To the members of the APA Board,

September 5th, 2020

I’m writing on behalf of Northern Arizona University’s Philosophy in the Public Interest. We received a $1,000 grant from the Berry Fund to start a Philosophy for Children Program. I greatly appreciate the support for the grant, especially as the public philosophy program was in transition and needed support. It was also a great jump-start to a new program for children.

Financial Details

$850 of the grant was spent on instruction for three classes
$150 was spent on supplies, including books and materials for classroom activities

Details of the Project

This grant supported the first steps toward creating a Philosophy for Children program in Flagstaff, Arizona. The Director of the program was able to assemble a team consisting of the director (a philosophy professor) and two teachers with experience teaching young children and also a background in philosophy. We partnered with a local elementary school and identified three second grade classes. Each class was taught a six week “Introduction to Philosophy” course, once per week over six weeks. The program Director participated with the teachers in discussions as well as leading some of the sessions.

The experience was excellent. We were all surprised at the level at which the students were able to converse. They were able to deal with complex philosophical questions. This does not mean they produced academic essays, of course, but they were able to think about difficult questions, offer answers or solutions to them, and discuss the merits of different views with each other. We also see development in terms of some of the norms of philosophical discussion. Students started developing the ability to listen and respond to the ideas of others, agreeing or adding on with their own ideas in ways beyond what we saw in the first weeks. The hugs at the end of the last session also suggested that they very much enjoyed their time.

With this connection to the local school and experience in place, I moved forward with this program in three ways. The first was a partnership with the Flagstaff Public Library. We were planning a series of events in the summer of 2020 to teach philosophy to children, but with the aim of inviting parents as well and showing them how one could have such conversations with children. A second was to have childcare at our public philosophy events provided by philosophy for children, so that the children could have their own philosophical conversation while their caretakers were in the next room having theirs. The third was to create an undergraduate course called “Teaching Children Philosophy.” This was set up as a cross-listed course with the Educational Foundations program at NAU. It was scheduled for Spring of 2021, with significant and sincere interest from the few philosophy students who heard about it.
Unfortunately, the pandemic was used as a reason to lay off a significant portion of the NAU faculty in April and May of 2020, including the Director of Philosophy in the Public Interest. At this time, I do not believe any of the philosophy for children work will continue in Flagstaff, Arizona as all three members of the team were affected by the NAU layoffs and have moved out of the state. However, the director has moved to the east coast and will continue doing this work in some capacity. He is currently scheduled to teach kindergarten students philosophy weekly, starting in mid-September 2020.

I would like to thank you for your support and assure you that it has had and will continue to have positive effects on our shared world.

Sincerely,

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