



# 7th PLATO Biennial Conference

## *Philosophy and Civic Engagement*

June 27-28, 2025

---

### **PROGRAM: FRIDAY JUNE 27**

#### **8:30am REGISTRATION**

**Barnum Hall, main floor lobby**

#### **9-10:30 am INTERACTIVE PLENARY (David Shapiro and Ariel Sykes)**

**Coolidge Room, Ballou Hall**

#### **11am-12:30pm PRESENTATIONS**

**Barnum 100**

**Chair: Benjamin Yelle**

- *An Organic Approach to Philosophy for Children in a Kindergarten Classroom* (Josh Benjamin)  
In my kindergarten classroom, children's organic observations and questions become the kindling for philosophical inquiry. During this presentation, I will share real-world examples of channeling children's spontaneous utterances (for example, "It's not nice for owls to eat mice") into inquiry circles with the support of relevant and provocative picture books. Participants will also have opportunities to discuss, envision, and plan this type of philosophical learning in their own educational spaces.
- *Building Philosophical Skills in Early Elementary School* (Karen Emmerman)  
Modeling is a wonderful way to help students engage in philosophical discussion, but skills are also necessary. In this presentation, I will discuss skills that are necessary for engagement in philosophical discussions with very young students and offer exercises for building those skills. We will do some of the exercises together, for an interactive and engaged conversation as a group.
- *Bringing Ethics Bowls to Elementary Schools* (Jana Mohr Lone and Melissa Diamond)  
This presentation will describe in-school ethics bowls in elementary schools. We believe our students are among the few or are the only elementary schoolers to have participated in an ethics bowl. Unlike most middle or high school bowls, involving small teams meeting as an extracurricular activity, entire classes of 20-25 students participate. Students are assigned roles as team members, judges, or spectators. We have run in-class competitions, whole-grade rounds involving the winners of in-class rounds, and multi-grade final rounds.

We will discuss the program's successes and challenges and lead a conversation about ways to improve and further develop this program.

**Barnum 208****Chair: Ariel Sykes**

- *Civic Empowerment in Rural K-12 Schools: Closing the Gap Through Student-Led Service Learning* (Brianna Larson)  
The civic empowerment gap is characterized by an unequal distribution of political power along socioeconomic lines, disproportionately impacting poor, working-class individuals. K-12 schools in the United States can unintentionally reinforce this gap through pedagogical practices that reinforce existing inequalities. Scholars such as Jean Anyon and Stephens et al. demonstrate how low-income schools instill civic and labor-based identities that might contribute to the civic empowerment gap. While scholars like Meira Levinson have explored civic empowerment in urban schools, rural schools remain underexplored in philosophical and pedagogical discourse. This presentation explores student-led service learning as a strategy for increasing rural civic empowerment.
- *Taking the Community of Philosophical Inquiry Outside the Classroom* (Aaron Yarmel)  
The Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) is both a dialogue method and a set of principles for collective thinking and decision-making. CPI fosters deep care for others, oneself, and the subject of inquiry, while helping participants develop agency over their beliefs. Drawing on over 10 years as a P4C facilitator, I use CPI techniques in diverse settings beyond the classroom working with nurses, protestors, students, media professionals, and faculty. This talk shares key insights from that work and invites participants to explore how their own educational practices can be adapted to foster meaningful dialogue in broader community contexts.
- *Philosophy Camp and the Practice of Civic Engagement: Cultivating the 'Super-Virtue' of Citizenship* (Daniel Conway and Claire Katz)  
The results of our longitudinal study on the impact of a one-week philosophy camp on teens and tweens demonstrates that intellectual humility increased over the duration of the camper's experience; the perceived moral distance of a political outgroup decreased; and there was a significant increase in tolerance for ambiguity and a developed sense of authenticity. In our presentation, we propose to demonstrate that the virtues cultivated in our philosophy camp lead to—and ultimately constitute—the “super-virtue” of citizenship. Toward this end, we propose to introduce and defend a model of citizenship that

encourages young people to regard citizenship as the intended (and perhaps ideal) culmination of the moral and intellectual education of democratic citizens.

**Barnum 216****Chair: Kate Thomson-Jones**

- *Philosophy in the Music Classroom: Responsibility of Musicians in Society* (Justin Lader)  
This session will review five years of experience integrating philosophical inquiry into the music classroom. Positive outcomes and challenges regarding working with elementary- to college-aged students on these topics will be explored. Open discussion will focus on constructing new avenues to engage students in music and art settings in philosophical dialogue and what impact this may have on their developing identities. In particular, we will discuss the multiplicity of roles musicians fill in society from producers of commodified music to spiritual leaders who use music as an avenue to unite communities.
- *Philosophy and Moral Values: An Interdisciplinary Framework for Civic Engagement* (Jillian Lee Myer)  
In a polarized world, fostering civic dialogue requires frameworks that are both interdisciplinary and grounded in moral philosophy. This presentation outlines the development of a new approach to moral values education that draws from philosophy, psychology, anthropology, biology, and religious studies. Rather than centering on a single moral theory, it explores diverse values across key ethical dimensions—such as individual versus communal priorities, consequentialism versus duty, harm sensitivity, and spiritual versus secular worldviews. The goal is to create a self-report measure and behavioral task that help participants reflect on their values and engage more empathetically with differing perspectives.
- *Law as a Character and Civic Education in K-12 Spaces* (Ariel Liberman)  
If a civic education is the essential foundation for a discursive democracy, how should it be taught? This presentation discusses an innovative approach: insofar as such an education means cultivating critical thinking skills and democratic character, a reimaged civic curriculum for K-12 schools ought to include teaching law and legal reasoning. Drawing on a range of theoretical disciplines—law, moral education philosophy, democratic theory—our focus will be to define ‘law learning,’ explore its potential as a tool for civic empowerment, and situate the proposal as an approach to modern democratic challenges. Such a training, as we shall see, cultivates stronger reasoning skills, motivates students to self-examine their

values and bring them into conversation with community values, and guides them in how to effectively navigate institutions and participate in public discourse.

