The National School Reform Faculty® (NSRF®) publishes the Connections newsletter six times per year. To suggest a topic or submit an article, email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org or call 812-334-8379.

National School Reform Faculty®
Harmony Education Center

November 2012

Connections

From the Director

By Michele Mattoon, NSRF® Director, NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG® Coach in Indiana, michele@nsrfharmony.org

"Open Training or On-Site Training?" That is the question (for some of our prospective clients who are considering a five-day NSRF New Coaches Training). For people considering how to make that call, let's outline the major benefits and drawbacks of each option.

Open Training

If you have six or fewer people who need to be trained and cost is your primary consideration, NSRF recommends the Open Training option. Open Trainings conducted in Bloomington, IN cost $795 per person for the full five days of training. You will also need to cover each of your attendees expenses—travel costs, hotel, and dinners (we provide a continental breakfast and a hot lunch each day). All of these costs added together will probably be cheaper than having a facilitator come to you for that few trainees.

Our Open Trainings provide advantages not typically available in On-Site Trainings. Participants fly to Indiana from all over the United States and sometimes from overseas to attend our trainings. For example, at our October 2012 Open Training, we trained individuals from California, Oregon, Wisconsin, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Georgia, North Carolina, and Indiana! These participants brought a wide range of experiences with them. They were teachers (early childhood through college), heads of schools, principals, vice principals, teacher coaches, and developers. They came from public schools, independent schools, educational PD providers, and colleges. These participants work with people from very different socio-economic, racial, and cultural backgrounds. Attending an open training that includes in-depth professional conversations from this vast tapestry of experiences is truly enriching (and enlightening) in so many ways!

Also, just getting away from your normal place of work can be very freeing. The luxury of geographic distance from one's desk and the thousands of details we are asked to attend to each day means we can be free to give the work at hand, the training, our full attention. Being in a new and different setting can recharge your professional batteries, allowing more of an opportunity for new insights to take place!

On-Site Training

NSRF recommends the On-Site option when you are training seven people or more. If you are training a full group of 15 people, costs work out to be anywhere from $760 to $800 a person, depending where in the US you live. (Variation reflects air travel and lodging differences.) Although training seven people will cost much more per person than 15, the total cost for the training is still cheaper with this option, when travel, lodging and meal expenses are considered.

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One benefit of the On-Site option is that the training is specifically tailored to fit the needs of the school, district or organization that hired us. For example, if a school is interested in peer observation, the NSRF facilitator will make sure to include an afternoon of practice with observation protocols in the agenda. Because more people from the same place will be trained, it is easier to support one another in making CFGs (and NSRF protocols and activities) a part of the school's culture.

No matter what you decide, we have heard over and over again that the NSRF Five-Day New Coaches' Training is one of the most useful professional development that participants have experienced. If you are interested in attending an Open Training this academic year, registration for our February Training is open right now. You may also claim a spot for the Open Training in July by calling 812-330-2702 or emailing our office. And for answers to any other questions besides what I've outlined here, or to have us work up an estimate for a possible on-site training at your location, please call 812-330-2702 or email me at Michele@nsrfharmony.org.

Wishing you the happiest of holiday seasons,

Michele Mattoon
Director, NSRF

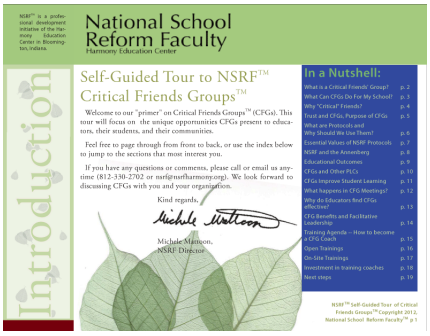
P.S. Please feel free to forward Connections to friends and colleagues, and suggest they sign up for our Connections e-list!

Want to clarify your understanding of NSRF's Critical Friends Groups? Want some support explaining CFGs to friends, colleagues, and administrators? Click these links to review our new promotional materials, or email us to request copies and links:

A Self-Guided Tour to NSRF Critical Friends Groups (pdf)

and

Video Glimpse of NSRF New CFG Coaches Training



FROM A FACILITATOR'S PERSPECTIVE:

What To Do When a Participant Misses A Day of Training

By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor, NSRF National Facilitator, CFG Coach in Wisconsin davelehman@mac.com

Occasionally, a participant in CFG Coaches training must miss all or part of a day's training due to an unexpected family emergency, a last minute directive from an administrator, an unforeseen schedule conflict, or illness. Someone absent on the first day or two of a five-day training misses crucial scaffolding activities and the understanding those activities entail, so an absence on those days means that person should reschedule their entire training. On day three or beyond, it's not ideal, but possible to make up the lost interaction. So trainees with a legitimate excuse (within reason and not exceeding one full day's experience), can still become NSRF-certified CFG Coaches, I often have these individuals complete the missed work and email me their assignments. Here are some examples of such assignments, and some responses from those doing the work.

For missed "Inclusion Activities" (warm-ups or ice-breakers or starters to the day)

Completing the "Gingerbread Man" or "Creating a Metaphor" activity: Write a brief reflection about this as an activity and if you would see any use for it in your work.

Reflection from Carmen in Madison regarding "Gingerbread Man" assignment: *"I use several different kinds of professional development in my work and I am always looking for new inclusion activities to do with groups. I like this activity because it can be tweaked to reflect personal or work-related ideas, or ideas specific to the kind of professional development activities we do.*

"Although I don't always like thinking of my responses to these kinds of inclusion activities, I do like this one because I think I'd use it in the beginning of my work with a group and then try to post them where we are working as a reminder to everyone what people are bringing (or trying to let go of) within the conversations and work we are doing."

Reflection from Kathy in Madison regarding "Creating a Metaphor" assignment: *"When I am at my best as a teacher, I am a sponge. A sponge is very absorbent and has the ability to soak up lots of liquid. When I am at my best as a teacher, I am able to absorb what I see and hear. I am able to soak up what my students/colleagues are saying and doing. I can fill myself up and even expand to a greater size. My capacity for absorption is great. A shadow of this sponge metaphor is that I am a very simple organism, perhaps the simplest of all animals. The liquid that is pumped into me has the possibility of passing right out of me through my pores.*

"This activity was a lot harder than I initially thought it would be. Although I came up with the idea of the sponge as my metaphor very quickly, I had trouble thinking about the strengths and shadows of the metaphor. Education and learning are not simple, and it's not just about soaking up ideas and filling up our students or ourselves. People need to do something with the liquid they absorb."

