As a student teacher from Western Illinois University, I had an experience in which I gained knowledge about various aspects of teaching. My student teaching placement was in an eighth grade American History classroom in Galaxy Middle School. The school was located in Galaxy, Egypt, a city with a population of approximately 11,000 people. The middle school served students who lived within the city limits and students who lived in rural areas around the city. I taught a total of 110 eighth grade students in six periods. I planned and implemented three units that included content about the first civilizations of the Americas, exploration and colonization of the Americas, and the 13 English colonies of North America. In addition to the six American History classes, I also taught a mentoring class of 13 students in grades six through eight.

**Content Knowledge**: Uses a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts that capture key ideas to help students develop conceptual learning. (Indicator K).

During my student teaching experience, I used methods of inquiry and resources that helped the students to comprehend central concepts in American History. In the first lesson I taught, the students participated in an inquiry-based, collaborative activity in which they analyzed pictures of artifacts from the Olmecs, Mayans, Aztecs, Incas, and the Anasazi. In the second unit about colonization and exploration of the Americas, the students read excerpts of Christopher Columbus’ journal. I taught another lesson in
the same unit in which students compared paintings and etchings about the English colony of Jamestown. In each of these lessons, the students gained meaningful content knowledge from sources that were interesting to study. They analyzed a variety of primary and secondary sources, an important skill in social studies that involved higher level thinking.

**Human Development and Learning:** Analyzes individual and group performance in order to design instruction that meets learners’ current needs in the cognitive, social, emotional, ethical, and physical domains at the appropriate level of development. (Indicator G)

In the first days of teaching at the middle school, I gave inventories to the students about their learning styles and interests. The students also took a pre-assessment about various skills used in social studies. These skills included mapping, graphing, reading timelines, and visual analysis of political cartoons and various sources. The results of the assessments helped me to create developmentally appropriate lessons. These lessons appealed to all types of learners. They also determined each student’s prior knowledge about a variety of skills used in social studies.

**Diversity:** Identifies and designs instruction appropriate to students’ stages of development, learning styles, strengths, and needs. (Indicator L)

In the 13 colonies unit, I planned and implemented a successful project-based lesson. The students chose one of the original 13 English colonies. They created a song, poster, or brochure, wrote a paper, or drew a comic strip about their chosen colony. It was ideal for the adolescent students to complete a project-based learning
activity and to provide them with choices within the activity. Each type of project appealed to the various learning styles of the students. The activity allowed them to use their strengths, which helped them to achieve academic success. It also helped the students to foster their personal expression.

**Planning for Instruction:** Creates approaches to learning that are interdisciplinary and that integrate multiple content areas. (Indicator O)

I designed instruction in my units that incorporated multiple content areas; Language Arts, Fine Arts, Mathematics, and Science with Social Studies. In the exploration and colonization of the Americas unit, the students wrote role-playing journals. In these journals, the students took on a role of an individual who lived during the time of the Jamestown colony. After reading information sheets that were differentiated by reading level, they applied writing strategies and shared what they had learned about their individual. In another lesson in the unit, the students used expression while they read and acted out various roles in a Reader’s Theater skit. The skit was about the Pilgrims’ trip on the Mayflower and the first Thanksgiving. It supplemented another lesson they had completed about the Plymouth colony.

**Learning Environment:** Uses effective methods for teaching social skill development in all students. (Indicator R)

In a mentoring class that occurred once a week called Ascent, I developed lessons for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students that encouraged social development. The students participated in team-building activities and games in which they worked together. These activities were developmentally appropriate and enhanced their critical thinking skills. The students learned problem-solving strategies that not only
helped them in their school work, but also in all aspects of their life. These activities were important for the students because of the unique age of young adolescence. It was critical to me that the students gain academic and emotional growth in the Ascent class.

