Philosophy 255
Practicing Philosophy with the Pre-College Student
Fall 2025
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Course Description

Young people are naturally inquisitive, often question assumptions others take for granted, and can bring a novel perspective to issues. In short, they are primed to be philosophical. There is a growing movement that sees the value of harnessing this potential by introducing primary- and secondary-age students to philosophical inquiry, both in the classroom and in the home, and there are documented and substantial benefits to doing so. This course will introduce students to the methodology, purpose, and benefits of practicing Philosophy with pre-college students. Emphasis will be placed on demonstration and rehearsal of specific instructional techniques one can use to help foster and improve philosophical thinking, particularly the facilitation of a *community of philosophical inquiry*, the use of different media to prompt philosophical reflection, and the curriculum-wide benefits of practicing philosophy in the pre-college environment. While the focus will be on working with young people, the techniques and methodologies learned in this class can be successfully applied to a number of different pre-college, early college, and even adult audiences.

Course Objectives / Learning Outcomes

This course is an ELAC Disciplinary Perspectives course.

Primary LAC Learning Outcome: Ethical Reasoning requires students to recognize ethical issues, identify their own ethical positions and analyze other ethical perspectives in real-world situations in order to consider the impact of decisions and actions on other individuals, society, and the environment.

Students will be able to:

LO1: Prepare pre-college students for philosophical exploration through the development of the skills and techniques relevant to the *community of philosophical inquiry*, the core methodology of the pre-college philosophy approach (please see below for description).

LO2: Successfully facilitate a *community of philosophical inquiry* by engaging in the process of question exploration, evaluation and testing, and application of lessons learned.

LO3: Demonstrate the value of philosophical inquiry to pre-college education through the impact on student learning, attitudes towards problem-solving, active exploration of ethical, metaphysical, epistemological, and aesthetic questions, and incorporation of diverse points of view.

LO4: Understand and analyze the educational foundations of practicing philosophy with young people through engagement with core philosophical texts in the ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical traditions, and methodologies relevant to philosophical exploration.

LO5: Guide inquiry participants in the development of moral imagination through the use of philosophical stimuli and engagement with philosophical perspectives demonstrating diverse value structures.

Secondary LAC Learning Outcome: Communication requires students to recognize and utilize the most appropriate means to address specific audiences in relevant contexts or genres in order to effectively inform or persuade.

Students will be able to:

LO6: Apply different media to use with communities of inquiry, and employ different techniques appropriate to each medium.

LO7: Design their own approach to philosophical inquiry through hands-on practice with the facilitation of a community of inquiry.

LO8: Create their own materials for use with communities of philosophical inquiry to best reflect their own approach to practicing Philosophy in the Pre-college setting.

This course employs the High-Impact Practice of ***Collaborative Assignments and Projects***

The core approach to practicing Philosophy in the pre-college setting is in the creation and facilitation of a *community of philosophical inquiry*. This is by nature a collaborative process – students work with each other and with the facilitator to move productively through an arc of inquiry. As a group, the community develops questions for exploration, suggests and tests hypotheses and solutions, responds and evaluates those perspectives, and determines appropriate behavioral changes and lessons learned from the inquiry. This approach differs from mere lively and respectful conversation in that it moves forward towards a resolution – the goal is to make progress on difficult questions, not just idle speculation. This does not necessarily mean consensus or that everyone would agree that the answer has been fully developed, but rather that they have reached a better understanding of the issues raised by the question, and are comfortable building on what they have discovered by moving forward with a new inquiry. This becomes a virtuous cycle of reflection and growth. Please see below for more details on the collaborative nature of the inquiry process.

Community of Philosophical Inquiry:

Our methodology is driven by what is known as the *community of philosophical inquiry*. This is a student-centered and student-driven approach in which the participants explore a philosophical question of their choosing, with the assistance and guidance of a facilitator – the teacher or other trained specialist, such as a philosopher-in-residence. The technique is grounded in perspectives on education from Dewey and Peirce, and developed more recently by Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp, but the inspiration goes back as far as the Academy of Athens some 2000 years ago – that Philosophy (and really any exploration of a complex topic) is best conducted through the open, directed, and good-faith discussion of ideas.

A typical session begins with guided exercises to help students begin to understand the basic elements of how to interact within a community of inquiry – active listening, responding and building on what has been said before, formulating new ideas based on what others have contributed – but much of this dynamic develops through the practice of inquiry and through the modelling behavior and interventions of the facilitator.

