Dialogue and Transformation: Bringing Philosophy to Juvenile Justice Educators in North Carolina

Abstract

“Dialogue and Transformation” brings philosophy to Juvenile Justice Centers in North Carolina. In Spring 2021, we offered a successful pilot program remotely teaching Plato’s Republic to students at Cabarrus Youth Development Center in Concord, NC. The present proposal will expand the program’s capacity by launching a new pilot program to “teach the teachers.” In Fall 2021 we will host a series of virtual professional development seminars available to all educators in the NC Juvenile Justice network. Our efforts will culminate in an intensive weekend seminar hosted by the Philosophy Department at UNC-Chapel Hill, where we will equip Juvenile Justice educators with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to incorporate Plato’s Republic into their curricula and classrooms. With the APA’s support, we will reach students for generations to come by offering an unprecedented and replicable program for teacher formation centered on philosophical inquiry in high school.

Basic Information

Project Coordinator(s)
Michael Vazquez, Alexander (Z) Quanbeck, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord

Steering Committee
- Satish Madho (Principal, Cabarrus Youth Development Center; North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice)
- Elliott Willingham (Teacher, Cabarrus Youth Development Center; North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice)
- Adam Johnson (Director of Juvenile Education Services; North Carolina Department of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice)

Funding Amount Requested
$4,825

Expected Project Completion Date
March 2022

Project Description
We will offer unprecedented opportunities for professional development, teacher formation, and philosophical training to educators in the North Carolina Juvenile Justice system. Our aims are four-fold: (1) to promote the distinctive value and interest of dialogical and inquiry-based pedagogical
practices in the classroom; (2) to introduce participants to conceptual and historical resources that can enhance teacher practice centered on philosophical inquiry in the classroom; (3) to collaboratively produce, with guidance from our expert teacher-partners, durable pedagogical resources that are sensitive to classroom needs and standards, and which can be shared with other educators who are interested in incorporating such material into their classrooms and schools; and (4) to give Juvenile Justice educators the opportunity to engage in philosophical reflection for themselves, thereby contributing to their sense of ownership over their beliefs, projects, and professional practice.

In Fall 2021, we will begin to offer a series of 90-minute virtual Professional Development sessions on philosophy to teachers and principals in NC Juvenile Educational Services, hosted in partnership with Cabarrus YDC. Pending permission from the superintendent, attending our sessions counts towards continuing education requirements governed by the NC Department of Public Instruction. The PD sessions are intended to serve as an accessible, comprehensive, and engaging entry point into philosophical content and methodology to folks without prior training or exposure. The series will provide the groundwork for an intensive seminar centering on Plato’s Republic, to be hosted in Spring 2022. In addition to exposing educators to this text and inviting them to engage in philosophical inquiry, we hope to collaboratively produce curricular strategies and scaffolding (e.g. requisite vocabulary and historical context) that will enable integration of the text into classrooms and facility programming. We also benefit from the addition of our newest team member, Z Quanbeck, whose experience teaching ancient philosophy and conducting outreach will greatly enhance our efforts to serve educators in the juvenile justice system.

Since arriving in July 2020, Michael Vazquez, the newly appointed Director of Outreach in the Philosophy Department at UNC-Chapel Hill, has been working closely with educational leadership at adult prisons in North Carolina. As a first step, together they developed a suite of new mail-based outreach programs. We successfully launched three for-credit correspondence courses and three non-credit correspondence programs at adult correctional facilities.

In light of those successes, educational leadership at the adult facilities recommended reaching out to the central office at Juvenile Education Services (JES) in order to learn about any educational needs and partnership prospects with younger folks in the correctional system. JES provides oversight of the education programming in youth development centers, juvenile detention centers and contracted community-based residential programs, and is charged with fulfilling all state and federal mandates of a traditional school system. After a series of meetings with the central office, Director of Education Services Adam Johnson invited every principal at a youth development center or juvenile detention center in the state to meet with Michael Vazquez to discuss the prospect of bringing philosophy to their facility.

