

It was my sixth-grade teacher who modeled quality teaching and instilled my love of learning. I do not recall the math concepts I learned that year, or whether we studied American history or world history, but I remember waking up each morning with excitement for another school day, being fully engaged in the classroom and realizing that my teacher cared about me. Despite the significant differences between teaching sixth graders vs. college students, the purpose of education demonstrated to me years ago remains my teaching purpose today: Engage with learners to enable their understanding and application of knowledge, concepts, and processes.

My expertise and wisdom are based on my education, research, and work experience. My role as teacher is to help learners acquire knowledge beyond what is in the syllabus by creating a classroom environment that allows for exploration. My career has provided me with experience in micro, mezzo, and macro social work, and at all three levels I have enjoyed the role of intermediary by assisting others in finding solutions in their organization's direct service to clients. I have a passion for K-12 school social work and providing social work staff and other educators the support that is needed for disadvantaged youth to find not only academic success, but reasons to thrive. As an instructor I can demonstrate curiosity and passion for this subject area that will motivate both undergraduate and graduate students to learn. Course work begins with an introduction to school social work and understanding school systems. School mental health, child development, crisis intervention, family engagement and trauma-informed care are additional topics pertinent for social workers to understand about working in schools. I am an instructor who can bring real life experiences and case studies to the classroom to pique student interest and allow for growth of critical thinking skills.

There are classroom conditions that I feel are essential for facilitating student learning. I subscribe to Paulo Freire's theory that students learn best when they are fully engaged in the classroom. I plan to use active learning strategies to create a supportive classroom environment and foster student engagement. When classes meet in person, I blend small group activities, gallery walks, and partner discussions with lectures, guest speakers and videos. I have experience with technology platforms that can facilitate student engagement in virtual settings such as quizzing, guest speakers, polling, web scavenger hunts, word clouds and video clips. In my teaching experience I have applied active learning and modeling, and evaluation results consistently show that hands-on learning helps with retention. I have also learned that when participants can share what they learned with colleagues, the training material is further reinforced.

I feel that student connection to the class is crucial. Peer-to-peer relationships help not only with classroom learning, but these relationships assist with maintaining student interest in the course and regular class attendance. I value a collegial relationship between myself and the

learners and hope that the pride I have in academia is evident and demonstrates that I value learning. I advocate for learning environments that are safe for all students. This includes responding to student concerns regarding physical safety on campus and working together as a class to establish community standards for both in-person and virtual settings that promote respect and emotional safety. Learning can best occur when students feel safe exploring new ideas and sharing personal experiences. While studying critical learning theory I researched writings by bell hooks and similarly believe that students need to know they are loved.

Other conditions in the classroom that facilitate learning are formalized assessments, receiving feedback, and providing opportunities for reflection. Knowing that students care about their grade and value timely feedback, I will make it a priority to provide timelines and meet expectations, communicating any delays that may happen. I will build in time for reflection throughout the course and reserve part of the final class for feedback in addition to written course evaluations.

My teaching goals begin with respecting the learner. To accomplish this, I will need to discover who the learners are, what kind of knowledge and experience they bring to the group and what they would like to achieve. I strive to be clear about the objectives for the full course and each lesson. Lesson design will consider the division of course material so that information is digestible in the time frame allowed. I will present the information in a variety of formats so that students from all learning styles feel heard and are able to increase knowledge.

When I consider what I want for my students at the conclusion of a course, the list includes: developing analytic and problem-solving skills, the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, appreciating other cultures, the capacity to make ethical choices, to work productively with others, and understanding the perspective and values of school social work. My mission then is to use the resources that I have in my toolbox to introduce and build these skills, creating an environment that fosters students' lifelong love of learning.

I am known as a person who is fair and as someone who listens and cares. I am authentic and model trust to students. I can admit when I do not know things and I remain calm when in tense situations. I follow through and keep my word. I value relationships and find it important to smile and laugh with students, taking time before and after class for informal conversations. I follow the NASW code of ethics and aim to develop a better understanding of ethical decision-making processes. I am attentive to diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion practices and welcome student feedback that can lead to paradigm shifts and improvements in my teaching.

The classroom holds opportunity. It is a sacred space for thinking, growing, developing, and learning. As an educator I am honored to share that space – to lead and to be led.