

Northern Plains
Writing Project
Portfolio
2009

by
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Kathy Fimreite
NPWP 2009
Writing Prompt

Distinguishing Facts From Opinions

When students read, many don't always distinguish fact from fiction. This exercise is intended to help them analyze information.

Whether writing a story or a research paper, a student should use facts if they are available and if they plan to preserve the integrity of their writing. They should also learn to distinguish fact from fiction or opinion.

I chose to use the 10 facts from the 113 Stretches book to do this lesson, but any statements that might be pertinent to the current curriculum lesson would work.

Here are ten statements about pregnancy and abortion. Five of them are facts. Which five?

1. It is immoral to arrest anti-abortion protesters who believe they are exercising their right of free speech by blocking access to abortion clinics.
2. Pro-choice policies will be in jeopardy so long as men control the political system.
3. The number of abortions performed in the United States has remained about level since 1979.
4. An abortion is ten times less likely to cause medical problems than carrying a pregnancy to term.
5. Most of the officers in the national pro-choice organizations are white women with above-average incomes.
6. If the unborn could be heard, they would be one-hundred percent pro-life.
7. Women have an innate need to give birth.
8. Forty percent of fourteen-year-old girls will become pregnant before they are out of their teens.
9. The Supreme Court has said, "The right of privacy . . . is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."
10. The right to privacy implied by the Constitution should be enough to protect a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy.

Answers: Facts - 3,4,5,8,9

Now:

1. Find a photograph that interests you.

2. Make a list of facts you draw from your observation of the photograph.

Example: A boy and girl pose for a prom picture. She wears what looks like a boy's class ring around her neck. They are not touching each other.

3. Make a list of opinions suggested by the photograph.

Example: They are a steady couple. They may soon be available to date others.

Example: She's going steady with someone else and in a fit of anger agreed to go to the prom with this boy. She now regrets her decision.

4. Integrate into a coherent paragraph some of these facts and opinions.

Kevin's prompt - cemetery tombstones:

Gary Mikkelson was born and raised in the Minot area. His father worked on the railroad and his mother had temporarily been a school teacher. He loved this area and chose to stay here to work and raise a family.

Gary found the love of his life in one of his classes. He and Pearl were married shortly after they graduated from high school. They settled down and concentrated on getting their college degrees. Gary chose to combine his love of sports and children and focussed on becoming an elementary teacher with a physical education background. He taught in the Minot Public School system.

He and Pearl expanded the size of their family over the next few years through the birth of 3 boys. Gary's boys were his pride and joy. He reveled in sharing his love of sports and knowledge with them. They might be found outside looking at constellations, identifying insects, tossing footballs, or pounding in a home run. Camping trips and canoeing were part of their "guys' weekend out". Gary and Pearl's house overflowed with friends of the boys and former students who "just stopped by."

Gary was sitting relaxing during a break on one of their camping trips. He was watching his family and reflecting on his young family.

Second time around,

Wonders still abound.

Grandkids exploring,

Grandpa's snoring.

Reflection:

This prompt really touched home. I don't do it very often, but I find it relaxing and reflective to wander cemeteries. Imagination can really soar. Questions can abound. Sometimes the dates can evoke sadness - a life ended early, a bunch of lives ending at the same time perhaps due to an epidemic or other tragedy. Sometimes the quotes on the stones can offer comforting thoughts or a gentle, brief history of the deceased. Some actually can make a person chuckle. Sometimes they leave a lot of questions. The sad ones are the ones with only a marker, perhaps not even a name, just a date of death. Who did they leave behind that probably always wondered what happened? How deep was the pain? Why was the grave here? Was the person really that alone? What a way to get students to imagine, empathize, make the past feel more real!

Kathy S's prompt - travel

I enjoy traveling. I grew up with mini road trips. My father, the farmer, would take us on Sunday drives. My mother, the housewife, wanted to go with - I think the idea of another day at home with just us kids probably wasn't her idea of a fun day! We would go on adventure drives! Actually, I saw a lot of implement dealership lots and car lots in a multitude of towns around North Dakota. My parents turned it into a bit of an adventure for us. We were able to get out at parks, playgrounds, and other places to play. I used to comment that I had probably seen more uncharted historic sites in North Dakota (now some of them are rather touristy) and cemeteries than most North Dakotans. We ran through the cemeteries and read head stones and imagined. We played in places with just the fieldstones setting the boundaries for buildings and pretended the buildings were still there. If it was a Saturday trip instead of Sunday, that was special, too! (Saturdays usually meant Dad had found a part for some tractor or something and wanted to pick it up.) We got to go shopping. Instead of having to buy all of my clothes in Minot which was 20 miles away, we were able to be really big time. We shopped elsewhere! Many of my classmates had never shopped in Kenmare or Rugby or Bottineau so sometimes I had one of a kind clothes.