**Instructional Delivery:** Develops a variety of clear, accurate presentations and representations of concepts, using alternative explanations to assist students’ understanding and presenting diverse perspectives to encourage critical thinking. (Indicator J)

In the exploration and colonization of the Americas unit, I developed a lesson about the Mayflower Compact in which the students used various ways of learning about the content. They read information about the primary source in their textbook. As they read, they organized the information from the textbook in a graphic organizer. Next, the students read an information sheet about the Compact that was differentiated by reading level. They completed comprehension questions after they read the information sheets. They also participated in a debate about whether they would have signed the Mayflower Compact. In this debate, they took on the role of a separatist or a non-separatist. They supported their point of view with the information they had gained from the other lessons about the Compact.

**Communication:** Creates varied opportunities for all students to use effective written, verbal, non-verbal, and visual communication. (Indicator G)

In each of the lessons that I taught, the students completed learning logs that created varied opportunities for the students to use effective written, verbal, non-verbal, and visual communication. The learning logs included questions about important
content in American History. In the learning logs, the students connected their prior knowledge to the new content that they learned that day. They answered questions and used a specific paragraph format that helped them with their writing skills. They drew pictures about the content that allowed them to visualize what they learned. They created lists in which they summarized what they knew about the content. They produced graphs and timelines that allowed them to work on important skills in social studies. After completing their learning logs, three students shared their work with the rest of the class. After the students had a chance to share their work, they participated in a whole group discussion, and identified connections to the ideas recognized by the class.

**Assessment:** Maintains useful and accurate records of student work and performance and communicates student progress knowledgeably and responsibly to students, parents, and colleagues. (Indicator L)

After each lesson that I taught, I maintained a paper grade book with current grades and entered the grades of the students’ assessments into a computer-based program. A month into my student teaching experience, a virus corrupted most of the computers in the Galaxy School District. Every computer in each school in the district was not available for use for approximately six weeks. Parent-teacher conferences took place shortly after the computers had been corrupted. I was very thankful that I had maintained a paper grade book and was able to share information with the parents about their child’s grades. Some of the other teachers in the building relied solely on the computer to record the grades of their students. Because I kept a paper grade book, I had a positive experience sharing the students’ progress with their parents.
**Collaborative Relationships:** Communicates with team members about characteristics and needs of individuals with specific disabilities. (Indicator R)

In my classroom, I worked with three special education teachers; one teacher for the students with identified behavior issues and two teachers for the students with Individualized Educational Plans. In my first period class, two associates helped me to assist the students with identified behavior issues. In my fifth and sixth period classes, I worked with the special education teachers for the students with Individualized Education Plans. I worked with these teachers and associates to provide an appropriate least restrictive environment for the students. The teachers gave me suggestions to accommodate the students in various ways. They helped me to develop appropriate assessments and classroom management techniques. We worked together as a team and shaped the classroom into a positive place to support student learning and well being.

**Reflection and Professional Growth:** Collaborates with other professionals as resources for problem solving, generating new ideas, sharing experiences, and seeking and giving feedback. (Indicator F)

As a student teacher, I worked closely with my mentor teacher every day. My mentor teacher watched me when I taught my lessons in first period. During my planning period (second period), I reflected on the lesson I had just taught, and shared my ideas for improvement with my mentor teacher. Then I asked for his feedback on my lesson. After I listened to his suggestions, I applied the changes to my lessons in all of the periods in the rest of the day. This system of reflection and discussion worked well throughout my student teaching experience. His feedback taught me how to critically
think about my lessons and helped me learn how to produce appropriate changes when adjustments were needed.

**Professional Conduct:** Contributes knowledge and expertise about teaching and learning to the profession. (Indicator I)

Each teacher in the Galaxy Middle School taught a literacy class four times a week in order to improve each student’s reading comprehension skills. This was the first year for the middle school to implement the literacy class. My mentor teacher taught this class, but I still contributed ideas at the eighth grade teacher teaming meetings. In the first teaming meeting, the physical education and chorus teachers did not feel confident about teaching their students reading comprehension strategies because they had not taken many reading methods courses. After hearing these teachers voice their concerns in the teaming meetings, I brought materials for them to use in their literacy lessons. I brought my reading inventory book, a book of reading comprehension graphic organizers, and a book of reading strategies for them to use. When I brought them the extra materials and gave them ideas for their lessons, I felt I contributed to the team in a positive way.

