

APPA

American Philosophical Association

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
NEWARK, DELAWARE 19716

Newsletter on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy

Volume 1

SPRING/SUMMER
'84

Number 1

EDITED BY:

William J. Rapaport
Department of Philosophy
State University College
Fredonia, New York 14603

AND

Frederick Oscanyan
Department of Philosophy and Religion
Berea College
Berea, Kentucky 40404

SPONSORED BY:

Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy

Gareth Matthews, Chair (1988)
Eric Hoffman (1985)
Dorothy Leland (1986)
Jacob Needleman (1986)
Joseph Palau (1984)
William J. Rapaport (1984)
Robert Swarz (1985)
Paul Wagner (1984)

FROM THE EDITOR

The American Philosophical Association is the major association of professional philosophers in the United States. Its Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy has as its charge:

1. To gather and disseminate information on available teaching materials.
2. To make contact with teacher training institutions and with state certification agencies and initiate discussions of the

ready for distribution later this year, but some preliminary observations can be made now.

Philosophy in the pre-college environment is taught in a variety of ways and under a variety of names, 'Philosophy for Children', 'Introduction to Philosophy', and 'Philosophy and Literature' being the most common. Philosophical materials are used in a wide spectrum of contexts and subject areas, ranging from 119 courses in language arts (including English and oral communications), 51 in philosophy per se, and 23 in social studies to courses in homemaking and

FROM THE EDITOR

The American Philosophical Association is the major association of professional philosophers in the United States. Its Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy has as its charge:

1. To gather and disseminate information on available teaching materials.
2. To make contact with teacher training institutions and with state certification agencies and initiate discussions of the steps necessary to ensure the official inclusion of philosophy in the process of teacher preparation and licensing in such a way as to safeguard professional standards.
3. On the basis of the foregoing to draft an official position statement of the Association.
4. To maintain a roster of members of the profession interested in and concerned about pre-college instruction who would be willing to serve as resource persons for school districts, state departments, etc., seeking to develop programs of instruction in philosophy.
5. To publish an occasional newsletter.

The official position statement, adopted in October 1980, reads as follows:

The American Philosophical Association has a long-standing interest in the teaching of philosophy at the pre college level, welcomes the recent increase in the level of activity in this area, and is firmly committed to the development of such instruction.

This commitment brings with it a strong concern for the excellence of pre-college instruction. The teacher should be qualified and the material of the highest order. To this end, persistent efforts must be made to insure that the interest in teaching philosophy in pre-college education is matched by appropriate training and competence.

The choice of material, of course, should be left to the qualified teacher. The topics and issues likely to be dealt with, such as logic, ethics, values and moral education, history of philosophy, aesthetics, social and political philosophy, existentialism, and philosophy of religion, are all within the domain of the professional concern of the American Philosophical Association.

The APA Committee on Pre-College Instruction stands ready to offer suggestions.

The Committee is not associated with any particular "movement" or organization, but serves as a "clearing house" for information on all aspects of teaching philosophy to students who are not yet in college or who might not go on to college.

WHAT IS PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY?

In 1982, the Committee sent out a questionnaire (reprinted below) to teachers of pre-college philosophy. It was not a scientific questionnaire, but was designed to get some idea of what sorts of courses existed and what sorts of information the teachers of these courses wanted. The full report will be

ready for distribution later this year, but some preliminary observations can be made now.

Philosophy in the pre-college environment is taught in a variety of ways and under a variety of names, "Philosophy for Children", "Introduction to Philosophy", and "Philosophy and Literature" being the most common. Philosophical materials are used in a wide spectrum of contexts and subject areas, ranging from 119 courses in language arts (including English and oral communications), 51 in philosophy per se, and 23 in social studies to courses in homemaking and chess. Most programs were introduced in the late 1960s/early 1970s and the late 1970s/early 1980s, with the numbers of new courses steadily increasing in recent years.

Courses in the 4th through 6th grades and the 11th and 12th grades appear to be the most popular, though there are classes using philosophical materials beginning as early as pre-kindergarten. The number of students involved ranges from 5 to over 600, with an average class size of between 20 and 30. Most of the courses (123) are strongly recommended by administrators and teachers, and quite a few (34) are required.

Most courses (188) use the materials produced by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, followed by readings from Plato (44), standard philosophy texts (22), Aristotle (18), Camus (12), and Descartes (10), though many other authors--both philosophers and non-philosophers--are also read. The topics included logic and critical thinking (171), ethics and values (65), language and meaning (50), philosophy of mind (28), and general philosophy (27), among others, using formats ranging from discussions, debates, and lectures, to films and writing.

