OVERVIEW

The DePaul Institute for Teacher Development and Research is grounded in support for the moral and intellectual life of teachers and the multiple dimensions of thoughtful and committed teaching. There is common agreement today that one of the most pressing problems in education is the education and continuing development of high quality teachers. In recognition of this, the State of Illinois has established a requirement that teachers engage in continuing education and training to foster their on-going professional development. Development and support for high-quality teaching and leadership is also a publicly stated central goal of the Chicago Public Schools. Teachers and teacher organizations are concerned about the quality of teachers’ work lives, professionalism, the impact of high stakes testing and standards on teaching and learning, and the social context of schools in the city and issues of equity and social justice. The DePaul Institute for Teacher Development and Research will focus on these issues with the goal of contributing to teacher development, research, and policy to improve urban schools.

A unique feature of the Institute is its commitment to building partnerships with community organizations working for social justice. Building collaborations and sharing ideas between teachers and communities is important to understanding the social context of learning and informs teacher practice. Organizations based in communities and committed to justice are ideal partners to foster these collaborations and discussions.

The DePaul Urban Professional Multicultural Educator Model will provide a framework for the philosophy and work of the Institute. This Model emphasizes the connection of theory and practice, the importance of schools responding to issues of difference and inequality in urban settings, the relationship between teaching and the social context of schools, the role of education in positive personal and social transformation of both teachers and students, and concern for each person.

Supporting Thoughtful and Committed Teaching

A central goal of the Institute will be to support teachers’ reflection on teaching in its multiple dimensions. A key principle is that teaching is fundamentally about decision-making. Strong teacher decision-making is grounded in thoughtful, knowledgeable consideration of the many aspects of education as a social and ethical activity. Effective teaching is more than technique or knowledge of subject area, although these are important components. It is characterized by professional collaboration, on-going intellectual work, and thoughtful deliberation about curriculum, pedagogy, human development, and the moral, ethical and social context of the schooling process.

The framework of the Institute is premised on the understanding that teachers need to continually deepen their knowledge and thinking about six dimensions of thoughtful pedagogy:
- Subject matter content knowledge
- Pedagogical content knowledge
- Knowledge about student thinking and affective, moral and social development
- Reflection on teacher professionalism by focusing on teacher culture and work, including also the moral and intellectual life of teachers
- Ethics: concern for each child, social justice, education for full development of humans, and for democratic participation in society
- The social context of education, including race, ethnicity, gender, culture, community development, social class, sexual orientation, etc.

These six elements will provide the framework for professional development. The Institute will use this framework as a starting point for teachers to read and think deeply about specific pedagogical issues and their practical implications.

**Supporting Teacher Professionalism**

One result of accountability reforms through high stakes testing, performance standards, and centralized regulation of schools and teaching is that teachers as a group have been excluded from policy-making decisions about urban school improvement. This exclusion of teachers as a group from these decisions has had a profound effect on teacher professionalism and morale. Urban education policy has also increasingly devalued the intellectual and moral judgments and skills of teachers in both content and pedagogic knowledge. Instead, school reform has reduced teachers to monitors and supervisors of a self-guided instructional process, to test-givers and record-keepers. The result is that the task of organizing and presenting lessons – or teacher work culture more generally – is regimented and prescribed by those who design curricular materials and tests for urban school systems. Skills of curriculum deliberation and planning, once deemed essential to the craft of teaching, as well as the ability to design teaching and curricular strategies for specific groups and individuals based on intimate knowledge of students, are no longer viewed as necessary for teachers. The devaluing of teacher professionalism, because of centralized control and accountability reforms that mostly are directed at urban school systems, has meant that school planning and decision-making have increasingly become the responsibility of central administration and the execution of its decisions the responsibility of teachers. The separation of planning and execution is exemplified by the emphasis by urban school officials on performance standards and not the curricula content standards recommended by professional educational organizations.

These policies have had a demoralizing impact on teachers’ attitudes and dispositions toward teaching. A majority of teachers choose the teaching profession for its inherent satisfaction. The result of devaluing teacher professionalism, however, is that many teachers who began with a sense of intellectual and ethical mission lose it after several years of teaching. The loss of enthusiasm and excitement, and most importantly the sense of mission and challenge, affects teachers’ ability to arouse student learning and imagination. This coupled with teachers’ disempowerment is driving teachers from the profession.

One central goal of the Institute is to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on the relationship between urban school policy and teacher professionalism and their effects on teaching and learning. The Institute will provide a supportive environment for teachers to reflect critically on their classroom and urban school practices; themselves as teachers; and help teachers regain their intellectual confidence as decision-makers who understand the impact of school policy and reform on students, urban families and communities, and on teacher professionalism.
WHAT THE INSTITUTE WILL DO

Teacher Professional Development

There is a growing need for high-quality professional development opportunities for teachers, especially those seeking Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs) and Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for re-certification. This will be a core activity of the Institute, ensuring that these programs represent the high standards of authentic teacher development grounded in the six dimensions of thoughtful pedagogy outlined above. Professional development might include workshops, seminars, field trips, teacher research projects, colloquia, invited talks by various experts, panel discussions led by teachers, community-based dialogues with parents and students, and workshops led by community-based organizations in partnership with the Institute. The Institute will work closely with key organizations of teachers that are concerned about improving the professional life and knowledge of teachers in the urban context.

Research

Research will be another core activity of the Institute to support its programs of teacher learning and development and to inform debates about professional development in education and teaching in Chicago and across the nation. Institute programs will be based on the very best research, and will be constantly informed by new studies. The Institute intends to seek funding for research fellowships on teaching, professional development and related issues, and expects to host regular seminars, conferences and other types of meetings related to research and the identification of best practices. It will provide models of teacher development that can be widely influential.

A major focus of research will be teacher retention: an investigation of the policies, social contexts, and intellectual and professional conditions that can support the attraction and retention of intellectually and ethically engaged teachers committed to teaching in urban schools. The Institute will support research that contributes to the knowledge base on teacher development as outlined in the Institute’s principles. This will include teacher research projects and collaborations between University researchers and teachers. This research will result in Institute working papers and published articles, and eventually, conferences.

Education Policy

The work of the Institute, its professional development activities and associated research, including the research conducted by teachers in their schools in conjunction with the Institute, will be the basis for participation in public policy discussions and debates. The Institute’s programs and its research will inform discussions about critical issues facing teachers, the conditions of schooling in Chicago, and urban education policy nationally. For example, based on its activities and research, the Institute may develop policy briefs and policy papers on issues such as authentic assessment of student work in urban schools, the effects of high stakes testing and accountability on teaching, high quality bilingual/bicultural education, principles of equitable quality education in urban schools, and linkages between schools and communities. Policy papers and discussions produced by the Institute will draw on the perspectives of teachers as well as researchers and insert the voice of teachers in debates about education policy.

LEADERSHIP

The Institute is housed in the Department of Education Policy Studies and Research of the DePaul School of Education. The Director is Pauline Lipman, Ph.D., Associate Professor.