Let's Talk! Facilitating a Faculty Learning Community Using a Critical Friends Group Approach

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Abstract
This article focuses on the complex process of facilitating a Critical Friends Group as a form of a professional learning community by teacher education faculty. During a three-year initiative, seven faculty members created a forum for collegial conversations regarding pedagogical dilemmas in efforts of improving teaching practice and student achievement. Critical Friends Groups use protocol guides to actively engage its members in learning, thinking, reading and discussing dilemmas from interdisciplinary perspectives. This article reviews the literature of Critical Friends Groups, the work of this particular Critical Friends Group and concludes by providing a rationale for sustainability of Critical Friends Groups in Institutions of Higher Education.

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Each group has a coach who has been trained to help the group members focus on how to improve their teaching. The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) program sponsors the training of Critical Friends Group coaches. The NSRF has this to say about CFGs: "CFGs are the product of a simple idea: providing deliberate time and structures to promote adult professional growth that is directly linked to student learning." How Does CFG Feedback Help? Because of what she learned in a CFG, Nejman actually changed her approach to teaching. "One of the biggest changes in my practice," she said "was having students give me feedback on lessons, learning, and class activities. Click Critical Friends Groups for information on CFGs. Last Updated: 12/9/2016. EW Lesson Plans. Take a critical approach to each other's research. It is critical to have friends in research, but critical friends are not critical in their approach with each other. Be clear and open about your responsibilities and commitment to each other in the mutual task of developing, enacting, and assessing your self-study research. Use active listening (i.e., listening for each other without judgment and without personal agendas). Self-study requires critical collaborative inquiry. It is personal and interpersonal with learning, thinking, and knowing arising through collaboration and the appropriating of feedback from others. It is the community that helps extend an individual's understanding. Critical friends encourage and solicit respectful questioning and divergent views to obtain.