

My foremost goal for teaching is to support students to learn in that reflects their goals and learning style. This ambitious goal is firmly engraved in my mind from my early teaching experience in my college years as an after-school teacher and an English tutor. I taught a wide range of school-aged children with different types and levels of motivation and from various socio-economic backgrounds. While I tried many different styles of teaching, such as authoritative one-way lectures, beautifully visualized presentations full of graphics, and group activities/discussions among peers, my college years' teaching experience taught me one clear lesson: any teaching method is useful only if a teacher carefully considers how to provide teaching methods that work in the eyes of each unique student. For example, one of my math students, who had been very indifferent (as many are, but more so), spent his time reading comic books in class. After several conversations with him, I found out that he was afraid of math because he was not able to understand any technical math concepts for his school year. After I convinced him to start from what he understood, we chose to learn math together with a very easy comic book style math workbook, and later he was able to graduate middle school with a satisfactory math score.

One may think teaching college or graduate students may need to be different from teaching children and youth, but I believe teachers in college or graduate school also need to use an approach that pays attention to context, instructional goals, and learning styles. In my PhD program, I have been a course tutor or TA for several different courses in the BSW (Evidence-based practice) and MSW programs (two consecutive research methods courses and child welfare policy), and used a similar approach of starting where each student was. As one area of my interests is conducting systematic reviews with meta-analysis, in the evidence-based practice course for MSW students one session was about the meaning of evidence. In that session I covered different research designs and the related hierarchy of evidence from these. At the end of the lecture, we discussed an example where systematic reviews with meta-analysis or well-designed quantitative studies do not always work well in social work. I encouraged the students to critically think about what they learned and apply their learning to the real world situations where they practice.

As a TA or a course tutor for two consecutive research methods courses, I met a few students who were not interested in research at all. They were mostly former or current practitioners who had been away from school and research for a number of years. I talked with them about their perceptions on the connection between research and practice, and searched together for practical research topics that fitted their own experience and interests. At the end of the quarter, all of them finished the research methods courses successfully. The TA experience in research methods courses for a number of years enabled me to teach an MSW research method course as a sole instructor in the beginning of this year. Due to the global Pandemic situation, the course was held via online-based platforms, mainly via Zoom. I thought the online teaching might have limited communications between the instructor and students, so I tried to spend more time to set up regular individual meetings with students to discuss their own learning goals and

individual research project progress. Below are some comments from my students after the course:

“Frequent and clear communication from the instructor regarding assignments and expectations.”

“I really appreciate how my instructor was open and flexible to meeting outside of class to help with my understanding and my assignments.”

In summary, I have briefly discussed a key aspect of my teaching -- emphasizing the application of what is discussed in class to students' own situations. My teaching approach includes clear and easy explanation of course content, examples that apply to the real-world settings in which students are interested, applied interactions with course material to foster critical thinking, and self-directed learning. In addition, based on many years of TA experience, I have a solid set of well-developed content for courses related to research methods and child welfare policy.