Teaching Philosophy

The challenge was clear: all I had to do was jump. But now, standing on top of the platform, as I was ready to step out, my thoughts began to swirl. I thought I could do this! It seemed like a good idea but now my fears were overwhelming me even though I could hear my teammates shouting, "Carol you can do it!" I was frozen, unable to move a muscle. It was then my coach came up to me and whispered, "It looks like you want to jump but I can see a lot of thoughts going through your head". I nodded, eyes big, staring at the water. He stood quietly beside me and said, "I can tell you are really scared". I nodded again. He said, "I believe you can – what you are feeling right now is a whole lot of fear and a whole lot of can nots". He then put out his hand and said, "Sometimes doing something like this alone is really scary – would it help if I jump with you?"

My experience with Don Webb, former coach of the Canadian National Diving Team, had not only had a profound effect on me at the time; it continued to influence me as a coach and later as a teacher. It would lead me to discover that teaching, like coaching, is not just about content or skill. It is a shared journey I take with my students which begins much like my experience with Don - based on mutual trust and respect, and communication. Teaching-learning relationships is an active process that involves empathy, concern for my students and understanding students' perceptions of their self and their learning process. The relationships I foster with my students determine how I teach, interact with, and understand students' learning needs - in a way that encourages their growth. My teaching philosophy is built on experiences and lessons learned through many years. I know today that teaching is about the relationships I build, creating a safe and respectful learning environment and facilitating the learning process.

Creating a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

My commitment to create an environment that is respectful and accepting of all students came from my childhood, family, and life experiences as a Chinese Canadian. Through these experiences I developed the belief that to bring out the best in my students I must model the core skills of social work practice: empathy and understanding, mindfulness to manage the influence of my biases and values, acceptance, and the use of cross-cultural skills. Developing students' *cultural awareness and cross-cultural understanding* is necessary for their mindful practice with future clients, but also for creating a safe and respectful learning environment. Another building block for such an environment is providing *feedback in a constructive and respectful manner*. I learned that my approach to giving feedback to students impacts their outcomes. I put effort into formulating and giving constructive feedback, thinking always about what will help students develop their skills and knowledge and encourage their growth as people. Students' thoughts and feelings impact their learning process and can prevent them from trying new things and being active in their learning process. Building trust through empathy is foundational to *support students to learn and grow*. One way of doing this is to stress that learning is about making mistakes "smaller and smaller".

Facilitating the Learning Process

In an optimal learning environment, students can reflect on their emerging social work practice. I see myself as a facilitator of this learning process, rather than as a social work expert. As such, I am committed to motivate and engage students, set clear goals and expectations for learning, create opportunities for collaboration, and challenge students to think critically and learn independently. My energy and enthusiasm carry me over into every interaction and topic I teach. Through it I *motivate and engage students*, for example by designing courses with variety and opportunities to learn in different ways. I provide students with *clear goals and expectations* by offering a "road map" of the course and its assignments that shows them where they are going and what they need to do to get there. This allows me to support my students' development along the journey. Instead of telling them what they did wrong, I share thoughts, considerations with tips and suggestions and then, to increase success in learning, I break down tasks and activities into achievable goals. *Collaboration* is essential in social work practice; thus, I prioritize creating opportunities for students to share and learn from one another. I facilitate collaboration by modelling group leadership skills and team building activities. Other social work practice skills necessary to advocate for clients or develop intervention plans, is *critical thinking and working independently*. I use self-reflection, problem-solving activities, inquiry-based learning strategies and group processes to encourage the development of critical thinking skills.