My father's theory was that if you need to get north, you head north and eventually you will get there. It was true! But even more fun was the adventure in actually arriving at your destination. We ended up in dead end yards, country cemeteries, and even pastures. A simple backtrack (sometimes a ways in reverse down a trail) and we were on our way. At the time it was a cheap way to keep 2 then 3 children entertained while Dad could do his own window shopping. We eventually graduated to longer trips and packed a pickup camper for the 5, then, 6, then 7 of us.

I inherited my navigation skills from my dad. I don't panic if my trail meanders. It has to lead somewhere and, with good company, that is truly the fun of it all. What scenery you can find on a side road! What misadventure memories! Getting lost on a little trail and wandering your way back is a much better story than that straight path down the Interstate.

Reflection: I think writing prompts like this give students (anyone, actually) the chance to relax and just let thoughts bounce around. Activities like this might be just what it takes to generate a transition to other writing. A person just has to get past the first roadblock - getting the brain wrapped around an idea or story line. Generating a jumping off (or in) point is a nice lead. This would be an interesting way to get a discussion going in a family. What does the word "travel" mean to the various family members? The oral reading could generate a discussion as to what stuck in people's memories about trips or events. It's amazing what different perspectives can pop out!

Lisa's writing prompt

Lisa assigned me a picture of a cool old car, a sign for Snively Law Firm, and the road sloping down a bluff or mountain. The two sparked fun memories. Minot used to have a soap box derby race track. It was located by Home of Economy before they remade the road. I think they were Sunday afternoon races. My brother and I were two of the adoring, little fans. We had a neighbor and a cousin who were often in the races. It was so much more exciting to know someone involved in the competition. We would sometimes get there early enough to see the trials, and the races were on! I don't remember them lasting long - doubtless they couldn't take too long since the track was short! It was just a section of the highway cordoned off for the races. The kids would get their cars lined up at the top, the tension would build, and the starter would signal. The cars would seem to fly down the little track with fans cheering wildly from the sidelines. Some cars wouldn't make the short descent in one unit - a tire might fall off or the steering would go amuck! The pit crew (usually a dad or big brother) would run to the rescue. The boys would try to hide the tears of defeat and you could hear more than one parent promise that the car would be repaired by the next race.

Reflection: What fun! I really enjoyed listening to the the ideas that others came up with for the pictures. I wonder if I could convince my students to do something like this just for fun when they are sitting in Mystic Minutes (a kind of 20 minute study hall designed to get them organized with homework at the end of the day) and they have "nothing to do".

Tara's prompt

WHAT IF

What if pencils were magic
and magnificent pictures flowed from them
onto the paper

What if erasers were edible so you could nibble
on the bad ideas and dream up good ones

What if the sheets of paper were able to change colors as you wrote
so it could show the emotions of the stories

What if my easy chair could transport me to a far off
quiet, tranquil place and I could write to my heart's content

But most importantly, what if I were able to share my ideas
bravely with my friends without insecurity.

Reflection: I must admit, I don't take the time to sit and do things like this. I used to putter a bit a long time ago, but I have not taken the time. Isn't it sad that to get the time, we are forced to take the time!? I had to sign up for a class to get things like this done. I also admit that I am rusty on tips to jump start the creative juices. That was a part of the reason for taking the Writing Project. Even if it doesn't fit in my curriculum exactly, it might just fit into my personal life. It also gives me ideas to help students that are sitting in my class struggling over an assignment or just puttering.

Chantel's prompt - tribes

I hadn't really thought about it, but there are a lot of tribes, aren't there? The usual: daughter, sister, mother, Norwegian/Icelandic, teacher, gardener, neighbor, friend, church group, 4-H, colleague, crafter, reader.

Probably the one that saddens me is the distance friend tribe. I have acquired several distance friends over the years. You know the ones - the ones you would hate to lose, the ones you don't get to see very often, maybe don't even contact as often as you would like. But they are there. They'd be a great loss if they were gone. They are such a background part of my life. Carleen in Hannah, Judie & Colleen in Fargo, Becky in Florida, Nancy by Wahpeton.

