I t was the first meeting of our third year together as a CFG. We knew we had come a long way when one member immediately stepped forward with student work, and even requested a tuning protocol to refine her assignment. In the beginning most of us had to be convinced to bring even our students’ best work. It was a sign that we were doing something right. We had stuck together and established the kind of support and trust that allows risk-taking and for deep, honest conversations.

While our meetings have always been substantial and heartfelt, we agreed at the end of last year that we needed to take our work to a different level. And what was that next step? Were there ways, for instance, of applying in our classrooms what we have learned from the agenda? It was apparent within minutes that we were doing something right. We had come a long way when one student who was not meeting standards. While the process was familiar to some teachers, it was not widely used in schools. The LLCs helped to unpack some reasons why the process was not used widely and enabled the presenter of the project to explore teaching the students in the use of the support process.

As President, what potential benefits did you see for your Association members?

I really welcomed the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practice. I appreciated the Superintendent’s commitment to shared leadership of the day-to-day way you do your work?

How has your understanding of collaboration and reflection grown as a coach? How has it changed the way you reflect on our practice? We’re not used to the busyness of our days to turn a corner. The conversation continued, though a bit ragged. I said at one point, “We aren’t sure where we are going with this.” One member said in jest, “Well, why don’t you know?” I laughed. “Because I’m the teacher, right?” To my mind, though, this was precisely what we needed as a group at that moment: to be ragged and to find our way together. Finally a foreign language teacher suggested that our essential question might be: how do we bring more reflection into the classroom? With that question, the conversation turned a corner.

Wasn’t this exactly the point of our own meetings: a time to step back from the busyness of our days to reflect on our practice? We’re not used to hearing often as pressured and stressful the work of teaching is. What was the essence of the protocol anyway? Wasn’t it about giving and receiving thoughtful feedback? A number of people shared how they were already using aspects of this protocol with their students from lower through upper school.

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From the other person. This work has made me continue to hone my listening skills. As a parent, listening to other people’s problems and working to co-construct possible solutions is a big part of my job.

In general, I think I’d say that reflective practice has become a more ingrained part of who I am. Now each time I’m in a situation, I never leave it without thinking about the impact of my participation. I wonder what I worked, what didn’t work and how I could have handled it differently or better.

The key is that by reflecting, I grow, and this has made the idea of my being a lifelong learner more explicit. Staying in this work and expanding my role as a facilitator has helped me understand the value of teacher inquiry and research. The more we do this work, the more we uncover the big questions we face. You know the ones I mean, the kind of questions that keep you up at night. Now when I have one of those problems, or a question, I find myself tapping into our collective experience by emailing colleagues in the broader network of coaches, asking for a resource or an experience they’ve had that can help push my thinking. I understand the need to systematically tackle those big questions over the long haul and I use collaborative, reflective tools to help find answers.

Have your hopes for the Lucent Project been realized? Are collaboration and reflection a part of the way things get done in SDOL schools now?

I believe the seeds of collaboration and reflection have been planted and there are many signs that they are taking root. In the first five schools that were involved in the project, collaboration continues to be a part of the ways those schools do business. In the Schoolwide Improvement Plans, the LLCs are listed as a strategy to improve student achievement, and the groups continue to meet regularly during the school day. Since our expansion of the project district wide, LLCs have started to take hold in the other schools as well.

Earlier you talked about the sustainability of LLCs if there were changes in leadership. I know you’ve experienced some changes and I wonder if you might comment on the impact.

We have had leadership changes since the start of this work, changes at both the school level and at the district level, but the work continues to grow. Our New Superintendent supports the project and teachers continue to take advantage of the opportunity to collaborate with their peers and improve their craft.

What next steps do you envision? How will SDOL sustain the use of collaborative, reflective practices during the school day without the Lucent funding?

There are several ideas that the SDOL should consider as we end the funded phase of this project. Namely, we must bring the coaches (teacher and administrators) together to examine the current structures that support the LLCs and determine what we must have in place to deepen the roots of collaboration. We should continue to support and grow the SDOL Apprentice Facilitator process to build capacity at the district level to support new and experienced coaches. And the most ambitious goal is to begin to create opportunities for students, parents and community members to participate in LLCs.

The power of collaboration is only truly realized when all members of the school community are reflective about teaching and learning in meaningful ways to accelerate student achievement and to close the achievement gap.

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Introducing CFGs…

(continued from page 7)

4

Creating Effective Small Schools
Kim Felicke, Oregon

I t could have been an ugly situation. After two years of planning and working, the four small schools’ staff had created to replace its large high school had just been reduced to three. Difficult in the planning process and student choice, amongst a myriad of other variables, led the leadership team to dissolve one of the schools before it even opened.

There was a collective sadness in the school the next day, but an atmosphere of sup- porting each other and moving forward prevailed. There is nothing easy to plan and launch a large high school into small autonomous schools and there are daily examples of the frustra- tions schools face in their efforts. But what many at this particular school have agreed on is that their attention to process from the inception of this work has gor- ten them through the tight spots. Their Foundation in Coalition for Essential Schools (CES) Principles and Critical Friends Group has supported them in creating a collaborative and supportive process that has resulted in the suc- cessful implementation of three small schools this year.

I am their school coach. Ultimately, for me, my goal as a school coach is no different than the Mission Statement of NSRF: to foster educa- tional and social equity by empower- ing all to achieve with an emphasis on collaborative, reflective practices as the key to creating successful small schools.

We will use the Success Analysis Consultancy Protocol and they will spend the evening supporting each other in dilemmas they’re facing at their individual schools as they imple- ment their action plans.

On Tuesday, I meet with a group of teachers from schools across Portland who are working on their Continuing Teacher’s License, a requirement to teach in Oregon. We will use the Success Analysis Protocol to examine culturally relevant lesson plans that each teacher is bringing with them to discuss attri- butes of successful culturally relevant learning experiences. As a part of the program, the teachers are required to write a jumpsheet on their classroom environment. They will start with the Metaphor Activity to give them a jumping off point into the conversation.

On Wednesday, it’s off to another school where my task will be to facili- tate a joint meeting with my school leadership team and the site council about where their redesign work is right now and what the next steps are. I don’t know what we’re doing there yet, but last time we met as a large group we did a Tuning Protocol around the design ideas. On Thursday I get to go to my coaches CFG group, my place of ref- uge in this work. The place where I get help with my dilemmas, challenge my own practice, and grow profession- ally.

Beyond coaching in schools, Small Schools Northwest at Lewis & Clark College is creating a network of pro- fessional development opportunities to support the long-term sustainability of small schools. If we consider CFGs to be valuable professional development for educators, what are we doing to support that concept and build it into our preparation of new teachers and support of veteran teachers? How does it inform our work in preparing administrators to work in an environ- ment of school change? How does it support the changing role of counselors in schools? These are some of the questions we’re looking at as Lewis & Clark College works towards its goal of creating a truly diverse school of educa- tion committed to bridging the achieve- ment and social class gaps.

Thus along with our typical Center of Activity work—CFG Coaches’ Trainings, ongoing learning opportu- nities and support for CFG coaches and introducing CFGs to new audi- ences—we are also working to integ- rate CFGs into our teacher education program. Currently, teachers can receive graduate credit not only for participating in the CFG Coaches’