



A class of their own

Teach for America and the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship program provide alternative paths to the teaching profession.

Although they didn't know each other, Brittany Langdon and Andy Seibert had much in common when their career paths took unexpected turns and brought them to Indianapolis for what Brittany describes as "the greatest experience of my life, but also the hardest thing I've ever done."

A 2008 graduate of the University of Kentucky, Brittany had excelled as a political science and journalism major, served as vice president of the Student Government and was considering law school. Andy, a 2008 graduate of Butler University, also had earned a degree in political science, served

Fresh from the University of Kentucky, Brittany Langdon (*this page and next*) was selected to be in the first Teach for America corps in Indianapolis. The 46 are members of a 6,000-member "class" that has taken up posts in schools all across the country. Langdon teaches reading at New Horizons Alternative School. She says she is having the "greatest experience of her life" and attributes the most satisfaction to the "little wins that prove we're accomplishing something."

as president of the Student Government Association and, like Brittany, saw law school in his future.

But all plans were put on hold when each surprised family and friends by making a two-year commitment to teach at-risk students in inner-city Indianapolis. Brittany teaches reading to youth who, because of behavior problems, have been assigned by the Juvenile Court to an alternative school. Andy teaches English to middle-school students who have been retained at least two times. Some of his fifth-graders are teenagers.

"These kids want to learn, but they've struggled in the past and have a sense of failure," says Seibert. "My goal is to engage them like they've never been engaged before. I want to prove that education really can do something for them."

Recruiting 'Generation Next'

Langdon and Seibert are corps members in the Indianapolis Teach for America program, one of two

Endowment-funded initiatives aimed at recruiting the next generation of Indiana educators. Teach for America is supported by a \$2 million grant to the Mind Trust, an Indianapolis-based organization founded to improve public education for underserved students through entrepreneurship. The Woodrow Wilson Indiana Teaching Fellowship program is supported by a \$10 million grant to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. Both programs prepare and place gifted leaders in under-resourced classrooms. The rigorous and highly selective programs focus on outstanding candidates who didn't set out to be teachers but who later felt a call to serve in that capacity.

"I'm incredibly passionate about education," says Langdon. "I was a first-generation college student, and I realize that the single reason I have done well is education."

Both Teach for America and the Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowship program are designed to create a cadre of educator-leaders who have taken alternative paths to the profession. Their entry into Indiana's classrooms is timely for four reasons:

- More than 40 percent of the state's teachers and administrators are age 50 or older, and one-third of Indiana teachers will be eligible to retire in five years.

- About half of all new teachers throughout the country leave the teaching profession within the first five years.

- Indiana's rigorous Core 40 curriculum calls for teachers trained in using innovative methods to engage students and prepare them to meet the new graduation standards.

- The state's economy requires more students to continue their education past high school. Enthusiastic teachers with excellent academic backgrounds and strong leadership qualities can serve as role models for youth who are



contemplating their futures.

"Our community must embrace education improvement efforts such as Teach for America and the Woodrow Wilson fellowships," says Ron Gifford, president and CEO of the Indy Partnership, a 10-county regional economic-development corporation in central Indiana. "A strong K-12 education system is essential to business recruiting. Well-educated employees will not move to a community that does not offer outstanding educational opportunities for their children. Excellent K-12 schools train not only the future workforce, but also play a vital role in attracting today's desired employees."

Building a pipeline

Since its beginning in 1990, Teach for America has placed almost 20,000 teachers in the classroom and earned a reputation for building a pipeline of leaders committed to educational equity and excellence. The Endowment was among the initiative's early financial supporters, but not until 2007 did Teach for America increase its number of urban sites to include Indianapolis. The catalyst in attracting the program to the city was the Mind Trust.

