

PLATO Philosophy Fund Application

Thank you for Applying!

Project Title[s]: 1] Philosophy with Children in the Classroom at El Toyon Elementary *and* 2] Philosophy with Teens Project at the San Diego Public Library downtown San Diego.

Dates for Project: January 2017 – June 2018

Amount of Funding Requested: _\$5,000.00 (\$4,000 and \$1000,00)

1. Please describe the project, including any work that has already been done to develop it. (500 words max – since I am discussing two projects, 1] Philosophy with Children in the classroom, and, 2] Philosophy for teens in the Library, I did exceed the 500 words)

Currently I am involved in two projects:

1] Philosophy with Children in the Classroom Project

I have been doing Philosophy with children at El Toyon Elementary, an underserved school in National City, San Diego, since January 2017.

2] Philosophy with Teens in the Library Project

I direct a Philosophy with Teens project at the downtown Library in San Diego. This project will meet twice a month, for which I will be paid through Friends of the Library. The teens attend school, but many are homeless or have parents who are addicts, and some are involved with prostitution and even human trafficking (San Diego is a major hub for trafficking). The purpose of the project with the teens at the downtown Library is to develop their thinking and decision-making skills to benefit their survival skills and learning skills in school.

Both projects are inspired by worldwide efforts to bring philosophy to K-12 schools.¹ The El Toyon project is directed toward expanding

¹ “Why Philosophy? Why Now?” Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.plato-philosohy.org/why-plato/>

the philosophy with children program that started in January 2017. It was initiated in partnership with the Partners At Learning [PAL] Program through the Education Studies Department at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD).² PAL is a Service Learning Program that connects UCSD undergraduates with 40 underserved schools in the San Diego County. After teaching at UCSD for ten years, I reconnected with the PAL Program to launch this project. (Please see the attached Letter of Support from the Chair of the UCSD Education Studies Department).

Professor Matthew Lipman, the pioneer of the field of Philosophy for Children, was my teacher in the early 1980's. My dissertation, "Philosophical Counseling and Teaching: 'Holding the tension' in a Dualistic World" (1998), developed from teaching Reading and Critical Thinking in the Upward Bound College Prep program at the University of Illinois. This experience trained me to work with teens. While living in Holland, I conducted philosophy with children sessions at two International Schools. One of them, The International School in Amsterdam, made a video of our sixth grade philosophy discussion of *The Real Thief*, by William Steig. Pete Worley, founder of the Philosophy Foundation, has been using the video in his training sessions.

Jessica Davis and I started the philosophy with children project at El Toyon Elementary in January of 2017. After a few months, Jessica got a full time job at UCSD and I continued the project on my own as a volunteer until June of 2017. I conducted 60 sessions one hour sessions. The school-site board, consisting of teachers at El Toyon, requested that the program continue for the following 2017-2018 school year. Yen Dang, the third grade teacher whom PAL had originally put me in touch with, did a wonderful Keynote presentation of the work we had done in her class. Ms. Dang, the Principal of El Toyon, Dr. William Mellman and I gave a presentation of the program at a District Board meeting and showed Yen's Keynote presentation, <https://www.icloud.com/keynote/06eXxCvF0C-Abzl8B8pP0n4xQ#MariaBoardPresentation>.

² *Partners at Learning (PAL)*, 2017, <http://palprogram.ucsd.edu/>. Accessed January 2017.

The Board approved the continuation of the program and promised a stipend of \$1,200 to show their commitment to the project. The Principal, Dr. William Mellman, Mr. Brian Clapper, member of the School Board and District Board and Dr. Leighangela Brady, the Superintendent, visited my group discussions on multiple occasions.

Since I received the stipend, the Principal has drawn up a schedule for me to visit all grades K-6 at least once until the end of the school year.

For the classroom visits I first confirm the date and time of visits, then discuss whether there is a specific topic relevant to class for that week. Then I choose a story that fits with the topic of the week. For example, I chose the story *Swimmy* by Leo Leoni when Ms. Dang was discussing Martin Luther King Jr. with her class. When we discussed the story, *Swimmy*, one question we focused on was how the little red fish helped the others overcome their fears. We eventually asked in what ways MLK Jr. was similar to *Swimmy*, resulting in a conversation on facing fears to work together for fairness, and how to deal with bullying.

I sometimes use the prompts found on the *Teaching Children Philosophy* website, and have started practicing the Community of Inquiry model in some classrooms, where students develop their own questions and vote on them.

Usually, I start by asking the class about the story we read last time and what they remember about it. After reading a new story, I ask some general questions about the story, what did they like about it, what stood out for them, etc. What I find remarkable is that the kids quickly make connections between stories, for example, they will explain how “giving,” as a central theme in the *Giving Tree*, is very different from that in *Tico and the Golden Wings*. Then I divide the class into two smaller groups for discussion.

Ms. Dang would often have one group work on a general question about the story, while the other half discussed a part of the story separately with me on the floor.

2. What is the purpose of this project? (500 words max)

Project 1. Philosophy with Children in the Classroom.