Considering a range of possible inclusion activities: Participants are instructed to visit the appropriate NSRF webpage listing Ice-Breakers and Warm-ups and select some

Dave Lehman is the former founding principal/teacher of the Lehman Alternative Community School, a public middle- high school recently named after him and his wife by the Ithaca, New York Board of Education upon their retirement after 30 years. He currently is doing "School Improvement Coaching" with the middle schools and high schools in Madison, Wisconsin.

Contact him with your questions or comments at davelehman@mac.com

from this list to comment on. Consider circumstances in which you might use them with colleagues or students.

Reflection from Cole, a teacher in a private school in Canada: *"Regarding '#3, Draw a picture that describes who you are.' I like this one as it is a change from writing one's thoughts or questions. I might use this for a class on the first day of school or with a group of kids in a camp-like scenario. Regarding '#13, Draw your school.' I like this one but I might consider changing to 'Draw Your Ideal School' and do this with teachers. That way you can get to the bottom of their wants/needs as educators and the conversation stays positive. I'd want to stay clear of negative discussions with questions like 'What don't you like about your current school?'"*

For missed "Learning from Student Work" activities

In the Resource book, read "Learning from Student Work and Overview" (pg. 52), "Further Thoughts about Learning from Student Work" (pg. 51), and "Protocol Matching Activity" (pgs. 64-66). Then, working with the "Guide for Using 7 of the Student Work/Problem Solving Protocols" (pgs. 60-62), select any one of the nine scenarios, choose a protocol that would seem most helpful to use with that scenario, and give your reasoning.

Reflection from Jenny in Chippewa Falls: *"I chose Scenario 4 where the Special Education Teacher has the assignment of using free-form maps on The Diary of Anne Frank. This teacher does have a dilemma, but since it seemed to center around a single assignment I felt that a protocol that focused on assignment review would be a better fit [than the Consultancy or Issaquah Protocols]. I finally settled on the Tuning Protocol. It seems as though she was generally quite happy with the results of the assignment and wanted to have feedback on how to improve it. For me, the advantage was that the group would have more background from the teacher with the Tuning Protocol on what she was actually looking for in the assignment."*

A variation on the above assignment: from the "Protocol Matching Activity," select any three, and decide which of the "Learning from/Looking at Student Work" Protocols you would use, and why?

Reflection on one of the three selected by Cole from Canada: *"For Scenario #2, I like the Success Analysis Protocol. I would have all of the teachers that teach these three individuals with the behavior concerns come together and share their successes with regards to what works for them in their own classrooms. Perhaps somebody has already come up with a system that allows the rest of the class more freedom, while still providing the structure needed for the kids in question. This way, the science teacher might be able to take a few ideas from the conversation and use them to implement a similar strategy that could work in his/her own classroom."*

Reflection from Kathy in Madison: *"Considering Scenario #3, when a group is looking at student work in order to learn from it, there should be a shared set of group norms that helps the participants act in respectful ways. The feedback for the presenter should be effective. Before beginning each protocol session it would be helpful to go over the norms and review what the group has established as respectful ways for doing business. One other thing to emphasize would be to keep comments evidence-based. Then the statements participants*

make would be more like, 'I notice that…' or 'I wonder about…' which don't sound so judgmental. It's not about giving advice to a presenting teacher; it's about giving them time to be reflective about their own practice. Through warm and cool feedback, participants react to evidence. They don't try to fix the teacher or provide them with the 'right answers.'"

For missed "Text-Based Discussion"

Read the "Connecting the Dots" chapter by Beverly Tatum and briefly answer these questions which were part of our "Text-Based Seminar" (pgs. 43-44 of the Resource Book). #1: Why did the author title the chapter "connecting the dots"? What dots? Why do they need connecting? What's the picture that emerges when they're connected?

Reflection from Carmen in Madison: *"'Connecting the Dots' is an appropriate title because the author is trying to connect certain ideas which she didn't think were being made. Her point in this article is that a large majority of people, specifically teachers have 'unexamined racial attitudes' that can negatively impact student performance. These 'unexamined racial attitudes' are just that – unexamined – and therefore, many people are not aware they have such a bias or misperception. The author's point is that until individuals become aware of their perceptions and then can modify them, change will not occur. In this specific instance, teachers must confront their racial attitudes for what they are and then through their awareness and change we can hopefully help improve student achievement (close the achievement gap)."*

Read the article "Yes, Black Males Are Different, But Different Is Not Deficient" [from the February 2012 issue of Phi Delta Kappan] and compare any two Text-based Protocols in the Resource Book.

Reflection from Kathy in Madison: *"The two protocols, 'The Final Word' and 'Save the Last Word,' are the same in many ways. However, there is one big difference between them. In 'The Final Word,' the presenter shares the passage he/she has selected as the most significant idea from the text and describes why that quote struck him or her. In the protocol 'Save the Last Word for Me,' the presenter shares the part of the text that he/she found to be most significant. The presenter says nothing about why he/she chose that particular passage. Both protocols go on to have each of the other group members share their responses to the chosen passage. Then the presenter in both protocols ends his/her turn by having the final/last word, responding to what has been said by other group members and what he/she now thinks.*

"I have always wanted to use culturally responsive practices in my classroom, but haven't really known how to do that. This article actually laid out the 'Five Cs of Reality Pedagogy' to use when acknowledging black males are different and need to experience something different in the classroom. I really like the idea of having 'co-generative dialogues'."

Conclusions

What do you think? Do these examples of assignments for those who missed part of our typical five-day training resonate with you? Have you done anything similar, or do you have a different way of addressing these situations? Please call or email us.

I MUST KNOW ... WHO IS QUINN?

(Reprinted from Winter 2004 Connections)

By Katy Kelly, NSRF National Facilitator, CFG Coach in Indiana, and former NSRF Co-Director, katykelly9888@gmail.com

Katy Kelly's work with NSRF started when she was a classroom teacher in 1995, when she became part of her first CFG. She went on to be trained as a CFG coach in 1998, then a national facilitator in 2000. Katy was the National Coordinator of NSRF in the early 2000s. Currently she works with children and families as a home-based therapist. She says CFG principles and facilitative leadership skills permeate all that she does.

