

Adding voices to the philosophy curriculum

Outline for a Professional Learning Community

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Introduction

In 2021, the ministry of education commissioned the *Netherlands institute for curriculum development* (SLO) to start a process of renewal of the Dutch high school philosophy curriculum. In the same year, the lack of diversity in the philosophy curriculum was pointed out by both teachers (Booy & Varekamp 2021) and learners (Verhoeven 2021). In national newspaper NRC, high school student Zafia Verhoeven remarked that for her upcoming philosophy test, she had to learn about twelve philosophers, of which eleven were male. Additionally, she had never encountered a woman of color in her philosophy textbook (2021, 19). When the *Dutch association for philosophy teachers* (VFVO) organized regional meetings to discuss the renewal of the curriculum, it became clear that the call for diversity was widely supported among its members.

However, diversifying the philosophy curriculum provides certain challenges. For example, Alderik Visser, former curriculum developer at SLO, describes a lack of available *expertise* as a problem (Visser 2022, 9). During a national study day for philosophy teachers, organized by the VFVO in Utrecht in 2022, several teachers mentioned a lack of *time* as another obstacle to diversifying their philosophy lessons.

This Professional Learning Community (PLC) is aimed at overcoming both challenges. First, we hope to invite international guest speakers to bring the necessary expertise to the Dutch teacher community. Second, we aim at publishing the outcomes of the PLC as a practical teacher's guide with clear lesson plans, in order to facilitate the effective introduction of new voices to the high school curriculum.

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Participation

The PLC with the title *Adding voices to the philosophy curriculum* is open to philosophy teachers in Dutch high schools. The meetings will be held at ICLON (Leiden University). The working language will be Dutch.

Next to the physical meetings in Leiden, we will organize several online meetings with international guest lecturers. These online meetings will be open to high school teachers from around the globe, and will be announced through the network of the International Philosophy Olympiad. The working language during the online meetings will be English.

Programme

The PLC will consist of six sessions, which each have an online and an offline part. During each online lecture, a non-canonical philosopher will be introduced by an expert in their field. The meetings at Leiden University will be used to translate the acquired knowledge into classroom learning activities. We aim at publishing the text of each lecture alongside the corresponding learning activity in an open access teacher's guide.

Professional Learning Community: Adding voices to the philosophy curriculum

Session 1	Online meeting with guest lecturer	Session 4	Online meeting with guest lecturer
	Meeting at ICLON		Meeting at ICLON
Session 2	Online meeting with guest lecturer	Session 5	Online meeting with guest lecturer
	Meeting at ICLON		Meeting at ICLON
Session 3	Online meeting with guest lecturer	Session 6	Online meeting with guest lecturer
	Meeting at ICLON		Meeting at ICLON

Structure of the online lectures

During the PLC, we will take bell hooks' premise that "canon formation should be challenged and rigorously interrogated" (hooks 1994, 140) as a starting point. At the same time, we hope to avoid a perpetuation of what hooks calls the "melting pot" idea of cultural diversity (1994, 30-31). The concern with adding non-canonical thinkers to the existing curriculum without context is well described by Peter McLaren, in an interview with Shirley Steinberg:

Diversity that somehow constitutes itself as a harmonious ensemble of benign cultural spheres is a conservative and liberal model of multiculturalism that, in my mind, deserves to be jettisoned because, when we try to make culture an undisturbed space of harmony and agreement where social relations exist within cultural forms of uninterrupted accord, we ascribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories that are played out in the field of social antagonisms. (Steinberg 1992, 399; quoted in hooks 1994, 31)

Therefore, we will kindly ask our online guest lecturers to pay attention to the social context of the philosopher in question, by adhering to the following structure:

