

Philip HOLT

Teaching the Teachers: Summer Institutes and their Value

A part of outreach, certainly for faculty in state universities, is working with schoolteachers in the area, helping them to understand material about Greeks and Romans and teach it better. The benefits to high-schoolers are obvious, but so are the problems for faculty interested in getting involved. What are some good frameworks for reaching teachers effectively?

This talk reports on a residential summer institute put on for four years (going on five) at the University of Wyoming, with considerable inspiration from the CANE Summer Institute and considerable support from the Wyoming Council for the Humanities. For five days, about 25 teachers and four faculty live together on campus and focus on a particular period of the ancient world. We have a seminar on major texts from the period (the *Odyssey*, Sophocles' Theban plays), and we explore areas of the period's literature, history, archaeology, and society through a range of public lectures and short courses.

Teachers are a great bunch to work with. They are mature learners, often with weak classics backgrounds, but generally willing to work and ready to discover new things. They're enthusiastic, they love the experience, they get inspired, and we get rave reviews on our evaluations. We have some good conversations, often better focused than scholarly discussion is on basic life issues, and better informed than undergraduate teaching by adult perspectives. It's all a refreshing change of pace from teaching undergraduates, and it's a stimulating and exciting for faculty as well as participants.

We began the institute with the idea that our participants would learn things that they could pass on to their students, mostly in English and Social Studies classes: much of the value of the institute (and an important justification for its considerable expense) is the multiplier effect when our participants take what they learn out into their classrooms. We've heard some gratifying stories from past participants about how the experience helped them in particular courses. But there's another benefit as well, less obvious but perhaps more important. Participants value the chance to read great books, discuss important ideas, and live the life of the mind. They tell us that they get plenty of pedagogical workshops in their school districts, but the institute lets them study the substance of what they teach and reconnect with the things that led them into a career in teaching in the first place. They also value-perhaps more than they ought-the chance to hear professional scholars talking about things on a fairly high level. Our work, our methods, and our ways of thinking, interest them, and their own teaching gains from the contact. Our experience shows a strong interest in classics, ready to be tapped given the right setting and the right stimulus.