**Barnum 231****Chair: Debi Talukdar**

- *The Public Philosophy Booth* (Jacob Blitz)  
At a 'philosophy booth' at a street fair or other public event, passers-by will only participate if they want to, and they'll expect a modular interaction of only a couple minutes. How can philosophy attract eyeballs in such a setting without sacrificing careful thought and critical civic engagement? Drawing from a philosophy booth developed for the Tucson Festival of Books, I'll present concrete, implementable activities from 'Ask a Philosopher' to a toy train trolley problem. I'll also share general strategies for successful activities, like moving from a simple hook to complex open questions and framing controversial conversations within games.
- *Public Community Colleges as Hubs for Pre-College and Public Philosophy* (Timothy Ignaffo)  
This presentation explores the (somewhat untapped) potential for public community colleges as sites for pre-college and public philosophy. Community colleges, with their open-enrollment model and partnerships with local high schools and universities, are the most public of institutions of Higher Education, providing broad access to philosophical education. This presentation features examples of successful initiatives, such as public philosophy walks, ethics bowls, and collaborative programs; as well as different models and possibilities for partnerships and programming. I hope this presentation will show how Public Community Colleges, while sometimes overlooked, play an active role in shaping philosophical, ethical, and civic engagement; and by reaching diverse populations, community colleges can bridge and connect academic philosophy with public life.
- *Assessing the Impact of Philosophy on Learners of All Ages* (Sarah Vitale and Stephen Miller)  
To better understand the state of philosophy assessment, PLATO's Research Committee created a survey for philosophy educators in public or co-curricular settings. The goal of the research committee is to find out how many philosophy educators are using evidence-based assessments, what these assessments are, and what outcomes they are assessing. In this session, we will share the committee's survey, along with some of its initial findings. Participants will discuss ways to use the data to promote philosophy with young people and in other public and co-curricular philosophy projects. Participants will also consider how best to share evidence-based assessments with practitioners.

**12:30-2pm LUNCH (box lunches provided, Barnum Hall main floor lobby)****2-3:30pm WORKSHOPS****Barnum 100****Chair: Jane Shay**

*Behind-the-Scenes of a Middle School Ethics Bowl* (Alex Chang and Erik Kenyon and panel: Oliver Walker, Friends Academy; Susan Russinoff, Tufts University; Audrey Ledbetter, Duke University; Scott Sumrall, Medford Public Schools; Nicholas Machado, New Bedford Public Schools)

The 3rd annual New England Middle School Ethics Bowl (MSEB) took place this April, bringing students together for discussions on ethical dilemmas. This workshop offers a behind-the-scenes look at our planning process, including input from students, coaches, and judges. Participants will explore three areas—event-day logistics, student preparation, and navigating institutions—through interactive sessions. A unique feature of our Bowl was the forming of mixed-school teams on the day, promoting collaboration over competition. We'll reflect on how structure and language influence ethical inquiry. This session invites shared learning and conversation as the MSEB continues to grow and inspire new regional initiatives.

**Barnum 208**

*Improving Civil Dialogue... One Conversation At A Time* (Dan Fouts and Marisa Diaz-Waian)

Learn new ways to spark meaningful dialogue and cultivate civic trust in this interactive community development session. Through a combination of reflective exercises and conversation using the Teach Different Method, the workshop invites participants to consider challenges they've encountered to civil discourse (whether in the classroom, professionally, or personally) and offers practical strategies for exploring controversial topics constructively. Facilitators from Merlin CCC and Teach Different—both partner organizations of PLATO—will lead the session. If you are an educator or community leader seeking to promote civic engagement and tackle challenging topics with empathy and clarity, this session is for you.

**Barnum 216**

*Using curiosity to converse: How teaching students to ask questions can spur productive dialogue on difficult topics* (Right Question Institute)

This workshop will offer participants the opportunity to experience, practice, and learn the Question Formulation Technique (QFT), a simple, step-by-step routine they can use to help students approach and talk about difficult topics with their peers with humanity and curiosity, through questioning. The QFT by its very design intentionally and consistently creates a safe environment where all students,

even those who typically do not speak up in class, feel comfortable to voice their questions and contribute to the group's process in unpacking the challenge at hand. Participants will walk away ready to implement the strategy their setting.

**Barnum 231**

*Behavior, Skills, and Curriculum Choices for High School (or how to get uncivil teens to talk like civilized adults and love philosophy more than their TikTok feed)* (Scott MacLeod)

The workshop will incorporate small groups to share best practices and generate ideas relating to teaching the behavior, skills, and language required for civil discourse in the classroom as well as curriculum choices that engage high school English and Social Studies students. Presenter will share specific materials that have proven successful, including Academic Conversation Templates. Participants will apply these in group discussion of controversial issues and build on the ideas and share best practices from their own experience. Curriculum choices will also be discussed, including the presenter's experience teaching a unit based on Harvard's Justice course.

