

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
**Teachers Talking about Teaching and School: Collaboration and**  
**Reflective Practice via Critical Friends Groups**

Reflection on one's practice is a pivotal part of teaching which in the busy lives of teachers is often neglected. Reflective practice is "a challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own behavior as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship" (Osterman, 1990, p. 134). Osterman adds that reflective practice not only allows individuals to become more skillful and effective, but has potentially positive effects on an organization's capacity to support itself and its members. A small yet important body of research shows that "students' academic achievement is greater in schools where teachers report high levels of collective responsibility for student learning" (Lee & Smith, 1996). However, teacher practices that benefit students are frequently unaccompanied by specific structures for effective implementation. The result is that teachers continue to do their work alone, reinforcing the historically identified cycles of isolation and closed classroom doors that many professional development efforts are trying to overcome (Barth, 1990; Grossman et al 1999; Lortie, 1975; Rosenholtz, 1989; & Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Transcending isolation in teaching practice, increasing teachers' sense of collective responsibility and promoting the kind of reflective practice that directly effects student achievement are issues of concern in education today. Prominent policy initiatives include components which encourage or even oblige teachers and schools to collaborate and reflect as part of their theories of action (Carnegie, 1986; Goodlad, 1994; Holmes, 1986; NCTAF, 1996.). However, the question remains as to how teachers are to construct a reflective practice in the various contexts in which they work. Jay (2003) proposes that while freedom to reflect without an imposed structure gives teachers

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

flexibility to reflect when and how they wish, the paradox of voluntary participation is that it can just as easily not take place. As Gee (1996) states, “the real issue – though too little debated directly in these terms – is when and how explicit information can be efficacious” (p. 273). However, in an effort to comply with policy and provide teachers with opportunities to examine practice and maintain a critical stance towards their work, districts, schools, and teachers have turned to various models and programs - many of which feature the integration of individual and collective experiences.

One such model which holds promise for addressing personal and collaborative reflection on practice is the Critical Friends Group (CFG). CFGs are a model of structured reflective practice that in the last ten years has gained momentum as a strong professional development movement. CFGs focus on the improvement of individual teacher practice as well as shared knowledge among colleagues. They generally involve groups of eight to ten teachers and are based on examination of student work, teacher dilemmas, texts of interest, and eventually peer observation. CFGs have personal growth components, a strong focus on critical examination of student work and teaching practice, yet include a consistent social feedback system in which the group can anchor and thrive.

This study seeks to identify the mechanisms, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, through which teacher growth and professional learning communities are developed and sustained. This study will focus on CFGs as an opportunity to study teacher collaboration and its influence on reflective practice and teaching. The following research questions, guided by the tradition of ethnographic case study, will be considered:

- What is the nature of teachers’ reflective experiences within the context of Critical Friends Groups?
- In what ways does teacher participation in Critical Friends Groups influence teacher practice?

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

This paper begins with a brief introduction to Critical Friends Groups followed by conceptualizations and implications of reflective practice which inform the theoretical framework that guides this research. Then, research rationale, methodology, strategy, design, and data analysis are presented. Finally, findings and a discussion of the emergent issues are offered.

**Critical Friends Groups: A Vehicle for Reflective Practice**

The Critical Friends Group (CFG) model of reflective practice and professional development has its roots in three school reform networks: The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES), the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR), and the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). Educators from all three organizations participated in the 1994 design of CFGs. Dissatisfied with typical forms of professional development, they developed an approach that was focused on teacher practice, was teacher driven, and promoted professional collegiality (Anderson & Hudson, 2002). (See Appendix A for an historical timeline of CFGs.)

Gene Thompson-Grove, a co-director of NSRF and participant in early CES work, recalls the idea was that every region in the United States would have a “center of activity” where NSRF trainers would work with teachers “in the schoolhouse” building grassroots momentum for the work and using the protocols as a way to structure conversations and get to solutions fast (personal communication, March 4, 2005). The protocols provided guidance for presentations and discussions enabling teachers to share a common language over time. One of the first protocols used, the Tuning Protocol (see Appendix B), included opportunities for a presenter to state a problem or dilemma, for participants to ask clarifying and probing questions, for teams to give feedback, and for

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

the presenter to reflect on the feedback. Over the years a variety of protocols were developed and now there are many from which to choose.

The structure of each meeting (usually held on a monthly basis) is similar: the group opens with “connections” – about ten minutes for teachers to share whatever is on their mind while others listen without responding. When groups first form, the next part of the meeting might include a team building activity meant to bond the group and foster trust. The group then moves to protocol based presentations. At each meeting one or two teachers take turns presenting issues, dilemmas, cases, student work, curricula, etc. using a specifically chosen protocol which presenter and facilitator work together to select. Facilitation duties also rotate. The end of a meeting involves debriefing the protocol and overall meeting. Groups spend time early on establishing mutually acceptable norms for group function and expectations, which are reviewed continually.

In the last 10 years, the CFG model has become a movement with established protocols and structures for meetings and has been accepted as a viable professional development option by many districts and schools. Anderson and Hudson (2002) note that there is a need for more research that charts the impact CFGs have on individual teachers, their practice, and school structures. This assessment is in alignment with other calls for work in this area. For example, Cobb et al (2003) point out that there are few models which directly integrate an understanding of organizational culture with teacher learning and behavior. As teachers engage in teaching, how do those who participate in collaborative groups situate or problematize their work? What needs to be in place, from socio-cultural and psycho-social perspectives, for teacher learning and change to occur?

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
**Reflective Practice and Communities of Practice**

Literature on reflective practice which focuses on student achievement and performance represents an important outcome of the impact of teaching practice, that is, the positive effects on student learning and well being (Grossman, 1989; Johnson & Brown, 1998; Kadel-Taras, 1998). There is agreement in the literature that reflective practice is a vital part of teaching and that teachers who engage in reflective practice will positively impact students. (Jay, 2003; Norlander-Case, Reagan & Case, 1999; Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). However, empirical data which documents impact on student learning is scarce.

Taking a critical reflective stance towards one's practice, engaging in collaborative experiences with colleagues, looking at curriculum and student work should be a regular part of a teacher's work. How to guide the training of reflective practitioners who will thrive in and inspire reflective communities is an issue for those in teacher training and inservice professional development. However, the kinds of things teachers must do to create a successful professional practice do not always become a regular part of their daily work (Osterman, 1990; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Strong evidence suggests that once teachers enter into the realm of practice, educational notions acquired during training fade into the background (Korthagen & Russell, 1999; Lortie, 1975; Shulman; and 1986 and Smagorinsky, Cook & Johnson, 2003). Often this is termed as "the transfer problem". Korthagen & Russell (1999) point to a combination of contributing factors to this dilemma – prior knowledge, personal resistance to new methods, and relevancy of knowledge. These contextual inhibitors are enmeshed with realities of school culture where one is apt to fall back on ways in which one was taught,

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

resist new theories, and fail to see how new knowledge has relevance to what one must attend to in daily work.

If the goals of reflection, as Grossman (1989) asserts, are to synthesize content and pedagogy toward a focus on student learning, then some teachers might benefit from tools and processes that steer reflection and practice towards these ends. For Korthagen & Russell, an effective reflective practice must happen in what they term a “realistic approach” where one develops “knowledge in a process of reflection on the practical situation in which a personal need for learning was created” (Korthagen & Russell, 1999, p. 7). From a cognitive perspective, it is vital not only that teachers are stimulated to reflect, but that they learn to master the process of reflection and take responsibility for personal growth.

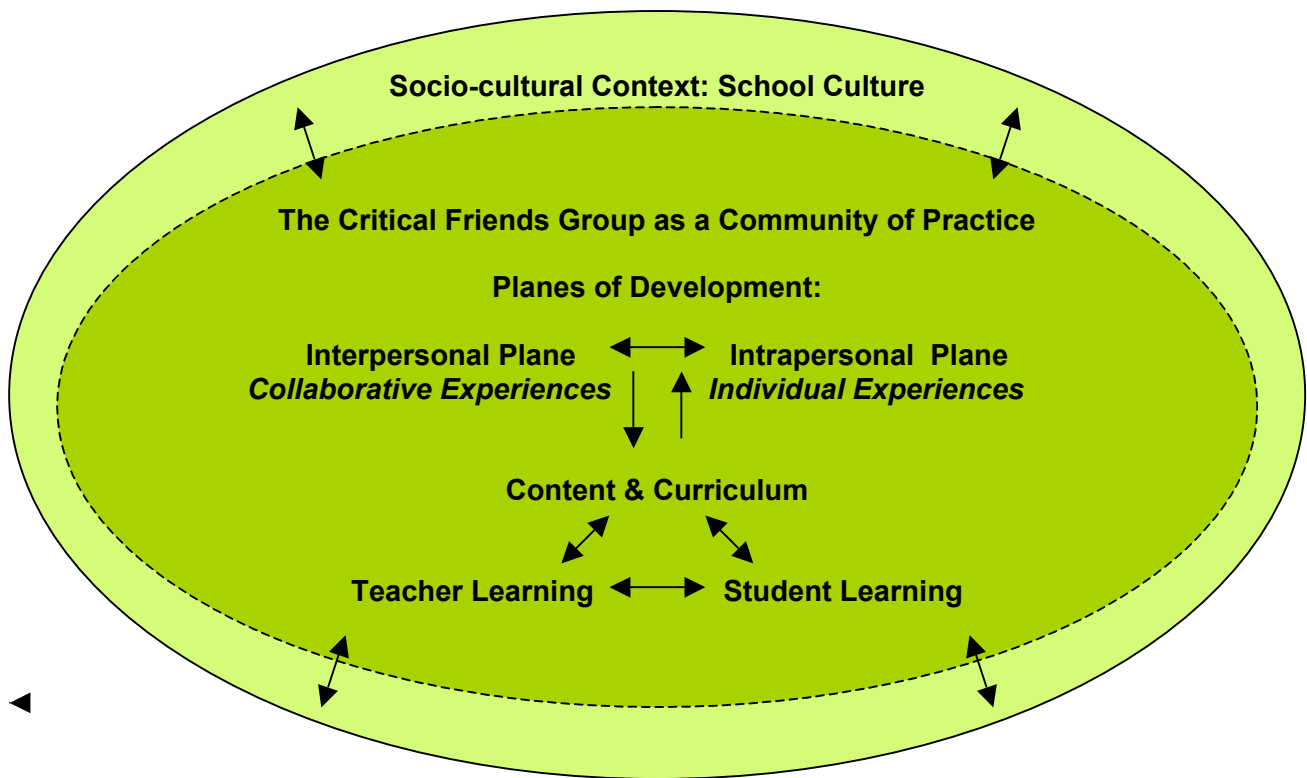
However, from a sociocultural perspective, a reflective practice is not simply a solitary, mental endeavor. Rogoff (2003) reminds us that individual development constitutes and is constituted by the activities and practices of one’s sociocultural context. “Thus, individual and cultural processes are mutually constituting rather than defined separately from each other (Rogoff, 2003, p. 51). Reflective practice that neither isolates or obscures individual teacher growth, but places it in the sociocultural context of the school community has promise for promoting and sustaining the work of teachers (Bransford, 2000; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Little, 1999; Osterman, 1990; Weibaum, et al 2004; and Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Figure 1 illustrates the relationships between teacher development and school culture as they relate to reflective practice. Reflective practice in what Wenger (1998) terms a community of practice (in this case via the Critical Friends Group) occurs in a

