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I see my teaching practice as an avenue to inspire students to develop an internal social justice compass. Using my own story and winding road to social work as a backdrop, I invite students to connect to their own motivations for seeking social work education in order to fuel the passion that they will need to be compassionate and effective social workers. My teaching experience includes teaching a foundation MSW course, co-teaching two foundation micro-practice MSW courses, numerous guest lectures to bachelors and masters students, and various lectures teaching non-art therapists how to incorporate art responsibly in their practice. I find that my clinical experience and years of supervising MSWs, MFTs and PsyDs in community mental health practice deeply informs my teaching style and ability to make content relevant by relating real-life practices stories. I seek to create a rich learning environment, infused with recent research from a broad range of epistemologies and methods to create an inclusive and engaging classroom. My practice as an art therapist has helped me develop an eye for designing creative, purposeful learning processes that engage students through a variety of learning styles.

Parallels with social work practice

Being a social work instructor has many parallels to practice across the spectrum of social work roles. I use these parallels in my teaching, relying on my experience as a group therapist. As in group therapy, the “here and now” of classroom dynamics provides endless learning opportunities for demonstrating social work practice principles. These include the ability to hold multiple perspectives and respond with compassion, honing one’s critical consciousness, creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries, and approaching difficult conversations in a professional, yet compassionate manner. The classroom is a crucible for how the dynamics of power and privilege play in out in both professional and personal contexts; I use these often difficult situations as “grist for the mill” and help students recognize their underlying assumptions, and model open, contemplative discussion.

Focus on developing a social justice compass

I see a strong internalized social justice compass as critical for developing social workers. Early in my courses and lectures, I explain my intention to help students to develop their critical consciousness. The classroom then becomes a space where we are colleagues working together to help each other in our professional development. I discuss my own path to social work to model reflexivity and to put my biases on the table from the outset, including my identity as a highly educated white woman. I draw from my experience as a therapist in low income, marginalized communities of children and adults with mental health problems to help students make connections across spheres of social work practice, spanning macro and micro practice. Crafting classroom processes and activities to promote ongoing reflexive work for students also facilitates deep engagement with the multifaceted challenges of the course material. In one

example of this strategy, after watching a documentary about school racial segregation in Louisiana, we applied concepts from a reading on the “race discrimination system” (Reskin, 2012) to the video by physically creating the web of influences using paper arrows to describe the many ways that racism is expressed and recreated through interlocking systems of housing policy, school funding, and individual colorblindness. This activity helped students to understand the deep roots of racism and place themselves within the web. My effectiveness in helping students to deepen their social justice orientation is reflected in a student’s comment: *“I would like Tiffany to teach more classes. She was easily accessible and helped me funnel my frustrations with inequality towards social action.”*

Meeting students where they are and for who they are

To meet all students where they are, and for who they are, I use a variety of pedagogical styles and actively create an environment where multiple types of knowledge are valued and all positionalities and identities are welcome. I demonstrate this value through simple practices, such as asking for students’ preferred pronouns, ensuring proper name pronunciation, and identifying the epistemic stances of the material we are grappling with, including the implicit Whiteness of APA formatting (see Thomson, 2004). Many students have rich histories of interpersonal work, advocacy and supporting their communities, but may not be as prepared in terms of traditional academic skills such as writing or using citations. To meet some students where they are, I provide supports to help students meet standards of academic rigor and spend additional time teaching basic writing, research skills, or data interpretation skills through assignment feedback, peer feedback sessions, in class group discussions or one-on-one meetings. Student evaluations noted, *“I really appreciated Tiffany’s knowledge, clear passion, and extra time she gave all of us for questions - both in and out of class time. She was clearly committed to helping us learn.”* *“Tiffany was incredibly available and supportive throughout my learning process.”*

I have found that utilizing a variety of teaching strategies and varied modalities demonstrates my value in all kinds of participation and students’ experiences as knowledge. Creating small group and partner exercises allows students who are uncomfortable with group sharing to still have opportunities to present and process their ideas. Students are more engaged when they actively apply new content to their own experiences and can learn from each other. In doing so, I help students to create boundaries for themselves, which I do through open discussion of the value of sharing personal stories with the application to course material. I have been gratified to find success in these areas, based on student feedback such as the following: *“This class expanded understanding of many core issues related to poverty, at both theoretical and practical or policy-based levels. This course skillfully wove textual analysis, critical group dialogue and discussion with experiential exercises and projects.”*

“I loved how this class was administered. It really touched on all learning styles and kept me involved.”

“Tiffany made the classes interactive by having activities for the majority of topics discussed. For me that worked out really well because it made learning a lot easier.”

“I greatly appreciated the various learning modalities that were implemented and which worked to compliment our learning process, from lecture, video’s, textual analysis and small group process and the movement between these modalities was extremely effective.”