I just finished perusing my most recent educational journals and newspapers. Every one of them—from Kappan, to the newsletter from the New England Middle School Association, to the MASS ASCD publication, to the Journal of Staff Development’s fastback, Tools for Schools—includes articles about collaboration, or about looking at student work, or about reflective practice and facilitative leadership. My reading leaves me wondering what makes our work in NSRF different from the practices described in these publications. If educators were looking for resources to help them begin working on collaborative practices in their schools, why would they call NSRF? More personally, why do I first look to colleagues in NSRF to expand my thinking? Why do I call on NSRF? What makes us different? Let me try out a few ideas.

We believe that we need to hold each other accountable for good work that makes a difference for all students. I think back to the first week of the first year of NSRF’s CFG Coaches Seminar in Providence, RI, when twenty-five of us struggled to figure out what it would look like if we shaped the professional development in our schools around the concept of creating learning communities. On the last day of our seminar, Barb Bleyaert from Michigan said, “It is simple. If I am in a CFG with you, it means that I am as committed to your practice, and to your students, as I am to mine.” Alan Dichter from NYC recently echoed that sentiment at a national NSRF meeting. He said, “What NSRF is about—from our governance structure to the way we work in schools and in CFGs—can be expressed by this statement: I am not here to tell you what to do – but what you do is not ‘none of my business.’” Unlike others who believe that the only viable accountability measures are top down and must include sanctions, we believe that educators can, through critical friendship, hold each other accountable for high quality work. Furthermore, we believe that this is important to do at all levels of the educational system, as well as in all parts of our own organization. It is, I believe, the only way we can truly live our mission statement, and work for educational equity.

We believe that our work is about changing the culture and norms of schools. While others stress using protocols almost as an end in themselves, we know that protocols are only a means to an end. Protocols and the agreements they imply create opportunities for people to develop the norms, habits and skills necessary for creating and sustaining collegial conversations and strong learning communities—communities that are focused on student learning and are characterized by shared values and expectations, joint work, and reflective dialogue. We know that the protocols help us to do authentic work together, no matter what our previous relationship. And in trusting the work, we lay... (continued on page 13)
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Protocols in Practice: It’s Elementary!

Diana Watson, Deb Franzoni and Margaret Taylor, New Hampshire

NSRF Work at the Bernice A. Ray Elementary School

Diana Watson, Deb Franzoni and Margaret Taylor, New Hampshire

Protocols in Practice: It’s Elementary!

Some years ago, the principal of our school went to Philadelphia to attend one of NSRF’s annual conferences. He came back incredibly enthusiastic about something. So enthusiastic, in fact, that he spoke at great length about this incredible work he’d experienced, and how he hoped to incorporate it into our school culture. We, the staff, noted his passion about this thing, this work, but really did not understand at all what he was so excited about.

The next school year 2000-2001, we got a chance to find out. About twelve staff members from our district were trained as CFG coaches. By the end of our training, we were all imbued with the same passionate enthusiasm we had witnessed in our principal upon his return from the Philadelphia conference.

Since then, those of us trained have indeed continued the work. Each of us has applied what we learned in a slightly different way, all with significant results. Here are some reflections on what we are doing at the elementary school level:

Our principal, Bruce Williams, reports about one recent experience in which he was able to use the Peeling the Onion protocol to address a “particularly thorny issue” of special education.

Bruce said, “The protocol uncovered several embedded assumptions that may not have even been consciously held. It also addressed the layers of complexity of the issue in a non-threatening way. It was especially helpful because other people in the meeting were also trained coaches. The people felt the level of understanding about CFG work and the use of protocols is increasing within the staff, and therefore he did not need to use precious time at the meeting to give an introduction to the philosophy behind the use of protocols, nor to garner support for its use. The work is becoming part of our culture.

Deb Franzoni is a trained coach, and one of the physical education teachers at our school. She writes:

Two years ago, as an alternative to the traditional evaluative process (an administrator visiting our classrooms and writing an annual evaluation based on the visits), the “Specials” at our elementary school

formed a CFG.

Since the beginning we have had many memorable sessions. One of my personal favorites was a presentation of a piece of artwork created by a second-grade student. The art teacher placed the piece on a middle of the table and asked us to tell her what we saw. The art teacher does not like to critically judge student work. One of a young age, hoping to encourage the enthusiastic flow and growth of personal creativity, but she was wondering if, with this child’s work, she should be more critical, since his looked so, well, unique, when placed beside the others on the wall.

Using the Collaborative Assessment Conference, she set to work. She told us nothing about the assignment. After an hour (and we could have continued) the art teacher was amazed. The teachers at the table had figured out the assignment from the piece in front of them and had pointed out, throughout the many configurations on the paper, how the child had successfully achieved what the others in his class had, though differently.

To prepare the students for the assignment, the art teacher had a story. She then explained that it was a custom in the time and place they were drawing a sketch that reminded them of the story she had read, onto a shape of a plate. Instead of focusing on one or even a few details of the story, this child had thrown everything in his head onto the paper.