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

context where teacher knowledge and learning are constructed via interactions with colleagues in the workplace and develop on two inter-related planes. One plane is interpersonal in nature and focuses on collaborative experiences. Another plane is intrapersonal in nature and involves individuals' personal thoughts and actions. These planes are held in the broad sociocultural context of schools, where teacher communities and reflective practice inform and influence each other with the goal of improving teacher practice and student learning. The planes exist in a mutually determining

*Figure 1: Reflective Practice in a Socio-Cultural Context*



relationship where collaboration and individual thought and action serve to sustain each other. These relationships can be understood through the lenses of Vygotsky and Wenger.

Vygotsky's theory of development addresses the relationship between social contexts and individual development. Learning occurs in a dynamic socio-cultural

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

context that shapes the interactions and thought processes of participants, and where knowledge is constructed interactively and internalized by individuals (Vygotsky, 1985, 2004; Adger, Hoyle & Dickinson). Instead of simply asserting that individuals somehow learn through interaction with others, Vygotsky presumes an inherent connection between the intra and interpersonal planes of functioning and the various contexts in which they exist (Wertsch, 1985). The contexts can be manifested as an individual's relationship to self, other individuals, the group, or larger social environments such as the school or community. In this scenario the individual is not a separate entity, but rather operates in a give and take manner within the various social contexts.

Reflective practice in the context of a community can be further theorized from Wenger's (1998) notions of communities of practice which exist in settings from industry to corporate institutions. Wenger asserts that such organizations develop a "shared practice" within which group members share their capacity to create and use knowledge in a collective process. For Wenger, it is within the context of shared practice that learning takes place. The idea of a community of practice brings together theories of social structure which focus on institutions, norms and ideas, and theories about situated experiences which are related to the dynamics of daily life, including how we construct interpersonal activity. According to Wenger,

"the repertoire of a community of practice include routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (Wenger, 1998, p. 83).

This repertoire synthesizes reificative and participative aspects of involvement in a collaborative experience and is illustrative of models such as Critical Friends Groups.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

When teachers get together to talk about their practice, what mechanisms cause teachers to continue to grow and develop professionally, to poise themselves for change? What attributes of school culture influence practice and need to be in place for teacher learning and change to take place? Communities of practice are made up of individuals who are motivated and influenced by a variety of psycho-social mechanisms (Wenger, 1998). Kadel-Taras (1998), found that for teachers “although their primary purpose for change...was to better address the learning needs of students, teachers also expected that this work would benefit themselves as professional and individuals” (p. 143). Pinpointing ways to help teachers trigger important pro-social behaviors and internalize them is crucial for their continued success in the classroom - as individuals, and as members of a teaching community. Conceptualizations of how individuals might be affected by or view their participation in social milieus help us to begin to understand the relationship between socio-cultural contexts such as communities of practice embedded in schools, and change in practice.

**The Study*****Tradition and Methodological Approach***

This work was guided by the tradition of ethnographic case study which helps to capture how participants make sense of their world and their particular points of view; the tradition seeks to understand the ways in which individuals act together to constitute environments for one another (Erickson, 1986; Finnan, Knapp, & Wineberg, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The goal of the study was to connect the conceptualization of a community of practice via the Critical Friends Group (CFG) model to the attributes of a single group and its participants. I show how the experiences of selected cases might inform a larger context of

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

professional development strategies which promote teacher learning and teacher practice.

Ethnographic field methods were well suited to the five months of data collection as this approach is “committed to uncovering and depicting indigenous meanings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 12).

The cases studied in this project were nested in what Stake (1995) refers to as a collective case study. In this methodology, each case study is instrumental to learning about the effects of a particular topic or phenomenon, but there is important coordination between the individual studies. In this study the CFG was the primary case or context for the research, however individuals in the CFG were also cases to be examined on their own and nested within the context of the CFG (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this way, the relationships between individual experiences and the group’s functioning could be highlighted.

Rappaport states that “good ethnography illuminates non-obvious aspects of experience and culture; it exposes and possibly accounts for the apparent contradictions that pervade all societies; and it tries to explain why particular ways of life have developed where and when they have” (1986, p. 334). As a researcher interested in the culture of schools and those who influence and are influenced by that culture, the nested ethnographic case study allowed me to explore experiences in all their contradictions and consistencies, the phenomena that emerge from that culture, and to get a glimpse of the “way of life” in the school setting.

### Setting

Three years ago a large district in the Puget Sound region of Washington State adopted the Critical Friends Group (CFG) model of developing professional learning communities through collegial reflective experiences. There are now CFGs in every school in the district,

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

some of which have been functioning for three years. As a result, this district is a rich site for the study of CFGs and teachers who have experienced reflecting on their practice over time.

The district professional development coordinator (also a CFG coach) for CFGs identified target schools for this study. I was able to gain access to a long running CFG at Durham Elementary, a school of approximately 560 students with 37 classroom teachers. Of the student population, 59.1% are on free or reduced lunch and 25.3% are transitional bilingual students. These characteristics are important as the school population presents certain challenges for teachers in terms of meeting the needs of a diverse student group. As a result, the three CFGs in this school setting represent a potential venue for teachers to get support for these challenges. Each CFG at the school has nine members including a coach, a range of classroom teachers, and para-educators.

### Participants

The professional development coordinator notified CFGs in various schools in the district about the study and a group at Durham responded with a desire to participate. This nine member CFG included two para-educators, a district employee who is a former Durham teacher, and six classroom teachers. I limited the interview sample to classroom teachers in order to maintain consistency. Four of the six teachers volunteered to be interviewed. Sampling was undertaken with the intent to “manifest the phenomenon with a certain degree of intensity to bring patterns and themes to the forefront (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 28). However, the study did not seek to identify behaviors characteristic of one particular kind of teacher; but despite the fact that the participants were volunteers, the four teachers provided a methodological richness in their diversity. Participants varied by gender, years of experience teaching, years in the CFG, and grade level. (See Table 1.) All participants were White. In

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

addition, the school principal of eight years and a CFG coach who also works as a professional development coordinator for the district were interviewed.

**Table 1: Teacher Profiles – Primary Participants**

Teacher	Years Teaching	Years in CFG	Years at Durham	Current Level
David	10	3	10	5 <sup>th</sup> grade
Angela	4	3	4	5th grade
Carol	4	1	4	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade
Gigi	7	3	7	Kindergarten

*Data Collection Strategies and Procedures**Questionnaire*

Data collection began with an initial questionnaire which all nine CFG members completed. This questionnaire helped paint a demographic picture of the group and its participants – for example, how they came to teaching, how long they have been in the CFG, and what their roles in the group have been.

*Observations*

As a non-participant observer I was able to sit in on five monthly CFG meetings. At each meeting two teachers presented student work, a teaching dilemma, lesson plan, text, or case study. Using a specific CFG protocol (of which there are many), the group discussed and gave feedback to the presenter. My observations focused on how the group conducted itself (group process) as well as on comments regarding practice, changes in practice, participant's feelings, identification of support or barriers to changes in practice, and on participation levels in the group. I also observed each of the four primary participants one time for one hour in their classrooms in order to establish rapport, get a sense of the context in which they worked, and provide examples of practice as a frame of reference for the second interview. I kept a field

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

notebook for CFG and classroom observations. Observing meetings and teacher practice provided contextual knowledge and reference points for subsequent interviews (Merriam, 1998). It also provided a window to behaviors in the group that may not emerge from interviews with individuals.

*Interviews*

I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each of the four primary participants. The CFG coach for this group and the building principal at Durham Elementary were also interviewed once. Interviews were documented through use of audio recording and field notes. The interviews of the four teachers were conducted after a CFG presentation and again after the classroom observation. The first interview focused on experiences in the CFG, the second on teacher practice. During interviews teachers were asked to talk about their experiences with the CFG, to elaborate on reasons for participating, and how they thought it affected their work. The principal interview focused on the implementation of CFGs in the school and at the district level. I was also able to explore the principal's role in the adoption of CFGs at Durham. The CFG coach (who also works at the district level) was asked about her role in the group, implementation of CFGs at the Durham and at the district level, and the evolution of the CFG over time. (See Interview Protocols in Appendix C).

