever get discouraged when kids aren’t working to their potential? “I’ve lost the faith numerous times, but I keep coming back because as I said before there are classes like yours last year and that’s the silver lining. If you can’t find the silver lining you’ll go crazy.” But what happens if the silver lining cannot be found? Will he ever find himself as being anything

but a teacher?

“Right now I love my job and I still get excited. The day I can’t find the silver lining is the day I should get out of teaching. When I have to think of a reason to show up then I should look elsewhere.” Where is would that elsewhere be? What kind of toll would that change take on his family?

“I definitely don’t think that I’ll be teaching thirty years from now. I’m currently taking masters courses in administration so one day I may have an opportunity as being a vice principal or principal. No matter what I end up doing my first my first concern is that my family is taken care of.” Can he really manage to take care of his family being a teacher, though? What toll does his teaching take on his family?

“When I first started teaching I was coaching football as well. And then last year was the first year for AP. I was putting in fifty plus hours a week on top of the hours my wife was working. I had to cut back because during that time she was raising the kids Monday through Friday and that wasn’t fair. I don’t make enough to condone fifty hours a week working to

take that time away from my family. It's sad that we almost have to work those hours just to afford family healthcare insurance for your whole family," he says.

Mr. Bergert was definitely right and health care is going to be even harder to come by, especially in Ohio. The Ohio House "has added a language to the state **budget** (HB 66) that would force public education employees into a statewide health care program." ("Budget"). The Ohio Education Association believes that it will take away hard earned healthcare benefits from its members and takes away bargaining rights ("Budget"). What are common misconceptions that may misdirect individuals into teaching because it has the stigma of being a family friendly career?

"Teaching used to be family oriented; it's just like any other profession now. If you want to be the best at your job then you must log the extra hours. Another misconception is that it's a 'safe' job. With funding being the way it is now teaching jobs aren't even guaranteed." Mr. Breedlove shares the same sentiments. Unlike Bergert's calm low key classroom, Mr.

Breedlove's sophomore biology class was a zoo. As I walked in he was trying to calm the tension between two kids who looked as if they just escaped from the sewer and blaming each other for calling each other the 'F' word, which instantly put me in mind of babysitting.

It was obvious to me, even when I was a student, that Mr. Breedlove's outlook on teaching would be completely different from Mr. Bergert's. Unlike Mr. Bergert, Mr. Breedlove was not married, had no children and lived in the apartment above his parent's garage. Another discrepancy is that teaching was not what he set out to do. Because of this I wondered if his approach to teaching was more lax than Mr. Bergert's, and if he felt as if he settled when he became a teacher?

"I originally wanted to be a doctor, but that couldn't happen because I didn't have the grades. I don't feel as if I settled so to speak because I never had the potential. Right now teaching is my main career and I take it seriously. I have no choice but to take it seriously." I also wonder what makes him get out of bed in the morning, what are his motives if he doesn't

have to support a family?

“The best part of my job is the interaction with the kids. Even though sometimes I feel like I’m on Sesame Street it’s not monotonous. I’ve also come to the realization that I have to work, and I don’t have a choice. I feel that if I don’t come to work everyday and work 100% then I’m stealing money.” When I was in high school, Mr. Breedlove was dabbling with screenplay writing. I wondered if that is what he saw himself doing instead of teaching, or if he has developed other career aspirations? If he were in Mr. Bergert’s position would he be working on so many different projects?

“Right now my brother and I are starting our own medical equipment company, and a partner and I have been sending out screenplays to production companies. Three of them are in the works now. I would definitely not be having so many projects going on if I was married and had kids. There just wouldn’t be enough time. Even though I don’t have a wife or kids, I am a very family oriented person and I’m finding it difficult to juggle family life and career life even now,” he

explained. Mr. Breedlove made it no secret that teaching is not where he sees himself in five years. If people assume that this is a one in a million case they are wrong, teachers have been leaving the field at an alarming rate since 1994, and at an especially high rate in the Midwest ("Why Teachers Leave"). Even though the salaries in for teachers in the Midwest are appealing, the starting salaries are not as high as their counterparts on the coasts and this is part of the reason as to why interest in the profession is lacking ("Why Teachers Leave").

Mr. Breedlove also claimed that salary was an issue and part of the reason as to why we wished to leave teaching, but where did he see himself, screenplay writer, and medical equipment distributor? And if his medical company blossoms how would he combat the "time bind" as an executive?

"My ultimate goal would be to get out of teaching within the next two years. I make more money off one medical machine than I do in one month as a teacher. The screenplays are iffy. I would like to build the medical company eventually. It

wouldn't be a Fortune 500 necessarily, but it is showing signs of being a prosperous business." With Mr. Breedlove discussing the possibility of becoming an executive of a corporation or business, I questioned him about how he would combat the "time bind" problem.

"I would try my best to prevent the time bind creating a business that provides a family with everything it needs. I would put this as a provision in their contract and have them charged for it. I would have the paternity leave and day care. I believe that if the kids are happy, then the parent is happy and that equals a more productive worker." What was it about teaching that made it so unappealing? Why does he want to "get out" within the next two years?

"It's a total slap in the face to know that my starting salary was \$24,000 with all my schooling and a person with no schooling could be making quadruple that amount in a business or having their face on camera." What is Mr. Breedlove's view of teaching and family life? What does he think to be the reason for the salary to be so low?

“Teaching was originally seen as a job for women so that’s why the pay is lower. It wasn’t seen as prestigious. Now it’s hard to find a man with a family whose only job is teaching. More times than not their wife works or they have a second job. Teachers are at the mercy of the administration. The only time we get commented on is when we’re not performing. I constantly find myself having to keep the kids occupied, and I need a break from being in charge.” Mr. Breedlove is not the only one who shares the sentiments that teaching is viewed as a “women’s career.” “According to the National Education Association, just 21 percent of the nation’s 3 million teachers are men- the lowest percentage in 40 years” (Helmer). John Yeager an elementary school teacher at P.S. 72 in the Bronx, New York finds that men also face many stereotypes he is constantly asked by his female colleagues to carry heavy boxes and have been assigned to extra lunch duty or hall patrol because they are better at dealing with disciplinary problems (Helmer).

ManTeach is an organization that promotes teaching as a profession for men and believes that there are three main

reasons as to why there are low numbers of male teachers, “low status and pay, the perception that teaching is “women’s work,” and the fear of accusation of child abuse” (Helmer). There’s no debating that if teachers were paid the salaries of NBA players there’d be more males in the profession. The tide is slowly turning and slowly but steadily more men are entering the profession but it will be an uphill climb (Helmer.)

Works Cited

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Questions for discussion: While Drew's research leads him to new directions away from his uncle, Jackie's research keeps her coming back to her subjects, circling around them with information. What are some of the effects of this kind of analysis? How does using two "subjects" help her compare and contrast the teaching profession? Who seems to be "the" subject of this paper, Bergert or Breedlove?