By the end of the session, the teacher realized that this child had indeed fulfilled the assignment, in fact overfilled it! What was exciting about this session was that not only did the art teacher come closer to learning how that child learns, but so did the rest of the Specials teachers, who also worked with him. By the end of the meeting, everyone had some accommodations in mind to help this child (continued on page 14)

facilitating these CFG seminars, I, with co-facilitators, have “trained” over 112 teachers, administrators, and school district personnel in groups of 8 to 26 participants. In each instance we have laughed, cried, gotten angry, thought deeply about our own practices and our impact on our students. For the most part the participants have had significant and positive experiences. Many report being rejuvenated by the opportunity to work with each other in collaborative ways. But often after a good experience with other teachers, after learning what a learning community is, after learning some protocols to look at student work, very little happens when they return to their urban classrooms. Instead, I visit these schools I hear instances that translate to a breakdown in power and control. For example, when coaches return talking about a tone of decency and more security guards are hired, we have a misalignment. Similarly, when principals report having problems with teachers who have poor classroom management skills, more often than not, those issues are evidence that the students in those classrooms do not have an authentic voice. Those students are grasping power in disruptive ways because they’re not being offered a healthy alternative. Offering the teacher “management strategies without addressing the root cause is another example of a misalignment. How can we as educational improvement coaches help teachers get at the issues of power and control that are aligned in nonproductive ways in their classrooms?

I have witnessed and heard about many courageous acts that have been performed in urban classrooms and urban schools. I cannot abide by the thinking that teachers are so disempowered by the educational system that they, in turn, are unable to empower and engage their students. I believe in order to engage students in learning that you have to give them voice in authentic ways. You have to engage them in the learning process through open and honest dialogue about issues of power and control. The challenge for me is to open this dialogue with my friends and colleagues at the center where I work and with my colleagues in the Coalition of Essential Schools and with my friends and colleagues in the National School Reform Faculty. The question we need to address is how we can use the transformative experiences adult educators receive in CFG seminars to have each adult examine his or her issues of power and control. Once the question is addressed, we can move from an awareness of how the use and abuse of power and control in urban classrooms undermines the education of poor urban students, to an understanding of how power and control need to be distributed in our classrooms so that all of the stakeholders succeed. Finally, we need to have each educator articulate specific actions he or she can take in his or her classroom to distribute the power and control equitably so that the poor, ethnically oppressed students can gain a sense of their power in authentic and productive ways.

To paraphrase Toni Morrison, the ability on the part of an educator to distribute power in urban classrooms in equitable, intentional ways is either hopeful or a slow walk of trees. Although some days I have less patience than other days, I want to go with “a slow walk of trees.”

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“A Sense of Power”

(continued from page 5)

“What do things to us; we’ll rebel.
Don’t do things for us; we’ll complain.
Just do things with us, for in working together, we all thrive.”

-Ashley Dierenfeld, a student

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solid observable evidence – laid a solid foundation for more challenging feedback later in the week. The fact that the feedback was always tied to the questions the facilitators themselves had posed was key to the success of the debrief sessions. There were never any ‘gotchas.’ This trust-building process was not given short shrift, and its value should not be underestimated. After all, the facilitators had never met John or me prior to this seminar week together.

I was surprised to learn how absolutely crucial the use of concrete observations was to the overall process. As I look back on the experience, I liken the whole observation process to a four-day ATLAS protocol. I used my laptop constantly each day, and found that the most efficient way for me to collect the data was to simply script the behaviors of the facilitators. I tried to be as objective and descriptive as possible, keeping my interpretations out of the script. I included direct quotes whenever possible, and kept some track of start and end times of the various activities. My note taking evolved into a four-column table format:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Warm Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- **My Questions**

  - **Connection to Focus Questions**
    - During the course of the day, I only typed in the description column. (This was the equivalent of round one of an ATLAS protocol – “What do you see, literally?”) Later each day, I would add warm feedback, my questions, and finally the connections to the facilitators’ focus questions. (This information was similar to “Interpreting the Work” and “Implications for Practice” in a round AN ATLAS protocol.) It was this note-taking process that provided the concrete and specific feedback that the facilitators seemed to appreciate. It enabled me to provide feedback that was nonjudgmental, because all interpretations were tied directly to the scripted activities – the raw data – and were not simply my opinions, based on my own experiences and preferences.

I have to mention the importance of having some facility with the laptop in this role as process observer. John and I each had about 7 pages of computer-generated notes daily. These we e-mailed to the facilitators at the end of the week. I am sure I could not have kept the pace with scribbling and writing organizing information later if I had tried doing it using handwritten notes.

- **One thing that I began to reflect upon myself as a facilitator:** I began to wonder if I am as inclusive of other facilitators as I like to think I am. As I watched the facilitators working together and becoming smoother in their interactions over the course of the days, I came to wonder about the role I play when working with co-facilitators. I watched the lead facilitator, who has given some of himself in helping to provide a strong foundation for the learning community work at CES NW, as she sought to share the leadership with others. I wondered how comfortably I am really am with sharing the leadership, and I wondered how much my personal investment in the outcomes of CFG work in our area may be restricting the creative input of the very talented facilitators with whom I work regularly.

  - **I learned a great deal from this experience,** and I appreciate the way Jill Hudson and the seminar facilitators of CES NW “walked the talk” of making the learning community work at CES NW, as she sought to share the leadership with others.

  - **I play when working with co-facilitators,** and I wondered how comfortable I am when working with others. I wondered how comfortable I am really am with sharing the leadership, and I wondered how much my personal investment in the outcomes of CFG work in our area may be restricting the creative input of the very talented facilitators with whom I work regularly.

- **NSRF Mission Statement**

  - **The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all professionals involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.**

Did you know that while violent crime has declined by the tune of 20% in recent years, media coverage of these crimes has increased by 600%? I didn’t, but I did know that I’ve been feeling less secure lately, what with all the child kidnappings and the sniper attacks. Yet it never really occurred to me that my fears were being manipulated to such a flagrant degree. In fact, I was even wondering if I was feeling more vulnerable because I was getting older...

