W e call the Indiana Center of Activity the Hoosier School Reform Faculty (HSRF). The name HSRF evolved out of an inquiry question: What is the group's historical activity to influence public schools to put equity at the center of their work as they transform schools and districts into democratic learning communities? HSRF grows out of the Harmony School’s history of support of democratic school reform in high-poverty schools, a history that was greatly influenced by my initial NSRF coaches training.

Fast forward to June of 2000, when the Harmony Education Center became the home of NSRF. For the next two years, all of the energy of the Harmony School Outreach Office was focused on the survival, growth, and new mission of NSRF. Our local work came to a standstill while we worked to establish NSRF’s national office. Imagine taking NSRF, a permanent national institution committed to the creation and sustainability of democratic learning communities with a focus on educational equity for each student.

In 2002, NSRF had grown dramatically and was providing services to national organizations, school districts and schools all over the country. It was now time to direct our attention back to the work in Indiana. Our theory of action was focused on our local school district and the Indianapolis Public School system.

Our first move as a formal Center was to build on our previously strong relationship with the School of Education (SOE) at Indiana University. Cathy Brown, an Associate Dean of the School of Education, was involved in a three-year project working with the local school districts with the IU Math Department, the SOE Mathematics Education Department, and local school districts such as Monroe County, Indiana. The project design was based on the Japanese Lesson Study model. After the first year, Cathy was concerned that the study group had not built a professional community where administrators felt safe enough to take risks, ask the tough questions, or expose their professional vulnerabilities. She encouraged me to introduce the concept of Critical Friends Group to the Lesson Study Group.

It was a great match, and working together with NSRF facilitator Ross Peterson-Youch, the group made the transition from study group to CFG. This early success led to HSRF facilitating two full-day retreats of the I.U. SOE faculty in two consecutive years. Indiana University has also sponsored coaches seminars for I.U. faculty and Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCSC) teachers and administrators for the last two summers, with another seminar scheduled for this August. Betty Bushinghoff from the Athens, Georgia Center and Ross have been invaluable members of the facilitation team.

Last June, HSRF and Indiana University entered into a formal partnership to offer professional development services to I.U. faculty as well as to offer our services to every district in Indiana. The services are offered through I.U. by HSRF.

Those first two coaches seminars have evolved into an extraordinary partnership between MCSC and HSRF. The critical incident that led to our deep relationship with MCSC came on the last day of coaches training, when the Superintendent, Dr. John Maloy, and his Associate, Bruce Law, came for lunch.

Over twenty-five teachers engaged them both. They wanted their central office administrators to know about the power of the work. Perhaps equally important, they wanted to communicate the idea that cultural transformation had to occur in order for the work to take root in their schools. They insisted that their principals had to understand this work so that it could become the core of professional development for their buildings.

Dr. Maloy invited these impassioned teachers to attend the Administrative Coaching Seminar (ACS) on August 15th. That respectful invitation led to the new coaches planning and facilitating the afternoon program for the Advance. The coaches facilitated their administration through a Collaborative Assessment Circle, a meeting on a chalk talk document from their June seminar that responded to the questions “What makes this work so powerful and what will it take to sustain the work back in your schools?”

They also created small groups to have text-based conversations and to participate in looking at student work sessions for all administrators. I had the great pleasure to observe my daughter Heather, a teacher, facilitate a group with Dr. Maloy and to hear her ask him “and what evidence do you have to support your perspective?”

Over the course of this school year, MCSC has demonstrated its commitment to CFGs as the heart of their professional development for the district. This year, HSRF provides:

• Monthly two hour meetings of the entire Leadership Team (all instructional and noninstructional administrators in the district)

• Monthly principal CFGs for 14 of the 22 MCSC Principals (with plans for all principals participating next year)

• Monthly and a half hour meeting for all CFG coaches to deepen and sustain their work in school

• HSRF monthly facilitation support for every coach of a CFG in this year’s seven identified schools (tier-1 schools)

• Monthly support for the district-wide “Human Understanding of Diversity Initiative”

• An introduction to the seven tier-2 schools that will be implementing CFGs next year

HSRF’s major initiative is the state’s largest, and lowest, district in Indiana. The Indianapolis Public School (IPS) system is challenges of an effective protocol? How do we know we have a process that we’re ready to try with other educators? Here are a few of our emerging understandings:

What processes best support collaborative dialogue and enhance collaborative learning?

• Framing the whole process as an inquiry is a priority. Today, evidence is important. Nowadays many people feel that data can be manipulated in a variety of ways to prove any point. It is essential that participants understand and even trust how the data is generated to engage in a data protocol.

• Additionally, concerns about how the data may be used are never far from the surface. If anyone in the group (whether the facilitator or an administrator) appears to already have reached some foregone conclusions which the group now needs to reach, the process is likely to backfire. This is one of the realities that led us to set the context for the data analysis by reading the text mentioned earlier.

What characterizes an effective protocol?

• It is important for us to remember the context in which we expect these protocols to be used: in grade-level or department-level groups, with educators who have not necessarily signed on to work together colleague-cially in a CFG and who, therefore, have probably not developed the culture of trust needed to look at these issues straightforwardly in the early stages of this work. (In our desire to dismiss the envelope regarding issues of equity, it was tempting to want to design the process so that the issues that can be revealed by disaggregating the data are confronted head-on.

• Creating a protocol because there is a need we feel driven to fill, a set of questions that we need to explore was key for us. I don’t think this would have been meaningful if we had simply said, “Why don’t we see if we can create some kind of a protocol?”

