

ONE TEACHER'S EXPERIENCES WITH STUDENT PORTFOLIOS

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At the start of my second year of teaching, I faced the challenges and pressures felt by all educators upon returning to the classroom. I experienced feelings of confidence and self-doubt simultaneously. My first year as a teacher had been rewarding and fulfilling; I knew I had chosen a profession I could truly enjoy. My greatest fear, however, was that I would remain content with lessons that had "worked" during my first year of teaching and that I would become satisfied with what teachers fresh out of university methods classes might consider mediocre. Therefore, as I looked toward the start of the fall semester, I established several personal and professional goals. In order to compel myself and my students to engage in active learning processes, I decided that one of my goals would be to guide them in the development of portfolios.

Prior to my employment at Naperville North High School, I graduated from Illinois State University with a B.A. degree in history. As a product of the history education program at Illinois State, I felt prepared in both content and methodology. As I began my second year of teaching, I was reminded of a problem facing Henry Adams, who in 1870 was to teach medieval history at Harvard College. Granted, I do not claim the intellectual acumen of Adams; nor are all my students at Naperville bound for an Ivy League experience. In my brief career, I have come to empathize with Adams, however, for he was a history teacher who wanted so desperately to motivate his students to love history as he did and to involve them more actively in its study.¹ Adams believed his efforts in discussion, lecture, and use of the "historical method" were illusory pleasures at best. He speculated that "the number of students whose minds were above the average was ... barely one in ten; the rest could not be much stimulated by any inducements a teacher could suggest." He therefore decided to "try to cultivate the tenth mind, though necessarily at the expense of the other nine."² While I confess that Adams's conclusion has tempted me, I have vowed that I would succeed in engaging *all* my students in an understanding of the past.

My methods class at Illinois State University had encouraged me to construct history lessons that utilized the broad range of abilities students possess, namely, to develop students' seven multiple intelligences (now eight), as proposed and

¹Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 300-304.

²Adams, 302.

categorized by Howard Gardner.³ My methods classes encouraged me to construct lessons that foster student analysis of primary sources in various mediums, draw upon sources from a number of disciplines, and include individuals from the past who represent diverse segments of society. Thus, during my student teaching experience and my first full year of teaching at Naperville North High School, I implemented a variety of sources to help students construct a meaning of the past and to recognize the importance of history in the curriculum.⁴ Moreover, I tried diligently to assess my students' knowledge and skills through traditional assessment practices (multiple choice and essay tests) and to develop classroom activities that required alternative means of assessing what my students know and are able to do.

During my last semester at Illinois State, my history methods instructors were beginning to write a book on alternative assessment.⁵ In my methods classes, we discussed "alternative assessment," the use of "rubrics," and the creation of "portfolios."⁶ In fact, we were required to produce our own teaching portfolios to demonstrate our capabilities as teachers and to prepare ourselves better for the interview process. I thought the creation of these portfolios had been vital to my development as a student and as a future educator. Compiling examples of my best work compelled me to focus on the content knowledge and reasoning skills I acquired as a student. At the same time, selecting items for inclusion and defending these selections required me to organize my thoughts and to recognize important themes and concepts in my study of history and in my preparation as an educator.

I believe that the purpose of schooling and assessment is to foster the development of standardized knowledge, while simultaneously making the knowledge personal and contextual. After my first year of teaching, I decided I wanted my students to have an opportunity to reflect on the work they completed throughout the

³Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁴Paul Gagnon and The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, ed., *Historical Literacy: The Case for History in American Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

⁵My methods instructors eventually wrote an alternative assessment book for the Illinois State Board of Education. See Lawrence W. McBride, Frederick D. Drake, and Marcel Lewinski, *Alternative Assessment in the Social Sciences* (Springfield, IL: Illinois State Board of Education, 1996).

