Teaching Statement | Xiao Ding

I believe good course preparation sets the tone for successful teaching and should always be emphasized and implemented before the delivery of the lecture. To me, this requires knowing myself and my students and integrating the latest research findings into my teaching. It entails bringing in the self as an instrument to appraise the required text as well as auxiliary learning materials and to create course content that is relevant and applicable to the real world. The relationship approach and solution-focused strengths-based perspectives to teaching and mentoring students go hand-in-hand in my teaching practice. I maintain a student-centered teaching philosophy, placing the needs, interests, and learning outcomes of the students at the forefront at all levels of social work education. I prioritize students' learning experience and the individual growth in the classroom. In doing so, I adopted a scaffolding approach to facilitate students to gain access to the curriculum and master skills one step at a time.

In order to create a safe learning environment, I use open ended questions to assist the student, starting with their existing resource repertoire, such as "What do you know about social justice or social change, even a little bit?" Students will typically share their unique experiences, perspectives, and understanding of real-life issues that lead me to guide them and build a common ground between theory and application using the literature assigned. Students are resourceful and can contribute to the class in more than one way when I work with them to activate their strengths. However, establishing authenticity and respect is key to building a collaborative relationship with students. Hence, at the beginning of each semester and every class, I invite students to co-create ground rules and codes of honor to maintain a safe and inclusive classroom space where all students feel valued and respected.

This grand vision of social work (i.e., preparing students to be competent professionals working with diverse populations across multiple spheres to enhance the quality of life, foster community resilience, and advocate for equity) can be challenging to fulfill without the instructor breaking down aspirations into concrete, attainable tasks. In both *Individual and Family Practice* and the *Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare* classes I have taught, I facilitate students learning to reflect how our positionality and clients' intersectionality interlace with personal biases to impact the provision culturally-competent services. After presenting a real-life case scenario in class, I remind students to revisit their learning materials, using prompts such as, "*How do the client's struggles tell us about how society works? What does the client's experience tell us about the dynamic system of oppression? Looking at your positionality inventory, what are some challenges for you to engage with the client, and how do you ensure your intervention plans align with professional values?*" These questions and activities invite students to engage in deep dialogues with themselves and one another, which requires students to temporarily suspend their identities and beliefs and take on others' perspectives. Based on a scaffolding approach, takeaways from the in-class discussion could be used directly to form students' personal reflection essays. To enhance students' confidence and level of readiness, I also use real-life case examples to create intervention lab sessions incorporating various experiential learning activities (i.e., role-play, in-class personal reflection, and group discussion) for students to practice their clinical skills. In the following week, building upon lessons learned from the intervention lab, students are invited to workshop and apply their proposed service plans based on theories and evidence, which is a higher level of learning in progress.

Critically evaluating my expertise in clinical practice, pedagogical skillset, and particular knowledge areas that I might excel or fall short of holds me accountable for facilitating optimal student learning. For instance, as a cis-gender straight female social work scholar mainly working with children, youth, and families, I invite colleague experts who are qualified in research expertise and personal experiences to record short lectures or present synchronously to cover topics regarding working with LGBTQ+ and elderly populations, immigrants, and substance use and recovery, which received high ratings and positive feedback in students course evaluation comments. Recognizing that students possess unique backgrounds, experiences, and learning styles, I strive to tailor my instructional approaches to accommodate diverse needs. For example, for students who need accommodations due to disability and students either missed class or could not participate in in-class learning activities, I offered a live Zoom option and one-on-one individual tutoring during my office hours to negotiate learning goals with the student that meet course objectives yet are timely and achievable. I have worked with students who were battling with financial instability, health/mental health issues, or students who missed crucial points in their essays or class projects to complete open-book make-up quizzes to catch up, and I always openly discuss these methods with the entire class before launching special make-up modules on Canvas.

As a clinical social worker, I approach class with the end in mind. I begin my course preparation with setting up the discussion board with a brief self-introduction and asked students to introduce themselves, sharing their interests in the upcoming field placement, the population they would like to work with and their career goals. To meet the students where they are, I also designed a pre-course survey and an end-of-semester survey using the online Qualtrics platform for students to rate their familiarity with some guiding theories and frameworks, current readiness to practice with individuals and families as well as their confidence level to provide ethical, critical, and social justice-oriented services to the clients on a scale of 1-10 (where 10 indicated the highest level of readiness/confidence). Following the guidance of the social work competencies stated in the CSWE *Education Policy and Accreditation Standards* (EPAS) while incorporating students' feedback (e.g., most students wanted to work with children, youth, and families and were at a low-medium level of readiness/confidence), I delineate clear learning objectives in the course syllabus to guide my teaching and help student individuals to self-assess and evaluate their learning outcomes. In the final class of the Individual and Family Practice, I presented the pre-post class survey results to students, where data analysis showed statistically significant improvement in their overall knowledge and readiness to engage with clients, as well as provide ethical, critical, and social justice-oriented services.

Last, when I view students' progress in their learning, I keep a growth mindset. I emphasize students' efforts and persistence, encourage them to learn from mistakes and work with them to renegotiate their learning goals that meet the learning objectives. I also value a timely constructive feedback loop between me and the students. I keep an open mind to incorporating students' constructive feedback to adjust my teaching approach throughout the semester, again using self as an instrument. I strive to harness the development of new technologies to innovate teaching methods, including lectures, group discussions, case studies, and experiential learning activities to continue engaging students in profound ways to understand social justice and promote social changes through a strengths-based and relational teaching model.