The inquiry itself typically develops through five steps:

1) Students read together an age-appropriate philosophical episode, story, or excerpt. Importantly, students are not being asked to respond to dense works such as Aristotle or Kant, but instead

are typically presented with material which has been crafted to elicit philosophical reflection and questions from young people. This is called the stimulus, and different forms of stimuli can be used (art, music, students' own experiences, etc.).

2) Students then raise their own questions for discussion, and typically one is chosen as the question by some student-driven method. These are often ethical in tone, as students tend to be more naturally attracted to questions on how to treat others, or the impact of actions on different groups, or the evaluation of their own value perspectives, but they may be directed towards other philosophical topics if the students choose one.

3) Students discuss questions as a community of inquiry. They think of possible answers and clarify and test their answers. Students evaluate and incorporate the diverse perspectives of the participants and work towards a resolution. An expert with philosophical training facilitates the dialogue. Discussion continues over subsequent sessions until the agenda for that reading is finished, or until the students agree to move on to the next reading.

4) At the end of each session, the facilitator leads the students in a brief self-assessment of their philosophical practice. The practice in question is typically shared with the students at the beginning, so they can be more aware of it as they contribute. For example, "Today try to be aware of how willing you are to change your mind."

5) Students incorporate their new insights into a new inquiry.

Required Texts
John Dewey, *Experience and Education.* ISBN 978-0684838281
   Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and Education. New York: Macmillan Company.
Matthew Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School.* ISBN 978-0877225553
   Lipman, Matthew (1988). Philosophy goes to school. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Gareth Matthews*, The Philosophy of Childhood.* ISBN 978-0674664814
   Matthews, Gareth (1994). The philosophy of childhood. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Bertrand Russell*, Problems of Philosophy.* ISBN 978-1534863446
   Russell, Bertrand (1912). The Problems of Philosophy. Portland, OR: Home University Library.
All other readings will be provided on Blackboard.

Assessments
The student's final grade will be calculated using the following assessments:

    30% Reflection Papers (3 total at 10% each)
    35% Final Project: Open Educational Resource or Original Stimulus
    35% Facilitation and Inquiry Participation

    We may have the opportunity to practice facilitation with elementary students. If we do, we will figure out how to incorporate that into our assessment.

Reflection Papers:
At the end of three content sections, students will be given a prompt that will ask you to apply the concepts of that section and explore how they relate to the practice of teaching Philosophy to young people. Students will prepare a 2-3 page paper and submit it on the designated due date. Late papers will be accepted with a late penalty of 10% per class late, with a maximum of one week late. *(LOs 3,4, 6-8)*

Open Educational Resource or Original Stimulus:
The students' final project will be open-ended and somewhat flexible. Students will have the choice to work independently or in groups, and will have the opportunity to produce materials which will contribute to the study of philosophy for young people. They can either produce study materials or other materials designed to be included in an Open Educational Resource document on teaching philosophy to children, or they can design their own materials designed to be used as an inquiry stimulus for future inquiry sessions. Details of final projects will be discussed with the professor and grading standards will be established based on projects chosen. ***(LOs 1-8)***

Facilitation and Inquiry Participation:
This course is designed to be a practical study of the techniques involved in practicing philosophy with young people. As such, students will be expected to actively participate in daily discussions and inquiry sessions, as well as facilitate their own inquiry session during the course of the semester. ***(LOs 1-5)***

Rubrics for all assignments will be made available before work on the assignment begins.

Course Specific Policies:

Course Philosophy
This is a course which aims to balance close reading and reflective participation, and therefore we will be incorporating daily the materials we study into the techniques we will rehearse. Classes will be less lecture and more discussion, although I will try to frame the discussion in terms that will create a consistent narrative. In many instances, you will be asked to contribute to the instruction by demonstrating these techniques yourselves. Note that a consequence of this approach is that it is absolutely vital that you read the assignments before class and come prepared to engage with the readings when we are together. The more lively the discussion, the more we will be able to get out of the class meetings, the more you will be able to explore your own interests, and the more engaged you will find yourself becoming with the subject.

