

REFLECTIVE ESSAY #1

Reflective Essay #1

Lance A. Webel

Cincinnati Hills Christian Academy

Digital technology is transforming the way that teachers can research, plan, communicate, and present information both in and out of the classroom. While the rate of advancement of this technology may be staggering, however, it is clear that technology is no longer necessary for just the token “technologically advanced” teachers to learn. To be effective in the world where students live, it is essential that every teacher gain a basic and usable understanding and use of technology in the classroom (Laureate Education, 2002).

In all honesty, I have encountered very little new knowledge or skills so far in this particular course. This is not because of a lack of important course material, but because I simply have a lot of experience in this area. I use Word, PowerPoint, and Excel on a daily basis for classroom, administrative, and personal tasks and I am well aware of their capabilities and restrictions. I also use the Internet extensively for both consumptive and creative purposes ... and although this medium constantly changing, I feel that I’ve been able to remain aware in its evolution and involved in key elements of its basic tenants and uses.

Furthermore, this course closely aligns with the curriculum that I teach my middle school students. In preparation for my own classes, I have extensively studied these pieces of software and design principles and feel that I have a fairly good understanding of their use. I've long said that the best way to learn something is to teach someone else ... and teaching digital media classes has given me the opportunity to learn this subject

matter well. As a result, I've found the content of this course to be very affirming and encouraging to me as I compare it to the curriculum that I've designed for my 5th to 8th graders.

Three years ago, I chose to consolidate this curriculum, cutting out specialized software packages and focusing instead on Microsoft Office and Internet-based software alone. From a professional standpoint, this may sound ludicrous. Microsoft Word, for example, is a horrible medium to do page layout. PowerPoint is extremely unfriendly to designers, and Excel, though full-featured, is not very intuitive or well-integrated.

This decision, however, has accomplished what it was intended to do ... it has simplified our IT infrastructure, and more importantly, has intentionally led to greater student comprehension, ownership, and creativity. When assigned to create an animated cartoon in PowerPoint, for instance, students must harness some fairly complicated critical thinking and design strategies to make up for the software's limited capabilities. In the end, I have found that students leave my classroom with limited software-specific experience but a very flexible and adaptable understanding of design, basic programming, productivity, and creative thought.

Personally, although I sometimes miss using a good piece of professional software, I have found that using basic productivity software has kept me on my toes as well, forcing me to think creatively and encouraging me to help other teachers and students learn to use computers creatively as well. It has shown me the importance of

universal standards and has helped to encourage digital collaboration among my professional colleagues at school.

One thing that I intend to do differently after taking this course is to infuse more resources into my digital media classroom. I have always taught about design principles using my own knowledge and understanding alone. Through this course, however, I have found the value of well-organized text-based and web-based tutorials. I can clearly see how some learners would benefit from the visual examples and concrete examples provided in these resources, and I can also see how to better ensure a common basic understanding of design among all of my students. I understand that these resources will probably need to change yearly because of the organic nature of digital communication, but I still feel that pursuing some solid resources would be a wise and effective decision.

Overall, I am very glad that Walden chooses to cover this material in this course. There are far too many professionals who have little to no basic knowledge of design and software ... and without the ability to communicate effectively through digital media, teachers become less and less effective in the classroom. As Burmark states, learning design “will help you gain familiarity with [young people’s] natural way of getting information and help you teach them how to become more effective visual communicators” (2002). Truly, it is our responsibility to do what we need to do to not only stay ahead of our students, but to have a deep-rooted understanding of where we are leading them with our digital communication!

References:

Burmark, L. (2002). *Visual Literacy: Learn to See, See to Learn*. Alexandria, VA:
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Laureate Education, Inc. (Executive Producer). (2002). *Multimedia Tools: How to
Research, Plan, and Communicate with Technology* [Video recording].
Baltimore: Author.