

## Setting the stage for intercultural engagement via professional development

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“Who are our international students? How does it feel to be them?” “How do I draw them into discussions and teamwork?” “Are there topics I should not bring up around them?” “Where can I learn more about international students?” These are some questions I have heard over the years, as director of an English for Academic Purposes Program (since 2009), from colleagues on my campus. To me, these questions clearly signaled the need for increased intercultural competence and professional development (PD) for faculty. This article explains the rationale, format, and results of a PD initiative that focused on intercultural competence for faculty across a mid-sized U.S. university campus; the role of TESOL professionals is highlighted.

Like most higher education institutions, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) has been internationalizing. The institution formalized internationalization as a goal in its strategic plan (“Strategic Planning,” 2020) and began developing global learning goals across the curriculum (“IUPUI Dimensions,” 2020). As Senyshyn and Smith (2019) note, this situation “creates professional development demands or opportunities. One critical challenge lies in creating for faculty effective professional development opportunities that emphasize pedagogical and curricular change which embraces linguistically and socioculturally diverse experiences” (p. 319).

As a TESOL professional in charge of an EAP program, I considered it my duty to serve as an advocate and a resource for intercultural understanding and related PD. In 2013-2014, I proposed and co-presented a series of workshops through our Center for Teaching and Learning. The shift towards internationalization-at-home highlighted the need to scale up PD. In 2015, when IUPUI reached a record number of international students, I was invited by the Division of Undergraduate Education and the Office of International Affairs to chair a faculty community of practice on intercultural learning (hereafter iCoP). My role was to serve as the subject matter expert on intercultural, pedagogical, and faculty development matters. A STEM faculty member was appointed as co-chair to convey the iCoP’s interdisciplinarity.

The CoP format was adopted because CoPs are a high impact practice (HIP) for providing faculty development and positively affecting the curriculum and campus climate. Communities of practice (CoPs) constitute an effective model for engaging individuals in learning and developing together (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Faculty in CoPs engage in self-directed, collaborative learning and practice, and then become ambassadors or champions among their colleagues and students.

### Year One: Learning Together, We Explore Ways to Increase Our Impact

IUPUI’s iCoP began as a learning community in which members came together monthly to discuss (a) members’ questions, concerns, and successes in intercultural teaching/learning; and (b) readings I provided on group-selected topics of interest. Early discussions focused on defining culture, intercultural competence, and the role of culture in the classroom. The first semester, the iCoP enlisted 12 members from Biology, Business, Computer Science, Nursing, an advisor, and two librarians. The group shared

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intercultural observations and teaching strategies based on their experience. I brought in articles from TESOL and related fields to support evidence-/scholarship-based learning. I led the discussions from anecdote sharing to theory- and research-informed analysis and pedagogical reflection. The iCoP activities conceived at these meetings, described below, are an application of the knowledge gained at these meetings.

The iCoP concerns itself with its members' PD and creating PD opportunities on campus. Wanting to increase our impact, we started sharing resources in the form of an annotated bibliography of our readings and a campus resource guide (distributed at the iCoP events described below and the IUPUI International Festival, where we recruited new members).

Based on the iCoP members' experiences and PD needs, we decided that learning about international student perspectives directly was best. We recruited a student panel which engaged in dialogue with faculty at a one-day conference for instructors of first-year courses. Many found the panel illuminating (as also found in Senyshyn and Smith's (2019) Global Awareness Dialogue Project) and asked for it to reoccur. The fact that most of the 50 attendees consented to join the iCoP through the conference evaluation form suggests that the session was effective.

Seeing their own observations confirmed in our readings, iCoP members felt compelled to combat international student isolation. To address this, we organized a speed friending event for 12 international and domestic students, who assessed the event as excellent (10) or very good (2). Thus, we learned that, if opportunities for intercultural engagement were created, students would attend. Upon organizing a larger intercultural mixer for students at the IUPUI International Festival, engagement expanded to include faculty and campus administrators. The high attendance rate and engagement level confirmed the event's success, leading to it becoming a staple at subsequent international festivals on campus, continuously drawing large audiences into informal intercultural learning.

