

## 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 Laches considers exiting the conversation, Socrates invokes the idea of philosophical courage; he urges Laches to stay the course, insisting that those present will benefit from Laches doing so. My aim is to cultivate this courage in my students. My own experiences as a student and as an educator inform how I understand and cultivate philosophical courage.

A key element of philosophical courage is learning to welcome uncertainty. Accepting uncertainty requires having trust in others and in the process of self-discovery. I aim to cultivate mutual trust in the classroom through daily collaborative activities that give the students an opportunity to check in with each other and ask any questions they have in a more informal manner. For instance, during a session concerning the nature of happiness, I will prompt the students to examine the role that envy plays in their lives and have them consider how their sense of happiness is impacted by comparative judgments of their peers. These activities invite the students to explore questions that are indirectly related to the day's topic. I then ask the students to report on the trajectory of the conversation to the class. By doing so, the students are led to reflect on and communicate their own philosophical process.

When I implemented these strategies after my second year of teaching, I noticed a change in the tenor of classroom conversations and a significant improvement in the quality of my students' work. What changed was their degree of trust in themselves and in me; a trust that left them open to the experience of working through the central questions of human life together. As one student remarked, I "brought the best out of students" by "making every student feel heard, valid, and valuable in the conversation," while another mentioned that I had "the most inclusive classroom" they had encountered.

Over the time I spend with students each semester, I watch as their desire for self-discovery gradually blossoms. Witnessing this process reminds me of my own journey. Due to a learning disability, I was expected to struggle and perhaps fail once I entered higher education. Given that philosophy is rarely taught in schools, students often experience the same embarrassment I did when met with the normal obstacles of the learning process. To ameliorate this embarrassment, I am open about my early learning struggles and my journey to accept my identity as an indigenous person, so that my students recognize there is no shame in not yet knowing who you are; after all, we have all been Laches before.

The utility of philosophical courage extends far beyond the classroom. Socrates invoked this idea of courage with the aim of convincing his companions that true courage proceeds from receptivity to others. While many of our students will not pursue academic philosophy, they will still be confronted with uncertainty throughout their lives; moments that will test their ability to remain open to the joy of self-discovery. My hope is to provide them with the tools to meet those moments with the courage and grace necessary to live well alongside others and to do right by themselves in the process.