

### **Teaching Philosophy | Tatiana Londoño**

Three principles guide my teaching: social justice, empathy, and empowerment. Accordingly, my teaching has three goals: 1) to create an individualized and experiential learning environment where students develop an increased awareness of their values, interests, and strengths; 2) to have an accessible, inclusive classroom; and 3) to integrate critical and social justice pedagogy in my lesson plans. Below, I define these approaches and give examples of how I apply them in my teaching.

#### **Individualized and Experiential Learning**

My first goal is for students to learn, practice, and critically reflect on social work values and principles; I achieve this goal through individualized (e.g., one-on-one, progressive goal setting) and experiential (e.g., real-world application) learning methods. When I taught (as instructor of record) two semesters of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE), I started the class by asking students about the skills they wanted to develop and about how the class could support their future goals. Based on these responses, I adapted my course. For example, students requested conversations with social work professionals to ground the complex issues we discuss in real-world practice. I invited professionals that fit the themes of class – including a social worker who discussed trauma-informed care in the military, a social service designer who focused on systemic change in health through design, and a bilingual clinician who implemented brief interventions in primary care settings. As my teaching evaluations show, this helped students see the career opportunities available to them.

Flexibility is important for individualized learning. When I taught HBSE, students had recently shifted from a fully virtual learning environment to an in-person environment. For many, it was their first in-person college class. With that came various challenges. For example, as some students were worried about COVID, I used a hybrid approach where students chose to attend class in person or virtually. I adopted activities with both in-person and virtual breakout groups so that I could engage with all students and I would amplify the comments of those on Zoom to those in person. To support students who are less comfortable speaking, I plan activities such as think-pair-share, low-stakes writing, and small group exercises. Using Universal Design for Learning principles, I tailor my class activities to provide multiple means of engagement and to be inclusive of all learning levels. For example, I use a gallery walk activity that includes writing several questions – varying in complexity – and having students work in groups and collaboratively respond to a question of their choice, in whichever format they prefer (e.g., written, drawn, or role-played). Students also learn through hands-on experiences, so I apply unique experiential strategies. For example, as a teaching assistant for a global social justice course in London, I took students to listen to and engage with local advocacy organizations, museums, theaters, and communities. Through cultural immersion, students developed critical self-awareness by deepening their understanding of how the U.K. addresses pressing social issues in a global society.

I bring my approach to individualized learning to other aspects of academic life. I have an open-door policy where students can come to talk to me any time after class if my office door is open. I talk to students about non-class related material like their future careers or about social work and research. Understanding that much of the university system does not necessarily set up for minoritized students for tailored support, these interventions are important for interrupting systemic barriers. Through these experiences, I have learned that teaching is itself a learning process, and I will always strive to grow and do better for the sake of my students.

#### **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

My second goal in the classroom is accessibility – i.e., ensuring all student voices are equally voiced and heard. Accessibility also means that students are not limited in meeting the course objectives and have an active say in shaping their learning processes and outcomes. For example, when I introduce major class assignments, I scaffold the assignment. When students submit each part, I ask them to include a short reflection on questions they have moving forward, challenges they faced, and parts they felt confident in and hope to improve for the final submission. This helps me tailor my feedback and give individualized opportunities for improvement. To further promote accessibility, I conduct check-ins throughout the semester. For example, students provide feedback on the course halfway through the semester, and I ask students who come to my office how they feel

about the course and what could be improved. I also design my classes with cost in mind, relying on accessible (online or through the library), low-cost materials. Finally, I work with students who might be struggling or need additional support to ensure their success. I have previously provided alternate assignments, extended deadlines, or supplemental meetings to students facing various challenges, such as health issues, financial struggles, or violence at home. Being responsive to the consequences of these challenges ensures an accessible classroom. As such, an important aspect of accessibility is helping students learn to navigate the ups and downs of university life. I, therefore, dedicate time in class to discuss academic, personal, or unique resources on campus. For example, I invite university staff to talk about consulting sessions at the writing center and at career services. We also discuss the various counseling, health, and disability and access services available on campus. In addition to these discussions, I meet student accommodations on an individual and consistent basis.