Most respondents reported positive responses from their students, and many claimed to see significant carry-over to other courses. The biggest problem reported was difficulty in getting students to participate, often due to the distinct "style" of doing philosophy, where there are no clear-cut answers to questions. (See "Critical Thinking and Cognitive Development", in this issue, for a possible explanation of this, and "A Rawlseyan Game", also in this issue, for one way to handle such problems.)

Who teaches these courses? Mostly women (114); there were only 50 men responding. Most had bachelor's degrees, many had masters degrees, and a few had Ph.D.s. Their philosophical background was, most often, undergraduate courses (53 respondents) or special programs such as the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (31), though many knew philosophy only from their own readings. Most were normally English or other language-arts teachers and elementary-school teachers; many were science and math teachers, and some taught only philosophy. Most had been teaching 20 years or less, the average of those with 20 or fewer years being 12.

Most teachers would like to share or get suggestions and information about successful courses and appropriate course materials; they would like information on courses for teachers of pre-college philosophy; they would like to know of college-level philosophy teachers who would be willing to work with their classes; and they would like to know about conferences, workshops, and essay contests. Most importantly, there is a desire to communicate with each other.

We hope that this Newsletter can help fulfill these needs. It will address theoretical and practical issues in teaching philosophy in elementary and secondary schools. It is concerned with curricula; methods of instruction; parent, teacher, and student relationships; and the role of philosophy in the schools. It will publicize news of pertinent activities and sources of instructional materials, and will serve as a forum for informed opinions and criticisms.

TWO

News, inquiries, reports, and comments about teaching philosophy are solicited and should be sent to the current editor.

William J. Rapaport, Editor
Newsletter on Pre-College Philosophy
Department of Philosophy
State University College
Fredonia, NY 14063

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION
PRE-COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY QUESTIONNAIRE

The Committee on Pre-College Philosophy of the American Philosophical Association is conducting a national survey on instruction in philosophy at the elementary, middle and high school levels. If you include philosophic or critical thinking materials in your teaching or teach a course in philosophy, please fill in the items below. Principals or superintendents please pass this questionnaire on to the appropriate faculty.

PART ONE

A. Subject Area(s) or Course(s)

1. Title _____
2. Context or subject area in which philosophic material is used _____

3. Year philosophic material or philosophy course(s) introduced _____
4. Number of times given _____
5. Grade level(s) _____
6. Number of students in each subject area or course _____
7. Required by school _____ . Recommended by (administration, parents, advisors) _____
_____ . Elected by students _____

B. Materials and Methods

1. Reading material in the course(s)
 - (a) Philosophical (give titles) _____

 - (b) Non-philosophical (give titles) _____

 - (c) Proportion of time devoted to the philosophical _____
2. Methods of Instruction (discussion, questioning techniques, debate, lecture, film, etc.)

3. Topics, issues, philosophers discussed _____

F. Others to whom this questionnaire should be sent (name and address; attach a list if you have one, or use back side) _____

G. Thank you for your assistance

Please mail the completed questionnaire or requests for additional copies of the blank questionnaire to:

Committee on Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy
American Philosophical Association
Office of the Executive Secretary
University of Delaware
Newark, Delaware 19711

Respondents are encouraged to return the completed questionnaires by June 1, 1982

H. If you wish to receive the results of this survey and to be on our mailing list, please fill in your name and address below (please print)

Name: _____

Address: _____

State: _____ Zip Code _____

For results _____

For Mailing List _____

(USE ADDITIONAL PAPER FOR ANSWERS IF NECESSARY)

ETHICS IN THE ETHICAL CULTURAL SCHOOLS

Although Plato believed that philosophy was not for the young, the teaching of ethics began in the Ethical Culture Schools more than 100 years ago. For teachers and for students, the ethics program continues to be rewarding, tantalizing, and frustrating. Despite an inescapable tension between expectation and achievement, ethics education has developed an identifiable structure. Certain questions recur, and certain assumptions about people and learning persist.

The Ethical Culture Schools (Midtown, K-6; Fieldston Lower, K-6; and Fieldston, 7-12), founded in 1878, are committed to democratic values. Consequently, we take a developmental view of human capacities and of schooling. This leads us into an educational and moral neighborhood marked, among other things, by freedom of inquiry, critical thinking, historical ideas, and comparative analysis. Ethics is studied, not commanded; commitments are developed, not imposed; conduct is experienced, not scripted; and change is expected, not condemned.

