



PLATO PHILOSOPHY FUND APPLICATION

THANK YOU FOR APPLYING!

PROJECT TITLE:

INTEGRATING PHILOSOPHY INTO MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULA

DATES FOR PROJECT: JUNE 2018 - MAY 2019

AMOUNT OF FUNDING REQUESTED:
\$5,000

1. PLEASE DESCRIBE THE PROJECT, INCLUDING ANY WORK THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE TO DEVELOP IT. (500 WORDS MAX)

This is the first part of a two-part project aimed at bringing philosophy to middle school (grade 6-8) students in the Philadelphia School District (PSD). This project is embedded within the larger context of the Philosophy for the Young (P4Y) community engagement initiative at the University of Pennsylvania. P4Y has been in operation since 2014. Through our existing programs — including engagement work with Philadelphia Futures, Benjamin B. Comegys School, and Penn Alexander School — we have had great success in bringing philosophy to local students. In our interactions over the past four years with students from 6th through 12th grades, our lessons and activities have consistently been met with eagerness and excitement. For example, an 8th grader at Comegys last year enthusiastically reported that we made the students' brains explode...in a *good* way!

However, we have found that, despite their desire to take advantage of our program and provide their students with a wider range of educational resources, teachers and administrators often struggle to accommodate multi-session Philosophy programs within the school day. Various pressures — including the focus on standardized tests — tend to result in schedules which provide very little wiggle room. Unfortunately, this problem is especially common at the underserved schools we most wish to reach.

With this in mind, this project aims to develop a series of stand-alone philosophy sessions which will fit smoothly into existing curricula. These sessions will allow us to greatly expand our reach in two ways. First, because they will require minimal time commitments and will be easily assimilated into the lessons which are already being taught, teachers who might otherwise be unable to grant us access to their students will be able to welcome us into their classrooms, if only for a single session. Second, since these stand-alone sessions will not require multi-week commitments with each class, our team will be able to reach more classrooms throughout the school year. These sessions will allow us to make an initial contact with hundreds of students throughout the PSD.

This brings us to the second part of the project, which is scheduled for Summer 2019. Bringing one or two philosophy sessions to a large number of students will be a valuable achievement in itself, but our ultimate goal is to provide a more thorough introduction to



philosophy to interested students. Thus, every student who participates in one of our stand-alone sessions will be invited to apply to a philosophy summer camp, which we will develop in partnership with Penn Summer at the University of Pennsylvania. The stand-alone sessions will allow us to cast a wide net, making initial contact with — and extending invitations to — middle school students from many different neighbourhoods. This summer camp will provide students with an opportunity to further develop their philosophical thinking and present their ideas to their peers. Our experience with Philadelphia Futures has shown us that students greatly appreciate the opportunity to share their thoughts; when given the chance to present their ideas at a conference-style event held at the university, our Philadelphia Futures students have produced impressive work.

2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT? (500 WORDS MAX)

The immediate purpose of this project is to bring philosophy to students in underserved and underfunded schools across the PSD. We are deeply committed to this goal because we understand that (a) helping the young cultivate philosophical thinking sharpens a range of skills that are helpful across all school subjects, (b) helping the young to cultivate philosophical thinking can directly address content in a range of subjects from K-12, and can deepen understanding in those subjects, and (c) bringing philosophy into underserved schools can help address the school justice issue of equal access to educational goods. We hope that our stand-alone, curriculum-friendly philosophy sessions will allow us to bring an initial encounter with philosophy to students at some of the most underserved schools in Philadelphia. These lessons will also be shared on an open-access website so that they can be used by teachers nationwide.

The second, long-term purpose of this project is to generate interest in philosophy and make connections with students who may be interested in doing more philosophical thinking at our philosophy summer camp. This week-long summer camp will be run by faculty and graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania, and will involve a range of fun and challenging activities based around philosophical themes (e.g. debates, field trips, making movies, writing picture books). We are currently developing collaborations with Eli Lesser at Penn's School of Social Policy and Practice, as he runs that ActionSP2 Film Fellows program. This group of graduate students regularly interact with PSD students in the creation of videos, and we plan to work together to have the middle school students produce videos on philosophical subjects.

