

# Philosophy in Public Schools: PHIL 391E

## Syllabus

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Office Hours: T/TH 2-3

Spring 2019  
F 12:20-2:50  
Dickinson 214

### Description

It's not uncommon to find people who think philosophy is something only a restricted group of people can do. The idea behind this is usually that a particular intellectual property is necessary for practicing philosophy: a great mind, a mature way of thinking, a genius intellect. In reality, just about anyone can do philosophy. This includes young children; your mother, father, uncle, or aunt who have never taken a class in philosophy; and generally anyone who is able to ask and to think about moral, metaphysical, epistemic, and other questions. Doing philosophy with your father or with a small child might look a bit different than it does in an academic setting, though.

In this course, we will explore how best to do philosophy with children in the setting of a school. We will think about what philosophy is and how best to practice it generally, but we'll also think about how best to practice it specifically with children in our targeted setting. After doing some theoretical work, we'll practice doing philosophy with kids in a school together. A distinctive part of our pedagogical approach will be to use narratives as a guide to stimulating discussions in small communities of inquiry. Students will discover just how much children are doing philosophy already and students will learn how to be effective partners in that activity.

As a 3-credit course, the expected amount of work outside of classroom time by university standards is 6-9 hours per week (which includes reading, taking notes, preparing for class, organizing travel details and working on assignments).

### Objectives

The goals of this course are to empower you to:

- Identify and evaluate some views on the nature of philosophy and how philosophical discussion is best practiced.
- Engage in and lead reflective and respectful discussion with a group of peers, especially in situations in which there is disagreement.
- Reflect meaningfully on the relevance of what you've read and discussed for living a fruitful and happy life.
- Develop your own views on the nature of philosophy and how best to practice it (both in general and particularly with children), communicating these views through both written and verbal means.

I'll measure your progress in these objectives by recording your performance on the assignments mentioned below.

## Communication

I will be available to contact via email every weekday between 9am and 5pm and will endeavor to respond to an email within 24 hours. To make sure your email is responded to in a timely manner, please put "PHIL 391" in the subject line.

If I email you, the email will be sent to your UMass email, so you should check that once per day on weekdays. If my email requires a response, please respond within 48 hours.

Communication in class and via email must always be respectful; I won't tolerate rude behavior, unnecessary vulgarity, or abuse of any kind (towards myself or any others). If you aren't sure what counts as any of those things, you should read the [UMass Guidelines for Classroom Civility and Respect](#). A large part of this class is dedicated towards acquiring the skill of dialectic, i.e. of collectively inquiring into the truth of a given matter. Respect is a necessary (and not a sufficient) condition for acquiring that skill.

If you're contacting me to ask a question about the course, an assignment, or something related, make sure to check the syllabus, Moodle, or the assignment instructions first! Communication doesn't just need to be about assignments, though. If you want to email me or come to office hours to talk about life or how your semester is going, please do so!

## Texts

The following text is required:

DC=*Dialogues with Children*, Gareth B. Matthews. Harvard University Press, 1992. ISBN: 0674202848.

All other required readings will be made available via Moodle. All required readings must be brought to class (either printed in hard copy form or downloaded on a computer or tablet) on the day they are to be discussed so that class discussion can easily refer back to them.

## Assignments and Grading

Your grade for this course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION	10%
FACILITATION & SELF-EVALUATIONS	25%
REFLECTION JOURNAL	20%
FINAL PAPER	25%
BOOK MODULE	20%

Below are preliminary descriptions of each assignment category. More detailed instructions, along with specific due dates, will be made available on Moodle for each assignment.

## Attendance & Participation

Attendance for the course is mandatory. The well-functioning of our classroom environment depends on students studying the material, showing up, and being active and enthusiastic participants in class discussion. Moreover, six weeks of the course will be occupied with trips to MLK Charter School in Springfield. It is imperative that

everyone attends all of these trips. You'll be leading discussions in pairs, so you'll support each other by showing up. Only a very serious emergency can take priority over these weeks of the course. If there is any conflict in advance (due to school, religious, family, or other important event) that you foresee, talk to me ASAP.

