

# CONNECTIONS

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## Report from the Directors

Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director

*Foreward to the book A Facilitators  
Book of Questions by Tina Blythe and  
David Allen*

I love to facilitate—be 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. Secondly, 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” one might want to respond in that way.

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

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# Success Analysis

Daniel Baron, Indiana

**C**an 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  
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**"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

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 for years 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 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 aloud. From there the rest is history.

These deceptively simple questions – Quinn’s 6 – have 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 I know the kids are getting it?
6. How do the kids know they are getting it?

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. 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?

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

1. What are we meeting about?
2. Why are we meeting about it?
3. How are we running/conducting our

meeting?

4. Why are we running/conducting that way?
5. How will we know the meeting was a success?
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/that?
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 deepen 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 my kids are getting 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 that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

## CONNECTIONS

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# 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 quirky 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 youngest kids were pinch runners for the adults. I loved the inclusiveness and ornate strategies that evolved from so many variables. I also learned a lot about how different personalities respond to different situations.

Though I played in more formal leagues, it was never as much fun. As an adult, I couldn’t really find the right situation to enjoy the many adult softball leagues here in the Midwest. It seemed way too competitive and not very much 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 groups 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 involve trying to 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. The rules, especially at first, feel artificial (not to mention sexist) and awkward, to say the least.

Still, in the two years we’ve played as a teacher/parent/spouse/ 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, encouraging people as a fellow teammate. I enjoy teaching a specific skill, with permission, and explaining rules and strategies – but mostly players learn from their teammates. I really enjoy it when I can forget who the coach is and the team runs smoothly during the game.

*Field Notes for CFG coaching: The team has most of the skills it needs already in the group. Coaching involves helping to set and honor*



*ground rules. It’s challenging to coach a group and be an active member at the same time. If you’re going to participate completely, make sure the group is skilled enough to not let you dominate the time! A sign of a strong group dynamic is when the group can share the facilitation.*

## 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 feeling needed 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 work can bring out the best in members. Switching roles, finding new perspectives to view the discussion increases the possibilities of learning.*

## 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 the “before picture” of the next inning or  
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# Creating Effective Small Schools

Kim Feicke, Oregon

**I**t could have been an ugly situation. After two years of dreaming and planning, the four small schools' staff had created to replace its large high school had just been reduced to three. Difficulties 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 supporting each other and moving forward prevailed. There is nothing easy about converting a large high school into small autonomous schools and there are daily examples of the frustrations 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 gotten them through the tight spots. Their foundation in Coalition for Essential Schools (CES) Principles and Critical Friends Groups has supported them in creating a collaborative and supportive process that has resulted in the successful 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 educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone. Creating effective small schools is how we do that. Coaching schools through the process of creating small schools is what I do, and NSRF tools and protocols are my toolbox for doing it.

How do I use NSRF in my work? Let me count the ways.... The easiest way I can describe it is just to show you what a typical week looks like for me.

On Monday, I'm meeting with the planning team of a large comprehensive

high school for the first time. They've just received a planning grant for creating smaller learning communities and this is their first meeting together as well. Throughout the day I spend with them we will do some ice breaking and team-building activities I pulled off of the NSRF website, we will do a text rendering



on an article related to their reform effort, we will do the Continuum Dialogue Protocol so they can get a sense of where they are in their attitudes about this work, and we will do a chalk talk about their school culture.

After spending the day with them, I will drive to another district I'm working with to meet with their Student Leadership Team, a group of students from each of the high schools in the district that are working together to build student voice in the district. I will teach them the Consultancy Protocol and they will spend the evening supporting each other in dilemmas they're facing at their individual schools as they implement 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 attributes of successful culturally relevant

learning experiences. As a part of the program, the teachers are required to write a statement about their classroom environment. They will start with the Metaphor Activity to give them a jumping off point into their writing.

On Wednesday, it's off to another school where my task will be to facilitate a joint meeting of the high 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 plan.

On Thursday I get to go to my coaches CFG group, my place of refuge in this work! The place where I get help with my dilemmas, challenge my own practice, and grow professionally.

Beyond coaching in schools, Small Schools Northwest at Lewis & Clark College is creating a network of professional 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 environment 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 to create a "truly diverse school of education committed to bridging the achievement and social class gaps."

