

Teaching statement

Growing up in the hometown of Confucius, a renowned philosopher and educator in ancient China, I was deeply influenced by an educational tradition that values *student-centered learning*, *equitable education for all*, and *tailored teaching methods to ignite students' curiosity*. My cross-cultural education in China and the United States, together with professional training in social work and public health, has reinforced these principles and encouraged me to integrate diverse pedagogical approaches into my teaching practices. I believe students learn best when they actively construct knowledge, connect theory to practice, and critically examine systems of inequity. My teaching practices are designed to cultivate these competencies.

As an educator, I aim to prepare future social workers to become effective agents of social change. I focus on three key objectives: (1) fostering constructive student-centered learning, (2) connecting theory and practice, and (3) cultivating critical thinking through a social justice lens. I view these objectives as vital to equipping students with the skills and perspectives necessary to address societal challenges while advancing social justice and equity.

Fostering constructive, student-centered learning

Inspired by the Confucian emphasis on teaching according to students' needs, I employ scaffolding techniques to ensure learning is meaningful and the objectives are achievable for students. One way I do this is to break down complex ideas using guided questions that encourage students to incrementally explore concepts. For example, in a lecture I gave entitled *Leadership in Social Work: From Theory to Practice*, many students entered the lecture with narrow or implicit assumptions about leadership. I began with a "leadership opinion poll" before introducing theory. Comparing students' responses with leadership frameworks helped students recognize multiple conceptions of leadership, critically examine their own assumptions, and connect abstract theories to their developing professional identities. Student evaluations for this lecture indicated that this class activity made the concepts more accessible and applicable to their lived experiences.

Influenced by my community-engaged participatory research, I believe learning is most meaningful when students actively co-create classroom experiences and construct knowledge collaboratively. When lecturing, I put this philosophy into practice by co-developing classroom norms with students and designing collaborative learning activities that foster an inclusive and engaging classroom climate. For instance, using interactive technologies (e.g., Miro, Mentimeter) allowed me to quickly identify misconceptions, encourage broad student participation, and develop a sense of ownership over course topics. I also incorporated interactive learning activities (e.g., group discussions, role plays, and debates) that encouraged students to collaboratively construct knowledge, deepen their understanding of course concepts, and participate confidently in discussions. Students reported that these activities enhanced their understanding of course content and encouraged them to continue reflecting on course concepts beyond the classroom.

Connecting theory and practice

Consistent with the Confucian view that learning becomes meaningful through application, I believe students learn theory most effectively when they examine empirical evidence related to the theory and apply this knowledge to real-world practice. Through collaborative and experiential learning, I help students use theory as a practical tool for understanding and addressing complex social problems. For example, in a guest lecture for the *Human Behavior and the Social Environment* course, I presented findings from my community-based research on older adults living with dementia to demonstrate how the community's lived experiences both supported and challenged an established theoretical framework. By comparing empirical findings with theoretical frameworks, students learned to evaluate evidence critically, recognize the complexity of lived experiences, and apply research to make social work practice more equitable and responsive to needs at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

Because social work theories are developed and applied within specific social and cultural contexts, I encourage students to examine how theoretical frameworks apply differently across diverse communities. In my teaching, I invite students to draw on their own lived experiences, community perspectives, and insights from guest speakers to examine when theoretical frameworks illuminate practice and when they require adaptation. Through these conversations, students learn to integrate theoretical knowledge with cultural

humility and cultural responsiveness needed to apply theory thoughtfully with clients from diverse backgrounds and across diverse practice settings.

Cultivating critical thinking through a social justice lens

Confucius taught that ideas must be examined critically. In social work education, I extend this principle by encouraging students to critically examine systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Through class activities and reflective assignments (e.g., case analysis, discussion board posts, reflection papers), I create opportunities for students to analyze critical social work topics while examining their assumptions and the broader implications for practice. For example, in a guest lecture on risk assessment for child abuse and neglect, I designed a case analysis activity based on the story of an undocumented immigrant with whom I worked during her prenatal and postnatal journey. Students connected clinical assessment skills with structural inequities, examined how systemic barriers influence client outcomes, and developed concrete advocacy strategies for more equitable practice. To deepen these conversations, I intentionally selected readings, multimedia resources, and community voices representing diverse perspectives. Engaging with contrasting viewpoints enables students to question dominant assumptions, evaluate competing perspectives, and engage more thoughtfully with complex issues affecting marginalized communities. Students learned to approach critical thinking as a professional responsibility that informs ethical social work practice and client advocacy.

Assessing student learning and gathering feedback

Effectively assessing students' learning and adjusting my teaching methods accordingly are important to my teaching. I have regularly used classroom assessment techniques to monitor students' understanding and gather real-time feedback to inform my instructional decisions. For example, in the *Social Work Research Methods* course, I implemented in-class quizzes and matching exercises to evaluate students' mastery of key concepts. These engaging and formative assessments not only helped students assess their own learning but also helped guide my instructional decisions. For instance, when classroom responses revealed some misconceptions, I revisited the key concepts using new examples or modified subsequent activities to reinforce students' learning.

Reflecting the Confucian emphasis on continuous learning and self-improvement, I treat assessment as an iterative process for both students and myself. Beyond the classroom, I have strived to be accessible through office hours and informal conversations, creating additional opportunities for students to share their learning needs and provide feedback. Similarly, I review mid-semester and end-of-semester student feedback with course instructors to identify patterns and refine future lesson plans, instructional techniques, assignments, and pacing. This feedback fostered a collaborative learning environment that supports student-centered learning, reflexivity, and mutual respect.

Future teaching

I am committed to bringing my multidisciplinary background, clinical practice and research experiences, and personal journey into the classroom to prepare students for impactful social work practice and research. I am well prepared to teach foundational courses (e.g., Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Social Work Research Methods) and I have the requisite expertise to teach specialized courses (e.g., Community Engagement and Social Work Practices, Social Work Practice with Older Adults). For me, teaching is also mentoring. Having navigated higher education across multiple cultures and disciplines, I am especially passionate about mentoring students whose educational pathways have been impacted by structural and cultural barriers. I aspire to help students build confidence and resilience as scholars, practitioners, and future leaders in social work.

Overall, my teaching philosophy is rooted in a student-centered, critical, and collaborative approach grounded in social work's core values of equity and social justice. From the hometown of Confucius to my journey as a social work educator in the U.S., I have come to view teaching as both a privilege and a responsibility. The teaching philosophy that first inspired me continues to guide my teaching today: learning flourishes when curiosity is nurtured, reflection is encouraged, and knowledge is applied in service of others. I strive to create inclusive learning environments where students develop critical thinking skills, embrace their unique strengths, and become empowered agents of societal change. In doing so, I seek to carry forward the enduring belief that education has the power to transform both individuals and society.