Participation involves not just showing up, but being a prepared and active member of class. That means studying the reading ahead of time, showing up on time, paying attention, answering and asking questions, and allowing for others to do the same. One objective of this course is that you learn to engage in and lead reflective and respectful discussions between a group of peers. You can't do that unless you show up ready.

## **Facilitation & Self-Evaluations**

On the following dates, we'll be visiting MLK Jr. Charter School of Excellence in Springfield to do philosophy with the second grade students there.

- March 1
- March 8
- March 22
- March 29
- April 5
- April 12

You will work in pairs to lead discussions with the students. During the visits I'll observe those discussions on a rotating basis and evaluate your progress as facilitators. Additionally, each week, each facilitation pair will fill out an "Self-Evaluation Rubric", a tool that will allow you to practice being aware of your own pedagogical style and to evaluate the quality of each discussion and how well the students were able to meet the objectives we have for them. Over the course of the six weeks, the collection of these Self-Evaluations will allow you to get a better picture of both the students' progress in their ability to do philosophy and your own progress as their partner.

## **Reflection Journal**

Throughout the semester, you will keep a reflection journal on Moodle in which you will comment on your thoughts on the readings, on the class discussions, and on your experiences at MLK. You are to comment on all of these elements each week, as much as applicable. The journal will be visible only to you and me. You'll make one entry each week, due by each Monday at 5pm (where a submission on a given Monday would cover readings and discussions from the previous week). The journal will give you a place to have a running conversation with yourself, letting you be self-aware of your progress as an interlocutor, giving you space to hone your thoughts about metaphilosophy and pedagogy, and allowing for reflection on why any of this might matter for your life as a whole.

## **Final Paper**

You will write a final paper with a 3,000-word limit discussing some important theme from the course. You must reference some readings from the course, and you are encouraged to incorporate your Self-Evaluation Rubrics as sources. I will require you to submit paper topics to me ahead of time, but this is mainly meant as a tool to help you (a) not procrastinate and (b) have someone to talk to about what you're interested in, so don't let the topic deadline intimidate you.

## Book Module

Each team will find a children's picture book they deem to be philosophically stimulating and create a book module for that book. The book modules will be added to a library of modules in the PiPS program.

## Late Work

Please turn things in on time. The penalty for late assignments is one third of a letter grade per day. For example, an assignment that would've been an A, if handed in one day late would instead be given an A-. If handed in two days late it would instead be given a B+. Unless otherwise specified, work is to be submitted on Moodle on the day it is due before the start of class. Work will be considered one day late if it is to me between any time in the 24 hours after the due date, two days late if to me between 24-48 hours of the due date, and so on.

I am happy to grant extensions on assignments for a variety of reasons if you communicate with me ahead of time. Think of your essays as projects, and of me as your project manager. I'm trying to help you manage your time and resources to do well on your projects, and the only way I can do that is if you are communicating with me.

## Technology

I have a Partial No-Screen Policy and a Full No-Cell-Phone Policy in class. That means (1) I never want to see a cell-phone out during class, and (2) sometimes I won't want to see any screens out, but other times it'll be fine (most often during discussions, if people are doing research, or if we're planning something).

During periods when the No-Screen Policy is active, notes should be taken by hand. If justification is wanted, laptops, phones, and tablets **distract people**, they **detract from face-to-face connection and empathy**, and they **worsen your retention of information compared to hand-writing notes**. If I'm being honest, I personally find them distracting, and I like to look people in the face when I'm talking to them, so that's a big reason for these policies.

If any student has a disability that makes it such that the Partial No-Screen Policy or the Full No-Cell-Phone Policy are detrimental to their ability to function well in the classroom, please email me or come to me privately. I'll lift the ban for the whole class in that case.

