In this issue...

Success Analysis
I Must Know: Who is Quinn?
Coaching Lessons from Co-Rec Softball
Creating Effective Small Schools
CFG Report
Introducing CFG’s to a New Network
Students at the Center—Meaningful Learning at Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical School
Philadelphia Center of Activity Report
NSRF’s Living History—An Interview with Sharon Allen-Hamilton
NSRF Research Project
Success Analysis Protocol

Report from the Directors
Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director

I love to facilitate—and it a protocol-guided conversation or some other kind of meeting or session—and I appreciate the work of really skilled facilitators when I am a participant in a group. However, I admit to being a bit skeptical of the value of books on facilitation, since most seem to focus on new sets of techniques, tricks, and recipes. This book is a much-needed departure from that approach to facilitation—and should be useful to experienced and beginning facilitators alike.

What makes it so different, and so useful? First, it avoids a generic discussion of facilitation and instead places facilitation in a particular context, that of facilitating protocol-guided conversations. In so doing, the authors are able to ask facilitators to consider their own assumptions and beliefs — about their role as facilitators, about the purpose of the work they are facilitating, and about the group with whom they are working. Second, it avoids giving pat answers for potentially complex situations, and instead invites readers to consider the consequences — intentional or not — of the various “moves” they make as facilitators. Finally, it addresses the important question of facilitator stance, or disposition.

The book challenges those of us who facilitate to ask ourselves: How am I reading this group, and how do I know I am right? What should I do, and how do I decide this is the best course of action? Do I really believe these people have the capacity to do the learning they say they want to do — and if I do, how do I best serve them and their learning? Certainly, in reading this book, facilitators will expand their repertoire, and will walk away with ideas and tips for responding to the wide range of facilitation issues that invariably come up in protocols. More importantly, however, the reader will be pushed to think about her stance as a facilitator, as all of the ideas about “how” to respond are linked to discussions of “why.”

Facilitating protocols can be a tricky proposition. The task requires the facilitator not only to “show up,” but to be fully present and completely attentive to the group and its learning. The protocols can help; acting, as the authors say, as a kind of co-facilitator. Protocols help build equity into the conversation; they help group members build new skills and habits; they help make efficient use of time; and they help build a useful agenda for almost any kind of meeting. However, they don’t stand on their own, and they require a firm, yet gentle hand on the part of the facilitator. A skillfully facilitated protocol not only creates the possibility of a group doing new, significant learning together — learning that will ultimately benefit students. It also can help a group build the kind of trust that allows it to tackle the really important (continued on page 14)
Coaching Lessons...

Field Notes for CFG coaching:
There are so many skills that support clear communication. We all make mistakes along the way. Over a whole week (or more) as we practice protocols together we have many opportunities to improve and support our own toolkits of skills.

Who’s Coach?
Our last game was a make-up for a rained-out game early in the season. The other team didn’t show up. We were all there and ready to go. With little prompting, we split up into small teams and had our own game – filled with closed fields, pinch hitters and guest runners from the bleachers. We relaxed and enjoying ourselves – not only comfortable with the rules and tools of the game, but also creating new rules (our scoring system was especially unique that game). We were all coaches.

Field Notes for CFG coaching: Ultimately a team becomes a self-propelling, synergistic group of potential coaches. The final meeting is the one you remember most during the summer vacation.

The Off Season
Working well together carries over into enjoying and valuing each other’s feedback and other’s skills. Shared moments of success help keep the walls open for the important and sometimes difficult work of teaching.

Field Notes for CFG coaching – It’s clear to me that my CFG group has helped me look more insightfully than I could by myself at my own teaching practice – in that sense it is much more than a game. Still, I find that most of my effort as a CFG coach is in helping to create and keep an environment where people are relaxed and ready for the unexpected – requirements for thinking out of their comfort zone.

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People in the NSRF network who have developed the habit of reflection in their practice often use the NSRF Coaches listerv to push their thinking or to share ideas with colleagues. An example of the kind of cross-country collegial sharing of practice comes from an on-line discussion about “Quinn’s 6 Questions.”

The CFG coach who wrote that she uses Quinn’s 6 Questions regularly to check her own teaching, as well as having her interns use them during their internships, but doesn’t know their source (she’s had “…multiple copies floating around for years and found them in our CFG tools notebook unlabeled”) elicited a response from the list that reveals the broad scope of the work of NSRF:

Juli Quinn is a professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Cal State University, L.A. She has been a CFG Coach since the first summer of training in 1995, she is a “Center of Activity” for NSRF in California, and works with lots of school folks in building Professional Learning Communities. Juli developed “Quinn’s 6 Questions” from a set of personal life questions, but the questions, as we know them, were developed in 1991-1992 when her sister was a new teacher, teaching first grade. Juli would meet with her every Sunday to help her plan for the following week, and since Juli had no idea about the curriculum for first grade, she had to conduct an inquiry to help her sister think through. From there the rest is history.

These deceptively simple questions – Quinn’s 6 - has been passed around the NSRF network, adapted and revised in ways that have made them relevant for different settings.

Quinn’s Original 6 Questions
1. What am I teaching?
2. Why am I teaching it?
3. How am I teaching it?
4. Why am I teaching it that way?
5. How do the kids know they are learning?
6. How do others know how well we’re doing it?

Here is a version of the Questions that was adapted for meetings:

1. What are we doing?
2. Why are we doing it?
3. How are we doing it?
4. Why am I teaching it that way?
5. How do I know the kids are getting it?
6. How do the kids know they are learning?

John Newlin of the Southern Maine Partnership wrote about a spin-off of the Questions that reflect a broader school application:

1. What are we doing?
2. Why are we doing it?
3. How are we doing it?
4. How do the kids know they are learning?
5. How do others know how well we’re doing it?
6. How will others know the meeting was a success?

Another colleague, working with new teachers, has adjusted the order of the original Questions to match with backward mapping from standards (content) to rubrics and assessments (quality performance) to curriculum and instruction (pedagogy)…so form follows function:

1. What am I teaching?
2. Why am I teaching it?
3. How will I know the students get it?
4. How will the students know they got it?
5. How am I teaching it?
6. Why am I teaching it that way?

This revision of unknown origin caused the writer to reflect upon the need for personalization in our work. She shared her revision with the list “because I think that while lots of us might be reflexively adding it already, making it explicit will help surface assumptions, both ours and others, and drive the conversation.”

1. What am I teaching and to whom?
2. Why am I teaching it?
3. How am I teaching it?
4. Why am I teaching it that way?
5. What evidence will I collect to show our kids are getting it?

(continued on page 13)