

Chapter 9

Empowering Collaborative Inquiry and Equity Through Intentional Learning Communities: Case Studies in Teacher Education Faculty Learning

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ABSTRACT

Originally prominent in K-12 settings, intentional learning communities (ILCs) are collaborative groups that support professional growth and research, particularly in equity-focused education. The chapter discusses how ILCs have been adapted for higher education, providing case studies that showcase faculty involvement in such initiatives. Key principles like trust, reflection, and a commitment to equity are identified as critical for the effectiveness of ILCs. These principles foster an environment conducive to mutual feedback and self-examination. The chapter also addresses the implementation of ILCs within the College of Education at the authors' institution, highlighting their role in promoting principles of belonging, equity, diversity, and inclusion (BEDI). The chapter concludes by offering practical suggestions for educational institutions interested in integrating ILCs, emphasizing their potential for interdisciplinary research and curriculum enhancement, while also contributing to an equitable academic culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Intentional Learning Communities (ILCs) have increasingly become a focal point in modern educational dialogues, often valued for their role in professional development and the promotion of Belonging, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (BEDI). While much of the existing scholarship on ILCs has been concentrated in the K-12 context, this chapter diverges by exploring the implementation and implications of ILCs specifically within higher education settings. In higher education, ILCs assume a nuanced role, adapting to the complexities that come with a different context for professional relationships and institutional hierarchies. This chapter will provide a comprehensive look at the evolution and various applications of ILCs within the Butler University College of Education. It brings into focus the ethical and operational complexities surrounding participation, specifically dissecting the tension between voluntary and mandated involvement. These considerations are not merely theoretical; they are informed by empirical evidence from two significant initiatives—Project Alianza and Project PACE—funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Professional Development Grant Program.

The chapter is organized to offer a multi-faceted understanding of implementing ILCs in higher education. It opens with a discussion on the ethical dilemmas related to voluntary versus mandated participation in ILCs, weighing the pros and cons of each approach. This is followed by a detailed account of real-world experiences drawn from Project Alianza and Project PACE, offering invaluable insights particularly in the realm of educational equity for multilingual learners. The chapter concludes with a series of actionable and strategic recommendations tailored for educators, administrators, and policymakers keen on optimizing the benefits of ILCs for both individual growth and broader institutional objectives. By marrying theoretical debates with practical examples and strategies, this chapter aims to contribute a unique perspective to the current literature on ILCs. In doing so, it addresses both the challenges and the enormous potential that ILCs hold in transforming practices and outcomes in higher education settings.

THE ETHICAL/PHILOSOPHICAL PUSH AND PULL OF MANDATING INTENTIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The implementation of ILCs in educational settings often involves a balance between voluntary participation and mandated involvement, which introduces a power dynamic. This philosophical and ethical push-and-pull is a significant aspect to consider in the implementation and effectiveness of ILCs. From the perspective of voluntary participation, the underlying philosophy is that ILCs are most effective when participants willingly engage in the process out of a genuine desire to improve their professional practice (Bambino, 2002). This voluntary involvement fosters a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the ILC, as the participants are not merely complying with an imposed requirement but are motivated by intrinsic interest and dedication to professional growth (Curry, 2008).

However, ILC participation might be mandated by someone in a position of power, such as a principal, department head, professor, or dean. This arrangement introduces a power dynamic that can potentially influence the operation and perceived value of the ILC. On the positive side, a mandate can ensure broad participation and signal the importance of continuous professional development (Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008). However, the imposition of a power relationship also brings about ethical concerns. Participants may feel coerced into the ILC, which can lead to resistance or superficial participation (Dunne & Honts, 2003). There may be less openness to critical feedback and reluctance to expose one’s

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