

Report to the Office of the Provost

From: Professor Erskine S. Dottin, Frost Professor 2009-2010 and members of the first College of Education Faculty Learning Community
September 11, 2010

Introduction

The College of Education awarded the Frost Professorship to Professor Erskine S. Dottin for the academic year 2009-2010. The award provided the use of Frost Professor funds (\$10,000) from the Frost Endowment.

Professor Dottin proposed, initially, in 2009, to the then Interim Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Marie McDemmond the following projects for the award: Project 1 - To facilitate the development of a faculty and candidates learning community by and through which the philosophical and moral inquiry ideas of John Dewey may be used as the catalyst for nurturing and assessing dispositions (that is, habits of mind for making professional conduct more intelligent). Project 2 - To sponsor a lecture to be given by one of the top scholars in the field of social foundations of education in the USA. Project 3 - To attend some conferences and workshops to enhance professional development in the area of dispositions (habits of mind) in education. Professor Dottin used the funds on Projects #1 (to form a Learning Community) and #3 (to travel to Singapore between May 31, 2010 and June 7, 2010 to attend a workshop on Habits of Mind).

The first Faculty Learning Community in the College of Education was formed, therefore, through the Frost Professor Learning Community Project, and the members of the Learning Community are: Mohammed Farouk, Joyce Fine, Maria Lovett, Teresa Lucas, Lynne Miller, George O'Brien, Aixa Perez-Prado, Angela Salmon, Bill Ritzi, and Robert Vos. Each community member was provided a \$400 stipend for his/her agreed participation in six community learning sessions. Each member, except Robert Vos, signed the following agreement:

I accept the invitation to be a member of the Frost Professor Learning Community Project, and the honorarium of \$400 to be provided from the Frost Professor Fund. I agree to participate fully and regularly in the Learning Community and to contribute to my and my colleagues' intellectual, social and pedagogical development and growth through a shared sense of community. My expectation is that my participation and that of my colleagues in six sessions between March and June 2010 will yield working

ideas and products that may be shared with other colleagues in the College of Education during the fall semester of 2010.

Conceptual Framework

The phrase “learning community” highlights two terms, learning and community. The traditional view of learning is “learning is the sum total of what is known, as that is handed down by books and learned men.... [and] study is then the process by which an individual draws on what is in storage” (Dewey, 1916/1944, pp. 334-335). On the other hand, “New developments in the science of learning suggest that the degree to which environments are community centered is also important for learning. Especially important are norms for people learning from one another and continually attempting to improve” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p. 144). The new science of learning brings to the fore learning as an active process by and through which learners “seek to understand complex subject matter and are better prepared to transfer what they have learned to new problems and settings” (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p. 13).

Recent calls for reforms in the professions importunes us to move beyond just what professionals do (whether doctors or teachers) to also attend to how professionals think about what they do (Cooke, Irby, and O’Brien, 2010). So, in the proposed recommendations for educating physicians, one sees the following:

1. To make professional formation an explicit area of focus in ... through strategies such as formal instruction in ethics and reflective practice, exploration of the role of the [professional-citizen] and establishment of more supportive learning environments.
2. To cultivate a spirit of inquiry and improvement in learners and in ...teams; this spirit supports both innovations in daily practice that translate into better service ..., system improvements and improved ...outcomes as well as the development of larger research agendas, new discoveries, and knowledge building.

A catalyst for reform in teacher education has come from the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education’s call to teacher education units to assess their candidates’ dispositions. The rush, however, to assess dispositions has inhibited the prerequisite need to acquire definitional consensus about the construct “dispositions.” If teacher education programs are going to focus on nurturing and assessing dispositions (the habits of mind for making professional conduct more intelligent) then candidates must be provided opportunities to see the habits of mind, practice them, and

receive feedback about their performance vis-à-vis the habits of mind. Some scholars have pointed out that the rush by many teacher education programs to meet accreditation mandates with regard to “dispositions” has generated a host of measures for assessing dispositions and very little focus on programs first establishing some conceptual understanding of the construct, and then teaching candidates about dispositions.