It was imperative for me to maintain the flexibility to pursue information in a variety of directions as determined by the participant, as well as focus on the key elements of the case. This made the semi-structured interview an invaluable tool. The strength of this approach to interviewing is that it "allows the interviewer/evaluator to be highly responsive to individual differences and situational changes" (Patton, 1980, p. 198).

*Documents*

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

Collection of documents is important because “to understand phenomenon, you need to know its history”; documentation provides historical and contextual dimensions to the observations and interviews, enriching what is said, heard, and perceived (Glesne, 1999 p. 59). Student work or materials presented by the teacher, as well as the CFG protocols were collected in order to complete the picture of the teacher’s CFG experience. Copies of the reflective protocols, case studies, texts read by the group, and student or teacher work related to the observation of teacher practice were also collected.

*Data Analysis*

In order to ensure high quality data from what is a small sample I employed a variety of strategies. I spent over five months with my participants to establish a high level of trust. “When a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behavior or feel the need to do so; moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you” (Glesne, 1999, p. 151). Participants appeared comfortable with my presence, were responsive in interviews, and their dialogue in meetings seemed free flowing and unedited. I requested that participants review and comment on transcripts of the interview data and CFG meetings. In order to get a wide variety of perspectives on the CFG experience I triangulated the data by using the multiple data collection methods described above and conducted interviews across data sources with the teachers, coach, and principal.

My approach to organizing, analyzing, and documenting the varied data was to create data sets which consisted of the observations and interviews with each teacher (Cobb et al, 2003; Simon & Tzur, 1999). From these sets, primary themes emerged. From each subsequent set collected, recurring themes were synthesized into an emergent coding system in which

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

themes were flagged, and marked for further analysis during transcription, review of transcripts, and follow-up interviews. The themes and codes were applied to a review of CFG meeting transcripts as well as principal and coach interviews. The structure of these sets served to maintain connections between teachers' collaborative and independent work so that important relationships were not potentially overlooked.

This process allowed me to generate what Wilson & Wineberg (1993) refer to as small sets of hypotheses that might account for the respondents' views, and then check those hypotheses by looking back to previous data sets, and forward to the next, searching for evidence which confirm and disconfirm assertions (Erickson, 1986). While there were initially many themes which emerged, continual review of the data and the relationships between themes allowed more salient issues to come to the foreground. Data collection ended with a member check of the themes which emerged during the study (Glesne, 1999). I presented the entire Critical Friends Group with key ideas from the data (see Appendix D) and elicited their responses. The themes, tensions, and dynamics which emerged from the data shed light on the teachers' work in CFGs and are examined more thoroughly in the following findings section.

**Teachers Talking about Teaching and School**

The story of teachers' experiences in the Critical Friends Group is the story of the implementation of CFGs at Durham Elementary and its district, as well as a story of relationships, community, and the complexities of teaching. The experiences of the teachers, their principal, the school community, and the district combine to produce a series of interrelated themes which help us consider teachers' work and the work of schools. Following some background on how CFGs became a part of Durham Elementary and efforts made to set the stage for their implementation, I discuss some key

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
findings from this study. First I look at how the establishment of trust in the CFG enabled teachers to talk about their work in new ways and how dimensions of trust influenced teacher reflection and practice, as well as group functioning. In addition, I highlight important contextual influences that affected the development of this CFG.

*Climate Changes and Setting the Stage: Critical Friends Groups Come to Durham*

In 2000, the district was reviewing their curriculum frameworks and the director of that review, familiar with the Coalition of Essential Schools movement, utilized CFG protocols during the process. At the same time the district set goals making collaboration a goal for future professional development endeavors. Melanie, a former Durham teacher, coach for the CFG, and a district curriculum coordinator described it this way:

“For a number of years we would have these ‘sit and git’ type of workshops and the more we were learning about professional development, the more we began to build a belief system in our district about ongoing, job embedded, professional development and really focusing on that collaboration” (Melanie, 1:2).

The district subsequently offered CFG coaches training which 65 people from across the district attended during the summer. Melanie, and two other teachers from Durham were among the attendees. (At this writing over 150 teachers in the district are trained, there are CFGs in every school, and over 25 principals, program managers, and assistant superintendents are going through training.)

The enthusiastic response from those trained made Joan, Durham’s principal, sit up and take notice.

“They were so jazzed when they came from the training! So they presented to the staff and they were just so enthusiastic. I saw the importance of this and saw that I wanted to be able to empower them to take leadership in that because I want my teachers to take leadership” (Joan 1:2).

That fall Durham offered teachers a choice of collaborative experiences: book groups, Understanding by Design (UBD), and Critical Friends Groups. Two Critical Friends

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

Groups were formed. Three years later, the book groups and UBD no longer met formally, a third CFG was added, and all but a few of Durham's teachers participated.

The principal at Durham acknowledges that when she came on board in 1997 the school would not have been ready to embrace the kinds of collaborative experiences the school and the district were offering.

“When I got here, I was calling the police left and right, cops, kids fighting, school was dirty, so I cleaned it up, planted flowers, painted. So I just really had to work on the climate...with the teachers and the kids. ...that started coming together and then we worked on the academic area, and we worked on academic expectations and intentional teaching” (Joan, 1:1).

Joan points out that collaboration was the “big word” in the district a few years ago, and it was a goal of hers for Durham. She knew that “in order to get anywhere we needed to have that collaboration, working together and the district gave buildings some autonomy in deciding how they would collaborate” (Joan, 1:2).

Teachers in the CFG were aware of the district's goals for collaboration and while Durham has no formal mission statement, they did spend time each year at their August retreat constructing school norms which are posted in the building. Teachers interviewed felt that the CFGs were a good match for the norms and the “mission” of the school because they encouraged the kind of collaboration and teaming that was a goal. Carol noted that the mission is:

“kind of an underlying one since I have been here...there has been a message that gets out regularly that we want to be together, we want to work together and help each other, we want to have time to spend together collaborating and thinking and doing the best we can for our kids” (Carol, 1:3).

Gigi, who has taught on and off at Durham for the past seven years and was a parent at the school for ten years before that corroborates this.

“It does fit in with mission of school because it deals with fact that we as educators always need to be educating ourselves and this is just another avenue to be learning from our peers for ourselves. ...The CFG supports what we want

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

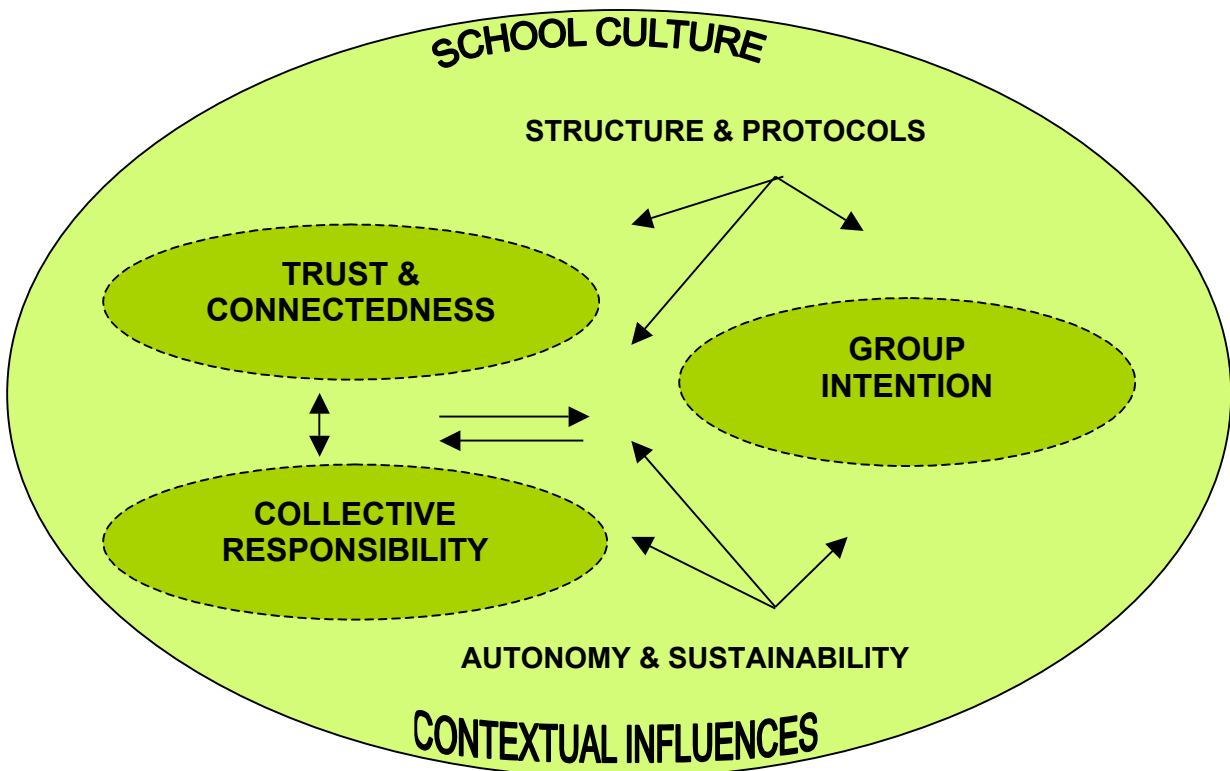
and the atmosphere that we want here at the school, if that makes sense. The way it is formulated you go and look at those norms, this is what we are expected to do, what we want to see happen” (Gigi. 1:2).

The opportunities for collaboration provided by the school have given teachers a forum through which they can make collaboration part of their lived experience. It is important to note at this juncture that a community of practice is not simply another term for a group, team, or network. “What it takes for a community of practice to cohere enough to function can be very subtle and delicate” (Wenger, 1998, p. 74). The necessary components are the mechanisms that make mutual engagement possible.

**Trust and Connectedness: Being a Critical Friend**

When asked about the merits of CFGs or how the CFG has influenced practice, language about trust and support was a consistent theme. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between three dimensions of CFG functioning that influenced this group.

