Protocol Structure as an Equity Pedagogy for Student-to-Student Critical Friendship

Greg Peters, California

This month in Connections, we’ve combined two regular features, “Protocols in Practice” and “Students at the Center” in this piece about students and protocols.

This past July, Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) National held its annual Small Schools’ Project Summer Institute. Having just provided CFG Coaches Training for dozens of its participating schools, the organizers wanted to hold “critical friends’ conversations” within this professional development week. Aware that a fair number of schools would bring students, I requested that during this time we provide an opportunity for interested students to engage in some critical friendship of their own. The hope was to explore what was necessary to leverage the tools used to support teachers to reflect on and improve their own work as an equity pedagogy to engage and support students to reflect on and improve their own learning. Students from Global Connections (a new small school in Seattle) and from San Francisco’s Leadership High School agreed to bring pieces of individual work that they wanted or needed to improve. In addition, students from Leadership High School agreed to facilitate the protocols for the Global Connections students. We knew the approach would be organic: they would bring a piece of work and the presenters and participants would cooperatively take on the challenges we put before them. In this case it led to one of our student presenters — Domanic — checking in with me just before the protocol and telling me his work was not ready to present. Upon further dialogue, this was only part of the anxiety that was welling up for him. In fact, he had not anticipated the group would be so large (there were about 16 other students in the room from other schools) and was much more nervous about presenting than about his work.

After a bit of a pep talk in which I clarified the expectations of the group — and of his ability, Don agreed to present if we broke the group into two smaller, concurrent protocols. In the end, Domanic said he got a lot out of sharing his work — and part of his challenge turned out to be in the actual act of receiving feedback. He even shared, “I had to get up a couple of times and get a drink of water. I had to clear my head, calm my nerves.” This relates to my second learning for the day:

1. Student presenters — just like adult presenters — need the support of a preconference meeting with the facilitators to review the work and match the protocol. I too fall into the trap of under-preparing students who cooperatively take on the challenges we put before them. In this case it led to one of our student presenters — Domanic — checking in with me just before the protocol and telling me his work was not ready to present. Upon further dialogue, this was only part of the anxiety that was welling up for him. In fact, he had not anticipated the group would be so large (there were about 16 other students in the room from other schools) and was much more nervous about presenting than about his work.

of water. I had to clear my head, calm my nerves.” This relates to my second learning for the day:

2. If we are learning that even adult learners need significant scaffolding to enter risk zones and zones of proximal development, we should give that much more attention to the students we are committed to serve. For all the predictable reasons related to the group dynamics and institutional power structures, I still can fall into the trap of over-preparing adults and under-preparing students. In actuality, there should be little difference between the best practices and pedagogies of professional development and of our classrooms. If the tool of the protocol is to be used as an equity pedagogy, our students will need the same direct instruction that our adult learners often need in order to make the most of these tools. This includes preparing and practicing the arts of presentation, facilitation and participation as well as the skills of observing, reflecting, questioning and providing and receiving feedback. How much of Domanic’s experience was about his presentation anxiety vs. the quality of his dilemma and not having an opportunity to have a preconference with facilitators from another state vs. the fact that as a group, we had not practiced giving and receiving feedback?

I decided to provide some of that support during the second session. I searched some PowerPoint presentations I have used as direct instruction for staff to find one that I felt this group of students needed at this time. I found one on “Giving and Receiving Feedback” and made adjustments for this context. The students had a positive response, asking for copies of the slides related to giving “Warm, Cool and Hard Feedback.” In particular, they appreciated the examples (see box above) and asked for copies to bring back to their schools.

What was most powerful — and not so surprising — was to see how these students from Washington to California to New York so readily adopted and began using their newly discovered tools to make the most of another opportunity for critical friendship. Israel also came prepared to present some of his work — an epic poem he had completed as a major piece of work during his own junior year. In particular, he wanted feedback on “tuning” his writing.

