Introduction

My student teaching experience was completed at Canton High School and Westview Elementary in Canton, Illinois. Canton is a rural community and the schools served the town and the surrounding rural area. The school district primarily served low income families with a high number of Medicare or Medicaid participants. The first 8 weeks of my experience was in Canton High School, in a cross categorical learning resource room that served sophomore-super-senior level high school students where I taught the following classes: English 2,3,4, and American History. The high school had an average class size of 19 students and served approximately 678 students. The second 8 weeks of my experience was in Westview Elementary. The first four weeks I was in a second grade classroom of 24 students. The second 4 weeks I was in a Kindergarten-second grade special education classroom. Westview Elementary is one of three elementary schools in the community and served approximately 447 students. My three mentor teachers, and their classrooms, helped me gain the necessary skills I need to become a successful teacher and provided many opportunities for me to grow as an educator.

Illinois Professional Teaching Standards

Standard 1: Content Knowledge: Facilitates learning experiences that make connections to other content areas and to life and career experiences. (Indicator 1L)

In my high school English 2 class (speech class), the students were learning about verbal and nonverbal communication. To help the students understand what they were learning better, I applied the concepts to their daily lives. During the lessons, we talked about different ways to communicate verbally and nonverbally. After explaining a way to communicate, I gave a real life example of the type of communication. For example, I taught the students about
how clothing was a form of nonverbal communication and one of my real life examples was how people dress a certain way to fit in to a particular group. I talked about the different ways the students in the school dressed to fit in to a particular group, whether it was the popular group or the Goth group. We also discussed how the clothes you choose to where to a job or job interview was a form of communication. I explained to the students that if you were not dressed professionally, the interviewee might not take you seriously. By giving these examples to the students, they were able to connect what they had learned to something they already knew, while making it relevant to their lives.

**Standard 2: Human Development and Learning: Stimulates student reflection on prior knowledge and links new ideas to already familiar ideas and experiences. (Indicator 2H)**

In my high school American History class, the students learned about World War II and the Cold War. The students learned the material by connecting what they already knew about history to what they were being taught in my class. To do this, I took what they had just learned in the chapters and lessons before and related it to what they were being taught in the current lesson. For example, I helped the students learn about the Cold War by relating it to what they already knew about World War II and communism. I took the students’ prior knowledge of communism, Soviet Union, fear, and America and linked it to the Cold War. The students were able to reflect on what they already knew about history and link it to the new information they were taught on the Cold War.

**Standard 3: Diversity: Makes appropriate provisions (in terms of time and circumstances for work, tasks assigned, communication, and response modes) for individual students who have particular learning differences or needs. (Indicator 3H)**

All of the students that were in my classes while in the high school worked at their own pace, and they all had a different pace. To accommodate this, I always left enough time for all
the students to complete in-class assignments and as each one of the students got done they worked on Reading Software, a program that helped the students with reading. This enabled all the students to work at their own pace, and not feel rushed to get done because the class was waiting on them. This technique also worked well for tests. The students had all period to take a test, and when they were done they were to get a computer and work on Reading Software so they did not distract the others that were still working. When there were in-class assignments in American History, I had one student who needed longer to get the assignment done due to his disability and he was allowed to turn in the assignment the next day, instead of at the end of class.

**Standard 4: Planning for Instruction: Develops plans based on student responses and provides for different pathways based on student needs. (Indicator 4P)**

Math is a subject that can be easy for some and difficult for others, which is why it was important for me to plan my lessons based on how the students had been doing. I always planned my second grade Math lessons in advance, but knew that I might have had to change them if the students did not understand a concept. While teaching my Math lessons I assessed how well the students comprehended what they were learning. If I felt the students did not understand what they were taught, I changed my plans for the next day to reteach the concept. In the same way, during a class if all the students did not understand a question on a worksheet, I stopped teaching and the class did the problem together. These two techniques, allowed me to teach towards the students based on the responses I got when I taught.

**Standard 5: Learning Environment: Organizes, allocates, and manages time, materials, and physical space to provide active and equitable engagement of students in productive tasks. (Indicator 5N)**
Success was a half-hour session where students participated in grade level small groups that focused on reading. My Success group had the higher level readers in it and the students were very talkative. Normally the students sat at desks right next to each other, but when they started to talk too much, I spaced the students out at tables to deter them from talking to each other. I also did not hand out materials until they needed them, or else the students played with the materials while I was teaching. By applying these techniques, I was able to create a classroom that was productive, active, and equal because the students were not too distracted by others or themselves to learn.

