

PCC NEWS

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Letter from the Director

Bob Midden, Director, Partners in Context & Community, BGSU

May, 2002

What will work? That is the ultimate question. What can we do to best improve student academic achievement, success and satisfaction?

In PCC we have several answers to that question. At the highest level they are: 1) improving our preparation of students to teach; 2) improving our support of teachers already in schools; and 3) developing effective partnerships among all those with a stake in student achievement including teachers, administrators, students, parents, universities, community organizations, and businesses.

The focus of our efforts to improve preparation of students to teach is the “residential learning community.” This is an old idea that goes back to Cambridge and Oxford Universities in the 13th century where faculty and students lived together in collaborative communities with learning as their primary focus. In the new conception, faculty don’t actually live with students, but there is greater interaction. Learning is extended beyond the formal classroom environment throughout the rest of students’ lives. Strong connections are made from the academic theories that students learn in their formal courses to experiences they have working with students, teachers and administrators in schools. There is abundant evidence that making such connections deepens learning and helps students improve their ability to apply and adapt theories to the real situations they will encounter as teachers.

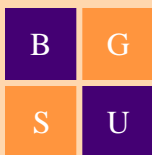
We are providing professional development and other support for teachers and administrators in schools. The professional development is based on a broad concept of how to improve

student achievement and satisfaction called “Contextual Teaching and Learning” (CTL). This strategy is built on evidence that many students learn best when their learning is embedded in a meaningful and realistic context. For instance, students can better learn science concepts when they need to do so to help answer an important question, such as whether private water wells in Wood County are contaminated by crude oil and whether this represents a significant health risk for County residents. By giving students meaningful reasons for learning, student motivation is increased. By giving students situations in which to use their learning they learn how to apply theoretical knowledge. By giving students situations where human needs are met, they increase their awareness of the importance of recognizing human needs and finding innovative and creative ways to meet those needs.

Thus CTL, not only improves student academic performance but also leads to other important outcomes that contribute to student success not only in their careers but also in their roles as responsible citizens.

The partnerships that we are developing involve increased communication that results in the best knowledge and expertise being brought to bear on the formidable challenge of improving educational outcomes in high need urban schools. All stakeholders are and will continue to make valuable contributions to this effort. The exchange of knowledge, expertise and dispositions helps improve the ability of all stakeholders to participate in this effort. For instance, the interaction between universities and schools helps universities better understand the needs of teachers and administrators in those schools and the schools learn what resources

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they can best obtain from universities. Interaction with community organizations and businesses often reveals valuable resources that can be used as well as informed perspectives that can improve the definition of the most important learning outcomes. Thus, all benefit in a synergistic fashion.

While these strategies are promising and are well founded in the best evidence currently available on the most effective educational practices, we must stay constantly alert for new ideas and new approaches. We also must

carefully examine our success and frequently reevaluate our plans so as to inform our efforts with actual results. In this way, we hope to make a real and lasting difference. Such an accomplishment is not easy and will not be realized quickly. But in spite of the time, in spite of the great effort involved, the results are well worth it. By keeping our eye on the prize and by constantly striving for excellence and improvement I am confident that we will ultimately reach our goals.

PCC's Professional Development Opportunities

Robert G. Berns, Professor, Division of Teaching & Learning, BGSU



Professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, and university faculty seemly abound through PCC. From the summer institute to online learning, educators can explore the community, consider the diversity of

their students, learn about engaging methods of teaching to help students find meaning in their classes and achieve at higher levels, and find ways to support an environment conducive to engaging teaching practices. Here is a short summary of each of these opportunities.

Summer Institute

The annual Summer Institute allows BGSU faculty and East Toledo teachers and administrators to explore the East Toledo community through traveling through the neighborhoods and business district, touring community agencies, and completing a learning exercise called community mapping. Understanding the homes and community from which their students come allows teachers and administrators to better plan for an effective learning environment and to choose effective teaching strategies. Businesses and community agencies, along with the home, provide a rich array of resources for teachers and students alike.

Along with experiencing the community, Summer Institute participants are introduced to

the engaging teaching practices of contextual teaching and learning. J.D. Hoyer, a national leader in school reform through community engagement, challenges the participants to think about the educational system, the community, and the larger contexts of the country and the world. J.D.'s presentation is embedded within a simulation that allow participants to hear from highly effective teachers representing communities such as East Toledo. Toward the end of the institute, the participants are registered onto the new DiscoverCTL professional development system through which they will learn about contextual teaching and learning on line during the upcoming school year. They learn how to use the system and actually begin completing the early stages of the process.

“Connecting the students’ world to the curriculum... really seems to motivate the students to achieve.”

The first Institute, in 2001, was a resounding success. Pay or BGSU graduate credit is available to participants. For an application,

contact Susan Smith at slsmith@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

DiscoverCTL

The innovative professional development system, DiscoverCTL, is offered completely on line. East Toledo teachers and administrators, as well as many BGSU faculty, are eligible to participate. Participants spend 1-2 semesters learning about the various aspects of contextual teaching and learning.

What is perhaps most appealing is that the individual learns these principles and practices



while addressing a situation, issue, or problem in one of their very own classes. Further, they can do this at school, the office, or at home—indeed, wherever the Internet is available. Although participants work individually, they share their ideas with each other in a small learning community of 5-7 instructors along with a facilitator. Essentially, participants learn about CTL by reading information in the system, visiting other Internet sites, considering feedback from others, and trying engaging activities in their classroom, all the while reflecting on their work. Todd Newhouse of Raymer Elementary in Toledo expressed his feeling for the system in this way: “The ideas that CTL bring to me as a classroom teacher are terrific. Connecting the students’ world to the curriculum...really seems to motivate the students to achieve.”

Meanwhile, Deborah Alvarez of the English Department at BGSU wrote, “I would love to use this system to guide and help me with each class I teach. The program or process of CTL helped me to refine my classroom pedagogy...hopefully for the better learning of my students.”

Just as with the Summer Institute, BGSU graduate credit or pay is available for participation in DiscoverCTL. Just submit the application at www.bgsu.edu/colleges/as/pccapp_profdev.html.

Student Profile

Janna Greene
BGSU Freshman

Hi. My name is Janna Greene, and I attended high school in Bellevue, OH. I was largely in the music program there, such as marching band, Wind Ensemble, and Pep Band. I was inducted into the National Honor Society when I was junior, and I participated in French Club for four years.

This year I joined the Women's Club Rugby team. I was a little wary about joining PCC, but it helped my first semester tremendously. I firmly believe that I would have had a poor first semester had it not been for my family at PCC.

This semester, the group is at Springfield Middle School and we are enjoying every moment. I am truly looking forward to the next three years in this program.

What's Happening?

Advisory Board Meeting

The next PCC Advisory Board meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 10, 2002, location to be announced.

Summer Institute

The annual PCC Summer Institute will take place June 10-13 and June 17-20, 2002. Please contact Susan Smith by phone at (419) 372-9443 or by e-mail at slsmith@bgsu.net.

Ball Park Bash!

The PCC students will celebrate the end of a successful academic year at an upcoming Toledo Mud Hens game.



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