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BRINGING PHILOSOPHY TO DISTRICT 6

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Recommended Citation

Peterson, Bailie, "BRINGING PHILOSOPHY TO DISTRICT 6" (2019). *Department of Philosophy Faculty Publications*. 7.

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

BRINGING PHILOSOPHY TO DISTRICT 6

Dr. Bailie Peterson, Department of Philosophy



Pilot Course Results

Fall 2019 Community Engaged Scholars Symposium

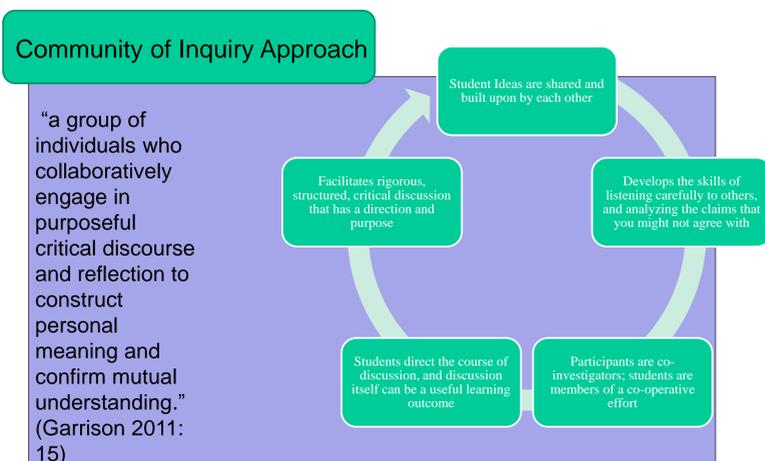
Introduction

I designed and taught a short-term summer philosophy course for students from high schools within District 6. This is part of an ongoing effort to share the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits of philosophy with a wider audience, and is backed by quantitative research, highlighting particular benefits for underrepresented students. The course was offered free of cost, with lunches provided in the dining commons. Three UNC philosophy majors served as “teaching assistants,” and mentors. In addition to the primary instructor, another professor joined discussion to further represent the accessibility of professors and philosophy. Pedagogical practices were informed by research on methods to include and support underrepresented students, especially future first-generation students.

The course was a success, as measured by student feedback, and teaching assistant response, and there are plans to build the program further.

* Financial support from the American Philosophical Association, and Weld County District 6, is gratefully acknowledged. Thanks also to Dr. Jeff Brown, Renee Dent, Arianna Borroto, Flor Mendoza and Nate Evans, for assistance.

Value of Engaged Learning



Methodology

Participants – 6 District 6 high school students; 3 UNC Philosophy Students; 2 UNC Professors; 5 additional high school students (campus tour only)

Data Collection: Qualitative Evaluations; Instructor Reports, pupil and student feedback

Procedures – Pre and Post course Questionnaires; end of course surveys for participants (and parents); informal feedback collection from teaching assistants and student participants. Observations of informal conversations with mentors.

Data Analysis: Qualitative Analysis

Results

- Students reported a high level of satisfaction, and made promising comments, e.g., (“this class was amazing--- thank you for this educational experience!” “I really loved the course, I think it was super fun and I learned a lot and made me open my mind and see the world in a different perspective.” “It really made me think about everything in just a new way.”
- After the campus tour, every student agreed that they would like to attend UNC in the future. Given that educational research highlights the immense importance of positive interactions between professors and first-generation students, (e.g., Hutchison, (2017), and the ways in which the college environment to be very psychologically intimidating (Swanson, et al, 2019), offering low-stress, high reward interactions could go far to bring these students back to campus to pursue degrees.
- Given that these students were unlikely to interact with professors before entering college, it was important to avoid initial negative interactions with professors. Counteracting these perceptions ahead of time could help students overcome challenges after they successfully arrive on campus, and could help fight the lower enrollment, retention, and graduation rates faced by underrepresented students.
- Observations of participant discussions with UNC mentors showed a dramatic change in the quality and depth of questions, indicating a strengthened interest in seeking higher education, and an ability to imagine themselves in this position.
- Student understanding of philosophy as a field, the methods used and the goals thereof improved drastically over the term. Participation levels also increased.
- UNC Student teaching assistants gained valuable experience; 2 out of 3 are seeking future teaching opportunities. They also furthered their understanding of philosophy, and practiced lesson facilitation in the Community of Inquiry Approach.

Discussion

There is growing evidence to support the need for summer and afterschool programming, as part of an effort to decrease the educational achievement gap for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Additional evidence highlights the particular benefits of philosophy, especially for mathematics and reading comprehension, which are the two areas of greatest need. Together, this makes summer philosophy incredibly attractive and could expound the benefits of stand-alone attempts from either case. The benefits of philosophy reach beyond these needed areas, however.

- Empirical research shows that studying philosophy before college develops and sharpens skills related to analytic reasoning and logic (Trickey and Topping 2004 & 2007).
- Studies link philosophy programs in K-12 schools to an increase in socio-emotional growth, independent thinking, and positive self-esteem (Mohr Lone and Burroughs, 2016).
- Research highlights the ways in which students can improve performance when they take a personal interest in their learning, which is a focus of Community of Inquiry.
- Test results on the GRE, LSAT and GMAT, and higher mid-career salary results for philosophy majors suggest further benefits.

Due to these benefits, the goal is to significantly expand the project in the immediate future.

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