Report on the fourth PLATO/ AAPT K-12 Teachers of Philosophy Conference
August 2022

The fourth PLATO Workshop for High School Teachers was held July 27th-July 30th in conjunction with the AAPT conference at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio. This workshop was originally planned and granted to take place in 2020. However, we had to delay the event for twice due to covid concerns and the fact that the 2021 AAPT Conference went remote. We felt fully confident that the nature of this workshop would not allow it to be effective remotely. Six participants (originally eight, but two had to withdraw at the last moment) formed a wonderful group, along with two facilitators. [See list at end.] We were particularly pleased that the participants ranged from a Kindergarten teacher through to a few high school teachers and a graduate student. The participants also came from the East Coast, Montana, and California. Additionally, we had one participant from Thailand and one from France, although both are now residents in the USA. We ran the program for three days in the mornings. We had planned on trying to get together on Wednesday evening but since the AAPT did not sponsor a welcome evening event, we had a more informal dinner meeting. We structured the workshop as a combination of discussions on the assigned readings, both classical and contemporary, and presentations from each of the participants (see schedule for readings). We also had participants lead the discussions on the assigned readings to encourage more active involvement with texts and pedagogy. Individuals were assigned to readings and scheduled for presentations before we traveled so that they knew ahead of time which reading they were a co-leader on as well as what morning they were to present their own questions/activities/ideas.

Again we had a mix among those who had been teaching a philosophy course for a while, whose who were already incorporating philosophy into their regular curriculum, and some who were just beginning to develop a course/unit. This year was a particularly strong group who grasped the structure of the readings as well as clearly prepared their presentation. They were a delight to work with. It was lovely to see how much those of us who teach college, high school and middle school could learn from a Kindergarten teacher and vise-a-versa.

After meeting each morning, participants attended sessions at the AAPT. We did have our last session run into the afternoon, however, as the group wanted to keep discussing...
bringing what we had talked about into the classroom. The following day we shared ideas learned from the presentations. The AAPT sessions were uniformly helpful and often connected to concerns that our participants had in their own classrooms. Several of the teachers commented how pedagogy presentations to college instructors covered techniques long known and practiced by pre-college teachers.

As a result, we were unable to offer a “Meet the PLATO teachers” session as we did in 2016. But our participants fully engaged in the AAPT sessions and plenary talks. During our last morning session we spent extra time discussing using picture books in philosophy courses in college and high school settings. The last evening, we arranged to share dinner on campus for our group, which really bonded.

After the conference ended we sent out a survey to get some feedback. All of the participants submitted responses. We ended on such a positive note that we are hoping many of them will come to the next PLATO conference in 2023. They uniformly appreciated the opportunity to participate in the workshop and the AAPT conference and would share ideas with colleagues.

On behalf of PLATO, we are grateful for the support from the APA to make this event possible.

--Stephen Kekoa Miller and Wendy Turgeon
8/8/2022
2022 APPT Conference Roster

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High School Teacher, Long Island
Some quotes from the survey:

Do you plan on implementing one or more pedagogical innovations as a result of your participation in this seminar?

Wendy and Stephen never stood in front of the room to speak; rather, we remained in a quasi-circular orientation to each other unless a participate was presenting their own work. This might seem simple, but it was to me an important reminder about how those unspoken choices communicate to the group. For my introduction to philosophy class this fall, I intend to start the first day with everyone sitting on the floor in a circle, without notebooks and such. My intention with this move (which I hope will not merely occur on the first day) will be that students experience their place in the dialogue at hand more so than even a seminar orientation which is horseshoe but the teacher remains at the front with students primarily oriented towards that figure. Of course, even in that class that shape will likely not remain for the full time (split into groups, etc.), but it occurred to me as worthwhile to have it as a starting place.

Yes, I would like to use the text on the ethic of factory farming and the discussion about death as a topic for my future students.

I'm thinking about how to take on more classic texts with students. I certainly see the value but have avoided this in the past, assuming that many students wouldn't have enough interest to sustain their attention. I think I'm ready to push on that a bit. And I might feel a little better prepared to work with my own students on the question of HOW philosophical arguments are constructed, which is something I haven't tried much yet.

I plan to ask more philosophical questions when reading picture books with students, based on learning more about this approach. I also plan to frame rule-setting at the beginning of the year philosophically, by having conversations about why act kindly and why we need rules. This was motivated in part by the discussion of Plato’s Republic.

I will not just focus on books for philosophical discussions. I will also focus on art, music, and poetry.

Yes, I plan to include youth literature as a gateway to philosophical inquiry.

Has participation in the seminar changed the way you think about teaching and learning, and philosophy? If so, in what ways?

A quite valuable element of the seminar was conversations with participants between sessions, at meals, etc.

This reminded me that although in many ways the nature of those interactions cannot be controlled through classroom activity, since their value is so noteworthy, it's helpful for me to think about how subtle choices in the classroom can reverberate beyond it. For example, allowing a break in the middle of class could allow for this engagement, or supporting interpersonal connections between students within class can help to cultivate them outside class. Especially for philosophy, which necessitates dialogue for its ongoing practice, as an educator I can think about how it might be more important than
any of the class content or skills to make moves for peers to find each other and thereby engage in that ongoing dialogue.