*Figure 2: Dimensions of Functioning and Contextual Influences*



**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

In the purposeful structure of the CFG meetings, trust opened the door to fostering social and intellectual relationships. Trust and collective responsibility exist in a mutually determining relationship to one another. They also influence, and are influenced by, how the group defines their purpose or intention. These dimensions have a direct connection to the manner in which teachers reflect on their practice and on what they choose to focus. In addition, these dimensions developed over time due in part to two important contextual factors: the autonomous way in which the group was formed, and the use of structured protocols which provided a foundation for group functioning. The following sections unpack and integrate these dimensions and contextual influences.

*Dimensions of Functioning**Trust and Connectedness*

David described the nature of his experience in the CFG in a thoughtful yet straightforward manner saying, “I really like the intimacy of our CFG group. I think we are really close and I know what happens in CFG stays in CFG” (David, 1:5). Teachers report that their initial reasons for joining the CFG had to do with social and emotional support. Angela commented that, “In the beginning, the emotional support system was the biggest support for me. ‘Connections’ are most important – we can check in with each other on that level, its important to have that connection” (Angela, 1:3). About ten minutes at the beginning of each meeting is set aside for “connections”, a time when teachers take a few minutes to share anything they wish about their day, their feelings, their lives. The “connections” and team building activities serve to build a context of trusting relationships in which teachers feel comfortable sharing their practice. Gigi echoes this. “I look at them (the CFG members) in a different way – not just as

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
colleagues, but as friends. They want me to be successful – that confidence they have in me, I need that” (Gigi, 1:9).

However, the intimacy and friendship people feel isn't all the group is about.

Carol describes CFGs as

“a place for us to get together and talk about whatever issues we're having in the classroom, whether it's with a student or with a lesson or with a unit or it's also time for us to kind of meet each other on a personal level in a different way through the connections piece. And then, I mean, just to have another place to go to get help when you need it for whatever you need it for” (Carol, 1:6).

The personal connection to someone they work with is what keeps teachers in the group and contributes to conversations about teaching and school.

#### *Collective Responsibility: Looking In and Looking Out*

Another dimension of the group's trusting relationship was the strong sense that responsiveness to other CFG members was crucial, no matter what was being presented during meetings. “Accomplish work – make the work you bring meaningful” was an important group norm (CFG Meeting, October: 1). Carol noted, “You have to be prepared when you are presenting, (its) not just something you throw together because you have to present, and it has to be something that's going to be useful to you” (Carol, 1:4). Carol contributes because she realizes she brings different perspectives to the group.

“I think one of my roles is to participate as much as possible to help out whoever is presenting. If it is a topic that I know a lot about it is definitely time for me to share that with people and also I think that when it was my turn to present, and when I present again, it is my job to bring something that others can really work with and learn from as well” (Carol, 1:4).

When Carol next presented she brought an article about literacy to encourage conversation about Durham's literacy goals. Group members read the article beforehand and discussed it via a text-based protocol (see Appendix B). As a

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

member of the literacy committee, presenting this text enabled Carol to reach out to her CFG and get feedback on reading and writing strategies in the school.

The sense of collective responsibility that emerged was rooted in the CFG's desire to maintain a trusting, connected group, not a collective responsibility for student learning or improving practice. This was revealed in an important dynamic, manifested in teachers' musings about the relevance of CFG issues to larger school-wide problems. David, in pondering the kinds of issues discussed in the CFG wondered,

“... you know of a case study or issues that can be brought to the whole staff. We haven't really done that. ‘Hey how come we never really take anything that comes up here that concerns the whole school?’ Why don't we ever deal with that as a whole school” (David, 1:10)?

David's sentiment was echoed repeatedly by others during the debriefing of protocols: “I wonder sometimes.... we've brought up things that would be good for the whole staff to talk about. How do we get to that level?” (CFG Meeting, March, p. 5). He verbalizes a tension that emerges in CFGs – the desire for those with a common context to make the reflection not about their practice, but about the environment in which they work. “Looking in” was about maintaining a comfortable group dynamic. At the same time there was a tendency to “look out” at school-wide issues. That the group earnestly focused on talking about teaching and school didn't insure inward personal reflection on practice and student work.

However, during the member check of the data, teachers offered another side of this tension. They talked about how there are many things outside their classrooms over which they feel they have no control. They noted that “part of the power of CFGs” is that they can address school-wide dilemmas constructively. This in turn makes them feel they have more control over their work. As Angela noted, it “can free me to focus more on my

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION**

own practice” (Member Check, May: 4). Teachers are speaking to their need to balance personal practice and their relationships to the larger school context, illuminating an interesting paradox. The trust the group cultivated enabled them to talk about teaching in ways they hadn’t before. However, their strong bond as a group may have created a tendency to project CFG work into the larger sociocultural context of the school at the expense of a focus on teacher practice and student work. This dynamic can be unpacked further by looking at the groups’ perception of the intention of CFG work.

*Group Intention: The Purpose of a Reflective Practice*

Looking at what group members brought to CFGs and their conceptions of how one gets feedback on teaching sheds light on the group’s intentions for CFG work. Despite the group’s level of trust and sense of collective responsibility the ways in which group members conceptualize how they might improve their practice was varied. Table 2 shows some of issues teachers brought to the CFG in the past. The topics evoked intense

**Table 2: Issues Brought to the CFG**

<b>Carol</b>	<b>David</b>	<b>Gigi</b>	<b>Angela</b>	<b>Other Members</b>
Text on literacy	Social studies unit	Expanding math activities	Reading groups	Student behavior and role of counselor
Organizing reading groups	Case regarding mentor relationship with colleague	Tutoring program	Strategies for what do when kids finish work early & utilizing assistants	Role of para-educators
		School wide issue on IEP procedures		
		Kindergarten visit days	Social studies unit plan	

and thoughtful conversation during the meetings, and student performance was discussed, but few are specifically about student work. After a discussion about the role of para-educators in the school someone asked Melanie, “So as a CFG coach would you like this

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

to be raised (with the) staff? The whole purpose of the CFG is to make it relevant to the school not just to our group and we haven't done a very good job of that" (CFG Meeting, March, p. 8). Others chimed in, heads nodding. Topics tend to focus on organizational aspects of teaching such as structuring reading groups, a tutoring program, or effectively working with assistants as well as larger school issues. Conversations are student centered, but also contain a strong, all school tone.

Teacher's comments about getting feedback on their teaching added another piece to the puzzle. During interviews participants were asked about how they get feedback on teaching and how they might improve their practice or become a better teacher (see Table 3). CFGs were not mentioned. Observation by a principal or supervisor, journaling as part

**Table 3: Teacher Reports of How they Get Feedback on Teaching**

	David	Angela	Carol	Gigi
<b>CFG</b>				
<b>Students</b>			X	
<b>Observing other teachers</b>			X	
<b>Parents</b>			X	X
<b>Para-educators</b>			X	X
<b>Observation by Principal</b>	X	X	X	
<b>Observation by another teacher</b>	X	X	X	
<b>Conversation with teaching partner</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>Journal, planning notes</b>	X	X	X	X

of a professional development endeavor, or conversations with teaching partners and grade level teams were most often mentioned.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

During follow up interviews and the member check of the data, group members noted that during interviews they may have had a “literal” interpretation of teaching when discussing how they get feedback on teaching. Angela said, “My CFG doesn’t see me teach, yet I do get feedback from them based on what I choose to share” (Angela, 4:1). Another teacher noted, “CFG is the one area where I find out most specifically what’s happening in other classrooms” (Member Check, 8).

For these teachers the idea of getting feedback on one’s teaching is closely aligned with observation of their work by someone else. However, how and when peer observation occurs varies and there were varying levels of readiness in the group for such an endeavor. Carol felt very comfortable with observing and being observed. She commented “It is so powerful to see what other people are doing...Also having other teachers observe me, critiquing me, and giving me real feedback” (Carol 1:6). She did not mind when others come to her room but acknowledged it would take time to get to the stage where people observed her and gave her critical feedback. “I can foresee that CFG would be a place where I would go after I’ve been with them a little bit longer and say, ‘Hey, could you come watch me?’” (Carol 2:11). Carol readily asserted that the observing which teachers are now doing at Durham is more for the person observing than it is for the person being observed. The CFG model includes a peer observation component which the group was just beginning to explore after their principal wrote a grant to get release time and substitutes for them to observe. Being observed by peers for the purpose of changing instructional practice is a step that can be challenging even for a group with a high level of trust.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

How teachers define the purpose of the CFG with respect to improving teaching seems a key variable in the kinds of conversations teachers have and what they do to promote them. While teachers ultimately did see the CFG as a place to get feedback, it was the idea of a collaborative support network that initially brought group members to the table. That almost all of Durham's teachers gravitated toward CFGs says something about their need for the kind of collaboration that is steeped in collegiality and meaningful conversations about teaching and school.

Is the intention of the CFG to provide a trusting, collaborative support network, or to form a group whose intention it is to focus on student work and improving practice via the establishment of a trusting peer group? The distinction is an important one and was verbalized by the coaches and some group members as they commented on the purpose of their group and wondered why they weren't focusing more on practice. Alisa noted that "CFG has help most in planning. We haven't gotten into best practice, engaging students" (Alisa 2:2). David "I think conceptually this (CFG work) is supposed to help you become a better teacher...but I don't think we have emphasized asking tough questions about yourself and what you want to improve about your teaching" (David 2:7). He described some of the issues brought to CFG as "more generic" or "systemic not personal".

The dimensions of group functioning therefore present a bit of a paradox. A sense of connectedness brought the group together to talk about teaching in new ways, but takes time to develop. Carol spoke to the time it takes to develop in a community of practice "I think its something that it going to evolve for me personally as to how much it impacts me" (Carol 2:15). Feelings of collective responsibility for the group as a

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

community and its collaborative process tended to steer the group away from deep reflection on personal practice and contributed to lack of explicit focus on student work. However, it is important to acknowledge that this group had sustained conversations about teaching and school for over three years. As a group functioning from a place of strength and trust, they seemed poised to take another step in their CFG work. Their principal had recently obtained grant money so teachers could get release time to observe each other and use CFG protocols to debrief observations. Whether or not they could take the steps toward critical talk about student work and practice seemed dependent upon the contextual influences in which the group functioned.

