

Coaching for Educational Equity: Placing Equity at the Center of New Coaches Trainings

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

Daniel Baron and I co-facilitated a CFG Coaches training for the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) network schools in the CES Gates Small Schools Project along with Frank Honts and Greg Peters. The Co-Directors of the CES Gates Small School Project were clear that they wanted equity and the 10th Common Principle of CES to be the center of the CFG training. Daniel, Greg and myself were part of the Sonoma Coaching for Educational Equity Group last July. In crafting this CES CFG training, which was structured to be 2 ½ days followed by another 2 ½ days, we intentionally incorporated a lot of the strategies, readings and processes in the first block of the training.

In keeping with Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) theory of action, we, initially as facilitators and later with the participants, made a commitment to using Discourse II and using an equity lens to look at student work and in our practice of the protocols. We were also committed to opening a space and a place for the participants in the CFG training to do both the emotional and intellectual work required when you make a commitment to take up issues of equity.

This participant letter follows on the heels of the equity work we did during the first 2 ½ days. It also is the result of a close collaboration with the Co-Directors of the CES Gates Small Schools Project and Daniel, Frank, Greg and myself. We offer this letter to you as one example of what it might look like and sound like if we intentionally placed equity at the center of our work in new coaches trainings. We welcome your feedback.

Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe it has been almost two months since we began building our equity centered learning community. As we prepare for our time together in Minnesota we hope that you have found many opportunities to reflect on and put into practice some of the learning that we did together in San Francisco.

As you know, creating equitable schools is the heart and soul of our work. In an equitable society test scores, graduation rates, average incomes, and fair elections would not be pre-determined by race, class, or gender. Educational institutions mirror our society's inequities. Schools are used to reproduce a culture of inequality where many of the assumptions, values, and practices of the dominant culture serve to disadvantage the students of non-dominant

cultures.

If we do not intentionally and meaningfully interrupt the inequitable sorting practices that exist in our schools and replace them with equitable practices, relationships and learning conditions we will continue to deny children of color and poor children a quality education.

The 10th Common Principle of CES declares "that schools should model democratic practices, honor diversity, and deliberately and explicitly challenge all forms of inequity." Through our work together in the CES Small Schools Network we have the power to create equitable new small schools (start-ups and conversions) and to deliberately improve our existing small schools to reflect democratic and equitable practices.

In our CES Small Schools we have accepted the challenge to be the change we want to see. As Gandhi once said, "We must become the change we wish to see in the world." Consequently, we as teachers, administrators, and other educators must end the inequitable practices in our classrooms, schools, and districts and re-invent these institutions with equity of outcomes for all students. To do this work wholeheartedly we must ask ourselves: What are the moral issues and the sense of urgency that drives this work for me?

During the second half of the Coaching for Educational Equity training we will continue to develop the will, skill, knowledge, capacity, and emotional intelligence to teach, coach, and lead for educational equity. The seminar develops these traits by:

- Defining educational equity
 - Sharing an understanding of the historical and current inequities in the cultural, economic, political, and social communities of our nation and our schools and an understanding of oppression, power, privilege, and hegemony,
 - Creating the space for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to break the bonds of these inequities and reflecting privately and/or communally about our own complicity without fear or rushing to judgment,
 - Empowering educators to ally themselves within and across racial, gender, and class boundaries,
 - Interrupting and responding to denial, hostility, and other inequities in real time,
 - Spotlighting how these inequities are
- (continued on page 14)*

- focusing question. Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.
5. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback — 2-3 minutes
 - Participants take a couple of minutes to reflect on what they would like to contribute to the feedback session.
 - Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.
 6. Warm and Cool Feedback — 15 minutes
 - Participants share feedback with each other while the presenter is silent. The feedback generally begins with a few minutes of warm feedback, moves on to a few minutes of cool feedback (sometimes phrased in the form of reflective questions), and then moves back and forth between warm and cool feedback. Warm feedback may include comments about how the work presented seems to meet the desired goals; cool feedback may include possible “disconnects,” gaps, or problems. Often participants offer ideas or suggestions for strengthening the work presented.
 - The facilitator may need to remind participants of the presenter’s focusing question, which should be posted for all to see. Presenter is silent and takes notes.
 7. Reflection — 5 minutes
 - Presenter speaks to those comments/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent.
 - This is not a time to defend oneself, but is instead a time for the presenter to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed particularly interesting. Facilitator may intervene to focus, clarify, etc.
 8. Implications for Equity: Like the Collaborative Assessment Conference, it may be valuable to discuss the implications for teaching and learning of what we’ve heard and discussed using the lens of equity. The reflection questions below would enrich the learning and help us “interrupt” inequities that may be raised by the Tuning. The point is not to shut the presenter down, or put them on the defensive but rather to challenge everyone involved to a higher level of awareness. Thus placing these at the end of the warm/cool feedback session both addresses the focus question and takes it beyond the presenter’s work.

Possible Reflection questions following the activity: (from both Nancy Mohr’s draft of LASW for

Equity and additions by Debbie Bambino)

- What have each of us learned about building the habit of equity through doing this protocol?
 - What are our own next steps?
 - Who’s at the table? Who’s missing?
 - Why aren’t those voices included?
 - How can we include those whose perspectives have been silenced historically?
 - How does the work we’ve just done serve all of our students?
 - How does it serve those students who have been marginalized in the past?
9. Debrief — 5 minutes
 - How well does the presenter feel the question has been answered?
 - How well do we feel we answered the presenter’s question?
 - Facilitator-led discussion of this tuning experience.

In conclusion, examining specific protocols through the lens of equity begs the question of doing the equity work ahead of the protocols. It seems that trying to do the work through the protocols could be risky and half-baked if the baseline work of some of the equity tools we used this summer at the CFEE seminar (Constructivist Listening, Examining Equity Perspectives, relevant readings), or other thoughtful equity work, hasn’t been done previously with the group. On the other hand, if we wait for that preparation to be done, we may never get to examining the student/teacher work. So once we’ve examined these protocols for equity we need to think about stepping up and making a strong case for CFG training and existing CFGs to do purposeful equity work. This might include more CFEE seminars around the country and an equity “curriculum” involving all our protocols. I like to think Nancy is cheering us on! ■

*Mary Hastings may be contacted at
mhasting@usm.maine.edu*

*A printer friendly version of this protocol is
available at www.nsrharmony.org/connections.html*

