

NSRF: What the Data Base Tells Us

Kevin Fahey
kfahey@salemstate.edu
National School Reform Faculty Annual Research Conference
January 24, 2007
Seattle, Washington

This paper is written with two purposes. The first is to provide a description of the current NSRF data base. The description was written with NSRF researchers in mind and hopes to provide them with a statistical portrait of NSRF work. The second purpose is to begin a conversation among NSRF researchers about how this data base can be built upon to support our scholarship and begin to provide answers to the many important questions that researchers are asking about Critical Friends Groups, Facilitative Leadership and Coaching for Equity.

Three sources of data inform the discussion below. A copy of the current NSRF data base is the source of the statistical portrait. Conversations with Gene Thompson Grove, co-founder of NSRF, are the basis of the discussion of the development of the NSRF data base during the years that it was housed at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Discussions with the current NSRF staff inform the account of the evolution of the data base during the years that it has been located at the Harmony Center.

The current data base was built upon an earlier data base started in 1995 when NSRF was part of the Annenberg Institute. This was a small data base, used mainly as a mailing list and to keep in touch with the original CFG coaches. During the first years, there were few National Facilitators and no Centers of Activity. The data base kept track of the different seminars, clinics and institutes that were sponsored by NSRF. The AISR data base also documented the reform efforts with which new coaches were affiliated, and was, to some degree, connected to the Coalition of Essential Schools data base, which was also located at Brown. The staff of the current NSRF National Center indicates that many, although not all, of the coaches who were trained during the AISR period can be found in the Harmony data base. However, information such as where and when they were trained remains largely unknown. Data about coaches'

affiliation with national reform efforts or rosters from Collaborative Inquiry and Professional Community institutes offered in the AISR period do not appear in the current NSRF data base.

In 2000, NSRF moved from the Annenberg Institute at Brown to the Harmony Educational Center in Bloomington, Indiana. The new NSRF National Staff inherited at least part of the 1995-2000 NSRF data base. It remains unclear how much or what information was lost during the transition. The Harmony National Staff made a sustained effort to not only make sense out of the data base that it had inherited, but also to redesign the data base to reflect the (1) creation of 38 Centers of Activity, (2) a significant increase in numbers of CFG coaches and (3) the emergence of NSRF as a national organization. The current Filemaker data base is more complicated and sophisticated than the one that was begun in 1995 at the AISR.

This short history is very much the story of an evolving organization and changing purposes for its data base. The data base's original purpose was simply to maintain a mailing list and keep track of trained CFG coaches. The data base became more sophisticated after it moved to Harmony where its purpose was to support the administration and development of an expanding national organization. Supporting a research agenda was never a purpose in either of these iterations of the data base. However, over the first decade of NSRF work, it has become increasingly clear that important research questions are being asked about Facilitative Leadership, the connection of CFGs to student learning, and the power of Coaching for Equity. It is the possibility of a broader, research-connected purpose for the NSRF data base that drives this paper's two essential questions: (1) What does the existing data base tell us about NSRF work? and (2) How can the current data base be built upon in order to support a research agenda?

What Does the Data Base Tell Us?

Currently, (as of January 5, 2007) there are 9,702 records in the NSRF data base. The National Staff at Harmony is much more confident about the accuracy of the records created after the move to Harmony in 2000 as compared to the pre-Harmony records. The National Staff suspects that many trained coaches were not included in the AISR data base. For example, I only appeared in the NSRF data base in 2004 although I was trained as a coach in 1997 and had participated in numerous NSRF events during the 1997 – 2000 period. In the current data base, the National Staff has only included in the category of “Coach” (see Appendix 1 for a snapshot of the NSRF Contact layout) those individuals who they could trace to a particular training session or National Facilitator. Using these criteria, 6,806 “Coaches” are identified in the data base. The remaining 2,896 entries are from the AISR data base, and it is unknown where, how or when they were trained. 70% of the 9,702 entries in the data base are from the post 2000, Harmony period, suggesting that this was a period of significant growth for NSRF.

In 2004, a “creation date” field was added to the data base (Appendix 2). The earliest creation date (date that an individual was entered into the NSRF data base) was 9/20/2004; the most recent was 12/19/2006. There are 3,673 (38%) records with creation dates in the current data base. This suggests that 38% of the total of 9,702 NSRF trained CFG coaches have been trained in the two and one half years - since the “creation date” field was added to the data base. This data supports the claim that NSRF, as measured by numbers of trained CFG coaches, continues to grow.

