**The Teacher Center of Broome County**



##### Teacher Study Group Grant Award

**2014-15**

# **FINAL REPORT DUE BY APRIL 13, 2015**

**DOCUMENT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES**

**STUDY GROUP TOPIC: Jensen’s *Teenage Turnaround* Group**

**List of group members: Rick Dutko, Chrissy Gates, Kim Rusnak, Josh Buczek**

**The final report must be word-processed and submitted both in print and through e-mail using this form. Send print copy Teacher Center @ WSKG, BOCES Mail Drop #22 and e-mail file to** [**bctc@btboces.org**](mailto:bctc@btboces.org)**. This report will be posted on the Teacher Center web page at http://teachercenter.info.**

## **Describe the initial goal of the group noting any adjustments that had to be made as time passed.**

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| At the outset, our group wanted to build on previous district-level work with Eric Jensen's principles about teaching and poverty, given that a high percentage of the students we work with are considered "economically disadvantaged." We were looking to learn about additional strategies we could implement in our classrooms that might enhance our approaches to the implementation of the Common Core Standards, as well as to begin to think more explicitly about the P21 Framework targets for self-direction, critical thinking, and problem solving.  We wanted to share our work to some degree, and started our blog, [www.lifelonglearningstudygroup.wordpress.com](http://www.lifelonglearningstudygroup.wordpress.com) as a way of documenting the evolution of our collaboration. However, we had not originally planned on facilitating a conference day for our Jr.-Sr. High colleagues during a conference day. We had assumed we might share briefly at a faculty meeting, and encourage colleagues to visit and chime in on our blog, but we realized we would need to expand our work beyond our group and our own classrooms.  As a result, we had to make adjustments, devoting time during several meetings to preparation for the workshop on Jensen's ideas from *Turnaround Tools for the Teenage Brain*. This was a growth experience for each of us, but it certainly expanded on our original goals for the group. |

## **Describe the ACTION PLAN that the group followed.**

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| Our group's action plan was to meet weekly on Tuesdays after school. Each week, we would read and discuss a chapter from *Turnaround Tools for the Teenage Brain.* A facilitator would generate a series of discussion tools for the central chapter, and later blog on our site about the group's discussion for the week. During the final meetings, we planned to collaborate with our administrative team to determine appropriate ways to share our work with others. |

## **Describe how the action plan was implemented.**

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| At our first meeting, we created a rotation for facilitating, and discussed the concept of using a blog as another record of our collaboration. After examining the P21 Framework and assigning the reading for the next week, we visited the *Word Press* site and set up our blog and user accounts. Each week, the facilitator e-mailed a reminder and some discussion questions or tools to the group before our Tuesday meetings. The facilitator would also keep the written record of the meeting, and write a blog reflecting on the discussion on our site. We met with our building principal twice, and generated a plan for leading a conference day workshop focused on the principles in our central text. We worked together to develop handouts and presentation materials. At our final meeting, we returned to our normal format of reflecting on the last few chapters of the book, and reflected on our work together these past few months. |

## **Evaluate the impact of the study group effort on teacher/student performance.**

## **How has this study group changed you as a teacher? Do you anticipate that any of your teaching practices will have changed?**

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| Two recurring themes threaded through our group discussions: actions/strategies that we were hesitant to try, and actions/strategies that we "used to use" that we were hesitant to try again. Reading *Turnaround Tools for the Teenage Brain* inspired us to take some "risks"-to build stronger rapport with struggling students, to focus on solutions rather than excuses, and to think less about content, and more about student engagement and learning. While these seem like small changes, our work together and with our central text has motivated us to approach planning and teaching differently. Each of us has begun to allow students more frequent periods of autonomy, which Jensen and Snider suggest are essential to help teens develop as lifelong learners. During the March conference day that we facilitated, we had the chance to engage our colleagues in explicit discussions about the strategies related to effort, attitude, cognitive capacity, and focused strategy. We believe that we've contributed to the changing culture around teaching and learning that is ongoing in our building. The evidence of this may not be "noisy," but shifts in our teaching practices are happening nonetheless. |

## **What evidence do you expect to see of student achievement improving as a result of your participating in this study group?**

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| It is likely that our participation in the study group will contribute to maintaining the graduation rate in our building, by strengthening relationships with students that keep them engaged in school. Student achievement on thematic essays and quarterly assessments should also improve as students begin to internalize the cognitive capacity strategies described in the book. |

**What evidence is there that the goals of the study group has/has not been met?**

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| Our goals were to improve our approach to the Common Core Learning standards and the P21 Frameworks, and to ensure that "All students...will...gain the cognitive and social skills that enable them to deal with the complex challenges of our age" (*P21 Common Core Toolkit*, p. 2). We believe we are well on our way to meeting these goals as a result of our work. Not only have we experienced and made shifts in our individual instructional practices, we were able to create ongoing dialogue on the issues of cognitive capacity and attitudes towards teaching and learning through our blog site. By facilitating a seminar on these issues for our building, we reminded the colleagues in our building about previous work with Jensen's principles on teaching and poverty, and engaged them in new and expanded discussion of the issues of developing students and ourselves as lifelong learners. The products and materials we developed for this project could be valuable to review throughout the year, as well as prove useful for colleagues across the region. |

## **Comment on the value of the study group process? Did it work for you?**

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| The study group process provided us each with a dedicated time and place for professional learning and dialogue. Although there are opportunities for this within our district and building as well, a study group is a teacher-directed activity that is empowering. It is difficult to carve out time to meet, but it is certainly worth the effort!  One component that is difficult is that the process makes it cumbersome to develop materials for a formal presentation. We ended up needing to divide some of our meeting time into collaborative work to set goals and independent work to create the materials needed to teach our colleagues. Future study group formats could benefit by allowing frames for both collaborative and independent work time for the participants. |

## **How can we make this study group program better?**

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| The study group program could benefit from options that allow for increased collaboration between teachers in different districts, opening up the Teacher Center to allow participants to reserve and use the center for meetings and work, and to allow for subscriptions to services as a component/support material beyond the book requests currently allowed. For example, we chose to use a free blogging site, *Word Press*, as a component of our work, but there are a variety of sites that require a subscription fee which could be included as part of a group's budget request if allowed. |

A final report is due two weeks after the last meeting or by April 13, 2015, whichever date is first. The report must be typed and double-spaced using the provided form. One copy must be submitted in print and the file must be submitted through e-mail to bctc@btboces.org. Return to the Teacher Center (Mail Drop #22), 601 Gates Rd., Vestal, NY