With English as Israel’s second language, he wanted a “flow chart” of things Israel needed to do to make his work more challenging for the reader. “I am communicating it clearly enough when I write so others know,” (See excerpt of Israel’s poem on page 23).

What was most powerful — and not so surprising — was to see how these students from Washington to California to New York so readily adopted and began using their newly discovered tools to make the most of another opportunity for critical friendship. Israel also came prepared to present some of his work — an epic poem he had completed as a major piece of work during his own junior year. In particular, he wanted feedback on “tuning” his writing.

With English as Israel’s second language, he wanted a “flow chart” of things Israel needed to do to make his work more challenging for the reader. “I am communicating it clearly enough when I write so others know,” (See excerpt of Israel’s poem on page 23). Israel stated why he was sharing his writing and the context of the assignment, and after answering clarifying and probing questions (everybody loved the line “Why did you format it this way?” to “What research did you do for this?”), Israel requested to read an excerpt out loud. This gift made it easy for fellow students — and the adults — to formulate authentic warm feedback. What was more challenging for the

(continued on page 21)

Students at Leadership High School use protocols to prepare for their Senior Exhibitions

Warm, Cool and Hard Feedback Examples

Warm: supportive, appreciative and meaningful. “It was great to see how much care you put into your project. It is clear that you were not doing this just for a grade, but that you actually care about your community. Specifically, you are still doing community service — even though that part of your project is finished.”

Cool: distanced, offers different ways to think about work, raises questions that may be easy to answer or consider. “It was good to see that you included a segment of research you did library research AND conducted interviews AND a group project. I noticed that the kids in your focus group were the same kids you interviewed. To what extent would using different students have had a more diverse response and changed your conclusions?”

Hard: challenges thinking behind work, raises concerns — does not require immediate answer. “You included a summary of the book you read which was downloaded from the internet (the web address was at the bottom). I am not sure if you provided this to me so I could understand what you read or if it was part of your project. Either way, your final analysis used some of the same language. To what extent might I- or your teacher — question the ownership of your analysis? What is at risk? How might this be addressed?”
Protocol Structure as an Equity Pedagogy for Student-to-Student Critical Friendship

Greg Peters, California

This month in Connections, we’ve combined two regular features, “Protocols in Practice” and “Students at the Center” in this piece about students and protocols.

This past July, Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) National held its annual Small Schools’ Project Summer Institute. Having just provided CFG Coaches Training for dozens of its participating schools, organizers wanted to hold “critical friends’ conversations” within this professional development week. Aware that a fair number of schools would bring students, I requested that during this time we provide an opportunity for interested students to engage in some critical friendship of their own. The hope was to explore what was necessary to leverage the tools used to support teachers to reflect on and improve their own work as an equity pedagogy to engage and support students to reflect on and improve their own work as most important to their own learning. Students from Global Connections (a new small school in Seattle) and from San Francisco’s Leadership High School agreed to bring pieces of individual work that they wanted or needed to improve. In addition, students from Leadership agreed to facilitate the protocols for the Global Connections students. We knew the approach would be organic: they would bring a piece of work and what this time we would bring a toolbox of protocols to consider. Together the whole group would discuss and decide this might be a powerful strategy for students and if so, how to best fine-tune it and bring it back to their schools.

After the first set of protocols, debriefed with the presenters and the adult and student facilitators brought a couple of immediate lessons to the surface which, I must confess, I am a bit embarrassed to say should have seemed obvious:

1. Student presenters – just like adult presenters – need the support of a preconference meeting with the facilitators to review the work and match the protocol. I too fall into the trap of under-preparing students who cooperatively take on the challenges we put before them. In this case it led to one of our student presenters – Domicri – checking in with me just before the protocol and telling me his work was not ready to present. Upon further dialogue, this was only part of the anxiety that was welling up for him. In fact, he had not anticipated the group would be so large (there were about 16 other students in the room from other schools) and was much more nervous about presenting than about his work.