Contact her with your questions or comments at katykelly9888@gmail.com

People in the NSRF network who have developed the habit of reflection in their practice often interact with other NSRF Coaches to push their thinking or to share ideas with colleagues. An example of the kind of cross-country collegial sharing of practice came from an on-line discussion about "Quinn's 6 Questions." The CFG coach wrote that she uses Quinn's 6 Questions regularly to check her own teaching, as well as having her interns use them during their internships, but doesn't know their source (she's had "…multiple copies floating around for years and found them in our CFG tools notebook uncited") elicited a response that reveals the broad scope of the work of NSRF.

Juli Quinn is a professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Cal State University, LA. She has been a CFG Coach since the first summer of training in 1995, and works with lots of school folks in building Professional Learning Communities. Juli developed "Quinn's 6 Questions" from a set of personal life questions, but the questions as we know them, were developed in 1991-1992 when her sister was a new teacher, teaching first grade. Juli would meet with her every Sunday to help her plan for the following week, and since Juli had no idea about the curriculum for first grade, she had to conduct an inquiry to help her sister think aloud. From there the rest is history.

These deceptively simple questions – Quinn's 6 – have been passed around the NSRF network, adapted and revised in ways that have made them relevant for different settings:

Quinn's Original 6 Questions

1. What am I teaching?
2. Why am I teaching it?
3. How am I teaching it?
4. Why am I teaching it that way?
5. How do I know the kids are getting it?
6. How do the kids know they are getting it?

John Newlin of the Southern Maine Partnership wrote about a spin off of the Questions that reflect a broader school application:

1. What are we doing?
2. Why are we doing it?
3. How are we doing it?
4. Why are we doing it that way?
5. How do we know how well we're doing it?
6. How do others know how well we're doing it?

Here is a version of the Questions that was adapted for meetings:

1. What are we meeting about?
2. Why are we meeting about it?
3. How are we running/conducting our meeting?
4. Why are we running/conducting that way?
5. How will we know the meeting was a success?
6. How will others know the meeting was a success?

Another colleague, working with new teachers, has adjusted the order of the original Questions to match with backward mapping from standards (content) to rubrics and assessments (quality performance) to curriculum and instruction

(pedagogy)...so form follows function:

1. What am I teaching?
2. Why am I teaching it/that?
3. How will I know the students get it?
4. How will the students know they got it?
5. How am I teaching it?
6. Why am I teaching it that way?

This revision of unknown origin caused the writer to reflect upon the need for personalization in our work. She shared her revision with the list "because I think that while lots of us might be reflexively adding it already, making it explicit will help surface assumptions, both ours and others, and deepen the conversation."

1. What am I teaching and to whom?
2. Why am I teaching it?
3. How am I teaching it?
4. Why am I teaching it that way?
5. What evidence will I collect to show my kids are getting it?
6. How will my students know they are getting it?

Here is what Juli wrote about these revisions and uses: *"I do like the notion of making the question of TO WHOM, explicit. It was embedded in the question about how I am teaching and why...but there seems to be additional power in bringing the students into the questions in a more personal, real way...up front.*

"Another way I am using Quinn's 6 is as an organizing framework forintegrating the variety of 'professional development' one of my schools is trying to integrate. We are deconstructing the theory and 'directions' for classroom implementation into Curriculum, Assessments, and Instruction and Pedagogy by fitting the attribute and strategies into the frame of the 6 Questions...it has helped us SEE that what we are doing is building our repertoire of connected ideas and strategies VS implementing a number of 'stand-alone' PROGRAMS that are unrelated...

"So, the Quinn's Six Questions are helping us feel wealth and abundance in starting our new year rather than overwhelmed with the age-old question of 'how will I get everything in!'

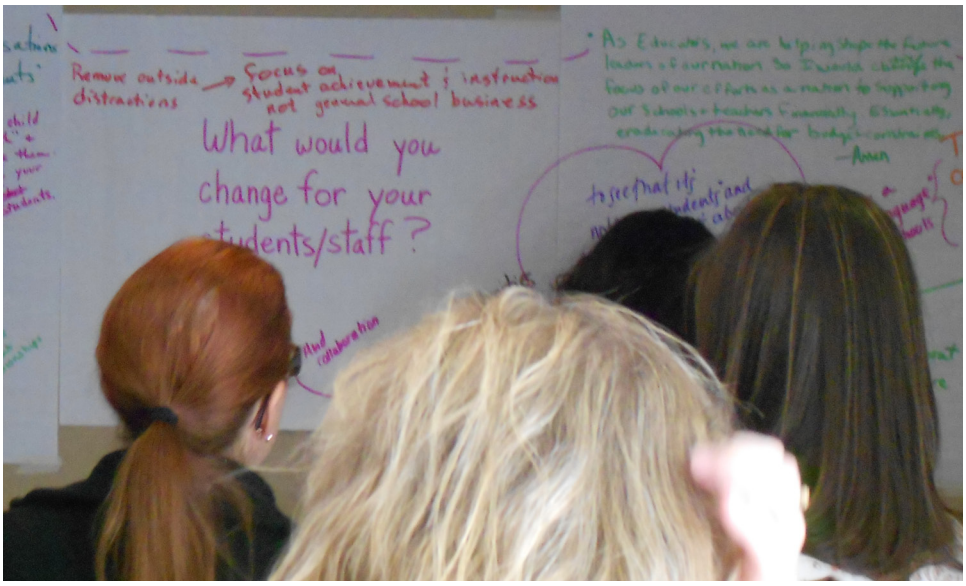
"Hope this helps, and please feel free to adapt and share any way these questions are being used!"

