

September), "Playing Doubles – Moving Beyond the Tag-Team Facilitation," she reminds us that this is about more than simply taking turns and sharing leadership of a CFG, more than simply dividing up the role of Facilitator:

"[Just like in tennis doubles!].... it means paying attention to one another – why are they doing what they're doing – and where are they on the court? [in the room!]. Another important aspect of working with a partner is that there is more than one person to keep an eye on what is going on within the [CFG] group.... While it is helpful to know that one member of the team is perhaps the 'lead' in an activity, a highly developed partnership would not just tolerate, but would require that either partner could speak up and say, out loud - 'Let's take a moment here to take stock of the group/go around/take a break' – something that will allow for course corrections without fear of upstaging/being out of turn/being rude/embarrassing one another."

Thus, I believe being an effective CFG Coach has a strong connection to being an effective Coach of a sports team (theatre troupe, orchestra or band). Effective CFG coaching, like other coaching, involves helping teachers to "read" their students, their classroom situations, and modify their teaching on-the-spot – just like an effective sports Coach "reads" his/her players and makes on-the-field adjustments. And, I believe CFG coaching involves the spiritual dimensions of selflessness and compassion, where we strive to create a safe and supportive, democratic climate, enabling all voices in our CFGs to be respected and heard. So I encourage us to continue to learn about our CFG coaching by learning more from other kinds of "Coaches" and their "coaching."

pete



Thrive by Five WA's Nurturing Families Initiative Communities of Practice Institute
By Pete Bermudez
Lastinger Center for Learning
University of Florida

Figure 1 Free-Form Maps served as a way for participants to get to know the work of their respective organizations. The Thrive by Five (TBF) Communities of Practice (CoP) Institute was held on November 3-5 at the Edgewater Hotel in Seattle, Washington. The institute was designed to train parent educators and other early learning professionals to facilitate CoPs in their respective organizations. A total of 21 participants representing 13 organizations including a team from the Mississippi Center for Education Innovation (MCEI) participated in the intensive three-day experience. An additional two days of training will follow later in the year.

As described by TBF, “communities of practice are based on the adult learning principle of collective learning within a shared domain. Meaning it is people coming together to learn from each other in a deliberate, facilitated manner around a specific, shared interest.” Thus, the following expectations were set for each CoP Facilitator who completed the initial three-day experience:

- Facilitate 3 in-person gatherings,
- Recruit parent educator members,
- Plan logistics for each gathering (securing space, sending out announcements, receiving RSVPs, food if necessary),
- Communicate regularly with Thrive and group (mainly through email/calls),
- Participate in larger learning community (through online community when implemented and on calls), and
- Participate in evaluation (post gathering data survey and reflective survey for the participants).

Figure 2 Participants engaged in “fishbowl” consultancy. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters were provided for the hearing impaired.

Throughout the institute, participants were introduced to the concept in ways that enabled them to actually experience the power of collaborative work and the ways that CoP can serve as a form of job-embedded professional development for parent educators. During the institute, participants learned about and practiced a variety of protocols for creating and maintaining a collaborative context for adult learning. These included techniques and strategies for setting community agreements, shifting conversations towards personal practice, engaging in reflective dialogue, and supporting each other on dilemmas of practice that included equity issues affecting vulnerable children and families.

Figure 3 Participants used a “Chalk Talk” to identify equity issues in their work.

At the conclusion of the institute, participants designed and shared working agendas for meetings they will facilitate to launch the implementation of CoP in their respective organizations and work contexts. Follow-up activities will be scheduled to both support and expand the “on the job” learning of CoP Facilitators and inform the two-day follow-up work session to be held in several months.

Critical Friends Coaches’ Refresher – Retreat for the Coaches

By Deven Horne

Instructional Coordinator of Special Programs

Capital Region BOCES

The Capital Region BOCES Center held a one day retreat on August 6th to support our area’s coaches in their continued work with school districts to utilize the tools of CFGs to promote professional communities. Fourteen coaches gathered in a small lake house hidden in the bustling community of Latham, NY. This location jewel reminded me of what sometimes our work brings to school districts, a shining treasure nestled in and overlooked by a very bustling community. The fourteen coaches ranged from coaches experienced for the past three years to

coaches newly trained in the spring of 09. The day was led by two newly inducted National Facilitators excited to support coaches in the Capital Region so that the work of collaborative reflective practices can be promoted in schools.