**3:30-4pm POSTER SESSION (Barnum Hall, lower lobby outside Barnum 8)****4-5:30pm PRESENTATIONS****Barnum 100****Chair: Karen Emmerman**

- *Preparation & Emotional-Management in Controversial Conversations* (Jane Rutstein Shay)  
Grounded in the direct instruction of social-emotional learning, facilitators of P4C can prepare students with lessons about emotional management prior to a possibly heated discussion. This presentation will review pedagogical techniques for teaching students explicitly about how brains and emotions function. We will investigate planned discussions that support students and facilitators with handling deep-seeded emotions when they arise during a philosophical conversation. Additionally, by building the class community through clear norms and consistent opportunities for student voice, the teacher and students will have thought through possible behaviors and reactions that are common when people are discussing strongly held viewpoints. Before engaging in topics where students' relationships and experiences might be challenged, practicing civil discourse with benign topics helps to get students in the habit of deep listening. Finally, while discomfort is essential for authentic controversial speech, the impact of language and viewpoints that denigrate the identity of another individual in the group is not tolerated. Denying someone's basic human rights and

dignity remains non-negotiable in creating a space for thoughtful discourse.

- *When teachers fear controversy, should they avoid it?* (Ariel Sykes and Aaron Yarmel)  
While ethical classroom dialogues on topics like race, sex, and war are vital, some educators face criticism for avoiding them. This presentation invites a more nuanced view, acknowledging the real professional, legal, and personal risks teachers may face. We examine when critique becomes hypocritical and argue that while teachers should assess their own risk, they still hold ethical responsibilities to foster dialogue. The session encourages reflection on how institutions and policymakers can better support ethical inquiry in schools, while urging us to reconsider how we judge those navigating these challenges in today's increasingly fraught educational environments.
- *A Student Perspective: How an Early Introduction to Philosophy Texts Can Combat Polarization* (Grey Peters)  
This presentation discusses the benefits and hurdles of introducing philosophy texts to middle school and high school students, focusing on how early introduction can help combat polarization. Engaging with prominent thinkers' ideas as a student helps create an understanding that strong arguments and influential ideas can still have flaws and counterarguments and that different viewpoints can be reasonably defended. This lays the foundation for approaching controversial topics in a logical, non-polarized way and helps build the skillset for respectful discussions and disagreements. The discussion will focus on strategies for introducing philosophy texts in a manageable form.

## **Barnum 208**

### **Chair: Bobbi Bins**

- *Facilitating Philosophy for Children Through Script Reading Based on Children's Fiction* (Mohammad Reza Vaez) (VIRTUAL PRESENTATION)  
The workshop aims to introduce and explore a creative approach to facilitating Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions by incorporating group script reading based on children's fiction. Traditional methods of storytelling in P4C often rely on either reading aloud by the facilitator or by the children, which can lack engagement and fail to fully capture the interest of young participants. Moreover, while many philosophical stories tailored for P4C exist, their delivery often lacks the dynamism and joy needed to captivate children. This workshop seeks to address these challenges by transforming narratives into interactive script-reading activities.

- *Promoting Civic Engagement in Bangladeshi Schools through Philosophy for Children (P4C)* (Manzoor Elahee) (VIRTUAL PRESENTATION)  
The polarized sociopolitical landscape of Bangladesh poses challenges to fostering civil discourse and critical thinking in classrooms, particularly when addressing contentious issues. This research explores how Matthew Lipman's Philosophy for Children (P4C) model can be adapted to promote civic engagement and develop a culture of civil dialogue among young learners in Bangladesh. By integrating philosophical inquiry and informal logic into education, the study seeks to empower students with critical thinking skills, ethical reasoning, and a participatory approach to societal issues.
- *Place-Based P4C and Fighting Colonial Charisma on Guam* (Gabriel Lane)  
Guam's education suffers from a unique form of negative charisma which reinforces indigenous inferiority in the face of Americanization. While P4C is seen as the antidote to Lipman's negative charisma, Guam's colonial context requires a more nuanced approach in order to challenge this "colonial charisma" without affirming colonial values. I argue that P4C within the context of Guam's colonial environment needs to be practiced as a Placed-Based P4C system. By emphasizing the Chamoru value "Inafa' Maolek" we move the impetus from the idea to the individual and the COI. With this we can create a space for ethical, educational, conversations.

**Barnum 216****Chair: Roberta Israeloff**

- *Examining Methods of Discussion Facilitation in High School* (Allison Cohen)  
This session shares preliminary research comparing four methods of classroom dialogue — Deliberation, Community of Inquiry, In-Class Ethics Bowl, and Socratic Seminar — used in high school government classes to discuss controversial topics. The study examines which methods best foster curiosity, critical questioning, engagement with diverse views, and subject knowledge. Participants will explore early findings and how each method impacts student engagement and civic learning. Time will be reserved for audience input on refining the research design and applying it to their own settings, with the goal of expanding the study across diverse classrooms and improving strategies for ethical and civic inquiry.
- *What role, if any, can logic play in helping young people navigate a polarized world?* (Arpy Khatchirian)  
It would seem that the possibility of fruitful argumentative exchanges depends on a background of shared commitments, and therefore, that deep disagreements undermine

the possibility of argument. Against this, I suggest that we construe a disagreement's fruitfulness in terms of its potential to shed light on the roots and extent of disagreement, rather than on the possibility of rational resolution. I then draw out some implications of this construal for how we should think of the role of logic and of the teaching of logic in connection with "effective" argumentation.

- *Contested Reasonableness* (Stephen Miller)

One of the bedrock criteria underlying the practice of a Community of Inquiry has long been the idea of reasonableness. The thinking has always been that in order for a conversation to proceed effectively, everyone involved needed to commit to being reasonable. However, recent perspectives from the philosophy of race to studies of epistemic injustice to philosophy of emotion to reevaluations of civil discourse have pointed to a problem. Without intending exclusion, practitioners have defined what counts as reasonable in such a way that the concerns and modes of expression coming from some participants were excluded as not part of "reasonable" discourse due to their social identity. This presentation will be an exploration of how moderators can avoid these exclusions without sacrificing the important aspect of a CofI that some comments are rightfully viewed as out of bounds. In short, it will look to inspire a discussion about how the boundaries of community expression can be enforced without shutting out the voices of participants we want to hear from.

