

## **Mentored Teaching Project Evaluation for Taylor Mills**

I had the pleasure to serve as mentor for Taylor Mills's teaching project. The topic of her lesson was Plato's *Lysis*, a dialogue about friendship. Taylor and I met early in the semester so that she could explain her project idea to me, and then again a few weeks before her lesson to discuss her plans for implementing her ideas. We also met the week after her lesson (via zoom) to discuss outcomes. The class had initially been meeting in-person, but was moved online when MSU migrated all classes online due as part of its response to COVID-19. The class met virtually over zoom. Taylor adjusted her plans with great creativity and flexibility. I found the project to be an enormous success, and took away from it some new ideas for my own teaching.

What follows is my evaluation of each element of her teaching project.

### **Teaching and learning goal: Comprehensive**

Taylor came up with a clearly articulated goal that is crucial for a course of this kind. With Plato's dialogues, textual exegesis is a necessary first step to good philosophical discussion.

### **Teaching question: Comprehensive**

Taylor was interested in learning whether a mapping exercise could help student comprehension of a Platonic dialogues. Since Taylor has been a student in this course all semester, she was in a good position to observe and experience the challenges she and other students were encountering. Even experienced philosophy students often find Platonic dialogues particularly challenging. Because the dialogues explore philosophical ideas in the form of a conversation, many students struggle to follow the thread of the arguments, and even to identify the dialogue's principal claims, arguments, and objections. The mapping exercise is a clever way to uncover and clarify the structure of Plato's reasoning. It will be useful not only for understanding the *Lysis* but also for other dialogues we read in this course.

### **Classroom practice: Comprehensive**

Taylor did an excellent job of explaining the dialogue mapping exercise and of guiding the class through it. She broke dialogue into smaller chunks and had students work through them together one at a time. Since this was a new approach for these students, Taylor made what she had in mind clearer by starting the class off with a concrete example and working through it with us. The exercise was also facilitated by a clear and concise Prezi presentation in which Taylor made it clear which part of the text students should consider and what the students should be looking for, i.e. how many arguments they should identify, how many objections, and how many conclusions. After open discussion, in which the class looked for these items collaboratively, Taylor presented a slide in which she had everything broken down. She also encouraged students to draw out a concept map for each section, and provided the class with example and suggestions. (E.g. "This argument comes back to the earlier argument, so you might want to

represent them as a kind of circle”.)

**Assessment Technique: Comprehensive**

Taylor sent an email to all students a few days before class asking them to complete a short survey about their initial understanding of the text. All students completed the survey, and it showed that they were indeed, to varying degrees, struggling with the text. She then has students complete a post-lesson survey, with questions about the mapping exercise itself as well as about their post-lesson comprehension. Judging by student responses, the exercise was extremely useful.

**Summary: Comprehensive**

Taylor’s summary of her results is clear and shows how that they answer her teaching question in the affirmative.

**Conclusion: Comprehensive**

Taylor’s conclusion clearly states what she has learned from analyzing her results and what she might do differently in future classroom practice. In her conclusion, Taylor recognizes that it can be difficult to find the balance between giving students flexibility and giving them robust guidance. This is something she plans to continue to fine-tune in the future.