**Standard 6: Instructional Delivery: Uses technology appropriately to accomplish instructional objectives. (Indicator 6N)**

While at Westview Elementary, I taught spelling to a second grade class. This classroom had a Smartboard that I liked to use during my spelling lessons. I used Smart Notebook to create spelling games for the class to play during spelling. These games allowed the students to practice their spelling words in a fun way. The Smartboard Games enabled me to reach my instructional objectives of word recognition, correct pronunciation, and correct spelling. For many of the games, students came up to the board and touched something to make a word appear or they spelled a word. After the children spelled the word on the Smartboard the whole class had to write it on individual white boards three times. The Smartboard made it possible for me to create fun spelling lessons for my class.

**Standard 7: Communication: Uses effective questioning techniques and stimulates discussion in different ways for specific instructional purposes. (Indicator 7F)**

It was important while teaching in the high school that the students understood what they were being taught. To find out how well the students understood what they were being
taught I asked questions before, during, and after I taught a lesson. For the American History class, I came up with a list of questions to ask the students before I taught the lesson. Then I asked these questions as we read the book out loud in class. These questions were pieces of information I wanted the students to understand by the end of the lesson. I asked the students critical thinking questions as well as questions about information right out of the book. To help the students think about what they had read, I asked them summative questions, as well as discussion questions about. The discussion questions allowed the students to think about the outcomes that happened during the Cold War and to think about what it would have been like to live during that time.

**Standard 8: Assessment: Appropriately uses a variety of formal and informal assessments to evaluate the understanding, progress, and performance of the individual student and the class as a whole. (Indicator 8J)**

It was important to track my students’ understanding of what they were taught. For my American History class, I used a variety of informal and formal assessments to evaluate my students’ understanding and progress. I asked questions during and after my lessons, filled out study guides with my students, and assigned homework and in-class activities as informal assessments. As a formal assessment the students took a test at the end of my unit. The scores from the homework and in-class activities, as well as the answers my students gave me to the questions I asked allowed me to track my students’ individual progress and how well they understood what they were being taught.

**Standard 9: Collaborative Relationships: Initiates collaboration with other and creates situations where collaboration with others will enhance student learning. (Indicator 9H)**

At my time at the high school I collaborated with my mentor teacher to create lessons that enhanced student learning. I talked with my mentor teacher, and other teachers who had
the students I was teaching, to learn about each student’s learning style and disability. My mentor teacher and I also collaborated on the expectations of the students in the classroom, what information should be taught in the classroom, and the students in the classroom. By collaborating with others I was able to create lessons that focused on the learning styles my students had.

**Standard 10: Reflection and Professional Growth: Uses classroom observation, information about students, pedagogical knowledge, and research as sources for active reflection, evaluation, and revision of practice. (Indicator 10E)**

As a teacher it is important to reflect on the lessons you have taught because it helps you understand if the students understand what they are learning and if you need to change the way you teach to help the students understand. While I was at the high school, I reflected during and after each lesson I taught. As I reflected I thought about how I taught the lesson, how I explained the concept I was teaching, and if the students understood what they were taught. I thought about things I did that worked and did not work. If I found something did not work, I came up with a different way of teaching it, or a different way of explaining it. If through my observations I noticed the material was too difficult for my students, I found new ways to teach the material, or reviewed the information the next day. While planning for my lessons, I made sure I included teaching techniques and methods that all the students would understand based on their different learning styles.

**Standard 11: Professional Conduct: Actively participates in or leads in such activities as curriculum development, staff development, and student organizations. (Indicator 11M)**

While at the high school, I participated in a Teacher’s Institute Day, which was focused on Professional Development. During this day, we discussed standardized test scores and student centered lessons. To work on making lessons more student centered, the principal had
the teachers split up into groups and each group had to create a lesson that was student centered. The other criterion for this lesson was that it could not just be a lecture style lesson, we had to come up with something interactive to get the students thinking and involved in the lesson. The principal gave the groups time to brainstorm ideas and create a thought out lesson. After this, the groups were split up and placed in different classrooms where we shared our lesson ideas.

**TEP Dispositions**

**Collaboration: Makes contribution to group effort**

In my second grade classroom, my students participated in centers. My mentor teacher prepared five activities for the students to do every week, and they did a different activity every day. The reading specialist and the K-2 special education teacher came in to the classroom during this time and helped with two of the centers. While I was at Westveiw Elementary, there were four teachers in the room during centers for five groups. Due to this, we planned the centers so that four of the centers could be led by a teacher and one was an independent center. I contributed to the group effort by leading one center so that the students could get more out of the activities they were participating in.

**Honesty/Integrity: Models behavior expected of both teachers and learners in an educational setting**

While at the high school, my teacher had to be gone from school a couple of times, leaving me with a substitute teacher. However, my mentor teacher trusted me to teach and manage the classroom as if she were there. She explained in the substitute plans that I was there and knew the schedule and would teach all the classes. The substitute teachers were very helpful and were willing to let me take the lead in the classroom. My mentor teacher
thought that I modeled the behavior expected of a teacher and trusted me to be in control of the classroom.