*Contextual Influences: Foundations for Group Functioning*

The trust that emerged in the group and was talked about so prominently did not occur in a vacuum. Rather it was the result of powerful sociocultural catalysts (See Figure 2). First the way in which larger school context set the stage for the formation of CFGs at Durham provided a sense of autonomy that allowed the group to grow over time. Second, the protocols provided the group with a concrete tool which purposefully structured conversations and built trust in the group. The balance between autonomy and structure proved to be an important foundation in the life of this group.

*Autonomy and Sustainability: Supporting Reflective Practice*

The way in which the district gave teachers choice in their collaborative endeavors and in terms of scheduling, release time, membership, presentation, ownership, coach training, and funding for observation supported the group over time without overwhelming the teachers' intentions and goals for themselves. The grass roots, bottom up implementation of CFGs is very much in keeping with the original intentions of the

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
process. Gene Thompson-Grove, NSRF Co-Director, noted that “people have transformative experiences in the (training) seminars – and it takes off from there” (personal communication, March 12, 2005). At Durham, teachers routinely comment on the powerful experiences they have in CFGs compared with informal interactions with colleagues or formal interactions in other team and committee meetings. Angela, who serves on several committees and teams at Durham points out that

“the big difference with those teams and CFG is that our principal determines the agenda for all of that. You just don't feel the same freedom and you have that whole tread softly attitude about certain issues when your supervisor is right there and it doesn't have anything to do with her in particular so much as it's just she's a supervisor” (Angela, 3:2).

The teachers in this study all noted the importance of the CFG setting their own agenda independent of other things going on in the school.

This autonomy stems from and adds to the bondedness of the group. It also has its merits and challenges in relation to the developmental aspects of how a CFG might focus its attention. The autonomy teachers experience in the groups draws them to the work of CFGs. However, Melanie, a CFG coach commented that “there are stages to how groups progress and a limit to how deep groups can go....it seems hard to get to the stage where people observe each other” (Melanie, 1:4). The ultimate charge of the district, to get teachers to collaborate was successful. However the focus on improving teaching and learning was not explicit in the charge. The group openly discussed their desire to “go deeper” into looking at practice with the understanding there was more work to be done. This indicated a healthy tension between the directives from the district and school administration, and the agendas of the CFG members.

### *Structure and Protocols: A Common Language*

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

The CFG model relies on use of structured protocols, with specific language that can guide the speaker's voice and the responses of others. The protocols are tools which inspire a unique social dialect leading to the development of concepts of reflective practice. The vernacular of the protocols is a vehicle which serves to bond the group and to help them reflect on their practice. From Gigi: "The relationship with people - I credit CFG with that. I feel more comfortable with people, knowing people who are in CFGs. They understand deep reflection. We have a common language" (Gigi, 1:2). (See Appendix B for an example and explanation of protocols.)

While the protocols give teachers a way to focus on the topic at hand, they also challenge them to participate in ways that might not have transpired without a social language. For example, once comfortable with the chalk talk format, group members jump right in, ready to communicate in the silent "talk" in ways they wouldn't have otherwise (See Appendix B). During a chalk talk group members respond in writing, without speaking to each other, to questions written on butcher paper. In one presentation Gigi posed three questions about how to structure a tutoring program she was running. In another, a para-educator presented two questions regarding the role of the para-educators at Durham. In each case, group members were visibly eager to get to the writing part, pens at the ready, and spent the requisite 20 minutes quietly yet enthusiastically writing, filling each sheet of butcher paper with their multi-colored commentary. Exclamation points and arrows stood in for the verbal interjections and dynamics that occur orally and are more time consuming. Comments during the protocol debrief included "It made me think and look at what someone wrote before I (wrote)." "I get more doing it this way – in 20 minutes I got more down." "This is a good way to get

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**  
information.” (CFG Meeting, October, p. 4). In the end those who posed questions had a wealth of information to take with them and the rest of the group expressed a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment regarding the process.

Teachers also learn how to move from simply giving advice to a deeper focus on inquiry. Part of the process involves presenters coming up with specific questions for the group to frame their presentation. Often the group asks clarifying questions which glean more information about surface details and probing questions which allow for deeper thinking. The structure of the protocols demands that group members take responsibility for how they participate. This in turn breeds the trust that allows group members to bring important issues to the table.

In the following example (during a debrief of a tuning protocol Angela used to help develop children’s thinking skills and formative assessment for a social studies unit), the teachers comment on the use of the protocol.

David: “I love the tuning protocol because when you go over a unit, no matter how well constructed it is, we get lost in the details, we lose the kids.”

Angela: “I was so lost in the details I didn’t have the big picture. As a teacher we get caught in details, the “zoom”? ...“I think I was focused on reading strategies, not thinking strategies.”  
(CFG Meeting, February, p. 6).

Later in an interview Angela expands on this:

“I planned this unit a long time ago without thinking about where kids would go. Now I need to think, is this going to be evidence for those things I am supposed to be meeting standard on? Right after I bring something to CFG I am thinking about it even more....that’s the intensity of presenting yourself.”

“..the scaffolding part, the planning to practice and the tools to figure it out – (it helps me) to compare to what kids were doing in the past.”

(Angela, 2:2).

Angela’s comments about the intensity of presenting her issue and gaining the tools to figure out how to look at the big picture of her unit illustrate how use of specific tools help internalize a new way of looking at her work.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

The protocols provide norms which seem to transcend the limiting etiquette of some staff meetings. Having established trust via connections and other team building activities, teachers share in the running of the meetings and adhere to group developed norms. Group members share roles such as time keeper and norm watcher in order to help the presentations stay on track. As a result, people are conscious of air time, sticking to the task at hand, and effectively channeling and addressing new issues that come up. However, the ideal of sticking to the protocol is not always realized. During group meetings teachers joked with each other about their habit of “breaking protocol” and group members formally and informally reminded each other of the CFG etiquette. Carol observed that

“it can be good and bad because (when we meet) after school, we're ready to just kind of sit and chat with each other and have conversations but, at the same time, we may not be as thoughtful and get through the process and give the same kind of feedback as we would with somebody who just is like the protocol police”  
(Carol, 2:18).

However, even the knowledge that they were not always “in protocol” reflected the intimacy of the group. They easily moved in and out of protocol, between formal and informal talk, using the protocols in conjunction with the level of connectedness and trust they had established.

**Conclusion: Mechanisms for Change and Sustainability*****Trust, Connectedness and Development***

The story of this group can be seen as one of development, where building trust emerged as an important mechanism that helped teachers talk about teaching and school in ways they hadn't before experienced. What are teachers developing toward? Where are their experiences in the CFG leading them? A sense of trust along with individual and group belongingness brings with it a certain power as group members work to define who

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

they are as a community of practice. “The kind of coherence that transforms mutual engagement into a community of practice requires work” (Wenger, 1998, p.74). This group had worked hard from the beginning to establish itself and there was more work to be done.

Development from a Vygotskian perspective holds that scaffolding and support coexist with the autonomy and discovery necessary for meaningful learning. In looking at the relationship between shared practice and individual learning, Vygotsky’s premise that learning occurs on two planes, one interpersonal and the other intrapersonal, helps to explain the importance of recognizing and providing for individual and community growth in professional development for teachers (Adger, Hoyle & Dickinson, 2004; Edwards, 1995). For this CFG the dimensions of functioning developed to where they sustained a course which began to link the individual and the sociocultural contexts of the CFG group and the school.

*Collective Responsibility*

Group and individual notions of collective responsibility played a key part for the functioning of this group. Many CFG participants used the word confidence indicate their comfort with group members with whom they built trusting relationships. This confidence also created a dynamic where teachers felt a need to examine issues beyond their classroom doors.

Important here is the mutually determining relationship between individuals, the various contexts in which they operate, and the time it takes for a group to truly balance individual and group growth. “Over time, group learning can lead to the creation of collective knowledge and a community culture in which the goal is to create public

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

understanding of ideas and phenomena” (Weinbaum, et al, 2004, p. 12). Achieving this balance takes time, support, and a clear intention for the group. While theory tells us that learning is most effective in a social context, in schools we have drawn lines which have isolated development artificially (Rogoff, 2003; Weinbaum et al, 2004). For many teachers intentional, close analysis of one’s teaching is a new and unfamiliar enterprise. In a community of practice such as a CFG teachers begin to blur the lines between individual and collective experiences. Such endeavors do not intend to lose the individual, but rather enhance one’s development in relation to the growth of the organization and the self. Teachers at Durham blurred the lines by looking at practice and engaging with social forces ordinarily beyond their immediate control, applying their experiences to the larger school context.

*Intention*

Teachers’ perceptions about the intention or purpose for the CFG were developing. Teachers tended to equate getting feedback on teaching with observation, usually by a supervisor. In addition, they felt that the CFG was a way for them to find out what was going on in other classrooms. They were adamant that the CFG was a forum for feedback on issues they brought to the group even though they were not regularly engaging in conversations around student work or participating in peer observations.

This is an important distinction; recent studies show that teachers who spend the majority of their time analyzing student work were associated with changes in teacher thinking and improvement in student work (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Nave, 2000). Discussions about student work and conversations based on peer observation will have a

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

different tone than those about school-wide issues, texts, and unit plans. Both are important to teacher development and rely upon a foundation of trust and connectedness.