With much interest and enthusiasm about the prospect of partnership, we collectively decided to pursue a pilot program at one facility, and to capitalize on the success and lessons from such a pilot in order to bring similar programming to other facilities. The principal at Cabarrus Youth Development Center (YDC), a 96-bed facility located in Concord, N.C., was particularly well positioned to facilitate this process by allowing us to integrate our philosophy programming into existing classrooms.
In Spring 2021, we offered a weekly philosophy discussion program centering on Plato’s Republic, led by Michael Vazquez and Geoff Sayre-McCord. We chose the Republic after consulting with leadership at Cabarrus YDC about the literacy and reading levels of students, and the educational goals of the facility. As a dialogue, the text lends itself well to a discussion-oriented introduction to philosophy that invites students into the exciting world of ideas as active participants. As the Republic is a tour de force of almost every canonical philosophical question, we continue to believe that Plato’s text (and others in its orbit, such as Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics) will serve as a fruitful basis for our teacher-facing programming.

Not only was student participation enthusiastic, but staff and teachers at Cabarrus YDC expressed a keen interest in discussing Plato’s Republic. Strikingly, over the course of the semester, the number of staff and teachers who came doubled. Upon completing the program, students submitted evaluations providing overwhelmingly positive feedback. Moreover, Principal Madho and Mr. Willingham expressed enthusiasm about the program after it ended. They both articulated a desire to continue collaborating and expanding opportunities for teachers to learn about Plato’s Republic in order to incorporate the text into their curriculum. This “teach the teachers” model will enable us to significantly expand the scope of Dialogue and Transformation in new and unprecedented ways.

A principal benefit of this program is expanding access to philosophy to the disproportionately low-income and minority students in North Carolina’s Juvenile Justice facilities. We know from experience that teachers and the young students in the correctional system are not just capable of thinking for themselves, but are well placed to contribute to our collective and humanistic inquiry into life’s most pressing questions. We believe that philosophical training intensifies and deepens one’s engagement with an activity already familiar to all human beings, and that this opportunity is rarely given to our educators in the Juvenile Justice system. We owe the young minds at North Carolina’s Juvenile Justice facilities not only opportunities for growth and reform, but also opportunities for edification and reflection. While we are committed to reaching students directly where possible, we believe that a sustainable and efficient approach must look to teacher education and professional development. By reaching teachers and educational leadership across the Juvenile Justice system, we hope to infuse philosophical reflection into curricula and classrooms, and thereby to reach students for generations to come.

As detailed in the groundwork section, we found that the teachers and staff present during our pilot program with students expressed an interest in discussing the ideas found in Plato’s Republic. In this way, our proposed program is a response to the expressed interests and needs of educators in the NC Juvenile Justice system.

**Project Impact**

We believe exposure to philosophical methods and the philosophical content in the Republic will continue to enrich the education of students under the care of NC’s Juvenile Educational Services for many years to come. We are also pleased to be able to offer this programming with the support and backing of Juvenile Justice educational leadership, who have expressed a commitment to seeking approval for participation in these programs to count towards continuing education requirements as set out by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.
Moreover, our collective philosophical inquiry benefits from diversifying its participants. In no uncertain terms, cultural and intellectual homogeneity are barriers to philosophical progress. By including the philosophical voices of those in historically excluded communities, we are taking one concrete step toward solving a problem of representation in the discipline of philosophy. The free exchange of ideas in our discipline only stands to benefit from bringing more voices into the fold, which in this case takes the form of inviting marginalized voices to enter into philosophical discourse.

In addition, the field of philosophy stands to benefit from its expansion in K-12 education in North Carolina. Philosophy provides opportunities for students to cultivate the skills of critical reflection and civil deliberation necessary for a flourishing democracy. Familiarizing students with philosophy before college is not only an excellent way for students to learn these skills from a young age, but it can provide an impetus for more advanced study of philosophy at the college level. While there are significant institutional obstacles to incorporating philosophy into the state’s K-12 educational curriculum as a whole, the greater curricular flexibility in Juvenile Educational Services, combined with the enthusiasm of our collaborators at North Carolina’s Juvenile Justice facilities, provides a promising avenue to promote pre-college philosophical education.

**Project Goals**

- To provide professional development opportunities for NC Juvenile Justice educators and educational leaders. We will accomplish this goal in two ways, the first of which lays the foundation for the second. First, we will offer a series of 90-minute virtual Professional Development sessions on philosophy to teachers and principals in NC Juvenile Educational Services, hosted in partnership with Cabarrus YDC. Second, we will host an intensive weekend seminar in February or March of 2022, providing NC Juvenile Justice educators an unprecedented opportunity to grow as individuals and as professionals.

