

Project PRE Newsletter

Partnering to Reform Education

Volume 3, No. 2

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Algebra in Middle School? You Bet!

How do you get high school math students interested in algebra? More than that, how do you help low achieving students "get it" and not mind all those math equations? You start early in school and give them ways to learn math that make sense to them, says Elizabeth Brown (Assoc. Prof.) and Elizabeth Jones (Asst. Prof.) from the Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science.



Brown



Jones

For the past few months, Brown, Jones and Marilyn Leinenbach (Asst. Prof., Elementary, Early and Special Education) have delighted in sharing hands-on approaches to teaching algebraic concepts to middle and high school math teachers from Vincennes Community Schools.

"Most math teachers are very good listeners and learn easily with lectures.

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Leinenbach

Steve Gruenert

"It's a lifestyle, not a job," says Steve Gruenert (Asst. Prof., College of Education), when referring to the work of school principals. As Coordinator for the Principal Preparation Program at ISU and facilitator for Project PRE's Principal Leadership Institutes (PLI), he has worked with some very dedicated principals.



Gruenert

A former principal himself, Gruenert re-
(Continued on page 2)

From the Co-Directors

By Rebecca Libler

Project PRE: 2006 Summit

On September 27th, 50+ individuals involved in some way with Project PRE gathered for a daylong summit to consider next steps. University faculty from the College of Education and content areas across the ISU campus engaged in discussion



Libler

(Continued on page 2)

What is Project PRE?

Project PRE is the \$3.9 million, 5 year federal grant collaborative partnership of the ISU College of Education, all ISU colleges in which pre-service teachers take courses, and the 20 Professional Development Schools (PDS). The grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Education is titled *Partnering to Reform Education (PRE)*, locally referred to as **Project PRE**.

Project PRE's Goals

- 1) the redesign of the teacher education programs at Indiana State University, and
- 2) improved learning environments for K-12 students.

The two goals work together continuously!



Indiana State University

More. From day one.

Each issue of the Project PRE Newsletter features a Professional Development School (PDS) and faculty from Indiana State University who are working toward Project PRE's two goals of creating rich school environments and teacher education reform.

Summit (Continued from page 1)

with administrators and faculty from PDS sites around the central questions of "Where have we been? Where are we now after three years (what has been accomplished)? Where do we go from here?" What do we most want to accomplish by the end of the grant period? How can we best use the last two years of the grant to create desired outcomes?"

Where do we go from here?

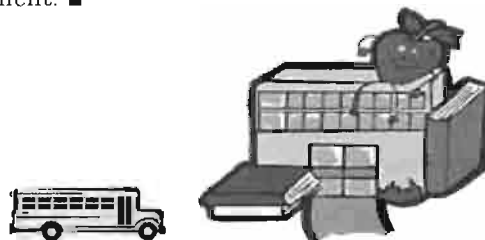
The morning was spent updating the group on activities of the grant in order to answer the first two questions. Presentations and presenters were: 1) Professional Development in Summer Workshops, Linnea Rademaker; 2)Institute for Transforming Teacher Education, Debbie Runshe; 3)Faculty Learning Communities, Rhonda Impink; 4)Principal Leadership, Karen Goeller; 5)Teacher Ed Renewal, Sue Kiger, Dan Clark, Diana Quatroche; 6)Beginning Teacher On-Line Support, Sue Kiger, Sharron Watkins; 7)Mentor Teacher On-line Support, Karen Hamilton; and 8) Center of Pedagogy, Jay Gatrell. Although all participants had been involved with some aspect of the grant, most were not aware of the breadth and depth of activity taking place over the past three years in support of the two main goals of Project PRE: 1)transforming teacher education to an experiential learning, clinically-based program; and 2)creating rich school environments that support learning by all children and serve as exemplanry clinical settings for the preparation and continued development of professional educators.

The afternoon was devoted to reaching consensus on what should be the focus for the final two years of the grant. What emerged was strong support for finishing

What emerged was strong support for finishing the re-design of teacher education...

the redesign of teacher education, making each program more clinically-based, with opportunities for pre-service teachers to understand the community and its needs. Every group wanted more professional development for teachers to deepen content knowledge, and for principals to hone leadership skills. Further conceptual development of a Center of Pedagogy was strongly encouraged. The overarching sentiment was to continue working in a collaborative manner designed to

meet the needs of our students, P-16, and to help the Professional Development Schools Partnership grow to meet its full potential in supporting the continuum of teacher development. ■



(Gruenert, Continued from page 1)

members well the hard work and dedication needed for the demanding position. New administrators often feel the lack of a peer support group within their buildings." To help meet the need for highly qualified and effective leadership, the PLIs have provided forums for new and veteran principals to communicate regularly, share advice and lend support to each other.

As one of the grant's professional development initiatives, the Principal Leadership Institute has had specific goals each year. **Year 1** introduced the large DOE teacher quality grant, established connections with veteran PDS principals and sponsored regular seminars where the foci were school renewal and personal improvement. **Year 2** continued the seminars and focused on increasing student achievement and school improvement with opportunities for self-reflection and analysis for principals with three or less years of experience.

