

Portfolio Introduction

As I begin my student teaching experience, I find myself striving to become an effective teacher. It has been my privilege to observe and work with a variety of exceptional educators, and I know that I want to borrow a myriad of extraordinary attributes from these individuals. I am amazed at how much I have grown and learned over the past four years. As I embark on this remaining portion of my journey, I have set some goals that I anticipate will enhance and improve the likelihood of my becoming the teacher I envision.

The next three paragraphs state her goals for student teaching which are directly related to her placement setting.

It is very exciting to be student teaching in a small, rural school. There is a definite lack of ethnic and racial diversity in this school. I believe that incorporating multicultural goals will be a valuable portion of my lesson planning. The classroom setting I find myself in is very organized and structured. Luckily, the hard work of establishing routines and developing sound classroom management procedures has already been completed.

There are nine boys and eight girls in this classroom. Since there are six students with IEP's, I believe that this should be an area of goal concentration. To be the most effective teacher possible, it will be necessary to implement differentiated instruction for this group.

I have observed that this is a very close knit community of students and faculty. These relationships have been built and maintained over a prolonged period of time. In order to become a productive member of this learning group, I recognize that I will need to work hard to develop relationships with school personnel, parents, and students. Reaching a personal understanding of individuals and the goals of the families in this community will be crucial to meeting the educational needs of my students.

She adds 2 more goals based on what she knows about herself as a teacher thus far, and gives clues as to how she may begin to achieve them.

On a more personal level, I realize that I have a couple of areas where I could improve during this student teaching experience. I have found that I need to develop more as a reflective scholar. This process is on my mind all of the time, and I am continually making mental notes of ways to improve and strengthen my teaching in specific areas. However, I find it difficult to find the time to sit down and write reflectively in this manner. My goal is to be much more diligent with reflective journaling and keeping track of my thoughts. I also feel that I need to incorporate more variety into my instructional strategies. Although I have had a wide range of experiences in several quality schools, the total number of lessons that I have taught is relatively small. I know that the effective teacher is comfortable incorporating numerous strategies throughout his or her lessons. Concentrating my efforts in this area will ensure that I provide the best possible instruction.

She concludes with a simile she remembers from Harry Wong's book, confirming that she is paying careful attention to professional literature in her desire to become an effective teacher.

I move forward in this new endeavor with a positive attitude, a desire to succeed, and the expectation that I can and will make a difference. I was captured by a statement that I read in *The First Days of School*. The statement relayed the message that children are like candles, and a leader builds a flame that causes others to glow brightly. My goal is to gain skills and grow in ways that will allow me to help provide that spark that kindles and awakens the initial desire to learn.

This introduction is from Sabrina Benner’s themed elementary portfolio, *My Many Colored Days*, fall, 2004. Her opening paragraph begins to develop her ‘color’ theme.

Life in a kindergarten classroom can be very colorful, both literally and figuratively speaking. Colors are used in many lessons in this grade so students can learn the basic colors and to help students focus on their lessons. I have also come to learn that kindergarten students can have very colorful personalities as well. Some are blue when they first enter the class, while some are red with excitement, and then there are others who are very mellow yellow, not quite sure what to expect from school or their teacher.

She gives a vivid description of her student teaching setting.

My experiences in the kindergarten classes at Union Elementary School have taught me that the needs of students can be as varied as their personalities. This school is a rural school with fewer than 300 students. One quarter of the school’s population receives free meals, while an additional 10 percent receive reduced fee meals. In my classroom, I teach 18 students in the morning class and 15 students in the afternoon. The gender break down in the two classes is very close to 50/50. fifteen of my 33 students require special services, either because of health issues, or identification of learning problems. Two of my students have already been tested and verified to be learning disabled. These students require the assistance of a special aid in the classroom. We have three students that we are waiting to have tested for learning problems. One student is already in speech therapy, and again we are waiting for five others to be tested. Another student receives occupational therapy once a week. We have one student that has cerebral palsy, one that had several brain damage at birth and another that has problems as an affect of being born addicted to drugs. Two students suffer from seizure disorders and have special medical plans that need to be followed. Many of my students, roughly 60 percent, did not attend pre-school before entering kindergarten and some have little fine-motor skill, making tasks such as writing, coloring or cutting difficult.

The next 3 paragraphs describe her student teaching goals. Each has a specific purpose and is connected to her students or based on her self-awareness.

After realizing the wide variety of special needs many of my kindergarteners had, and identifying weaknesses in my own teaching, I created a list of goals that I hoped to accomplish this semester. One basic goal that I am working toward meeting is gender equity. In both my morning and afternoon classes, I have nearly the same number of boys and girls. When examining my past teaching, I realized that I do tend to call on boys more often than girls. However, I am working toward acknowledging both genders equally. I also realize that I need to provide opportunities to boys and girls equally, such as helping in class with daily chores, having chances to work on computers and assisting me with science and math activities.