However, trust alone does not guarantee a strong focus on the aspects of practice that might come to the surface via examining student work and peer observation. There must be explicit norms which focus group intention on the critical examination of practice and student work. After three years this group was just beginning to use peer observation protocols to look at each other's practice. This also speaks to the time it takes to develop a trusting environment in which observation in the context of a CFG can become a primary form of feedback, breaking down what Lortie (1975) refers to as well established norms for how teachers interact.

*Autonomy and Sustainability*

In the case of this Puget Sound district, the CFGs had a certain staying power, many now in their third year and going strong. Choice of collaborative endeavors combined with district and building support of these autonomous groups has cultivated groups who want to keep working together. Their sense of common purpose and autonomy gave teachers the feeling Rosenholtz refers to as, "making things happen with intentional striving" (1989, p. 423). This reduced the revolving door of short term and expensive professional development offerings.

Indeed, both the coach/professional development coordinator, and Durham's principal mention the reason collaboration has been a mainstay of their school improvement plan (which they had in place before and after No Child Left Behind), is that it is a very inexpensive form of professional development. Initial implementation and ongoing costs are relatively low. As Little, (1999) asserts, perhaps one of the most

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

powerful and least costly forms of teacher learning is “the systematic, sustained study of student work, coupled with individual and collective efforts to figure out how that work results from the practices and choices of teaching” ( p. 235). The coaches and principal at Durham meet regularly to debrief about school goals and climate while teachers maintain autonomy over CFG agendas. Durham seems to have a healthy tension between the top down, bottom up dynamic of CFG sustainability.

*Protocols*

Critical Friends Groups use of specific protocols with specific language hold promise for the process of mediated reflection within a community of practice. These protocol based experiences embody a model of reflective practice in which teachers can anchor their work. In Bakhtin’s view, claims Wertsch (1991), “a speaker always invokes a social language in producing an utterance, and this social language shapes what the speakers individual voice can say” (p. 59). For example, the delineation between clarifying and probing questions can help participants distinguish between conversation that gets at surface details and prompts which get at someone’s deeper thought structures. Angela and David’s comments about “being lost in the details” are directly related to the use of the protocol and what it gave voice to during the meeting. In addition, a speakers’ voice is shaped during times when the group discusses the presenter’s issue and the presenter remains silent. In this way the presenter gets to hear his or her voice through the voices of others, gaining an outside perspective. The protocols provide structures, norms, and patterns of behavior which take place on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. These structures are an important part of the cultural context in which reflection takes place.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION***Mechanisms for Change*

Kadel-Taras (1998), in conversations with teachers about their practice and the changes they make in their work found that in order for change to happen teachers need to feel a sense of power or efficacy in their work. Kadel-Taras defines efficacy as “teachers’ beliefs that they have the power to change what they perceive as problematic” and “that efforts toward improvement were worth it” (1998, p. 149). While reflective practice can be a personal and often private endeavor, the ability to sustain such a practice over time may extend beyond individual pursuits.

“On one hand it is the power to belong, to be a certain person, to claim a place with the legitimacy of membership; on the other it is the vulnerability of belonging to, identifying with, and being part of some communities that contribute to defining who we are and thus have a hold on us (Wenger, 1998, p. 207).

When Angela and others voiced their need to address school issues as well as personal practice in order to feel more control over their work, they spoke to the need for teachers to feel empowered about what they do. For this CFG, the dimensions of functioning such as trust, collective responsibility, and perceived intention acted as mechanisms to empower teachers to engage colleagues in new ways and sustain the work of the group. However, a tension was created as teachers attempted to shift the focus from systemic school-wide issues to personal practice. Is getting to critical feedback based on peer observation and examination of student work dependent on a group’s developmental readiness? Is it a matter of good facilitation and leadership as the group gains more experience? Is collaboration without critical reflection on practice “good enough”?

There was a need for explicit direction in terms of maintaining a balance between looking outward to influencing the larger context in which one works, and looking inward at changing practice. “The isolating and isolated practice of teaching has rendered

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

teaching invisible and by extension we assume that our own learning processes are invisible.....as opposed to making learning processes visible in order to better understand how we construct knowledge and how we can influence that process” (Harvard Project Zero, 2003, p. 10). This group was engaged in the process of making learning visible via their CFG. In addition, teachers were supported overtly and behind the scenes by their district, the principal, and the coaches. By offering CFGs as an option for collaboration and letting teachers and coaches define group norms and set agendas, the school allowed groups to blossom from the ground up. The principal’s efforts to get a grant for teachers to observe in each other’s classrooms and use CFG protocols to reflect on these observations provides the kind of continued scaffolding a group such as this – a group poised for new endeavors - might need to develop their reflection skills in a more complex way. However, from this study it appears that critical reflection on practice cannot be developed by trust, collective responsibility, autonomy, and structured protocols alone. There is a distinction between developing collaborative culture, versus critical reflection on practice as the common enterprise.

An avenue for future research would involve following this group as they experience peer observation. The work sustains some limitations in its examination of one group in one school. While the data are rich, comparing the experiences of individuals across multiple groups and school contexts would provide a stronger foundation for examining the mechanisms that trigger and sustain reflective practice. In particular, applying this research to pre-service populations engaged in reflective practice within communities of practice would garner important information about how we train teachers. Helping new teachers to enter the field with some of the CFG repertoire in hand

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

might assist in the development of communities of practice in an intentional way – getting to the riskier elements of the work more quickly.

Teaching is an endeavor that changes over time. It changes because teachers change, because their students' change each year, and because the demands of outside forces change. Deborah Meier (1995) asserts that in order to create the kinds of change that will transform America's schools, teachers will have to "change how they view learning itself, develop new habits of mind to go with their new cognitive understanding, and simultaneously develop new habits of work" (p. 140). The CFG provides a structure which allows teachers to develop intimate personal relationships over time. In addition, the CFG as a community of practice provides teachers with the repertoire, tools, and shared experience in which teachers can reflect on their practice and the practice of others. This has promise for helping teachers overcome the isolation of their classrooms gain exposure to the kind of work Meier envisions. However, teachers will also have to expose their teaching to each other and make their practice more visible in order to effect change. The dimensions of functioning in tandem with a level of group autonomy and protocol use are vital mechanisms for change and sustainability. They are also part of the process of developing communities of practice where individuals and groups can cultivate a critical reflective practice.

DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION

**Bibliography**

- Adger, C.T., Hoyle, S. M. & Dickinson, D.K. (2004). Locating learning in in-service education for preschool teachers. *American Educational Research Journal* Winter, Vol. 41, No. 4 pp. 867-900.
- Anderson, R.K. & Hudson, J. S. (2002). Critical Friends Groups: Collaborative inquiry for life-long learning. Seattle, WA: HudAnderson Enterprises.
- Barth, R. (1990) *Improving schools from within: Teachers, parents and principals can make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. (McGee, V.W., Trans.) Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Blythe, T., Allen, D. & Barbara, S. (1999). *Looking together at student work*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bransford, J. (2000). *How People Learn*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- Cheyne, J.A. & Tarulli, D. *Dialogue, difference, and the "third voice" in the zone of proximal development*.  
[www.webpages.charter.net/schmolze1/Vygotsky/bakhtin.html](http://www.webpages.charter.net/schmolze1/Vygotsky/bakhtin.html)
- Cochran-Smith, M. & Lytle, S.L. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. In A. Iran-Nejad & C.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Review of Research in Education* (Vol. 24, pp. 249-305). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Dewey J. (1974). *John Dewey on education: Selected writings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dunne, F., Nave, B., & Lewis, A. (2000). Critical friends groups: Teachers helping teachers to improve student learning. *Phi Delta Kappa Center for Evaluation, Development and research* 28, December 1-7.  
[www.pdkintl.org/edres/resbul28.htm](http://www.pdkintl.org/edres/resbul28.htm)
- Edwards, A. (1995). Teacher education: Partnerships in pedagogy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 11(6), 595-610.
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R.I., & Shaw, L.L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research on teaching. In M. Wittrock (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. New York: MacMillan.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

- Finnan, C. R., Knapp, M. S., & Wineberg, S.S. (1989). *An ecumenical approach to qualitative research methods in education*. Paper presented at American educational Research Association Annual Meeting. March. San Francisco.
- Gee, J.P. (1996). Vygotsky and current debates in education: Some dilemmas as afterthoughts to discourse, learning, and schooling. In D. Hicks (Ed). *Discourse, Learning, and Schooling*. New York, : Cambridge University Press.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers*. New York: Longman.
- Jay, J. (2003). *Quality teaching: Reflection as the heart of practice*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Harvard Project Zero (2003) *Making teaching visible: Documenting individual and group learning as professional development*. Making Learning Visible Monographs.
- Korthagen, F. & Russell, T. (1999) *Building teacher education on what we know about teacher development*. Paper presented at the AERA Annual Meeting, April 1999, Montreal Canada. pp. 1-14.
- Lee, V.E. & Smith, J. (1996). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement and engagement for early secondary school students. *American Journal of Education* 104 (2), 103-147.
- Little, J.W. (1999). Organizing school for teacher learning. In L. Darling-Hammond & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 233-262). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Miles, M.B. & Huberman, A. M. (1994.) *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Moll, L.C. & Greenberg, J. B. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L.C. Moll (Ed.), *Vygotsky and education: Instructional implications and applications of sociohistorical psychology* (pp. 319-348). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nave, B. (2000). *Critical friends groups: Their impact on students, teachers, and schools*. Bloomington, IN: Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

- Osterman, K. (1990) *Reflective practice: A new agenda for education*. Education and Urban Society. 22(2), 133-152.
- Patton, M. Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rappaport, R.A. (1989). Desecrating the holy woman: Derek Freeman's attack on Margaret Mead. *American Scholar*, 5, 313-347.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). Workplace conditions that affect teacher quality and commitment: Implications for teacher induction programs. *The Elementary School Journal* 89 (4), 420-439.
- Schon, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: Professionals in action*. New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers.
- Simon M. & Tzur R. (1999). Explicating the teacher's perspective from the researchers' perspective: Generating accounts of mathematics teachers' practice. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, 30, 252-264.
- Smagorinsky, P., Cook, L.S., & Johnson, T. S. (2003). The twisting path of concept development in learning to teach. *Teachers College Record* 105(8) October, 1399-1436.
- Stake, R.E.(1995). The unique case. In *The art of case study research, Ch. 1.*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Tyack, D. and Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering Towards Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky. L.S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Weinbaum, A., Allen, D., Blythe, T., Simon, K. & Seidel, S. (2004). *Teaching as inquiry: Asking the hard questions to improve practice and student achievement*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

