How to Do Pre-Collegiate Philosophy: Some First Steps

1. Determine the age level and form. Will the program be part of a regular school curriculum, an honors course, an afterschool program, a school or independent club, or a home schooling program? Who will participate and what will the age range be?
2. Connect to the relevant existing resources, such as the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO), the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children, or the Winning Words Initiative. Determine what age appropriate material is available on these sites.
3. Consider the different curricular possibilities. Will the program use ‘great books’ or classic works, or be more problem-focused, or combine the two?
4. Make contact with the trained facilitators whose example will be most helpful to you. Visit classroom sessions or afterschool program sessions to experience pre-collegiate philosophy in action. Locate the nearest college or university with a strong philosophy department and students willing to help.
5. Determine your funding needs and the time commitment needed to make the envisioned program a success. Be realistic. It is important to build relationships with young people over a long period of collaborative philosophical inquiry, and you may need to seek grant support for this purpose.
6. Make the commitment and resolve to be patient. Building up a successful philosophy program or participating in one takes time, and there will be setbacks. You will need to determine what really works in practice and adapt your efforts as you move along.
7. Remember that philosophical discussion is good in itself, as well as having beneficial effects on various academic skills. Keep a detailed qualitative record of what you have done and with what success, and encourage the young people and children involved in your program to keep journals and share their ideas with you as the program proceeds. In the end, their voices and their philosophizing are what will demonstrate the worth of your program.

The Winning Words model would encourage you to read and reflect on some of the classic Platonic dialogues as the best way to begin your philosophizing. Some texts in older translations are available for free at *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues*, Plato, trans. B. Jowett , [*http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plato/index.htm*](http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/plato/index.htm) ) A free user-friendly guide is Henry Sidgwick’s *Outlines of the History of Ethics*, at [http://books.google.com/books/about/Outlines\_of\_the\_history\_of\_ethics\_for\_En.html?id=qvEzKIh3\_VkC](https://xmail.uchicago.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=3be50769e62a4eba9dc1c7b9675d9220&URL=http%3a%2f%2fbooks.google.com%2fbooks%2fabout%2fOutlines_of_the_history_of_ethics_for_En.html%3fid%3dqvEzKIh3_VkC) Nigel Warburton’s *A Little History of Philosophy* is a wonderful first book on the history of philosophy.