Yes. The participants have expanded my thinking about different topics to teach philosophy, which was limited to P4C. Fellow participants showed that there are many other experiential learning activities for the same goal.

I feel like the seminar helped me enlarge the way I think about my course and my teaching in general.

It has made me think about philosophy more broadly. It has made me question the boundaries of philosophy as well as the practice of questioning what counts as philosophy. It made me think about how to incorporate philosophy into teaching without the opportunity to teach a subject called philosophy.

To have a more organized teaching point and make more time in the school day for a philosophical discussion.

yes, because it gave ideas to make my students more active and not only passive listeners.

**Considering content, format, presenters’ style, or other variables, what would you say were the weaknesses of the seminar or areas we might improve?**

I really liked seeing a bit of how other educators construct their philosophy lessons, and discussing those lessons in detail. Also, I liked that there were two facilitators and that they sometimes disagreed. It both provided a window into some of the debates within the P4C community, and why those debates matter, and provided in brief a model for reasonable dialogue. Given the nature of contemporary public discourse, I think this is not something to be understated.

I like the IDEA of reading and presenting the articles from ATPP, but I thought that time might have been better spent in learning from you, Stephen and Wendy. I found myself wanting to learn more about how you envision and structure your introductory courses, how you strategize about readings and activities, your favorite tools/lessons/etc.

I think that the article discussions sometimes felt less helpful than the other program components. It would have been helpful to more directly simulate a community of inquiry. It would perhaps be helpful to gather seminarians’ questions at the start of the program and throughout and set aside time to discuss particular questions related to teaching philosophy in K-12 settings. Spending more time in the seminar was helpful, as many of the AAPT sessions did not feel as relevant.

The cafeteria food and beds could use a lot of improvement. I would not pay for the food again. Also, more options/topics geared toward elementary grade philosophical discussions and lesson plans.

Maybe sometimes the lack of time to continue an interesting discussion.

**Would you recommend the experience to others? If you were to describe your**
experience in the seminar to a friend, how would you describe it?

Oh yeah, for sure I’d recommend the PLATO seminar to others. I’d say the seminar was “really great” to a hypothetical friend, as I did to some friends who are not hypothetical. You can quote me on that. The seminar was an opportunity to practice philosophy with a group of peers, and to investigate my own pedagogical interests and challenges. Stephen mentioned to me that he was teaching high school philosophy for ten years before he found out there was a community of people doing philosophy pre-college. As a pre-college philosophy teacher, I have a tendency to think about my own teaching in isolation, and to look at problems in my classroom almost as though they are total novelties which I alone am in the position to solve; the seminar was significant as a reminder that there are others doing this work, and there is a great deal to be learned from just being together and talking about what we do. For example, I’ve been curious about using fairy tales as a stimulus for doing philosophy with children, and I’ve played around with some in the classroom; then, I find out Wendy has written a book on the matter! So, I would describe the experience as one of comradery. Teaching is hard enough as it is, let alone teaching philosophy; it’s much better to benefit from the wisdom of others than to assume that as a teacher its all on me to rediscover how to do it.

Yes, I would recommend it. This is a meeting of practitioners of philosophy teaching who are enthusiastic about sharing their diverse viewpoints grounded in concrete classroom practice. We critically engaged in reflection of both the content and method of teaching philosophy. (Yes, I agree to be quoted)

I would absolutely recommend the experience to others. I felt really "full up" with new ideas by the time I left -- and hopeful for our shared ventures in teaching philosophy. Yes, you can quote me.

I would recommend this conference to anyone who loves Philosophy and/or wants to learn more about it.

A very stimulating experience to think philosophically about how to make philosophy accessible to the young ones, without compromising on the rigor of the subject.

*And last comment from one of the participants:*

I just want to thank you for making these seminars possible. I also found that both Wendy’s and Steve’s encouragement and hospitality made the environment for learning imaginative and expansive. Engaging with the thinkers of the past -- Socrates, Plato etc -- is meaningful today. This seminar offered great examples of how one might incorporate dialogue into the classroom.

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Schedule for PLATO-AAPT Summer 2022 Seminar

Pre-Conference:
Background reading:
Read some of the resources or Philosopher's Toolkit on PLATO website; check the entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/children/
Recommended: Provocations by David Birch, Crown House Published, 2014. [Available on Amazon]

This workshop is a collaborative experience with participants actively engaged in co-facilitating the experience along with Stephen Kekoa Miller and Wendy Turgeon. Each of you will be working in a team to lead the discussion on a piece of philosophical writing as well as having an opportunity to present something of your own to the group.

I. Three readings: Excerpt from The Republic by Plato (read section 7), “Puppies, Pigs, and People” by Alastair Norcross and articles chosen by you from Analytical Teaching and Philosophical Praxis

II. ATPP articles
Please choose an article from the online journal, Analytical Teaching and Philosophical Praxis to share with the group. You can choose one from the current issue but we encourage you to explore back issues (all online) to find a topic or theme that directly speaks to you and your interests.
Link: https://journal.viterbo.edu/index.php/atpp/index

Please send us your choice (accompanied by the direct link) and we will share these with the entire group before we meet in July.