But recently I went to the movies and I got a new lens on the whole fear issue... I was feeling a little anxious going in because I knew the film, Bowling for Columbine, might not be easy to watch, but I really wanted to see what Michael Moore had to say about gun violence in general and school violence in particular. It turns out that the title of the film is based on the bowling class that Klebold and Harris attended at Littleton High. The two young men actually attended their first period bowling class in the early hours that fatal morning when they took their high school hostage. The reminders of Columbine were hard to take, as were a number of other 911 calls by teachers and school personnel, but in the end it was Michael Moore’s consistent questioning about our society’s predilection for violence and the exposure of the media’s saturation coverage of the film Michael Moore keeps returning to the question of why we’re so afraid of white people and whether our fears have resulted in our essentially violent national culture. He even goes so far as to offer an original, animated portrayal of our nation’s history as one based on fear, from the arrival of the Pilgrims, through the decimation of Native Americans and on down to the formation of the NRA and KKK during Reconstruction. He follows his thinking through history, up to, and including, white flight to the suburbs and a near hysterical frenzy of gun purchases all designed to keep “them” out of our homes and communities.

Moore’s no tongue-in-cheek examination of racial fear and its manipulation by the powers that be was driven home in the movie and was underscored by his recent remarks as a guest on Oprah. He basically said that as long as we’re consumed with fears of each other, we’re sidetracked from a focus on the real problems that affect us all, problems like under-funded schools, unemployment and the threat of world war, to name just a few.

My colleagues, friends and family to see this film and I’m reading Glassner’s The Culture of Fear: I think the implications for our struggles to build community and social equity are clear. I’m hoping that the power of this film’s message will open some hearts and minds that fear has paralyzed until now.

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Bowling for Columbine

A Film Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

2003

La Raza (continued from page 8)

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Creating a Culture of Conversation
Dave Schmid and Cindy Gay, Colorado

If we want to support each other’s inner lives we must remember a simple truth: the human soul does not want to be fixed, it wants simply to be seen and heard. Sometimes advice is offered in order to be helpful, and sometimes it is given to make the adviser feel superior. But the motivation does not matter, for the outcome is almost always the same: quick fixes make the person who shared the problem feel unheard and dismissed. We need ground rules for dialogue that allow us to be present to another person’s problems in a quiet, receptive way that encourages the soul to come forth, a way that does not presume to know what is right for the other but allows the other’s soul to find its own answers at its own level and pace.

Parker J. Palmer, The Courage to Teach

How do you create a learning community in a school that helps teachers make sense of new ideas, challenges, and complexities about how people learn, and then incorporate them into their own practice? At Steamboat Springs High School we actively address the need to create a culture where meaningful, thoughtful conversations are embedded into the rhythms of the day.

The vision for our school is a community where people feel respected, honored, valued, and that their voice is heard. A place where thoughtful conversations enable teachers to learn from each other and grapple with complicated ideas. We want our school to be a place where conversations inspire people and create passion for making a difference in the lives of students, reminding us why we entered into our profession in the first place.

Our work with CFGs has provided tools and structures to help us become a reality. CFGs gave us a glimpse of what a learning community could look like on a larger, school-wide scale. Working in environments that promoted reflection, we not only learned about the tools and structures of CFGs, but also experienced what it felt like to work in an environment where people truly listened and valued our opinions. An environment so safe, we regularly challenge each other to think about our practice at a higher level. We began to ask ourselves how we could continue these conversations outside of the structure of CFGs so that the work could become embedded in our daily culture.

There is no model, no quick fix for creating a culture of conversation, from a humble, hard probing questions that can call forth answers from the heart of our own practice. In working to make the vision of this culture a reality in our school, we endeavor to be purposeful and thoughtful in our planning and, in everything that we do, to always ask ourselves, how can we promote a culture of conversation? The questions we continue to ask ourselves fall into two main categories: What are the routines and structures of the day that provide opportunities for meaningful, thoughtful conversation? And what are the processes we will use to ensure thoughtful conversation whenever people are gathered together?

(continued on page 15)
goals in mind. We have committed a great deal of time to this effort. For us, it has meant a shift from thinking about not only the purpose of the gathering, but also the processes to be used. It has meant a shift from a passive staff being addressed by the principal, to meetings that encourage conversation and participation by all present. Purposeful planning involves grappling with many ideas, the first of which is being clear about the purpose of everything we do. The questions: Why are we doing this? What is the purpose? If the purpose is to create thoughtful and meaningful conversations, do we have structures that support flowing conversation in which people feel respected, trusted, and have chances for their voices to be heard?

We have recently discovered the power of meeting together in a circle. It involves sitting together in a circle without anything in the middle – including a table – that would interfere with the flow of conversation. A circle enables us to be totally self-conscious and aware of what we are saying and how we present ourselves to others in the group. A circle promotes community with the power distributed among all participants. It supports the norms of listening, respect, and trust. No one can hide in the back of a circle. Christina Baldwin, in her book Calling The Circle describes it this way: “A circle is not just a meeting with the chairs rearranged. A circle is a way of doing things differently than we have been accustomed to. A circle is a return to our original form of community as well as a leap forward to create a new form of community.” The use of the circle in our faculty meetings promotes thoughtful conversation. In parent meetings, it helps us resolve conflict. In our decision-making committees, we use the circle to honor the voice of staff, students and parents. The most rewarding feedback that we have received after trainings is that we have done with other schools is learning that other school faculties are beginning to meet in a circle and the positive difference it has made in promoting conversations.

