It is very rare that all of the Elementary Principals get together to share...if we could always work this way it would be incredible.
-- an Elementary Principal

I enjoy this more than I ever thought I would. Strategies [pro- tocols] are very helpful, and realizing that we have similar issues is reassuring. I look forward to having the consultation piece next time.
-- a Secondary Associate Principal

I was very pleased with the way this meeting/training occurred today. I must admit, I was hesitant to become part of a CFG – time issues. However, after this session, I can clearly see the benefits of a CFG and how becoming part of a group can actually save me some time and help me complete my job responsibilities more effectively.
-- a Director

Looking at student work is directly applicable to work with department heads and staff at staff meetings. Help with my issue expanded my thinking on it; and helped me to plan an action. I like this a lot.
-- a Secondary Principal

These are a few quotes from some of the Reflections of the Principals’ CFGs I have been coaching in the Ithaca City School District in upstate New York. Public School Principals, Associate Principals, and central office Directors typically lead very lonely professional careers. There is only one Elementary Principal in any given elementary school and, although they may meet with their Associate Principals, Secondary Principals find themselves alone in making decisions. And certainly Directors at the middle management level in school districts - e.g. of Special Education, Staff Development, and Pre-K are in lonely positions. As the above quotes indicate, it is my strong belief that school district administrators are almost desperately in need of CFG professional learning communities. Thus, in this article I will briefly summarize how I got these groups started, support for them from the Central Administration, how often, where, and when we met, what worked and what didn’t.

Several years ago when a new Superintendent of Schools was hired, I was in the interim position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, K-12, while continu- ing to serve as the Principal of the Alternative Community School (6-12). It was her first year in her new position, and the Superintendent consulted with me about activities for a summer workshop with the district’s “Administrative Team” (all Principals, Associate Principals, Directors, and Managers). She knew of my involvement with the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and thus I designed a series of text-based discus- sions, walkabouts, and an introduction to some other protocols as well. This culminated in my recommendation at the end of the summer workshop that we form several CFGs to continue this kind of professional collegial sharing. Thus, two Elementary Principals groups (four each), a Secondary Principals CFG (four), and a Secondary Associate Principals group (five) met, with sup- port from the Superintendent, on the last morning of the workshop to engage in “consultancies” and decide on times to meet. Our Secondary Principals CFG, of which I was a member, met regularly for the next two years, either once or twice per month in the office of one of the Principals, on a rotating basis, after school from 3:30-5:00. However, the Superintendent continued to call on me to use CFG protocols (particu- larly text-based discussions) during our monthly Administrative Team meet- ings, and despite the other groups very much wanting to do their CFGs after a meeting or two, all but the Secondary Principals’ CFG petered out and did not continue to meet. My guess is that it was too much to expect that they could carry on the CFG activities without the experience a facilitator/coach such as I provided our Secondary Principals. In the summer of 2001-02, again at the Administrative Team sum- mer workshop, and again with the full support of the Superintendent, I presented a new CFG proposal. This time I offered to facilitate/coach two administrator CFGs, each made up of a mix of Elementary and Secondary Principals, Associate Principals and Directors. Although there was unani- mous support for this proposal, it was modified to create three CFGs; one for the Elementary Principals (eight), one for the Secondary Principals and (continued on page 16)
I found that these people, despite several having been in the district for a number of years, really didn’t know each other very well, and needed to build a sense of trust, particularly as they increasingly came to take risks within their groups to share real concerns, issues, and problems. I began each CFG with the Success Analysis Protocol as a way to get them initially to share something positive and to celebrate successes so as not to focus only on problems – these people in particular are sorely in need positive strokes and must be encouraged if they are ever to engage in the more difficult challenges facing us all in public education. We established our Group Norms, and used all varieties of protocols for getting help on an issue. Most particularly Consultancies, Sticky Issues, and One Minute Consultants – as this was frequently what they appreciated the most. Also, we used all of the variations of Text-based Discussions – including The Final Word, Save the Last Word for Me, and Text Rendering (now a personal favorite). We discus work with the various protocols for looking at student work, sometimes using these actually to look at administrators work. Although experience with one of these administrator CFGs taught me that, when using the Tuning Protocol for a particular piece of administrator work, that regard for the person says they really want to hear the cool feedback first and it doesn’t matter if it is available. I will always insist on beginning with the warm feedback before going to the cool. Particularly with the Secondary Principals and Associate Principals, we frequently did a check-in at the beginning of our sessions, going around the group, asking each person simply to share where they were, what they were feeling, experiencing, dealing with, excited about, annoyed by, or preoccupied – then sometimes using something from that process as the focus of a Consultancy even if only to use the short Sticky Issues Protocol.