Blackboard
This course will make extensive use of a web site dedicated to our class. Certain readings will only be available from that site. I suggest that if you have not done so already, you familiarize yourself with the operation of Blackboard. There will be links to resources to help you with understanding the material, your grades will be available, and there will be other fun things as well, I hope. It is a resource for continuing your education on the topics and your personal development. You should make a habit of checking Blackboard regularly, particularly in cases where you have a question about the class (for example, in cases of extreme weather). All class notifications that cannot be done in person will be posted on the web site.

Classroom Courtesy – Respect on all Sides
We may be discussing difficult, controversial, and occasionally emotional issues. A certain amount of disagreement is therefore expected, and encouraged. Disagreement is one thing, however, and disrespect quite another. Please refrain from personal attacks. The trick is to disagree without becoming disagreeable! Please turn off or silence your cell phones before entering class, and keep them away. Also, please refrain from being on your laptop, or do any other work while in class; nor should you be carrying on a conversation not relevant to the class at hand. Doing so is disrespectful to the professor and your fellow students. If you are discussing this class with another student, please

speak publicly since the class may benefit from your comments!

(Some of) Your Responsibilities as a Student
I used to think these sorts of things were just common sense, but in the spirit of practicing sound critical reasoning, I can no longer make such assumptions. The following list may even grow over the course of this semester.

- Keep all your graded assignments until final grades are recorded. I don't make many mistakes, but I am human, and therefore fallible. If I do make a mistake with your grade, you will need to be able to prove that fact to me by producing the original graded assignment.
- Although for some parts of the class I may use Powerpoint slides (and these will always be available on the website) you should always be ready to take good notes in class. Be particularly aware that in a class like this I will be writing some things on the board, but just having free discussion through other important points. You should be noting these discussions. If you only write down what is on the slide or what is on the board, your notes will be woefully incomplete.
- It is both rude and disruptive to consistently arrive late for class. Every now and then is not a big concern (we all have to park, deal with weather, etc.) but if you are late daily you need to make other accommodations. If I begin to feel that you are crossing a line, we will have a conversation.
- Silence your cell phones before entering class, or better yet turn them off. If you have a temporary reason to need to have them on (sick family, etc.), please let me know and I will be understanding. I need to have mine on and during class for Eastern Alert and in case of an emergency with my children, but it is extremely rare that it will ring.
- If you have reason to not turn off your phone, I expect it to be kept away. In particular, I insist that you do not text during class. Students grossly underestimate how distracting it is to look out and see your students texting during class.
- Laptops should also be kept away unless otherwise instructed. Research shows that taking notes on laptops is not as effective as taking notes by hand, both in terms of retention and understanding. This also reduces the temptation to be looking at something else during class time.
- Official University policy regarding the recording of classes is that it is not permitted, and doing so can land you in some serious hot water. If you have compelling reason to need recordings of lectures, I can grant permission on a case-by-case basis, after the student agrees to certain conditions.

ECSU Policies:

Student Sexual Misconduct Statement
Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972, as well as the Board of Regents Policy on Sexual Misconduct Reporting, Support Services and Processes, prohibit acts of sexual misconduct – sexual harassment, sexual assault, sex-based discrimination, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and inappropriate relationships between employees and students. If you or someone you know has been or experiences harassment or assault, resources are available with the Sexual Assault & Interpersonal Violence Response Team (SAIV-RT). Alleged violations can be reported to the Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Equity and Diversity at 860-465-5791. Reports to law enforcement can be made to Eastern Connecticut State University Police Department at 860-465-5310. To receive support and advocacy, please contact the Coordinator of the Sexual Assault & Interpersonal Violence Response Team (SAIV-

RT) at 860-465-4314. You may also visit the SAIV-RT website at [SAIV-RT Response Protocol - Eastern (easternct.edu)](easternct.edu) for more information including a list of confidential resources.

Cheating, Plagiarism, and Personal Misconduct
Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the University's numerous policies and procedures contained in the University Catalog and Student Handbook. The Code of Conduct policies and the Policy on Academic Misconduct are of special significance, since cheating, plagiarism, and personal misconduct are strictly prohibited and carry severe penalties. Students should read and understand Eastern's Academic Misconduct Policy, which can be found in the student handbook. http://ecsu-svkb2.easternct.edu/index.php?View=entry&EntryID=307

All violations will be handled under the procedures established in this policy.

Support Information:

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
Eastern Connecticut State University is committed to following the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the ADA Amendment Act of 2008, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended in 1998. If you are a student with a disability (or think you might have a disability) and require accommodations or assistance evacuating a building in the case of an emergency, please contact the Office of AccessAbility Services (OAS) at 860-465-0189 to discuss your request further. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and must be communicated through a Letter of Accommodation, which is drafted by the OAS.