If the faculty in an institution sees dispositions as “habits of mind that render professional conduct more intelligent” then a direct link can be made between the 21st-century skills and the habits of mind called for in teaching and learning in the work of Art Costa & Bena Kallick, Ron Ritchhart, and David Perkins, among others. The College of Education has adopted the following habits of mind that will render the conduct of faculty, staff, and candidates more professional:

1. Adopting a critical eye toward ideas and actions (Being Analytical).
2. Withholding judgment until understanding is achieved by being thoughtful in [their] actions (Managing Impulsivity).
3. Working to see things through by employing systematic methods [in] analyzing problems (Persisting).
4. Thinking about [their] own thinking (Reflective Thoughtfulness).
5. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision (Communicating accurately).
6. Showing curiosity and passion about learning through inquiry (Being Inquisitive).
7. Showing a sense of being comfortable in situations where the outcomes are not immediately known by acting on the basis of [their] initiative and not from needing a script (Taking Responsible Risks).
8. Recognizing the wholeness and distinctiveness of other people’s ways of experiencing and making meaning by being open-minded (Being Open-minded).
9. Taking time to check over work because of [their] being more interested in excellent work than in expediency (Striving for Accuracy).
10. Abstracting meaning from one experience and carrying it forward and applying it to a new situation by calling on [their] store of past knowledge as a source of data to solve new challenges (Applying Past Knowledge to New Situations).
11. Showing sensitivity to the needs of others and to being a cooperative team member (Thinking Interdependently), and,
12. Showing a sense of care for others and an interest in listening well to others (Empathic Understanding) (Costa & Kallick, 2004 as cited in “The Conceptual Framework,” n.d., p. 11).

A direct link can be made, therefore, between the above habits of mind and the 21st century skills called for by the likes of Tony Wagner (2008):

21st century skills

- Problem solving and critical thinking
- Collaboration across networks and leading by influence
- Agility and adaptability
- Initiative and entrepreneurship
- Effective written and oral communication
- Accessing and analyzing information
- Curiosity and imagination

Dispositions/Habits of Mind

- Persisting, Questioning and posing problems, Applying past knowledge to new situations, Gathering data
- Thinking interdependently
- Thinking flexibly
- Taking responsible risks
- Listening with understanding and empathy, Striving for accuracy, Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- Thinking about own thinking
- Finding humor, Responding with wonderment and awe

The Faculty Learning Community

The effort of the topic focus Frost Professor Faculty Learning Community is to help teachers and other professional school personnel to form habits and use them as active means in making their professional conduct more effective, that is, more intelligent.

The group held a preliminary session on March 5, 2010, and agreed that having a leading expert on faculty learning communities work with the group would be advantageous. Funds from the award were used to bring Dr. Milton Cox, the leading expert in the country on faculty learning communities to Florida International University to visit with the community on Friday, April 9, 2010 from 1:00-3:00pm in the Green Library, Room 835.

The Learning Community held other learning sessions on April 16, 2010, May 14, 2010 and May 21, 2010, and agreed to use its sixth session on August 28, 2010 to share its learning with members of the College of Education and the larger University community.

Outcomes of the August 28th Session

The outcomes of the August 28th gathering may be summarized in statements linked to the goals of the learning community (LC).

Goal 1: To understand how dispositions as habits of mind may be used to promote good thinking in the COE faculty.

The August 28th session was given direct support by the new Interim Dean, Dr. Delia Garcia, since she held the belief that the work of the Frost Professor Learning Community should be operationalized throughout the College. Dean Garcia's Office, therefore, played an instrumental role in helping to organize the August 28th session. Both President Mark Rosenberg and Provost Douglas Wartzok agreed to attend the session. Attenuating circumstances precluded President Rosenberg being in attendance, but Provost Wartzok participated in the session.

