Success Analysis
Daniel Baron, Indiana

Can you imagine how different school would be if we built teachers and students’ strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses? I am thinking of 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. I was too focused on the 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 reasons for 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 on their mistakes and those of their students. It was her practice to ask parents to tell stories about those times that they struggled with in their own schools. 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 was her practice to ask parents to tell stories about those times that they struggled with in their own schools.

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 of other experiences. The SAP is easily tailored to the critical dialogue of a full participant in this protocol, and each participant takes a turn as the facilitator.

The Success Analysis Protocol (SAP) is designed to help the group to keep focused on how the success described by the presenter is different from other 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 area 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.

2. Presenter describes the success. In triads, the first presenter tells the story of his or her success, in as much detail she / 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. The presenter is silent and takes notes. (10 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. (30 minutes)

6. SAP 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. (continued on page 15)
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?”
2. Presenter describes the success. In triads, the first presenter tells the story of his or her success, in as much detail she or 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. The group comes to an agreement on how the success described by the presenter is different 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?
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Connections: A Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

successes or their students. NSRF practices and protocols typically focused on dilemmas in our practice or difficulties 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 us with the best practices for the purpose of adding those strategies to teachers’ repertoires. Although numerous or 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 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 of dilemmas 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)

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

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 own 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 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.

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