What, then, is to be studied under the name of ethics education? Is it sufficient to address questions of skill (e.g., moral reasoning), or history (e.g., comparative ethics), or mental health (e.g., human relations)? Moral commitment becomes a problem. It is foolish to talk of "teaching ethics" and

CULTURAL SCHOOLS

Although Plato believed that philosophy was not for the young, the teaching of ethics began in the Ethical Culture Schools more than 100 years ago. For teachers and for students, the ethics program continues to be rewarding, tantalizing, and frustrating. Despite an inescapable tension between expectation and achievement, ethics education has developed an identifiable structure. Certain questions recur, and certain assumptions about people and learning persist. The Ethical Culture Schools (Midtown, K-6; Fieldston Lower, K-6; and Fieldston, 7-12), founded in 1878, are committed to democratic values. Consequently, we take a developmental view of human capacities and of schooling. This leads us into an educational and moral neighborhood marked, among other things, by freedom of inquiry, critical thinking, historical ideas, and comparative analysis. Ethics is studied, not commanded; commitments are developed, not imposed; conduct is experienced, not scripted; and change is expected, not condemned.

What, then, is to be studied under the name of ethics education? Is it sufficient to address questions of skill (e.g., moral reasoning), or history (e.g., comparative ethics), or mental health (e.g., human relations)? Moral commitment becomes a problem. It is foolish to talk of "teaching ethics" and raise questions about the appropriate behavior of teachers and other adults toward children, e.g., about legitimate and illegitimate authority, about distinctions between indoctrination, advocacy, and education.

Since we cannot isolate moral behavior, moral knowledge, and moral commitment from each other, we need to understand the relationships between them. But that is by no means clear. In other disciplines, we find similar concerns to be sure. For example, in teaching music, we can distinguish between knowledge, appreciation, and performance. We do not expect all students to be musicians, or historians or scientists for that matter. In what is called humanistic education, we aim for broad "literacy", although we seldom provide a defensible interpretation of literacy and its scope. For example, consider current confusions about the meaning of "computer literacy". We do expect schools, however, to participate significantly and intentionally in producing moral beings and not just moral specialists. Literacy in ethics, however defined, is not enough.

Schools have claimed to and been expected to educate for "character". This is so for the tradition-bound and the progressive, for the church-related and the secular, for the tax supported and the independent school. We may differ about moral substance and teaching method. We do not differ on intention or function. Paradoxically, we know that ethical education happens. At the same time, we don't know how it happens. Reliable and self-conscious ethical schooling remains elusive.

Ethics education seems to have some affinity for the "practical" features of scientific, artistic, or scholarly education. We instruct for skillful performance in these fields but only create conditions and hope for innovation, invention, or discovery. This tantalizing similarity to practice--which, if fully realized, would give us adequate models--reveals at the same time a striking dissimilarity. We ought to be able to distinguish between ethical skill and ethical innovation, etc. Having done so, we would need to know what those skills are and demonstrate that they are teachable. This seems a manageable task. Unfortunately, skillful performance is insufficient. The ethical situation is ordinarily novel in some significant way, and that is itself a salient moral characteristic. It is far less so for other disciplines where originality and art are not commonly expected. For some disciplines, the suppression of uniqueness is, indeed, prerequisite to effective inquiry.

I might also suggest, dialectically, that the nearby models for ethical education could be other universal disciplines. We expect all students to write and speak and calculate, but we do not expect all students to be historians or mathematicians or scientists. In that sense, ethics is a "basic" discipline in a functional and not a pejorative sense. Unlike other "basics", however, ethics is not sufficiently covered by a standard structure, format, or content. As with language and arithmetic, it does have these. We can and do identify standard moral syntax, analysis, usage, etc. Unlike language and arithmetic, however, satisfactory moral performance cannot be substantially habit based, i.e., is not just a matter of training or of learning rules and applications.

I trust you will forgive these incomplete reflections. They are background to our continuing efforts to work out ethical education. They serve, too, as a

1. Reading material in the course(s) _____

(a) Philosophical (give titles) _____

(b) Non-philosophical (give titles) _____

(c) Proportion of time devoted to the philosophical _____

2. Methods of Instruction (discussion, questioning techniques, debate, lecture, film, etc.) _____

3. Topics, issues, philosophers discussed _____

C. Evaluation

1. Please comment on the success of the use of philosophical material (student evaluations or other student feedback. . .) _____

2. Difficulties encountered _____

3. Attitude towards the use of the philosophical material: by administration, parents, students _____

D. Instructor

1. Sex: M _____ F _____

2. Degree(s) obtained _____

3. Specialization (major/minor) _____

4. Subjects certified to teach _____

5. Background in philosophy or source of your interest in philosophy _____

6. Present teaching: _____

Subjects _____

At: Private _____ Public _____ Parochial or religious _____ school _____

Grade levels _____

7. Years of teaching experience _____

PART TWO

E. In what ways can our Committee be of service to you? _____