• Allowing room for the individual’s and the group’s own inquiry questions, and not feeling tied to the questions that we’ve suggested, is an important point to remember. With that in mind, the “Querying Data” process can be overwhelming. We came up with some very good questions to pose, but for someone who is getting started in analyzing the data, the sheer volume of questions (not to mention all the materials that are required for the protocol) might seem daunting.

How do we know we have a process that we’re ready to try with other educators?

• We may never know that we’re ready. It is an absolute point when we decided, “It’s good enough. Let’s do it.” In our case, I sought out a school site listed on one of the CFG coaches at her site. I knew she’d be willing to take risks, and would set a tone within the group that would support reflective dialogue in an atmosphere where it would be safe for educators to take risks and learn together.

As our CFG worked our way through this creation process, we gained new insights and we reinforced something that we already knew about collaborative learning: holding a set of questions, and being willing to seek answers together, lies at the heart of this work. The following quote, by Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, describes the spirit that sustained us through the months of our inquiry and characterizes how we’ve learned to view data:

“All scientific knowledge is uncertain. This is a fact of much doubt and uncertainty is important. I believe that it is of very great value, and one that extends beyond the sciences. You have to permit the possibility that you do not have it exactly right... So what we do is we ask questions and we try to answer them. Sometimes we get answers, sometimes we don’t, but note that we are absolutely certain.”

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From the Indiana Center of Activity Report

Daniel Baron, Indiana

Spring 2005 Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty 4 (continued on page 12)

Read the Learning from Student Data Protocol at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html

protocols are available at www.nsrfharmony.org/protocols.)

A colleague recently shared the Data Dialogue with me and we may merge this process with our own newly designed protocols in the future.

Through the individual and collaborative versions of the “Learning from Student Data Protocols,” our CFG has the sense that we have begun to address the questions we knew were guiding our inquiry: “What do we know about looking at hard data about student performance?” and “How do we look at this data in ways that are productive?” We’ll be able to gather evidence about these questions when we have more feedback about the protocols as they’re being used.

However, the most important bonus that I’m seeing, for myself and for other members of our CFG, is the learning that we’re gaining about those underlying questions about protocol development, the questions we didn’t even know we were asking.

What processes best support collaborative dialogue and enhance collaborative learning?

by Carl K. Chafin for the American Association of School Administrators. (The article is available at www.aasa.org. The Indiana Center of Activity Report

Daniel Baron, Indiana

This article was featured in Connections Spring 2005. Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty "Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty" was published by the National School Reform Faculty in 2005.
those people who are experienced CFG coaches and who have completed the preparation required to facilitate CFG Coaches Seminars. We use the term “CFG coach” to refer to a much larger group of people who have participated in a CFG Coach seminar and are engaged in some way in coaching a CFG. We’re using these terms in order to clarify different kinds of roles and responsibilities within the common body of work that we’re all engaged in, not to establish an unnecessary sense of hierarchy.

Edrah Frazer and David Leo-Nyquist.

I nteresting in the spring of 2003, Nancy Sutton, former NSRF principal and former principal of Manual High School in Denver, invited Steve Bonchek (Executive Director of HSF) and me to the University of Indianapolis to discuss the potential of a new Bill and Melinda Gates Project. The intention of the grant was to transform all five Indianapolis high schools into models of more than twenty equivalent small schools that would demonstrate their commitment to and the academic success of each student.

After several months of conversation, HSF became the professional development/school transformation technical assistance provider for the University of Indianapolis through its Center for Excellence in Learning and Leadership (CELL). My fellow national faculty members are Grace Green, Lois Butler, and Carol Myers and I began meeting regularly to co-construct a strong partnership between CELL, the IPS District, the Indianapolis Education Association and HSF.

The HSF coaching team in this initiative includes Lois Butler, Kevin Horton, Wendy Brannen, Tom Gregory, Megan Howey and Naomi Brannen. HSF tapped from both New York and Chicago facilitator talent to help build our capacity to lead and sustain an ongoing continuous improvement process. This cross-pollination has been invaluable to all of us.

Each coach was matched with one high school and has been supporting the school’s orientation, exploration, and preparation planning process. The team explicitly promotes the culture of inquiry and reflective practice.

In the spring of 2003, Edorah Frazer and David Leo-Nyquist (continued from page 4)

Facilitators as Peer Observers

Preparing for Peer Observation: Addendum to the Observer as Coach Protocol

Full protocol available online at www.nsrfrharmony.org/connections.html

Peer Observation Pre-Conference Questions (The following questions were developed by Edorah as a result of our debriefing.

• What should I know about the class and lesson I am observing?
• What do you want me to look for? (What is your focus question?)
• What data do you want me to collect? Is there a particular way you would like me to collect it?
• Where would you like me to be in the room? Do you want me to be involved in class, or quietly observing from one place in the room?
• Is there anything else you tell me before I observe your class?

Peer Observation Debriefing Steps

Step One: Observer asks observer, “How do you think the class went, relative to your question?”

Step Two: Observer shares data relative to the focus question in light of the data. Observed takes the lead here – might ask for direct suggestions.

Step Three: Observer asks probing questions relative to the focus question in light of the data. Discussion between observer and observed. Observed takes the lead here – might ask for direct suggestions.

Step Four: Observer ends with warm feedback and thanks for the opportunity to watch a lesson. Variation: Combine steps two and three to ask questions specific to each part of the data being shared.