2. If we are learning that even adult learners need significant scaffolding to enter risk zones and zones of proximal development, we should give that much more attention to the students we are committed to serve. For all the predictable reasons related to the group dynamics and institutional power structures, I still can fall into the trap of over-preparing adults and under-preparing students. In actuality, there should be little difference between the best practices and pedagogies of professional development and of our classrooms. If the tool of the protocol is to be used as an equity pedagogy, our students will need the same direct instruction that our adult learners often need in order to make the most of these tools. This includes preparing and practicing the arts of presentation, facilitation and participation as well as the skills of observing, reflecting, questioning and providing and receiving feedback.

After a bit of a pep talk in which I clarified the purpose of the group – and of his ability, Dom agreed to present if we broke the group into two smaller, concurrent protocols. In the end, Domicri said he got a lot out of sharing his work – and part of his challenge to grow and improve was in the actual act of receiving feedback. He even shared, “I had to get up a couple of times and get a drink of water. I had to clear my head, calm my nerves.” This relates to my second learning for the day:

2. If we are learning that even adult learners need significant scaffolding to enter risk zones and zones of proximal development, we should give that much more attention to the students we are committed to serve. For all the predictable reasons related to the group dynamics and institutional power structures, I still can fall into the trap of over-preparing adults and under-preparing students. In actuality, there should be little difference between the best practices and pedagogies of professional development and of our classrooms. If the tool of the protocol is to be used as an equity pedagogy, our students will need the same direct instruction that our adult learners often need in order to make the most of these tools. This includes preparing and practicing the arts of presentation, facilitation and participation as well as the skills of observing, reflecting, questioning and providing and receiving feedback. How much of Domicri’s experience was about his presentation anxiety vs. the quality of his dilemma – and not having an opportunity to have a preconference with facilitators from another state vs. the fact that as a group, we had not practiced giving and receiving feedback?

I decided to provide some of that support during the second session. I searched some PowerPoint presentations I have used as direct instruction for staff to find one that I felt this group of students needed at this time. I found one on “Giving and Receiving Feedback” and made adjustments for this context. The students had a positive response, asking for copies of the slides related to giving “Warm, Cool and Hard Feedback.” In particular, they appreciated the examples (see box above) and asked for copies to bring back to their schools.

What was most powerful – and not so surprising – was to how these students from Washington to California to New York so readily adopted and began using their newly discovered tools to make the most of another opportunity for critical friendship. Israel also came prepared to present some of his work – an epic poem he had completed as a major piece of work during his own junior year. In particular, he wanted feedback on “tuning” his writing.

With English as Israel’s second language, he explained that, “sometimes I don’t write what is up here [his head]. I always know what I mean, but I am not sure I am communicating it clearly enough when I write so others know.” (See excerpt of Israel’s poem on page 23).

Israel stated why he was sharing his writing and the context of the assignment, and after answering clarifying and probing questions (everybody was curious about “Why did you format it this way?” to “What research did you do for this?”), Israel requested to read an excerpt out loud. This gift made it easy for fellow students – and the adults – to formulate authentic warm feedback. What was more challenging for the (continued on page 21)
Monday, March 27, 2006, seemed like any other spring day until Beth Clayton, a world history teacher, came by to get a cup of coffee. Beth beckoned me, “Did you hear there is going to be a walkout today by the Hispanic students?”

I replied with a quick, “Had not heard anything and what about?”

As I was moving around the room the next period, a sophomore girl, Di, asked me to sit and talk to her. She informed me of the impending walkout. I asked how they pulled it together. Some of the kids had been talking on myspace.com and text messaging. She said, “You understand a white person showed us the movie about the children’s march during the civil rights movement.” She was looking for my approval. I felt I could not promote the walking out of school and I was not even sure I understood the reason for the walkout yet. To oversimplify the bill that prompted these reactions from students, HR4437 would make it a felony to be in the United States illegally, and impose new penalties on companies who hire illegal immigrants. Yet, I could not tell her not to do it either; I knew the power of standing up for something you believe and the satisfaction and pride in realizing that you had the courage to make a tough decision.