CFG Coaches come from every part of the country. There are trained CFG coaches in 45 states and 6 countries. California has the most with 1,315 coaches followed by Texas (847); Colorado (582); and Washington (587). The following table and chart describe the geographical diversity of NSRF:

Coaches by State:**Coaches by State:**

	Frequency	Percent
State	51	.5
AK	19	.2
AR	9	.1
AZ	131	1.4
CA	1315	13.6
Canada	3	.0
CO	581	6.0
CT	95	1.0
Czech Rep.	1	.0
DC	20	.2
DE	6	.1
FL	316	3.3
GA	216	2.2

HI	125	1.3
IA	3	.0
IL	133	1.4
IN	355	3.7
IO	1	.0
KS	6	.1
KY	14	.1
LA	14	.1
MA	671	6.9
MD	31	.3
ME	193	2.0
MI	219	2.3
MN	8	.1
MO	32	.3
MS	11	.1
MT	51	.5
NC	123	1.3
NH	161	1.7
NJ	165	1.7
NM	189	2.0
NV	47	.5
NY	372	3.8
OH	625	6.5
OK	5	.1
OR	707	7.3
PA	242	2.5
RI	124	1.3
SC	72	.7
South Korea	1	.0
THAILAND	1	.0
TN	226	2.3
TX	847	8.7
Ukraine	1	.0
UT	130	1.3
VA	11	.1
VT	210	2.2
WA	578	6.0
WI	200	2.1
WV	2	.0
WY	11	.1
Total	9681	100.0

The data base also tells us, in a broad way, about the roles of the coaches in their school districts. 757 Coaches – the largest group- identified themselves as teachers; 286 defined

themselves as school administrators and 187 members of this group identified themselves as principals. 107 Coaches identified themselves as Coordinators; 35 as Consultants and 31 as Counselors. 18 Coaches identified themselves as Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents of Schools. However, because of the inconsistent terminology that the Coaches used to describe their roles in their schools, it is reasonable to consider these numbers broad indicators and not exact statistics.

There are 211 National Facilitators in the data base. National Facilitator is a category created in 1995 to identify facilitators who would work through NSRF nationally to train CFG coaches. It is difficult to track how the number of National Facilitators has changed over the years. According to Gene Thompson-Grove, in the spring of 1999, approximately 30 facilitators attended the last National Facilitators meeting held at the AISR. A large majority of AISR/NSRF National Facilitators were at this meeting. Since that meeting, the number of National Facilitators has grown to 211 during the Harmony period.

National Facilitators come from 32 different states. Texas has the most with 19; California has 14; Maine and Pennsylvania each have 13; Colorado, Florida and New Mexico each have 11. The following table and chart describe the geographical diversity of the National Facilitators:

National Facilitators by State:

	Frequency	Percent
State	1	.5
AZ	7	3.3
CA	14	6.6
CO	11	5.2
CT	3	1.4
DC	1	.5
DE	1	.5
FL	11	5.2
GA	3	1.4
HI	2	.9
IL	6	2.8
IN	6	2.8
MA	9	4.3
MD	3	1.4
ME	13	6.2
MI	3	1.4
NC	1	.5
NH	6	2.8
NJ	4	1.9
NM	11	5.2
NV	1	.5
NY	8	3.8
OH	6	2.8
OR	11	5.2
PA	13	6.2
RI	1	.5
SC	1	.5
TN	3	1.4
TX	19	9.0
UT	3	1.4
VT	9	4.3
WA	16	7.6
WI	4	1.9
Total	211	100.0

The National Facilitators are usually associated with one of the 38 Centers of Activity, which were created during the Harmony era and have responsibility for conducting CFG

trainings and related institutes in their areas. The current data base contains little information about the institutes that were offered during the AISR era. There are only 40 (out of 491) records of institute trainings or meetings that took place before 4/18/2004. Most of these early (pre-2000) records were of Winter Meetings or events undertaken in partnership with the Coalition of Essential Schools. In 2004, a system was implemented to track NSRF sponsored events. There are 451 post-2004 trainings in the current data base. However, of these 451 trainings, the data base contains no rosters or other information for 103 (23%) of them. A reasonable assumption is that if this information was available, the number of trained coaches in the data base would increase significantly.