Other processes we have used effectively to promote conversation are the structures and tools we have learned from our Critical Friends experiences. Protocols provide agreed-upon guidelines for a conversation and it is the existence of this structure – which everyone has agreed to – that permits a certain kind of conversation to occur, often the kind that people are not in the habit of having.

In your school setting, what are the ways that you could use protocols beyond critical friends meetings to begin to develop a culture of conversation?

At Steamboat Springs, we are beginning to see progress in how we work together, learn together, and work with students. Meaningful conversations are at the heart of our continuous efforts to improve our school. Are conversations enough to improve schools? Margaret J. Wheatley, in her book Turning To One Another, answers it best: “To advocate human conversational power and control as they impact millions of students and teachers in urban, rural and poor areas.

I n all of my years of experience as a high school and middle school teacher and as a school improvement activist there has always been a disconnect between the educational paradigm, i.e., “all kids can learn.” “No Child Left Behind.” “Students at the center,” “Kids First” and what students in urban schools and classrooms across the country actually experience. In a videoconference (Ohio, October 22, 2002), Joe McDonald spoke about the University Neighborhood School located in the Lower East Side of New York City. Joe said that the teachers in this small school wanted to provide a more economically poor students at the school with five keys. These five keys would enable all students, regardless of their ethnicity or economic standing, to be successful in college. The five keys are:

1. A sense of power
2. A sense of purpose
3. A sense of quality
4. A sense of progress
5. A sense of community.

These keys were to be understood and brought to students and adults in this school in their relationships with their work, and in their writing. The first key, in particular, has captured my thinking about our children and our work.

Ted Sizer talks about the fault line between theory and practice. For me the fault line is between issues of power and control and how those issues are played out in urban schools. For many years I have been wondering how educators, particularly those in urban areas want to instill a sense of power identify their own issues, read to learn how to address those issues in non-violent ways, and act to make their immediate environments places where all can thrive. Kids instilled with a sense of power act in kind ways toward each other. Kids instilled with a sense of power help each other succeed. Kids instilled with a sense of power respect adults and engage in open and honest dialogue with them. But our work with equity can not stop short of addressing issues of power and control.

I have been facilitating CFG seminars in a variety of urban settings for many years. Currently I am a school coach and coordinator of CFG trainings at the Center for Effective School Practices at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In the year that I have been doing more clearly and intentionally address and act on issues of equity. Most of us have, in one fashion or another, incorporated discussions of equity into our CFG seminars. We as a group have begun to examine our own equity issues. And we are thoughtfully pursuing an aggressive program to confront issues wherever we encounter them. But our work with equity can not stop short of addressing issues of power and control. I have been facilitating CFG seminars in a variety of urban settings for many years. Currently I am a school coach and coordinator of CFG trainings at the Center for Effective School Practices at Rutgers University in New Jersey. In the year that I have been doing more clearly and intentionally address and act on issues of equity. Most of us have, in one fashion or another, incorporated discussions of equity into our CFG seminars. We as a group have begun to examine our own equity issues. And we are thoughtfully pursuing an aggressive program to confront issues wherever we encounter them. But our work with equity cannot stop short of addressing issues of power and control.

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Walking the Talk...Peer Observation of Our Facilitation Center of Activity Report – Jill Hudson, Washington

The NSRF Washington Center of Activity is housed at CES NW in Tacoma, Washington.

Our story: CFG seminar facilitators from the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest invite peer observers from NSRF. After five years of successful CFG seminar facilitations, the facilitators and I were puzzled with our participants’ lack of interest in peer observation. Was it too threatening? Was it too difficult to find time to observe each other? What exactly was keeping people from utilizing the unique data that only peer observation could provide?

As we wondered about these questions we realized that very few of us were practicing what we preached. As facilitators, we often talked about the benefits of peer observation, but we hadn’t tried it ourselves. We hadn’t walked the talk.

We decided to dive in to find out just how valuable peer observation could be. I invited two people from the NSRF to attend our next seminar in Tacoma. The facilitators, Debbi Laidley, came to Seattle. Here is an account of our seminar observations.

Debbi observed the Beginning Seminar and provided some overall warm feedback and probing questions during the facilitators’ debrief at the end of the day. John and Debbi were both amazed at how far we had taken the group in one day and were surprised to see that warm feedback. They saw the value and efficacy with each of the activities that we conducted. One probing question for us was, “What would you gain or lose from engaging participants in a protocol on student work on the first day?” From this question we realized that we were building up the background knowledge and skills to look at student work but really did not allow the participants an opportunity to look at work from their practice on the first day; we were saving that for later in the seminar. The obvious became clear because John and Debbi brought a fresh perspective on our seminar. I could already tell that this was going to be a provocative and worthwhile learning experience.

After the first day, John continued to observe the beginning CFG seminar experience and Debbi moved to be with the continuing group. Debbi scripted the seminar using a four-column format. The first column contained descriptions of the events of the day including quotes from the facilitators so that we could look at what we actually said. The second column included warm feedback and the third column included cool feedback designed to challenge the facilitators. The fourth column listed questions and feedback specifically focused on the seminar participants’ needs.

“As facilitators, we often talked about the benefits of peer observation, but we hadn’t tried it ourselves. We hadn’t walked the talk.”

First, what are the routines and structures of the day that provide opportunities for meaningful thought conversation? Or, to break that question down further:

Do our underlying beliefs that support the way our school functions embrace a culture in which all members feel encouraged to engage in meaningful conversation? Do we make decisions based on democratic processes that allow all stakeholders a voice and promote conversations about things that are important to the entire school community? Is our staff development organized to promote critical thinking and in the light of questions? The fourth column listed questions and feedback specifically focused on the seminar participants’ needs.

