

Tips for Improving Your Teaching Practice

Your Teaching Style

Developing and refining your teaching style is important to feel confident and secure when leading hands-on lessons with students and is a great way to build confidence and gain tools for group management. Although it's important to always keep general teaching best practices in mind, being a successful educator looks different, depending on the person who is teaching. What's key is to facilitate learning experiences that work for students while building safe, healthy, and thoughtful relationships with your students. Here are a few suggestions about how to develop and hone your teaching style.

Shadow Experienced Educators

We strongly recommend that service members observe several classes taught by experienced educators at your school(s) before teaching their own classes. Shadowing educators who teach a variety of subjects is a great way to observe how others teach and determine whether any of their techniques might be a good fit for you. It is also a great way to learn about schoolwide systems and culture. Start by asking for permission to shadow another educator's class. This could be a classroom teacher, a coach, an enrichment teacher, or even a fellow service member. To get a good sense of the lesson structure and student learning try to observe for at least thirty minutes. Observe how that educator creates a positive classroom culture, ensures student safety, engages students in the lesson, facilitates the learning of new concepts, guides reflection, and assesses student learning. It can be helpful to have a specific focus when observing another teacher's practice. For

example, in anticipation of working with students with special needs, you might want to learn how they teach students with diverse skills and abilities. You can let the teacher know what you're focused on observing; he or she might have some great suggestions to share. As you grow more comfortable with teaching, you might even ask that teacher to shadow one of your classes and offer feedback. Shadowing allows you to consider different teaching strategies and adopt techniques that will work best for your teaching style.

Self-Reflect

Taking time to reflect on and assess your own teaching practice on a regular basis is necessary for continued growth and improvement. You might consider recording notes in a teaching journal on what went well and what was challenging about a particular lesson. Videotaping a class is another great way to assess your own practice because it allows you to observe details about your teaching and your students' responses that you might not have noticed in the midst of delivering the lesson (make sure you have permission to videotape students if they are included). FoodCorps has developed the Lesson Observation & Coaching Tool (p. 163) to identify some of the basic components of effective lesson planning and teaching. The Observation Checklist can be helpful as you reflect on a lesson, and the Lesson Rubric describes specific actions you can take to strengthen your teaching as well as references different sections of this guide. You can record notes on what went well and areas for improvement in the Self Reflection section. It also asks what resources or supports you might need to continue improving your practice.

Ask for Feedback

Asking for honest, constructive feedback from trusted individuals is a great way to hone your teaching style. Start here:

1. Check in with an educator whom you admire, and schedule a time to be shadowed. Allow the educator to give you constructive feedback on your strengths and weaknesses as well as action steps for improvement. Consider giving the educator a copy of the Observation & Coaching Tool (p. 163) as a way of capturing feedback. If you are working on a specific aspect of your teaching (e.g., keeping students engaged), ask the educator to pay particular attention to that component.
2. Members of your state team will visit at least twice per year to observe your service in action using the Lesson Observation & Coaching Tool. This is a great opportunity to get feedback on your lesson plans and delivery. If there are particular instructional strategies or concepts that you are working on, share these with your observers in advance so they can be sure to provide relevant feedback.
3. Students often recognize great teaching, and student surveys can be one of the most accurate predictors of achievement gains. Asking students to reflect on the quality of your lesson, either by asking informal questions or by having them complete a survey at the end of class, can be a great way to hone your teaching skills while building strong relationships with students.

Recommended Resources

- Hanover Research “Student Perception Surveys and Teacher Assessments”
- Tripod Project Survey Questions