⁶Two works are particularly helpful regarding portfolios. Teachers who are interested in developing their own portfolios should see, John Zubizarreta, "Teaching Portfolios and the Beginning Teacher," *Phi Delta Kappan* (December 1994), 323-326. Teachers who are interested in encouraging their students to develop portfolios should see, "Testing and Grading Strategies," Chapter 11 in Merrill Harmin, *Inspiring Active Learning: A Handbook for Teachers* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1994), 142-154. My portfolio project is different than the suggestions of Merrill Harmin. However, Harmin's chapter might be helpful to teachers.

semester and to recognize the content knowledge and reasoning skills they gained and hopefully had come to appreciate. I began the semester by introducing students to "History's Vital Themes and Narratives"⁷ and "History's Habits of Mind."⁸ The National Council for History Education (formerly known as The Bradley Commission on History in Schools) outlined six "Vital Themes and Narratives" and thirteen "Habits of Mind" for the study of history. (See figures 1A and 1B. Used by permission of the National Council for History Education.) I planned to emphasize "History's Vital Themes and Narratives" and "Habits of Mind" throughout the semester. I wanted students to use the "Habits of Mind" as a starting point to stimulate their thinking about the past. "History's Vital Themes and Narratives" would provide the structural framework and a way to organize their knowledge of history. Like Henry Adams I wanted "to teach [my] students something not wholly useless."⁹ I hoped that organizing our study of the past through a thematic construct would make history relevant for my students. Thus, I began the experiment of assigning students the responsibility of creating their own portfolios as a way to engage them in an active learning process that required them to construct their own meaning of history.

Helping Students Succeed

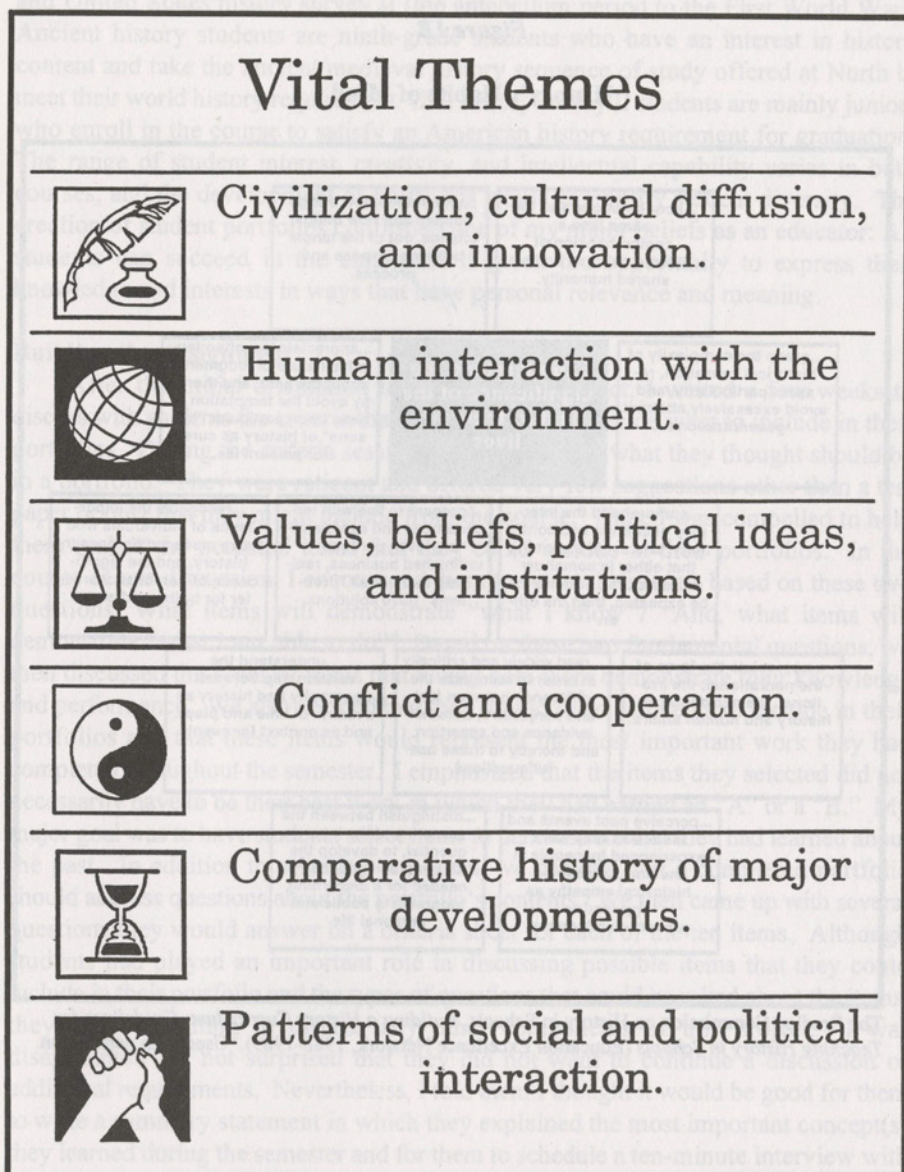
Naperville North High School has a rich tradition of excellence among its faculty, students, and administrators. Therefore, I knew that initiating a form of assessment through the use of portfolios would be met with enthusiastic support from members of the Social Studies Department and the administration. My major concern was selling the idea to the students. Although many Naperville North students are highly motivated and focused, most of the student body is made up of typical high schoolers. My explanation of the creation of portfolios was met with a spark of interest from some, quiet acceptance from others, and outright protest from a select few. Determined and still idealistic, I plunged in and explained the purpose of the portfolios and why they would be beneficial to students in their lives. I attempted to entice them by relating the creation of portfolios as a way to prepare for college entrance and for job interviews. During the orientation session to developing portfolios, which was during the first week of the semester, my students expressed misgivings but accepted the idea overall. After the orientation, I suspect most stuffed the explanation and criteria sheets I had distributed into their folders and forgot about the entire project. (See Appendix on the "Portfolio Project.")