Assistance at the Writing Center
The Eastern Writing Center, located in the ASC and staffed by trained peer tutors, is available to help all students with their writing. The Writing Center supports the liberal-arts mission of Eastern by helping students with their writing from any class, at any stage, from brainstorming and drafting to revision to proofreading and editing. We help students do their own work, and do it more comfortably and confidently. Any student can and should use the Writing Center. The process of talking with readers about writing and getting feedback on student writing is something all writers do and can benefit from. Students can either drop into the Center or make an appointment by going to the "Useful Links" column on the Current Students webpage and selecting "GradesFirst" (http://www.easternct.edu/index/current-students/). Students are asked to bring copies of any assignment sheets to the Writing Center, so tutors know what is expected of the assignment.

Assistance with Academic Advising and Subject Tutoring at the Academic Service Center
Students are encouraged to use the support offered by the Academic Services Center (ASC) located on the ground floor of the Library. Advising Services and tutoring in math, writing, and other subjects, including supplementary instruction, are available. The ASC also offers Peer Academic Coaching (PAC) assistance with study techniques, time management, "Eastern in 4" planning and understanding learning styles. For further information about our services, please call 465-4625 or check the ASC website at http://www.easternct.edu/asc/.

Students in Crisis or in Need
Any student who is facing challenges (i.e. mental health, securing food/housing) and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students at 860-465-5244 for support. Students experiencing an immediate threat to their safety or wellbeing should contact 24-hour

emergency services by dialing 911 or the Eastern's University Police Department: 860-465-5310.

Course Schedule (firm but may be adjusted to accommodate student need)

Week / Unit	Topic	Learning Objectives	Readings and Assignments
Foundations			
Week 1	Kinds of Questions Objective/Subjective/Normative Educational Philosophy	LO3	Dewey, Experience and Education Dewey, How We Think Peirce, The Scientific Attitude and Fallibilism
Week 2	Introduction to P4C	LO1, LO6	Oyler, "The Lipman Sharp Approach to P4C"
Community of Inquiry			
Week 3	Philosophy as Subject / Philosophy as Practice Necessity of Dialogue	LO1, LO3, LO5, LO6	Gregory, "Peirce on Community" Plato, "The Republic" Plato, "Crito" Kennedy, "The 5 Communities"
P4C Methodology			
Week 4	Preparing for Inquiry	LO1, LO2, LO5	Matthews, "The Philosophy of Childhood" Sharp, "The Community of Inquiry: Education for Democracy"
Week 5	The Stimulus	LO1, LO2, LO4, LO5	Pixie, Suki, P4C literature Picture Books Other Media – Art, Music *Reflective Paper 1*
Philosophical Issues			
Week 6	Rights, Liberties, Justice Knowing and Believing	LO2, LO4, LO6	Rawls, "A Theory of Justice" Russell, "Problems of Philosophy"
Week 7	Personhood, Friendship Beauty and Art Minds and Consciousness	LO2, LO4, LO6	Dennett, "Consciousness" Goodman, "Categories of Art" Parfit, "Reasons and Persons" *Reflective Paper 2*
Facilitation			
Week 8	The Role of Facilitator Facilitation Moves	LO2, LO4, LO7	P4C Teaching Guides

Week 9	Modeling Reflection Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO4, LO7	P4C Teaching Guides Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School* Stimulus Selections
Measuring Progress			
Week 10	Arc of Inquiry Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO3, LO5, LO7	Peirce, Hegel on Dialectic Oyler, "Teacher Contributions to the Community of Inquiry" Reznitskaya, "The Rational Force Model" Stimulus Selections
Benefits and Challenges			
Week 11	Conceptual Frameworks Democratic Thinking Critical, Creative, and Caring Thinking Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO3, LO5, LO7	Lipman and Sharp Stimulus Selections
Week 12	Pre-bunking Self-confidence Challenge: Relativism Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO3, LO7	Stocker, selections Stimulus Selections *Reflective Paper 3*
Put into Practice			
Week 13	Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO7	Stimulus Selections
Week 14	Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO7	Stimulus Selections
Week 15	Facilitation Practice / Live Sessions	LO2, LO7, LO8	Stimulus Selections *Final Project Due*