Thus along with our typical Center of Activity work—CFG Coaches' Trainings, ongoing learning opportunities and support for CFG coaches, and introducing CFGs to new audiences—we are also working to integrate CFGs into our teacher education program. Currently, teachers can receive graduate credit not only for participating in the CFG Coaches'

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# CFG Report

Eric Baylin, New York

It 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 for risk-taking and for deep, honest conversations.



While our meetings have always been substantial and helpful, 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 our own collaborative work?

This question was the first item on the agenda. It was apparent within minutes, though, that with the long summer interlude and the bustling first weeks of school, the question was too removed for us to consider in a deliberate way. It seemed a good moment to shift the agenda and move straight into looking at the third grade work to give us some grounding. The familiar rhythm of the tuning protocol was comforting.

With this strong reminder of how thoughtfully we worked together, again we addressed our question: how might we take this work into the classroom? Were there aspects of the tuning pro-

cedure itself that could be adapted? Immediately some anxiety surfaced. "Impossible." "Not enough time." "Wait a minute! Remember: we are a seasoned group! Let's take a look at it." 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.

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? Weren't our students' lives often as pressured and fragmented as ours? How could we create for them the same opportunity for more reflection? We were starting to forge a direction that was acceptable to the whole group. We agreed to focus, for this year, on developing ways to encourage our students to become more reflective about their own work.

The next morning there was an excited e-mail from one member about a successful class discussion with his sixth graders regarding group norms. He ended the message: I love our

group and how we work together. I want my classes to have the same feel.

There is something tremendously satisfying in seeing our talk bear fruit and in knowing that one small thing happening on one side of the school may well be the spark that ignites a positive change elsewhere, all because we talk together in a productive way, and arrive at something no individual could produce alone.

We are a fortunate school in many ways. We have made a tremendous commitment to professional development by providing one early release day each month to allow for in-depth collaborative work. We call the program TALL Tuesdays (Teachers as Leaders and Learners). Among the 12 faculty groups, there is one other CFG; others meet in self-selected study groups, each focused on a particular topic.

We feel especially fortunate, too, that for more than a year we had the pleasure of working closely with Nancy Mohr. She trained more than fifteen of us as facilitators and helped us launch a faculty-wide introduction to looking at student work, a day that signaled a tidal change in our development as a learning community. As our CFG began our first meeting we reflected for a moment on how much she meant to us. We felt a renewed sense of commitment to continuing our work with the same dedication and enthusiasm that she had inspired in us. ■

*Eric Baylin teaches art at Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn NY, a pre-K-12 independent school with 935 students and 130 faculty members. The school has had CFGs since 1998. The group of teach in both middle and upper school. Grades and disciplines represented include science, math, English, foreign language, dance, visual art, 1st, 3rd and 4th grades. Teaching experience ranges from six to over thirty years. Eric may be contacted by email at [ebaylin@packer.edu](mailto:ebaylin@packer.edu)*

# Introducing CFGs to a New Network: Fighting the Good Fight

Pam Ayres and Mary Helen Spiri, Maryland

For schools in Maryland and Virginia, Critical Friends Groups represent a new and foreign possibility. Driven by long-standing, rigid student assessment programs, teachers, principals, and central office folk often view teaching as an exercise in efficiency: How can we teach students more than we are currently teaching them? The typical professional development goal in such a climate of efficiency is to present teachers with strategies that enable them to teach “better” – measured always and only by student performance on standardized tests. “Better” teaching, like “better” learning, is an individual activity. The “best” teachers perform magic within the boundaries of their classrooms. The “best” learners test well on Maryland’s and Virginia’s standardized tests.

Introducing the heresy of authentic collaborative practice into such an educational culture has proven challenging on many fronts. Generous grant funding in 18 schools supported by the Chesapeake Coalition of Essential Schools has created ample opportunities for training. Simply stated, money is not a deterrent in the schools we serve. Instead, the challenges we face in promoting CFG work can be categorized into three areas: (1) preconceptions about professional development, (2) belief in the sanctity of traditional content, and (3) definitions of planning time as an individual – and zealously guarded – commodity.