#### Years Two Through Five: Reaching Out to Larger Audiences

While monthly iCoP meetings continued, we progressed to offering campus-wide symposia with concurrent conference-style presentations, workshops, and plenary speakers. As a TESOL professional, I continued to focus on balancing theory and practice in our programming. Session topics ranged from globally-minded teaching strategies to intercultural competence in the workplace and the intersection between internationalization and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our 2016 conference received an overall rating of 5.5 on a scale of 6 for increasing the attendees' knowledge. Our largest event yet was the 2019 Intercultural Engagement Symposium, which brought together 115 local and regional attendants. The symposium was sponsored by a competitive Welcoming Campus Initiative Grant and was assessed as excellent or very good by 82% of the participants. Faculty commented that they learned about "the experiences and struggles of people from other cultures," "promising practices and collaboration opportunities," "ideas from other fields that can be modified for one's job," and "how to communicate on the subject of culture and intercultural engagement."

iCoP members craved applied learning. It was important for our PD activities to move from *learning about* to *practicing how to* design culturally sensitive teaching materials for their classrooms. Thus, iCoP funding was used for a one-day workshop on materials design led by an expert on cultural competence. Ten faculty were competitively selected, and the finalists received a financial award upon submitting a reflection and revised teaching materials. All 10 assessed the workshop as excellent and made moderate

to drastic revisions to their teaching materials as a result of the session. One of the participants developed an action research study and a book chapter about her implementation of culturally-sensitive teaching materials.

The table below presents the types of events organized and how they were assessed.

Activity	Participants	Assessment Instrument
<b>CONFERENCES</b>		
1. <i>Intercultural Engagement Symposium</i> (2019, funded by a Welcoming Campus Grant)	115	Evaluation form with open-ended, Likert-type, and multiple-choice questions.
2. <i>Increasing Your Intercultural IQ Conference</i> (Gateway Retreat) (2016)	80	Evaluation form with open-ended, Likert-type, and multiple-choice questions.
3. Multi-department panels of students and faculty on intercultural engagement and globally-minded teaching (2016, 2018)	50 each	-
<b>WORKSHOPS</b>		
4. <i>Intercultural Engagement Workshop Grant</i> (2019)	10 (competitive)	Evaluation form with open-ended, Likert-type, and multiple-choice questions.
<b>STUDENT ENGAGEMENT</b>		
5. Speed friending (2015)	12(6 international,6 domestic) students	Evaluation form with open-ended, Likert-type, and multiple-choice questions.
6. Intercultural Mixer - At the IUPUI International Festival (Spring 2018, 2019, 2020) - Fall 2017, 2018	100 50 each	Attendance

The most important longitudinal pattern is that faculty, staff, and students highly appreciated the learning

opportunities created by the iCoP – both the more experiential and the academic ones. Over time, satisfaction with the events was remarkably high, perhaps thanks to the fact that each assessment was shared with the iCoP and used to improve the design of new offerings. Currently, an overall assessment of the iCoP's effectiveness is under development. Despite the challenges of assessing a complex and fluid structure like the iCoP, the evaluations conducted so far paint an encouraging picture of its overall effectiveness.

The year 2020 imposed challenges on our work, with co-chairs and campus leadership trying to determine the best way forward. By slowing us down, COVID-19 made 2020 into a time to reflect and plan for the future. We are now mindful of webinar fatigue, technological challenges, and the workloads of the 70 iCoP members. Looking forward into 2021, we are considering ways to invigorate our membership, bring the community back together around a speaker, and experiment with an intercultural mixer in Zoom, utilizing the interactive capabilities of the breakout rooms.

Two conclusions stand out from the IUPUI iCoP experience: that the CoP format is a sustainable and effective HIP for PD and that TESOL professionals are critical to its success. They have knowledge and experience with HIPs in intercultural teaching/learning; international students; and related topics. As PD, program design, and assessment experts, they can develop, carry out, and evaluate a complex PD plan. TESOL-grounded directors of EAP programs have access to experts who can lend their expertise, the way our guests from Purdue University, Boston College, and International Florida University did. From their leadership position, program directors advocate for their students and have knowledge of relevant campus priorities (such as internationalization). Having access to international students to involve in iCoP activities proved valuable in my work with the IUPUI iCoP, as was the access to faculty from the EAP and other English language programs, who joined the iCoP and involved their students. When it comes to involvement in PD for intercultural teaching/learning, my story demonstrates that TESOL professionals have a lot to offer.

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## Resources

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