I do have one that we actually refer to at work as the West Wingers! As a group, we are often the last ones in the building after school and are there on weekends, too. We rely on each other a lot, maybe it's partly due to the fact that since we aren't all close to the office and, hence don't hang out in the teachers' lounge much, we are "out of the loop" on general information. The great part is that there are some really knowledgeable, helpful, involved people. Steve is the ultimate smart Science guy who is my computer guru, too. Renee and LaNae are amazing Resource Room ladies. They are sooo involved with plans to help students learn, but not in a pushy way. And I can't imagine working without their partners and aides! These ladies are among the first to volunteer. Annette is my comic relief, partner in crime. She eats strange lunches in front of my 4th hour students. Pete does amazing cartwheels into the gym and is an all around coach, cheerleader! Jeri keeps the bar high with her students' artwork plastered

above the lockers. We all have our little parts in this group - I think my most important one is to keep the Science department fed with leftover treats from labs.

Reflection: What a unique way to get students (and others) to think about their varied personalities, other selves, groups! I think this would really help get someone to relate to a story or character or even situation. Think History teacher- how do you get students to relate to some of the situations? Could this be correlated to one of those lessons?

Now I need to see if there is a way to tie it into one of my units - maybe foods - is there a way of writing this up for an ethnic food situation?

Sherie's prompt

My prompt was a picture of 2 wrestlers - one was holding the other one overhead.

Hey, George, you should try this sometime, the view is pretty good up here.

You know, Fred, I've been thinking about it, but in the meantime could you move your right hand. I'm a little ticklish there.

No problem, I need you to move your right hand, too. Say, George, I like the tat on your armpit. Where did you get it? Had any problems with it?

Nah, it's kinda subtle there. My mom doesn't give me any flak about it. I got it down at Rita's. She's really reasonable and gentle, too.

Wow, mine was a little painful. Maybe I'll check her out next time.

Tell her I sent ya, Fred. She'll probably give you a discount.

That's great. I'll need the extra cash to pay for the meds I'll have to get after you throw me across the ring.

Reflection: I've always gotten a kick out of making up mock conversations. Some people are so good at thinking this through and coming up with some really funny stuff. I was just thinking that maybe I could have my students do something like this while we are working in a unit such as cooking or sewing. It could make a fun poster for the classroom. I used to have one that was a cartoon from the paper and someone had come up with a funny quote to go with it. It ended up being tossed out and maybe it's time for a new one!

Holly's prompt

At the time it was traumatic. Most of my classmates' parents weren't well off when I was growing up. My parents managed to find some off-the-beaten-track toys that, if my friends were at my house playing one-on-one, they thought were pretty cool. But, at school it seemed to be a different story. I remember the year that the girls played with Barbies. Everyone brought their dolls and accessories to school. I didn't have a Barbie. My parents had found me a Tressie (which I still think is neat) and another pseudo Barbie that was probably a little more realistic and, I thought, a little prettier. I showed up with my dolls on Barbie day. We all headed off to the nook on the side of the school that had been designated ours. As we took out our Barbies, one of the more "influential" girls looked over and exclaimed that I didn't have a Barbie. She then proceeded to tell me that I couldn't play with them. Her closest friend also decided that it wouldn't do. Somehow, they managed to convince all of the other girls that I was not allowed to play with them unless I had a "real" Barbie. Borrowing wouldn't do, I had to have my own Barbie and no amount of crying convinced my parents that they could afford to buy me one. I spent the next few weeks of recess as an outcast. My friends were not to talk to me about playing at recess if they wanted to remain in "the group".

Reflection: This prompt brought back some hurtful memories that have lingered over the years. It was a good prompt, it just made me recall something that I have tried to stash away in the back of my mind. I am sure the students involved had no thought as to the extent of their actions, but it was a classic case of bullying in my young eyes. There was nothing I could really do to change the situation. Teachers couldn't force

them to play and to be honest, the girls involved were what the kids call “preps” nowadays and the teachers would have thought I was the difficult one. I was smart, but not a prep. I had gotten in trouble as a first grader because I had dared to get after one of the girls because she was being mean to someone. I knew I’d lose this time, too. I wonder if that is why I tend to stick up for/believe the students who complain about being bullied by the preps. Do I notice the subtleties that are involved more when the preps do the bullying? Do they just have better skills at schmoozing to get out of trouble?

