

CFG Report

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It was the first meeting of our third year together as a CFG. We knew we had come a long way when one member immediately stepped forward with student work, and even requested a tuning protocol to refine her assignment. In the beginning most of us had to be convinced to bring even our students' best work. It was a sign that we were doing something right. We had stuck together and established the kind of support and trust that allows for risk-taking and for deep, honest conversations.



While our meetings have always been substantial and helpful, we agreed at the end of last year that we needed to take our work to a different level. And what *was* that next step? Were there ways, for instance, of applying in our classrooms what we have learned from our own collaborative work?

This question was the first item on the agenda. It was apparent within minutes, though, that with the long summer interlude and the bustling first weeks of school, the question was too removed for us to consider in a deliberate way. It seemed a good moment to shift the agenda and move straight into looking at the third grade work to give us some grounding. The familiar rhythm of the tuning protocol was comforting.

With this strong reminder of how thoughtfully we worked together, again we addressed our question: how might we take this work into the classroom? Were there aspects of the tuning pro-

ocol itself that could be adapted? Immediately some anxiety surfaced. "Impossible." "Not enough time." "Wait a minute! Remember: we are a seasoned group! Let's take a look at it." What was the essence of the protocol anyway? Wasn't it about giving and receiving thoughtful feedback? A number of people shared how they were already using aspects of this protocol with their students from lower through upper school.

The conversation continued, though a bit ragged. I said at one point, "We aren't sure where we are going with this." One member said in jest, "Well, why *don't* you know?" I laughed. "Because I'm the teacher, right?" To my mind, though, this was precisely what we needed as a group at that moment: to be ragged and to find our way together. Finally a foreign

language teacher suggested that our essential question might be: how do we bring more reflection into the classroom? With that question, the conversation turned a corner.

Wasn't this exactly the point of our own meetings: a time to step back from the busyness of our days to reflect on our practice? Weren't our students' lives often as pressured and fragmented as ours? How could we create for them the same opportunity for more reflection? We were starting to forge a direction that was acceptable to the whole group. We agreed to focus, for this year, on developing ways to encourage our students to become more reflective about their own work.

The next morning there was an excited e-mail from one member about a successful class discussion with his sixth graders regarding group norms. He ended the message: I love our

group and how we work together. I want my classes to have the same feel.

There is something tremendously satisfying in seeing our talk bear fruit and in knowing that one small thing happening on one side of the school may well be the spark that ignites a positive change elsewhere, all because we talk together in a productive way, and arrive at something no individual could produce alone.

We are a fortunate school in many ways. We have made a tremendous commitment to professional development by providing one early release day each month to allow for in-depth collaborative work. We call the program TALL Tuesdays (Teachers as Leaders and Learners). Among the 12 faculty groups, there is one other CFG; others meet in self-selected study groups, each focused on a particular topic.

We feel especially fortunate, too, that for more than a year we had the pleasure of working closely with Nancy Mohr. She trained more than fifteen of us as facilitators and helped us launch a faculty-wide introduction to looking at student work, a day that signaled a tidal change in our development as a learning community. As our CFG began our first meeting we reflected for a moment on how much she meant to us. We felt a renewed sense of commitment to continuing our work with the same dedication and enthusiasm that she had inspired in us. ■

Eric Baylin teaches art at Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn NY, a pre-K-12 independent school with 935 students and 130 faculty members. The school has had CFGs since 1998. The group of teach in both middle and upper school. Grades and disciplines represented include science, math, English, foreign language, dance, visual art, 1st, 3rd and 4th grades. Teaching experience ranges from six to over thirty years. Eric may be contacted by email at ebaylin@packer.edu