The purpose of the El Toyon project is to work with schools and teachers affiliated with the PAL Program, and other interested schools in San Diego, which strangely – being such a large city – does not have any active group working on philosophy in schools. Working through PAL is an excellent opportunity to start to develop this project in surrounding areas that lack K-12 philosophy with children programs.

My initial focus is on expanding the El Toyon Elementary program that started in January 2017 in order to build it up as a model school for the National City district by partnering the Philosophy with Children program with the PAL program in order to:

1] Develop Philosophy with Children in the PAL classroom in order to help students to:

- Develop skills for providing good arguments and for evaluating and integrating the arguments of others
- Develop a relationship with curriculum so that they can learn by being personally invested, without having to rely exclusively on memorization
- Develop the confidence and experience in transferring their knowledge and understanding to the real world and real world issues
- Develop communication skills by realizing the importance of what they and others think as well as the skills to listen to themselves and others

2] Focus on additional partnering with PAL by:

- Working with interested partner teachers and offering demo lessons
- Encouraging students to contribute to the *Questions: Philosophy for Young People* journal

- Documenting examples of integrating philosophy across the disciplines and across different grade levels
- Curriculum and resource development for PAL and other classes
- Guest speaking or discussion sections in PAL classes
- Creation of a Philosophy for Children Center in San Diego, in which undergraduate as well as graduate students could participate.

Project 2: Philosophy for Teens in the Library

The purpose of the Library project is to develop teens' survival thinking skills by focusing on developing their academic thinking skills as well. These teens do attend school, but their interest in school is often curtailed by the immediate concerns involving survival on the streets, in abusive homes, etc. When school has no immediate relevance to their lives, it can undermine learning.

This is where I expect my program will be of value. I want to avail teens with the opportunity to become intensely focused, sharp, inquisitive thinkers. I want to offer them an experience of the joy of thinking about things through to the next question, and to bring their reasoning to bear on real life issues. My hope is that thinking that is relevant to their lives will also transfer to school learning, thereby triggering their curiosity and interest to learn and, hopefully to help them find their way back into society.

Inspired by Diennek Hondius' work with holocaust survivors, in which she focuses on the need for holocaust survivors to be seen and heard not merely as victims but as witnesses of their experiences, I think that this educative dynamic technique can contribute greatly to my philosophy class with the teens. Thinking that is trapped in victimhood is greatly compromised. Moving from victim to witness can liberate thinking, focusing instead on critically analyzing and understanding what they are dealing with in life.

3. Who will benefit from the project, and how? (500 words max)

Both projects will benefit all K-12 students (see *The Evidence Supporting Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy*, especially as it relates to disadvantaged students)

<http://dailynous.com/2018/01/17/evidence-supporting-pre-college-instruction-philosophy/>)

Many outcomes of the project align with Common Core standards, making it a “win-win” for students, teachers, and administrators. Upon repeated sessions, students will become more proficient in thinking and communications skills. They will demonstrate greater clarity of thought and expression in civic dialogue, both when they raise questions, and in their efforts to answer them collectively.

They will learn to ask for clarification, assess claims based on evidence and reason, check for understanding, connect their own ideas with others, and modify their views in light of new information. These skills correspond with Common Core Standards CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.1.C, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6.3, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8, and SL.7.1.D.³

Further, students will demonstrate that they will have become more reliable thinkers by summarizing points of agreement and disagreement as they are immersed in an seek out diverse perspectives. They will be able to revise their positions based on new evidence brought up within dialogue sessions. This appreciation for diverse thinking, both productive and unreasonable, within classroom conversations, will allow students to transfer, translate and apply standards of reasoning to experiences outside of school as well. These skills correspond with Common Core Standards CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1D, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1.C, and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.D.³

Dr. William Mellman, principal of El Toyon, has submitted a statement

³ National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2017). Common Core English Language Arts Standards Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/students-who-are-college-and-career-ready-in-reading-writing-speaking-listening-language/>

of confirmation that Philosophy with Children supports the Common Core curriculum, specifically in the areas of speaking and listening.

Positive feedback and endorsements from teachers who showed enthusiasm in my classroom indicate that we are going in the right direction. They voted to continue the program.

Student and teacher interest indicates that our project offers a refreshing learning environment for both students and teachers. To measure, study and record this learning experience, the teacher and I debrief with the children after the dialogue and then ask them to write about what they like about the story, or their response to a particular question. For example, regarding Leo Leoni's *Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse*, I asked students to write about whether they would want to be a real mouse or a wind-up mouse, and why. Yean Dang follows up with having the children write about a key question we had discussed. Examples can be seen in the Keynote video presentation:

<https://www.icloud.com/keynote/06eXxCvF0C-Abzl8B8pP0n4xQ#MariaBoardPresentation>

(double click to run the video)

For the Teens' Library project, I hope to involve more teens as we develop the program. Initially, we will start with a relatively small group of 8-10 students to maintain good focus.

I would like to invite Native American poet Jim Moreno, who has extensive experience working with juveniles in detention centers, to my session. He has found that poetry is a creative way for teens to express themselves without the constraints that prose can have on those who lack formal writing skills.