## Students with Disabilities

If you desire accommodations for this class on the basis of physical, learning, psychological or emotional disability, you should contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located at:

161 Whitmore  
181 Presidents Drive  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, MA 01003-9313

It can be reached by calling 413.545.0892. Visit <https://www.umass.edu/disability/students> for more information. Make sure to plan ahead if you are going to ask for adjustments to assignment requirements.

## Academic Dishonesty

Don't plagiarize. I'll know if you do, and you will receive a 0 on the assignment (and possibly fail the course). It's also immoral and you'll be worse off as a person if you do it. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism

is. If you aren't sure whether something counts as plagiarism, ask me. Simple cases are things like copying words or ideas from others without quotation or citation, using a paper (or section of a paper) you wrote for another class in an assignment for this class, or helping anyone else do any of those kinds of things. You can research our school's stance on plagiarism and related issues here:

<http://www.umass.edu/honesty/>

<http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/geninfo/plagiarism.html>

## Tentative Course Schedule

Our course meets on 13 days. Here you will find a schedule of how—tentatively—the readings and events of the course will break down over those days. All readings not included in the Matthews book will be made available on Moodle and each one should be finished *before* attending the associated class that day.

Dates	Event	Readings Due
01/25		DC—Prologue & Happiness; “What is Philosophy?” Graham Priest (2006)
02/01		DC—Desire; “Intuitive Knowledge,” Elijah Chudnoff (2011); “Why Philosophy Can Overturn Common Sense,” Susanna Rinard (2013)
02/08	Gail Herman visit	DC—Stories; “Fiction as Thought Experiment,” Catherine Z. Elgin (2014)
02/15		DC—Cheese; “Thought-Experiment Intuitions and Truth in Fiction,” Jonathan Ichikawa & Benjamin Jarvis (2009) §§1-6; “We Made Progress,” Clinton Golding (2013)
02/22	Gail Herman Coaching Visit	DC—The Ship; “Children, Intuitive Knowledge & Philosophy,” Maria daVenza Tillmanns (2017); “Why Philosophy?” Caroline de Muckadell (2013); chap. 6 of <i>Big Ideas for Little Kids</i> , Thomas Wartenberg (2014)
03/01	MLK Facilitation	DC—Knowledge; “P4C and Developmental Psychology,” Lena Green (2017); chap. 7 of <i>Big Ideas for Little Kids</i> , Thomas Wartenberg (2014); “Dragons and Giants,” from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> , Arnold Lobel
03/08	MLK Facilitation	DC—Words; chap. 8 of <i>Big Ideas for Little Kids</i> , Thomas Wartenberg (2014); Developing Philosophical Facilitation,” David Kennedy (2013); “Cookies,” from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> , Arnold Lobel
03/22	MLK Facilitation	DC—Time Travel; “A Formal Apology for Metaphysics,” Sam Baron (2019); <i>The Important Book</i> , Margaret Wise Brown and Leonard Weisgard
03/29	MLK Facilitation	DC—Ethics; “Moral Reasoning and Emotion,” Joshua May & Victor Kumar (2018); <i>Last Stop on Market Street</i> , Matt de la Peña and Christian Robinson
04/05	MLK Facilitation	DC—The Future; “The Elephant in the Room,” Darren Chetty (2014); <i>Ferdinand</i> , Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson
04/12	MLK Facilitation	DC—Developmental Psychology; “Philosophy for Children and the ‘Whole Child,’” Winifred Wing Han Lamb (2015); “The Garden,” from <i>Frog and Toad Together</i> , Arnold Lobel
04/19		DC—Epilogue; “Philosophy in Philosophy in Schools,” Peter Worley (2009); “The Generic Argument for Teaching Philosophy,” Philip Cam (2018)
04/26		“The Ethics of Narrative Art,” Laura D’Olimpio & Andrew Peterson (2018); “Discussing Philosophy with Children,” Ronald Reed (1985)
05/02	MLK Visit	