Reading Recipes
Grade Level: Middle School EMH Class
Family and Consumer Science
by Kathy Fimreite

Background Information:

This lesson is designed for a 6-8th grade Educable Mentally Handicapped class that I teach for 1 semester each fall. I have most of these students all 3 years of their middle school experience. We have a Food and Nutrition unit that covers a different meal each year. Year 1 is breakfast foods, Year 2 is snacks, Year 3 is lunch and easy meals. I have listed the Objectives and Standards that are set for my regular classes that apply.

Objectives:

Students will relate the importance of understanding the meaning of words and following directions.

Students will explore the importance of organization in using a recipe.

Students will learn the importance of reading the whole recipe before they start the activity.

Standards:

1.2.1 Apply communication skills (e.g. reading, writing, speaking, etc.)

1.2.4 Demonstrate teamwork and leadership skills

2.1.2 Apply decision making skills

4.5.2 Define appropriate cooking terminology when reading and following a recipe.

Resources:

- *recipe instructions precut and placed in envelopes - 1 set per team of 2
- *SmartBoard preloaded with 3 pages: cartoon, full recipe, Steps 1 - 6 locked in place and free-floating instructions ready to for arrangement
- *worksheet with questions about recipe, if necessary

Sequence of activities:

I plan to begin with a cooking cartoon that is intended to catch their attention and sense of humor. We then flow into a discussion about last year's food labs.

Do you remember some of the food items we made last year?

What was your favorite?

What can you remember about the food labs?

Were there steps we had to follow?

Step 1. I will pair each student with a partner. The emphasis will be on pairing readers with non- or limited-proficiency readers.

Step 2. Each pair of students will be handed an envelope with a recipe that has had the directions cut into strips.

Note: The recipe should be something simple that has a few lines of directions. I chose the No Bake Cookies recipe for this particular lesson. The ingredients and the name of the recipe will be on the Smartboard with the instructions covered. I don't know until we get into the school year what all of their strengths are in

terms of reading/teamwork. Lessons are adapted as we go along, but this is the general format.

Step 3. The students will read through the list of ingredients orally for the benefit of those who are nonreaders. If there is some necessary discussion about the ingredient list, now may be the time to cover it.

Step 4. The students will be instructed to place the sentences in order. This activity is intended to keep both students busy. They are to work as a team. If the reading skills are mixed, the nonreader can help with the logical organization of the strips.

Step 5. Allow for a few minutes (or until all groups are done). Sometimes I have asked questions randomly of the students to get them started with the organization.

Step 6. When they have sentences arranged in front of them, ask the teams if they are ready. If you know there is a mistake, but they haven't caught it, ask pertinent questions to see if they can recognize the mistake.

Note: If the SmartBoard/Activeboard is to be used, the sentences could be on the board and the students could send a volunteer to the board to help untangle the scramble.

2 options for this activity:

1. Select one person to listen to the teams and rearrange the sentences.
2. Have each team take a turn at the board arranging one sentence at a time.

Once things are in correct sequence, ask questions such as:

Why is it important to follow directions?

What should you do if you don't know what a word means?

Why might it be important to read the whole recipe first before you start cooking?

Note: The second half of the lesson involves more SmartBoard time. The students will pick apart the recipe and do some prethinking before they make the recipe in class. Students will take turns answering questions about the No Bake Cookies recipe. Depending on the class we may do it as a group project or, if they recall well from last year's lab, they may want to answer as individuals. The following are questions/instructions they will be asked to respond to. Most assignments tend to be group- or team-work due to the learning skills of this class.

1. Underline the ingredients you need to prepare the cookies.
2. Circle the amount of each ingredient you will use.
3. List the measuring utensils you will use.
4. List the preparation terms found in the recipe.
5. Do you know what they mean?
6. What kitchen equipment will you need to use to make these cookies?

Adaptations:

For a non-EMH class or a class that has not cooked before, the opening discussion could center more around home experiences since they might not have the class lab experience. A non-FACS teacher could still borrow a hot plate or burner unit and make the No Bake Cookies as a fun follow-up activity. Other recipes could be used that might follow a story. One suggestion was to use the book "The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza) for elementary grades.

Rationale:

This lesson targets a sixth through eighth grade Educable Mentally Handicapped class that I teach each fall. I never know from year to year what the reading levels will be, if some of them read at all. Their handicaps range from obvious physical disabilities to hidden learning disabilities. The students are generally in this class for three years so the lessons have to be taught on a three year cycle. Most of the students will be in my

class for at least two of the years, if not all three. This means there needs to be some repetition, but not too much. Since we cook each year for a few weeks, we need to do a review each year. Before we begin with the food labs, I want them to be able to understand the importance of reading through the recipe and asking questions before they begin cooking a product. They need to grasp the importance of understanding the meaning of words and being able to follow directions if they are to obtain the correct results - in this case, edible food. The key word with this class is FLEXIBILITY!