⁷Gagnon, 26-27, and The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Education Excellence Network, 1988-1989), 10-11.

⁸Gagnon, 25-26, and The Bradley Commission, 9.

⁹Adams, 302.

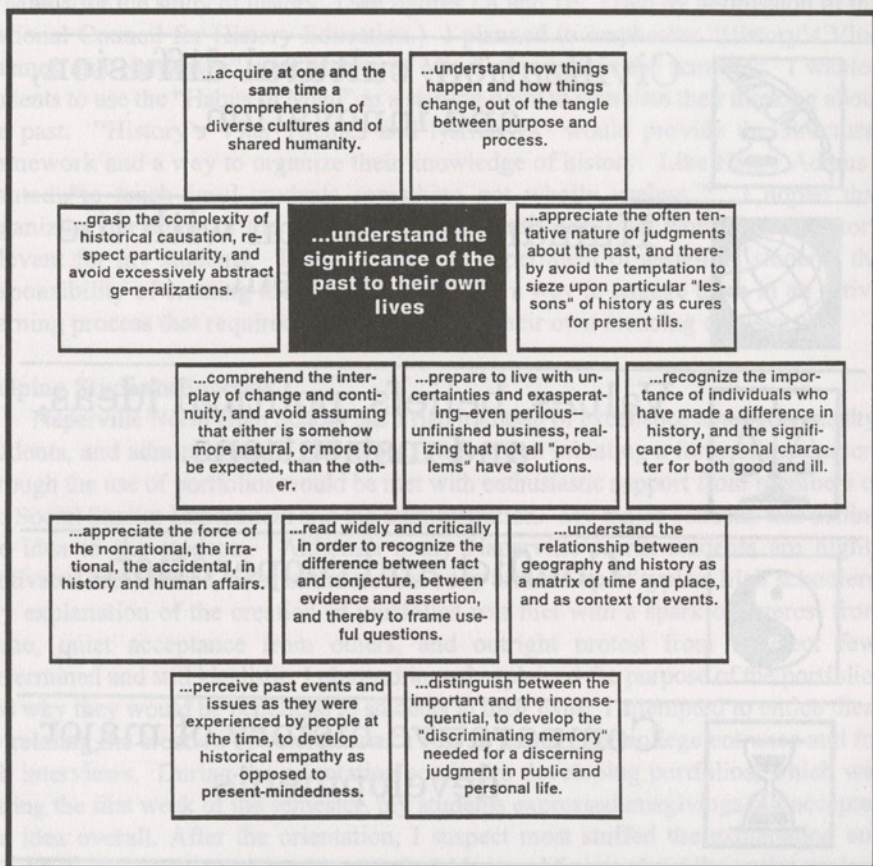
Figure 1A



The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Education Excellence Network, 1988-1989). Used with permission.

