

Into the Classroom: Developing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Book Review by Michaelann Kelley, Texas

I must think that this book shows many parallels between the work of Critical Friends Groups and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) because of the tremendous amount of post-it notes and underlining that was evident when I finished reading. Even after rereading to pull out significant quotes, I felt myself saying yes that is true and fits perfectly into what I am doing.

The book opens with a forward by Lee Shulman. He describes the work of CASTL as follows: "The scholarship of teaching and learning ... views teaching as serious, intellectual work, ask good questions about their students' learning, seek evidence in their classrooms that can be used to improve practice, and make this work public so that others can critique it, build on it, and contribute to the wider teaching commons" (p. ix). He points out the need for making the work public, which is often the missed step or a step not included in past CFG work. I recognize there is a very fine line between making work public and breaking the trust of the CFG, and this could be part of the reason for the lack of substantial literature about the work of CFGs. But as I reflect back, I wonder about the paths the work of the critical friends traveled. As a first-year coach, I went to a portfolio evaluation of the work of second-year coaches in Pawling, N.Y. There, experienced coaches were required, as part of the process, to document evidence through portfolio-making and to publicly defend the work of their CFG. I am wondering now whether the dropping of this component of the work seven years ago has contributed to the lack of current longitudinal evidence to substantiate the powerful work that has been happening in CFGs over the past ten years.

Hatch, in introducing the work of CASTL, points out that "few reform efforts reach directly into the classroom to look carefully at what teachers do" (p. 3). The work of the National School Reform Faculty and the Houston A+ Challenge (formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge) tried, and I think were very successful in, reaching into the

classrooms to the teachers and the students. There is powerful anecdotal information on the impact the CFG work has had in schools. This journal's archive contains story after story about the positive impact of our collaborative, reflective work. The question is to what end. As a group of teachers and inquirers, we need to create the needed research and produce the literature of our own work.

Hatch illuminates some of the pitfalls of teachers doing research, "the fact that the demands of teaching must take precedence over the demands of research makes it particularly difficult for teachers to maintain a focus on a particular issue or

question. For teachers, the object of study is like a moving target that refuses to stay still long enough to get a careful look..." (p. 18). Hatch continues throughout the work describing the successes and challenges that faced the teachers participating in the program. The book brings the teachers to life, using their writings, until their voices are heard loud and clear.

The conclusions that Hatch presents are on target and speak to the trials that I go through in maintaining my own work with CFGs. He states in one conclusion, "the current working conditions for teachers fail to provide adequate time and rewards for the careful examination of teaching and learning, but they also underscore how much can be done even under adverse conditions." He continued, "what might be possible if we had a system of education that ... embraced the idea that teachers' expertise can be a critical resource in reshaping classroom practice and improving schools" (p. 101).

I recommend this book to anyone in a CFG, working to develop CFGs, or interested in changing teaching and learning systems for the good of our students. ■

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