

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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At a crucial point in Plato's *Laches*, Laches becomes discouraged when he fails to provide a satisfactory definition of courage. Just when he considers leaving the conversation, Socrates invokes the idea of philosophical courage; he urges Laches not to lose heart, but rather to commit to continuing the conversation despite its difficulty and uncertain outcome. Socrates reminds Laches that he possesses the ability to endure and that his interlocutors will be the better for his presence. My chief aim as an educator is to cultivate philosophical courage in my students. There are two aspects to this courage: first, one's toolbox is equipped with the skills necessary to feel confident in one's abilities; second, one is willing to embark on a process of self-discovery alongside others. My experiences as an educator and as a student inform how I understand and cultivate both aspects of philosophical courage.

First, the skills that I work to develop in my students are *comprehensive literacy* and *effective communication*. Comprehensive literacy involves knowing what is required to understand and engage with different types of texts. This skill is especially useful in philosophy, where my students are confronted with a variety of sources, whether it be Cavendish's poetry, Haslanger's essays, or Plato's dialogues. Our students should feel confident enough to navigate any text so that they do not forgo the experience of overcoming what they take to be their own limitations. Effective communication requires being able to charitably represent the ideas of others as well as effectively express one's own ideas. The first step to critically engaging with an idea is developing a proper understanding of said idea. If a student is only interested to the extent that they can make an incisive point, they will only be conditionally committed to the educational process. I thereby focus my attention on exercising the students' innate curiosity to leverage their ability to be receptive to new ideas and to reason with others.

I also have formal training in teaching both comprehensive literacy and effective communication. While completing my doctorate, I was certified as a writing instructor by the Boston University Center for Teaching & Learning, and served as a graduate fellow in the Boston University Writing Program during the 2018-2019 academic year. Additionally, while teaching at Stonehill College, I was hired as an instructor by the Clemente Course in the Humanities, a program dedicated to furthering the educational goals of adults who face economic hardship. All that separated many of my Clemente students from those I taught in more traditional environments was the lack of skills required to feel confident. What most struck me, however, was that many of my students felt shame for not having already mastered these skills. In those moments, I clearly felt the obligation to instill confidence in my students and not least because it connected with my own experience as a student.

Due to a late diagnosed learning disability, only as a sophomore in college did I begin to perform at my true potential. The turning point in my education was a course in Ancient Greek philosophy; I encountered the idea of philosophical courage in Plato's writings and came to recognize, with the help of others, that the ideas I had about my own limitations were unfounded. By reflecting on my own experiences, and the experiences of my students, I came to appreciate that – prior to developing the skills necessary to feel confident – one must be secure enough to accept uncertainty. Given the fact that philosophy is absent from most secondary curricula, incoming philosophy students are likely to be embarrassed when they are met with the normal obstacles of the learning process. I am therefore open about my early struggles, in the hope that my students recognize that there is no shame in not knowing; we have all been, and will continue to be, Laches at various points in our lives.

Accepting uncertainty requires having trust in others and in the process of self-discovery, which brings me to the second aspect of philosophical courage. I cultivate mutual trust in my classroom by setting aside time in class for my students to discuss the day's topic in small groups and have them workshop their writing assignments in pairs. These activities give the students a chance to check in with each other and the opportunity to ask any questions they might have in a more natural fashion. When I implemented these teaching strategies after my second year of teaching, I noticed an immediate change in the tenor of our classroom conversations and a marked improvement in the quality of my students' work. This progress cannot be attributed to my students having mastered a set of skills, as mastery takes a great deal of time. What changed, rather, was their level of trust in myself and their peers, which led to an openness to the experience of working through questions with others. It was less important to my students whether we settled what "the self" happened to be, so long as they learned something about what the concept entailed and how it bore on issues central to human life.

While I have referred to this species of courage as "philosophical" throughout, its utility expands far beyond my classroom. After all, Socrates invoked the idea of philosophical courage in the public market. His aim was to rethink the common conception of courage, which was tied to bravery and acts of war. This way of conceiving courage placed it too close to arrogance and foolhardiness. For Socrates, true courage proceeded not from self-certainty but from receptivity to others, and the fruits of inquiry. Not all of our students will pursue a major in philosophy, but they will still be confronted with uncertainty throughout their lives; moments that will test their ability to remain open to self-discovery. My hope is to provide them with the tools necessary to meet those moments with the courage and grace necessary to live well with others and to do right by themselves in the process.