NSRF also maintains a listserv that is made available to Coaches, Principals and National Facilitators. Of the 9,702 identified Coaches, 605 (6%) participate in the NSRF Coaches' listserv. 58 Principals subscribe to the Principals' listserv. 196 of the 208 National Facilitators belong to the National Facilitators' listserv.

In summary, the data describes a true nationally based organization that has enjoyed tremendous growth over the last few years. There is a large cadre of CFG Coaches and National Facilitators who work nationally to sponsor a variety of NSRF institutes and trainings. However, because of the history of the data base and the different purposes for which it has been used as the organization has evolved, it is difficult to provide a detailed analysis of the data. Relevant demographic information about the coaches and their schools has never been collected. In general, the two issues limiting the usefulness of the data base from a research point of view are: (1) the incomplete nature of data inherited from the AISR and (2) the high percentage of missing records (28%) from trainings sponsored by the Centers of Activity.

How Could the NSRF Data Base be Built Upon to Support a Research Agenda?

In general, it can be argued that any data base can support a research agenda only to the extent that there is some clarity about what that research agenda is. It is difficult to think about restructuring the NSRF data base without having at least a broad sense of the types of research questions that NSRF practitioners and scholars are interested in understanding.

Over the years, eleven research related conversations have been held at Winter and National Facilitator Meetings, and at the NSRF Research Conference. The majority of these conversations were facilitated by Carrie Brennan, Gene Thompson-Grove or Kevin Fahey. In order to get an idea of what practitioners and scholars thought an NSRF research agenda might look like, I reviewed all of the notes from these sessions and carried out a broad categorical analysis to surface the questions in which participants seemed most interested. Three broad areas of research questions emerged from this analysis.

The first broad area was connected to student learning. One version of the question could be, “**How is CFG work connected to what and how students learn?**” In every session that was reviewed, participants very clearly stated that any useful research agenda should highlight the connections between CFGs, changes in teachers’ practice, and how and what students learn.

The second broad question might be asked as, “**What are the conditions that support and sustain CFG work?**” In the reviewed sessions, practitioners wanted to know, “What conditions were likely to increase the probability that CFG work will make a difference in teacher practice and student learning? Do principals have to be involved? Does the CFG work have to have a focus? and What kind of training is most effective?” Participants also had questions about sustainability: “How do CFGs deepen their work? Stay focused? Learn and grow? How does the work change? How does rigor increase over time?”

The third question was connected to NSRF's organizational mission around equity. This broad question might be framed as, "**How does CFG work connect to an individual and school wide focus on equitable educational practices?**" Participants wondered about how to sustain an equity focus, what types of coaching were necessary to build equitable practice and what factors support an equity focus. Questions about what it means to have an equity focus and how it could be measured also surfaced.

A research agenda based upon these three broad areas of concern seems to require a very different NSRF data base. In general, because the current data base in all of its iterations has been an administrative rather than a research tool, it has focused on such things as documenting trainings, keeping track of Winter Meetings, and making sure that the NSRF journal is sent to the right people. In general, the data base has attended to CFG coach trainings, which has been the center of NSRF work. The limitation of this focus is that it gives neither practitioners nor researchers any way to determine if trained coaches actually coach, whether their CFGs thrive and for how long, or the extent to which equity is the focus of their work.

The following three recommendations might provide a useful place to begin a larger conversation about rethinking the NSRF data base:

1. Make sure all rosters and agendas from the Centers of Activity are in the data base. It is difficult to build either an effective administrative or research data base when there are no rosters from 23 % of the trainings that the Centers of Activity have sponsored over the last few years.

2. Redesign the annual Centers' Report to collect data (or estimates) about numbers of CFGs that are functioning, who leads them, and the characteristics of the schools and districts in which CFGs exist. If we are to answer some of the research questions listed above, we will need to identify a range of CFGs in a variety of school settings. We will also need to have an idea of

how long they have been functioning and if they have a particular focus. This data can only be provided by the Centers of Activity.

3. Use a statistical sampling method to create a portrait of the thousands of records that were inherited from the AISR. Although it seems impossible to determine how each and every record appeared in the NSRF data base – when the data was entered, who trained the Coach, where were they trained, did they ever coach etc. – it might be possible to at least create a general portrait of how NSRF has grown, and what critical factors influenced that growth.

In summary, the recommendations, summary of research questions and statistical portrait offered above are not meant to be definitive in any way. The intent is to highlight some important research dilemmas that have surfaced and will continue to surface as NSRF expands its work, and, more importantly, to open the door to more conversations.