

Madison East High School include the support of their Principal and my on-going consulting – co-facilitating weekly meetings with their Leadership Team and with individual Department Chairpersons. Additionally, I met frequently with La Follette High School's Innovation Team, REal Grant Coordinator, and Literacy Coach, and did a series of half-day workshops with them over the past three years.

I invite Connections readers to explore more fully how to sustain our work with schools and/or a school district over an extended period of time in order to have a more lasting impact. We know that an initial five-day CFG Coaches Training, while powerful, is only the beginning for the new coaches. For maximum impact to improve teacher practice and student learning, these coaches need to participate in CFGs and the use of Protocols in a consistent, sustained manner over a number of years.

So, my fellow NSRF members, National Facilitators, and CFG Coaches, how can we help existing Critical Friends Groups maintain and build their effectiveness? How can we better encourage new, spin-off CFGs to be created? How can we support schools and districts in learning new Protocols to “refresh” their experience, reinvigorate excitement in those familiar with CFGs and extend that experience to new faces?

The survey can be found [here on the NSRF Website](#). We encourage you to download it, use it with your group, and share the results with us.



BUILDING A COLLEGIAL COMMUNITY: A Lead Teacher's Experience with Protocols

By Shelley van Benschop, NSRF CFG Coach in Toronto, Ontario, SvanBenschop@bss.on.ca

Let me share a bit about our school context. I work in the Junior School of a JK-Grade 12 independent, all girls day and boarding school in Toronto, Ontario. For over a decade now we have been pursuing a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach with a focus on inquiry, research and project work. Our school has a history of innovation and consistently strives to research and implement practices that support the mission, vision and values of our school.

As a Junior School faculty with a focus on inquiry, emergent curriculum and collaboration, we have been looking for scaffolding that supports collaboration, supporting the teacher as a researcher and looking for multiple perspectives to enrich both student and teacher work.

This endeavor has led our school to create new positions intentionally to support this goal, including my role: Lead Teacher-Research & Inquiry. My task is to support teachers in reflecting upon and refining their pedagogical practices focused on grades 2-4. The Lead Teachers focus on pedagogical documentation and provide an objective perspective when analyzing data and we contribute to decisions about ongoing investigations and project work occurring in the classrooms.

With this shift in thinking and classroom practice, we have found it necessary to also shift our meeting culture. Traditionally our meeting structure was often a place to share information with the entire faculty. We have since moved to a balanced approach with some whole school faculty, some Junior School faculty and most often, grade floor meetings (ex. Our Floor meeting invites Grade 2-4 classroom teachers and all specialists who can make it). Our meetings have changed to be more reflective of our pedagogical practices of research, reflection, refinement and collaboration. In order to support this change we brought in experts to support us as we shift from congenial relationships to more collaborative collegial relationships¹ (Evans, 2012).

The Middle and Senior School has built a relation-

ship with High Tech High in San Diego and their experience with protocols inspired us to structure collegial conversations to support looking at student and teacher work. That being said, with little professional understanding or training and no real depth of understanding, I was nervous about taking on the role of facilitator and how it might clash with my other roles as coach, collaborator, co-teacher and outsider. The value of structured conversations was instantly recognizable, the potential unending, but the buy-in was missing. Some teachers saw the use of protocols as a trend that would pass and had legitimate misgivings.

Since our training in the Spring of 2012, we have been crafting opportunities to use NSRF protocols to support the sharing of our work. It is always a risk to put your planning, student work, and outcomes on the table for others to view and comment on. The experiences are invaluable in learning from the perspective of others, but it also supports the risk-taking that is a model for our students and our greater community. At our floor meetings we began by using Feedback Nightmares, which uses a protocol to support dialogue, but also intrinsically builds collaboration and congeniality by sharing ones experiences with others. At the same time, Feedback Nightmares is a structured conversation, which hints at the value of protocols. It was a safe

place to start, or restart as it may be.

At a Grade 2-4 Floor meeting at the end of the year, we planned on sharing some project work with a group of visitors to our school. A group of Grade 4 teachers volunteered, with the caveat, "Only if we can use a protocol." This shift in perspective was a personal highlight. I believe it demonstrates a deeper understanding of the process, the support and the protection a protocol provides teachers while sharing their work. That protocols help the work become shared; that we can think deeply together and contribute to the growth of knowledge and craft rich projects with support; that our individual perspective meaningfully

adds to the group understanding; that respectfully asking questions of our colleagues helps us all to learn more about the work happening in our own school and about how to work together more effectively.

Through the process of developing and identifying our role as Lead Teacher and through the scaffolds provided by our NSRF training, I see that my role to support the development of collegiality is often helped by the timely and purposeful use of protocols which enable all voices to be heard and our work together enriched.

¹Rob Evans (2012): *Getting to No: Building True Collegiality in Schools*, *School Matters*, Winter, 2012, 99-107



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