Figure 1B

History's Habits of Mind



The Bradley Commission on History in Schools, *Building a History Curriculum: Guidelines for Teaching History in Schools* (Education Excellence Network, 1988-1989). Used with permission.

My teaching assignments for the semester consisted of classes in ancient history and United States history survey II (the antebellum period to the First World War). Ancient history students are ninth-grade students who have an interest in history content and take the ancient/medieval history sequence of study offered at North to meet their world history requirement. U.S. history survey II students are mainly juniors who enroll in the course to satisfy an American history requirement for graduation. The range of student interest, creativity, and intellectual capability varies in both courses, and the development of portfolios would exemplify student diversity. The creation of student portfolios confirmed one of my major beliefs as an educator: All students can succeed in the classroom if given the opportunity to express their knowledge and interests in ways that have personal relevance and meaning.

Building the Assignment

After the initial orientation to the portfolio project, I waited a few weeks to discuss with students the criteria that would help them decide what to include in their portfolios. During the criteria session, I asked students what they thought should be in a portfolio. They were reticent and offered very few suggestions other than a test paper or quiz that they might include from the course. Thus, I was compelled to help them realize the potential items that they could include in their portfolios. In the course of our discussion, I encouraged them to select their items based on these two questions: What items will demonstrate "what I know"? And, what items will demonstrate "what I am able to do"? Based on these two fundamental questions, we then discussed the types of items that would help them demonstrate their knowledge and performance. We also decided that they should select ten items to include in their portfolios and that these items would represent the most important work they had completed throughout the semester. I emphasized that the items they selected did not necessarily have to be their best work in which they had earned an "A" or a "B." My major goal was to have students select items to demonstrate that they had learned about the past. In addition to selecting ten items, we decided that a completed portfolio should address questions about the portfolio's contents. We then came up with several questions they would answer on a criteria sheet for each of the ten items. Although students had played an important role in discussing possible items that they could include in their portfolio and the types of questions that could be asked about the items, they were unwilling to discuss any other components of this project. I was disappointed but not surprised that they did not want to continue a discussion of additional requirements. Nevertheless, I told them I thought it would be good for them to write a summary statement in which they explained the most important concept(s) they learned during the semester and for them to schedule a ten-minute interview with me so I could examine and discuss the contents of the portfolio with them.

The class discussions with my students about the items and questions for the portfolio proved important: Students believed they had some ownership in the project.

My decision to require them to write summary statements and schedule an interview, albeit imposed upon the students, proved to be crucial components of the project. Like Adams, I have discovered that a major difficulty in any classroom is getting students "to talk at all." Adams believed that the most beneficial experience in schooling is private consultation with the teacher. He plaintively explained how he "had to devise schemes to find out what they were thinking about, and induce them to risk criticism from their fellows."¹⁰ I certainly hoped the private interviews would foster discussion with me. However, I wanted to go beyond a teacher-centered instruction. I wanted the project to give my students more confidence, prompting them to share their ideas and questions with their peers in the classroom. At the time, however, I felt some trepidation at having made such an instructional decision.

Thus, to initiate the portfolio project I devoted a little over one class period in preparing students for the project with an orientation session taking about the last fifteen minutes of one class period and an initial criteria session taking a whole class period. Throughout the semester my students and I continued our discussions of what might be in a portfolio.

As the end of the semester approached, I reminded students of their responsibilities to complete their portfolios. Most, as I expected, began to panic as the time for final completion of their project drew near. Some students even protested at this point that it did not make sense to "get graded on work we already got graded on." I emphasized that I was interested in their reasons for including the items they chose and their abilities to recognize important ideas we had studied throughout the semester. Tensions began to mount as we scheduled interviews and the due dates approached. I faced uncertainty and doubts. Would the students actually complete their projects? What would the interviews be like? How would they react to my assessment of their knowledge and performance?