"They're running great schools and doing great work."

Year 3 saw first year administrators mentored by more experienced administrators with the goal of strengthening leadership abilities and encouraging retention. This year is **Year 4**, and school faculty interested in becoming principals have been invited to explore educational leadership without having to enroll in an administrative licensure program.

Gruenert is in awe of the level of professionalism and commitment he has seen in those involved in the PLIs. He remarks, "They're running great schools and doing great work. It's been a privilege to work with them in Project PRE." ■

McFarland Middle School Environmental Science & Technology Academy

McFarland Environmental Science and Technology Academy is an Indianapolis PDS middle school with a strong mission statement: "... [to] provide a disciplined environment where students develop problem solving skills to become productive citizens." Located in the southeastern



**McFarland
Environmental Science & Technology Academy,
Indianapolis, Professional Development School**

part of the city just off I-65 on Raymond Street, the school serves over 300 students and is only one of three science and technology magnet schools in the city. Thirty teachers and fifteen support staff serve a diverse population comprised of 20% Hispanic, 60% African American and 20% Caucasian students.

Several years ago, Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) wrote and received a three year science and technology grant for \$800,000. With some of the funds, the school immediately increased its emphasis on environmental science and technology instruction. Today, every classroom has a computer for every child, and students leave 8th grade with strong computer skills.

New to McFarland this year, Principal Robert Guffin is enjoying being part of a school where faculty members are close to each other and to students. Rose Stephens, PDS building representative, begged to return to McFarland after being

transferred several years ago from her former position as school counselor. Now teaching math, she says that her school is one of the best kept secrets in town. With uniform dress, a welcoming and diverse student population, and strong technology opportunities, the school is also diverse in academic levels and classroom configuration. She says, "We may not have the highest scores, but we have a great environment."

Guffin is grateful for a faculty that knows they must work hard in different ways to reach students, be-

"...the present generation of learners is quite different from those of the past..."

cause the present generation of learners is quite different from those of the past. He is excited about recent benchmark testing results, which show math and social studies scores up 8 to 10%. This is quite an achievement for a school where 65% of the students read below grade level. Guffin credits the school's intensive reading program for students' increased levels of confidence and positive attitudes toward learning. Forty of the school's students most at risk for academic failure are receiving intense one-on-one tutoring in reading, giving them powerful strategies and "can do" attitudes.

Stephens is thankful to Project PRE for the technology summer workshops held two years ago. She and four colleagues attended a week of learning on the Indiana State University campus. For Stephens, the workshop was a time of rest and professional development where she learned of the latest technology tools and how to apply them to her specific teaching area. The experience "renewed my energy and gave me tools I was excited about. It was great."

The media announced recently that Indianapolis has one of the highest dropout rates in the state. If any school can help to lower the dropout rate, it will surely be McFarland. ■

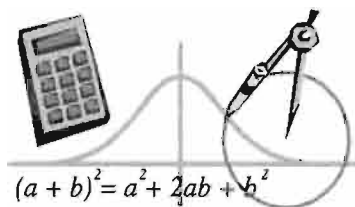
The Project PRE Staff wishes you a safe and restful winter break.

(Continued from page 1)

Most low achieving math students do NOT learn best with lectures," explained Brown. "They need more concrete, visual and hands-on experiences to move from the concrete to the abstract."

That's exactly the problem with algebra. Remember those equations, like:

$$3a(a + 4b + 3c) + 2a(-2c) = x$$



They were incomprehensible at first to those of us who were unable to move easily to the abstract just by listening to the teacher explain. We might've understood more easily if we had been taught in ways that met our preferred way

of learning.

It was after Jones and Brown gave a presentation to teachers in the Vincennes Community Schools last spring that teachers asked them to come back and help plan better math lessons. Doug Rose (Superintendent of VCS) and Tom Nonte (Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction) were surprised and excited that ISU faculty really did want to help low achieving math students. The two men immediately asked Brown and Jones to return to give more professional development.

After unsuccessfully applying for two grants to fund further workshops, Jones and Brown visited Rebecca Libler, new

The hard working educators are focused and committed to helping low achievers be successful...

co-director of Project PRE, to explore possible funding. Because one of the grant's objectives is improving school environments, Libler immediately recommended funding for what is now called "The Algebra Project."

Jones, Brown and Leinenbach are delighted with the response of the middle and high school teachers to new ways of teaching algebra. The hard working educators are focused and committed to helping low achievers be successful, and have asked the ISU profs to return and help them write their own teaching units adapted specifically for their students.

"It's not one size fits all."

Brown says, "If teachers feel empowered to create and adapt curriculum, I think we'll see improvement [in math achievement]." Jones, speaking of students needing multiple instructional strategies, adds, "It's not one size fits all." ■



Summer 2007 Workshops

We surveyed PDS teachers about summer workshop needs.

We entered your responses into a database and are analyzing the results.

Your choices will determine Summer '07 offerings.

More information coming soon!

Project PRE

Partnering to Reform Education

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