

Report on the APA Grant that supported the Development of “What’s the Big Idea?”

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With the assistance of the APA grant, we were able to continue development of the website “What’s the Big Idea?”, whatsthebigideaprogram.com. More specifically, we were able to complete the development of the website layout, revise and post the first unit of the site on bullying, and to complete and post the second unit on lying.

Each unit consists of an introduction to the philosophical issue, introduction to the clips, the clips, and questions. There are also printable handouts that teachers can use. Each unit took considerable time to develop, both in terms of the philosophical materials and the filming, editing, etc.

We had hoped to be able to complete a third unit on friendship, but with the funding we received this was not possible. It simply was not financially feasible to do this. We are currently seeking further funding and are planning to complete the final three ethics units by the end of the academic year. I do not know if this will be possible or not.

One change we made was to the composition of our Steering Committee. Because we were testing the materials in local schools and because I was in New Zealand on a Fulbright Fellowship from February thru June, we needed a local philosopher to consult for the project. Meredith Michaels was therefore recruited onto our steering committee in place of Sara Goering.

We have not sought to publicize the site yet, as it is still being developed. But we have been using it with some local schools and will embark on a more extensive testing phase this year. So far the results have been very positive and the feedback we have received from the schools have emphasized how useful the project has been for their students.

One teacher who is a friend of the filmmaker with whom I worked posted a blog about using the site which you can access here: <http://dogtrax.edublogs.org/2012/09/12/sparking-discussions-and-video-as-text-lying/>

His comments indicate that the lying unit is helping to spark deeper discussions of lying than his class previously had engaged in. It was also encouraging to see that a high school class could use the website rather than just middle schools

One thing that we have realized from testing the site is that teachers need more guidance in how to conduct a philosophy lesson in which they act as facilitators rather than active participants in the discussion. We intend to add something to the website to help teachers understand the pedagogical model we are using.

Once the full website has been created, we anticipate making a push to publicize the site. Our expectation is that teachers will use the site and that this will increase the reach of philosophy into pre-college classrooms. We focused on middle school because there already is material for high school and elementary students that encourages philosophical discussions in classrooms. We anticipate that this website will move philosophy into

middle schools thus making philosophy available for all levels of pre-college classroom.

I have learned how time consuming and expensive working with film (digital video, really) is. It's a very different ballgame from writing a philosophical paper. Although I did have to do some writing to script both myself and the students who are featured on the website, this was a minor part of the total project. We had to rehearse, do the actual filming, and then have everything edited. Once that was all done, we only had a rough cut of the material, which we had to revise and then have reposted onto the site. The number of people working on these aspects of the project was fairly large and they all had to be compensated, especially the cameraman, the film editor, and the website designer. All of this was a bit of a surprise to me and I would suggest that anyone else embarking on a video project be aware of the time and monetary expenditures that this will require. While a website gives people access to the materials, it is a time consuming venture.

Nonetheless, I think that this promises to make a significant impact on the spread of philosophy beyond colleges and universities. With subsequent grants, we will work with teachers and introduce philosophy into classrooms in local schools. The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, which also gave us a grant, is planning to make a video about the site that they will use to publicize it for us.

In sum, the APA Grant helped us move forward on a project that has the potential to make a large contribution to the spread of philosophy into pre-college classrooms. The project is moving forward and we anticipate being able to complete it once we have secured sufficient funding.

Note: I attach a separate document that indicates both the revised budget and the actual expenses.

Budget: What's the Big Idea?

Director (TW)		\$1,400
Filmmaker (JA)		800
Steering Committee		
Teacher	DM	150
Teacher	NC	100
Philosopher	MM	250
Editing (Rikk)		1000
Web		
	Justin	500
Actors	Hina	50
	Jake	50
Camera	Mark	250
Materials/Refreshments		450
TOTAL		\$5,000