I Must Know: Who is Quinn?
Katy Kelly, Indiana

People in the NSRF network who have developed the habit of reflection in their practice often use the NSRF Coaches listserv 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 offices and found them in our CFG tools notebook uncited”) 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, LA. 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 lifefile observations, 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. 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 getting it?
6. How do others know how well we’re doing it?

Here is a version 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. Why are we doing it that way?
5. How do we know how well we’re doing it?
6. How do others know how well we’re doing it?

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NSRF Mission Statement
The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities producing powerful learning experiences for everyone.

We are the journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony School Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to Connections contact us at 812/330.2702, kkelly@harmonyschool.org, dbambino@earthlink.net.
Coaching Lessons from Co-Rec Softball

David Christman, Indiana

Bouncing Balls

I have always loved games that involve lots of people and bouncing balls. They seem so social, friendly and filled with quick wins and unexpected events. In my neighborhood, as a child, to get a game started involved going door to door to find enough people to play at any given time, and usually involved kids of many ages, some adults, and even a dog or two (great fielders!). We had to “close fields” if there weren’t enough players, expand and contract teams around mealtimes, and often the younger rules were made for the adults. I loved the inclusiveness and ornate strategies that evolved from so many variables. It taught me a lot about how different personalities respond to different situations.

Though I played in more formal leagues, it was never as much fun. As time has progressed, I became part of my first Critical Friends Group. That changed five years ago when I had free time to enjoy the many adult softball leagues here in the Midwest. It seemed way too competitive and not very fun.

That changed five years ago when I was asked to be on a Co-Recreational softball team, right around the time I became part of my first Critical Friends Group. As time has progressed, I’ve become a coach for both teams and it is hard not to notice some overlap in skills required to be effective in both roles.

Field Notes for CFG coaching:

Ideas are a lot like bouncing balls and tossing them around in a group of colleagues can yield unexpected insights. People come to the table from different backgrounds, some have scars from previous group interactions and need to make sure their ideas will be listened to...

The Rules of Engagement

The “extra” rules of Co-Recreational softball include:

1. To avoid balance issues of perceived power: having the same number of men and women on a team (two each in the outfield, infield and pitcher/catcher combination); men must bat opposite handed (than their “natural hand”) and use a bigger ball (that will not carry as far) when batting. Walking a man is two bases, to discourage pitching around women in the order. Batting orders must alternate genders.

2. The rules, especially at first, feel different (except gender, that is now a given context) and awkward to say the least.

3. Still, in the two years we’ve played as a teacher/parent/sponsor/alumni team, we’ve had a huge amount of enjoyment playing this hybrid game, and enough success (even a few come-from-behind victories). It has also definitely contributed to a feeling of closeness and shared insights within the group, as well as improving our skill level dramatically.

Field Notes for CFG coaching:

Protocols can be awkward at times and may take explaining and practice. Attempting to “level the playing field” can yield some false assumptions, but sharing the power is an important goal. Having a diverse group increases the knowledge base and pool of insights available.

The Player-Coach

I love the side-by-side quality to being a player-coach, can yield unexpected insights. People come to the table from different backgrounds, some have scars from previous group interactions and need to make sure their ideas will be listened to...

Diverse Skills and Comfort Zones

I like to ask what positions players want to play, what goals and fears they might have and then work from that space. Some members really only feel comfortable playing one position for a while; others like to switch around. Some of our best games have been when people are needed to fill in for absent team members – there is something about needing that heightens the effort and enjoyment of the game.

Field Notes for CFG coaching:

People have to feel comfortable before sharing and taking risks. The urgency of being asked to help the group work on difficult and important goals. Having a diverse group increases the knowledge base and pool of insights available.

Second Chances

There are so many ways to contribute to a successful softball game – a nice catch, hit, throw, backing up a fellow fielder, or hustling down to first. Mistakes have a way of becoming “before picture” of the next inning or (continued on page 14)

Who is Quinn?

(continued from page 3)

6. How will my students know they are getting it?

Here is what Juli wrote about these revisions and uses: “I do like the notion of making the question of TO WHOM, explicitly and unambiguously. For the first time, I ask the question about how I am teaching and why...but there seems to be additional power in bringing the students into the questions in a more personal, real way...up front.

Another way I am using the Q’s 6/7s is as an organizing framework for integrating the variety of ‘professional development’ one of my schools is undergoing. We are deconstructing the theory and ‘direction’ for classroom implementation into Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction and Pedagogy by fitting the attribute and strategies into the frame of the 6 Questions...it has helped us see that what we are doing is building our repertoire of connected ideas and strategies; improving on the number of ‘stand-alone’ PROGRAMS that are unrelated.

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