

Summary of *First-Year Voices: Faculty Building Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice*¹

During the 2004-05 school year, thirteen faculty at Bakersfield College pioneered a new process of building evaluation capacity by participating in a research study of Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice (CLIPs). The overall hypothesis being tested is that CLIPs are a vehicle by which community college faculty can develop evaluative inquiry skills, knowledge, attitudes, and relationships that build a long-term culture of inquiry and evidence-based decision-making about teaching and learning. This work is a complement to the college's existing emphasis on student outcomes assessment.

The study is being conducted by InSites (a non-profit research firm) under a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Bakersfield College, in an agricultural area in southern California, has an enrollment of about 16,000 students (39% Hispanic).

What CLIPs Are

CLIPs are informal groups whose members use a five-step "evaluative inquiry" process to study one or more questions about an instructional course or program with the focus on student learning. The five-steps are (1) position the inquiry; (2) plan the inquiry; (3) collect data; (4) analyze and synthesize data; and (5) communicate/use the findings from the inquiry. Through participation in the CLIP, members build their skills and knowledge in conducting such inquiries. CLIPs are neither student learning communities nor a series of workshops or training sessions. They are communities of faculty who learn together about their professional practice. A faculty member within each CLIP serves as its facilitator.

Three CLIPs at Bakersfield College in 2004-05; Six in 2005-06

Three CLIPs operated at Bakersfield College during the 2004-05 school year.

Computer Studies: The three members of the CLIP investigated various assessment methods for a course on Microsoft Office. Through their inquiry, the CLIP identified a new method of assessment that saved faculty time and didn't adversely affect student learning.

Math: The seven members of this CLIP set out to identify student learning outcomes for Math Elementary Algebra. They derived clarity on topics currently taught in the Elementary Algebra classes and established student learning objectives for the course.

Physics: The three-member CLIP investigated the operation and effectiveness of discussion sessions for the Physics classes. They deepened their understanding of important operational features and the value of discussion sessions. For example, they learned that many students take information from the discussion sessions back to informal study groups of their classmates.

¹ Parsons, B. & Reinhart, R. (2005) *First-Year Voices: Faculty Building Communities of Learning and Integrated Practice*. Ft. Collins, CO: InSites (www.insites.org/clip/). For further information on the study as a whole, contact Dr. Beverly Parsons, Executive Director, InSites at bevandpar@aol.com , 970-226-1003, or 661-343-5052 (cell). This work is supported by NSF grant #0335581.

The CLIPs in 2005-06 are in the areas of Communication, Developmental Writing, General Education outcomes, Math, MESA, and transitions (of students to four-year institutions) with a total of 42 participants. Two of these CLIPs evolved from the past year's CLIPs.

Resources

A major resource for the CLIP work was the learning and action that occurred among the CLIP members within their individual groups and in the cross-CLIP meetings. The emphasis was on surfacing the tacit knowledge that exists in the group. The CLIP Facilitators (faculty members) and CLIP Guide (from InSites) drew upon the interests and needs of the CLIP members to determine the agenda and content of the three cross-CLIP meetings. The first cross-CLIP meeting (August) provided an orientation to the work and emphasized planning the inquiry activities. The second meeting (January) focused on data analysis and completion of the full inquiry process by the end of the second semester. The third meeting (April) was a time for sharing results and celebrating the work together.

Concurrently, InSites encouraged CLIP members to reach out to new outside resources and provided resources to CLIP members to build their general evaluative inquiry capacity. The main resources were: a website of resource materials and links; skill-building sessions provided upon request (e.g., refining questionnaires, conducting focus groups); conference attendance; and visits to other college campuses. The extent of use of these resources varied.

Impact of CLIPs

The participants in the first round of CLIPs indicated that participation affected them in the following ways: (1) made them more receptive to new ideas; (2) enhanced their ability to make evidence-based decisions; (3) increased their knowledge and skills related to evaluative practices; (4) enhanced the quality of their relationships; (5) provided opportunity to influence student learning; and (6) motivated them to stay involved.

Key Features of CLIPs

The following features of how a CLIP is structured and operated appeared important during the first year of operation: (1) CLIPs choose their own members and topic for investigation resulting in a meaningful focus; (2) cooperative, safe, trusting relationships are emphasized among CLIP members; (3) willingness of CLIP members to undertake responsible roles; (4) diverse perspectives among CLIP members; (5) manageable size of CLIPs; (6) provision of stipends; (7) productive meetings; and (8) provision of external resources on an as-needed basis.

Future Emphasis in Study

In addition to the second round of CLIPs during the 2005-06 school year, the research is focused on how to build a support structure within the college for continuation of the CLIPs beyond the life of the grant and how to share its findings to create broad impact among community colleges. We are exploring alternative means within the college of strengthening a culture of exploration, safe trusting space, self-organizing and self-focusing inquiry CLIPs, and strategic thinking about important areas for CLIPs to explore. The group may use Appreciative Inquiry to determine high priority teaching and learning issues campus-wide. The means of creating broad impact involve online sharing of how to establish/operate CLIPs and determining the types of third-party organizational relationships that may be important.