Religious groups are disconnected and working in isolation. I think that the practices we use around issues of equitable teaching and learning, knowing the self and others intimately, can play a valuable role in restoring a sense of hope and empowerment to our neighborhoods. I believe we can help our communities become united in proactive responsibility to the problems that are affecting all of our lives.

My greatest fear is that we might become content with “frittering away the edges” of reform and fall short of our need to continually build and stretch our base. The need for “transformative conversations” is stimulated by the voices of parents, teachers, administrators, communities and students continues to grow. We won’t be able to keep pace with the need for transformed leadership unless we continue to attend to our own growth and transformation, both as individuals and as a movement for change. I guess I’m saying that we will only be effective working from “without,” if we are working in the effort of what we value and believe from “within” our hearts. I believe that this internal work needs to be intentional and that it needs to be acknowledged because who you are, and will become, impacts on what you’re doing to, for, and with, others.

How do you see your role in the next period of our work? I see myself moving toward greater community alliances in a time when life is blinking a “choke” light. As a retired educator, I hope to move beyond the schools with our process for having “changed” conversations, both one-to-one and in the community as a whole.

Any closing comments? I’m grateful for this journey and these experiences that have allowed me the courage to “wade into the water” of change of the values and benefits that await children and their families if we cross to the other side together.

Contact Lois Butler at butlerlisa5@aol.com

An Interview with Lois Butler...

(continued from page 12)

Cengage Learning 2014
Connections: A Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Winter 2003
When I accepted the invitation to travel to Seattle last June to take on the role of “Process Observer” for the CES NW Critical Friends Groups Seminar, I really didn’t understand fully what I had agreed to do.

It turned out that I had stumbled into one of the most profound learning opportunities of my experience with CFW work. The role of Process Observer, a relatively new form of Peer Observation, went far beyond my expectations. Not only did I observe and report my observations to the Seattle facilitators; I also learned a great deal about giving feedback, about maintaining objectivity by basing interpretations on the data observed, and about myself as a facilitator.

Overview of the Sessions

When John D’Anieri and I arrived in Seattle to act as process observers, we had relatively little definition of our actual role. Jill Hudson, in an e-mail a few days before we arrived, defined the task as:

“Basically, we are looking for you to take on the role of a consultant and look to see if we are really getting across the following ideas: improving student learning, a professional learning community, inquiry, reflection, Coalition of Essential Schools’ 10 Common Principles, collaboration tools, and tools for looking at evidence of practice.

When John and I met the other members of the seminar facilitation team, they refined our feedback needs by providing the following focus questions:

• How do we meet the different levels of learners in our seminar?
• How are the transitions between exercises/Are they smooth? Connected? Do they make sense?
• Timing and Pace: Does it feel rushed? Does one activity need more time than another? Are all activities necessary? Should anything be cut?
• What is the balance between beliefs, functions, and structures?

We used the Observer as Learner protocol that first day, and we agreed that the feedback at the end of the day would be mostly written and centered on the focus questions the group had provided.

Starting on the second day, John continued to work with the Beginning Coaches team for the duration of their four-day seminar, while I worked with the Continuing Coaches Seminar, which started its three-day session on Wednesday. At the end of each day, both teams debriefed for an hour among themselves, after which we each provided our observations, giving feedback, cool feedback, and questions for the facilitators to think about. They met at 7:00 each morning to incorporate any changes or new ideas based on the previous days’ debrief. Our roles, at the request of the members of the facilitation team, evolved into something like a “coach of coaches” role. During the course of the next few days, we met with each of the individual facilitators at least once to give feedback on specific aspects of their facilitation, directed by individual focus questions.

Learning – Some Anticipated and Some Surprising

When I agreed to spend four days in Seattle, I certainly anticipated learning some new approaches that I might be able to incorporate into the Coaches Seminars that I coordinate for the UCLA School Management Program in Southern California. I also expected that I would improve my skills at providing feedback. Those goals were certainly met – and then some! I honed my skills at giving “edible feedback” – feedback that is nourishing (it helps the recipient to grow) and is easy to swallow (the recipient doesn’t have to take any more than it learned). We do not eat a fad. We are a way that is purposeful, productive, and effective. – Daniel Baroum, Co-Director NSFRCES Northwest CFG Seminar Observation

Debbi Laidley, California

Donations Sought For NSFRCScholarships

In the spirit of equity, NSFRC is seeking tax-deductible contributions in order to make our work accessible regardless of a person’s ability to pay. It is not our intent to provide funds for all those attending our gatherings, but to earmark every dollar obtained through this solicitation to support those who otherwise would not be able to attend our institutes. During the first five years of our existence at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, many of the costs associated with attendance at conferences and coaches’ seminars— including registration, food, transportation, and lodging— were covered by the generosity of the late Walter Annenberg. That level of funding is no longer available. Please consider sending a tax-deductible contribution to: NSFRC Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1787, Bloomington, IN 47402

“For this year NSFRC becomes more deeply rooted in the practice of creating democratic learning communities made up of reflective practitioners who support each other’s growth and practice. We are not a fad. We are a way that is purposeful, productive, and effective.” – Daniel Baroum, Co-Director NSFRC

By Samantha, age 5

Diana Watson is a kindergarten/first grade teacher currently on sabbatical. You can contact her at d2watson@adelphia.net

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Donations Sought For NSFRC Scholarships

In the spirit of equity, NSFRC is seeking tax-deductible contributions in order to make our work accessible regardless of a person’s ability to pay. It is not our intent to provide funds for all those attending our gatherings, but to earmark every dollar obtained through this solicitation to support those who otherwise would not be able to attend our institutes. During the first five years of our existence at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, many of the costs associated with attendance at conferences and coaches’ seminars— including registration, food, transportation, and lodging— were covered by the generosity of the late Walter Annenberg. That level of funding is no longer available. Please consider sending a tax-deductible contribution to: NSFRC Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1787, Bloomington, IN 47402

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better express all his wonderful ideas in the different subject areas.

