PATRICK BREIDENSTEIN

Dr. Angela Breidenstein

Pat and Angela Breidenstein's session titled "Learning for each other's learning, and, to that end, many presenters and participants, we took responsibility for each other's learning, and, to that end, many presenters...

I was grateful for this opportunity to get folks together who are interested in studying systematically CFG work. It's affirming and energizing! — Research Forum participant

That quote sums up the positive response to the second annual NSRF Research Forum held on January 24, 2007. Around 30 practitioners associated with NSRF gathered in Seattle to examine and advance research related to CFG practices. The three sessions covered a wide range of topics that prompted another participant to reflect: "A revelation to learn the scope, variety, and quality of research related to CFG practices." What sets the NSRF Research Forum apart from other similar gatherings is a collaborative atmosphere that fosters questioning and transparencies encourages presenters and participants connecting with each other as well as to connect with new knowledge. The studied rectangular setup of tables and chairs that the hotel provided quickly gave us a way to present and participants forming circles to better interact with each other. As both presenters and participants, we took responsibility for each other's learning, and, to that end, many session leaders chose to use protocols to examine their research. For example, I attended Pat Norman and Angela Breidenstein's session titled "Learning to analyze student work: The use of protocols to develop teacher candidates' assessment skills and dispositions." As professors and CFG Coaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, Angela and Pat asked "whether and how protocols support teacher candidates' ability to assess student work as well as whether and how the engagement in protocols influences teacher candidates' stance toward assessing children's work." They collected data by videotaping university class sessions where teacher candidates used the ATLAS protocol to describe poetry written by elementary students. They transcribed the videotaped discourse and analyzed it poi...
“Was Molly smarter than all the experts? No, she was just braver. The Administration’s exploitation of 9/11 created an environment in which it took a lot of courage to see and say the obvious… Molly had that courage; not enough others can say the same.”

And it’s not over. …Now, more than ever, we need people who will stand up against the follies and lies of the powerful. And Molly Ivins, who devoted her life to questioning authority, will be sorely missed.” Paul Krugman in a column mourning the death of columnist Molly Ivins.

On Monday morning, I barely stopped myself from standing on a table at a faculty meeting in an urban school and yelling, “Stop! Stop talking about the kids that way!”

The odds are if I had, I wouldn’t have been satisfied with the results. And yet, I still wonder. The picture replays in my head like a cartoon where my body stays seated listening to the discussion of how to control the kids with systemized and increasingly more serious punishments for infractions of dress code, being in the hallways without a pass, and so on. And I am not sure if I can trust my old instincts. Am I quiet or tactful to keep my mouth shut? Am I saying something offensive or naïve? Who am I to facilitate this learning unless I am taking the same risks into unknown territories, not only on my own, but with this community?

I don’t often have the luxury of days set aside for “training,” or workshops to build new awareness through carefully crafted experiences. Rather, my work seems to occur in real time in classrooms and hallways and committee meetings. I have to find ways to insert questions, new perspectives that shed light on assumptions and name inequities in the moment. With these short chances at conversation, each move has to count toward affecting instructional practice and relationships with students.

Once a meeting was starting, a teacher approached me with whom I was feeling some beginning alliance whispered to me, “Many of these kids are involved in gangs and drugs. We can’t compete with that.” I wondered what he did to cope with the kids.” I wondered what he did to cope with the kids. I looked at me in a way that I interpreted as, “You are naive. You are not in the classroom with these kids.” I wondered what he did to cope with the horror of kids being just let go. I wanted to tell him stories of students and their teachers whose lives refuted his assumption. I suspected he could match me story for story, and I would not change his mind. My question was just a beginning for both of us.

I keep looking at how my beliefs about what actions are possible and right are influenced and limited by my own experience. My perceptions are colored by my Midwestern childhood in a school that was 100% Jewish with no Jewish teachers and no external acknowledgment ever including scholarship support when necessary.

We are the protocol people – we’re also the CFG people, the CFFE people, and the facilitative leadership people – no one else, and no other organization may lay claim to those things (one exception is our partner organization in the CFFE work, BayCES, with whom we are codeveloping that work). Choosing to support NSRF is a choice toward supporting the things we do coupled with our theory of action, which supports our mission statement of educational and social equity. The choice to support NSRF is made with the understanding that the organization stay committed to its core values and principles. We have had many conversations and thought openly and honestly about the business of NSRF. NSRF is worthy of your support because we are, have always been, and will continue to be an organization committed to mission first. What we have realized and what we are asking you as a dues-paying member is that we must operate as a business in order to have the resources to further our mission.

And our time is now. I believe we are entering a perfect storm for teacher voice and teacher empowerment. In the face of the punishing effects of an unsustainable accountability system based on standardized test scores, school systems across the country are asking out loud what service they are providing their schools. Systems from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles are considering and reconsidering their mission. We can’t compete with that. New York City alone is in the process of dismantling a failed bureaucratic school management structure in favor of locating as much power, decision making, and resources as possible at the schoolhouse level. With that type of administrative discretion, teachers and principals will get to choose the type of professional development and external support they buy and receive. Imagine, no longer will a central office staffer demand this or that type of professional development in over 1,000 schools representing tens of thousands of teachers. This is not a dream but a reality that will take effect July 1. Our time is indeed now.

As you consider your memberships, affiliations, and obligations this year, I am confident you will not only choose to become a dues-paying member of our organization but that you will encourage others to do so as well. I have had great counsel from trusted colleagues and critical friends in this time of transition for NSRF; our work is stronger, more important, and more critical than ever – it is up to each of us to choose to make our organization equally as strong as a voice for adult learning in the service of student achievement.

We can choose to make NSRF strong and I believe deeply that if we stay committed, we can and will choose a more socially just and equitable society.

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