Students often equate reading with “just for school”. Reading is life! Whether it is reading a manual to be able to operate a new piece of equipment, reviewing a cell phone bill, or cooking something, knowing how to break down the instructions is very important.

This lesson is designed to help them with “real world” issues. “Real world” includes what we call Life Skills which is sometimes another name for Family and Consumer Science classes! The skills I teach are transferable to the world outside of school on a regular basis. Reading a recipe, learning to cook, sewing on a button, using a washing machine . . . these all fit under that category. I have had such a mix of students, many whose parents haven’t taken the time (or are too busy) to teach their children basic things they will need to know to live on their own. This particular class is special in that many will need a lot of repetition to remember the key concepts and many may never live on their own or if they do it will be some form of assisted living. I have found that the more engaged they are in the process, the more willing they are to learn and apply it at home. It’s just the same with mainstreamed classes. Most of my students like to brag a little about their efforts! The learning process may take a bit longer in this class and we have to do adaptations for the various disabilities (some students have been wheelchair-bound, non-speaking with fine motor limitations). As a whole though, the needs are the same for all students. They must be able to translate what they read and see a purpose.

Sheri's demo - diamante

Kathy

confused insecure

pressured watching panicking

Northern Plains Writing Project

thinking writing relaxing

focussed knowledgeable

Chantel

aa

ticks

little quiet

brown short-lived focussed

Seek Warm blooded Mammals

evil voracious infected

little quiet

ticks

Reflection: This was fun! I have never tried something like this before. I think it made my thinking in the poem genre a little more light-hearted. I guess I could have gone serious with it since I was able to throw emotions and descriptions into it, but that would have defeated my more entertaining purpose. I can imagine how students could really get into this once they got the initial hang of it.

Kathy's lesson - writing off the cuff

Part 1: I am still struggling with the professional piece. I haven't completely formulated the finished product and to be honest still feel a little lost. Kathy gave me some great leads yesterday and helped me with some focus. Last night I spent my time finishing up the last little details on my prompt - actually it was pretty much done - doing some reflections on the pieces I have already written for the other prompts, and finishing my lesson plan for tomorrow. I wanted to make sure I have that ready so I fine tuned - I hope it's fine tuned. I didn't have a chance to work more on the paper. I can only hope I didn't lose my train of thought. It seems I really need to get past all of that procrastination stuff so I can settle down and really concentrate. I think I work better when I have it relatively quiet, but I noticed last night that when I finally had the house to myself, I found little "other things" to do first. Once I really, finally, got started working it started to flow a bit and when my son came home we had our random conversation, but when he sat down and turned on the tv it didn't bother me too much. He also didn't really talk to me though. I tuned out most of the tv show. I am a little more worried about the focus for the paper. Will I have it quiet? Will I be able to get the flow started? Should I go to the MM tonight or should I stay home to try to finish it? What to do? I'd really like to go tonight, but will it put me that much further behind? Do I have the information organized for the paper?

Part 2: I find that so often it is useful to share ideas. That is the prime reason I like the meetings that involve some talk by a group leader and a lot of conferencing, sharing. I could do without the inservices that are primarily someone telling me what to do or the rah, rah stuff. I want to be able to confer and share with others. Mesh out what works with others, not just hear one expert's great advice.

Sometimes it is nice to have the comments written down quietly. We say so much and get/give such good ideas, but sometimes it is nice to be able to share it on paper without verbalizing until later. It makes us pause a little (usually).

The other ideas were helpful. I plan to use the ones that I can adapt to my rooms.

Reflection: I don't think I have ever tried something like this where you were assigned to "just write" for a certain amount of time without a concise point. It was scary at first, but I just followed her instructions and rambled! I am trying to decide if there is some way that I could put this to use in my class. I can't think of anything yet, but, as we have been discussing, everything is a work in progress!

As for part 2, this is what I like best about classes like this - it's the real stuff! Not a writer who spent 2 years in the trenches and has all of the answers or someone who went right into grad school from college and is sure their technique is amazing. I get frustrated with the ones who taught 20 years ago and still know it all. My kids from 13 years ago were not the same to teach as the ones I have now! I have really had to change my lessons.