Lastly, at the end of the second year of coaching these three CFGs I indicated to the Superintendent and subsequently to each of the groups that I would not continue facilitating their sessions and encouraged them to get coaches training for themselves. This led to a CFG at the beginning of the next year that I offering a one-week “Beginning CFG Coaches Training” last summer, which was paid for by the district through the Staff Professional Development office. As a result, all three administrator CFGs are at some stage of functioning on their own with trained Coaches from their ranks now in each group. An additional positive spin-off from all of this work has been the ever expanding use of some of the protocols by our district administrators while working with their various staffs, tackling real issues, looking at student work, and beginning CFGs among the teachers in their buildings. It has taken five years to get this far, but it seems to have been well worth the effort and I’d like to believe that it has at least some significant impact with the students in the elementary and secondary schools throughout our district.

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inding the right mix of professional development for teachers is often challenging searching for journal articles and books which are timely, finding workshops and grade level materials which are widely available. Finding the balance between meeting the needs of individuals and the needs of the school or district can be daunting. Finding time is a constant issue all these tasks and more fall on the shoulders of the “Curriculum Coordinator”. Imagine, however, you are a Curriculum Coordinator and the nearest college or university is a full seven hours by plane. Magazines arrive way past the month of issue, books need to be ordered sight unseen and take equally long to arrive and as for workshop leaders or consultants, they literally need days of travel to reach you and often arrive jet lagged and intimidated by their surroundings. These are the working conditions of Patty Butz, the curriculum coordinator at the American School in Japan. So, how is she not only able to connect with the work of NSRF but to bring the work of NSRF to her school.

The American School in Japan (ASIJ) is for all intents and purposes a “typical” American school of 1528 students PreK-12. Founded in 1902 to provide a high quality education to expatriate business, embassy and missionary families, it is housed on a campus setting of attractive buildings in the suburbs of western Tokyo. Students arrive daily on school buses as they would in the US, and their days follow a “typical” US curriculum, with the addition of Japanese language, history and culture at all levels. The philosophy of the school is embodied in the statement that it has at least some empathy with the students in the elementary and secondary schools throughout our district.

Patty uncovered the work of NSRF. Knowledge of the work of NSRF came to Patty and the faculty via the Internet and subsequently a few books. No one at ASIJ has attended a workshop or presented a paper, yet Patty is aware of the work. In the mind a five-day seminar. In fact, no one has had any formal training of any kind. Nevertheless, the reading of articles and downloading protocols, Patty and the staff plunged. In the 2003-2004 school year every staff member at ASIJ belonged to a collaborative group modeled on their understanding of a CFG. Being a member of a group was part of their job. In fact, the kind of group you joined was up to individual, allowing and a wide variety of groups to meet in grade and level groups, around subject matter, in special interest groups and in multi-grade groupings. The groups met for five scheduled sessions throughout the year and some groups held additional meetings. Although attendance was limited, no one had access to the full range of tools a typical CFG has at their fingertips. All the more reason, however, the Tuning Protocol and some used the Success Analysis. In the spring of 2004, during an evaluation for school accreditation purposes, when asked about the offerings at the school the staff overwhelmingly pointed to their collaborative work as a positive experience and one they wanted to continue.

It was at this point that Patty contacted NSRF and asked for someone willing to travel to Japan to work with the faculty. afternoon I met with Patty and the NSRF for 10 years travelling the world and teaching. I met my husband, Bruce, in Tokyo. In the 1970’s I feel very much at home in an international school setting. I ended up being a match for Patty and the ASIJ. Consequently, I found myself travelling the 14 hours by plane to Tokyo to work with the faculty for two days, to (continued on page 16)

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