Because many of these students received no formal preparation for school, many students do not understand basic procedures and routines. Using the model provided by Harry Wong, I am implementing simple routines and procedures that kindergarten students should be able to follow. These procedures include transition times, lining up, walking down the hallway, and gaining the attention of the class.

My third goal is to ask higher order thinking questions of my students. These students need to be challenged beyond simple recall questions. Although this is important for all students, many of my students have never been given opportunities to use problem-solving skills, or given the chance to express their ideas and reasons for their thinking. I also need to work on my questioning skills and become more aware of where my questions fall on Bloom’s Taxonomy. All three of these goals are important for my kindergarten students’ success, but will also carry over into any grade that I teach, making me a stronger teacher.

Being a kindergarten teacher is a very colorful experience. The days are a blur of colorful activities designed to educate and keep the students on task, one also quickly realizes that the students are very colorful as well. After this experience, I have certainly come to realize that not only do students have unique personalities, but many also have special needs that require adaptations and special assistance. After working with these students, I realized that no two days in a classroom are the same and an effective teacher is able to adapt to change for the benefit of the students.

These final paragraphs summarize some of the things one will read within the pages of the portfolio and entice the reader to discover Sabrina’s triumphs and challenges.

No other grade can duplicate the experience of kindergarten. The lessons learned in this grade carry over and affect everything that students learn and build on later in their education. This portfolio is just a sampling of the many triumphs and challenges that my students and I conquered during my brief semester at Union Elementary School. Welcome to My Many Colored Days.

She begins her introduction with a vivid description of her student teaching setting.

Introduction

I am currently student teaching seventh grade Language Arts at Northeastern High School. Northeastern High School is located in Fountain City, Indiana that currently has a population of 726. The school population, which is 558 students in grades 7-12, is derived from this small town and the surrounding rural community. The student population is 98% Caucasian and only 21% are on reduced or free lunches. I currently have 85 seventh grade students, 47 males and 38 females. Within these students fifteen have IEP's and one is currently undergoing testing to determine whether he qualifies for assistance. It is the current role of a couple of these students that directly connects to my first goal as a student teacher.

The final sentence in this paragraph leads the reader straight into what follows - her student teaching goals.

There are two students I have in two classes each, who continually disrupt the class and their classmates. One of these students has been diagnosed as emotionally disabled/handicapped. He was pulled out of all of his classes last semester due to his behavior and has only started back into the classroom this semester. The other student currently does not have an IEP, but is continually referred to the Principal and Guidance Counselor because of disruptive behavior. There have been many parent-teacher conferences and little progress. I want to try and incorporate these two students within the classroom in a manner that is the least disruptive to their classmates, but still allows for all to learn. My goal is to expand my knowledge and experience with these types of students, implement and adapt instructional materials to assist them with learning within the classroom, and establish an open and stable line of communication with the two students as well as their families.

This goal is clearly stated and directly linked to her current

These two students, neither of whom is in my 5th period Language Arts class, are not the only issue pertaining to learning interference. I am teaching a class right before lunch that tends to get too rowdy. My current 5th period Language Arts class continually wastes classroom time by talking, getting out of their seats, and generally acting in a disrespectful manner. I have begun timing the amount of class time that is missed due to their lack of attention. My goal is to develop my classroom management skills and implement specific procedures that will eliminate or at least significantly lower the total waste of learning time.

Not only does she specify why she set this goal, but she also has a plan for how she is going to monitor her management skills and collect data to prove the extent to which she is successful in achieving it.

My third goal is something that I have always wanted to try and Northeastern has made that possible. My 6th period is a team meeting with all the seventh grade teachers. This time gives all of the teachers an opportunity to communicate problems, compare curriculum, work on non-classroom activities, and so much more. I have always had very strong and passionate beliefs about the need to connect materials and concepts across the content areas, and these team meetings have given me that opportunity. I am able to work with teachers from other content areas to bring our subjects together within the minds of the students. My goal is to develop lessons that will connect content areas and provide the students with several opportunities to link their classes.

She gives very good reasons why she has set this goal and why she thinks she may have the opportunity to achieve it.

Though Northeastern is a smaller school, it provides ample occasions for me to expand my instructional abilities and personal growth. It is giving me the chance to develop further three areas: my capability of assisting and monitoring students that disrupt the classroom, improving my classroom management skills, and connecting content areas within the classroom. The experience promises to be demanding and a tremendous learning opportunity for me. At the end of my experience, I can only hope that it is apparent that I have left my own distinct educational fingerprint on the students, teachers, and school, because they have left one on me.