Assessment

I had decided at the beginning of this project to utilize a rubric with which I was familiar to aid me in the process of assessment.¹¹ The rubric (designed by my methods instructors at Illinois State) evaluated student performances in three areas: knowledge, reasoning, and communication. (See Figure 2, "A History Rubric for Alternative Assessment." Used by permission of the authors and *The History Teacher*.) As I set up the assignment, I established the criteria for evaluation with the rubric in mind. I wanted students to demonstrate their content knowledge during the interview process

¹⁰Adams, 301-302.

¹¹The rubric I used came from Frederick D. Drake and Lawrence W. McBride, "Reinvigorating the Teaching of History through Alternative Assessment," *The History Teacher*, 30 (February 1997), 145-173.

and to be able to give evidence of their historical reasoning. I wanted them to demonstrate their reasoning skills through the selection of the items included in the portfolio. I thought they should be able to justify their choices based on how the assignments they completed contributed to their thinking processes and how their project enabled them to demonstrate their knowledge about history. Finally, I thought students needed an opportunity to show the ability to communicate their ideas effectively. The summary statement and interview, I hoped, would enable them to demonstrate this crucial skill. As I waited for the interviews to begin, I reminded myself of my goals. I was determined to maintain high expectations while remaining flexible and open-minded.

The rubric was an important instructional tool in the process of assessment. I found that as I used it for guidance throughout the semester my understanding of its efficacy changed. Initially I experienced difficulty because I confused the evaluation of knowledge and reasoning skills. Somewhat obsessed with the importance of content, I attempted to categorize too much under the knowledge dimension. I also confused reasoning and communication. After working with the rubric, I believe I have improved in my ability to assess student skills in each of the three dimensions. Through practice, it became easier for me to recognize what constitutes reasoning and how the skill differs from a demonstration of knowledge and communication. To aid myself in evaluation, I developed my own criteria specific to the assignment based on the generic guidelines provided by the history rubric.

The Interviews

The experience of interacting with each student on an individual level for ten minutes fascinated me. I discovered new information about students whom I had taught for an entire semester but unfortunately knew little about. With large class sizes and daily administrative demands, some students inevitably are overlooked. I do not excuse myself for such occurrences, but I recognize they do exist. The individual interviews enabled me to learn more about some students and build on my relationships with students I already "knew well."

During the interviews, I explained that I wanted the students to "take me through" their portfolios and explain "why you selected what you selected." I asked them to focus on what each item represented to them and how it demonstrated the work they had done as students of history. I was impressed with the analysis and synthesis inherent in their responses. Students selected a wide assortment of projects and daily assignments to represent their work. Many chose group projects, Venn Diagrams, journal entries, essays, and research papers. Political cartoons, posters, and maps were popular items as well. As students explained the rationale behind their selections, I realized they truly understood the purpose of assignments in which they had been engaged. They explained how the Venn Diagram on Sumerian society enabled them to show they could "separate the parts that make up a society and show how they

Figure 2

A History Rubric for Alternative Assessment

KNOWLEDGE	
<i>Knowledge of evidence from history: facts/supporting details/themes/issues; and concepts/issues</i>	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues/ideas are thoroughly identified, defined, and described •Significant facts/supporting details are included and accurately described •Has no factual inaccuracies
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues/ideas are considerably identified, defined, and described •Facts/supporting details are included •Has only minor factual inaccuracies
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues are partially identified, defined, and described •Some facts/supporting details are included •May have a major factual inaccuracy, but most information is correct
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Some key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues/ideas are identified, defined, and described •Few facts/supporting details are included •Has some correct and some incorrect information
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Few key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues/ideas are identified, defined, and described •Facts/supporting details are not included •Information is largely inaccurate or irrelevant
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key concepts/Vital Themes and Narratives/issues/ideas are not identified, defined, and described •Facts/supporting details are not included •Information is inaccurate or absent

Figure 2 (cont.)