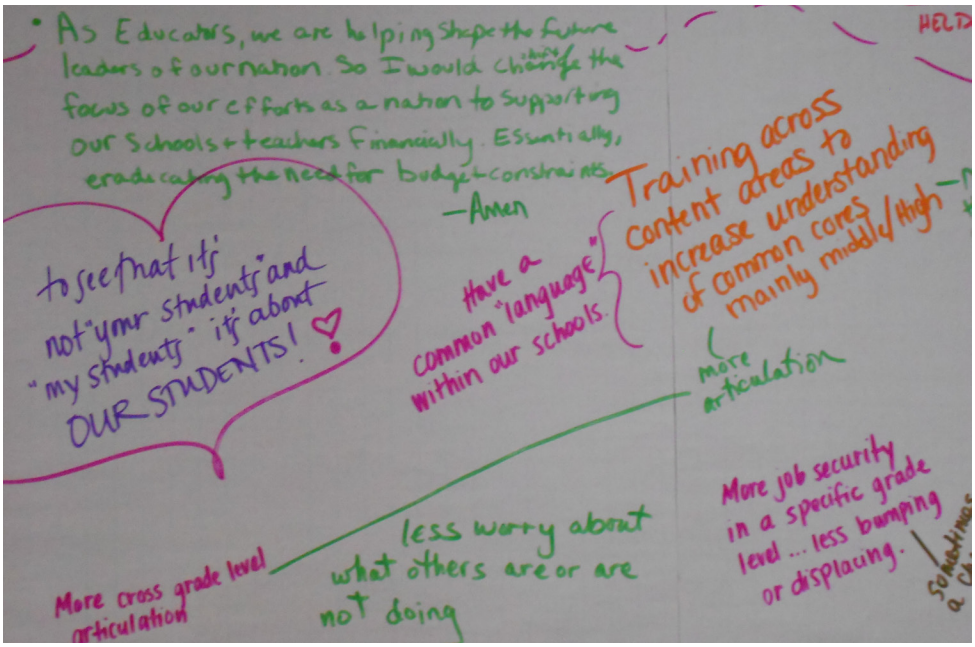
I'd like to add as an addendum the full text by Teri Schrader, Principal of Francis W. Parker School in Devens, MA. I think it underscores how tools like "Quinn's 6 Questions" can influence the culture of a school, especially when practitioners take the opportunity to reflect on how these tools apply to their own work and are pushed in their thinking by colleagues using different approaches.

"We are in our third and final week of faculty summer planning here at Parker School – and tomorrow we will spend our mornings in domain (interdisciplinary subject-based) meetings to share our curriculum across divisions (integrated grade levels – middle, intermediate and upper high school) and plans for what we're about to ask the kids to do this year.... so, I'm thinking about how timing really is everything. I'm struck by re-looking at Juli's questions on this particular day, given what we're up to here.

"The questions posed in Quinn's 6 make me think about framing our sessions tomorrow differently – rather than convening separate conversations about curriculum and instruction and assessment, these questions frame a comprehensive discussion that may allow us to talk together about the academic program in a multi-dimensional way and revise our thinking on any aspect of the work. Terrific curriculum is only as terrific as the means by which we assess it, and great ideas that aren't thoughtfully framed or translated into developmentally appropriate class activities or comprehensible projects don't help kids learn. So... it strikes me that using the questions here allow presenting teams of teachers to talk about the curriculum, yes, but also we can think alongside about the factors that must prevail upon our curriculum building – the questions about intention, "audience," anticipated reaction and potential bonuses or pitfalls we face in instruction and assessment.

"I will be interested to see how the deliberate posing and thinking about these questions helps push us to revise, change or affirm what we're thinking. Sometimes we wait till a unit or a project is fully designed before tending to deeper instruction or assessment questions, but it seems like we can consider the full array at the design stage. "It's also a nice, concise format to frame and discuss.





CFG Coaches use ChalkTalk...

By Luci Englert McKean,
NSRF Special Projects Manager,
CFG Coach in Indiana,
luci@nsrfharmony.org

The October Open Training for new CFG Coaches was remarkable in more ways than one. We sold out the full cohort of 15 early, opened a waitlist to see if we could open a second, simultaneous session ... and then not only opened the second room, we filled it!

Most of the training happened in separate rooms, but on day one and day three, we gathered both cohorts together for a few protocols. (Several schools and organizations sent more than one trainee, so, for the broadest perspective, we split those groups between the two trainers. The combined sessions allowed all trainees the experience of working with different trainers and interns.)

One highlight was the combined-room Chalk Talk, during which 30 attendees worked simultaneously on two different Chalk Talk boards: "What would you change about your own education?" and "What would you change for your school/staff?" It was amazing to see and read the variety of opinions expressed (silently!) on long lengths of chart paper. The ensuing discussion and debriefing brought forth even more rich content.

Within a few weeks, we had a second "photo opp" for use of the Chalk Talk protocol–in the 5th/6th Grade classroom of Harmony School, an independent, pre-K-12 school. (Both NSRF and Harmony School are divisions of the Harmony Education Center.)

"We use Chalk Talks in our

...and 5th & 6th graders use it too!

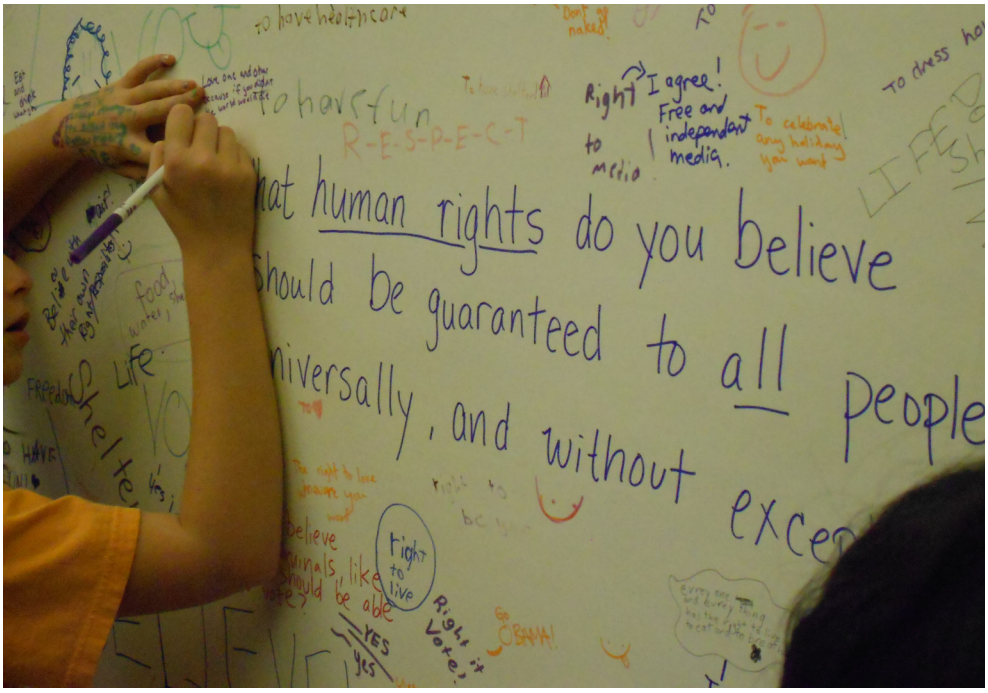
curriculum as well as a tool for exploring win-win solutions for conflicts and issues within the group," says Kathy Boone, one of the two 5th/6th co-teachers and a trained CFG Coach.