4. What is the plan for developing and implementing the project? Include a timeline.

My schedule last school year included visiting Yen Dang's third grade class once a week and visiting additional classrooms the same

day, which Yen arranged for me. Since I started to develop and implement the project on a strictly volunteer basis, I would require funding in order to continue the current level of involvement at El Toyon Elementary and the PAL program and further the project's goals.

Since January of 2017, I have conducted 60 sessions, two sessions per classroom, and 20 sessions so far in this current school year. I am scheduled to teach another 20 sessions until the end of the year.

Timeline for the Philosophy with Children in the Classroom Project and for the Philosophy with Teens in the Library Project:

There will be three phases (though they tend to blend):

- Phase I: Groundwork Phase – I will continue to visit classrooms every Tuesday at El Toyon Elementary, report back to the PAL Program Director and keep a log of my visits. It would be advantageous to have an assistant who would video and take notes of our discussions.
- Phase II: Growth Phase – My focus will be on providing teachers with resources by offering a Continuing Education course in Philosophy for Children through PAL or UCSD Extension, which I have already developed and taught before.
- Phase III: Sustainability – We will create and keep an archive of the work done by students and teachers to document and share our resources.
- Phase IV: in the very long-term, I would like to create a PLATO Philosophy for and with Children Center within the UCSD Education Studies Department.

Additional Timeline for the Philosophy with Teens in the Library Project

I will focus on reading a picture book story, which has worked successfully with other teen groups that I have conducted. We will then discuss elements of the story that appeal to the students. Here we can also use the Community of Inquiry model. I would like to follow up by having them write about what we have discussed, possibly in the form of a poem, which allows more focus on individual

words and how they may rhyme, using rhythm and/or jive. This has been an effective teaching method in the past.

5. What other funding sources have you explored for this project?

I submitted grant proposals to the following funding sources in 2016, all of which were rejected: Price Philanthropies, Girard Foundation, The Parker Foundation, The Berggruen Foundation, The Open Society Foundation, and The Xerox Foundation.

Together, Maria and Jessica also submitted a grant proposal to the AAPT, which was rejected. We were also looking toward possibilities from NEH, although we were aware that this may not be viable in the future due to governmental changes.

More recently, I sent out six letters requesting financial support for El Toyon Elementary from major car dealerships operating in National City. Car dealerships are basically the only high revenue businesses in that area that are known to support various projects. I had a lengthy conversation with Ms. Ball, the manager at Ball Honda and she mentioned that she would bring my proposal to the annual budget meeting. I have not yet heard back from her.

In seeking support for the program, I wrote: “You may or may not know about a Philosophy for/with Children Program at El Toyon Elementary School on East Division Street in National City. The program focuses on skills not often part of the curriculum in schools, but will be increasingly important in the 21st century workplace. These include skills of collaboration, listening and communication, independent thinking and decision-making, the ability to thrive in a diverse work environment, and the ability to problem-solve and evaluate knowledge in order to learn how to judge what is of importance and relevant.”

The Friends of the Library are committed to supporting the Teens Library Project and they will pay me \$60. an hour.

In 2017, I worked as a volunteer for the North University branch of the San Diego Public Library and conducted a Teen Seekers Club. My supervisor there attended some of the sessions and, when she was transferred to the downtown Library, contacted me to see if I would be interested in starting up a similar program for teens at that site.

6. Please list your budget, including any amounts from other sources.

The proposed budgets for the Philosophy with Children in the Classroom Project and for the Philosophy with Teens in the Library Project include:

1] Budget for the Philosophy with Children in the Classroom Project:

	<i>Project Description</i>	<i>Projected Cost</i>
1.	Teaching: 30 sessions x \$60 For the school year January 2017 – June 2017	\$1,800
	Teaching*: 40 sessions at \$60 For the school year August 2017 – June 2018	\$2,400
2.	Travel Expenses: 32 weeks x \$17 = \$600 (last year) 37 weeks x \$19 = \$700 (this year) Commuting to El Toyon Elementary School in National City (36 miles round trip, at least once a week, \$0.53 per mile)	\$1,300
3.	Proposed Assistant: I would like hire a student for the El Toyon project who can assist with recording data of classroom d discussions.	+ \$xxxx

* Teaching Stipend received from the District for the entire school year: \$1,200

2] Budget for the Philosophy with Teens in the Library Project:

1.	<u>Teaching payment:</u> Teaching Stipend for the Teen Library Project is \$60 per hour x 2 hours per month x 12 months	\$1,400
2.	<u>Proposed Teaching Assistant:</u> [I would like to invite a well-known Native American poet in the area, who has done a lot of work with juveniles in detention centers. Combining thinking skills and poetry will add greater depth to understanding the realities they face.]	\$ xxxx
3.	<u>Travel Expenses:</u> 12 months: 2 x \$16.00; 12 x \$32.00 Commuting to the downtown San Diego Library (30 miles round trip, twice a month, \$0.53 per mile)	\$380.00