REASONING*Analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of evidence***6**

- Identifies and logically organizes all relevant evidence
- Uses appropriate and comprehensive critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
- Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence

5

- Identifies and logically organizes most of the relevant evidence
- Uses appropriate and critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
- Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence

4

- Identifies and organizes some of the relevant evidence
- Uses partial critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
- Reaches informed conclusions based on the evidence

3

- Identifies some of the relevant evidence but omits other evidence
- Uses incomplete critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
- Reaches incomplete conclusions based on the evidence

2

- Identifies little relevant evidence and omits most of the evidence
- Uses unclear or inappropriate critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize evidence
- Reaches inaccurate conclusions based on the evidence

1

- Important evidence relevant to the problem is not identified
- Critical thinking skills and Habits of Mind are absent
- Conclusions are lacking or unclear

Figure 2 (cont.)

COMMUNICATION

Demonstrates knowledge and reasoning through oral, written, visual, dramatic, or mixed media presentation

6

- All ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
- The presentation is well focused with a well-defined thesis
- Presentation shows substantial evidence of organization
- Presentation shows attention to the details of specific performance conventions

5

- Most ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
- The presentation demonstrates a focus and thesis with minimal narrative gaps
- Presentation shows sufficient evidence of organization
- Presentation has minor mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

4

- Some ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
- The presentation demonstrates a focus and thesis with several narrative gaps
- Presentation demonstrates adequate evidence of organization
- Presentation has mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

3

- Few ideas in the presentation are expressed in a way that provides evidence of the student's knowledge and reasoning processes
- The presentation demonstrates an inadequate focus and thesis
- Presentation demonstrates inadequate evidence of organization
- Presentation has insufficient attention to the details of specific performance conventions

2

- Most ideas in the presentation are not clearly expressed
- The presentation demonstrates insufficient focus and a poorly defined thesis
- Presentation demonstrates insufficient evidence of organization
- Presentation has multiple mistakes in attention to the details of specific performance conventions

1

- Expression of all ideas in the presentation is unclear
- The presentation demonstrates little focus and lacks a thesis
- Presentation demonstrates little evidence of organization
- Presentation has no attention to the details of specific performance conventions

relate." They majority of students claimed they enjoyed writing journal entries and letters from the perspective of people living during the time period because such work made them "feel" like they were there. One assignment that was particularly popular among ancient history students required them to write a letter to an eight-year old in which they explained the situation in Rome after the Punic Wars and Tiberus Gracchus's attempts at reform. Several students commented that having to write a letter to a younger person compelled them to really think about the topic. One student explained, "If I have to explain it to someone younger, I have to understand it myself."

Students in United States history also offered insightful reasons for including some of the items they selected. Since I incorporated the use of political cartoons as primary sources frequently in class, most students inserted in their portfolios political cartoons they had drawn. One student included two political cartoons and justified his selection because, "I did really bad on the first one, but the second one was better. It shows I 'got it.'" Another assignment that seemed to have an impact on students was one that required them to compose an essay in response to an article on whether English should be made the official language of the United States. Students liked this assignment because "it related immigrants [which was our topic at the time] to stuff today, and I got to say what I think and use stuff from history." As an educator, I was truly impressed with the ability of high school students to recognize the importance of discussions that take place in the classroom and the true purpose for completing the assignments I make.

Summarizing Concepts

Including a "summary statement" in student portfolios seemed vitally important to me. I wanted to learn what concepts students thought were most significant. I was anxious to read what ideas they thought had contributed to their development as students of history throughout the semester. In describing the requirements and purpose of the "summary statement" on the criteria sheet, I purposefully left the assignment open-ended. I realized that my ambiguity might cause consternation among students, but I wanted to find out how students would respond with as little prompting from me as possible. Overall, I was impressed with the results. The majority of students took the project seriously. They identified and explained a concept that they believed had an impact on them as they studied the past. I felt gratified as I realized that many of my students were able to recognize the vital themes and narratives that historians might use to organize their knowledge. As important, the students were expressing their ideas to please themselves rather than to satisfy my requirements to complete the assignment. The nature of their statements revealed that the ideas they communicated were written as a result of personal examinations and insightful reflections. Students entered the study of the past by utilizing history's habits of mind. The following examples demonstrate the analysis of many students in my history classes.

