

# *Partnership Overview: The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES)*

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Received March 2021

Accepted for publication March 2021

Published May 2021

**Abstract** The *HER* is delighted to include The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES) part of the Union Institute & University as one of our Partner organizations. Here we offer a window into the holistic, integral and transformative MEd programs offered at TIES. TIES offers a global community of international adult learners an opportunity to pursue curriculum centered on principles of Gaia, cosmos and spirit, while also providing a lovingly mentored pedagogical process.

*Keywords:* TIES, holistic education, integral education

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Participating as a faculty member at The Institute for Educational Studies (TIES) has offered me a privileged window through which to experience some of the most personally integrated expressions of study, practice, and reflection I have witnessed in education. What is it about TIES that nurtures such authenticity, vulnerability, and the capacity for being fully present among faculty and students alike? There is a depth to the TIES learning encounter that at first blush feels like nothing short of magic. It is indeed the holy grail towards which holistic educators often reach but rarely, if ever, achieve. Upon reflection, however, the mystery of creating this container for depth, presence, and authenticity begins to be revealed.

One key component at TIES is the content that is explored, what Parker Palmer would call the “Great Thing”, around which the “Community of Truth” gathers. TIES syllabi have the courage and wisdom to seek out what is most important, the very essence of what it means to be human, and live well upon this earth. Exploring authors from J Krishnamurti and David Bohm to Margaret Wheatley and Thomas Berry ensure that each seminar is engaging with matters of the utmost weight and import. This is a far cry indeed from typical teacher education programs that might orient around technique, methods, and competencies. Courses in traditional education programs, such as “How to Manage Behavior to Maximize Student Achievement” for example, as expected, draw out superficial participation. While common TIES questions around what is “right relationship” in education or how can we envision the educational mission to reflect the wisdom of Gaia or what are the implications of quantum physics on organizational leadership, is what leads this

community to the deepest explorations of soul and spirit, purpose and meaning.

Also critical to TIES success is the expectation and nurturing of students’ attention to deep noticing and personal reflection. This is achieved partly by the beautiful “observation” periods that are sprinkled throughout the M.Ed. program. During these courses, students are encouraged to observe in nature, or as a witness to human encounters. They reflect on what they see, how they feel, and the meaningful implications of these observations. The writing that emerges from students here exudes fullness, vulnerability, and sincerity. In a typical post during observations, one student writes:

“I wish I could “be” as freely and easily in other parts of my life as I was observing Blake. Free from worry, demands, timelines, lists- just relaxed pure joy. Being here now without the self-imposed pressure. I think that is part of why I love teaching. I am forced to be here now, and be all in.”

And this quality of engagement carries easily into seminars, where students’ study of new texts and challenging concepts, again is applied to personal lived experiences and reflections on classroom teaching and learning encounters.

A final remarkable and essential element to TIES unique approach, is the quality of the mentors’ role and expression. This again bears little-to-no resemblance to the traditional transmission model of higher education, where the faculty lectures, bestowing knowledge upon the passive and receptive learners, en masse. At TIES, the faculty open each seminar with such personal and poetic expressions of who they are as human beings, rooted in place and context. They

proceed to engage alongside the learners with obvious care, posing key questions in response to students' comments, driving the dialogue ever deeper, in an intricate process known at TIES as "weaving." Often faculty mentors will share new relevant content beyond the syllabus, or add their own reflections, insights, and applications of quotes that have been identified by the students. Mentors are willing to expose their own vulnerabilities and not-knowing, always as an invitation to dive deeper together, with awe and wonder. Perhaps most remarkable of all is the mentors' capacity to allow for space and emergence within the dialogue, while still reassuring the community of their watchful caring presence. A common faculty posting is simply, "I am here. Listening and acknowledging. Paying attention."

There is a "quality of being" at TIES that is difficult to describe, but is so clearly and instantly evident. Everything about the program from content to context belies the fact that this work is profoundly important; the individual student is honored and elevated, each person's learning process is recognized and nurtured. TIES' success goes well-beyond method and syllabus. It is a worldview, a consciousness that envelopes the program, permeating every aspect of the work, like a steady prolonged rainfall seeping into the soil and then slowly occupying a stream bed until all is immersed by the grace and beauty of this holistic learning community.

### **Acknowledgements**

Paul Freedman is the Coordinating Editor for HER. I am the father of two amazing young adults, my greatest mentors. I have been a K-6 teacher for 28 years. I am the Founding Head of Salmonberry School on Orcas Island, WA. I have served as President of the Graduate Institute for Transformative Learning and am currently a member of the faculty of TIES (The Institute for Educational Studies) and the Transformative Learning Foundation. I have served as a Contributing Editor for *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*. My TEDx Talk is on "Deep Education." I am the Co-Director of the Holistic Education Initiative. It is an honor to accept the reins for *The Holistic Educator* from Susan and Gary, and to share the leadership of this project with my friends and colleagues, Renee and Laurel. I look forward to serving the needs of the holistic education community.