- To create a replicable model for teacher formation, especially in Juvenile Justice education, centered on philosophical inquiry. We will accomplish this goal by producing durable pedagogical and training resources informed by cutting-edge philosophical research and by existing curricular standards. We are also planning our events with a view to posterity within and beyond Juvenile Justice education. To cite just one example, we are cultivating partnerships with agencies like the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching in order to secure a venue and institutional support for future iterations of the proposed “teach the teachers” programming. We hope that our program might serve as a model for others in the profession engaged in outreach, both for reaching an overlooked demographic and for ways to integrate philosophy into teacher formation opportunities. The animating principles behind our “teach the teachers” approach are portable and of general use.

**Project Timeline**

While the exact date for the seminar has yet to be finalized as we collect data about participant interest and availability, we plan to schedule the intensive seminar for February or March 2022. We will, in any case, begin our professional development sessions in early Fall 2021, which will serve as a recruitment tool for the capstone intensive seminar in the Spring.
Project Outreach

Our primary audience consists of NC Juvenile Justice teachers and educational staff. Our fall and spring programming will be advertised by our collaborators, Principal Madho and Director Johnson, through whom the program will be advertised to every NC Juvenile Justice educator and educational leader. Pending permission from the superintendent, attending our sessions counts towards continuing education requirements governed by the NC Department of Public Instruction, thereby incentivizing and rewarding participation in this innovative program.

Accessibility Plan

We will make every effort to accommodate those with special needs. Relevant materials (such as texts, handouts, or PowerPoints) can also be made available digitally in advance to participants if needed. The buildings and rooms on campus have been chosen specifically for their capacity to accommodate a range of needs and abilities (the building in which the Philosophy Department at UNC is housed is not accessible in important ways, so we did not pursue that venue). Out of an abundance of caution, we will share our detailed seminar itinerary with both the Director of Disability Services at UNC (Tiffany Bailey) and the Accessibility Coordinator at UNC (Viviane Ackall) to ensure that our travel, lodging, and campus plans are fully inclusive. An ASL interpreter will be available if needed. UNC Philosophy Director of Outreach, Michael Vazquez, will serve as the point person on accessibility. The Department of Philosophy at UNC is committed to ensuring that there are no barriers to meaningful participation in our proposed program, and will provide any financial backing needed to overcome as yet unforeseen obstacles.

Evaluation Plan

We will assess the teacher development program by distributing surveys to all participants and by soliciting verbal feedback, in-person, at the conclusion of the weekend seminar at UNC. We will also hold a meeting involving our collaborators at Cabarrus YDC and at the central office of Juvenile Education Services to assess which of the specific goals articulated for the seminar were achieved and determine what factors facilitated or inhibited meeting these goals. We will be particularly interested in determining the extent to which the central leadership of JES feels that the program met the criteria and aims for continuing education programming and professional development. We will also follow up with participants at periodic intervals to see whether and in what ways they incorporated the materials and lessons we provided into their classes and facilities.

Online Presence

We plan to make pedagogical resources produced over the course of our program that might be of interest to other teachers and engagement practitioners available on the UNC Philosophy Outreach website and on the platforms of partner organizations that serve NC educators (such as UNC's Carolina K-12).

We will also utilize longstanding partnerships with community partners and UNC organizations such as Carolina Public Humanities to share the news of the program with the broader NC educational community. Finally, we will reach out to state and local news outlets about the unprecedented and exciting efforts by Juvenile Justice educational leadership to integrate
philosophy into their broader efforts to educate and nourish the minds of the youth in the correctional system. We hope that our program might serve as a model for others in the profession engaged in outreach, both for reaching an overlooked demographic and for ways to integrate philosophy into teacher formation opportunities. The animating principles behind our “teach the teachers” approach are portable and of general use.

Budget Narrative

Meals (Seminar Breakfast, Send-Off Breakfast, Seminar Lunch, Seminar Dinner): We hope the meals serve to punctuate the intensive seminar with opportunities for community and socialization. We also hope they make our guests who will have travelled from across the state feel welcome, and feel that they are getting a taste of local Chapel Hill cuisine. Estimates are based on past catering contracts, previous departmental event meal planning, and information available online from the vendors.

