

“What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves.” - Paulo Freire

Drawing on Freire’s work, my educational philosophy is founded on collective critical consciousness building, which begins with the goal of cultivating students’ sense of belonging. I focus on belonging because it is associated with not only improved educational outcomes such as persistence and achievement, but also increased self-worth and self-advocacy. These positive psychosocial outcomes are especially true for minoritized students. I cultivate students’ sense of belonging by centering my pedagogy in a critical social justice framework, and in the belief that transformative education is achieved through collective critical consciousness building. To this end, I facilitate learning by: 1) creating an environment and learning culture built on trust, respect, and accountability; and 2) engaging students in *our* learning by utilizing various teaching modalities.

To achieve my first goal, I begin each course with a discussion of how our intersecting identities have shaped our educational experiences and what that means for us as members of our learning community. I challenge students to move away from the previously prescribed “safe spaces” and to lean into “unsettled spaces” because this is where growth happens. To facilitate this growth, I use counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), a tenet of critical race theory, as a tool to intentionally invite students to center their own narratives and to illuminate perspectives that resist whiteness as the norm. For example, in my experience teaching *Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare*, many students had preconceived notions about the child welfare system (e.g., social workers are “bad”). I also had students with direct experience with the child welfare system, including former child welfare system residents. Empowering the latter group of students to share their lived experiences with the former allowed for the excavation of other perspectives, ultimately leading to ideas about how to transform the child welfare system. As part of my course evaluation, one student commented, “This was just a great class. The professor did a really good job of allowing it to be more in our hands and that allowed us to learn so many different points of views and about each other.”

Due to differences in course objectives, I recognize that incorporating a critical social justice framework may come more naturally in courses such as *Foundations of Social Justice* than it would in *Introduction to Research Methods*. As part of my work around diversity, equity and inclusion, I co-facilitated meetings with our research and quantitative methods faculty across all academic program levels on incorporating an anti-racist approach to their courses. I am proud that my efforts have led to the introduction of a new course in the doctoral program focused exclusively on research with marginalized racial/ethnic groups. As such, I welcome the opportunity to teach courses in which a critical social justice framework may not seem congruent. I would harness the diversity in my students and invite them to tether their lived experiences to research methods and quantitative concepts to develop a greater understanding of course topics such as survey instrument development, sampling, and statistics. As a minoritized student myself, I know firsthand how using my funds of knowledge helps to keep me engaged in course material that I may initially feel threatened by (i.e., stereotype threat, impostor syndrome). I also believe that counter-storytelling can be used to critique previous empirical research, especially around validity and the idea of “evidence-based.”

To achieve my second goal, I facilitate learning by using various modalities including drawing from diverse scholars. I expect my students to engage with course materials not only through text, but through other mediums such as videos, podcasts, and attendance at social justice events. My teaching philosophy is founded on the idea that the learning process is reciprocal; we are all simultaneously teachers and students. I expect members of our learning community to build shared knowledge through active participation in group work, classroom discussions, and activities.

For example, students are required to comment on at least three of their peers' work to facilitate this exchange of knowledge. In addition, I ask students to bring in an artifact (e.g., resource, scholarly text, art) relevant to course topics. As such, we move away from this banking structure in which only I choose course material and instead move towards collectively curating a course anthology. Furthermore, drawing from diverse scholars, I intentionally infuse cultural studies into the curriculum as a signal to students that they will be seen and heard in this space. This practice was missing from my own educational experiences. To this end, I share my own lived experiences as a Pilipinx immigrant and introduce how racial oppression may lead to psychological consequences such as colonial mentality. Students have viewed my sharing as an open invitation to contextualize the course materials with their own lived experiences. One student wrote, "Writing this [assignment] has gotten me to do a lot of reflecting about my own experiences and I would like to talk and ask some questions regarding colonial mentality and growing up Pilipinx. I know we are not quite done yet, but I just wanted to let you know that this class has made me grow the most and I wanted to extend my gratitude :)."

To avoid privileging a particular learning style and/or learning difference, our learning community produces various types of products. For example, I developed a photo elicitation project to challenge the typical practice of text-dominant assessments as seen in more traditional classes; a practice which places students such as English Language Learners and visual learners at a disadvantage. Moreover, consistent with the goal of collective critical consciousness building, the products students create are meant to build collective critical consciousness beyond our classroom. Students are asked to write op-eds rather than a traditional research paper, and in lieu of a typical PowerPoint presentation, I ask students to create a public service announcement video. Both products have the capacity to help students develop new skills and reach broader audiences.

I believe that traditional grading systems are an inadequate metric for the critical consciousness building (i.e., learning) that happens in our learning community. That being said, I still have high standards for what members of our learning community should achieve. To hold us accountable to these standards, I collaborate with students to develop holistic grading rubrics. Students submit a self-evaluation (based on the rubric they helped create) along with each assignment as a way to reflect on their learning. Again, learning is a reciprocal process, thus I encourage students to hold me accountable as well. After each class, they are prompted to tell me what worked for them, and what they would change. This is done electronically and anonymously. I also request more formal feedback at mid-semester by asking students to rate my teaching strategies in terms of their effectiveness in considering various learning styles, facilitating students' understanding of course materials, and meeting their expectations based on the course's objectives. To ensure transparency, I share a summary of the results and any plans for revisions to affirm students' voices.

Overall, I aim to be an educator who empowers students by cultivating their sense of belonging and by developing their critical consciousness both in and outside of the classroom. I have formally mentored students through the MSSW Mentorship for Students of Color and Intellectual Entrepreneurship programs. In addition, I have advised and supervised undergraduate and master's level students through my research projects. As such, I look forward to building on my teaching and mentoring experiences as a faculty member. Ultimately, I hope these efforts will contribute to a pipeline of social workers that not only aim to help clients achieve their personal goals, but also aim to help clients dismantle systems of oppression.