



David Nelson brings 23 years of teaching experience to his high school Social Studies classrooms at ACS Athens, where he has taught for the past 11 years. Originally from the Hillsboro School District in Oregon, he has experienced a wide variety of administrative styles that empower faculty and seek to improve student learning. As a building coordinator for P.D. at the American Community Schools of Athens, Greece, he applies his research and CFG coaches training to help establish "Collaborative Learning Communities" in his school.

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CFG TRAINING: Exploring Levels of Collaboration Within NESAs and its Schools

By David Nelson, NSRF National Facilitator, CFG Coach in Athens, Greece, nelsond@acs.gr and Corey Watlington CFG Coach in Mumbai, India, coreywatlington@hotmail.com

Last May, the Near East South Asia Council of Overseas Schools (NESAs) awarded the American Community Schools of Athens and the American School of Bombay (ASB) a NESAs Collaboration Grant, which helped to set in motion cooperation between our two schools as we explore the vast applications of Critical Friends Groups (CFGs). While both schools had already begun to recognize the potential of learning communities and Critical Friends Groups, the grant helped to initiate an invaluable collaboration between members of the two faculties.

ASB selected one teacher to represent its faculty and to attend a new coaches' training, held in the summer of 2012 at ACS Athens, Greece. A total of fifteen educators came together in the week-long training conducted by the Director of the National School Reform Faculty, Michele Mattoon, who flew in from Bloomington, Indiana.

The CFG training provided a framework for educators to improve student achievement by engaging in collaborative protocols and multiple levels of inquiry. The strength of the training lay not only in the diversity of the participants from different institutions, but also in the spectrum of grade levels and subject areas. By the end of the training, participants had learned methods to improve student learning, create equity in collaborative groups, increase efficient and effective communication, and enhance personal and institutional performance through the use of protocols and reflective practice.

The training provided skills needed for educators to apply a variety of approaches as



they seek to initiate their own groups in their schools. These skills have great utility for the classroom as well as for other educational contexts. Reflecting on the experience, one teacher wrote, “Complex issues are ‘slowed down’ by the protocols so people have time to consider before they react/speak.”

Another echoed the finding of many that “good protocols allow people to think, share, and REFLECT.” While yet another appreciated “the structured way to deal with a variety of issues.”



For us, the power of CFGs resonates from professionals coming together to share insights and solutions that might otherwise remain hidden within their own classrooms. The group members rely on their critical friends to help provide alternate paths for solving professional dilemmas, for tuning lessons and projects, for examining student work and for exploring institution-wide implications. Above all, the group reminds us of the virtues of using focused time to reflect and share on the things that we care about most and do best, and perhaps most importantly, reminds us of the importance of listening to each other.

The NESAs Collaboration Grant helped to initiate what has become an ongoing relationship between our two schools. In November, 2012 ASB Mumbai held its fourth CFG training for a group of its teachers. As a representative from ACS Athens, one of us, David Nelson had the opportunity to participate as a training intern, side by side with ASB Mumbai faculty to collaborate as we seek more effective ways to widen participation on our campuses.

Finally, both of our schools look forward to sharing our findings at the 2013 NESAs Spring Educators Conference, where a special institute for the training of new coaches of Critical Friends Groups will be offered. On behalf of our schools, we want to thank NESAs and the Professional Development Advisory Committee for helping to make this collaboration possible.



Corey Watlington started his career as an educator on the South Side of Chicago in 2000. Since then he taught for six years in São Paulo, Brazil and now is a teacher and CFG coach at the American School of Bombay (India). He is originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

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