

Success Analysis

Daniel Baron, Indiana

Can you imagine how different school would be if we built on teachers' and students' strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses?

I find it striking that as a teacher I naturally thought that marking the incorrect answers on my students' math assignments was the natural thing to do. It made sense to me that the opportunities for learning were most obvious when I brought my students' attention (though I didn't use red ink) to their errors. I routinely ignored correct answers without comment and kept my focus on what my students didn't know or understand.

The disposition to look first for errors in my students' work soon became a habit. The number of mistakes that were marked by me on their assignment often discouraged my students.

I brought the same deficit-centric disposition to my own work.

After every class I would naturally think of those students I didn't reach, and even if the number were small, I would be hard on myself for the lack of

success of my lesson. As a reflective practitioner, I would often analyze the nature of the mistakes my students were making and then adapt my instruction to address the misunderstanding of my students.

Over time, I came to realize that many educators spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy focusing their reflection on their mistakes and those of their students. As a CFG coach, I found that most teachers were presenting work of their own or their students that failed to reflect the quality that they were expecting for them-

selves or their students.

NSRF practices and protocols typically focused on dilemmas in our practice or deficiencies in our work and that of our students. In January of 1996, while serving as a site developer for ATLAS Learning Communities, I attended a workshop on parent engagement presented by Dr. Vivian Johnson from Boston University.

Vivian had committed much of her professional life to empowering parents in west Africa, west Portugal, and the inner city of Boston to take an active and important role in the life of their children's school. It

reflecting on my failures as a teacher, a whole new realm of possibilities that was based on the analysis of successful practice opened up for me. It was standard practice in professional development to provide successful (best) practices for the purpose of adding those strategies to teachers' repertoires. Although this form of professional development often provided the immediate gratification of what to do on Monday, it did little to nurture the habit of reflective practice on what makes some teaching strategies successful.

The Success Analysis Protocol

(SAP) was created to support educators to focus on those practices that actually met their desired outcome and to learn from the critical dialogue of their peers as they analyzed what made that particular strategy successful. The intent was not to have colleagues add a particular strategy to their bag of tricks, but rather to reflect together on the analysis of what made the

strategy effective and what new insights they might glean from the analysis into dilemmas

they were struggling with in their own pedagogy. The inquiry is on what made the practice successful and how to adapt future practice to reflect the new insights on what makes pedagogy effective. Invariably, the analysis by peers also enhances the understanding of the presenting teacher of their own work.

The SAP is easily tailored to be relevant to the goals of virtually any meeting. The prompts to guide the presentation of successes can be adapted to the topic at hand. I have used it to explore the success of CFG
(continued on page 15)



"Many educators spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy focusing on their mistakes mistakes and those of their students."

was her practice to ask parents to tell stories about those times that they felt most comfortable and significant in their child's school. Those stories were shared with teachers and the lessons learned from parents' successful experiences in school became the data from which parent engagement schools designed programs. Parents became the experts/consultants for their children's school.

The notion of reflecting and analyzing successes as a vehicle for improved practice struck me like a bolt of lightning. After 20 years of

Success Analysis Protocol

The facilitator's role is to help the group to keep focused on how the success described by the presenter is different from more routine work. The analysis of what made this so successful is the purpose of the protocol. The facilitator is a full participant in this protocol, and each participant takes a turn as the facilitator.

"Success" is defined as something that proved to be highly effective in achieving an outcome important to the presenter.

1. **Identify a success.** Write a short description of a success in some arena of your professional practice. Describe the specifics of the success. Be sure to answer the question, "What made this different from others like it that I have had?" You might choose a success that surprised you, or that you haven't already analyzed on your own, or that you would like to get others' thinking about. It doesn't have to be a large success — people learn a lot in this exercise from relatively "small" successes as well. (5 minutes)
2. **Presenter describes the success.** In triads, the first presenter tells the story of his or her success, in as much detail she s/he can remember. The group takes notes. (5 minutes)
3. **Group asks clarifying questions.** The rest of the group asks clarifying questions about the details of the success in order to fill in any information the group needs to be helpful to the presenter. (5 minutes)
4. **Group reflects on the success story.** Group members discuss what they heard the presenter say, and offer additional insights and analysis of the success. The presenter is silent and takes notes. (10 minutes)
5. **Presenter reflects.** The presenter reflects on the group's discussion about what made this so successful. The group then discusses briefly how what they have learned might be applied to all of their work. (5 minutes)
6. **Protocol begins again for the next group member.** Repeat steps 2 through 6 for each member of the group. Remember to keep the focus on the underlying principles or processes that made for success.
7. **Debrief protocol.** What worked well? What would we do differently next time?
8. (If there is time), the **triad identifies and lists the factors that contributed to their successes**, and shares this in the large group. The large group looks for trends across triads, and then discusses what it would mean to consciously create conditions that lead to success.

coaches, mathematical communication, issues of equity and social justice, service learning, powerful teaching and learning, distributed leadership, etc.

Teachers, by our very nature, tend to be hyper critical of our work. We are reluctant to talk about our practice, and are particularly reticent to share our successes with our colleagues out of deeply ingrained sense of humility. We are much more likely to share our limitations than our strengths. The Success Analysis protocol provides an opportunity for all participants to learn from each other's practice and to apply what we have learned from each other for the benefit of all of our students.

I am now much more inclined to mark the correct answers (even with red ink!) on student and teacher work. ■

Daniel Baron is a Co-Director fo NSRF and can be reached at dbaron@harmonyschool.org



Small Schools ...
(continued from page 5)

for participating in the CFG Coaches' Training, but also for the work they do in their CFG in their school. We are also integrating CFG and NSRF work into our Continuing Teachers License Program and other programs and are deeply examining other ways to model and support collaborative and reflective practice throughout the college.

In the words of BAYCES director Steve Jubb, "We are so much more effective at meeting human needs as interdependent communities than we are as independent individuals." Our goal of equitable opportunities and outcomes for each of our children is impacted by our ability to work together and problem-solve as a community. As a school coach and director of Small Schools Northwest, I see it as my responsibility to model, support and create collaborative community in the environments I work in, and I deeply value the support and reflective thinking that comes from NSRF and motivates me to continue this work. ■

Kim Feicke, Director of Small Schools Northwest, can be contacted at feicke@lcark.edu