

Analysis By Intern

Name: Sarah Bourdeau

School: Biddeford High School

Grade & Subjects: 10th Honors Literature and Communications and 12th AP Literature

Cooperating Teacher: Veronica Foster

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Learning Experience:

The word I would use to describe my learning experiences is “experimental.” The reason I say this is because, at first, I was not entirely sure what to expect from my student teaching. Sure, I had worked at summer camps, substituted, and tutored, but I was unsure how any of those experiences compared to teaching in a full-time classroom setting. I went into the internship with minimal expectations. I often leaned into my previous experiences and knowledge whenever I felt unsure, though I knew I could always rely on my cooperating teacher to answer my (many) questions. As time went on, I gained more confidence in what I was teaching, how I asked for help, my grading abilities, and student connections. It was “experimental” because I felt supported in trying new things.

Beyond trial and error, I gained further insights into what it means to be a teacher. Though I knew the importance of relationship building, it was beneficial to see the effectiveness of that bond. A teacher’s role is to educate their students, but it’s also to be their greatest supporters. How can a teacher support their students if they know nothing about them? The moment I started my student teaching, I immediately began conversing with my students as much as possible. Later, when issues came up for students, they knew they could approach or email me to let me know what they needed. Moreover, I gained valuable feedback from my students because of this relationship. Some students approached me or submitted questions or constructive feedback to my Google Form to help me improve as a growing educator. To be a strong educator, one needs to look out for their students, which often means knowing who they are.

Professional Development:

As an emerging educator, it is vital to my practice to reflect on areas where growth is beneficial. Overall, I developed in numerous areas and discovered new strategies and strengths everyday. However, I recognize the significance of continuous reflection to better foster positive learning experiences for the future citizens we teach daily.

The piece I most look forward to improving on is my toolbox of differentiation strategies, particularly related to the vastness of the English content area. It is unfeasible to come out of my student teaching with a complete understanding of how to teach every book, how to perfect every essay, know every grammar concept, and how to differentiate each step of the way. These are strategies that continuously evolve. However, that is why I am eager to expand my learning throughout my career. While my time in honors and advanced placement classes were heavily rewarding, they only account for a small population of student diversity. This opens opportunities for greater development in working with students who present and perform differently than the high-achieving students I primarily worked with. During my visits to other classrooms, I glimpsed the variety that I had less experience with and I hope to build relationships with a wider array of students in my future career.

One thing I immediately recognized at the high school was the complexity of the content. An area for further development is planning for that complexity. While I had numerous opportunities to plan for instruction, I often utilized and altered lessons from my cooperating teacher. So much of the content taught was new to me, too, not just the students. I will be better prepared to teach a more comprehensive array of content as I grow into my career. English has such an immense variety that also depends on the level of the class, the standards being taught, and other school or district expectations. Regardless, I am prepared to take on the challenge of more intensive curriculum planning in my future career.

Strengths:

This experience was beyond rewarding as I discovered new things about myself professionally and personally as an educator. An area in which I exceeded my own expectations was my ability to shape a constructive and supportive learning environment. Throughout my college courses, the significance of student-teacher relationships has been reiterated time and

again: my primary goal during my practicum was to get to know each student as quickly as possible. Without this bond, students lack a sense of safety and belonging, two crucial elements of Maslow's hierarchy. How can learning happen when there's a stranger in the room? I quickly got to know all of my students, starting with their interests and then slowly learning what works for them and what does not in the classroom. I loved talking to each student every morning; I learned their personalities, especially through our question of the day routine. This relationship reassured them that I would support them whenever they were struggling, needed to vent, or wanted to share good news.

My most-improved-upon area was my ability to assess students. Going into my student teaching, I had not considered the amount of assessment that occurs in the classroom, particularly at the high school level. While I learned a lot about formative and summative assessments in college, I did not realize how challenging it was to grade them. Initially, I needed a substantial amount of guidance from my cooperating teacher. However, as the year progressed, I required less of her guidance. I found myself grading more and differentiating between an 88 and a 92 more easily. Grading writing is particularly challenging, but as I learned to create and adapt rubrics and alter grades that did not reflect the work, it became second nature. Feeling confident in my grading abilities vastly benefited my instruction. There is a stereotype that some teachers are slow graders, but I have discovered that the faster the assignments are graded, the quicker students can receive feedback to improve their skills. Biddeford's two-week revision period proved helpful for students who want to refine their skills. Students could meet with me one-on-one to work through areas they struggled with or were confused about. Additionally, if I graded the assessments quickly, it allowed me to readjust my instruction to revisit a skill or concept that students missed or did not fully comprehend.