Scott Evans, her co-teacher, says, "We like to give the students the power of rule-making and decision-making, and Chalk Talk is a good way to get a lot of ideas out on the table from everyone. Three or four years ago, we had a very chatty class and we used Chalk Talk to talk about the issue. The students came up with a 'quiet monitor' that rotated, and they developed appropriate consequences. The ideas came from the kids instead of top-down, and that's the power of using this protocol."

These photos show the students working in a theme on immigration, answering the question "What human rights do you think all people should be guaranteed universally?" Almost every April or May, Kathy conducts a Chalk Talk around the question, "How can we help make the world a more just and peaceful place?"

"The challenging part for fifth and sixth graders is to remain quiet!" Scott says. "But this discussion was quite deep. They really paid attention to others' ideas, brought forth a lot of ideas that were just on the perimeter of their awareness, and then were able to bring those in and make it real."

If you use NSRF Protocols in the classroom, we want your stories! Email us!



AN EXPERIMENT IN GROUP DYNAMICS: How I Learned To Stop Talking

By Teri Lindner,
NSRF National Facilitator, CFG Coach in Pennsylvania, tklindner@me.com

Teri Lindner is the founder of the Life-Link programs in the State College Area School District in Pennsylvania. These award-winning programs help students with special needs transition to the adult world. Teri has taught in the USA, Paris, London and Switzerland and was the Disney Teacher of the Year in 1999.

Contact Teri with your questions or comments at tklindner@me.com

Have you ever noticed in meetings that there is a certain type of person who attentively listens and when she speaks, the room grows quiet? As she begins to talk, there is a noticeable anticipation in the air. Her colleagues listen to her because she is considered to be so insightful. For her less is more.

"She doesn't say much but when she does, she's right on the mark."

Do you find that there are also those who dominate the conversation and hold the floor longer than most? They might have impressive ideas and make valuable contributions to a discussion but, in the end, they have talked two or three times more than anyone else. As a result, when you survey the room, you notice that there are some people who have not uttered a word or expressed a single idea.

If you identify with the second type of speaker, as I do, you might have promised yourself to try and tone it down a bit. You tell yourself that you will let others have the floor and that you'll express your ideas, just not ALL of them.

During the next meeting, one inner voice says to you, "OK, sit on your hands, listen and wait to talk."

Then another voice says, with utmost enthusiasm, "I've got it!" or "This is really important, I need to say this!"…and off you go.

Before you know it, you are talking and everyone else is listening. After the meeting, people seem to have appreciated your ideas, and it seemed that you helped spark an interesting discussion. But, when you stopped to think about whether you had reached your goal of sharing the stage, you realized that you had fallen short again. Some – maybe many – voices in the room had not been heard. If you're being honest with yourself, you might admit that "Maybe they didn't get a chance to talk."

Try as you might, you just don't seem to be able to slow down and be that person who everyone waits to hear from – part mysterious, and part brilliant!

During one of my CFG facilitator trainings, I heard my NSRF mentor say, "If you wait, someone else will probably make your points and you can save your best for last."

Was this one of those sayings that get thrown out to make you feel better? Is it just some friendly advice? Do you find yourself saying, "Thanks…that's probably true" but thinking "Yeah, right…"

Was my mentor's advice just another maxim like:

- "When one door closes, another one opens." "Yeah, right…"
- "Someday you'll thank me for this!" "Yeah, right…"
- "This time next year everything will be better." "Yeah, right…"

- "All things happen for a reason." "Yeah, right…"
- "If you just wait, someone will make your points and you can save the best for last."

Is this another "Yeah, right" moment or could it have some validity? How could I know for sure?

I decided that since I was in the land of protocols, I would try a "mini protocol" of my own. It just so happened that the morning's activities gave me a perfect chance to try out my experiment.

One of the teachers in the group had a dilemma and together the group decided to use the Consultancy protocol. Perfect! In my experiment, I wrote down any thoughts or comments that I would usually have expressed to the group. Next, I stayed quiet and if someone made one of the points on my list, I would cross it off.

PREMISE: If I wait, others will make most of my points and I will be left with only a few that haven't been raised. I could then choose one or two to express.

When other members of the group spoke, it was difficult not to jump right into the conversation. But, per my experiment, I kept crossing out items on my list as they were mentioned. Sure enough, towards the end of the discussion, I only had a few points left on my list. When I spoke, I felt that what I had to say was potentially of more value to the group.

Since one can't prove a premise with a single trial, I spent the rest of the day making lists, crossing off items and only speaking once, or at the most twice, during a protocol or conversation. Was it true that I had started to become a member of the group who allowed others the opportunity to share first?

PREMISE: If I wait, others will make most of my points and I will be left with only a few that haven't been raised. I could then choose one or two to express.

After continuing my experiment for a few days, I had the answer to the question. It was a resounding affirmation of my mentor's maxim. Yes, it is true, if given the chance, others will make your point(s) and you can save your best for last! Personally, I felt more valuable to the group and, much to my surprise, I felt more relaxed and in control.

A week later, when I returned home, I noticed an interesting by-product of my experiment. I was beginning to find it easier to relax during friendly conversation. I am becoming a better listener!

I don't know whether this discovery will be of help to the readers of Connections, but I do know that, for me, it was a revelation that has deeply affected the manner in which I approach discussions.