## **Barnum 231**

### **Chair: Ariel Liberman**

- *Free Speech on Campus: Debating the Boundaries of Debate* (Alejandro Marx)

How can we foster productive, respectful dialogue around current issues that have inflamed emotions and produced outrage? Amidst the campus speech controversies of the fall of 2023, the presenter helped high school ethics students delve into the many layers of what "freedom of speech" should mean, including what limitations such freedom should have (and why). Strategies and guidelines will be shared that were used to help maintain students' focus on the complexities of campus speech questions while acknowledging differences of opinion about the global events themselves.

- *Disagreement matters. Disagreement in the classroom: becoming democratic* (Claire Cassidy)

This presentation focuses on the project Valuing Disagreement in Classrooms: Teacher education and democracy. At a moment of growing polarisation, fostering disagreement is fundamental to enriching learning and to working and living together in pluralist societies. Working in England, the Azores, Scotland and South Africa, the project explored teacher

educators' perspectives and preparedness to engage with disagreement in their work, and to create new insights into the value of disagreement for education and democracy. We will share results from surveys and community of philosophical inquiry-informed workshops that were designed to engender confidence and to create activities for classroom-based productive disagreement.

- *The New Socratic Method: How a fresh take on ancient wisdom can help revitalize civic discourse* (Andy Norman)

Western philosophy takes shape around the arresting example of Socrates, a curious character who wielded questions in a fascinating way to explore unsettling and divisive issues. Can the essence of his famous "Socratic Method" be distilled—that is, captured in a comparatively simple form others can master? In this talk, I will present a simplified schema for conducting broadly Socratic conversations, and explain how its elements work to de-escalate tension, provoke curiosity, and facilitate the building of shared understanding.

#### **5:30-7pm Reception (Tisch Library Roof)**

## PROGRAM: SATURDAY JUNE 28

### 10-11:30am PLENARY SESSION: *Embracing Difficult Conversations: The Intersection of Ethics and Civics Education*

Barnum 8

Panel discussion about the importance of facilitating classroom discussions on controversial political and social issues, strategies for discussion, and the ways in which deeper ethical discourse can enrich these conversations.

#### Panelists:



**Allison Cohen** is the president of PLATO's Board of Directors and an Advanced Placement U.S. Government and Philosophy teacher at Langley High School in McLean, VA. She also teaches the AP Capstone Seminar and Research classes. She is dedicated to bringing quality philosophy curricula to high schools across the nation and expanding opportunities for students to engage in philosophical questioning and reasoning, and also serves on the board of directors for Street Law, a national nonprofit committed to preserving and enhancing civics education in our schools.



Dr. **Peter Levine** is an Associate Dean and the Lincoln Filene Professor of Citizenship & Public Affairs in Tufts University's Jonathan Tisch College of Civic Life. He is a political philosopher and political scientist who specializes on civic life and has helped to develop Civic Studies as an international intellectual movement. He is the author of eight books, including most recently *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: The Promise of Civic Renewal in America*.



Dr. **Jana Mohr Lone** is PLATO's Executive Director and holds an affiliate appointment in philosophy at the University of Washington. She is the author of many books and articles about young people's philosophical thinking, including *Seen and Not Heard* (2021), *The Philosophical Child* (2012), and most recently *What Would You Do?* (2024) (six picture books about ethics). She has led philosophy classes with students from kindergarten to graduate school for over 25 years. Her work focuses on taking seriously the voices of young people.



Dr. **Sarah Stitzlein** is Professor of Education and Philosophy at the University of Cincinnati. She uses political philosophy to uncover problems in democracy and envision solutions, often through educational interventions. She is editor of the journal *Democracy & Education* and former president of the John Dewey Society and the Ohio Valley Philosophy of Education Society. In 2021 she assisted the National Academy of Education in writing a report on how to educate for civic reasoning and discourse. She is the author of five books, including, most recently, *Teaching Honesty in a Populist Era: Emphasizing Truth in the Education of Citizens* (Oxford University Press, 2024).



Dr. **Winston C. Thompson** holds the Casto Professorship in Interprofessional Education at The Ohio State University where he is faculty in both Educational Studies and Philosophy. The incoming Director of OSU's Center for Ethics and Human Values, Thompson's scholarship explores ethical and political dimensions of educational policy across all contexts. His work on justice and education in democratic societies appears in leading international journals. A former Fellow at Harvard University's Safra Center for Ethics, he has edited three books and serves on multiple academic organizational boards.

## 11:45am-1:15pm WORKSHOPS

### Barnum 100

*Dialogue Across Difference after Gaza* (Steven Goldberg)

Raising controversial questions in the classroom has always been challenging for teachers. Few issues today are as contentious and polarizing as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. What are the possibilities for engagement when teachers face confrontation, suspicion, or silence from students or parents? What obstacles must be overcome to make progress? How can we carve out a space for dialogue across divergent points of view? This session will explore potential strategies to foster dialogue and open-ended inquiry. The aim is not persuasion but a deepened understanding of and sensitivity to competing arguments, perspectives, and historical narratives.

The workshop will begin with discussion of the conditions of dialogue, possible formats for the classroom, and historical framing of the conflict. We then will address obstacles to progress. The balance of the session will be devoted to teaching strategies. These include argument analysis, conceptual clarification, political and ethical theory, and thought experiments. Participants will

reflect on perhaps the hardest question: How can personal and collective trauma be transformed into a recognition of our shared humanity?