During August 28th session, participants learned about the meaning of dispositions as habits of mind, and how this theme was used to create a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) within the College of Education to promote good thinking among faculty. All members of the learning community group were actively engaged and enthusiastic in sharing learning and understanding with participants, and helped to facilitate a dialogue/discourse about "our new COE Learning Community," and important conceptual frameworks and ideas linked to "dispositions as habits of mind." Within the time constraints of the event, nearly all participants dialogued with presenters of sessions and all members of the learning community group. During this event recommendations for expanding the current learning community and establishing new learning communities emerged from the discussions.

Goal 2: To appreciate how dispositions as habits of mind can enhance the COE faculty teaching and [candidates] learning.

On August 28th, individuals and faculty pairs presented sessions in which they shared their professional orientation and applications of both major ideas "learning communities" and "dispositions as habits of mind" in the context of teaching and learning in various COE undergraduate and graduate programs (e.g., in elementary education, early childhood education, secondary education, ESOL, reading education, educational foundations, and others) and in PK-12 school settings. Preliminary research studies were shared and discussed (e.g., the use of habits of mind in the Reading Program and Action Research and Pedagogy in Social Foundations of Education) as were changes in teaching and learning in various settings

(e.g., in Art Education and the off-shore Jamaica Program), the design and use of surveys (e.g., in the Reading Program) and the use of protocols, such as MYST and LAST (e.g., Visual Thinking in the Early Childhood and ESOL programs).

Goal 3: To understand, document, and support individual and group learning.

Participants in the August 28th session benefitted from seeing the reflective learning of FLC members as captured on video, the possibilities of learning through global networks, and community engagement through video action research and pedagogy. The resource materials distributed at the session included session papers, associated readings/literature, and featured researcher papers in various disciplines provided some guidelines for recommended follow-up activities by participants and the FLC group. Furthermore, the session activities provided more information to the FLC about the status of ongoing scholarly endeavors of individuals and school partners within the larger college community.

Results

The August 28th session demonstrated the power of creating faculty learning communities. Participants, especially the school principals in attendance seemed to be impressed with the benefits of opening the classroom doors to allow teachers to learn from each other.

In addition, the members of the FLC shared with the audience their experience as individual and group learners trying to understand how to create cultures of thinking in the classroom by building dispositions as habits of mind. The foregoing was an eye opener for those in attendance as they became more aware about their thinking and the messages that they send to students.

The feedback from the participants definitely favored (1) the nurturing of follow-up activities, (2) the development of other Learning Communities within the COE and (3) partnerships with local community schools and other departments and Colleges at FIU.

Future FLC Activity

The Frost Professor Learning Community will have follow-up meetings this fall 2010 to continue the members building faculty collegiality and collaboration around dispositions as habits of mind and thoughtful learning.

Collegiality will be demonstrated by the FLC members using the MYST protocol to write an article for the Learning Community Journal. In the article, FLC members will articulate how each is making visible his/her modeling and making candidates aware of and inclined to demonstrating dispositions/habits of mind; how each member is making visible to everyone his/her bringing forth and capturing students' awareness of and inclination to demonstrate the habits of mind; how each is using the space of the classroom [the learning environment] to make the habits of mind more visible; and how each is providing time for the habits of mind in his/her lessons.

References

- Bransford, J.D., Brown, A.L., and Cocking, R.R. (Eds.). (1999). How people learn: Brain, mind, experience and school. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Cooke, M., Irby, D.M., and O'Brien, B. C. (2010). Educating physicians: A call for reform of medical school residency. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Dewey, J. (1916/1944). Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education. New York: The Free Press.
- Hansen, D. (2002, autumn). Dewey's conception of an environment for teaching and learning. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 32(3), 267-280.
- Ritchhart, R. (2002). Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters, and how to get it. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Wagner, T. (2008). The global achievement gap: Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need-and what we can do about it. New York: Basic Books.