

Strengthening Writing and Reading Skills

Read the article below. Then, write a five-paragraph reaction paper answer the following: What is the author's main idea? What did I learn from the article? How does the author's writing style relate to the Logical Sequencing Formula? What are **my** goals as a teacher?

The Rewards of Teaching

When you accept the responsibility to be a teacher, there is so much more that comes with that role than many realize. From the daily obligations to the emotional attachment, the cost of being a teacher can be overwhelming. Depending on the grade level, subject, and location, your obligation varies too. Of course, the individual factor, the “you factor” is what truly determines how much you give. And, how much you give is the biggest determination in how much you receive. I would like to believe that I give it my all and then some. To say that my obligation spills over into other aspects of my life would be truth. However, it does not negatively impact my life. Rather, it enriches my life and keeps me grounded.

Once upon a time, I stood at the front of a secondary classroom in a high school agricultural mechanics shop. I stood in front of freshmen and sophomores who wondered what this woman could possibly teach them about agricultural science that they could not learn from their family farms and ranches. What they could not tell by just looking at me is that I had been in their shoes. I had raised livestock in high school for county fairs. I had worked at the campus farm, moving hay, feeding animals, and building pens. And, they began to learn that about me as I learned about them. But, how did I get them to listen to me? Compassion and innovation. It is no secret that I often wear my heart on my sleeve (I have gotten a little smarter about it over the years, though). However, I let my kids know that I cared and was genuinely interested in them. As for innovation...well, in 1998, not a lot of high school teachers were using PowerPoint and if they were, they did not have my sense of design or usage. You see, my lessons have long been interactive, engaging, and aesthetically pleasing. For example, when we covered breeds of livestock, I knew what NOT to do...flashbacks of my high school experience have scarred me for life. No one wants to sit in a dark classroom as slide after slide of images of livestock flash

before the screen and a droning voice calls out the name of the breed. It is worse when class is right after lunch, and you are prone to nodding off anyway. So, my students got a two-day presentation via PowerPoint that coincided with a giant crossword puzzle. To them, they were playing a game and watching television. To me, they were learning breed names and characteristics. And through fidelity of design, that knowledge transferred to their final exam and later to field experience.

Perhaps the most memorable bad moment of my experience came when one of my students lashed out in retaliation for me being gone for a week. I had chaperoned a school trip out of state, leaving my students in the capable hands of my cooperating teacher. What I did not realize at the time was that one of my best students was the troublemaker in all of his other classes. Somehow, I had gotten through, and he did everything he could in my class for approval and recognition, going so far as to join one of the leadership development competition teams. But, when I left for that week, he saw it as my abandoning him. This is the part they do not teach you in those Instructional Methods courses. There is no textbook that tells you how to handle these situations. And I was completely unprepared when he suddenly stopped listening to me or following instructions. When I had finally had enough, I sent him out of the classroom to be dealt with by my cooperating teacher. If I had been unprepared for his disruptive behavior before, I was completely caught off guard by his reaction when he returned to class. The tears were welling up in his eyes when he looked at me squarely and asked why I left him and why I would send him away. In that instant, my heart shattered into a million pieces. That day, I had to question if I was emotionally prepared to be a teacher.

Here I stand (sit) 14 years later. Over time, I have been at the front of a variety of classrooms. I have delivered informal training sessions on software for co-workers (ever try to get a bunch of 50 year-old men to learn how to use a new email program?). I have designed continuing education training in subjects like road building, construction safety, emergency preparedness, and more. I have been in the room to watch the pilot testing of my courses and record learner feedback to make changes to my designs. And I have been at the front of college classrooms for four different institutions; Texas A&M University, Blinn College, the University of Georgia, and James Madison University. Being a post-secondary teacher is a different experience all together. You have a 50-50 shot on whether your students are there because they want to be or because some advisor told them to be there. And when you teach classes related to technology and how to

use it, the risks are higher. To anyone who tells you that these are the Digital Natives, the Millennials who inherently know how to use the tools, send them to me. Let them sit in my classes. Sure, my students can use some of the tools. But using them effectively and efficiently is something else entirely. Not to mention that knowing how to use Facebook does not in any way diminish the anxiety they feel when told that they have to learn how to use Photoshop, create a website, and produce a video.

That is where I have to be the teacher. And if you have read my philosophy on teaching, then you know that it is my humble opinion that by the end of the semester, I should have worked myself out of a job. That is to say my students should feel competent enough to use the tools, show others how to use them, and begin refining their personal philosophies as they use the tools more in their daily lives. I have to keep my students engaged and watch for those “glassy eye” moments where they feel overwhelmed and check-out of the situation. It is a fine line between challenging them and inundating them with too much information. This task gets more challenging when you move from a traditional classroom to an online environment, where you cannot see their faces. Here, I have to rely on all of those techniques proven by both research and practice. Active questioning, deliberate pauses, time to apply and practice...these all contribute to how I work in my online classes. I also have to make myself available for help. In my most recent experience, I am not on campus with my students to provide assistance when they need it. I am not even in the same state. However, I do have tools available. I am quick to respond to emails. I am happy to schedule one on one sessions using Eliminate/Collaborate. Remote desktop comes in handy when you need to be able to see what it is that is giving them a hard time.

So, what is the reward for all of this work? Occasionally you might find that they bring you gifts. That is a tangible reward. But, when your students answer their reflection activities with enthusiasm about their newfound skills, that's a pretty big emotional reward. When they come to you and ask you to help them with this project outside of your class, because they trust you that is a pretty big emotional reward. And once in a while, your students completely amaze you with a reward you never expected; something both tangible and emotional. That is where I am at today. Before I show you this reward, let me give you the backstory...

My LTLE 370 Instructional Technology students at James Madison University are pretty awesome. Few of them were familiar with all of the software we have used this semester. Most

had used PowerPoint, but never created their own custom template. They had all heard of Photoshop, but never used it. Dreamweaver is something that tech geeks use, not average students. And while some had played with iMovie or Movie Maker, they were few and far between. Each assignment I gave them brought on a new wave of anxiety, but I always tried to break it up into small, understandable steps. I built various video tutorials for them and created a YouTube playlist for them to follow. Their final project was to create videos in groups. They could pick the subject, and most wanted to do something for JMU after seeing a similar project I built with students at UGA. But one group wanted to make a promotional video for the class. I was intrigued and made sure they knew I was available if they had questions or needed my input. They never did consult me on the project, and I received the link to the video this morning.

To say that I am overwhelmed with emotion would be an understatement. The skills my students gained making this video are simply awesome. I am so proud of them for that. But more importantly, to see what they think of me and how they view me is nothing short of amazing.

When I was a student teacher so long ago, my kids called me “Miss D” since they did not want to mispronounce my last name. I find it fitting that somewhere along the way I grew up into “Professor D.”

When you agree to be a teacher and to stick with it, you hope that you are doing a good job and getting through. It is not often, though, that we get immediate feedback on this effort. So, this is where I definitely need to step back and appreciate my students, my profession, and my life. I am humbled and thankful to be their teacher.