**Barnum 208**

*Transforming Screen Time into Philosophy Time: Empowering Families through Inquiry-Based Learning* (Ricardo Gomez Villanueva)

This interactive workshop introduces the Hope Seed Method, an inquiry-based framework that nurtures civic awareness, ethical reflection, and philosophical thinking in children under 8-10. Participants will experience a hands-on learning cycle (Watch > Reflect > Ask > Do > Reward > Unlock) drawn from engaging lessons used in homes and classrooms. Together, we'll explore how early inquiry fosters habits of empathy, dialogue, and critical thinking that last a lifetime. Whether you're a parent, teacher, or educational leader, you'll leave with practical tools to help children become reflective, engaged citizens from the very beginning.

**Barnum 216**

*The Art of Attention: Philosophical Engagements in Art Museums* (Ariel Sykes and Luned Palmer)

This workshop explores how integrating philosophy into museum education can deepen visitor engagement and build community. At the Noguchi Museum, we've found that inviting philosophical dialogue around art fosters curiosity, perspective-taking, and a sense of belonging. Moving beyond factual recall, we focus on open-ended, reflective questions that encourage visitors to explore meaning, identity, and civic responsibility. Drawing on artist Isamu Noguchi's writings and public work, we'll consider how museums can become spaces for contemplation, connection, and civic engagement. Participants will reflect on how philosophical inquiry can transform museum experiences and inspire deeper care for art, others, and the world around us.

**Barnum 231**

*What and how do we need to learn for success in life?* (Paula Moses)

My presentation outlines a unique methodology combining Husserl's transcendental phenomenology with Dewey's educational pragmatism to explore how 10-year-old children conceptualise 'success in life' and the primary school curriculum in England. Through philosophical enquiry and imaginative variation, the research brackets taken-for-granted assumptions to reveal children's lived meanings. Dewey's pragmatic lens ensures these insights remain relevant to real-world contexts. This method resists the reproduction of dominant cultural capital, empowering children to articulate agentic, reflective understandings grounded in their own lives. The presentation offers a new philosophical approach to working with children that centres their perspectives as sources of genuine phenomenological insight.

**1:15-2:30pm LUNCH (box lunches provided, Barnum Hall main floor lobby)****2:30-4pm WORKSHOPS****Barnum 100**

*Writing About Philosophy* (Roberta Israeloff and Jana Mohr Lone)

This workshop will encourage participants to write personal narratives about their experiences with philosophy. We will suggest several topics to explore – for example, early experiences with philosophy, the ways in which the discipline sustains us, and "mission moments" during which we shared our love for it with others. We will introduce an organic rather than linear writing method that many find liberating; it emphasizes that we cannot write and edit simultaneously. We hope to use some of the narratives to promote and publicize PLATO's work.

**Barnum 208**

*Proven Pedagogies: Classroom-ready strategies to engage students in productive civic dialogue* (Ati Waldman)

This session will introduce some of the resources available to support educators' efforts to bring civil dialogue into the classroom. Attendees will discuss best practices for how to structure and support classroom civic dialogue; be introduced to numerous well-vetted discussion strategies for engaging students in safe, productive, and rich dialogues; have an opportunity to discuss why these strategies are high-quality and how they can be used to solve for common challenges in leading productive civic dialogue. Finally, attendees will also gain access to Street Law's free online Resource Library, which provides classroom-ready resources they can immediately use in their classrooms.

**Barnum 216**

*Pedagogical Improvisations: Engaging Embodied and Affective Dimensions in Philosophy Class* (Shoshana McIntosh)

This workshop invites participants to attend to the emotional and embodied dimensions always already present when we engage in dialogue with others. Rather than dismiss physical sensations and affective reactions as unimportant or irrational, we will investigate and take seriously the integral role these dimensions play in our civic engagement and teaching practices. The workshop will include interactive and accessible exercises as well as guided discussion.

**Barnum 231**

*Fighting Like Cats and Dogs* (David Shapiro)

In this workshop, I will share a lesson I've created called "Fighting Like Cats and Dogs?" in which students explore the difference between debate and dialogue through an interactive exercise and a

reading of the picture book *Like* by Annie Barrows. I've done versions of this lesson with elementary middle school, high school, and college students. Participants in this workshop will come away with some ideas of their own for fostering civil dialogue in the classroom and perhaps beyond the classroom walls, as well.

#### 4:15pm Closing Remarks (Barnum Hall)

### CONFERENCE SPONSORS



GIDEON HAUSNER  
JEWISH DAY SCHOOL



## PRESENTERS

**Josh Benjamin** teaches a diverse class of kindergarteners at Winship Elementary School in Boston, MA. He is passionate about oral language in the classroom, receiving a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching to study oracy in England in 2015 and developing city-wide training on oracy for Boston teachers. Josh has also written about education and classroom life for a number of publications, including *The Boston Globe*, *The Hechinger Report*, and *TES (UK)*.

**Jacob Blitz** is a PhD student at the University of Arizona studying ethics (and related areas in social philosophy, philosophy of language, aesthetics...), focusing on normative phenomena and what they reveal about our interpersonal and intrapersonal lives. He also works on pedagogy and public philosophy outreach, incorporating active learning and student choice into classic philosophical teaching methods—including through games.

**Claire Cassidy** is a full Professor of Education at the University of Strathclyde in Scotland. Her research and publications coalesce around three main topics: philosophy with children; children's rights, and human rights education; and childhood studies. She has practised philosophy with children and adults for over thirty years, and trains others, including teachers, nationally and internationally in facilitating Community of Philosophical Inquiry. She leads the Philosophy with Children and Communities Network Scotland.

