

UCLA School Management Program

Center of Activity Report – Lisa Manning, Debbi Laidley, Los Angeles, California

This August, 2002, the UCLA School Management Program (UCLA SMP) it reached its two-year anniversary as an NSRF-approved provider of CFG Coaches Institutes in California. During that time, we have organized and facilitated twenty Coaches Institutes attended by approximately 400 teachers, administrators, and district office personnel from the Greater Los Angeles area.

A snapshot of UCLA SMP's larger efforts

In addition to our efforts to work with a broad spectrum of schools and districts in the Greater Los Angeles area, the organization's focus over the 2001-2002 school year has been to provide CFG Coaches Institutes and follow-up workshops to two school districts: Colton Joint Unified School District in San Bernardino County and Los Angeles Unified School District's Local District F.

In Colton, teacher representatives from ten schools, along with seven administrators from the District's Central Office, worked together with us in August 2001 to prepare to become coaches for CFGs with their colleagues. We have organized two follow-up workshops to provide additional support, and the full group meets monthly at the District Offices to discuss successes, challenges and next steps.

In LAUSD Local District F, the superintendent has embraced CFGs as a powerful vehicle for improving student learning. He has provided resources so that each of the district's 63 schools can send a team of four teachers and one administrator to one of thirteen Coaches Institutes we've organized. This opportunity to impact the culture of an entire school district has been an exciting and challenging endeavor! As a result, we are now beginning a comprehensive effort to evaluate and assess the impact of CFG work in District F and plan our next steps.

Challenges

Among the greatest challenges we face as we prepare and support CFG coaches are issues regarding the time and format of the institutes, and the barriers to implementation once coaches have returned to their sites.

A number of educators express frustration with needing to be out of their classrooms for the five-day Coaches Institute. In some instances, coaches have been "selected and sent" to the institute, rather than having volunteered themselves to participate, which adds to their reluctance. In most cases, after a few days of engaging in the protocols and experiencing the power of the learning community, educators value the professional development time. Nevertheless, being away for five consecutive days is a struggle.

In terms of implementation, several coaches have returned to the first follow-up workshop (usually offered three months after the initial institute) without having started a CFG with their colleagues. A variety of factors has been cited for this lack of immediate implementation:

- Time constraints at school sites or district offices.
- Resistance to allowing CFGs to be voluntary, while other teacher collaboration activities are mandatory.
- Concerns about the response of colleagues to the idea of making their practice public.
- A sense of incredible pressure within an atmosphere of increasing focus on high-stakes tests and performance sanctions.

We are exploring ways to offer an increased level of on-site "coaching for coaches" in order to help them maintain their momentum as they leave the five-day Coaches Institutes and enter the implementation stage back at their sites.

Successes

We have learned a lot from each institute and continuously modify and improve our efforts. We're proud of our track record in terms of: honoring the concepts of constructivist, adult



Team building in Los Angeles.

learning; utilizing experiential learning processes and reflection effectively; and providing well-run, professional events.

Each institute provides opportunities for participants to become swiftly and deeply engaged in their own learning, to make connections, pose their own questions and create relevance in the work. Attention is paid to participants' energy levels, their varied learning styles, and to the importance of their developing relationships and creating networks of support. A growing number of our faculty members are now skilled institute facilitators and are members of CFGs themselves. The personal experience each facilitator brings lends a deep sense of credibility to the work and enhances participants' awareness that the facilitators are facing some of the same challenges the school site coaches face.

Additionally, our staff including Program Manager Lisa Manning, has been engaged as learners in the five-day institute. Each staff member brings a personal understanding and value of the work of CFGs, and makes logistical decisions that support the work. Participants comment that for many of them, these institutes have been their most striking experience of

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Looking at Student Work Collaboratively

NSRF and The Looking at Student Work Collaborative are offering a day long “Looking at Student Work” pre-conference to the Coalition of Essential Schools’ Fall Forum.

The practice of looking at samples of student work in collaborative teacher inquiry groups, such as Critical Friends Groups (CFGs), has become a prominent form of professional development. In this session, participants will explore the purposes and principles for looking at student work collaboratively (LASW), as well as engage in some of the practices of LASW. Most of the workshop will be devoted to looking at student work samples that participants themselves bring and present. We will work in

small groups, learning about, using, and reflecting on different “protocols” (e.g. the Tuning Protocol, the Collaborative Assessment Conference, and the Consultancy) to structure the conversations. Groups will be facilitated by experienced NSRF facilitators and members of the national Looking at Student Work Collaborative, which supports schools and teachers in LASW.

This workshop will be offered as day-long session on Thursday, November 14. Capacity is limited, and registration is on a first-come, first-served basis.

What

Looking at Student Work Collaboratively Workshop

When

Thursday, November 14, 2002

Where

Washington, D.C.
Marriott Wardman Park Hotel

Cost

\$145

To Register go to

www.essentialschools.org/pub/ces_docs/fforum/fforum.html

Building Professional Learning Communities

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to share best practices and dilemmas. Whether or not the term CFG is used in training and implementation “models” of the various LA efforts, one can see that the work in LA consistently focus-

es on building the capacity of site principals, teachers, and schools to reflect upon their practices to improve student learning by using the collaborative strategies and tools that folks doing

CFG work have proven to be effective and valuable. ❖

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being treated as a valued professional – some even say it has been their first such experience. ❖

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Information about upcoming Coaches Institutes can also be found on UCLA SMP’s website at www.smp.gseis.ucla.edu.

Documenting Decisions

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and after two more stops and discussions, we juggled three balloons through the entire class six times in a row! We walked in the room, patting each other on our backs, congratulating each other on our efforts. It wasn’t the juggling we were proud of. We were proud that we had become a team that needed each other.

Likewise, as I think of the CFG, I feel great pride in the team we have become. I realize that we are not meeting only every other Monday. We are

meeting much more—in the hallways, on the telephone, or in another’s classroom. I realize that I need the CFG and the community we have built so that I don’t just juggle my concerns. I can tackle them with the help of others.

Because of our efforts to begin documenting the learning surrounding our CFG, we’re beginning to shape a process for embedding teacher action research into the ongoing rituals and routines of our time together. We’ve

made a good start, but we will begin again next year trying to do an even better job of not just making our teaching public - but also our learning. We’re coming to accept that we may never feel as settled or sure, as we’d like to be. We are confident, however, that the stability of our critical friends group will give us the support we need to keep asking the hard questions and not feel so alone in the process. ❖

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