

Teaching Statement

I was born in a remote and poor village in Southern China. My father only has a high school diploma, while my mother barely graduated from middle school. For most of their lives, they have been making a living by working as fish farmers in our village. When I was a child, they would tell me, "If you do not want to stay in the village for your whole life, you should go to college." For me, this is a simple, but essential lesson. Education is important, and particularly important for people who come from poor families in a society with great income inequality. In summer 2010, I became a volunteer teacher for a small town in Guizhou, one of the poorest areas in China. There I encountered students who similarly wanted to transform their life prospects through education. As my understanding of the importance of education deepened, my passion for teaching ignited. I found this occupation to be particularly meaningful and full of responsibilities. It transmits knowledge, and more profoundly, it can transform lives. Now I have a chance to become a professional teacher and teach philosophy. Here I will explain my teaching ideals, my strengths as a teacher, and specific teaching skills I have developed.

My teaching ideals are influenced by the Chinese tradition, according to which teaching courses well is only a basic virtue of a teacher, but being a good teacher requires more. First, a good teacher should always strive to generate positive influences. A teacher's behaviors or words, no matter how negligible they seem to the teacher, may have a life-changing impact on students, while her good character may inspire students to become better persons. A second virtue is caring for students' wellbeing and success. A good teacher is always there to offer encouragement and advice, or to listen. This virtue has become especially important during this Covid-19 pandemic, because some of my students have lost family members. In this situation, I felt that it was not enough to just give them extra time to submit their assignments, but I also needed to show them that I am there for them emotionally, that I deeply sympathize, and that I will help them if there is anything else I can do to support them.

While my commitment to and ideals for teaching are related to my life experience, my teaching capabilities are derived from my upbringing and academic interests, which together give me some distinctive abilities. First, I am able to teach from a cross-cultural perspective. Before I came to America to pursue my Ph.D. degree, I spent more than 25 years in China. My experience of living in two different societies often enables me to explain arguments or ideas from a different cultural perspective with which students may be unfamiliar. In my course on international justice, some students had a hard time understanding why many developing countries are strongly against international intervention even if it is in the name of humanitarianism. By explaining the history of colonialism in China and other Asian countries, I helped these students understand a main reason for suspicion about international intervention that they were unable to grasp intuitively: namely, the traumatic memory of imperialism is fresh in these societies and people worry that intervention would turn into interfering or worse, colonizing.

My second strength as a teacher is my ability to teach philosophy from a comparative philosophical perspective. This perspective not only helps students learn about commonalities shared by philosophical traditions of the West and Asia, but also enables them to comprehend the ideas of both traditions better by identifying important differences between them. For example, when I taught a course on political philosophy, I asked students to compare Xunzi (an early Confucian thinker) to Hobbes. Through the comparison, students were surprised to discover similarities these two philosophers in terms of their views of human nature and its impact on

political arrangement. Moreover, by focusing on Xunzi's ritual theory and moral cultivation, students also understood better many scholars' concern that Hobbes' own position is defective because it relies heavily on people's self-interest, to the near exclusion of all other possible motives.

In addition to these broad methods, I have also developed some specific approaches to teaching. First, engaging students can be challenging, since philosophy is often abstract, dry, and alien to students' daily lives. One strategy I often use to connect philosophy to students' lives is to describe real-life examples or use examples from popular movies and TV shows. For example, when teaching about why Confucians think that *de* (moral charisma) is essential for a leader to gain support from his followers, I showed a clip from the movie *Selma*, where Dr. King's followers are inspired by his moral power and march over the Edmund Pettus Bridge with him, although they realize that the state troopers ahead will probably beat them badly. By using examples with which students were familiar, they immediately grasped the basic content of philosophical concepts that would otherwise have been alien to them.

Second, I also believe that becoming a good teacher demands a process of reflection and cultivation. Therefore, after lecturing, I ask myself a series of questions, such as: Did the students like the content? Did they understand it? Was there anything that I did not present well or failed to present? Students' reactions can answer these questions partially. To observe their reactions, I constantly attend to students' assignments, and listen to their opinions expressed during my office hours. Based on what I learn, I adapt my expectations and make changes accordingly. For example, when I became a sole instructor for the first time, I assigned many reading materials for each class. I found that students had a hard time understanding the material. After having conversations with many of them after class, I realized that it was difficult for them to digest that much philosophical reading in a short time. Therefore, I reduced the quantity of required reading, which made the rest of the semester run much more smoothly. To get further information, at the end of the semester I asked students' views about this course and my teaching by doing an in-class questionnaire. Some of them said: "The class is very interesting, but if the instructor lectured less and let us have more time for in-class discussion, it would be much better." I took this to heart. The following semester I made my lectures shorter to leave time for discussion. According to many students' comments on that course, my change was successful and students appreciated the engaging environment very much.

Two virtues—"learning and yet never becoming tired" and "teaching others and never growing weary"—are highly valued by Confucius, the greatest teacher in Chinese history. As a teacher, I should certainly teach my students without growing weary! Meanwhile, as a student myself who is learning how to become a good teacher, there is still much to learn about how to teach well. Thus, I will work on that continually and never become tired!