These challenges have inspired us to create a training program in which participants are centered in the *processes* – rather than the *products* – of learning. Together with RoLesia Holman, we addressed this dilemma by designing a pre-coaching, introductory course. Our initial training is now a 30-hour course, “An Introduction to Critical Friends Collaborative Processes,” offered for graduate credit in partnership with Rosemont College in Pennsylvania. We encourage par-

ticipation across school and district roles. Secretaries, instructional assistants, central office staff, administrators, and classroom teachers – to date 262 people from across our network – have engaged together in this work.

The central focus of the introductory course is comfort with the processes of collaboration. Our hope is that participants will begin to use these processes in authentic settings – in their classrooms, in faculty meet-

Introducing the heresy of authentic collaborative practice into such an educational culture has proven challenging on many fronts.

ings, as members of grade-level teams or academic departments, and the like. We attempt to empower people to engage in structured conversations in forums that already exist in their schools and districts. The initial training is comprised of three strands: (1) building trusting relationships and fostering development of a learning community through collaborative processes, (2) developing shared understandings through text-based discussions, and (3) rethinking teaching and learning through looking at authentic student and teacher work.

The initial training introduces a common language and provides shared experiences that we then work to support at the school, district, and network levels. It is not unusual, for example, for teachers in our network to ask for assistance in selecting a protocol to use in a grade-level meeting. Parent meetings have included text renderings, tuning protocols, and charettes. Collaborative groups have worked to establish ground rules and norms. Common understandings have helped us to elevate the level of

discourse at network gatherings and to build enthusiasm for the introduction of new tools and protocols.

Despite our successes among those who have engaged in our initial training, we have discovered that true Critical Friends Groups are slow to evolve. Among the 25 schools in our network, we have only six such groups functioning as CFGs. Others are beginning to form, but the challenges described previously are real deterrents. Those who have an opportunity to explore the work readily acknowledge its value, but the schools and districts in which these individuals work remain unconvinced that structured professional dialogue IS potent professional development.

We acknowledge two essential next steps in fostering the work of CFGs. First, we must find ways to support the efforts of those who believe in and promote the work in their schools and districts. We have begun to sponsor regional dinner meetings in different locations in our network that encourage collaboration among graduates of the introductory training and others interested in the work. Second, we must grow a cohort of CFG coaches and encourage their connection to the larger national work of the NSRF. We have scheduled a coaches’ training for July for graduates of the introductory course. We plan to engage members of the NSRF in working with us to design and facilitate this training.

Not surprisingly, we have been most successful in creating environments that support the development of CFGs in districts where central office officials have participated in and then promoted the training. In one district, for example, text-based discussions and uses of protocols to review professional and student work at the central office level are common. In another, teachers who participate in CFGs can earn re-certification credit – acknowledging CFGs as an effective form of professional development. We continue to work to reshape a vision

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## Meaningful Learning at Jules E. Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical School Pennsylvania

**L**ast spring, Nicole Gaughan, a first-year Philadelphia high school teacher, participated in a CFG Coaches' training. Here's an excerpt from her reflections about her experience along with her students' responses to a prompt she shared with them about a time when their learning was meaningful at Mastbaum...

"As a first-year teacher I came into the school year with high hopes and huge plans. I was quickly snapped into the reality of a living breathing high school in the Philadelphia School District. High hopes and huge plans became small wishes and day-to-day plans. I was overwhelmed and ready to run for the hills...From September to March the viewpoints I learned in college were lost to just trying to survive; that is, until I was introduced to Critical Friends. Just four Saturdays were able to remind me of my original beliefs, and helped me make them a reality in my classroom...Through CFG I have grown to realize that it takes a community to create a good teacher. The training gave me the opportunity to say, "I need help." I also learned that the first take or draft is not the last and final product. Using a Tuning Protocol I was able to change an assignment that I originally thought was great, but had received disastrous results from my students. Listening to other teachers critique my work...I was able to change my project enough that the original goals and objectives are met, and I am now looking forward to next year, working on my revamped, Banned Book Project. Huge plans, here I come again!"

Nicole's students were asked to remember a time when their learning at Mastbaum really meant something to them. Here's what they shared...



I was in shop class and it was the time our teacher taught us how to fix brakes. I was holding the brakes in my hand, and then slowly put them in place. My classmates were watching me and I felt so excited to be in the center of attention. When the job was done I felt proud of myself, and

also proud to be a girl being able to do something like this.

