

The Institute for Transforming Teacher Education and Faculty Learning Communities: Encouraging Pedagogies of Engagement through Professional Development at Indiana State University

The Center for Teaching and Learning, the College of Arts and Sciences and Project PRE, a U.S. Department of Education grant focused on the transformation of teacher education programs, are interested in promoting inquiry-based learning strategies to guide students and faculty in addressing local issues confronting the community. They recognize that such issues must be approached in an interdisciplinary way to facilitate the collaboration of our faculty, the community, our students, and particularly our future teachers.

Building on the long-term tradition of excellence in ISU's teacher education programs, the Institute for Transforming Teacher Education (ITTE) has been designed as a faculty development program aimed at transforming university coursework in teacher education curricula. The 3-day ITTE has been delivered four times over two summers (2004 and 2005) to 62 faculty members from Indiana State University. The ITTE is modeled after a similar program at the University of Delaware and focuses on teaching strategies for use in teacher education and General Education coursework. Both problem-based learning and case teaching are introduced, and their role in promoting scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching and learning is emphasized. The sessions are delivered using inquiry-based teaching methods, providing participants with a unique opportunity to directly experience the value of each strategy.

The ITTE is followed by a series of interdisciplinary faculty learning communities (FLCs) led by experienced faculty (termed Institute Fellows) who have an extensive background in providing inquiry-based pedagogies. The College of Arts and Sciences defines experiential learning quite broadly to include not just internships and service learning, but also pedagogies that promote opportunities for students to put their knowledge and skills into action. The FLCs are designed to facilitate faculty professional development and cooperative work in addressing issues of local concern, as well as develop faculty skills on inquiry-based pedagogies to serve as models and mentors for future teachers. Communities are offered for faculty with interests in the following areas: *Environmental Quality, Quality of Life in an Urban Setting, Participatory Democracy, Child Welfare, and Migration, in and out of the Valley (diversity)*. Members of the communities meet regularly from September to May to discuss readings, meet with members of the local community, develop inquiry-based teaching strategies and/or activities, and design a module or other course feature. The module or transformation should be connected to the interdisciplinary theme of the community. Each learning community also has the resources to develop contacts with local community leaders to approach specific problems or issues. These may be governmental, business, or non-profit entities where engagement and research opportunities might be explored; they will also include local school systems where educational opportunities should be explored.

The reception of this U.S. Department of Education grant promises to change the pedagogical landscape at ISU in significant ways. The Institute for Transforming Teacher Education and Faculty Learning Communities are viewed as a first stage in providing professional development for teacher educators and content specialists implicated by the grant. As the Institute grows over the years, it seems likely that it would be particularly attractive to teacher education faculty external to ISU. Using ISU faculty as expert presenters, the ITTE could serve on a national scale as the primary information source for transformational efforts in teacher education through pedagogies such as PBL.

Questions:

- What advantages/disadvantages of offering learning communities during the academic year following the 3-day summer workshop?
- Would these types of programs work at your institution?