

NADIA SARDJEV

Health Connector Intern Portfolio



THE TEAM

Journal 1: Entering with Purpose

I began this internship with a strong desire to make a difference through teaching, but also with hopes of growing personally, by building my confidence, improving my communication, and learning how to connect with different audiences. It marks the beginning of my journey toward becoming more self-aware and impact-driven.

HCI Journal

This module opened my eyes to the importance of child safety in schools and healthcare settings. I learned more about security risks, emergency procedures, and legal responsibilities as a Health Connector. How vital background checks, staff training, and certain protocols made me evaluate the ethical responsibility we have to create a secure, supportive environment for children to learn and grow. I feel like severity of this subject has boomed more recently compared to long ago, maybe a previous generation ago. As more knowledge of experiences come to light, most people probably never imagined they would need to emphasize the importance of it all.

My mom is a teacher, and when transferring to new schools, I hear the variability in background checks between the different schools. I imagine the schools that seem much "safer", especially when it comes to having more resources, the emphasis on safety education is less pronounced. Perhaps it is just expected. This week was personal. I applaud Professor Price for sharing her story, helping me understand the layers of protection that go into protocols, and how to make kids feel safe.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Compassionate

Journal 2: Adapting to Young Learners

I learned how much teaching methods need to shift depending on students' developmental stages. I reflected on the challenges of keeping middle schoolers engaged while respecting their growing independence. It also explores how emotions and social dynamics shape how students learn and how I, as a health connector, can adjust to meet their needs.

HCI Journal

I first enrolled in this internship because, through several experiences revolving around outreach and educating others in the health sector, I've grown to be very passionate about it. I have worked with kids K-8 in several different ways, however, I feel this will be a very different experience. I worked as a camp counselor for many summers, as well as one here at UVA! I got to create plans for the day's activities, including learning enrichment activities, which I enjoyed. But, what fully opened the door for me was in my Biology class. My teacher invited me to participate in producing a "lesson plan", or presentation for local middle schools. We incorporated basic materials from what we knew and tried to make it more interesting and engaging, offering a new and fun perspective on a science topic. The students were more engaged in our presentation than I had expected, making it a fulfilling experience. I want to continue bringing more positive impacts in these classrooms, and learning how to do so in this program will be amazing.

I want to be here as a Health Connector because I think that one of the most effective ways to improve community health outcomes is through easily available and interesting education. Although it is sometimes disregarded, health literacy is essential for enabling people to make knowledgeable decisions regarding their health. Providing students with knowledge at a young age, whether it be about nutrition, preventive care, or anything regarding their well-being, can have a long-lasting impact on their future self-esteem and decision-making.

Our first class session solidified my desire to be a Health Connector. My goal is to create a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere where students are inspired to challenge preconceptions, ask questions, and actively participate in their own health. A health connector, in my opinion, is someone who engages others, builds trust, raises awareness, and contributes to developing healthier minds. They are more than just educators; I am thrilled to be a part of this program because I am confident that it will give me priceless experiences in public health education and enable me to directly influence lives' lives.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Empowered

Journal 3: Improving Presentation Skills

After our class presentation, I reflected on areas for growth, like vocal projection and content delivery. I recognized my physical challenges in speaking loudly and identified the need for clearer messaging and tangible props.

HCI Journal

The past couple weeks have been exciting, especially once finding out team and school assignments. We had a very broad topic, Nutrition but we finally narrowed it down to one topic. We are focusing on the 5 food groups. At first, I was skeptical of that subtopic because it revolved around MyPlate, which seemed to be well implemented into the school's system. I felt it may seem too repetitive, and they would not be interested in it since it is something they may be reinforced with regularly. But they are 1st graders so there is only so much they can retain at once. Repetition is good, and I believe we have a lot of new information to bring to the table engaging ways to present it. I also am trying to see what resonates with 1st grade students. I remember when I was that young I thought I had such a developed perspective of the world. Learning and discussing the development stages of children helped a lot in planning what and especially how we are going to present our topic to the students.

I feel that our team has made a lot of progress in a short amount of time, but I know we still have a lot of work to do. I am thankful we open the start of our lesson with what foods they like and why they need it. We'll relate it to activities they do, like recess activities and how different foods will provide them with the best energy/how they have different benefits/downsides. I'm looking forward to formulating our ideas into a lesson plan in the following sessions.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Enterprising

HCI Journal

One of the large components we talked about especially last week was how teaching varies by age group, as well as how to effectively cater to young kids. The significance of adapting teaching methods to their developmental stage was one of the most important lessons I learned. Students transitioning in middle school are at a special stage where they want independence but still need structure and direction. Maintaining their interest while making the material interesting and approachable might be one of the most difficult things about teaching them. They typically seem to react best to interactive instruction, visual aids, and relatable real-world examples because their cognitive abilities are still maturing.

Another topic of discussion I found interesting was what kids can process in terms of their emotions as they age. They feel a lot, but may not know how to properly express it. They all express themselves differently, as we have different communication styles from one another, rooted in how they are raised and influenced.

The social component of learning at this age was another crucial topic we covered. Since peers have a big influence on middle schoolers, fostering a collaborative learning atmosphere would be a great way to get them involved. Games, team-building exercises, and small group discussions can all serve to reinforce key ideas while enhancing the learning experience.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Adaptive

Journal 4: Diving into the Topic

This journal reflects on the beginning stages of preparing our lesson. I started researching our topic that we are teaching, discussing how to present it in a way that was both age-appropriate and engaging. This entry marks the shift from theory to real-world preparation.