The best time I liked was when we were in English class and we were reading *The Piano Lesson*. Everyone in the class

participated and after we were done reading the book we watched a movie on it. The teacher was reading the book with us and watched the movie with us. It was meaningful because we all paid attention and did all of our work. The teacher gave us a test and we all passed except like three people.



The whole class was in shop and the shop teacher was showing us how to use the knife in a proper way. He was also showing us how to slice, mince and dice celery, carrots and onions. The whole class was participating, the teacher demonstrated cutting the celery, carrots etc. and showed us a couple of ways that you can get cut with a knife while not paying attention. When my mom's making dinner I can help her cut the carrots, celery etc. in the proper way.

The time when I learned a lot was last year in ninth grade. In algebra, I say I learned a lot then because now in geometry I'm taking all my skills from last year and using them in geometry.

I was walking in the classroom and preparing to do my work. Some of my classmates were talking and some were already doing work. The teacher was beginning to speak. When the teacher said to me, "you passed my class." I felt special, because I never thought I was.

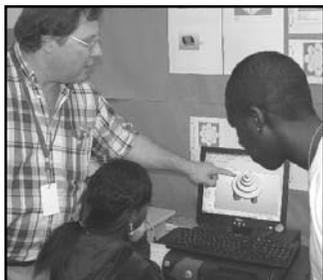
There really wasn't a special day where I felt I learned something new but every day I walk out of my class with something new when we talk together as a class.

A time when I was learning was when I was in geometry. We were learning about angles. Me and my classmates were working in groups and we worked on these angles together. My teacher was helping us and doing work on the board so we could understand what we were doing a little bit better. Me and my classmates were understanding how the measurements and angles were formed. I learned a lot of new things that day.



# the Center

What I learned was how to do fishes out of clay. Everyone was doing it and my teacher was helping us out on the shape of it. I learned something there; if I keep on trying, I can do it!



I remember a time in science class when all of the students and teachers got together and talked about a subject. I don't remember what the topic was about but I do know that everyone was getting along and it was a great topic, and everyone was asking questions and

learning. What made it so meaningful was that everyone was learning and not talking or playing around.

A time when I learned something new, that really meant a lot to me, was in my Spanish class. From my experience in this class, I have learned a different language and now I am able to explain some things in Spanish to other people.



The time I learned something is when we were learning how to cut and cook and a guest speaker came and taught us how to make pasta salad. Another time I learned something at



Mastbaum was in ninth grade in world history when we were learning about swords and watching movies. The other time was in English class when we were writing poems and talking about the Blues.

A time when my learning meant something was when I got my shop, when I helped fix a fence for a man that came to the school. He said that he couldn't find anyone that knew how to fix his fence. When I did it I got \$30. My teacher said that I can make way more money than that, when I get older. My classmates must not enjoy my shop as much because they didn't help me. But when they saw me get paid they wanted to work harder. My teacher was



just checking up on me to make sure I was OK. This particular experience was so meaningful when I heard you can make up to \$40 an hour. Now that's a lot of money.

It was in ninth grade when I was in geometry class with people I knew. The teacher and students made it comfortable for me. The teacher was hard but helped us get our work done. I was motivated to get a good grade.



As I look back on this school year I think the most valuable thing I have learned was in my shop. I learned how to

sanitize properly and handle a knife in the proper way. I learned how to make sautéed chicken, muffins, cookies and a lot more. I'm glad I chose the shop I am in. It is easy to get a scholarship if you really want it and work hard at it. My shop teacher also showed me that I need to control my temper. That is another thing I have learned about myself.



One time that really meant something to me was when we went on a class trip to the Franklin Institute. We had a lot of fun when we were in the Omniverse Theater because it made me feel like we were moving when we weren't. When we left we had a snowball fight and it was really fun. My teacher was enjoying herself while she was with us. My classmates were helping the teacher and having fun themselves. The reason this day was meaningful is because it was the first time I had fun while learning.



These excerpts and others were used as text by the staff at a retreat in June.