In the past three years we have tried everything, from looking at student work to placing dilemmas on the table. This year, we are organizing an integrated arts show that will involve all of us, working with three different grade levels, in order to examine the performance of a multi-media tumbling show. Our goal is to develop a rubric that will guide us from start to finish, one that will ultimately help us to look carefully at our teaching and at our students’ work.

The result of our work is simple: Focusing our energy on the goal of teaching and student learning has strengthened us as a group and as individuals.

Margaret Taylor teaches one of the school’s seven combined kindergarten/first grade classes. She has held the role of grade-level team leader for several years. She writes: “One of the reasons I wanted to join the CFG training was to improve my skills as a facilitator of a group of K/1 teachers. We had decided that we needed some leadership that would help us all meet mutual goals and all feel heard. The training focused me and taught me skills that ultimately guided me to being a facilitator, not a leader. Discussing and agreeing on a set of ground rules allowed everyone to feel part of the group and everyone’s voices became a concrete document we could all refer to. As I learned more from the training, it became clear that the “structure” of the group, having an agenda, listening to each other and making group decisions was moving us forward. The protocols became useful in looking at children’s work. In time, CFG work has filtered into professional evaluations and Critical Friends Groups. With particular curriculum purposes, I am now finding that CFG work applies in courses I am taking. The Looking at Student Work protocols have direct application to my work with Schools Attuned. Our CFG work has also moved our Science Curriculum along. And then there’s my own reflection.

Last year, I had one of the most enriching experiences of my teaching career: peer coaching. Our school as a whole needed some leadership that would guide us from start to finish, one that will ultimately help us to look at student work. Our school as a whole are organizing an evening of Thought through which to increase professional collaboration; a chance to enrich experiences of my teaching and student learning has enriched experiences of my teaching and student learning has been an added layer of accountability. She and I met every Monday during our planning session, we would review the debrief notes to incorporate what we had learned about the children’s learning. The planning was dynamic and collaborative. The Loe teaching of the lesson became a “meta-teaching” experience because we were looking through the lens of a learner. Sherrie and I both felt this was a truly beneficial experience. We learned a lot about our own teaching strengths and areas where we need growth.

The students were fascinated by this process, and we were deliberately transparent about what we were doing together. It may sound corny—but the students loved that they were teaching us how to teach better.

And isn’t better teaching really what this work is all about?

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La Raza
Pedro Bermúdez, Florida

In an article that appeared in the September 1988 edition of Phi Delta Kappan, Willie Singham, Associate Director of the University Center for Innovations in Teaching and Education, Case Western Reserve University, reminded us of an early warning system used by coal miners to detect the presence of deadly fumes in their work environment. The system was quite simple: miners went into the mine with a canary in a cage. If the air in the mine killed the canary, it would soon kill the miners.

Singham uses this metaphor to suggest that the persistent achievement gap between students of color and White students may really be a sign of “fundamental problems with the way education is delivered to all students.” As he notes, “Latino and Hispanic children continue to be disproportionately poor—a rate that is three times higher than that of White children. In addition to the persistence of poverty, the main deterrent to raising achievement stems from low expectations and the main factor is a lack of academic rigor in the classroom. This stems from low expectations and foreboding of the main factor in any student’s achievement is a lack of academic rigor in the classroom.

The NTDPi was a “24/7” event immersed in the multi-layered issues of classroom practice and curriculum. Sessions began at 8:00 a.m. and usually lasted until 11:00 p.m. with facilitator debriefings that usually concluded at 11:00 p.m. At the end of each day, participants were given a wake-up session to refresh their minds and begin the next day’s activities.

Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching with the Heart

These sessions involved helping participants to understand that good teaching is about love, commitment, setting clear, measurable and purposeful expectations, and knowing how to craft instruction that will make students successful.

Participants explored ways to establish where students were headed, how they could “hook” them into meaningful learning through exploration, rehearsing complex performances, and challenging demonstrations of content mastery.

Classroom Climate: Teaching with the Heart

This component of the NTPDi emphasized that good teachers know themselves and their students well enough to create interdependent, respectful classroom learning communities. Participants examined their own life journeys and reflected on how these had shaped their perception of students and their expectations of student “behavior” in the classroom.

All participants developed philosophies for classroom climate to be used as a catalyst for the work they would begin back at their schools.

Knowing Students Well: Latino Learners

Each day began with a Wake-Up session that addressed issues of equity, diversity, and racism and explored characteristics of Latino learners from various scholarly perspectives. Participants included: Monica Palacio and Ruth Rubio of the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Dr. Blánsár Cárdenas, Dean of the School of Education and Human Development, University of Texas-San Antonio, Dr. Sonia Nieto, Professor of Education, University of Massachusetts, Dr. Marta Sanchez, Professor of Education, Pepperdine University, and Elva Travilo, author of Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child.