Module 5: Progressing in Research

Upon completing our draft of our teaching presentation, there were a lot of adjustments to make when taking time constraints, tone, and properly presented content into account. Preparation isn't always smooth, but the effort we put in helped us build something stronger together.

HCI Journal

I enjoyed working on our lesson plan the past few weeks. It brought hurdles that I didn't expect to have, but once we got rolling we had a lot of ideas bouncing back and forth. Our first obstacle was specifying such a broad topic, being Nutrition. We toggled back and forth between ideas without overcomplicating it.

We decided to focus on the 5 food groups, which I think was the best course of action. Putting the content together after that felt much easier and went smoothly for us all. The hardest challenge for us that we are still facing is simplifying the material enough for first graders while still fully getting our message across. It is hard to relate to them and understand what they know because of such a large age gap. We have had to make significant changes to our scripture repeatedly because it was too complex; both the wording and the concepts.

However, thinking of our hands-on activities and making the lesson more engaging sparked some creativity for us. The previous weekly readings helped with that by emphasizing how to talk and to engage these students. I'm excited to put our plan into action, Monday. I'm expecting to receive a lot of feedback and changes that need to be made when we present on Monday. I also liked the dynamic of our team. We all equally contributed and brainstormed together in a way that flowed nicely. Even though we all have a similar background being Physiology majors, we were still able to highlight our individual strengths to create an enriching lesson plan.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Collaborative

Module 6: Adjusting to the Field

I experienced the importance of flexibility while presenting. When students asked questions ahead of my planned points, I had to shift on the spot. This taught me to anticipate curiosity and flow with the moment.

Module 7: Teaching in Action

We finally taught our lesson to a group of first-grade students. My focus shifted from delivering perfect content to being present with students. I learned to let go of rigid plans and instead respond to their needs, allowing their curiosity and connection to guide the moment. It made our lesson more fun and interactive, which I feel makes a much more lasting impression on the students.

HCI Journal

Teaching ~~has~~ went even better than I expected. The first graders were incredibly engaged, energetic, and surprisingly knowledgeable about nutrition. It was encouraging to see how many of them already had a basic understanding of healthy foods, which made our presentation feel more like a conversation than a lecture. One of the most enjoyable parts was seeing their excitement when they recognized foods we were talking about or shared their own healthy habits. They were so eager to participate and ask questions.

One challenge we faced was classroom management. Right before we started, I wanted to ask the teachers what strategies they use to get students' attention or refocus them, especially when things get a little noisy. Unfortunately, I didn't get the chance to ask in time, so the beginning was a bit rough. The students were very talkative and had trouble settling down between slides. Thankfully, Miss Amber stepped in and helped us regain control, and after that, things ran smoothly.

What really stood out to me was how different presenting to first graders felt compared to presenting in front of my peers. There was no pressure to be perfect. The kids weren't there to critique; they just wanted to learn and have fun. That helped me feel much more relaxed and confident while speaking. It reminded me that teaching is about connection, not perfection.

My teammates also played a big role in making the presentation successful. We supported each other, stayed flexible, and kept things flowing even when the students got a little off track. Working together made the experience feel much more manageable and fun. Overall, I learned a lot about adapting on the spot, keeping a young audience engaged, and relying on teamwork in a live teaching setting. I'm satisfied with how it turned out.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Satisfied

Module 8: Final Reflection: A Shift in Purpose

Looking back, I see how my "why" has evolved. What began as personal growth became a deeper commitment to serving others. I now see education and outreach as a part of who I am, and something I want to carry into my future career.

HCI Journal

Upon entering this internship, besides my desire to teach and make lasting impressions on others, another large part was motivated by personal and professional growth. I wanted to build my teaching and outreach abilities, create lesson plans, understand my audience, and be immersed in new experiences. I also saw this opportunity as a stepping stone to becoming a more confident communicator and effective leader.

Looking back now, I realize just how much my "why" has evolved. What started as a way to gain skills and experiences have turned into something much deeper. I found myself genuinely invested in the people I was teaching, reminded the young students we worked with. Their curiosity, energy, and willingness to learn resonated with me. My focus shifted from self-improvement to service—being present, being adaptable, and being someone who could spark curiosity or offer encouragement in even a small way.

Throughout the internship, I learned how important flexibility and empathy are when working with others, especially in teaching. I learned that it's okay not to have all the answers, and that being reliable and patient can go a long way. I learned how to read the room, adjust in the moment, and collaborate with others to meet our shared goals. I also was able to attest to the fact that leadership isn't about control. It's about trust, understanding, clear communication, and connection.

This internship has not only strengthened my skills but has also helped me reflect more clearly on the kind of work I want to pursue. I have always been interested and got involved in outreach and education. Now, I see them as core parts of my identity—things I truly enjoy and want to carry into my future career, no matter the field. While I pursue my dental career, helping others to better help themselves will always be in the back of my mind. I know that connecting with people and creating positive learning experiences will always be part of my path.

Use one word to describe/evaluate your growth as a Health Connector or Super Connector this week/module:
Fulfilled