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# Philadelphia Center of Activity Report

Julio Feldman, Pennsylvania

Over the past two years there have been CFG coaches' trainings in Philadelphia, State College, and Upper Darby. These trainings were conducted by local NSRF coaches in partnership with local Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) centers. CFG coaches' seminars have also been organized in the Chesapeake area. As a result of these activities there are working CFGs in

practices are being introduced into the school's cabinet and academy structures as the school works to become a schoolwide learning community for all students and staff members. Veteran Critical Friends Groups are continuing to work and grow at Taylor Elementary and Central East Middle School. Our Center's most recent development is the creation of a Leadership CFG. In the fall I received an e-mail from Deb-

and has enabled me to become a more effective instructional leader.

At our first meeting, during Connections, those of us who knew Nancy took the opportunity to reflect on how she impacted on our lives, and afterward in true Nancy Mohr style we proceeded to do the work that she would want us to do.

A Hopes and Fears activity (What's your greatest hope for this group?...your biggest fear?) led to the development of our norms. This was followed by the development of a plan of action (Where do we imagine we'll be in June? Where are we now? How will we get there?). We are a group of twelve, and represent elementary, intermediate, high school and central office administrators across four school districts. We meet one Saturday morning a month.

At our second meeting we focused on collaborative leadership and how it can be sustained. Following our opening moves, we did a text rendering on Rick DuFour's article " 'Collaboration Lite' Puts Student Achievement on a Starvation Diet. " One of our members then presented a dilemma and we proceeded with the consultancy protocol. The assignment for our next meeting is to bring a dilemma and to share it within a triad. I'm ready to present my dilemma and can't wait to hear the feedback from my colleagues. The consultancy has always been one of my favorite protocols. Whether presenting or participating I always gain new ideas and perspectives. I first learned about consultancies, as well as many other practices, from Nancy Mohr.

I am rejuvenated, excited and look forward to what we can accomplish as individuals and as a group during the coming year. Nancy Mohr's legacy will force us to imagine and ask the hard questions. Our commitment will enable us to grow, to examine our practice and to facilitate change in our schools. ■

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a number of local elementary, middle and high schools throughout the region.

In addition to their CFGs, some of these schools have started to embed reflective, collaborative practices into their ongoing staff and leadership meetings as well as their classrooms. At C.W. Henry Elementary School in Mt. Airy, in addition to their CFG, weekly classroom meetings are held schoolwide. All team meetings are based on collectively developed agendas that are facilitated by team members in a shared leadership structure. At Mastbaum High School, there are now two CFGs, a veteran group that began last year and a new group that is being coached by teachers who participated in last spring's coaches' training. Collaborative, reflective

bie Bambino inviting me to join this group.

Prior to our first meeting we were saddened by Nancy Mohr's death. I first met Nancy during the 1995-'96 Annenberg Principals' Institute. I was a participant, she was a facilitator. Nancy came on as a facilitator during our second or third meeting that year. At first, I was not quite sure how it was going to work since we had already bonded as a group, and here was an "outsider." Well "this lady" proved me wrong, within a very short time she connected with us and became an integral part of the group. Since then I had many opportunities to be in her company and to learn from her. I would often take notes on her facilitation and marvel at her abilities. Nancy has been a significant force in my development

# NSRF's Living History

## A Conversation with Sharon Allen-Hamilton Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

**D**uring the 2000 '01 school year the School District of Lancaster (SDOL) joined three other districts in the Lucent Peer Collaboration Project. NSRF, at the invitation of The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), has been involved with the project and its rollout of district-wide Lucent Learning Communities (LLCs) since its inception. One outstanding feature of this project has been the intentional collaboration of administrative and union forces on the project in each district. This issue's Living History segment features my conversation with Sharon Allen-Hamilton, president of the Lancaster Education Association and CFG coach/facilitator.

### **Can you tell us a little bit about what it was that first attracted you to the Lucent Peer Collaboration Project in the SDOL?**

As President of the Teacher's Association in Lancaster, I was part of the team that was interviewed by Hallie Tamez of TPI and Daniel Baron of NSRF. During those first conversations I was struck by Daniel's mention of teacher empowerment and the ways that learning communities allowed teachers to take responsibility for their own professional growth.