Well-written concluding paragraph entices the reader to peruse the remainder of the portfolio.

This introduction presents her portfolio theme comparing her *Odyssey through student teaching* with the classic novel she taught, *The Odyssey*.

Introduction

Classical literature remains with us today because it presents themes that resonate with humanity across the eras of time. The challenge for teachers of classical literature is to present those themes to their students. In teaching *The Odyssey* this semester, I stressed the importance of making text to self connections as I wanted my students to see how Odysseus' journey home relates to their lives. As I began to reflect on student teaching, I saw that I could make those same text to self connections that I stressed to my students. More specifically, my experience fit perfectly into the epic hero cycle. It seemed fitting then to reflect that aspect of Greek mythology in my portfolio.

In order to understand my odyssey this semester, it is essential to understand the circumstances in which I found myself. Student teaching at Richmond High School certainly posed some unique challenges. Diversity was a daily reality for the students that I taught. While 79% of students at RHS were white, 12% were African American, 7% were multiracial, and 2% were Hispanic. Diversity, however, was not limited to race and ethnicity. While the majority of the students were on paid lunch, 45% were either reduced or free lunch. Even more importantly, the students I taught represented a wide range of abilities from my honors class to my inclusion classes. Because of the vast diversity that I confronted each day, it was essential that I included differentiation in order to meet the individual needs of each of my students. Through discussing ideas for differentiation with my cooperating teacher and the special education teacher and through incorporating activities and strategies to help each learner build on their strengths, I strived to create a classroom where individual differences were respected and celebrated.

Her opening paragraphs not only draw a clear picture of her student teaching placement, but also begin to describe her goals in terms of the students with whom she will be working. The following paragraph continues that train of thought.

Another crucial element to my success as a student teacher was to build positive, professional relationships with my students. Many of my students were considered at-risk. I have worked with at-risk youth before, an experience which has proved invaluable to my student teaching experience. I have learned that at-risk youth are desperately searching for attention from adults, even when they deny the need for positive interaction. Through the consistent use of praise and through continual efforts to learn about my students and their lives, my hope was to create a positive relationship with each of my students.

Her final goal is a result of what she learned about herself as a teacher during previous field experiences.

The last important element of success for my student teaching experience was a close examination of how I assess my students. My previous field experience taught me that assessment is an area of my teaching that must be improved. My plan was to use rubrics, answer keys, and comments on student papers in order to justify the grades that I gave. Through discussions with my cooperating teacher, my university supervisor, and my support group, I wanted to create assessments with clear expectations and objectives for my students.

Similarly to the heroes of Greek mythology, I faced many challenges as a student teacher. My placement at RHS taught me much over the few short weeks I spent there. The epic heroes of previous eras went through obstacles without appearing to have changed. My own odyssey, however, has forced me to grow as an educator and as a person. My portfolio chronicles that growth and change through the characteristics of the epic hero cycle.

APPENDIX B – M401 Sample Elementary Introduction (fictitious)

For the M401 portfolio include settings and grade levels of field experiences and a few of the highlights from these experiences.

During the last 4 semesters I've had experiences working with children at four different grade levels including KDG, 2nd, 3rd and 5th grades. My field placements were in various school communities. While there was very little ethnic diversity in these schools, my experiences acquainted me with rural, small and large town communities and with schools where free and reduced lunch rates are as high as 80% and as low as 20%. In each classroom to which I was assigned there were special needs students included in the full day general education classroom. I had the opportunity to tutor a visually impaired student to ensure his IEP requirements were met. I worked with a small group of LD students on reading strategies, and included adaptations in four of my lesson plans to accommodate ADHD students and students with literacy deficits of one to two grade levels. In addition, I completed my service learning hours assisting in the after school program at Townsend Center. Thirty-five percent of the students in this program are African American or Hispanic. My responsibility was to assist with homework, but I found myself creating mini-lessons designed to re-teach skills needed for successful homework completion.

The concluding paragraph previews for the readers what they can expect to see evidence of within the portfolio.

These experiences revealed to me the wide range of backgrounds, needs and developmental levels of elementary school students. My methods courses prepared me to use a variety of teaching strategies, which you will see examples of in the artifacts I've selected to include in this portfolio. Just as importantly and especially during my M401 field experience, I began learning the value of developing a learning community in the classroom where students feel safe, contribute to the positive atmosphere and encourage one another to learn. I see myself as a teacher who focuses on positive expectations for students while planning instruction to ensure academic achievement for all students.