Professional Learning Communities: Working Together

During the week, we designed and facilitated Nightly Learning Team sessions, which served as a context for collaboration around issues of teaching and learning. NCLR staffs who had attended a two-day training held the foundation for building the kind of trust in each other that allows us to take risks, to say what we really believe, and to challenge each other’s assumptions. We also use these practices in our organizational work, and in so doing, we have created a more honest, open, and collaborative culture in our national organization as well.

We believe that no one in a school community should be anonymous—that all should be known well. Furthermore, we believe that everyone’s work should be public—even transparent. We value multiple perspectives, and we know the power of feedback as we strive to improve our practice. Our ability to learn from each other, and to be accountable to and for each other, depends on us deprivatizing our practice. We ask this of our leaders and colleagues in NCLR as well. We can’t work together to close the achievement gap if we allow ourselves to stay isolated from one another, and we can’t work for those students who are not learning if they remain invisible to us. Most importantly, we can’t benefit from our collective wisdom if we allow ourselves to remain anonymous to one another.

We believe that there is an enormous amount of untapped expertise in our schools, and that it is important to bring all of the people in a school’s community—adults and students alike—as having important knowledge that must be brought to the table. Furthermore, not only do we believe that everyone has worthwhile knowledge and expertise, but we also value each other as learners. This venturesome organization view educators in this way, preferring to think that people in schools don’t know enough and can’t learn if left to their own devices, and thus need scripts, didactic models of professional development, and “trainings” that are “delivered” by outside experts.

In NSRF, we trust educators to shape their own professional development in collaboration with each other, and we trust that we will know when we need to call in outside resources. We believe that if we are going to effectively adapt our practice to meet the needs of all our students without lowering standards, we can’t do it alone. Instead, the “answers” lie in the collective wisdom of the people who are closest to the students. We believe that powerful learning is reciprocal in nature, and we try to live by this tenet in all facets of NSRF’s organizational and program work as well.

Finally, we believe that the values and beliefs we hold should extend to all aspects of our work. It is not a coincidence that all of the beliefs we have discussed above are described not only in terms of work in schools, but also in terms of our own organizational practices. This has its roots, I think, in an early organizational decision that all NSRF facilitators would be people who did the work they taught others to do. This has meant, through the years, that the majority of NSRF’s facilitators come from schools and districts that are part of NSRF, and that NSRF staff coach CFGs as part of their work. That practice has continued to this day.

This article has already been done, make better use of that, and then determine what future studies might be useful to inform our practice. We suspect that there is a wealth of data about the effects of CFGs and CPG-related activities in our schools within the cover of dissertations, filed away as class papers on hard drives, or stacked in milk crates next to desks. Some of you have contacted us. We hope more of you will.

We have done research, collected data, and we have not already done so, please contact us at nsrc@harmonyschool.org

Research • Data • Evidence

As the National School Reform Faculty develops a research agenda we are actively soliciting research that you have done around your work. In an effort not to recreate the wheel we would like to study what research has already been done, make better use of that, and then determine what future studies might be useful to inform our practice. We suspect that there is a wealth of data about the effects of CFGs and CPG-related activities in our schools within the cover of dissertations, filed away as class papers on hard drives, or stacked in milk crates next to desks. Some of you have contacted us. We hope more of you will.
An Interview with Lois Butler
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Lois is a school change leader whose original change work began at Chicago Vocational Career Academy, where she was the leader of the Small School of Business and Finance. This school was later cited by the U.S. Department of Education as one of five schools in the nation that exemplified the characteristics of a small learning community.

When did you learn about NSRF and why were you drawn to this process as an educator/activist?
I was a Citi-Bank Faculty Member (Program for facilitative leaders of change school developed by CES from a grant from Citi-Bank in New York) when I heard about a new program that was being designed to take the change work in schools to a deeper level. These changes were not only paper changes, but new training were called for, and we had two Chicago teachers accepted into the first training back in 1995. I was not one of the first trained. However, I did participate in the cohort’s Winter Gathering in Chicago as the school coordinator for the Chicago Coalition Center and I remember being struck by the sense “that this CFP strategy was different” and “that it might be just what we needed to influence whole school design changes.” After the meeting, I went back to the office and my director and I as leaders of the small schools, change process, co-wrote a proposal to the Chicago Annenberg Challenge asking them to allow us to train CFP coaches locally. While we waited for the approval of our local training request, we proceeded with the solicitation of applications for the national training from potential coaches in our six Annenberg Challenge Schools. At this point, in the summer of 1996, six more Chicago teachers were trained as CFP coaches by the Annenberg Institute. I was part of that group. We also trained two principals as leaders of the change. Later, in the winter of 1997, after our proposal was funded, we trained 32 more National School Reform Faculty coaches locally. What in particular stood out about this new approach?
I had already begun to experience the power of looking at the work of teaching and learning in our schools as an observer. Citi-Bank Faculty had been working on peer coaching and the creation of collaborative cultures to help us look deeply at what was really going on in our buildings. But this new CFP process seemed to go further. I saw the possibility for “a new communication system with information flowing back and forth in all directions.” I saw us being able to actually “see” the mind at work through the protocols. I realized that we needed to create a “safe way to talk” with each other. I wasn’t expecting a panacea, but I did hope that CFP training would help create the conditions that would allow us to challenge the learning gap in schools all across the country.
I was also very interested in the focus on community building. I had seen situations where teachers who asked too many questions had become marginalized and written off just because their views were different— they weren’t really heard. Misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions often had the effect of delaying or blocking our ability to make the transformative changes that were needed. I thought this new approach would help us clarify our collective values and set the norms needed to constructively and collaboratively wrestle with the inevitable controversies that we needed to face in order to teach our own and other peoples’ children successfully.
How has your lifetime involvement in NSRF supported your efforts on behalf of students? Has the process lived up to your early expectations?
While the process has been sustained, I think that early on, folks in Chicago were somewhat locked into competition for the same pot of limited funds and weren’t always working together. But for the last few years I think we’ve forged alliances to effectively help kids. We currently do much of our work through a collaborative design with NSRF CES, the Small Schools Workshop and others, freely sharing the information and resources needed to really effect school change. One especially strong example I can point to is the experience of Keisha Williams. Keisha was one of my students, who experienced the power of having teachers who were engaged in reflective, collaborative practice on behalf of students. Keisha went on to earn a scholarship to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Keisha was also identified as a “Golden Apple” student. (Golden Apple is a prestigious, competitive award given by the Kohl Foundation annually and renewable for 4 years.) She was the first member of her family to receive a college degree, and she is now a third-year teacher at... (continued on page 15)
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