**Collaboration:** Shares information and materials with others.

My mentor teacher helped me to develop differentiated lessons during my student teaching experience. He shared a book about differentiated instruction with me so that I could learn more about it. After I read the book and returned it, we worked together to create the lessons. In the lessons, I changed the reading levels of the information sheets that the students read. I went to the library and used the Internet to find appropriate levels of reading materials for the lessons. I also rewrote some of the
materials myself. My mentor teacher contacted the AEA, the Southeast Iowa Area Education Agency, for more reading materials. We shared all of the materials and developed appropriate lessons that met the needs of our diverse students.

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

Each day, I demonstrated appropriate behaviors expected of teachers and learners in the classroom. Inside and outside of the classroom, I recognized that I was a role model. Each day, I dressed appropriately and followed the guidelines for appropriate clothing set in the school handbook. As a student teacher, I used proper language at all times. I used cursive handwriting when modeling answers on the white board. When I corrected mistakes completed in my lessons, I used those opportunities to teach the students that even teachers are not perfect. I was truthful at all times with every individual I worked with at the middle school.

**Respect:** Demonstrates a friendly and caring manner to others.

At the middle school, I was friendly to everyone, including custodians, secretaries, lunch staff, associates, students, teachers, and administration. It was very important to me to build a good rapport with all of the staff in order to be a part of an effective team. In my classroom, I treated all of my students with the same amount of respect and expected the same in return. In between classes and after school, I talked to the students in the halls. When important events in the community took place, I tried my best to attend in spite of my busy schedule. I believe that I gained the students’ respect because of my efforts to get to know them personally and supported them in their extracurricular events.
**Commitment to Learning:** Seeks opportunities to learn new skills.

When I began my student teaching experience, I decided to learn more about differentiated instruction. After working with my students of all ability levels, I recognized the need to provide different levels of reading materials for my students. After reading a book about differentiated instruction, I continued my efforts to learn more about it and completed research online. Through collaboration with my mentor teacher and my own research efforts, I gained knowledge about appropriate ways to differentiate my lessons. My mentor teacher and the special education teachers also taught me various ways to change my assessments to accommodate all levels of learners. I implemented all that I learned in my lessons.

**Emotional Maturity:** Accepts less than ideal situations when necessary.

After the virus corrupted all of the computers in the Galaxy school district, the lessons that I had planned involving technology and computers were no longer a possibility. After being told about the corruption of the computers, I accepted that I could not use technology in my lessons for an undetermined amount of time. I recognized that I must change some of the lessons I had already planned that included the use of computers. It was frustrating to change the lessons that I had planned so carefully, especially when I knew that my students enjoyed using technology. In spite of the loss of the computers, I adjusted my lessons and found other materials to replace them. I provided opportunities that engaged my students in the lessons and used different activities that were not technology based.

**Responsibility:** Prepares for classes, meetings, and group work.
For each lesson that I taught, I wrote a full C & I lesson plan. Each lesson plan was completed one week in advance to teaching it. The night before I taught each lesson, I reviewed the lesson plan and various resources so that I was prepared to teach the next day. In my planning time, I prepared copies of necessary materials at least three days in advance before I used them in a lesson. After school each day, I supervised the students as they waited for their buses and guardians to take them home. Each night, I graded the students’ assignments, and turned the students’ work back to them in a timely manner. Each grade was recorded in the paper grade book and, when available, the computer grading system. Weekly student progress reports were given to the special education and behavior teachers.