"We thought Teach for America was a good fit for Indianapolis because we believe that teachers are the most critical piece of education reform," says



David Harris, president and chief executive officer of the Mind Trust. “One of the challenges that we face as a community is to create a talent pool of people who can serve as teachers, principals, central office staff, superintendents, directors of nonprofit organizations and policy advisers to elected officials. Teach for America brings in a new group of motivated and socially conscious people who become part of the city’s talent pool.”

The 46 teachers who make up the Indianapolis corps are typical of the 6,000 Teach for America recruits who began assignments in schools across the country in September. They have a collective grade point average of 3.6, were leaders on their college campuses, completed lengthy application forms, and participated in telephone screenings and all-day personal interviews.

After successfully emerging from the selection process, the recruits attended what they call “teacher boot camp,” a five-week intensive summer training institute in Phoenix that taught them classroom management, instructional planning and other pedagogical skills.

“The institute tailored its approach to low-income community settings,” says Seibert. “It prepared us for the situations that we would be entering. That said, there’s no substitute for the real experience of standing in front of a classroom of kids and working with them day in and day out.”

Continuing education

To help the young teachers meet the “day in and day out” challenges of the classroom, Teach for America provides ongoing educational opportunities. Corps members work with a program director who observes them in class, they attend monthly professional development sessions, and they have the option of enrolling in a two-year graduate program at Marian College that leads to a master’s degree in education.

To help them feel connected to Indianapolis, they have been matched with “advocates” who are employees of Eli Lilly and Co. “The business community wanted to make sure that corps members

In an impromptu bit of hall monitoring, Andy Siebert playfully gloms on to a student who thought he had somewhere to go. The Teach for America participant graduated from Indianapolis’ Butler University in the spring and then headed a few miles southeast to Thomas Carr Howe Academy where he teaches English to middle-school students.

had positive experiences here,” explains Jason Kloth, a former Teach for America teacher who directs the Indianapolis program. “That way, they will be more likely to stay in the community at the end of their two-year commitment.”

“Eli Lilly and Co. recognizes how important it is that efforts to improve K-12 education succeed,” says Rob Smith, president of the Eli Lilly and Company Foundation. “Several of our employees were more than happy to serve as Teach for America advocates and to welcome and support these talented, committed teachers into our community.”

Smith, who serves as one of the advocates, shares Kloth’s hopes that the hospitality shown by the Indianapolis community to these young teachers will encourage many of them to think of Indianapolis as an appealing place to call home. “These bright and motivated young people can only add to our community’s quality of life,” he added.

Efforts to integrate the new teachers into the Indianapolis Public School (IPS) system have gone well. Seibert believes that veteran educators who might have questioned the nontraditional preparation



of the newcomers have come to appreciate the enthusiasm of their junior colleagues. "I try to be one of the first to arrive at school in the morning and one of the last to leave," Seibert says.

Brittany Langdon is similarly dedicated. "I've observed that good teachers know it's not about words; it's about actions. I stay late to talk with the kids. Now I'm trying to start a tutoring program, and students who aren't in my reading class are coming up to me and asking if they can stay after school for help. I had this crazy idea that within three months all my kids would be reading at their grade level. What I'm realizing now is what experienced teachers already know: It's the little wins that prove you're accomplishing something."

Testing new models

The Indiana Teaching Fellowship program, created by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, shares a similar mission with Teach for America. A key difference is that the fellowships are open to outstanding college graduates and career-changers who majored in mathematics or science and are willing to teach in those disciplines at high-need secondary schools for three years.

The two-year pilot program, announced last year, will train as many as 80 new math and science teachers annually, with a goal of creating a critical mass of fellows statewide in the crucial STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). Building on what it learns in Indiana, the foundation plans to expand the program to other states.

"When we were considering possible locations to launch the pilot program, I talked with a number of people around the country and described the characteristics that we were looking for," explains Arthur E. Levine, president of the foundation. Indiana earned enthusiastic support from several national education leaders.

"Indiana has a governor who cares deeply about education and a legislature that has been active in that area," says Levine. "It's the right size—not too small, not too large—and it has an excellent university sector for us to work with."

