Introducing CFGs to a New Network: Fighting the Good Fight
Pam Ayres and Mary Helen Spiri, Maryland

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lungs, as members of grade-level teams or academic departments, and the like. We attempt to empower people to find ways to support the efforts of those who believe in and promote the work in their schools and districts. We have begun to sponsor regional dinner meetings in different locations in our network that promote participation among graduates of the introductory training and others interested in the work.

The initial training is comprised of three strands: (1) building trusting relationships and fostering development of a learning community through collaborative processes, (2) developing shared understandings through text-based discussions, and (3) rethinking teaching and learning through looking at authentic student and teacher work.

The initial training introduces a common language and provides shared experiences that we then work to support at the school, district, and network levels. It is not unusual, for example, for teachers in our network to ask for assistance in selecting a protocol to use in a grade-level meeting. Parent meetings have included text renderings, tuning protocols, and charters. Collaborative groups have worked to establish ground rules and norms. Common understandings have helped us to elevate the level of discourse at network gatherings and to build enthusiasm for the introduction of new strategies.

Despite our successes among those who have engaged in our initial training, we recognize that the number of Critical Friends Groups are slow to evolve. Among the 25 schools in our network, we have CFGs held in groups functioning as CFGs. Others are beginning to form, but the challenges described previously are real deterrents. Those who have an opportunity to explore the work readily acknowledge its value, but the schools and districts in which these individuals work remain unconvinced that structured professional dialogue is potent professional development.

We acknowledge two essential next steps in fostering the work of CFGs. First, we need to find ways to support the efforts of those who believe in and promote the work in their schools and districts. We have begun to sponsor regional dinner meetings in different locations in our network that promote participation among graduates of the introductory training and others interested in the work.

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