

Partnering in the Classroom

Faculty learn a great deal about teaching from colleagues who can provide a new and different way to think about "learning." Learning through collaboration and communication with colleagues offers faculty support and an opportunity to develop a different view of the classroom dynamic.

Faculty selected a partner (often from a different discipline). They were coached to work together in a non-evaluative manner. Partners visited each other's classrooms three times each semester. Each visit included a pre-meeting (to discuss expectations, etc.) and a post-meeting (to discuss observations and responses). The partnerships fostered a new excitement as faculty invited each other into their classrooms. Many of the faculty began to run student focus groups for their partners and reported that this was one of the most eye-opening experiences in the project. We encouraged faculty members to partner with different individuals during the year to maximize the experience. One participant wrote, "The greatest lessons have come from my teaching partners. Just having a teaching partner made me grateful. Being able to share my experiences, both good and bad, created connections I value. The project has had a greater impact on me as a teacher and as a person than I had imagined."

Final Retreat

In May 2000, the group traveled to a lake in New Hampshire for a weekend retreat to bring closure to the year's project, evaluate the program, make recommendations for next year's project, say good-bye, and compose a personal teaching mission statement. The following is the mission statement written by an English professor and chair of the department. "I teach because I love to learn and I know that learning provides physical, intellectual and spiritual pleasure. I share my best self and my best ideas with students because I believe that education can and should make us all kinder, more tolerant and nobler. Education enabled me to seek answers to the questions: 'Who am I?' and 'What is my purpose in the universe?' I feel duty bound (in the best sense) to help others formulate their own questions and begin to search for their own answers."

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