Respect: Interacts in a polite and respectful manner with students, peers, colleagues, and supervisors

One of the classes I taught while at the high school was American History. In this class we discussed the beginning of the Civil Rights movement and the desegregation of schools. While discussing these topics in class my students had some very interesting opinions about what should have been done. Several of my students thought that they should have left schools segregated. My students seemed to have very strong opinions about this. I allowed the students to voice their opinions about segregated schools, and then explained to them the pros and cons of desegregating schools. In a polite and respectful manner I explained to my students why it was a good idea to desegregate the schools and how it improved the American culture. I respected that the students had a different opinion than most do, but I also politely explained to them why desegregating was a good idea.

Commitment to Learning: Takes initiative to expand knowledge base

The second grade classroom I was in had a Smartboard. I had very little experience with a Smarboard and had never used one in a classroom or a lesson. As a result of this, I wanted to learn as much as I could about using a Smartboard in the classroom. I tried to use it whenever I could to enhance my lessons. To understand how to use the Smartboard in a lesson I observed my mentor teacher using it and asked her to explain ways in which I could use it in the classroom. I also learned about the website SmartExchange, where I could look up already made Smartboard designs and games to use in lessons. During my time in this classroom, I was
able to learn how to create Smartboard lessons and Smart notebook pages to create creative, fun, and interactive lessons.

**Emotional Maturity: Uses appropriate strategies to respond to emotional and emergency situations**

My first experience teaching at the high school with a substitute teacher did not go as I would have liked. Most of the day went very well, the students were very responsive to what I said and followed all of my directions, except during 7th hour. I had some difficulty getting the students to stop talking and get to work, especially one of my students. I gave the directions for what the students were to be doing during the class period, and this student asked if he could do something different. I explained to him that he needed to do what I asked him to do, but he continued to ask if he could do something else. Finally, I told him that I was not going to argue with him and he needed to get started and walked away. When I came to check on him, he was on the wrong program on the computer and I told him to get on the correct program. After this, the substitute teacher asked me if he was allowed to be on YouTube while on the computer, and he is not, so I asked him to get off of YouTube and do what he was supposed to do. He was refusing to listen to the directions I was giving him, and when this happens we went to the classroom next door to get his Case Manager, who dealt with his behavior when he was disruptive. The student got even more angry when I brought the other teacher into the classroom, and we ended up having to have the Dean of Students and the police officer on call come up to the classroom. Once this happened, the principal and I decided to move the rest of the class to a different classroom while the appropriate staff members were dealing with my student’s outburst. I responded to the situation very calmly and went through the correct and necessary procedures and strategies to relieve the situation.
Responsibility: Seeks clarification and/or assistance as needed

While teaching in the second grade, I always wanted to make sure I was teaching what they needed to learn and what my mentor teacher wanted them to learn. To make sure I accomplished this, I always asked questions when I wanted to make sure what I was planning was acceptable. I also was not afraid to ask for assistance in what I was planning or making, so that I knew what I was teaching was meaningful. As I planned a lesson, if there was something that I did not understand, or needed help coming up with an activity the students would like, I talked with my teacher to come up with ideas or understand what I needed to do. When I first entered the classroom, I asked my teacher many questions about the way her classroom was run, the daily schedule, and what was expected of me. By asking these questions, I was accepting the responsibility I had to be the best teacher to the class as I could.

Fairness: Accepts feedback from others

While at the high school, my mentor teacher was always willing to give me feedback on how I did. My mentor teacher told me what she thought I did well and gave me constructive criticism on what she thought I could improve. I always took this information and used it to my advantage. I tried changing the things she thought I could improve on, like being more firm with the students, and see how it changed my lessons and my lesson outcomes. I always accept feedback from my mentor teachers because I think that it is important to know your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. I liked knowing what I needed to improve on and what I did well.

Belief that All Students Can Learn: Appreciates and embraces individual differences

While teaching in the second grade classroom, I liked to make sure I embraced all the students’ differences and taught to all their learning styles. While teaching math, I did this by teaching towards auditory, visual, and kinesthetic learners. For example, while teaching about
plane shapes the students had to put plane shapes together to make other plane shapes. After creating the shapes, the students drew a picture of the shape. I walked around as the students were trying to draw the shapes and if they were having difficulty I gave them pattern blocks to trace around. This allowed them to learn about what the shape looked like and how to draw it.