Willows

by Kathy Fimreite

Willows bending

Swaying in the breeze

Gently telling stories

Stories of today

Stories of long ago

I hear them whispering in the breeze

Fingers splaying out to catch my attention

Waving at me to come closer

Gathering me up into the story

Willows bending

Swaying in the breeze

Reflection: I had no reason to write this other than creative writing! I was sitting here and the words came to me in a flow. Was it a fluttering of a memory of the willow tree in my grandmother's yard? I really have no idea what prompted it! I have seen students do this in class randomly. Unfortunately for my sake, sometimes it seems to be when I am trying to get out instructions or a lesson! For their sake it is a wonderful thought process and it is interesting when it is spontaneous for them. Sometimes I have had a chance (time) to ask them if I could peek at what they wrote. Some proudly share, some are hesitant, some are very private. It's all okay with me - as long as it isn't inappropriate!

Lisa and Kathy's book discussion prompt from 113Stretches.

This was my writing:

Document Change: *Remember how things used to be.*

I am the oldest child in my family and have four siblings. The oldest of my brothers is one and a half years younger than me. Although we weren't great buds, we share a lot of common memories because of our ages and forced playmate status. My youngest brothers are ten and a half and twelve years younger. Their memories are worlds apart from ours.

They don't remember the party line telephone or our mother's frustration when the neighbor ladies would tie up the phone lines gossiping or listening in on other phone conversations. The FBI had nothing on Gladys and Birdie!

Playground safety regulations?! Oops, we had teeter totters that were balanced on rickety beams. Remember slivers and pinched legs because your friend bailed on you when you were at the top? My grandmother actually made a spinning teeter totter for us out of a board and a wagon wheel with the axle stuck in the ground for the post. Tall swings allowed competitions to see which brave soul could swing so high that they did a complete 360. Their school had to take them down because they were too dangerous! My own children notice that the old movies left much to the imagination which sometimes made them more of a thriller. Sex might be inferred, but not usually shown. Bedroom scenes were usually pretty rare and blood wasn't exactly on the screen. They notice the "shoot-em up" Westerns where people were shot, but there was no blood and no focus on the gore. Maybe there are the "last dying words", but that's pretty much it. Is that good or bad? Scary movies were more about psychological scare than blood, guts, etc. Psycho left a lot to the imagination. Now they spoon-feed the violence to the audience just in case someone can't imagine details. So sad. The imagination is a great inventor.

Reflection:

This prompt could work with my unit on childcare. I am thinking it could work either way
- students interviewing older family members.

- students telling their experiences to younger children in a story form.
It could really promote some interesting discussions at home and at school!

PAPER

Students often equate reading with “just for school”. Reading is life! Whether it is reading a manual to operate a new piece of equipment, reviewing a cell phone bill, or cooking something, knowing how to break down the instructions is very important.

I teach Family and Consumer Science at the 8th grade level in a middle school setting. I also teach a sixth through eighth grade Educable Mentally Handicapped class each fall semester. I enjoy all of my classes, but this one is special! We can really have fun in here because this class has to be flexible! The number of students in a class has varied from 4 or 5 to 15. Sometimes there may be an aide or two, sometimes not; it all depends on the IEPs and the structure of the class. I never know from year to year what the reading levels will be, if some of them read at all. Their handicaps range from obvious physical disabilities to hidden learning disabilities. The students are generally in this class for three years so the lessons have to be taught on a three year cycle. Most of the students will be in my class for at least two of the years, if not all three. There are no set curriculum guidelines for this class, just a list of topics the Minot Public School Family and Consumer Science teachers set up as a rough guide several years ago.

Teaching these students has really expanded my understanding of what it takes for a learner to learn. There is no one system that works for all, so I am constantly reworking my lesson plans. I am comforted by a research study that drew on Vigotsky’s theories of learning. According to Edwards, Carr, & Siegel, (2006), “effective teachers have always considered their students’ uniqueness (i.e. academic needs, talents, interests, learning styles) in planning, teaching, and evaluating lessons.” I have also acquired more nonreaders over the years so the note taking system I inherited from the

previous teacher was scrapped. There isn't much out there for EMH students in a Family and Consumer Science class at the middle school level. Don't the researchers/lesson planners think these kids exist? Do these children disappear from radar during the time from being diagnosed to being in an independent studies class in high school? I have found Health information that targets small children - which is the information level of some, but not all of my EMH students - and is formatted for little ones, not a 7th grader who has the reading level of a second grader (maybe), the thinking process of a fourth grader (maybe) and the body of a 14 year old. Many are also struggling with some of the social issues that are inherent among middle schoolers. Add the disabilities and the social awkwardness that follows into the mix and some of these students are in a whole other world! And in that group are some who just want to play house or cars or stuffed animal adventures, but know that maybe it isn't okay with their classmates.