The jury is still out as to whether I can maintain my status as a reformed "talker" but I intend to keep trying, quietly.

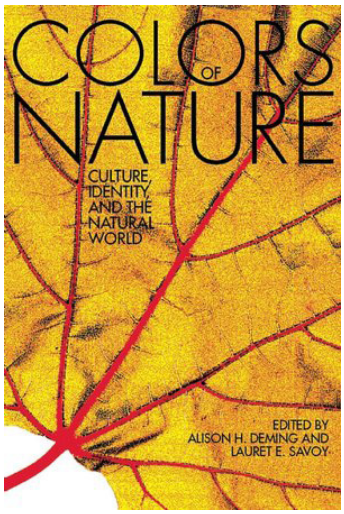
Book Reviews

THREE BOOK REVIEWS

By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor, NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG Coach in Wisconsin, davelehman@mac.com

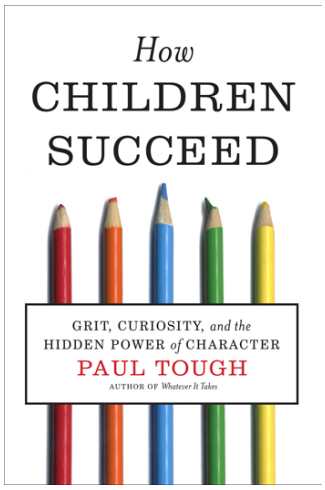
The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World

Edited By Alison Deming and Lauret Savoy
Milkweed Editions, 2011, Second Edition



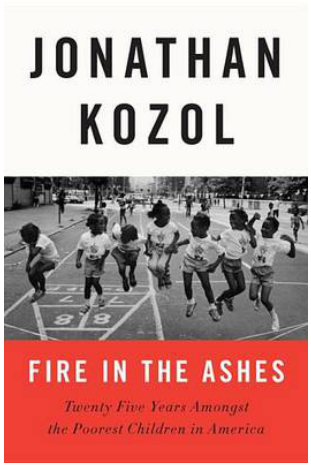
How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character

By Paul Tough
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012



Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America

By Jonathan Kozol
Crown Publishing, 2012



It's not uncommon that I have more than one book that I'm reading, and in September the following three came together with a powerful connection – ***The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*** edited by Alison Deming and Lauret Savoy, ***How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*** by Paul Tough, and Jonathan Kozol's latest, ***Fire in the Ashes: Twenty-Five Years Among the Poorest Children in America.*** The connections are related to our NSRF Mission Statement: "*The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.*"

It is in the "educational and social equity" part of our mission statement where there is the powerful connection in these three recent books. Kozol's book is the most recent, having just been published in September. It is a revisiting of the inner-city children and youth that he met years ago in his earlier books about them – Rachel and Her Children, and Amazing Grace. Fire in the Ashes is an up-close and personal account of what has happened to some thirteen students of color whom he

first met when they were in elementary school, and follows them through their adolescence and into young adulthood. They are children from one of the poorest neighborhoods, and the some of the worst schools in this country.

The first five chapters in "Part One: The Shadow of the Past" are heart-rending accounts of some who didn't survive. Despite what seemed to be promising possibilities for them to rise above their unimaginably destructive environments–rat-infested, crime-ridden, shrouded in drug dealing apartment buildings and neighborhoods–they were gunned down or committed suicide. Their deaths came far too early.

Then, the next series of chapters, "Part Two: A Bright Shining Light," are the moving accounts of those who, to date, have made it out, and are overcoming their terrible situations.

But before I return to more about Kozol's challenging book, let me make the connection to Paul Tough's ***How Children Succeed***, also published in 2012. His is both a personal account of some of the children he met and followed to their schools, and of researchers from a wide background of professions: educators, psychologists, neuroscientists, and economists. Tough begins by pointing out that our current, predominant educational hypothesis (he traces its rise to the 1994 publication of the Carnegie Corporation's report, "Starting Points: Meeting the Needs of Our Youngest Children") is what he calls the "cognitive hypothesis:"

"…that success today depends primarily on cognitive skills – the kind of intelligence that gets measured on IQ tests, including the abilities to recognize letters and words, to calculate, to detect patterns – and that the best way to develop these skills is to practice them as much as possible, beginning as early as possible."

Then, citing extensive research from the diverse studies of the professions mentioned above, he concludes that what matters most is ***not*** how much information we can stuff into a child's brain. Rather, we should be helping a child develop a very different set of qualities, including "persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit and self-confidence." He notes further that these are what economists refer to as "non-cognitive skills," what psychologists call "personality traits," and the rest of us might call "character." And here is one of the connections of Tough's more deeply researched book and Kozol's personally moving book:

"Some of the kids whose lives have been most difficult are struggling still and have yet to find that place of inner peace in which they can start to shape a vision of contributive maturity.… Success within the lives of those I've known for all these years is as much a matter of their inward growth – in decency, in character – as of their outward victories."

Enter the third book in this series of reviews, ***Colors of Nature***, published in 2011. The troubling essential question this anthology of some thirty-three essays by an amazingly diverse series of authors (African American, Arab American, Asian American, Latino/Latina, Native American, "multiracial," or "mixed bloods") is this: "Why is there so little 'nature writing' by people of color?" This begs the answer to other questions:

"What if one's primary experience of land and place is not a place apart but rather indigenous? What if it is ur-

"... persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit and self-confidence ...."

"What if one's primary experience of land and place is not a place apart but rather indigenous? What if it is urban or indentured or exiled or (im)migrant or toxic? To define 'nature writing' as anything that excludes these experiences does not reveal a 'lack' of writing, but reflects, instead, a societal structure of inclusion and exclusion based on othered difference– whether by 'race,' culture, class, or gender."