A coaches' support group has been in existence in the Capital Region since a new coach training was conducted in the 06-07 school year by Bill Polluck from the Effective Schools Coalition of Rutgers University. The individuals knew after their five day training that they needed to keep the spirit alive of what we had learned and committed to a continued support group. This support group has continued and has met at least four to six times a year to review our work, practice protocols, conduct consultancy and support each other in our various roles with school districts.

Our day of retreat began with much anticipation and excitement from the coaches about an opportunity to renew their skills and their souls in the work they do. I also, as a National Facilitator was excited and anxious to work with these coaches who I knew affect many professional lives in schools. It is critical to me that our skills are honed and that our spirits are bolstered for the promotion of reflective democratic dialogue and effective tools for learning in a professional community. Connections seemed like a great way to start the day to center ourselves on transitioning from the outside to a small retreat house on a lake surrounded by a small wooded reserve. It set the tone for the rest of the day with a respect and appreciation for attending to our human need for quiet reflection and renewal. A world café around the questions of what is your passion, what is your purpose as a CFG coach and what is your hope for those you lead, renewed our spirit of dedication and sealed our resolution as a group. We had a chance to revisit our norms and used chalk talk to facilitate renewal of our ground rules. The morning ended with two activities that were given as a choice and the group divided evenly to engage in some new experiences with data driven dialogue and a fun scavenger hunt activity designed to share practices with the CFG protocols.

After a satisfying lunch and a chance to explore our beautiful lake and wooded area, we utilized the surroundings and the great weather to conduct our opening activity for the afternoon outside. The Paseo, or Circles of Identity, protocol was facilitated to help the group strengthen their personal professional identities and reflect on how our perceptions of other's identities shape our decisions and behaviors. The beautiful outdoors helped to soothe the sometimes uncomfortable and tension provoking reflection that the protocol may elicit. As we learn more about each other, we are able to support each other better. This activity also helped to further solidify our identity as a group and set the stage for how we might support each other in our work for the coming year.

The day was quickly closing upon us and we reflected on our charge for the coming year and when we could continue coming together. A quick write for the closing was a good bookend to the day reflecting quietly again about our days ahead and what we want to look forward to. As we come upon the culmination of another five-day coaches training in the fall, we look forward to the growth of our coaches' support group with new members. This renewal of the coaches is vital to the continued

development of the CFG work in our area. Several members have expressed interest in also becoming National Facilitators. This is a testament to the power of the tools and the needed promotion of the reflective dialogue in our school communities.

From the mouths of the coaches their reflection on the day gratified my own sense of purpose to renew our coaches' sense of self and purpose. Noteworthy feedback were: "the data driven dialogue was just what I needed", "I was especially pleased with the data driven protocol and the world café for two very different reasons: the data driven allows you to go deeper while the world café opens up thinking and allows you to go broadly", "I feel like I learn something new to try out each time we meet", "I especially like the de-briefing to clarify questions about using the protocol – what to do if.. what would you do when...", "I need to grow personally to grow as a coach", and "especially liked the idea of marrying passion with work for both teachers and learners". I have personally grown as a coach and National Facilitator and am fed by the opening up and growth of our local coaches. With each encounter with our coaches support group, my hope is restored.



Eileen's Dilemma: The Magic of Critical Friendship
By P. Tim Martindell
Coordinator of Secondary ELA
Fort Bend Independent School District

"Tim, I have my dilemma ready to present to the group, but I'm afraid you will find it trivial compared to the other dilemmas," said Eileen, a veteran teacher and English language arts district level content coach. She frowned as we walked towards the meeting that Friday afternoon. "I've been practicing how I will present the dilemma, but I may become emotional."

In my role as coordinator of secondary English language arts for a large suburban school district, I supervise an existing group of five "helping teachers" – content area coaches – whose jobs involve frequent school visits and on-site professional development for teachers. The group had been meeting for several years. They wondered what to expect from me as their new "boss." They soon learned that my vision for our mutual professional learning would be to create a highly effective team of critical friends.

Critical Friends Group (CFG) is a coaching model that uses structures or protocols to quickly facilitate deep level reflective conversations. In these conversations, educators discuss professional dilemmas, bring examples of student or teacher work for critical feedback, and gain insight into better serving the learning needs of individual or collective groups of students.