Learning is a joy to me, and my philosophy of teaching is rooted in seeking to walk alongside students in a vibrant path of learning. I have educational experience in various settings: my home country, the Philippines, for elementary and undergraduate school; Canada for high school; the US for graduate school; and South Korea and Guam for teaching-related work experiences. Synthesized into my teaching philosophy too are my work experience in direct social work, community practice, and Research Assistantship about ‘scholarship of teaching in learning’ in social work with the UW School of Social Work Office of Academic Affairs. I aim to foster an engaging classroom, drawing from my diverse experiences and personal affinity for learning.

Three goals, towards engaging, critical and personal learning, motivate my teaching. First, I aim to animate learning by presenting information in a manner that is spirited and stimulating, in order to ensure long-lasting connections. I believe that social work practice is so embedded and reflected in social life, and harnessing that connection in the classroom makes for effective learning. I seek to relate classroom material to current events, pop culture and contemporary issues as much as possible. This entails my keeping close ties with communities and staying current in research and socio-political and academic debates, and then incorporating application to course content. This requires that I seek out relevant, curious and varied resources and sources of knowledge. In my teaching, I used podcasts, youtube videos, clips from films, blogs, news articles, student participation in local events and community-based activities, and invited speakers, some of whom shared expertise and others their lived experiences. As other examples, films can provide material to learn about mental health disorders; and participating in social movements can make more clear and palpable community practice in social work.

Second, I aim to engage with students in critical thinking, to foster continued desiring of renewed futures and action towards transformative social work. This aim entails providing a larger context for dominant ideas in academic knowledge and public discourse. This means taking into account historical context and the perspectives of those who are often suppressed from dominant ways of viewing and being in the world. Gaining familiarity with and then value for peripheral voices can facilitate a more evaluative and critical stance. By zooming out for a broader context, we gain a deeper understanding; and with that breadth and depth, we as social workers may learn to respond more effectively to the complexity and dynamism of our work and the systems within which we work.

Third, I seek to make learning personal. Being a social worker is so intertwined with one’s sense of self, and learning to become a social worker means also learning about one’s self. I seek to facilitate self-reflection through meaningful dialogue in the classroom, written reflection about material, and one-on-one feedback discussions with me as instructor. Social work knowledge, skills and values are deeply linked with students and their individual histories,
identities, perspectives and, importantly, futures. Recognizing and valuing students as individuals cultivate social work practice that is not only effective but also reflexive and humble.

A main strategy towards these three goals is a “take-away framework” I applied in the MSW macro practice with communities and organizations course that I co-taught last year. In the first days of class I provided a framework or ‘grid’ wherein we would later map ideas and knowledge learned each week against broader, interrelated histories and systems of thought and practice. By providing the big picture framing, students are better able to situate acquired knowledge, while also finding their own place in that big picture. Then, students composed a ‘take-away’ every week. These take-aways can be in the form of three- to five-liners that students can readily remember to synthesize the most relevant and personally meaningful parts of material learned that week and how those fit in the big picture. In those ‘take-aways,’ students substantiate the arguments and claims they make in several ways: use a vignette or case study to illustrate a point; reference key statistics; identify counterfactuals; cite and quote authors, thinkers, exemplars, or popular figures or celebrities, for example. The aim is for students to be able to recall and articulate summarizing key ideas, as they work with individuals, organizations and communities as social workers, in discussions with peers and family, and in personal assessing and thinking through news events and social life. The course would culminate with a narrative, composed of bite-sized bits of knowledge from each week as part of a broader framework, that students can take away with them.

I strive to foster learning spaces wherein I’m viewed not an authoritative figure, but facilitator. I too am learning from students, and I appreciate that opportunity. I place a high value on mentoring students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. I personally know how guidance, role models and aspiration are critical for those students, especially looking back on my own path as an immigrant in pursuing higher education.

Learning is always unfinished. Although we have a responsibility to prepare students with social work competencies, those competencies develop over time as they become practitioners. I feel that central to our imperative to successfully educate social workers is to cultivate an appreciation for learning itself, and provide foundations and resources for continued self-development. Social work practice, as well as our personal lives and broader systems, are ever-evolving and thus we never cease to learn and transform.