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There are some essays here by writers with whom I was already familiar, like bell hooks, but most are refreshingly new, like Jennifer Oladipo, a writer and award-winning journalist from Louisville, who recently became Kentucky's first African American state-certified environmental educator. As a former biology and environmental science teacher with my own deep affection for the outdoors and nature, her essay, "Porphyrin Rings," is particularly insightful. Oladip begins with the recognition that the hemoglobin in our blood and the chlorophyll in plants both have 136 atoms in common in their exact same molecular structure (the "porphyrin rings"), with only one atom of difference, the iron in hemoglobin, and magnesium in chlorophyll. She closes her essay writing metaphorically about invasive, "alien species" of plants like kudzu and winter-creeper, and invites us to view them differently. I see this as a connection to the two books by Kozol and Tough:

"If we, who have cultivated protective and even rhapsodic relationships with native plants, can try to understand, from the inside out, our deep connection to all vegetative life, then perhaps that understanding could also encompass our connections to other people, however 'alien' they might seem…. Surely our intrinsic sameness should lead us to embrace and value people with the same fervor that we do plants, and to let go of fictions of social and biological stasis in favor of a more inclusive and more accurate view….With so many lives so intricately enmeshed in the same soil, it is not only the deepest roots that matter in nature. More often than not, what matters most is some connection we can't immediately see, but that makes all the difference—or maybe that shows us all of the sameness—once we do."

Returning to ***Fire in the Ashes,*** Kozol speaks of the young adolescent males he came to know from his volunteer tutoring in an after school program run by Martha, an incredible pastor of a neighborhood church. Kozol wondered why the adolescents found it so hard to search within themselves to find the inner strength and character needed to surmount their desperate circumstances. Thinking of one young man he calls Benjamin: "Martha's love and loyalty surely had a role in this. More important, I believe, was the model of determination he had seen in her…. He's told me many times that her example of persistence and relentlessness throughout the years he'd lived with her 'helped me find the strength inside of me I didn't know I had'."

This is a point Kozol emphasizes again and again throughout these personal stories, that "all these children had unusual advantages. Someone intervened in every case, and with dramatic consequences." The intervention may have come from a devoted single parent, an-

other relative, a friend, someone in the community, a tutor, a mentor, or a teacher, as well as people from various charitable agencies (sometimes unknown personally to these children) who provided resources. Here, too, is another connection to a similar theme struck by Paul Tough in ***How Children Succeed***.

After interviewing the amazing coach of an inner-city middle school's chess club, and following them through their tournaments and consistent national championships, he, too, notes:

"In each case, a teacher or mentor found a way to help a student achieve a rapid and unexpected transformation [many of these chess-playing students had not been particularly stellar students] by using what James Heckman would call non-cognitive skills and David Levin would call character strengths."

Tough then goes on to challenge all of us, asking, "What if we could do that for large numbers of teenagers – not to help them attain chess mastery or persuade them to quit fighting in school but to help them develop precisely those mental and character strengths they would need to graduate from college?" Note Tough's precise wording: not only for them to enter college, but to graduate!

But what are those "character strengths" that the researchers find are so invaluable and essential for success in college and beyond? They involve developing work habits, study skills, time management, help-seeking behavior, critical thinking, social/academic problem-solving skills, self-control and delayed gratification. Tough recognizes these strengths despite earlier inaccurate research on the development of the adolescent brain which saw young people as captives of neurological changes that make them uncontrollably impulsive, thrill-seeking, shallow thinkers.

It is worth noting, in connection with the personal transformations that Kozol and Tough see some young people exhibiting, that extensive research presented at the recent annual meeting of the Society of Neuroscience, shows that adolescents do have the ability to control impulsivity and to think through problems, particularly when the rewards are significant and meaningful. And, that the ongoing development of the "social brain" in adolescence can give young people the flexibility they need to navigate successfully the changes they inevitably encounter in such multi-faceted social environments as found in entering college.

Returning to ***Colors of Nature***, and the development of social skills, there is the wonderful personal essay by Nalini Nadkarni, who is the daughter of an Indian/Hindu father and a Brooklyn/Jewish mother, "A Tapestry of Browns and Greens." Now a member of the faculty in environmental studies at The Evergreen State College, her research concerns the ecology of tropical and temperate forest canopies. What captivated me most in her essay was the way she has gone about seeking connections with non-professional communities, public audiences outside of academia, "the concept that all voices, all approaches, and all types of people can contribute to keeping the great tapestry of nature intact."

"Urban youth is a segment of the population that can be hard to educate about the importance of nature. To connect young people from the inner city with science and natural ecosystems, I engaged a young rapper named C.A.U.T.I.O.N. to interact with field scientists – a marine biologist, a forest ecologist, and an entomologist – along with thirty middle school children from Tacoma, Washington. Each day included field time – with the rapper singing about the trees, clams and bugs we encountered – and sound studio time – when the students made up their own rap songs about their field experiences. By the end of the week, the children had cut their own CD, which they presented to their families and peers."

Here's a second example:

"I initiated the Sustainable Prisons Project at Cedar Creek Correctional Center, a local prison, to help solve the problem of the non-sustainability of moss harvesting, working with prisoners as partners in exploring ways to best cultivate moss…. Prisoners observed and recorded the vigor of moss samples, which we then weighed to quantify growth rates. After eighteen months, the results of the project were dramatic. The corrections center staff were astonished at the energy, interest, and patience the participants exhibited. Several of the inmates found training in the horticulture field after they were released. As an outgrowth, I launched an in-prison lecture series called 'Sustainable Living – Sustainable Lives'."

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I close this three-part review with something from each book; first, from bell hooks' essay in ***Colors of Nature*** entitled "Earth Bound, On Solid Ground:

"More than ever before in our nation's history, black folks must collectively renew our relationship to the earth, to our agrarian roots. For when we are forgetful and participate in the destruction and exploitation of the dark earth, we collude with the domination of the earth's dark people, both here and globally. Reclaiming our history, our relationship to nature, to farming in America, and proclaiming the humanizing restorative of living in harmony with nature so that the earth can be our witness is meaningful resistance."

And this from Paul Tough's ***How Children Succeed:***

"When I spend time with young people growing up in adversity, I can't help but feel two things. First, a sense of anger for what they're already missed....my second reaction: a feeling of admiration and hope when I watch young people making the difficult and often painful choice to follow a better path, to turn away from what might have seemed like their inevitable destiny.... Every day they pull themselves up one more rung on the ladder to a more successful future. But for the rest of us, it's not enough to just applaud their efforts and hope that someday, more young people follow their lead. They did not get onto that ladder alone. They are there only because someone helped them take the first step."

