

Catherine's research work

I am Irish, and I teach Philosophical Anthropology and Principles of Ethics to undergraduate students who are studying Commerce, Information Technology and Hospitality at Strathmore University, Nairobi (Kenya). My students range from 18 to 25 years of age and they are doing the full-time programme. My classroom is usually made up of many Africans and some Hindus and Muslims who all come from a variety of cultural and educational backgrounds. The great challenge in my teaching and learning practice is to understand the contexts of my students, where they are "at", in order to work from there to help them learn in a manner which helps them to freely change themselves in many ways.

I try to focus on creating what I call a "spiration of love in freedom", which involves building positive, loving relationships with my students, and helping them to do the same with each other so that we can all learn in a more effective manner both inside and outside the classroom. We try to achieve this in various ways, among others, through the teaching and learning activities and assignments which I design for my students to help them develop themselves in an all round way as persons.

I have a few video clips of my work in the classroom and, above all, a lot of interesting feedback from my students regarding our efforts to create a spiration of love in freedom. I copy here a quote from one of my students, with her permission, which I feel is highly relevant:

Question (in a final report): have you tried to create a spiration of love in freedom that facilitates your personal growth and that of others during Principles of Ethics?

"Answer: *creating a spiration of love in freedom that facilitates my personal growth and that of others is about creating an atmosphere of acceptance and respect of others and appreciating the diversity amongst ourselves. I have tried to create a spiration of love in freedom and initially it seemed like it won't work out but eventually it did grow and I even envision further growth.*

Evidence: *Journal entries* (she now refers to journal entries where she described in more detail the events she summarises below)

In Journal 7, I attempted to create a spiration of love in freedom by forming a discussion group with members of the class that I hardly talked to in the past. Despite our first group work failing since I ended up doing all the work alone, we eventually developed team spirit and this I believe has helped us all grow, for instance, for me, the experience has helped me build fortitude as a virtue.

In Journal 8, I made a mistake and one of my classmates corrected me and in an attempt to create a spiration of love in freedom, I took the correction positively and even asked her to notify me anytime I make a mistake so that she could help build me up. Moreover, I requested more of my classmates to be my accountability partners and provide checks on my character. I believe in the process of providing checks on each others' character, we will continue to build the spiration of freedom even after finishing POE (Principles of Ethics)" (NSD).

I think that all I need add is the title of my PhD proposal, which summarises my research work:

My African Journey: how am I developing my understanding of educational relationships as a “spiration of love in freedom” as I seek to improve my teaching of philosophy and ethics to facilitate holistic transformational learning in my undergraduate students carrying out non-philosophical degree programmes?