**Alexandra Chang** is a PhD student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, where she studies the relationship between philosophy and teacher education, particularly around questions of how teachers and students mutually develop as moral agents. Alex previously taught middle school ELA and Social Studies for six years, first in the Boston Public Schools and then in a range of educational settings in Michigan. She holds an M.Ed. from the Boston Teacher Residency and a BA in philosophy from Carleton College. Alex has been developing curricula and facilitating philosophical discussions with young people since 2015, most recently as an organizer of the New England Middle School Ethics Bowl. Alex also serves on PLATO's Research Committee and Academic Advisory Board.

**Allison Cohen** is an Advanced Placement U.S. Government and Philosophy teacher at Langley High School in McLean, VA. She is the current President of the Board of Directors for PLATO and also serves on the Board Directors for Street Law, a national nonprofit committed to preserving and enhancing civics education in our schools. She is dedicated to bringing quality philosophy curricula to high schools across the nation and expanding opportunities for students to engage in philosophical questioning and reasoning.

**Daniel Conway** is Professor of Philosophy and Humanities, Affiliate Professor of Religious Studies and Film Studies, and Professor, by courtesy, in the TAMU School of Law and the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University (USA). He is the Co-Director of P4C Texas, and part of the founding faculty facilitators for the Aggie School of Athens Philosophy Camp.

**Katy Connolly** is the education program coordinator at the Right Question Institute, where she manages relationships with teachers and designs content for RQI's professional development offerings. Connolly has presented to educators across the country, including to the National Council of History Education, the University of Notre Dame, and the Maine Department of Education. Connolly earned a Bachelor's degree in English Education from Boston University, where she spent her time teaching and tutoring high school students.

**Melissa Diamond** is a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington studying philosophy of education. Her research generally focuses on the ethics of education in the context of climate change. She served as a PLATO Graduate Fellow from 2021-2023, and leads 4th and 5th grade philosophy classes in a Seattle public school through PLATO's Philosopher-in-Residence Program.

**Marisa Diaz-Waian** is a community philosopher and generalist by nature, training, and practice. She has an MA in Philosophy and an interest in ethics, ancient philosophy, humor, and "fuzzy" topics at the intersection of philosophy and psychology. As founder & director of Merlin CCC — a public philosophy non-profit — her work focuses on philosophy in the community, frequently with an interdisciplinary, environmental, and intergenerational bent. Marisa is on the academic advisory board for PLATO, a speaker for Humanities Montana, and a facilitator/organizer for numerous activities in her community.

**Manzoor Elahee**, Ph.D is a Professor of Philosophy at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh, and a former department chairman. With over three decades of academic experience across Asia, Europe, and North America, his research focuses on applied ethics, philosophy of education, and philosophy for children. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Sofia, Bulgaria, and has been a visiting scholar at Montclair State University, USA. Prof. Elahee is a member of several international philosophical bodies, including ICPIIC . He is also a member of Bangladesh Philosophical Society (BPS) and remains active in advancing philosophical education in Bangladesh and beyond.

**Karen S. Emmerman** is PLATO's Education Director. She has worked as the Philosopher-in-Residence at John Muir Elementary in Seattle since 2013, has taught a high school philosophy class, and has facilitated teacher trainings for many years. Karen teaches a course in philosophy for children at the University of Washington and mentors graduate and undergraduate students. She is part-time faculty in the philosophy department at the University of Washington and

---

writes in ecofeminism, animal ethics, and philosophy for children, as well as serving as senior associate editor of PLATO's journal *Precollege Philosophy and Public Practice*.

**Dan Fouts** has taught high school social studies since 1993 in the Chicago suburbs. He holds degrees in philosophy and political science from Bradley University and a MS in education from Northwestern University. As co-founder of Teach Different, he promotes a neuroscience-backed conversation method fostering critical thinking, empathy, and civil dialogue. Dan serves on PLATO's academic advisory board and has collaborated with the APA to bring philosophy into K-12 classrooms.

**Steven Goldberg** currently leads philosophy and history adult education seminars at Northwestern University. He taught philosophy at Harper College, history and philosophy over three decades at Oak Park River Forest High School, and A-Level philosophy at an English state school. He also developed a summer philosophy program for high school students at Northwestern University's Center for Talent Development, led workshops on teaching philosophy at University of Chicago's Graham School, and co-led joint PLATO/AAPT summer workshops for high school teachers. Goldberg served on the PLATO Board and the APA's CIP Committee. He is the author of *Two Patterns of Rationality in Freud's Writings* (University of Alabama Press, 1988) and co-editor of *Technological Change and the Transformation of America* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1987). Goldberg also has written for magazines and journals in philosophy, education, and history. In 2005 he received the National Council on Social Studies Award for Global Understanding. Goldberg holds a doctorate in philosophy from DePaul University.

**Ricardo Gómez** is the Founder and CEO of Hope Seed, a platform dedicated to teaching critical thinking and philosophy to children through interactive, engaging content. With a background in creative direction and marketing, Ricardo combines innovation with a passion for education, empowering families to foster meaningful connections and civic engagement. His work bridges creativity and learning, making philosophy accessible and impactful for young minds in today's digital world.

**Timothy Ignaffo** received a BA from the University of Scranton; an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University; and an MPhil and PhD, both from Columbia University where he co-founded and coordinated the Columbia University Philosophy Outreach. Timothy is an Assistant Professor (Tenure-Track) of Philosophy at Raritan Valley College and also teaches in the Department of Philosophy at John Jay College and Baruch College (CUNY). Timothy's interests include pre-college philosophy, public philosophy, ethics, technology, philosophy of education, and philosophy of comedy.