**Strengths**

**Patience**

One of the strengths I demonstrated while student teaching was patience. Westview places their students in their second grade classrooms based on their skill level, and my students are the lower level students. Due to this, sometimes lessons needed to be retaught or need to be more thoroughly taught. I was teaching a math lesson where the students were completing worksheets that were being used to assess how much they learned in the solid figures unit. The students were struggling with completing the worksheets and I had to answer many questions. The students were not following the directions on the worksheets and were not listening to the verbal instructions I was giving. The students were having an off-day and were not following directions. Instead of losing my patience and yelling at my students, I calmly handled the situation. After bringing my students’ attention back to the front of the classroom, I re-explained what the students were supposed to be doing, and reminded them that if they did not understand what they were supposed to be doing they should raise their hand. After doing this, I went around and individually helped the students understand the questions they were struggling with.

**Questioning Techniques**

Another strength I demonstrated was my questioning techniques during instruction. While teaching American History at the high school it was very important to ask questions
during the lessons to make sure they understood what they were being taught. While planning for the lessons I made a list of questions that I would use before, during, and after the lessons that assessed how much the students learned from the lessons. The questions I asked before the lesson were prior knowledge questions, to get the students thinking about what they already knew about what they were going to learn. The questions I asked during the lesson were higher level questions that got them thinking about what they were learning and informational questions to keep the students on task and helped me to know if the students were paying attention to the lesson. The questions that were asked after the lesson were used to assess what the students remembered from the lesson and let me know if they understood what I just taught. By using these questioning techniques, I was able to see if my students were ready to move on, or if I needed to reteach the lesson.

**Flexible when plans need to change**

Another strength I demonstrated was my ability to be flexible when plans needed to change, or unexpected situations occurred. While at the high school, my teacher was unexpectedly sick and was unable to come to school. I had to be flexible and work with the substitute teacher as we worked through the day. When I came into the school that morning, I had to get everything ready for school. I was used to my mentor teacher being at school and doing some of the things I found myself doing, like turning on her computer and logging into Skyward. This situation allowed me to take on more responsibility and grow as an educator. Another time were I had to be flexible and think on my feet at the high school, was when the mobile cart we used during out English classes was not working. I had planned for my students to use the mobile lab all day, but the network was down and they were unable to use the laptops. Once I found this out, I quickly thought of a plan B, and taught the lesson I had
planned for the next day instead. Being flexible is an important characteristic as a teacher because you have to be ready for anything that might happen.

**Weaknesses**

**Procrastination**

One area where I thought I demonstrated a weakness was in procrastination. I have always been a procrastinator, but it is something that I have been slowly improving on. I have a tendency to procrastinate more when it comes to getting school work done. While at the high school, I would wait till the day before or day of my lesson to make copies. I waited either because I didn’t have what needed to be copied ready, or I thought I had enough time to get in copied before the lesson. This was not a good habit to get into because there was always a potential of the copier being broken or it being in use. Once I realized this was not a good idea, I worked to try to make copies in a more timely fashion, so I could be better prepared in case I got sick or there was an unexpected change in plans.

**Planning in a Timely Manner**

Another area where I thought I demonstrated a weakness was in planning in a timely manner. While at the high school, I brainstormed ideas of what lessons I wanted to teach and came up with a couple lesson ideas a week or two before, but never made the final decision until it came closer to the date to teach. Due to this, I would not write the finalized plans down in the plan book until the Friday before the week I was planning for. This sometimes made it difficult to get things ready for Monday. I needed to make a decision in a timelier manner so that I would be prepared to teach my lessons on the day I needed to. By not planning in a timely manner, I was risking not having plans ready if I became unexpectedly sick or if there was a snow day. As I began to realize I needed to plan in a more timely manner, I tried to do so.
When I go to my elementary placement, I planned my lessons in a more timely manner, so that I would be prepared ahead of time.

**Time Management**

Another area where I thought I demonstrated a weakness was in time management. While teaching in the second grade, I planned too many activities for one lesson and could not always complete what I planned. Other times, I would spend too much time on one activity or topic and have to speed through the lesson to get it done, or cut parts of the lesson. I have a tendency to spend too much time explaining one idea or topic, and not get to some of the things I want to do with my students. I feel like due to this, I would sometimes miss out on being able to slow the lesson down when I needed to reteach a concept to one or two students. As I became aware of this weakness, I became more aware of how I was teaching and what I was teaching and was able to better manage my time.

**Conclusion**

I learned a lot about myself as a teacher and about teaching itself while student teaching. Student teaching allowed me to grow as a professional teacher and allowed me to learn about my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. While student teaching, I was able to get hands on experience in teaching students. I learned about what it takes to be an educator and I gained the necessary skills to become a successful teacher. One area I felt I learned the most in, and was really able to become better at, is classroom management. In this experience I had to use three different classroom management types, for the three classrooms I was in. Every classroom had a different set of students, and a different way I had to manage it. I also learned about the great responsibility a teacher feels for their students. As a teacher, you want
all of your students to succeed, and do well in and outside of school. This experience allowed me to use the teaching skills and techniques I had been learning about and apply them. This student teaching experience had made me a better teacher and has prepared me to continue my teaching career.