Lastly, striking a similar theme, is this from Jonathan Kozol's ***Fire in the Ashes***:

"If any lesson may be learned from the academic breakthroughs achieved by Pineapple and Jeremy, it is not that we celebrate exceptionality of opportunity but that the public schools themselves in neighborhoods of wide-spread destitution ought to have the rich resources, small classes, and well-prepared and well-rewarded teachers that would enable us to give to every child the feast of learning that is now available to children of the poor only on the basis of a careful selectivity or by catching the attention of empathetic people like the pastor of a church or another grown-up whom they meet by chance. Charity and chance and narrow selectivity are not the way to educate the children of a genuine democracy."

There is so much more to these three wonderful books, so do yourself a favor this holiday season—treat yourself to at least one of them. Then buy one for another teacher friend, or perhaps give one to your school's principal, or have your librarian purchase a copy for the professional shelves of your school's library. You can even give one to the pastor or rabbi at a nearby church or synagogue, or an elected official in or from your region. All three of these books I strongly believe are essential reading to transform our schools into developing global citizens in the 21st century.

ADAPTING PROTOCOLS: Variations on The Consultancy Protocol

By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor, NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG Coach in Wisconsin, davelehman@mac.com, and Luci Englert McKean, NSRF Special Projects Manager, CFG Coach in Indiana, luci@nsrfharmony.org

NSRF's Consultancy Protocol provides powerful, useful feedback for helping an individual or a team think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma. It so effectively typifies the power of a well-run Critical Friends Group, that it's always taught and practiced in Five-Day New Coaches Trainings. When new coaches return to their schools and start CFGs, it's often one of the first active protocols used after the scaffolding, team- and trust-building activities are completed.

Originally developed by Gene Thompson-Grove, Paula Evans and Faith Dunne as part of the Coalition of Essential Schools' National Re:Learning Faculty Program, the Consultancy was then further adapted and revised as part of work of NSRF. It's been adapted specifically for Looking At Student Work, and further suggestions have been written to help Presenters more effectively prepare for presenting dilemmas.

But sometimes, it's hard to find the full 50 minutes to conduct a Consultancy, per its original design.

Then the Thirty-Minute Protocols were written, including a shortened version of The Consultancy, to be conducted in dyads. This option can still get a Presenter some great feedback in a short period of time, but only from a single person.

Sometimes, it feels better to get feedback from a larger group, and a larger number of people want to bring dilemmas to the same meeting. Thus, another adaptation was created called the Two-Minute Consultancy Rounds. (Follow the link to download a formatted version of this protocol, outlined in the rest of this article.)

The Two-Minute Consultancy Rounds protocol allows each member of the CFG to bring a limited, defined challenge, problem, or dilemma to the meeting, and to receive two minutes' worth of feedback from every other member of the group. The total time for the protocol depends on the number of participants: for a group of ten, it will take a total of 30-45 minutes to complete, including debriefing. It's best used after a CFG has been together long enough to have experienced at least one or more traditional 50-minute Consultancies, and certainly not until the group has achieved a basic level of openness and trust between the members.

Materials Needed – Each person participating within a circle will receive a stack of half sheets of paper, contained with a paper clip, equal to the number of participants. (Thus, for a group of ten people, each person will have a paper-clipped stack of ten half-sheets of paper. If your CFG includes 15 people, divide into three groups of five, and give each participant a stack of five sheets of paper.)

Objective – To brainstorm silently, in writing only, several possible solutions or suggestions for individual participants' own current work challenge, problem, or dilemma.

Procedure

1) Sort out your groups into no more than 10, no less than 5, in each circle or around each table.

2) Distribute the stacks of half-sheets of paper, and pens or pencils as necessary.

3) Each person is given about three minutes to think about a current, job-related challenge, problem or dilemma, for which they do not presently have a solution. Each should develop a framing or focusing question – e.g. "How can I get more group involvement out of my students?" or "How can I get my students to be more punctual?"

4) Each person now has two minutes to write out the issue, ending with the framing or focusing question. They must use only the face of the top half-sheet of paper in their stack. Suggest that they keep their writing terse as everyone will need to read and understand quickly, to write only on the front, not on the back, and to stick with only the top half sheet.

5) When the timer rings, the coach confirms that each person has written down a framing question. Then reset the timer for two minutes and everyone passes their paperclipped stack of papers (with their dilemma on top) to the person to the right. Each person then reads the dilemma just received, pulls a blank paper from the bottom of the stack, and has two minutes only to jot down their first thought, idea, or suggestion to address the dilemma. When finished writing, or when the two-minute bell rings, each person attaches their completed sheet just behind the cover dilemma sheet they just read, and reattaches the paper clip.

6) Repeat this process every 2 minutes and keep the process going until each person gets his/her sheet back with the attached suggestions/ideas.

Facilitator Tips – monitoring each person's time is crucial. Say things like: "30 seconds left," then, "Time's up, clip your response behind the dilemma sheet, and pass it on."

Debrief – Last, after everyone has received their original dilemma back and read all the attached responses, take time to debrief as a group.

Possible Discussion Questions:

• "What solutions were discovered that you hadn't previously considered?"

• "Can you see any value in trying some of these suggestions/ideas?"

• "What suggestions/ideas triggered other ideas or solutions for you?"

• "What does this teach you about reaching out to others for help?"

Help us give you what you want!

Are you looking for advanced protocol training, beyond the basics taught in a five-day training? Would you feel more confident with an intermediary step toward becoming an NSRF National Facilitator? Want advice on 'tough crowds' or difficult dilemmas?

We want to hear from you!

Please email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org or call us at 812-330-2702 to discuss what "next steps" appeal to you in your use of NSRF® Protocols and Critical Friends Groups®!

How'd we do?

How did you like this issue? Do you have ideas for future articles, book reviews, or topics you'd like to explore (or you'd like us to explore)? We'd love to hear your experiences with NSRF Protocols and CFGs. Email us, or call 812-330-2702.

The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is a professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through professional learning communities. We train individuals to coach Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs, a specific type of Professional Learning Community (PLC). Critical Friends Groups use protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving and learning.

As the NSRF does not receive grant support, your paid membership helps us continue to freely provide the original NSRF protocols and supporting materials via our website, as well as support our mission to continue offering training across the nation and world. We encourage you to support our scholarship fund so that any teacher could participate in a training regardless of ability to pay our fee.

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