

Collaboration Benefits Students

By Evelyn Seymour

Yesterday, as I walked out of my classroom, one of the boys said he will miss school although he cannot wait for summer. He explained that it was because he would miss his friends. Learning always comes within the context of our relationships. Teachers, as well as students, thrive in a community which recognizes and respects this truth. Bellevue Christian School has intentionally provided teachers with collaborative time as well as opportunity to learn in seminars and conferences aimed at improving the quality of teaching in our school.

We know that because students learn from one another, we purposely design classrooms where students sit together to solve problems. No such classroom exists for teachers. Faculty lounges are lunch rooms. Conference rooms (when they even exist in schools) are mostly used by administrators and board members. Such rooms do not exist because teacher collaboration has not always been valued and no time is given to it in most school's daily schedule. BCS, on the other hand, has provided additional funds to pay teachers for some collaborative time throughout the year.

Teaching improves through enriching conferences and seminars. Last August, teachers at BCS heard John Medina present recent research about how the brain learns. Several teachers at Three Points met after school, on two separate occasions, throughout the year to discuss implementation of the ideas presented. We learned about ideas that had worked from time together sharing with each other. Ideas such as standing up on the seat of your chair when asking a question, (rather than raising your hand) or changing the classroom activity (even slightly) every 10 minutes is consistent with what the brain craves in order to learn. These two brief collaborative opportunities changed the classroom experience for my students. Change comes slowly and we need the support of teacher friends to make it happen.

BCS has encouraged *Courage to Teach* seminars. Although teachers have given up four weekends a year to attend these seminars, BCS has funded the registration fee. At these seminars, I have learned the importance of listening deeply to students. "When someone deeply listens to you...It's as if gold has been discovered." ("Deeply Listening" is a poem by John Fox) We must listen if we are to help each other learn. Much of the time, I am teaching what students cannot learn because I have not listened to them carefully enough to address their actual problem. It has made me talk less, and listen more, in the classroom.

Another important opportunity for me was attendance at the National Middle School Association meeting last year. The teachers I met and the time spent with our BCS Junior High and sixth grade teachers was rich. As a result, one classroom change I made was to purchase and use individual white boards. By using these boards, students can do calculations or write answers quickly, then hold them up in the air for me to quickly see where they are having problems. This allows me to address issues immediately.

Collaboration time and additional learning opportunities have made an enormous difference in my classroom. I am thankful for the donors who have financially supported these programs for our faculty and enabled us to become better teachers. Time to collaborate, to pray, and to encourage one another in teaching has been my experience at Three Points. As I leave for the summer and close my classroom, I can't wait for summer but I am sad because I will miss my friends.

Editor's Note: Evelyn Seymour left her position teaching sixth grade at Three Points Elementary to become an instructor at BCS's Praxis Academy—fall 2004.