**Roberta Israeloff**, executive director of the Squire Family Foundation, is PLATO Board Secretary. She was a professional writer for 30 years and has many publications including books, short stories, articles and essays.

**Erik Kenyon** teaches middle-school Latin and Humanities at Friends Academy, Dartmouth MA. He is a member of PLATO's Academic Advisory Board and an organizer of the New England Middle School Ethics Bowl. He is author of *Augustine and the Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2018), *Philosophy at the Gymnasium* (Cornell, 2024) and co-author of *Ethics for the Very Young* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). Erik is currently translating a collection of Greek and Latin philosophical texts for young readers.

**Arpy Khatchirian** is a Philosophy Core Instructor at Stanford Online High School. Courses taught include History and Philosophy of Science, Critical Reading and Argumentation, an Advanced Topics course on Transformative Experience, and Study of the Mind. She earned a BA in Math and Philosophy from Rutgers University and a PhD in Philosophy from UC Berkeley.

**Claire Katz** is professor of philosophy and education and associate provost for faculty advocacy. Her research and teaching interests follow two distinct lines of inquiry: the intersection of Contemporary French philosophy, gender, Jewish philosophy, and education, and preK-12 philosophy, with a focus on the philosophy for children program. She is the founder of P4C Texas and the Aggie School of Athens Philosophy Summer Camp for Teens and Tweens.

**Gabriel Lane** is a University of Guam undergraduate currently studying English and Philosophy. Gabe focuses on decolonial philosophy and education and how those can be used to further the goal of Guam's decolonial project. Gabe has written two publications: A P4C teachers guide based on the values of the 4-H kids club, as well as a short story published in Gypsum Sound Tales: Yabblins 2. Past this Gabe enjoys spending time with family. Biba Guåhan!

**Justin Lader** is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music Education at Pacific Lutheran University. He has taught music to all ages from toddlers to elders. He researches how musicians form motor memories but is devoted to including philosophy for young people in music education. He holds a PhD in Music and Human Learning from UT Austin, a master's degree in viola performance from the University of Oregon, and bachelor's degrees from Oberlin College/Conservatory of Music.

**Brianna Larson** is a PhD student in the Philosophy Department at the University of Cincinnati (UC). Her research interests are in social-political philosophy, the philosophy of education, feminist philosophy, and the philosophy of science. She's currently thinking about civic empowerment, pedagogy, and rural education, and trust in science. Brianna is also the Lab Coordinator at UC's

Philosophy for Children Group, where she builds curriculum for 5th and 6th grade classrooms and facilitates P4C activities.

**Audrey Ledbetter** is a PhD student in philosophy at Duke University. She was formerly an Ethics Bowl coach as an MA student at Tufts University and a PLATO Philosopher-in-Residence at Medford High School.

**Jillian Lee Meyer** earned her undergraduate degree in psychology and communication at DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana. As an intern at The Janet Prindle Institute for Ethics, she realized her passion for moral psychology and ethics education. She is currently a doctoral student at Indiana University Bloomington, where she is earning a dual degree in social psychology and cognitive science. Her specific research interests include measures of morality and K-12 ethics education research.

**Ariel Liberman** is Assistant Professor in Law and Legal Studies in the Department of Political Science at Auburn University, where he teaches courses in its undergraduate 'Law and Justice' program. An interdisciplinary scholar of law, religion, and education, his work considers schooling and learning through legal, political, philosophical, and religious perspectives. He is the author of two forthcoming books entitled *Law as Civic Education* (Routledge, 2025) and *Implementing Law as Civic Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2026).

**Stephen Kekoa Miller**, Humanities Department chair at Oakwood Friends School and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at Marist College, has taught philosophy for the past 20 years in Poughkeepsie NY. Stephen has developed a wide range of courses from middle school philosophy through upper-level college courses, and a philosophy series for parents and community members. Stephen's research interests lately have included pre-college philosophy, philosophy of education, virtue ethics and philosophy of emotion. Stephen is also the Chair of the APA's Committee on Precollege Instruction in Philosophy. Stephen served on the Teachers Advisory Council of the National Humanities Center. He is the editor of *Intentional Disruptions* (Vernon, 2021).

**Jana Mohr Lone** is PLATO's Executive Director and holds affiliate appointments in philosophy at the University of Washington and the University of Maine. She is the author of many books and articles about young people's philosophical thinking, including *Seen and Not Heard* (2021), *The Philosophical Child* (2012), and most recently *What Would You Do?* (2024) (six picture books about ethics). Jana has led philosophy classes with students from preschool to graduate school for over 25 years.

**Nick Machado** teaches 8th grade ELA at Normandin Middle School, New Bedford, MA. He is a founding member of the New England regional bowl, has coached a team for three years and serves on the case writing committee.

**Scott MacLeod** earned an AB cum laude in Philosophy from Harvard University and an MAT from University of San Francisco, where his master's thesis was titled "Philosophical Inquiry in the High School English Classroom." After careers in advertising and nonprofit management, Scott pursued his lifelong passion for education as an award-winning teacher at San Marin High School, where he taught AP Language & Composition and Journalism and coached the Ethics Bowl team.

**Alejandro Marx** has been teaching Introduction to Philosophy & Ethics at a NYC public high school since 2000. In 2018 through a partnership with SUNY-ESF we were able to add an Advanced Ethics & Environmental Ethics course that includes a college credit component. He also coaches the school's Ethics Bowl team, and partners with local universities to facilitate connections between high school and college philosophy students.

**Shoshana McIntosh** is a doctoral candidate and teaching fellow in Environmental Philosophy at the University of North Texas. Currently writing a dissertation on critical ecopedagogy, her research interests include ecofeminism, feminist new materialism, decolonial theory, and multispecies justice. She is a 2024-2025 PLATO fellow and has been teaching philosophy in schools since 2018.

