

Returning teacher finds new challenges

I recently returned to teaching high school in the Archdiocese of Baltimore after an absence of more than 30 years. The things that I have learned (and in some cases relearned) are as numerous as the challenges a teacher faces today.

I began my professional career teaching English and language arts at Archbishop Spalding High School - one of the stalwart educational institutions in our archdiocese. After 32 years as a copy editor and sometimes writer, primarily in the sports department at The Baltimore Sun, I returned last August to teaching English and journalism at Cardinal Gibbons School - one of the stalwart educational institutions in our archdiocese.

I guess what I have learned in my short time back teaching shouldn't surprise me. As in all walks of life, some things change; others remain constant.

Many of the priorities have a familiar ring to them. Reading comprehension and critical writing skills could not be emphasized enough in the 1970s. Nor can they be emphasized enough today.

I began teaching thinking that I could teach Homer, Virgil and Dante the way that I had been taught as a student at Cardinal Gibbons a decade earlier, but I soon returned to graduate school so that I could acquire the skills to address my students' more basic writing and reading needs.

It is just as vital, perhaps more so, to address those basic writing and reading needs today.

Other things, including names, have changed. Martin Spalding is now Archbishop Spalding; 32 years ago, it was Cardinal Gibbons High School.

Names and faces may change. Challenges remain constant.

The challenges a teacher faces today are new and sometimes more complex.

Three decades ago, we competed with movies and television for our students' attention and creativity. Today, we still compete with movies and television but also vie with the Internet, iPods and cell phones.

The risks for the student, too, are more involved.

Thirty years ago, the temptation to cheat was just a library, textbook or encyclopedia away. Today, plagiarism is just a mouse click or Wikipedia away.

Impressing upon our students that intellectual property is a building block of society remains a priority in my classroom.

I try to proceed as would some of the parents of our students in their professional careers.

Like a good mason, I try to draw straight lines, keep the levels of learning plumb and construct a sound foundation for study.

Sometimes I succeed; sometimes I come up short. I still go for the occasional home run. (Please excuse the sports metaphor. It's difficult to abandon old habits after 30 years and, besides, young men at an all-boys school usually relate better to athletic references.)

Sometimes I connect. Sometimes, like Rick Dempsey in his hilarious pantomime of Babe Ruth, I fall flat on my face.

I wouldn't have it any other way.

Michael Reeb is one of 14 faculty members at Cardinal Gibbons to have graduated from the school.