The bell rang and masses of kids went to the front of the school and waited. They waited. The administration was there; they waited. The principal spoke briefly, saying that this was not the right thing to do and that there were other ways to get your voices heard. The group suddenly began moving forward—peacefully, but forward out the door, with Jesse in the front as the leader.

The group of about 150 students marched nine miles and concluded its march near the immigration department. “We just decided, hey, it’s time for us to stand up for our rights and protect our citizenship and our families,” Jesse said. “I know that our voice was heard today and it will be even stronger tomorrow.” Students at school were kept informed of the students’ progress through the internet, and impromptu discussions popped up in many classes. I received e-mail from a colleague in another district complaining that she wished her students were as motivated, organized, and passionate about an issue!

The media immediately spotted Jesse as the organizer and sought him out for interviews. Jesse said a larger rally was planned for Tuesday, downtown. “I challenge all Latino and Hispanic-descent people to come out with us tomorrow, to miss one day of work, because that will show the city of Houston, and everyone in the nation will see how badly this proposed immigration restrictions will affect the country.” Jesse led an additional walkout the next day to City Hall; this time students from all over the city walked out with Eagle High School students. Politicians at City Hall spoke to the students giving their support for the students’ activism, but also pointed out that an education is a needed part of success and encouraged them to stay in school and protest on the weekends and after school.

Jesse was on television, in newsmakers, and in cyberspace. He took all of this attention in stride. Jesse was still a good academic student. Although he was a little more eager to participate in class discussions, even after all this attention, it still amazed me how the other students looked up to Jesse because I knew how the year began.

The beginning of school can always cause a little apprehension, even for the most well-adjusted of teenagers. But what if you had to worry about fitting your six-foot three-inch, 400-pound body into a desk made for a person about half your size? What if the school dress code policy required you to tuck in your shirt, which is the only thing covering your stomach? What if your new football uniform was taped to your undershirt just to stay down and your socks were taped to your legs to stay up? Jesse had to deal with these physical challenges as well as the psychological trauma of being.

group was to provide the cool and hard feedback requested to improve his written communication. I wondered to what extent time was being taken up with compliments because Israel shared a passionate and powerful piece of work or because within this piece of work, Israel already surpassed the limited expectations we held, socially and institutionally, for our cherished memories to last a lifetime.

Diversity Books for Young Children

(continued from page 13)

More More More
Said the Baby
by Vera B. Williams

A tickling, hugging, laughing good time for “babies” (early childhood through kindergarten)! This story tells of three different families and how they adore their little ones. The books’ three love stories are Little Guy, about a white boy and his father; Little Pumpkin, about a black girl with her white grandmother, and Little Bird, about an Asian girl and her mother. More More More is a great introduction to variety in family compositions and similarities in love.

My Name is Bilal
by Asma Mobin-Liddin

Bilal and his sister Ayesha are the new kids at school, and on top of that, they are the only Muslims. When some boys tease Ayesha and pull off her hijab (headscarf), Bilal is too scared to help her. He tells the children in his class that his name is Bill, and Al is his middle name. He doesn’t want anyone to know he’s Muslim, for fear that he will be teased and tormented too. Fortunately, Bilal’s teacher offers him some help in the form of a book about his namesake, and by reading that powerful story, Bilal is able to stand up for himself, his sister, and his beliefs.

For a more complete list of children’s books that address diversity, see our web site at www.nsfharmony.org/connections.html

Sarah Childers can be contacted at
schilders@nsfharmony.org
It is not surprising that, in an organization whose essential principles include such commitments as making our work public, and both exposing and challenging our fundamental assumptions, research should claim an increasingly important part of the organizational conversation. After ten years of helping schools and districts build more collaborative, reflective communities that support good teaching, powerful learning and equitable practice, NSRF is in a unique position and perhaps even has an important responsibility to ask and answer some critical questions. And there is compelling evidence that NSRF has accepted this challenge.