Wertsch, J.V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of the mind*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991). *Voices of the Mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zeichner, K. M. and Liston, D. P. (1996). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

<b>Appendix A</b>	Timeline of the Critical Friends Movement
Mid 1980s	Idea of “National Faculty” emerges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1984, Ted Sizer, Horace’s Compromise, CES begins</li> <li>• Joint effort between Educational Commission of States and Coalition of Essential Schools</li> <li>• Disseminates CES philosophy with an “in the schoolhouse” program</li> <li>• Consultants facilitate bottom up reform downstream</li> <li>• TREK Summer Institutes for CES schools</li> <li>• protocols begin to be developed to facilitate team visits</li> </ul>
1990-1995	Citibank Grant to Coalition of Essential Schools, initially for 3 years, extended to 5 years
1992	Formal trial run of Tuning Protocol
1993	Annenberg Institute for School Reform established at Brown University <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CES housed here, funded through AISR</li> </ul>
1995	NSRF formally developed at AISR
1998	NSRF and CES become separate entities, yet share philosophical beliefs and training resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CES now based in Oakland, California</li> </ul>
2000	NSRF disseminated through the Harmony School in Bloomington Indiana, an independent non profit school which provides 501c3 status and a hub for the training support network

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION****Appendix B: Tuning Protocol – History and Sample***Tuning Protocol: Overview*

---

The following description is excerpted, with slight adaptations, from  
*Looking Together at Student Work* by Tina Blythe, David Allen, and Barbara S. Powell  
(New York: Teachers College Press, 1999)

The tuning protocol was originally developed as a means for the five high schools in the Coalition of Essential School's Exhibitions Project to receive feedback and fine-tune their developing student assessment systems, including exhibitions, portfolios and design projects. Recognizing the complexities involved in developing new forms of assessment, the project staff developed a facilitated process to support educators in sharing their students' work and, with colleagues, reflecting upon the lessons that are embedded there. This collaborative reflection helps educators to design and refine their assessment systems, as well as to support higher quality student performance. Since its trial run in 1992, the Tuning Protocol has been widely used and adapted for professional development purpose in and among schools across the country.

To take part in the Tuning Protocol, educators bring samples of their students' work on paper and, whenever possible, on video, as well as some of the materials they have created to support student performance, such as assignment descriptions and scoring rubrics. In a circle of about six to ten "critical friends" (usually other educators), a facilitator guides the group through the process and keeps time. The presenting educator, or team of educators, describes the context for the student work (the task or project) - uninterrupted by questions or comments from participants.

Often the presenter begins with a focusing question or area about which she would especially welcome feedback, for example, "Are you seeing evidence of persuasive writing in the students' work?" Participants have time to examine the student work and ask clarifying questions. Then, with the presenter listening but silent, participants offer warm and cool feedback - both supportive and challenging. Presenters often frame their feedback as a question, for example, "How might the project be different if students chose their research topics?"

After this feedback is offered, the presenter has the opportunity, again uninterrupted, to reflect on the feedback and address any comments or questions she chooses. Time is reserved for debriefing the experience. Both presenting and participating educators have found the tuning experience to be a powerful stimulus for encouraging reflection on their practice.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION****Appendix B, Continued: Tuning Protocol**

Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen

1. Introduction — 5 minutes
  - Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule
  - Participants briefly introduce themselves (if necessary)
2. Presentation — 15 minutes

The presenter has an opportunity to share the context for the student work:

  - Information about the students and/or the class — what the students tend to be like, where they are in school, where they are in the year
  - Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
  - Student learning goals or standards that inform the work
  - Samples of student work — photocopies of work, video clips, etc. — with student names removed
  - Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.
  - Focusing question for feedback
  - Participants are silent; no questions are entertained at this time.
3. Clarifying Questions — 5 minutes
  - Participants have an opportunity to ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation that they feel would help them to understand the context for the student work. Clarifying questions are matters of “fact.”
  - The facilitator should be sure to limit the questions to those that are “clarifying,” judging which questions more properly belong in the warm/cool feedback section.
4. Examination of Student Work Samples — 15 minutes
  - Participants look closely at the work, taking notes on where it seems to be in tune with the stated goals, and where there might be a problem. Participants focus particularly on the presenter’s focusing question.
  - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.
5. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback — 2-3 minutes
  - Participants take a couple of minutes to reflect on what they would like to contribute to the feedback session.
  - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.
6. Warm and Cool Feedback — 15 minutes
  - Participants share feedback with each other while the presenter is silent. The feedback generally begins with a few minutes of warm feedback, moves on to a few minutes of cool feedback (sometimes phrased in the form of reflective questions), and then moves back and forth between warm and cool feedback.
  - Warm feedback may include comments about how the work presented seems to meet the desired goals; cool feedback may include possible “disconnects,” gaps, or problems. Often participants offer ideas or suggestions for strengthening the work presented.
  - The facilitator may need to remind participants of the presenter's focusing question, which should be posted for all to see.
  - Presenter is silent and takes notes.
7. Reflection — 5 minutes
  - Presenter speaks to those comments/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent.
  - This is not a time to defend oneself, but is instead a time for the presenter to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed particularly interesting.
  - Facilitator may intervene to focus, clarify, etc.
8. Debrief — 5 minutes - Facilitator-led discussion of this tuning experience

DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION

*Appendix B, continued*

Text-Based Seminar

From HSEC/NSRF Winter Meeting, 2000

---

## Guidelines

### Purpose

Enlargement of understanding of a text, not the achievement of some particular understanding.

## Ground Rules

1. Listen actively.
2. Build on what others say.
3. Don't step on others' talk. Silences and pauses are OK.
4. Let the conversation flow as much as possible without raising hands or using a speaker's list.
5. Make the assumptions underlying your comments explicit to others.
6. Emphasize clarification, amplification, and implications of ideas.
7. Watch your own air time – both in terms of how often you speak, and in terms of how much you say when you speak.
8. Refer to the text; challenge others to go to the text.

## Notes to Facilitators

Text-Based Seminars can be remarkably engaging and productive for both students and adults. A Text-Based Seminar facilitator has two primary tasks: posing the framing question and keeping the group focused without pushing any particular agenda.

Facilitating a seminar is not terribly difficult, but it can be challenging. A few tips might make the job easier:

1. Invest time in creating the framing question. It needs to be substantive, clear, relevant to the participants' experience, and likely to push their thinking in new directions. Above all, constructing a response to the question should require close reading of the text. We recommend that the framing question be genuine for everyone, including the facilitator, so that the entire group is engaged in the inquiry. Framing questions are often based on a quote from the text, which begins to establish a pattern of using the document as a basis for the conversation.
2. In addition to the framing question, create a few follow-up questions that seem to raise the level of participants' thinking. If the groups takes off, you may never use them (or you may create new ones that come from the conversation itself), but it's a good idea to have something in your hip pocket, especially if you aren't very experienced at this kind of facilitation.
3. Unless the entire group does Text-Based Seminars routinely, it is useful to go over the purposes and ground rules before you begin. Because so many conversations (in school and out) are based more on opinion than evidence, and aim toward winning the argument

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

rather than constructing new knowledge, it is often important to remind the group of the basics: **work from the text** and **strive to enlarge your understanding**.

4. Give the group time (about 15 minutes) to re-read the text with the framing question in mind.
5. The most common facilitation problems in this kind of seminar come from two kinds of participants: the folks who have to win, and those who want to express opinions independent of the text and will use any quote they can find as a springboard. Usually, a reminder of the ground rules will pull them back, although it is sometimes necessary to redirect the conversation if you are dealing with a particularly insistent “winner.” With the “winner,” asking the group to examine closely the assumptions underneath the arguments or opinions being presented sometimes helps. When someone doesn't stick to the text, it is often helpful to ask the group to look for evidence of the opinion being expressed in the text. What you **don't** want to do is ask these two types of participants a direct question, or ask them to cite the evidence in the text for their opinions (although you might be tempted to do so). The goal is to redirect the conversation away from these folks, not to get them to talk more!
6. It is sometimes useful to keep running notes of the conversation, and to periodically summarize for the group what has been said.
7. It is also sometimes useful (especially if you are nervous) to have a “plant” among the participants – someone who will model ideal participant behavior at an early point in the seminar.
8. It is sometimes useful to keep running notes of the conversation, and to periodically summarize for the group what has been said.
9. As is always the case when facilitating, try to keep the conversation balanced. Don't let one or two people dominate. If there are many quiet people, asking them to speak in pairs for a few minutes on a particular point can sometimes give them an entry into the conversation when you come back to the large group. Sometimes you just have to say, “let's have someone who hasn't said much yet speak,” and then use **lots** of wait time, even though it may feel somewhat uncomfortable to do so.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION*****Appendix B, continued*****Chalk Talk**

Originally developed by Hilton Smith, Foxfire Fund

This version imported from [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org) National School Reform Faculty

---

*Chalk Talk is a silent way to do reflection, generate ideas, check on learning, develop projects or solve problems. It can be used productively with any group—students, faculty, workshop participants, committees. Because it is done completely in silence, it gives groups a change of pace and encourages thoughtful contemplation. It can be an unforgettable experience. Middle Level students absolutely love it—it's the quietest they'll ever be!*

**Format**

Time: Varies according to need; can be from 5 minutes to an hour.

Materials: Chalk board and chalk or paper roll on the wall and markers.