Carolina Inn Lodging: Lodging into Sunday will ensure that participants in our seminar from across the state are able to join us for an intensive and extended seminar on Saturday. The rate provided is a liberal estimate provided to us by the Sales Manager at Carolina Inn. We have confidence and assurance that the rate will be negotiated down once we settle on the final date (we will enjoy a discounted rate, ultimately, as university affiliates).

Seminar Travel Offset Funds: We believe that participation in the seminar must come at no cost to those involved. The travel offset fund will be made available by application to those participating. We do not anticipate exhausting the fund in its entirety, but should there be more need than supply we will make determination based on need, circumstance, and equitable distribution.

Seminar Campus Room Reservation: The expense estimate listed was determined using the documentation provided by UNC’s Carolina Union. Utilizing Carolina Union for our room reservation will ensure an accessible and technology-equipped space for our day’s events.

UNC Facilitator Honoraria: Faculty and PhD student guest facilitators from UNC will help to administer the seminar, facilitate discussions, and generally participate in the intellectual community we plan to cultivate for our partners. The rate was based on the assumption of awarding, from departmental funds, $100 honoraria per volunteer (up to 5 volunteers will be recruited).

20 copies of Plato's Republic: One copy of Plato’s Republic will be provided to each participant in the seminar in light of the central role that this text will play in the philosophical content of our program. Cost was calculated based on Amazon’s current pricing for the 1st Edition of Reeve’s Hackett Classics translation, which is the edition we will use.

15 Welcome Packages (UNC water bottle, t-shirt, folder, notebook, pen, and itinerary): The Philosophy Department and Parr Center for Ethics at UNC will provide materials and cover fees associated with welcome packages for our outside guests.

15 Certificates of Completion: We will provide each seminar participant with a UNC Philosophy Certificate of Completion (and, with a view to posterity, start a database of those who have
completed our teacher-facing programming). The rate is based on previous certificate printing purchases by the department.

20 Reading Packets (Printing and Binding): Seminar participants will be provided with reading packets containing handouts and other pedagogically salient material. Although those reading packets are under construction, the rate is based on an estimate from UNC printing services, which is in turn based on an estimate about the number of pages and kind of binding to be used.

Fall 2021 Professional Development Programming Printing & Book Purchases Fund (as needed): This line item is to cover any ad-hoc expenses that arise in the context of our virtual professional development programming in the fall. We do not expect to incur expenses with this programming (it will take place over MS Teams and all materials will be provided in digital form), but the fund will ensure that our plan for that series is adaptable.

Juvenile Justice Outreach Fellow: Building the required infrastructure for this program involved recruiting Juvenile Justice Outreach Fellow, who will assist in the preparation of teaching materials, liaison with partners across the state, create promotional materials such as videos and flyers, contribute to grant writing, and serve as a co-facilitator. The fellow, recruited among qualified doctoral students in philosophy at UNC, is awarded a $1000 honorarium in recognition of their service. The honorarium is covered by funds secured from Humanities for the Public Good at UNC.

Director of Outreach Staffing (.25 FTE): The Director of Outreach in Philosophy is committing a substantial amount of time to the success of this program over the course of the next academic year. We estimated this expense would amount to one-fourth of his base salary, split evenly between the Parr Center for Ethics and the Department of Philosophy.

Accessibility Accommodations Fund: This support will be provided by UNC’s Department of Philosophy on as-needed basis. We do not foresee expenditures of this kind because of our thorough planning around accessibility, but we believe it is important to budget for it out of circumspection and respect.

**Other Funding Sources**

To date, we have secured $7,925 from the Humanities for the Public Good Initiative at UNC-Chapel Hill, to support our efforts to reach Juvenile Justice students and to fund our Juvenile Justice Outreach Fellow. With those funds, we were able to offer our pilot program, supply books and technology, and to reach students directly at Cabarrus Youth Development Center. Some of the remaining funds can be used for the presently proposed pilot that aims to reach teachers in particular. With the support of the APA, we will be able to provide the venue, meals, stipends, and travel funds needed to make our intensive weekend seminar happen. The Department of Philosophy and the Parr Center for Ethics are covering the salary and time worked by the Director of Outreach on this project, as well as some other expenses around the edges of the administration of our planned seminar.