Along with accessibility, I strive for inclusivity – starting with the material I teach. In HBSE, students read or heard voices that mirrored their own, whether in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, or theoretical perspective. For example, I invited a colleague to talk about her advocacy and research with LGBTQIA+ communities after students shared that they identified with these communities. In addition to guest lectures, I include personal narratives and autobiographies as class readings. Within the classroom, I encourage students to be aware of their own positionality and biases when interacting with class material and one another. To facilitate introspection, I start each semester by presenting my own biases, positionality, and privileges. Doing so motivates students to talk about and acknowledge these topics, fosters participation from students with various social identities, and encourages students to voice their opinions. Finally, I strive for a classroom rooted in social equity by stressing to students that stepping back and listening is just as important as stepping up and responding. Importantly, I model the importance of stepping up to challenge potentially harmful comments. For example, if microaggressions occurred in my HBSE class, I 1) asked for clarification of the microaggression; 2) provided an explanation of why the incident was problematic; 3) allowed others to reflect, respond, or leave; and 4) followed up with whoever needed it. In doing so, I supported critical reflection on the situation, acknowledged its impact, and validated those who had been targeted. After this, I witnessed students similarly challenge other microaggressions. Modeling social equity is crucial for inclusivity.

### **Integrating Critical and Social Justice Pedagogy**

As Brazilian educator Paulo Freire noted, critical and social justice pedagogy is needed to foster critical consciousness – the ability to recognize and analyze systems of inequality and foster a commitment to take action - in students. As an instructor, I include content structured around critical social justice theoretical frameworks, intersectionality, and cultural humility. I focus on materials that question common social narratives and provide counternarratives from underrepresented groups. I encourage students to critically appraise positionality in research, especially in studies conducted on underrepresented groups by researchers from dominant identities. My classes also focus on scholarly contributions from individuals underrepresented in academia. For example, I include community-based research by indigenous scholars, such as Bonnie Duran’s work on postcolonial practices in indigenous communities to improve health disparities. I also decolonize the historically deficit-based mental health practices with minoritized populations, discussing how manifestations and descriptions of symptoms can vary across cultures and sometimes be overlooked or stigmatized. For example, in HBSE, students read a memoir – *Willow Weep for Me* by Meri Nana-Ama Danquah – about a Black immigrant woman suffering from depression and her experiences with mental health stigma as a woman of color.

Besides challenging power structures in the outside world, critical pedagogy is also about modeling that change through the instructor-student relationship. Simple steps, like changing the classroom layout from a typical lecture hall to a circle, can help achieve this goal. I also refrain from solely lecture-based classes and instead use discussion-based teaching strategies that give students the space to teach each other, think critically with one another, and draw their own conclusions. During discussions, I model and encourage students to challenge their own beliefs and social narratives and to think independently. Finally, I encourage them to use this new knowledge to think strategically about how to combat oppression in their families and communities.

**Teaching Interests**

I have experience in teaching both lecture-style and discussion-based classes, in addition to designing a semester-long course and syllabus. With my teaching experience, I can teach foundational social work courses as well as specific content courses related to Latine/x or immigrant communities. Since my research is heavily informed by theory, I can also construct my own course on theories related to Latine/x populations, trauma, or critical perspectives in social work. My fieldwork experience makes me particularly well-suited to teaching a fieldwork methods class that focuses on topics like community-engaged research or the recruitment and retention of underserved populations. Lastly, based on my methodological expertise, I can teach an applied qualitative research seminar. Overall, my goal as an educator is to support students in reaching their individualized goals and their maximum potential, showing them that they are capable and worthy of succeeding. For me, it is an immense privilege to teach and learn from the future social workers of the world.