As Association President I had become increasingly aware of the teachers' concerns about the value of their professional development sessions for their day-to-day practice. In light of their concerns, the idea of a grass-

roots project where teachers would be responsible for their own learning really appealed to me. I was especially interested in the plan to provide teachers with a structure, framework and tools, along with the time to collaborate and reflect on their work. I thought that this combination of time and tools would allow teachers to sustain their growth even after the Lucent funding was exhausted, or there was a change in leadership.

### **As a public school parent and a teacher, how did you think the creation of LLCs would help students?**

I was a classroom teacher for 17 years and I know that teachers col-



laborate in small ways all the time. I thought the LLCs would help teachers add more focus to their collaboration and sharing. During my training as a coach I learned new ways to structure conversations so that we could zero in on improving our practice.

When we look at student or adult work and really focus on a question or dilemma, we always end up with concrete ideas to improve our practice and that helps our students.

### **Can you share an example of the kind of teacher learning or change that you're describing?**

One LLC explored a district process, which was developed to support students who were not meeting stan-

dards. 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 to create new ways of supporting teachers 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 teaching-learning and accountability pieces of the process.

The benefit I saw for our members was really about this shared leadership or teacher empowerment. Traditionally, as teachers, we always thought we knew what was best for the students in our classrooms, and that understanding directed our classroom practice and decision-making. But we didn't always examine the results of our practice to see if it was indeed accelerating student achievement. We haven't always taken, or been given, the time to ask ourselves if our teaching was really meeting the needs of all of our students.

Now, when we collaborate to "tune" a plan or examine an assignment with a focus on results for students, we can collect reliable evidence and adjust our instruction, as it's needed. In the end, we see the benefits for members as an increase in student achievement...their success is the best benefit we can get!

### **How has your understanding of collaboration and reflection grown as a coach? How has it changed the day-to-day way you do your work?**

Since I started coaching, I find myself thinking a lot more about the assumptions I make about what I see, or things I hear people say.

### **Can you give me an example?**

Well, by acknowledging my own assumptions I now ask more questions and make sure to get clarification

*(continued on page 12)*

from the other person. This work has made me continue to hone my listening skills. As president, 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 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 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 administrator) 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)

at all levels of school organization. In some places, we have been successful in convincing people that tapping the expertise of a group of educators and encouraging them to value and share this expertise is an extraordinarily *efficient* form of professional development.

We remain optimistic that critical friends processes and, in time, Critical Friends Groups will continue to enrich the cultures of the schools and districts in our network. When we were trained as CFG coaches, Debbie Bambino and Carol Nejman taught us a mantra: "Trust the process. The work sells itself." They were right. ■

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## 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, explicit. It was embedded in 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's is as an organizing framework for integrating the variety of 'professional development' one of my schools is trying to integrate. We are deconstructing the theory and 'directions' 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 VS implementing a number of 'stand-alone' PROGRAMS that are unrelated...

"So, the Quinn's Six Questions are helping us feel wealth and abundance in starting our new year rather than overwhelmed with the age-old question of 'how will I get everything in!'

"Hope this helps, and please feel free to adapt and share any way these questions are being used!"

I'd like to add as an addendum

the full text of one posting by Teri Schrader, Principal of Francis W. Parker School in Devens, MA. I think it underscores how tools like "Quinn's 6 Questions" can influence the culture of a school – especially when practitioners take the opportunity to reflect on how these tools apply to their own work and are pushed in their thinking by colleagues using different approaches.

"We are in our third and final week of faculty summer planning here at Parker School-- and tomorrow we will spend our mornings in domain (interdisciplinary subject-based) meetings to share our curriculum across divisions (integrated grade levels--middle, intermediate and upper high school) and plans for what we're about to ask the kids to do this year... so, I'm thinking about how timing really is everything. I'm struck by re-looking at Juli's questions on this particular day, given what we're up to here.

"The questions posed in Quinn's 6 make me think about framing our sessions tomorrow differently-- rather than convening separate conversations about curriculum and instruction and assessment, these questions frame a comprehensive discussion that may allow us to talk together about the academic program in a multi-dimensional way and revise our thinking on

any aspect of the work. Terrific curriculum is only as terrific as the means by which we assess it, and great ideas that aren't thoughtfully framed or translated into developmentally appropriate class activities or comprehensible projects don't help kids learn. So... it strikes me that using the questions here allow presenting teams of teachers to talk about the curriculum, yes, but also we can think alongside about the factors that must prevail upon our curriculum building--the questions about intention, "audience", anticipated reaction and potential bonuses or pitfalls we face in instruction and assessment.