With years of high-level experience behind him, Levine knows what to look for in all matters of education. He is a nationally known advocate for educational equity and excellence and for the improved preparation of teachers and principals. He came to

the foundation in 2006 after a 12-year term as president of Teachers College, Columbia University. He also chaired the Higher Education Program and the Institute for Educational Management at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, served as president of Bradford College and as a senior fellow at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He is the author of dozens of reports and articles and several books.

He also knew what to look for in university "partners" for this new program: wholehearted endorsement of the program and a solid commitment to its success. Based on their willingness to serve as laboratories to test new models for teacher preparation, four universities emerged as campus partners in the pilot program. Purdue, Ball State, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and the University of Indianapolis each will welcome groups of up to 20 fellows in the next couple of years. Each fellow will receive a \$30,000 stipend to complete a master's degree in education.

"The campuses are using this program as an opportunity to take risks," says James Fraser, senior vice president for programs at the foundation. "It's given people permission to rethink teacher preparation. The result is that each school is taking a different direction. We've tried very hard not to create a single Procrustean bed that everybody must be molded into."

For example, the University of Indianapolis is



Arthur E. Levine, president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, feels the urgency of educating teachers "to reflect all the new realities" of an information economy. The foundation's pilot program in Indiana targets career-changers who will teach science, technology, engineering and mathematics in high-need Indiana high schools.

moving away from traditional semester-long courses by developing learning modules. Engineers at IUPUI have assumed a major role in designing a program that will make the study of science and math more exciting for students. With guidance from faculty members in its College of Agriculture, Purdue is focusing on preparing and supporting teachers who accept assignments at rural schools.

“We also want to learn how to help prospective teachers become licensed in more than one STEM area,” explains Sidney Moon, associate dean of the College of Education at Purdue. “Dual licensure is very appealing to small, rural districts that may not be able to employ a full-time physics teacher but could employ a full-time teacher who can teach both math and physics.”

Reversing the brain drain

Although the first group of fellows won't be announced until May 2009, the applicant pool “looks very promising,” according to Connie Bond, the foundation's senior program officer who oversees the selection process. Of the 300 applications submitted by early December, 20 percent of the candidates held advanced degrees, including seven with doctorates.

The “career-changer” category included a molecular biologist, aerospace engineer, marketing executive and a research scientist. Ages ranged from 21 to 67, and the alma maters of the candidates included schools such as Stanford, Carnegie Mellon, Boston College and many Hoosier institutions.

In completing their applications, several candidates offered explanations as to why the fellowship opportunity appealed to them. Among their comments:

- “I have been blessed with a successful 25-year career in clinical laboratories and diagnostics. I have raised a son in our Indiana public school system and

Andy Seibert claims that, after all the training Teach for America provides, “There's no substitute for the real experience of working with kids every day.”



had many opportunities to share my skill set and knowledge base with students. It would be an honor in the latter half of my career to serve our community where I could contribute the most.”

- “The best teachers I've known did not lecture but rather engaged students, created relevance and supported possibilities. They showed me the value of an education.”

Although most of the respondents live in Indiana, some are based as far away as New York and New Mexico. All expressed a willingness to relocate—or in some cases, return—to the Hoosier state. “A number of applicants for this fellowship program grew up in Indiana, have a connection to the state and feel that this is an invitation to come home,” says Fraser. “At a time when the middle of the country is dealing with a constant brain drain because people are fleeing to the coasts for their careers, this opportunity is bringing some of those people back to Indiana.”

Advocates of the fellowship program hope that what happens in Indiana will touch off change throughout the country. Levine says the need for education reform is urgent. “We're living in a time of dramatic change. We've moved from an industrial to an information economy, and the consequence of that move is that good jobs require more education than any other time in history,” he claims. “Students need the highest skills and knowledge levels to function in society. We have to educate teachers for this new world. Teacher preparation has to reflect all the new realities.”