

April 19, 1994 - Joseph A. McLaughlin, Education

I firmly believe that learning is natural and easy. If the principles by which students learn outside of the school environment are applied to the classroom, they would learn more and enjoy it as well.

In the first week of Rd 010, the freshman reading class which I have taught for six years, emphasis is placed on what the students know and how they learned it. I introduce the elements of comprehension so that the students are aware of the factors that are involved in learning. We compare their experiences as learners outside of school with their behavior in school. For example, I ask them to describe their behavior when leaving a movie, sporting event, concert or play. Frequently, they respond that their first action is to discuss the event with their friends. We then compare their behavior when leaving a class or lecture. The typical responses are "I talk about what's on my mind," "I just go to the cafeteria," and "I never thought about what I say after class." I explain that this difference in behavior is crucial because learning is directly proportional to the amount of reaction. I compare the process to a chemical reaction in which a change takes place to illustrate that learning involves a reaction and a change in the learner.

To this end, I reserve five minutes at the end of class for reaction time. I require that the students react either in written form or orally depending on the content and purpose of the class. Although I haven't heard any students enthusiastically discussing the content of my classes as they walk out the door on their way to the cafeteria or McIntyre Lounge, I am confident that they at least have been changed a little by having to react to what they experienced.