Example

"I learned a lot of little facts in Survey, but I learned one really big concept. That concept [is] not just events and names. It is different for every person in the world. Another thing about that is history covers everything. During the school year in Survey we not only learned events and peoples, we learned business and economics. History really can't be defined for by the people who lived it, and those people who lived it are every one of us living today and everyone who has ever lived."

-- United States history student

"I think that the most important concept I learned in my study of ancient history is to look at things in terms of wholes. If I did not do that in ancient history, I would be very lost and unable to relate different groups and cultures to one another. Thinking in terms of wholes lets me see how completely different events are like each other or cause one another to happen. If I did not think in terms of wholes, I would not be able to understand why we study history, or why we spend so much time trying to understand it. Ancient history is not the only class in which I have to think in terms of wholes. I have to do it in all classes, so that I can understand and learn from the material we cover. As Roderick Nash said, 'The environmental historian like the ecologist [sh]ould think in terms of wholes, of communities, of interrelationships, and of balances.'"

-- ancient history student

"I entered this class thinking that history is just past information. However, having nearly completed one semester of ancient history, I now recognize that history is an extremely vast field that can help us view the world from multiple perspectives. The study of history can stretch far beyond dates and wars and civilizations. As we study environment, geography, government, trade, religion, social classes, political leaders, art, even currency of the past, we are really using all of the tools/methods of the historian. By looking at all of these different aspects of history, we acquire a richer understanding of the world around us. After all, history is what shapes the future."

--ancient history student

Improvement

After completing my first experience with student portfolios I have the opportunity to evaluate the procedures I used and to recognize the positive and negative aspects of this form of assessment. I have concluded that the use of student portfolios is crucial because the project requires reflection on the part of teachers in their construction of the past. Creating portfolios compels students to examine the knowledge and skills they develop throughout a semester and to place such information in a perspective that has meaning and relevance for them. Portfolios require teachers to reflect on the way they construct the content and teaching methods they incorporate

in each lesson. I was able to identify lessons that had particular interest to students and lessons that students felt caused them to think critically in their study of history. Interviewing students and responding to their comments gave me an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the types of assignments and issues that are of interest to high school students.

The interview process was particularly important in helping me find additional information about my students and to use this information to inform educational decisions. By listening to students and examining their portfolios, I was able to recognize the topics and themes I taught well and those that would need improvement. The extra time and effort I demanded from the students and myself was undeniably time well spent.

In the future I plan to continue using the basic structure and concepts regarding portfolios, but I will make changes. I plan to utilize the history rubric more as an instructional tool. The rubric, with its three dimensions of knowledge, reasoning, and communication, provides the framework for "coaching" my students. It is particularly applicable for helping those who are at the developing level to attain a developed level in all three dimensions. Such coaching procedures will offer students immediate feedback, and it will increase communication opportunities for my students and me. In addition, I will encourage students to interact more with each other as they create their portfolios. I believe that students learn well from their peers and the free exchange of ideas will contribute to both intellectual and interpersonal development. I will, of course, continue requiring personal interviews and summary statements. I believe both these requirements are the crux upon which the success of portfolio development rests.

Furthermore, I would like to strongly consider the students' disposition as they engage in historical inquiry. What attitude does a student have about examining primary sources? How does a student go about gathering information for the portfolio? These are but a few of the questions that I would like to study as I help my students improve their understanding of history.

My brief experience in the use of student portfolios inspires me daily as I teach. The portfolios created by students confirmed my belief that all students are capable of experiencing success in the classroom.

