Thank You, Teacher!
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Workshop Objectives

- Attendees will participate in a really cool cognitive processing strategy.
- Attendees will write a note of appreciation to a teacher who has had a big impact on their lives.
- Participants will transform their notes to a teaching autobiography.

Cognitive Processing Strategy: Affinity Diagram*

The Affinity Diagram is an interactive data collection method that allows students to identify and process large quantities of information in a short amount of time. This strategy works best with large tables so that students can easily walk around the tables to view the contributions from their peers.

Affinity diagrams are beneficial because they:

- are interactive and involve all of the students
- allow students to quickly collect and categorize numerous contributions
- give all ideas equal value
- allow ideas to be categorized according to their natural relationships
- can be used with upper elementary through university-level students

Materials: pencil or pen, different colored small post-it notes; different colored larger post-it notes.

Procedures: The entire activity is to be done silently and without gestures, pantomiming, etc.

1. Group students into groups of 4-5. Give each group member different colored, small post-its. Give each group one stack of large post-its.
2. State a prompt. Make sure you provide an open-ended question with many possible responses. (For example, “What are the characteristics of an effective teacher?”)
3. On each small post-it, students are to write a 1-3 word phrase (such as “fair”) that comes to mind when thinking of the prompt and then place the post-it note on the table. They keep doing this until they run out of ideas. They write one phrase/post-it note.
4. Once students run out of ideas, they are to start organizing all of the post-its into categories. On the larger post-it notes, they are to write the name of each category (such as “personality traits”).
5. At the end of the activity, have the students share their categories and phrases.

*Source of information: Dr. Larry Holt/Langford, David P. Total Quality Learning, Inc.
Thank-You Note

Below is letter that I (Dr. Verkler) am sending to Kay, the teacher who has been my greatest inspiration:

Dear Kay,

I am writing to thank you for being my inspiration. When I decided to be a teacher, you were my model. As you got to know my class, you discovered how under-prepared we were for Senior English. Our previous teacher had neglected to give us the foundation we needed to succeed in your class. Upon discovering this, you took it upon yourself to teach us what we needed PLUS the entire Senior English curriculum. As a result, I never worked so hard before in my life. You dedicated yourself totally to making sure we were prepared for college. You pushed us to achieve to our greatest potential. You modeled excellence.

When I decided to become a teacher, you were my role model. Thank you for providing me with the foundation to strive for excellence in the teaching profession. I think of you regularly as I seek to bring out the best in my students.

With much love and gratitude,

Karen

Transforming Your Letter Into An Autobiography

When writing your autobiography, you can use some of the words, experiences, and expressions you used in your letter of appreciation to your teacher. Below is an example of such an autobiography. Bolded are words, phrases, and experiences derived from the letter.

My Autobiography

*Life is no brief candle to me; it is a sort of splendid torch which I’ve got a hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.*

George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

When I started college, I majored in psychology (because that’s what everyone in the 70’s did) and Spanish (because I always liked the language). I wanted to become a bilingual psychologist. However, in my senior year, my future husband suggested that I get a teaching certificate as something to “fall back on” in case I couldn’t get a job as a psychologist. It was during my internship that I fell in love with teaching. I was hooked and I never looked back!

As a beginning teacher, I reflected back on my 12th grade English teacher, Kay Trull, as my model for excellence. At the beginning of the year, Mrs. Trull discovered that our class was sorely underprepared for Senior English. Our previous English teacher, whom we had from ninth through eleventh grades, had neglected to provide us with the foundation to succeed in Mrs. Trull’s class. When she realized that, she made it her goal to teach us what we lacked PLUS the entire Senior English curriculum! As a result, I never worked so hard before in my life. I’m sure she had never either! She dedicated herself totally to making sure we were prepared for college. She pushed us to achieve to our greatest potential. She modeled excellence.

To this day, I reflect back on my former teacher Kay, who is now my friend, for guidance on how to help my students become the best educators they can be. This incredible teacher – 36 years later – continues to be a significant force in my life as I strive to be the best educator I can be.
Autobiography, like ethnography, has a reputation of ‘commitment to the actual’ (Fischer 1986), in which here ‘the actual’ means memories arising out of personal experience.” (Mitchell, et. al., p. 218)

For your internship applications, you will have to write a one-page autobiography that is focused on events, people, etc. that have influenced your decision to become a teacher. Below are some guidelines to assist you in writing your autobiography:

An autobiography is a process of self-formation and self-declaration. Because teachers are the instruments of their own practice, developing an awareness of self is part of becoming a thoughtful, intentional teacher. A professional autobiography assists you in increasing your awareness of beliefs and preferences about teaching and learning. This is not the same thing as a personal autobiography, and should not contain personal information unless it relates directly to your professional growth. As you write your autobiography, reflect upon events in your life that have significantly affected your decision to become an educator. You might consider (but are not limited to) the ideas suggested below:

- Note your full name, your current position and location.
- Use descriptive words such as hard-working, team player, compassionate, or positive.
- List characteristics or accomplishments that made a former teacher stand out and in turn, caused you to want to become a teacher yourself.
- Share challenges you overcame, such as an illness, injury, or a problem like shyness.
- What did your decision to become a teacher mean to you at that time?
- What about teaching interested or attracted you?
- What were some of the qualities of your most outstanding teachers?
- How have teachers influenced your decision to teach?
- What are some early experiences that continue to influence what and how you plan to teach?
- What are some central teaching ideas that guide you?
- What do you imagine you’ll be doing in five or ten years?
- What are some of your early experiences that influenced your decision to teach?
- Did your family play a role in your decision to become a teacher?
- Find a quote that sums up your view of being a teacher or working with children.
- End your autobiography on an uplifting note.

“A teacher’s role is not to replicate suffocating conditions that stunt self-awareness and self knowledge but to set up the conditions that will inspire, that will literally give breath to students’ visions of themselves as ‘knowers’.” (Mitchell, C., Weber, S., & O'Reilly-Scanlon, K., p. 187)