***Process***

1. The facilitator explains VERY BRIEFLY that chalk talk is a silent activity. No one may talk at all and anyone may add to the chalk talk as they please. You can comment on other people's ideas simply by drawing a connecting line to the comment. It can also be very effective to say nothing at all except to put finger to lips in a gesture of silence and simply begin with #2.

2. The facilitator writes a relevant question in a circle on the board.

Sample questions:

- What did you learn today?
- So What? or Now What?
- What do you think about social responsibility and schooling?
- How can we involve the community in the school, and the school in community?
- How can we keep the noise level down in this room?
- What do you want to tell the scheduling committee?
- What do you know about Croatia?
- How are decimals used in the world?

3. The facilitator either hands a piece of chalk to everyone, or places many pieces of chalk at the board and hands several pieces to people at random.

4. People write as they feel moved. There are likely to be long silences—that is natural, so allow plenty of wait time before deciding it is over.

5. How the facilitator chooses to interact with the Chalk Talk influences its outcome. The facilitator can stand back and let it unfold or expand thinking by:

- circling other interesting ideas, thereby inviting comments to broaden
- writing questions about a participant comment
- adding his/her own reflections or ideas
- connecting two interesting ideas/comments together with a line and adding a question mark.

Actively interacting invites participants to do the same kinds of expansions. A Chalk Talk can be an uncomplicated silent reflection or a spirited, but silent, exchange of ideas. It has been known to solve vexing problems, surprise everyone with how much is collectively known about something, get an entire project planned, or give a committee everything it needs to know without any verbal sparring.

6. When it's done, it's done.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION****Appendix C: Interview Protocols for Semi-Structured Interviews****Teacher Interview #1: Following observation of CFG participation – 60 minutes*****Teachers' participation in CFGs & conceptions of reflective practice.***

- The questionnaire asked a bit about how you came to be a teacher, but can you talk a bit more about that? How did you come to teach at this school?
- Let's talk about thinking about your teaching, reflecting on your teaching. When does this happen? Does it happen outside the CFG?
- What do you think the purpose of reflecting on practice might be? What does reflective practice mean to you?
- What led you to participate in this group?
- What has been your role in the CFG?
- If a colleague wanted to join a CFG, what might you tell them about the experience? Merits? Challenges?
- Let's talk a bit specifically about the CFG meeting at which you presented. What preparation did you do for the CFG meeting recently observed?
- In what ways did this meeting meet your expectations given the dilemma or work you presented?
- How do you think you might utilize the feedback or information the group gave you at this meeting?
- In what ways, if at all, has your participation influenced your teaching practice?
- I'd like to shift to talking about CFGs and your school and colleagues. How has your school responded to the establishment of CFGs in your building?
- How do you think the CFGs fit into the vision or mission for this school?
- In what ways, if at all, has your participation affected your interactions and relationships with colleagues, those in and outside of the CFG?
- What other information is important to know in understanding your experiences with reflective practice via the CFG?

**Teacher Interview #2: Following observation of teaching – 60 minutes*****Teachers' conceptions of their own practice. In what ways are teachers' conceptions about their practice influenced by CFG participation? In what ways might participation in a CFG manifest itself in teacher practice?***

- How was or wasn't this teaching episode typical of your usual teaching practice, teaching day?
- Describe how you usually prepare for teaching. Do you do this alone, with a peer, what are your influences?
- How did you go about planning for this teaching episode?
- How does your work with the CFG impact your planning and thinking about teaching, if at all?
- In what ways has the CFG influenced your teaching in general?
- What are your biggest challenges related to improving your instruction?
- Where do you find support for addressing those challenges?
- If there are changes to be made in your practice, what barriers might you encounter?
- What kinds of feedback do you receive on your teaching? In what form? From whom?
- What impact do you think your participation in the CFG might have on your students?
- How does the work you do in other teams, school meeting, compare with the work you do in CFGs?
- What other information is important to know in understanding how you teach?

**Facilitator Interview – 45 minutes**

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION**

- Describe what the term reflective practice means to you. What is its purpose? (integrate into the interview when opportunity arises)
- How did CFG's come to be a part of professional development in this district, in this school?
- What led you to participate in the CFG process, in this group?
- If a colleague wanted to join a CFG, what might you tell them about the experience? Merits? Challenges?
- How has the school responded to the establishment of CFGs in this building?
- How do you think the CFGs fit into the vision or mission for this school?
- Question about role as broker, intermediary, foot in school and admin.

**Principal Interview – 45 minutes**

- Describe what the term reflective practice means to you. What is its purpose? (integrate into the interview when opportunity arises)
- How did CFGs come to be a part of professional development in this district, in this school?
- What has your role been in relation to the CFGs at your school?
- If a teacher in your building wanted to join a CFG, what might you tell them about the experience? Merits? Challenges?
- If a fellow principal expressed interest in implementing CFGs in their building, what would you tell them?
- How has your school community responded to the establishment of CFGs in your building?
- How do you think the CFGs fit into the vision or mission for this school?

DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION

## Appendix D: Member Check of Data

### Teachers Talking about Teaching and School: Collaboration and Reflective Practice via Critical Friends Groups

#### Climate Changes: Setting the Stage

Teachers in the CFG are aware of the district's goals for collaboration and while the school has no formal mission statement, teachers do spend time each year at their August retreat reviewing or constructing school norms. Teachers feel CFGs are a good match for the norms and the "mission" of the school because they encourage the kind of collaboration and teaming that was a goal for the school and the district. In looking at the CFG experience, four key ideas emerged.

#### (1) Constructing and Defining a Reflective Practice:

How teachers define reflective practice or what they see as the purpose of collaboration varies. At the same time, there are some key consistencies in how teachers describe their experiences.

*Trust:* When asked about the merits of CFGs or how the CFG has influenced practice, language about intimacy, trust and confidence was a consistent theme. Teachers report their initial reasons for joining the CFG had to do with social and emotional support. The personal connection to someone they work with seems to maintaining social and intellectual relationships. The way in which the structure of the CFG meetings includes time for sharing of personal experiences seems to pave the way for conversations about teaching and school.

*Feedback:* When teachers were asked about how they get feedback on teaching, and how they might improve their practice, CFGs were not prominently mentioned. Observation from a principal or supervisor, journaling as part of a professional development endeavor, or conversations with teaching partners and grade level teams were most often mentioned. For these teachers the idea of getting feedback on one's teaching is closely aligned with observation of their work by someone else. The CFG model includes a peer observation component in which the group is beginning to explore.

#### (2) Autonomy and Sustainability: Top Down and Bottom Up Development

*Administrative Support & Teacher Control:* The district gave schools choice in their collaborative endeavors and schools responded in terms of scheduling, release time, coach training, and funding for observation. Groups were formed and teachers and coaches took it from there. The grass roots, bottom up part of CFGs is very much in keeping with the original intentions of CFG developers. Experiences teachers have in CFGs may give them a sense of autonomy and agency they may not experience in other settings.

*What's the Agenda?:* The teachers noted the importance of setting their own agenda for CFG meetings. This level of autonomy has its merits and challenges in relation to how a CFG might focus its attention. The autonomy teachers experience in the groups draws them to the work of CFGs. However we cannot assume that teachers involved in this work will have a common understanding what it means to think about their practice critically. For now there seems to be a healthy tension between the directives from the district and school administration, and the agendas of the CFG members.

**DRAFT - DO NOT REPRODUCE WITHOUT AUTHOR'S PERMISSION****(3) Collective Responsibility - The “Me” and the “We”(and Them)**

*Responsible and Responsive Participation:* There is a relationship between the kinds of issues teachers bring to CFGs, how they talk about those issues, and how what they bring meets personal needs, the needs of others in the group, and the needs of the larger school context. For example, participants voiced that there are times when the issue presented may or may not be interesting or pertinent. However, there was a strong sense that responsiveness to other CFG members was crucial, no matter what the presentation. This sense of collective responsibility applies to the presenter as well as those giving feedback. Teachers in the CFG feel they have a responsibility to themselves to get as much out of the experience as they can and to contribute as much as they can.

*It's Not Just About Me:* Collective responsibility also emerged in teachers' musings about the relevance of CFG issues to larger school-wide problems. They wondered about a tension that emerges in CFGs – the temptation to make the reflection not about their practice, but about the environment in which they do their work. In this respect, collective responsibility could be seen as distracting teachers from looking at their own practice, but also helps teachers see the world outside their classrooms.

*Do Unto Others:* The trust theme came up again in how group members relate to others in the broader school community. Several teachers in the study mentioned that while they had an increased level of trust with those in the group, it extended to how they wanted to be with and interact with others at their school. The CFG seems to cultivate a sense that one should treat those outside the group with the respect fostered in the group.

**(4) The Power of Protocols**

*Common Language:* The CFG model relies on use of structured protocols which give the group a common language. While the protocols give teachers a way to focus on the topic at hand, they also challenge them, via the language of the protocol, to participate in ways that might not have transpired without a certain structure. For example, the distinction between clarifying and probing questions helps distinguish between conversation that gets at surface detail and conversation that gets at someone's deeper thoughts.

*Protocol Logistics:* Teachers share in the running of the meetings and try to adhere to group norms developed by the group. As a result, people are conscious of air time, sticking to the task at hand, and effectively channeling and addressing new issues that come up. As a result, the protocols can provide structure in which the group can function effectively. It does however, takes time to learn the protocols, use them effectively, and become familiar with the facilitation process. The comfort the group has with each other can also impact how effectively protocols are implemented. Group members have roles in order to help the presentations stay on track and try to stay to the ideal of sticking to the protocol.

*Getting to the Heart of the Matter:* The protocols serve a vital role in quickly answering questions and getting at the meat of an issue. Teachers talked consistently about how effective the protocols are for getting at key issues or getting lots of feedback efficiently – in CFGs and when they saw them used in meetings outside the CFG.