**Fairness**: Accepts feedback from others.

After reviewing each one of my C & I lesson plans, my mentor teacher gave suggestions for improvements or changes that he wanted me to implement. I produced the changes he suggested immediately. After I corrected the lesson plans, I had them available for him to review the next day. After hearing feedback from the special education and behavioral teachers, I adjusted my curriculum and assessments to meet the needs of our diverse students. After creating a unit, I met with the teachers, showed them my ideas, and asked for their feedback. They had wonderful suggestions for me that helped me to learn more about accommodation.

**Belief that All Students Can Learn**: Demonstrates positive attitudes toward diverse cultures and learners.

In my experience at the middle school, I had all different levels of learners. In my classroom, I had high, typical, and low level learners. I offered to help all of my students
with their assignments before school, during lunch, and after school. During their academic assurance period (similar to a homeroom period or study hall), I brought late assignments to students to assure that their grades did not slip. In this experience, I learned that extra effort pays off not only in the students’ grades, but in gaining trust with my students. When I gave extra effort, the students recognized that I really cared about them and their progress in American History.

**Strength**

As a pre-service teacher, I reflected on my teaching abilities after each day spent in the school. One of my strengths as a teacher was that I gained my students’ trust. The adolescent students in my classroom often related to their peers and sought independence from their parents and teachers. I broke through that barrier. My students respected me. In my student teaching experience, I gave effort to learn about each one of my students in order to learn about his or her interests and family. While I built positive relationships with the students, I thought about what I had learned and created lessons that coordinated with their interests.

**Strength**

Another strength that I identified about my teaching abilities was my ability to plan multi-disciplinary curriculum in a timely manner. When planning my lessons, I incorporated more than one core subject into the social studies content. In the three units I created, I included the core subjects of Language Arts, Fine Arts, Mathematics, and Science into my American History lessons. My students needed improvement in their writing skills, so I included writing in as many lessons as I could. My lesson plans were very thorough and developmentally appropriate. As I gained more experience
throughout student teaching, my lesson plans and assessments improved; therefore, my mentor teacher gave fewer suggestions for improvement.

**Weakness**

While reflecting on my lessons, I also identified areas of my teaching that needed improvement. My classroom management skills still needed development. After I watched a videotape of one of my lessons, I noticed when I reprimanded my students for off task behaviors that my voice was louder than I realized. After recognizing the need to control the volume of my voice, I used non-verbal ways of communicating with the students. To control negative student behavior, I used proximity with my body, silence, or one hand in the air to tell the students when to quiet down. When I corrected a student that was off task, I kept my voice level, and used a lower tone. When I used these techniques, I gained better control of the classroom. I am hopeful that gaining more experience in the classroom will help me to further improve my classroom management skills.

**Weakness**

Another weakness that I identified is that my wait time needs to increase. When I taught, I was very enthusiastic about my lessons. When I asked my students a question, I did not always wait long enough for my students to critically think about the question. After hearing silence, I occasionally gave them hints to the answer or began to explain what kind of answer I was looking for. Instead of giving the students hints, I should have remembered that middle school students are at different developmental levels. I should have allowed them an appropriate amount of time to think about their answers, and should have given feedback only when they couldn’t answer the question.
In conclusion, student teaching was a valuable learning experience for me. After giving pre-assessments and gaining the trust of my students, I developed multi-disciplinary curriculum that included activities that incorporated the students’ various learning styles. I used methods of inquiry and resources that helped my students to understand central concepts of American History. In the American History classes and the mentoring Ascent class I taught, I encouraged my students’ social development. Throughout my experience at the middle school, I gained significant knowledge about differentiation and meeting the needs of different levels of learners. After working with my mentor teacher, the special education and behavior educators, I produced inventive learning logs, created differentiated reading levels in multiple lessons, improved my assessments, and used appropriate accommodations for the students. After a virus corrupted the computers in the school district, I changed my lessons and replaced my original plans with a variety of formative assessments. In the literacy teaming meetings, I shared relevant ideas and materials with the teachers on my team. Each day, I demonstrated appropriate behaviors expected of teachers and students. Overall, I feel that I was an effective educator at Galaxy Middle School and I had a positive impact in the community.