"I will be interested to see how the deliberate posing and thinking about these questions helps push us to revise, change or affirm what we're thinking. Sometimes we wait till a unit or a project is fully designed before tending to deeper instruction or assessment questions, but it seems like we can consider the full array at the design stage.

"It's also a nice, concise format to frame and discuss.

"Hope the beginning of the year is a time of real energized renewal and creativity, and optimism for everyone in all our schools." ■

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## NSRF Research Project Carrie Brennan, Arizona

The National School Reform Faculty is taking stock of the various research efforts that have been conducted and articles that have been written about Critical Friends Group over the past decade, and we need your help. Is your school or district implementing CFGs as a critical component of a larger restructuring effort that requires careful documentation, such as the Small Learning Communities or Comprehensive School Reform federal grants? Is your Center of Activity recording the impact of your work, using either quantitative or qualitative measures - e.g. the number of coaches trained each year, the number of schools using CFGs as part of their professional development program, or case study narratives of teachers changing their practice? Has your CFG documented the growth of the teachers involved or the impact of their collaboration on their students' work in the classroom? Have you come across an article about Critical Friends Groups that you think others might not be aware of? Are you conducting research related to the work of NSRF as part of your graduate studies, perhaps even writing a dissertation on Critical Friends Groups? If you answered yes to any of the questions above, please contact Carrie Brennan and share your "leads." Call her at (520) 884-1548 or email her at [carrie@cityhighschool.org](mailto:carrie@cityhighschool.org). The National School Reform Faculty enters its tenth year next fall, and it is essential that we are able to demonstrate to others the power of our collective work. ■

## Director's Report

(continued from page 1)

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questions about teaching and learning. Addressing such questions requires individuals' willingness to share and, often, reconsider their own privately held beliefs.

I think about this kind of facilitation as being full of tensions — tensions that as a facilitator I want to, in the spirit of this book, manage, rather than resolve. I want to be an advocate for the presenter's success, yet also be in service to the whole group and its learning. I want to facilitate with a light hand, yet be firm in helping the group stick to the agreements it has made about how group members will talk together. I want to honor the steps and intention of the protocol, yet not feel by the end of the session as if the protocol has somehow used us. I know the protocol will demand a certain rhythm by its very structure, yet I want to tap into the natural rhythm of the group. I want to be an active facilitator — one

that group members can count on to keep the process safe so they can have potentially risky conversations with each other. Yet I know that sometimes the best thing I can do or say as the facilitator is nothing, because sometimes it has to be uncomfortable for group members to learn and grow. I want to be a fully contributing member of the group, yet I know that good facilitation sometimes demands that I give my full attention to that aspect of the work.

I remember the day I turned the corner in my thinking about myself as a facilitator. The conversation that day had been challenging, and the group confronted some deeply held beliefs about expectations for students. I knew that individuals in the group had moved to a new, more productive place in their thinking. As I read the reflections about the session written by group members, I was struck by how all of them talked about their

learning, about their students, about their practice, about how other group members had challenged them to see the student work and their assumptions differently. There was not one mention about the role I had played as facilitator. That is when I understood what is for me now the most important maxim about facilitating protocol conversations: "This is not about me." Facilitators with a broad repertoire of responses and sophisticated ways of thinking about their craft are critical to the collaborative work of teachers. But, in the end, the work is not about the facilitator, or the facilitation, or the protocol. It is, first and foremost, about the learning the presenter and the group do together on behalf of students. ■

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## Coaching Lessons...

(continued from page 4)

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game when you make the perfect play. So many skills are critical that there is always a way to help while we develop new skills.

*Field Notes for CFG coaching: There are so many skills that support clear communication. We all make mistakes along the way. Over a whole year (or more) as we practice protocols together we have many opportunities to improve and support our own toolbox 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 play. 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 were 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 skills. Shared moments of success help clear the way for all kinds of day-to-day interactions. The pattern of positive feedback and gentle

kidding helps to keep communication channels 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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# 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. ■

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*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. ■

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