

Ignatian Great Ideas for Teachers Submission

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The central project in my Philosophy for Children course is *active philosophy*. Active philosophy invites a community of knowledge-producers, many of whom have never considered themselves anything other than passive recipients of knowledge. We re-orient that dynamic. It starts with a prompt. The function of the prompt is to raise a philosophical question. Put simply, philosophical questions are questions that are answerable but unsettled. This means that, for any such question, there is a correct answer, but we may not be currently capable of determining what that answer must be. Our best option in the face of such questions is to think through candidate answers and the reasoning that surrounds them. This is philosophical inquiry. The philosophical inquiry that follows the prompt is determined by the thoughts, questions, and contributions of the members in the community. They offer ideas, ask for reasons, uncover assumptions, and evaluate beliefs. Children are as adept at this as anyone, and I train my students to facilitate philosophical discussion with area schoolchildren by developing our own community of inquiry in our classroom and bringing those skills and explorations to the pre-college classroom. Active philosophy allows both students at Spring Hill and pre-college students in community schools to realize that they have a role to play in the production of knowledge. It demands intellectual humility but develops profound insights. It creates a space for doubt along with curiosity and wonder, and it reinforces these attitudes as fundamental to the human condition and vital for reflective analysis of the world and one's place in it.

Students are assigned to facilitate multiple sessions in active philosophy during our course. The student-learning goals are as follows: an understanding of philosophical questions and what qualifies as a philosophical question; development of philosophical sensitivity and an attentiveness the way that certain details can shape the philosophical content of a discussion; appreciation of logical argumentation and the practice of questioning beliefs and uncovering assumptions, including one's own; the ability to recognize philosophical progress within ongoing, unsettled debates and to find comfort in uncertainty; and, overall, the manifestation of these skills in a community of philosophical inquiry with children. These goals connect directly to Ignatian pedagogy and to the College's mission. In our active philosophy sessions, my students discover that they're not alone in thinking about big questions and ideas, and that each of them has something to contribute to persistent philosophical debates. This helps to develop their sense of self not only as leaders and thinkers, but also as humans and humanitarians. The confidence and humility gained in this process prepare them take on critical challenges and service opportunities, both now and in the future. The lessons they learn from young children and from each other serve to remind them that self-reflection and honesty are vital to the pursuit of knowledge, and that there is often good reason to listen to those who are not typically given a platform. Some of the well-documented benefits of active philosophy for the children themselves are improved educational outcomes across disciplines as well as positive identity formation. These benefits are most pronounced among underserved populations where children have fewer opportunities for self-recognition and more experiences with misrecognition. Children, especially those who are underprivileged, are used to having their perspectives stifled or overlooked. Actively listening to children and calling and treating them as 'philosophers' helps them develop a positive relation-to-self. It takes children seriously as children, and at its best, it is respectful, empowering, and genuine. My students are committed to serving the community and to bringing these benefits to area children, collaborating with these kids in developing a recognition of life's mysteries and its big questions, and engaging in mutually beneficial service and solidarity with these younger members of the human family.

ACTIVE PHILOSOPHY SESSION GUIDELINES & RUBRIC

Philosophy for Children PHL 295C

GUIDELINES: You will facilitate a session of active philosophy in a community of philosophical inquiry. You must select a topic, a prompt, and general plan for how the discussion will form. Keep in mind the four central features of a community of philosophical inquiry as you prepare for your session:

- 1) **LOGIC:** The focus is on following the logical force of the argument (not teaching philosophy but *doing* it).
- 2) **MODESTY:** Active philosophy requires a consensus of *epistemological modesty* (acknowledging that all members of the group, including the facilitator, are fallible).
- 3) **LANGUAGE:** You should refrain from using (much) technical philosophical language or direct references to the work of particular philosophers.
- 4) **TRUST:** You should establish an environment of intellectual safety, which encourages trust and a willingness to present one's ideas, and in which all ideas and questions are acceptable so long as they do not belittle or devalue others in the group.

RUBRIC: Your active philosophy session will be evaluated according to the following:

- **PROMPT**
 - Is a prompt used? Is it appropriate for the topic? How effective is it?
- **PLANNING**
 - Is it evident that the student has a general plan in mind for how the discussion will form?
- **TIMING**
 - Does the student adhere to the allotted time frame?
- **TOPIC**
 - Is the topic philosophically relevant? Does the student have a basic understanding of the philosophical debate surrounding the topic?
- **PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS**
 - Is the student able to identify philosophical questions? Does the student have philosophical questions prepared? AND/OR does the student successfully allow for philosophical questions to emerge during reflection or discussion?
- **LOGICAL ARGUMENTATION**
 - How well does the student guide the discussion along the logical flow of argumentation?
- **PHILOSOPHICAL SENSITIVITY**
 - Does the student demonstrate an attentiveness to the way that certain details shape the philosophical content of the discussion? For example, does the student seize on any assumptions made or on the larger concepts at work?
- **INTELLECTUAL SAFETY**
 - Does the student foster an environment of openness, respect, and trust? Does the student establish and maintain an environment of intellectual safety?
- **PROGRESS**
 - Is there an attempt to make some movement forward with respect to the debate surrounding the topic?
- **CLOSURE**
 - Does the student provide some form of closure for the community of inquiry at the end of the activity?