In the long run, another purpose that we have with this project is to diversify philosophy, and to make it more inclusive as a profession. The philosophical profession has historically been especially non-diverse and non-inclusive, and the profession has recently started to address these concerns (for example, through the American Philosophical Association's generous Diversity and Inclusiveness Fund). The earlier young people are introduced to philosophy, the more easily they might imagine a life in philosophy for themselves. We aim to enable young people who may have successful and fulfilling careers in our profession toward that goal.

3. WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM THE PROJECT, AND HOW? (500 WORDS MAX)

This project will benefit Philadelphia area students in grades 6-8; in particular, we will concentrate on bringing our sessions to students at underserved schools. Philosophical thinking – e.g., wondering about the nature of goodness, what one values, social justice, how to live well, how to

determine the right course of action – shows up very early in children, and children greatly enjoy thinking about philosophical questions. The students we reach through this program will be given an opportunity to tap into this enthusiasm and develop their critical thinking skills (an ubiquitous Common Core skills anchor) while deepening their understanding of Common Core subjects.

This project will also benefit educators nationwide, who will be able to download our classroom-tested lesson plans on an open-access website. There are currently a small number of such websites, but none covers the range we wish to cover, namely all grade levels and all school subjects, as well as both self-standing philosophy lessons, together with philosophy integrated into teachers' curricula and lessons. The stand-alone, curriculum-friendly middle school philosophy lessons we develop as a part of this project will be a central feature of our website.

Finally, this project will provide opportunities to graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania. Two graduate students — one from Philosophy, one from the Graduate School of Education — will be tasked with developing our stand-alone sessions; these students will gain experience in curriculum and lesson plan development. Additionally, a team of Philosophy graduate students will be given a valuable opportunity to engage in public philosophy and gain teaching experience. Such opportunities for professional development are extremely important to graduate students, as teaching experience and public engagement are becoming increasingly common components of job applications in the profession.

4. WHAT IS THE PLAN FOR DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT? INCLUDE A TIMELINE.

Building on our current work developing stand-alone philosophy curricula and lesson plans for middle school students, we will begin developing curriculum-focused philosophy sessions – sessions specifically aimed at being integrated into existing school classes – in the summer of 2018. These sessions will be developed primarily by two University of Pennsylvania graduate students, one from Philosophy, the other from the Graduate School of Education. Over the course of the 2018-2019 academic year, we will continue developing new sessions as a team of faculty and graduate students works to bring existing sessions to schools across the PSD. We have already made strong connections with teachers and administrators at Benjamin B. Comegys School and Penn Alexander School. Additionally, Prof. Karen Detlefsen will be teaching philosophy to PSD middle school teachers in the spring of 2018 and aims to cultivate partnerships with these teachers, their schools and their students.

Our experiences in the classroom will allow us to update and optimize our sessions in response to teacher and student feedback. All participating students will be invited to apply to a philosophy summer camp which will run in the summer of 2019 in collaboration with Penn Summer. Once a sufficient number of our stand-alone sessions have been finalized, the lesson plans for these sessions will be shared on an open-access website; we expect this to happen no later than May 2019.

5. WHAT OTHER FUNDING SOURCES HAVE YOU EXPLORED FOR THIS PROJECT?

We have obtained \$500 in funding from the Department of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. We will also be applying for funding from the Netter Center for Community



Partnerships, which we hope will cover the cost of transportation and background checks for graduate student teachers.

Prof. Detlefsen has also applied for a Making a Difference in Diverse Communities grant at the University of Pennsylvania. If this application is successful, the associated funds would be used, in part, to develop the website associated with this project.

6. PLEASE LIST YOUR BUDGET, INCLUDING ANY AMOUNTS FROM OTHER SOURCES.

With this application, we are seeking funding for phase one of this project: lesson plan development and implementation from June 2018 through May 2019.

\$2,500 - Lesson plan development: Stipend for Philosophy graduate student

\$2,500 - Lesson plan development: Stipend for Graduate School of Education graduate student

<\$500> - Transportation to/from participating schools, background checks for Penn students who will teach the middle school students (Funding anticipated from the Netter Center)

<\$500> - Snacks for participating middle school students (Funding provided by Penn Philosophy)

Total budget: \$6,000

Total requested: \$5,000