Lessons for these students really follow an authentic instructional path. Many of these students struggle with memorization and really need to use hands-on repetition to embed knowledge. My classroom blends well with authentic instruction. Knowledge that is learned is applied to real experiences. If they are studying grooming, they have an active lesson on toothbrushing or washing hair. The length of the lessons is really determined by their understanding of the lesson. Do they need one day? Or one week? How much do they know and how much do they need to learn? Do I need to back up, retrace my steps, reteach a particular part of a lesson? Is there a better way to teach them what I feel they need to know?

After they have worked in the food preparation unit for a while, they plan for a party, write up an invitation and invite family and teachers to show off their skills.

Assessments for this class vary. Some write, some don't, some are verbal, some aren't, some see the big picture, some really struggle with getting through the lesson. I have decided to evaluate on a very loose, flexible scale. Some assignments are graded on listening skills. If they can answer my questions, verbally, orally, or through demonstration, I might consider them proficient. Activities are split - we start with some content based, but much of it needs to quickly bounce into performance based to make sure they grasp the concept. I have really gotten away from assigning exams. Once in a while, I feel the need to give them, but I would rather assess these students through oral or actual physical assessments.

I admit, I have a lot more flexibility with this class, partly due, I suspect, to not having a set curriculum or rigid standards. I have done some copying of guidelines and standards from my regular classrooms to set a baseline. My main frustration is lack of resources. Everything has to be adapted, readjusted, maybe even scrapped.

My biggest wish is that the life skills I try to teach them at this age level will somehow stick with them as they grow older. Most will continue with high school level FACS classes, but not all will. Some of them have families who are very supportive of the skills they acquire and reinforce them at home, but others do not. Those are the ones I worry about. How will they manage after high school? Will they be able to manage on their own or will they have to live in an assisted living facility or at home for the rest of their life. How will living at home work out as their parents age if they are not taught to help and be somewhat self-sufficient? Just like the rest of our students, parental support is a huge factor.

I have had parents who were wonderfully supportive and realized that their children would eventually grow up - at least physically - and have to move on. These parents worked to make sure their children practiced the life skills that they were able to manage. They pushed them to be achievers. I have also had parents who didn't look at the bigger picture, parents who thought of their children as helpless little ones who couldn't do anything. They bailed on the excuses. One family insisted their child sit with them at a class-sponsored party because "she was shy" and, therefore, did not have to take her turn at the door to greet people. We tried to explain to them that she enjoyed bantering with some of us on a regular basis and wasn't afraid to speak out in class. Or there was the child that wouldn't eat anything because she "didn't like it." She only wanted pizza and gagged on everything else. We discovered that she never knew what anything tasted like because she had never tried it. She would pretend to gag and that was the end of it. Wily teachers and parents that we teachers were, we chose to approach it just like we would with our own children. The young lady was asked to try one bite. She could not pretend to gag and disrupt the others. If she decided that she did not like it, she did not have to try any more of it. We did this for 2 weeks, then it was 2 bites, eventually it was 3 bites. We made sure she was not allergic to anything before we tried this step. By the end of the food labs, she had progressed to a minimum of 3 bites and sometimes, without thinking about it, she had finished the entree. I wish I could say it continued at home, but I don't think her parents ever believed how successful this approach was working for her. Warnemuende (2008) believed, "Strong parental and educational support provides slow learners with the greatest likelihood of educational, social, and emotional success with the fewest frustrations and

discouragements."

I don't see much difference in a way with my regular classes. There are all kinds of learners out there. It is just more obvious in a special needs classroom. The other learners sometimes hide better in a regular classroom! They don't want to be noticed or we don't take time to notice them. They struggle with reading or writing or memory or family issues. It all can affect class time. As I sit here and contemplate my different classes, I realize that I have merged a lot of my lessons and styles. The lessons that I teach my EMH class are some of the same ones I use for my regular classes and vice versa. Maybe I have slowed down or sped up the lesson depending on the class' personal experience or knowledge, but the material is presented the same. I think I have learned to look a little harder for the struggling ones in my regular classes. I wish that I had the same flexibility in my regular classes. Too much to learn, too little time seems to be the motto. Some days I wish I had the smaller class size, the aides, the flexibility that this class has in all of my rooms. Don't we all?