This past year, NSRF has:
1. Created the position of National Research Coordinator.
2. Hosted an NSRF Research Conference, and
3. Created a task force to develop a multiyear NSRF research agenda, which was submitted to the Institution for Educational Research for funding at the end of July.

Each of these actions is evidence that thoughtful research that is helpful both to scholars and NSRF practitioners will be a crucial part of NSRF work as the work moves forward into its second decade.

**National Research Coordinator:** In the spring of 2005, the Accountability Council created the position of National Research Coordinator. The Accountability Council and the Co-Directors felt that if research and scholarship were to become a more central focus in NSRF work, then it would be important to have a formal position to support this focus. In the initial discussions, the Co-Directors felt that some initial goals for the Research Coordinator would be to (1) facilitate the creation of a multiyear research agenda, (2) partner with the Harmony Research Institute, especially in support of the Annual Research Conference, (3) develop an online database of NSRF-related research, and (4) facilitate a conversation around a theoretical framework of NSRF and CCG work. In general, like much of our work in NSRF, the job of the Research Coordinator is to “coach” – to support, to ask difficult questions, and to be transparent - an ongoing, complicated, professional conversation. Naturally, many of these goals for the National Research Coordinator are still in the beginning stages; however, there is reason, especially with our IES proposal and Annual Research Conference, to feel optimistic about the

---

In this issue

**Taking Up the Research Challenge**
Kevin Fahay, Massachusetts 2

**11th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting** 3

**Transformation of Body and Soul**
Michaelares Kelley, Texas 4

**A Tale of Two Schools**
Debbi Laidley, California 5

**Hip-Hop: A Crucial Addition to the Curriculum**
Camilla Greene, Connecticut 6

**NSRF’s Living History:**
An Interview with Hered Vosekas Peggy Silva, New Hampshire 7

**Changing the World: A Report from the Houston Center of Activity**
Donna Reid, Texas 8

**Results Now, A Book Review**
Chris Kinghery, Pennsylvania 9

“I Don’t See Color, Kids Are Just Kids”
Tanisha Davis-Doss, Washington 10

**Diversity Books for Young Children**
Sarah Childers, Indiana 11

**Students at the Center: Protocol Structure as an Equity Pedagogy for Student-to-Student Critical Friendship**
Greg Peters, California 12

Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CCG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editorial Board: Debbie Bambino, Sarah Childers, Camilla Greene, Debbi Laidley, and Greg Peters

---

**Participant feedback**

“I want to bring this protocol back to school and apply it in the classroom. I got a lot out of this… not only the idea of a protocol working for… feedback, but also the knowledge of these epic poems, which I have not had the chance to try yet.” - Student

“I got a practical experience with something I had often thought could be done, but had never tried. It’s a new tool for my coaching toolbox.” - CCG/School Coach

“I valued the protocol and actually getting feedback from different points of view. I had a good experience receiving feedback.” - Student

“I valued the step-by-step approach and that (presenters) did not have to take anything (feedback) to the face.” - Student

“If I think these would be powerful in school.” - Student

“... or even in personal life outside of school.” - Student

“I got to watch teens provide critical feedback.” - CCG Coach

“I learned different ways to give advice in a manner that didn’t hurt people’s feelings.” - Student

“I appreciated everyone’s thoughts and respect for each other. This learning experience will help me a lot in future projects I have to do.” - Student

“I valued that the presenters did not have to feel vulnerable at all when everyone gave feedback in a way that was organized to not hurt feelings.” - Student

“I definitely learned a different way to help give respectful feedback.” - Student

“I will bring this to English class and see how it works when you put it to work.” - Student

---

Gregory Peters is co-principal of Leadership High School and Center Director of San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools. He may be reached at ggeyter@scvcs.org