Conclusions

Using portfolios as a form of assessment was the most beneficial and personally rewarding project I have undertaken thus far in my teaching career. Watching my students explain their rationale behind the selections they included in their portfolios helped me to realize that students are concerned with their work and truly do want to do their best. The personal communication in the interviews was vital to the legitimization of this project. The interviews helped me recognize what types of assignments truly have an impact on students and will aid me in the future as I create

new lessons. Interacting with students as they explain why they liked certain activities and how their images of history changed throughout the semester provided me with a focus and renewed sense of direction. As I work to improve on past lessons and strive to create new lessons, I plan to refer to the notes I took during the interviews and concentrate on the types of activities that make history relevant and important to students.

I teach history because I want to provide students with a sense of their place in the world and engage them in lessons that will compel them to think critically as they construct their own meaning of the past. Portfolios help them to reflect upon the meaning of people, events, and ideas of the past. Active learners and reflective thinkers are vital in a fast paced, competitive world. Students must also have a sense of pride in their accomplishments and must be challenged to construct a meaning of history. The portfolio project helped them to recognize their self-worth. I hope that by using portfolios as a form of student assessment I was able to contribute to the development of knowledge, reasoning, and communication skills all citizens need to succeed in our diverse society.

Selected Readings

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Appendix

Portfolio Project

Explanation:

Many times prospective employers want to see examples of the type of work you are able to do. Therefore, they may ask you to bring a portfolio with you to a job interview. A portfolio is a collection of papers, projects, or activities you have completed that represent the work you are capable of doing.

This semester you will have the opportunity to create a portfolio for your history class. The portfolio will consist of the work you have done in class throughout the semester. The materials included in the portfolio will represent the best work you have completed in the study of history and will demonstrate the progress you have made during this course.

You will be required to keep all the assignments we complete this semester in a special folder for this class. This semester we will engage in several projects, daily assignments, and special written work. At the end of the course, you will choose the ten assignments that you feel best represent your work and progress as a student of history. You will also participate in an individual conference with Ms. Drake in which you explain your selections and discuss and evaluate your portfolio. Before this meeting, you will complete a preconference self-evaluation form to help you select the items you wish to include in your portfolio and explain the rationale for your selections. The form will address the following questions:

- Why was this item included.?
- What content knowledge is demonstrated by including this item?
- What reasoning skills are demonstrated by this item? What Habit of Mind did I use?
- What was the purpose of the assignment? What did I learn?
- How does this item relate to one of History's Vital Themes and Narratives?

Thematic Organization:

To provide structure for your portfolio, select two of History's Vital Themes and Narratives. Then choose five assignments that apply clearly to each Vital Theme and Narrative. The selections should be chosen from all time periods in history and should be linked conceptually and thematically.

Peer Evaluation:

As a class we will conduct peer evaluation sessions three times during the semester. These sessions should help you to organize your portfolio and improve your ability to explain and rationalize the selections you made.

Requirements:

- 10 assignments that represent your work as a student of history.
- Self-evaluation form completed for each selection.
- Identification and explanation of the Vital Theme and Narrative represented in the portfolio (separate from the self-evaluation form).
- Personal statement written and included in the portfolio. The statement should explain the most important concept learned in your study of history.
- Individual conference with Ms. Drake in which you explain your selections and discuss and evaluate your portfolio.
- Representative selections organized in a pocket folder with a table of contents.

Evaluation:

A rubric will be used to evaluate your portfolio. A rubric is an evaluative tool which enables teachers or peers to assess the work of others in a consistent manner. The rubric used to evaluate your portfolio will assess your skills in three areas: knowledge, reasoning, and communication. You have received a copy of this rubric to help you organize your portfolio and understand the expectations of the assignment. If you have any questions, please ask Ms. Drake for clarification. A summary of key elements in each area includes the following:

Knowledge:

- Content knowledge demonstrated
- Supporting details/facts included
- Themes identified

Reasoning:

- Organization evident in selection of items
- Critical thinking skills demonstrated by items and the selection of items
- Conclusions reached
- Selections relate to the identified Vital Theme and Narrative

Communication:

- Expression of ideas demonstrates knowledge and reasoning
- Focus is clear
- Attention to detail/conventions of assignment

Your portfolio will be worth 135 points. It will be due at the time of your scheduled conference.