Protocols in Practice
Using the Success Analysis Protocol to Unpack a Text
by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

F or the past few years I’ve been reflectively using the Success Analysis Protocol in my work with new coaches and school teams. I’ve found that taking the time to reflect deeply about our strengths, the things that are working, is not only a shot in the arm, it’s a way of building in accountability for those changes we can and should make immediately.

Recently, I was searching for a way to connect with the successful experiences of others whose lives had been captured and described in a book and I decided to try the Success Analysis Protocol with a text.

Here’s the way it worked in our CFG.

Our group decided we would like to read a book together. We read Respect by Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot and wanted to share our responses to the rich lessons in the book without taking months to get through them. Using a modified Success Analysis Protocol, we were able to discuss the entire book in one session.

We divided the text into its six chapters, each of which corresponded to one person’s experiences. We are a group of twelve so we worked in pairs. Each pair reread their chapter and pulled out the evidence of “respect” that they saw in the person’s daily projects; a photographer who never takes pictures; a texter who never sends messages; an anonymous, “candid” photo and always shares prints with his subjects;

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Debbie’s CFG Group

Success Analysis with Text

1. Divide the text into chapters or sections of comparable size.

2. Divide your group into small groups of two, three or four.

3. Have small groups read their assigned section and discuss the evidence of respect they see in the story.

4. Small groups chart the attributes of the success they found and present it to the larger group.

5. Large group asks clarifying questions. (Repeat steps 4 & 5 for each small group.)

6. Large group looks for patterns in the success stories that have been shared.

7. Large group discusses implications of these success stories for their practice with students, colleagues and families.

8. Debrief of the process. If your CFG is using an I-Map or reflective writing to document their work and “Close the Loop”, you might want to specifically pose a prompt that asks what changes in practice individuals are considering after this text-based discussion.

To be loaded as follows: On 1st base is the content of CFG work; 2nd base is knowing how to collaborate; and 3rd base is having cultural competency with critical consciousness.

As we read the book (origins, objectives, tools, structures) of Critical Friends Groups, we noted the work of facilitators showing genuine respect for the thoughts, views, and needs of the group; being willing to work together to reach the intended goals; and acting in ways that demonstrate commitment to these tenets. Knowing the rules and making them explicit is the beginning as well as having open, honest dialogue is crucial. Paying close attention to power dynamics and endeavoring to seek consensus. All of this requires give-and-take on the part of participants as well as facilitators.

Critical friends here lies the critical element that will break or make the experience meaningful. It is knowing the importance of the history, culture and location of minority and/or disenfranchised groups here in the US and prior to their arrival. Possessing an understanding (or at the very least, the desire to understand) of what it will take to move from an historic oppression group of people forward in their knowledge, to develop fortitude and empower them to act in what ways that will foster greater levels of academic achievement. Knowing this will inform the facilitators’ attitudes, preparations (content about CFG etc. what bodies of literature and experiences will speak to the group) and what is needed in order to build genuine relationships with individuals and the group as a collective. This consciousness requires facilitators to do their own ongoing homework, to be thoughtful and fearless, yet cautious, in their quest to get at the hard issues and intentionally create the space to have the difficult conversations that most facilitators oftentimes avoid. By not focusing on critical consciousness, the facilitators’ behaviors will likely yield cursory conversations; shallow low inroads (if any) and unlikely bring transformative moments that can change the beliefs, processes and actions that are modeled to dismantle systems of inequity.

Lastly, but not no less important having buses loaded in the aforementioned areas, is to build authentic relationships with whomever is in the room. Establishing heartfelt relationships will set in motion everything that follows from being transparent about facilitation, making difficult decisions in consultation with participants, working through dilemmas, taking risks and genuinely caring and trusting one another.

