
The Editor's Notes

This past summer the American Philosophical Association sponsored a summer workshop at Williams College on teaching philosophy. The Exxon Foundation put up ninety thousand dollars; there were about thirty participants. Some will complain about cost effectiveness, especially those who are familiar with the biennial summer workshops that have been organized without APA sanction since '76 by Terry Bynum *et al.* These biennial workshops have been week-long gatherings of one to three hundred (counts vary) who pay their own modest expenses to share ideas, techniques, materials in a big "bring your family, let's get acquainted" atmosphere. Very different, the APA's was a three week, intense, "let's get down to business" affair based, I guess, on the NEH summer workshop model. (It was originally designed for NEH sponsorship.)

Michael Hooker, Chair of the APA Teaching Committee, was the prime mover; Baruch Brody its director. "Experts" (my term) were brought in to run sessions on teaching particular topics: ethics, logic, etc. Other time was devoted to small group discussion and topical meetings. (I visited for three days primarily to promote interest among the participants in *publishing* materials useful to teaching, but also as a representative of the APA Teaching Committee.)

What makes this affair worth talking about is one element of the plan that I was skeptical about when it was first proposed. Each participant was required to bring to the workshop a brief video-tape recording of their own classroom teaching. An hour and a half would be given each morning of the conference to discussion of a different participant's tape. Though these discussions were not at first satisfactory, they became for many, after about the fourth or fifth day, the most fruitful and satisfying part of the day's activities. At first, apparently, the participants thought their task was to evaluate each

other's teaching, to pronounce it good or bad, but they had no criteria and little mutual understanding about how to proceed. So things did not proceed well. But these preconceptions about their task were given up as the participants discovered that the tapes could be used to suggest general topics for group discussion, rather than to focus so narrowly on questions such as "What am I doing right (wrong)?" One tape, for example, showing an unresponsive student, focussed attention on the topic of student discussion in the class: its value, techniques, and what to do about reluctant ones. Also broached in the same session was the function of "asides," the remarks or short digressions we add to lectures, that may in part illustrate something of the day's topic, but seem more directed at revealing our own attitudes, political stances, or character. Such general discussion drew on everyone's teaching experience and prompted new appraisal of much of it.

The APA Teaching Committee hopes to repeat its success here by arranging for regional three day workshops which would adapt the best features of the summer session to a long weekend. That will be a challenge, but careful planning may make it possible. Richard Wasserstrom (University of California, Santa Cruz) will soon be replacing Michael Hooker as the Committee's Chair. Anyone with suggestions for this project, or even suggestions for other projects the Committee might work on, should direct them to him.

Elsewhere

Aitia, 9:2, James Friel, ed., Knapp Hall 15, SUNY Farmingdale, NY 11735

"Liberal Arts: A New Approach," Neil Rossman and Joan Richardson.

— Describes the role of philosophy in required liberal arts courses at LaGuardia Community College where it receives as much emphasis as composition, etc. (6-16)