**Paula Moses** is an experienced teacher and school leader from the UK. Most recently Paula has completed a PhD in response to the undefined use of the term 'success in life' by policy-makers and curriculum designers. Her research worked with pupils, parents and teachers to examine this concept and how it can effectively be an aim of a school curriculum. Her findings highlight the importance of happiness, emotional well-being and skilful, applied knowledge. Paula also runs Permanent Education CIC which trains school teachers in enquiry-led teaching and learning as well as whole school sustainability through permaculture.

**Andy Norman** is the award-winning author of *Mental Immunity: Infectious Ideas, Mind-Parasites*, and *The Search for a Better Way to Think*. His scholarship delves into the nature of critical thinking, the evolutionary origins of human reasoning, the root causes of defensive reasoning, and the logic of collaborative inquiry. For decades, he has studied, practiced, and promoted the art of resolution-oriented dialogue.

**Luned Palmer** (she/her) has been an educator at the Noguchi Museum since 2010. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art from Swarthmore College and a Master of Science in Museum Education from Bank Street College. She has worked at numerous NYC cultural and art institutions

including The Jewish Museum, The Morgan Library and Museum, The Cooper Hewitt, The Japan Society and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. She has also worked as a high school and elementary school teacher, graphic designer and curriculum designer.

**Grey Peters** is a rising college freshman pursuing a Philosophy and Neuroscience double-major. As a graduate of Stanford Online High School (SOHS), she was introduced to philosophy from middle school onwards and experienced first-hand the benefits of precollegiate philosophy. Grey has recently pursued further education through Yale University's Interdisciplinary Center for Bioethics, applying philosophy and ethics to real-world applications. She hopes to draw on her passion for philosophy while introducing it to younger students.

**Susan Russinoff** is Distinguished Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Tufts University. She runs the Tufts Ethics Bowl Program and regularly teaches courses on logic, philosophy for children, and pre-college philosophy.

**Mohamad Reza Vaez Shahrestani** is a researcher in philosophy at the University of Bonn and an experienced facilitator specializing in Philosophy for Children (P4C). He holds a PhD in Philosophy of Science from the University of Bonn and the Iranian Institute of Philosophy, with a thesis titled "Kant and Davidson on Conceptual Schemes." He is the founder of Yara: The Iranian Center for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and Youth (ICAPCY) and the head of the Institute for Humanities Studies (Rooyeshedigar). He has presented at numerous international conferences, including the XXV World Congress of Philosophy in Rome, 2024, and led workshops such as "Art Education through the Community of Philosophical Inquiry" in Naples, 2024. Mohamad Reza is also a member of the Scientific/Editorial Committee of the "Childhood & Philosophy" journal.

**Jane Rutstein Shay** has been an educator for nearly 20 years and is presently a 5th-grade teacher and the Lead Middle School Debate Coach at the Evergreen School in Shoreline, WA. Jane received her bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Tufts University and her master's degree in teaching from Seattle University. She spearheaded the creation of an Ethics Bowl for middle school students in the Seattle area in 2024. She has been involved in PLATO (formerly The Center for Philosophy for Children) since 2014, currently serving on its Academic Advisory Board.

**David Shapiro** teaches Philosophy at Cascadia College, one of Washington State's 34 Community and Technical Colleges. He is a Board Member of PLATO and has been doing Philosophy with young people in Elementary, Middle, and High Schools in and around Seattle for about thirty years.

**Scott Sumrall** teaches middle- and high-school Spanish and French and is the faculty advisor to Medford's Middle School Ethics Club. He is interested in the application of philosophical reasoning to world language education and school culture.

**Ariel Sykes** is a freelance consultant specializing in philosophy for children practices and dialogic teaching strategies. She has worked in the philosophy for children community for 17 years and draws heavily from her experience as a philosopher in K-12 schools. She received her B.A from Mount Holyoke College and her M.A. from Teachers College, Columbia University in the field of Philosophy and Education. Ariel previously organized the NYC High School Ethics Bowl and was a founding member of the Middle School Ethics Bowl in NY and NJ. She is an endorsed practitioner of the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, and currently teaches at Montclair State University as an adjunct professor.

**Sarah Vitale** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, where she teaches classes on philosophy with children, critical theories, existentialism, and social institutions. Her research focuses on Marx and post-Marxism, as well as the scholarship of teaching and learning. She is co-chair of the Radical Philosophy Association and the director of the Philosophy Outreach Project, which promotes philosophy in high schools.

**Ati Waldman**, Senior Education & Training Specialist at Street Law, develops curriculum and trains educators to support young people in productively discussing controversial issues and learning to improve their communities. She received her B.A. from Tufts University and a master's in international education policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She has worked with communities around the world to develop programs focusing on legal literacy, intergroup dialogue across conflict, and supporting advocacy and activism.

**Oliver Walker** is an alum of Friends Academy, Dartmouth, MA, where he competed in MSEB for three years. Now a Junior at Dartmouth High School, Oliver has judged for the New England MSEB and served on the case writing committee.

**Aaron Yarmel** is the Associate Director of the Center for Ethics and Human Values at The Ohio State University, where his research interests include philosophy for children, social change, and two-level utilitarianism. In addition to overseeing all CEHV programs, Aaron leads its efforts on dialogue facilitation and skill building, outreach, and the ETHOS Fellows program. He is also the Founding Director of Philosophy Counseling and Consulting, an organization that offers philosophical counseling. He has a PhD in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Outside his academic work, Aaron has been an animal rights activist and a vegan since 2011.