We are tired of the sessions that dance around issues which are of fundamental importance to students, families and other adults who are intellectually, emotionally and spiritually dying in urban communities because of those who want to remain safe in their comfort zones. We decided to do something different. We broke the mold. These sessions were not for the faint of heart; however, no one was sacrificed. Our agenda was clearly predetermined, but we had alternative activities and resources available in the event we needed to change our course. We were hyper-vigilant in staying attuned to the group and therefore practiced responsive facilitation. We checked in frequently with “others” and each other to be sure that no one was “left behind.” As a matter of fact, those who many of you might think would be uncomfortable with this sort of dialogue weren’t, or at least didn’t appear to be. We knew that they were enlightened by the conversations and never had opportunities to hear such candid and insightful dialogue that prompted them to reflect on their own values, assumptions and practices in the classroom both with those whom they were entrusted to teach and work with.

I reflected on my experiences and the question of how our practice of CFGs (white and non-white) develop meaningful pathways to bring together the work of CFGs with adults committed to equitable education for all children and students from diverse racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds? How does one establish authentic relationships with those whose backgrounds differ from one’s own? How do these relationships impact CFG trainings and their ongoing personal and professional development? How can our work “close the achievement/preparation gap”? How does one establish authentic relationships with those whose backgrounds differ from one’s own? How do these relationships impact CFG trainings and their ongoing personal and professional development? How can our work “close the achievement/preparation gap”? After a year of my own homework and talking with other educators of color, I learned that there’s really no mystery when working with groups comprised primarily of people of color. The following formula can maximize your chances of winning: prepare your team to win by doing your own homework so that you know your content; work toward true collaboration; be or become culturally competent with critical consciousness; and build effective, authentic relationships. Having your bases loaded with these essentials in place can result in The Grand Slam and yield a powerful learning experience for everyone.

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How could we both build on the foundation of CCGs and address the realities of inner city educators, their students and families?

We planned and conducted these trainings and, in my mind, to say they were quite a departure from oth-
er's that I was aware of. We included readings authored by people of color who wrote about successful experi-
ences with students who were racially, ethnically and economically diverse. We used resources of these
and also from Asi Hilliard's chap-
ter in Young, Gifted and Black, "No Mystery: Closing the Achievement Gap Between Africans and Excellence" We also began the "equity" dialogue on day one as opposed to the usual
point of entry on the afternoon of days two or three. On one hand, the groups were surprised to see two African-
Americans facilitating and leading work in education reform. On the other hand, participants commented on how
surprised they were that issues which were important to them as adults and those that impact the lives of students of
color were intentionally addressed in depth throughout the training. From the outset to the conclusion of our five
day seminars, we remained focused on how the work of CCGs could bring about change and lasting improvements
in the lives of the educators, parents, families and children we were serving. We were elated with the reception we
received, the daily reflections and eval-
uations. As we continued to observe and think about why our trainings were so successful, I came away with three
critical beliefs that I believe enabled our accomplishments and will ensure the success of other CCG Seminars.

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- a hospice worker understands the importance of just being there when there are no other means to help;
- a pediatrician who knows that a sick child is a member of a family and includes the entire family in their visits/appointment, not just the "custodial adult;"
- the focus on sharing information and power that cut across all the lives being described.

All of the people described in the book were busy. None of the people had an abundance of time, yet they all
had on to the ways they could connect deeply with the lives of these strangers offered us powerful reminders
for our practice in schools. Using the Success Aanalysis Protocol we were able to
connect their lives with our own.

As we debated the process, some people talked about wanting to go back to the text to reread particular sec-
tions, while others talked about sharing this book with their staff and achieving schools. Everyone agreed that using
the protocol to put ourselves in the shoes of the book's subjects had helped us go
more deeply into the lessons of these lives, the lessons of the text. We moved beyond feeling passively inspired to
act in ways that embody respect in our schools. In particular, we discussed the need to make our personal decisions to
respect others consistently explicit. Our conversation of the text ended with a
conversation about the ways we could systematize respect in our departments and schools.

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