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July 5, 2009

4th of July used to be a family event, but as my children got older things changed. My children have great memories of going to the lake, shooting off fireworks, eating homemade ice cream. Lately, though, it has changed. Not because we wanted it to, but as a natural progression I guess. My son has friends to hang out with, my parents sold their lake cabin a few years ago and went without a lake spot until recently, and my husband has become a homebody! My girls and I still try to carry on the traditions. We attend the 4th of July parade in Berthold and we really try to get together with family. My parents got a lake lot again last year so we were determined to go there to enjoy some sun, water, and a little family time. My regrets are that my son and husband didn't go. Michael chose to go to the lake that he remembers from childhood - my parents' old lake, but now filled with his friends' cabins. We females went to the "new" lake with my parents and my sister's family. Gayle chose to stay home and babysit pets. He missed the amazing fireworks displays that we all were able to watch. We didn't get to make the homemade ice cream this year - a loss for all of us! My girls have expressed sadness of growing up and life changes that we can't seem to prevent or slow down. Me, too!

July 7, 2009

As I sit here contemplating what to reflect on, I am overwhelmed. I am dwelling on the now, while listening with half an ear to the Farewell to Michael Jackson. Michael's Farewell is a choreographed production, broadcast to the world. Intended to showcase, allow some people to express deep felt emotions, allow others to be able to say "I was there". I find it sad that such a private, final moment as a memorial has to be a production designed to spotlight those who want to share the glory. The newscasters ramble on, others perform, the family is put on parade.

My family is busy with other priorities. Things that just get us through. Working to pay for school bills, babysitting a relative's pets while she is away, day-to-day things with minimal communication between us. But it is communication. We randomly reach for the cell phones to connect. Dumb little conversations, short little conversations, questions,

reminders, maybe even spattered with a quick “luv ya” from one of my children. I’ll never have a “production” for a memorial, but at least I can be sure during my lifetime who truly loved me.

July 8, 2009

Are my pipes okay? What a commercial! It’s on right now in the Beaver Dam. I chuckle every time I see this commercial. I don’t know why. Last night, my husband and I saw the commercial and both of us commented on the well-behaved dog! What a thing to notice. Maybe it’s because ours has been behaving badly lately and it caught our attention.

July 12, 2009

I am trying to relax and work on my lessons. Yesterday was to be a day to get things done around the house: laundry, work on my classwork, focus on my things. It didn’t work that way! It turned out that we were supposed to be at a reunion. I stayed home to work on my project. I felt guilty about not being there, but I had tried to set my priorities and, to be honest, I really didn’t know what the plans were for the reunion! I was able to fine tune my prompt and I finished reading/skimming “In the Middle” and making notes for myself so I can meet with Kevin on Monday to review for our book discussion. As I worked on things though, my mind kept going back to the reunion. Should I have gone and reset my priorities? Some people were frustrated that I didn’t go with my husband, I guess. He promised his aunts that we would see them last night so I packed up my work and we went out for an early supper. What was to be a short visit lasted several hours! We got home late and he knew that today is the day! Now I am hiding in my bedroom trying to find resources for my lesson - not my day! My laptop doesn’t want to cooperate and the Internet won’t find the research that I knew I had seen out there! I am struggling to find what I want so now I am journaling to ease my frustration. It isn’t even noon and I have been to church and already had 3 visitors to my house! Am I getting much accomplished? I am also debating whether I want to spend my evening with

family again. I enjoy meeting with most of them, but there has been drama lately and I really don't want drama - I want to be done with my homework! I want to go camping!

July 13, 2009

There are thirteen stoplights on Broadway between Walmart and Minot State University! Five of them are between Walmart and Marketplace Foods! I counted today! When the lights are sequenced for green, I love sailing through. Today wasn't one of those days! What frustration to start the day out like that! I tried not to think about traffic. I took a different route home for lunch. Usually 6th Street is a little less traffic and at noon that's a big plus. I got caught behind someone who really took the slow at school zone signs seriously. Never mind that the sign says "if children are present" and there were NONE. You go through three zones on 6th Street! After lunch I took a new approach to driving. I came up busy Broadway, but I discovered that my daughter had changed my Country radio station to one that plays mellow Christian rock. I spent my drive with a different focus. It didn't make traffic any less crazy, but if I listened to the music, I really couldn't stress much!

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