**A New Teacher “Makes Room” in Her Class**

Kelley is an apprentice teacher at Central East Middle School in Philadelphia. This is her first full year with her own classroom and she has been working hard to build a sense of community in her fifth grade class. As part of their community building this culturally diverse group of ten-year-olds has begun to tackle issues of gender, race, and class. Last Friday, Kelley decided to hold a class meeting that would use the poem “Making Room” (below) as its starting point.

Kelley, by her own admission, was very nervous. She had been unsuccessful in her efforts to combat anti-gay remarks the previous year and didn’t want to make the same mistakes again. This time she was determined to handle things differently, starting with the foundation of trust she’s been building steadily since September, and relying on the structures for conversation that the class has adopted as their norm. She began by telling her class they were going to have a meeting and that they were going to share some “pretty heavy stuff.” She appealed to the students they wanted them to listen carefully while she read. However, much to her surprise, after she gave the offenders her best stony stare, other students told their peers to stop and get serious.

The initial remarks on the Chalk Talk with “Making Room” at the center ran the gamut from “It was stupid” to “It was very good” to “I’m not gay!” However, after the first few comments, the kids started to write about friends and relatives who were gay. They also said “everyone deserved a place at the table” and “people shouldn’t be judged by their skin color or if they are gay.” They went on to say “the poem was sad” and one child volunteered that he/she “didn’t think there would ever be room for them at the table.”

The follow-up conversation was equally honest and students picked up right where the Chalk Talk ended. They talked about their sadness when gay friends of their family, or relatives, were mistreated. They told their less comfortable classmates “it wasn’t nasty to be gay, it’s just what people are.” The bell rang for dismissal and Kelley promised they’d finish their discussion on Monday. After the weekend, when the students arrived, she decided to conduct a follow-up Chalk Talk with the prompt, “We are.” This time the many ways people shared the many ways they are different. One child shared that her parents were deaf, while others wrote about being “Spanish” or “Black.” Quite a few students wrote that this class was a family, and one child said they were happy to have Kelley as their teacher.

Finally, a parent of a recently transferred student, who volunteers in the class, approached Kelley to say, “You really work with them on how to act. It’s great! I see a difference in my son just since he’s been in your room.” When Kelley asked how he was different, the parent replied, “He used to hit his sister every time she walked by, but now he doesn’t do it so much. Now he even says he’s sorry, if he hits her by accident. My husband and I couldn’t believe it the first time it happened! Now I see where it comes from.”

We hope that this is just the first of many stories about the ways we’re translating our belief in equity into practice in our classrooms.

You can e-mail Kelley at kelcoll@aol.com or share your stories with Connections at nsrf@harmonyschool.org

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**Making Room**

Written by Bridging the Gap members, an ELK Grove (CA) HS SEED Group, Dianna Shoop, Teacher/ SEED Facilitator, In response to the film “A Place at the Table” from Teaching Tolerance and the poem, “I, Too” by Langston Hughes

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**Just because I do well in school**

Doesn’t mean I feel less stupid when I am wrong.

It doesn’t mean that when I do my homework, I am a home works.

When I pass a test, It doesn’t mean that I’m not failing in life.

Just because I do well in school, Doesn’t mean I don’t face challenges.

But it does mean that I am willing to sacrifice in order to secure my future.

Is there a place at the table for me?

---

**Just because I am Black**

Doesn’t mean I am athletic - I hate to run.

It doesn’t mean I am uneducated - I happen to be a straight A student. Just because you see me coming, doesn’t mean you should rush to the other side of the street. I am not dangerous - I am kind, and loving. Just because I’m Black, doesn’t mean that all of my ancestors are from Africa.

I am part Native American, and part Irish. Being Black doesn’t mean I use my race as an excuse for my mistakes. But it does give me hope, courage, and strength.

Is there a place at the table for me?

---

**Just because I am Gay**

Doesn’t mean I can’t play “manly” sports like football and wrestling.

It doesn’t mean that I want to be a hairdresser, or perform in Broadway musicals.

I plan on becoming a college graduate, a doctor, and someday maybe even a dad. It doesn’t mean that purple is my favorite color.

I don’t like rainbows or triangles.

Just because I believe in equity into practice in our classrooms.

Now I see where it comes from.

My husband and I couldn’t believe it the first time it happened! We are each unique individuals who share common ground.

We are teenagers, Who are Smart, Black, Gay, White, Jewish and Mexican.

We are each unique individuals who share common ground.

Is there a place at the table for us?