1	Content	Which philosopher outside the western canon should, in your view, be added to a high school philosophy curriculum, and why? Please focus on a specific contribution by this philosopher, such as a concept, a thought experiment, a position, an idea, or otherwise.
2	Positionality	Please describe the historical context and the place this philosopher occupied in society, in so far as it is relevant to understanding the philosophical ideas mentioned under Content.
3	Source	Which source reading from this philosopher would you recommend to be used in high school philosophy classrooms? Please specify a paragraph or chapter.
4	Untranslatables ¹	Are there any words in the source reading that are best left untranslated? Please explain why.
5	Implementation	How should the work of this philosopher be implemented in the philosophy curriculum? (e.g., added to the curriculum, or compared with / opposed to / in dialogue with a philosopher from the current curriculum)
6	Antagonisms	Can you reflect on the social antagonisms that might have resulted in the prior exclusion of this philosopher from the canon?
7	Perspective	To what extent do the ideas of this philosopher change the perspective on what philosophy is, as a discipline?
8	Didactics	Do you have any didactical suggestions with regard to the introduction of this philosopher in the classroom? (e.g., points of attention, possible classroom learning activities, things to consider)

¹ See Cassin et al. (2014).

Structure of the meetings at ICLON

During the physical meetings at Leiden University, the participants will work together on the development of classroom learning activities. Inspired by Ramdas et al. (2019), we will strive to incorporate the diversity in the classroom into each learning activity, in order to connect form and content and to enhance the learning experience. We will ask the following questions during each meeting:

1	Form	How can we develop a learning activity where the form of the activity reinforces the content of the online lecture?
2	Positionality	In what way does our positionality as teachers in Dutch high schools pose challenges to teaching the content of the online lecture effectively?
3	Perspectives	How can we use the diverse perspectives in the classroom to enhance the learning experience?
4	Reflection	How can we incorporate reflection on canon formation into the learning activity?

For the effective development of learning activities, we will structure each meeting at ICLON in accordance with the model for Professional Learning Communities by Bruns and Bruggink (2016, 18). Each meeting will have the following five phases:

1	Check-in	What have you been working on since the last meeting? What challenges did you encounter?
2	Explore	What is your own experience with the philosopher in question? How should this philosopher be positioned in the curriculum? What learning activities could be applied to this particular topic?
3	Condense	Which of the ideas in the exploration phase should be developed further?
4	Make	Participants work on the development of concrete and creative learning activities that reinforce the content that was presented during the online meeting.
5	Review	What have we been able to create so far? What can still be improved? How can we divide the tasks that still need to be done?

Publication

The guest speakers are invited to turn their online lecture into a written article. These articles will go through peer review, and will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* (JDPh). In this special issue, we hope to publish six introductory articles on non-canonical philosophers. These articles will follow the structure described in paragraph 4, to make the publication as practical and accessible to teachers as possible. Alongside the articles, we will publish the learning activities that are developed by the teachers taking part in the Professional Learning Community. We plan to publish the special issue of the JDPh before the start of the World Congress of Philosophy 2024 (Rome, August 1-8, 2024). The topic of the 25th edition of the World Congress of Philosophy is *Philosophy across Boundaries*, a title which aligns well with the topic of ICLON's Professional Learning Community. The special issue of the JDPh will refer to the World Congress of Philosophy in its intended title: "*Philosophy across Boundaries: a special issue on the occasion of the World Congress of Philosophy 2024.*"

Presentation

The special issue of the JDPh will be presented at the World Congress of Philosophy 2024. The World Congress of Philosophy is organized by the *Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie* (FISP), the Italian Philosophical Society, and Sapienza University. Floris Velema co-chairs the thematic section *Teaching philosophy* at this event. All contributors to the special issue of the JDPh are cordially invited to present their paper at the WCP 2024, within the *Teaching philosophy* section.

Practical information

So far, the following guest lecturers have confirmed their participation in the professional learning community:

- Prof. Dr. Ruth Hagenruber (University of Paderborn)
- Dr. Sarah Tyson (University of Colorado Denver)
- Dr. Ahab Bdaiwi (Leiden University)
- Dr. Michael Eze (Leiden University)

Participation in the Professional Learning Community will cost EUR 599. The programme consists of six online lectures and six physical meetings at ICLON, including meals. Together with a colleague, you will work towards a publication in the Journal of Didactics of Philosophy. If you are interested in participating, please contact Floris Velema: f.p.velema@iclon.leidenuniv.nl

Literature

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