III. Children’s/young adult story
Please bring a favorite children’s book or young adult story to share for our Saturday session on using literature for philosophical discussion.

IV. Individual Presentation options:
Please plan on a presentation for the participants of 30-40 minutes in length (including time for questions). Consider the following suggestions:

a. a lesson plan/project/unit that they have used that works particularly well
b. a lesson plan/project/unit that you have tried to use and that did NOT go well but that they think should have and would like feedback
c. a lesson plan/project/unit that they are working on or planning to present for the first time.
We hope to have a good cross section of varying options here so please let us know some options for what you would like to present so that we can structure this with wide appeal. You can choose a piece of philosophical literature, some other prompt, or whatever approach you use or are interested in.

**SCHEDULE**

**Wednesday, July 27**

Casual Meet and Greet get together in the evening—hope you can make it! If not, no worries. We will go over this briefly tomorrow morning when we begin.

**Some background discussion: Paths to Philosophy—Direction—administration**

- history, approaches, rationale
- how philosophy was introduced to school—a brief history
- place of philosophy in the curriculum: fitting it in?
- the range of approaches available: models of philosophy as forensic debate, community of inquiry, historical sweep/Great Conversation, problems application, philosophy as stand-alone/as interwoven within disciplines, rigorous analysis vs. free-flowing reflection, others?

**Thursday, July 28th**

**8:30-9:00** Getting Oriented—meet and greet and an intro to AAPT and to our workshop

**9:00-9:45** Reading a text—Plato, Book II excerpt from *The Republic*. You can find it through this link online and go to section 7 for the actual reading. [https://flexpub.com/preview/moral-philosophy-a-reader](https://flexpub.com/preview/moral-philosophy-a-reader)

facilitated by two participants and the facilitators

Discussion: How would you outline the arguments in this reading? What views of human nature are expressed?

Themes: Ethics—why be good? What makes for human happiness? How can this reading be adapted for all ages?

**9:45-10:00** Coffee Break

**10:00-10:30** Open discussion about two of your choices from ATPP.
10:30-noon  **Your turn:** presenting a unit or program
two participants, 40 minutes each
  - distinctive nature and value of philosophy as a discipline
  - characteristic philosophical questions and problems
  - philosophical reasoning and conversation
  - intellectual and moral virtues cultivated by philosophy
  - tackling challenging readings with students;
  - Getting productive classroom discussion

**Afternoon:**  **AAPT sessions begin at 1 PM each day**

**Friday, July 29th**

8:30-9:00  Review of AAPT Sessions you attended yesterday

Ideas for college teaching from yesterday’s afternoon sessions that
 can be adapted to high school philosophy

9:00-9:45  Reading a text—reflecting on The Norcross article:
[https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/readings/norcross.pdf](https://spot.colorado.edu/~heathwoo/readings/norcross.pdf)
facilitated by two participants and the facilitators
Discussion: What is the big issue or question in this reading? How
does he construct his arguments and counterarguments? Focus on
the structure of philosophical argumentation here.
tackling a text with high school students

9:45-10:00  Coffee Break

10:00-10:30  Open discussion about articles from ATPP

10:30-noon  **Your turn:** presenting a unit or program
two participants, 40 minutes each

**Afternoon**  **AAPT sessions**

**Saturday, July 30th**

8:30-9:00  Review of Friday AAPT Sessions

9:00-9:45  Reading a text—Using Children’s literature for
philosophical reflection
Discussion: How to use children’s literature in philosophically rich
ways. Engaging younger and older children through word and
theme: Finding philosophy in the familiar

9:45-10:00 Coffee Break

10:00-10:30 Open discussion of the chosen ATPP articles

10:30-noon Your turn: presenting a unit or program two participants, 40 minutes each

Possible extra: Aesthetics: the forgotten philosophical area: demonstration of a community of inquiry and/or other areas of interest to the group OR Ethics Bowl demonstration

  - *Motivating the Question:* thinking about art and aesthetic experience: maybe it is not all opinion?
  - *Central Question and concepts:* what is art? The roles of artist, audience, critic
  - *Close reading and discussion:* Leo Lionni’s *Frederick* and Clive Bell on significant form

Afternoon AAPT sessions

Later on Saturday afternoon we hope to offer a session sponsored by you all for your colleagues at AAPT to find out more about teaching philosophy at the high school level. But we have to check with the AAPT organizers first!

General Information

Opportunities for Teachers and Students

  - PLATO conferences: next one in summer 2023
  - International Philosophy Olympiad
  - NEH seminars and Institutes
  - ICPIC and its upcoming conference
  - *Questions,* a pre-college philosophy journal for students and teachers
  - APA Committee for Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy (CPIP)
  - APA Teaching Hubs at the regional APA meetings
  - Useful Online Materials for teaching philosophy

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2022 APPT Conference Roster

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