The protocol issue
A collection of articles about NSRF protocol and activity use

As those of you know who’ve taken Critical Friends Group Coaches’ Training from NSRF in the last few years, we have been very busy fine-tuning our most-often used protocols and activities, as well as developing new ones and expanding our training materials and website protocol list accordingly. And we’re not done yet!

In this issue, as we all look toward summer vacation (for you, dear reader, we hope) and a full schedule of CFG Coaches’ and Administrators’ Trainings (for us at NSRF), we wanted to showcase some of our new materials and a few new ways to use some of our older ones. We hope you’ll get some great new ideas to try in all aspects of your professional life. Also, please let us know if you have other ways to use our protocols and activities that maybe we haven’t already tried. These tend to be very popular articles in NSRF Connections and perhaps you’d like a new byline for yourself? When we publish an article of yours, you will receive a year’s membership at your earned membership level — coaches, this is a great place for you to show your stuff and earn $75 worth of membership!

To those of you who we’ll see this summer in trainings or as interns toward becoming National Facilitators: thanks so much for giving us a part of your precious summer break!

To all of our friends: Our best regards from everyone at NSRF!

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Gauging your effectiveness as a CFG coach and facilitator

Teaching and training and facilitation and collaboration: in NSRF terms, these skills are allied, but definitely distinct from one another. When we lead a CFG Coaches’ Training, part of what happens is training attendees in the use of NSRF protocols and activities, but a lot of the week’s work is demonstrating good facilitation skills and techniques. All week, we’re transparently doing both: aiding new coaches in recognizing the difference and knowing what skills to use, when.

The Checklist for Effective Facilitation document below and on the next page was designed as a sample checklist for CFG Coaches (and others) to assess some key facilitation skills, but it is certainly not a complete list. The linked article within it, General Facilitation Tips, outlines many more issues that trained CFG Coaches learn to manage.

For those of you who are not yet members of the NSRF or who have let your membership expire, enjoy this free preview of materials typically only available with paid membership. If you like what you see, please join or renew here: https://www.nsrfharity.org/merchandise_services/membership-benefits.

Every productive collaborative process requires someone to take charge, not with the intention of driving or affecting the content, but to facilitate a conversation neutrally toward a positive outcome. Some groups may share facilitation responsibilities, but at any point in time, someone is leading the collaboration.

Think of an orchestra conductor, who sets the tempo of the piece of music, ensures that each member of the ensemble joins and withdraws appropriately, and, through gesture and encouragement, shapes the phrasing and volume to create a wonderful experience for the audience. Facilitators of collaborative conversations do much the same. They set the tempo by creating an appropriate agenda and by imposing just the right structures to produce an appropriate, desired outcome. They ensure that everyone gets to speak, but not all at once and not for too long. They shape the language of the process by making sure all participants speak respectfully, give feedback skillfully, and ask questions from a place of curiosity rather than judgment. A good facilitator must keep all of this in mind doing their job. (Note that this is not a complete list of all attributes of an effective facilitator. For more information, please also see General Facilitation Tips for more advice on facilitation in general.)

Purpose — This checklist allows you to focus on many important attributes of facilitation. To improve your skills as a facilitator, you may choose a few areas to work on. Once growth and confidence has been achieved in those areas, move onto something new. It may also be used for others or yourself to periodically assess your progress with these objectives.

An effective facilitator must:

___ 1. Focus on the group’s agenda, not on their own, personal agenda. A great facilitator never sways the outcome by sharing their preferences or perspectives. If you have a strong opinion that you need to express, then someone else needs to facilitate that conversation.

___ 2. Practice compassionate unattachment. Effective facilitators always work for the good of the group, making sure to meet its needs without getting caught up in difficult emotions and group dynamics.
___ 3. Be responsive to group dynamics through the entire process. Pay attention to things like:
   • Who’s speaking and for how long
   • Who’s not speaking
   • Body language
   • Inflection and tone of voice
   • Reactions from group members
   • Personal agendas (as opposed to the group agenda)
   • Judgmental comments, or feedback that is given unskillfully

___ 4. Intentionally work to include the voices of all the members of the group, offering opportunities and/or different structures to support quieter, thoughtful, or dissenting voices to participate.

___ 5. Help everyone uphold all group agreements (or norms), checking in with the group to offer and support the addition of new norms when needed to improve group dynamics.

___ 6. Help a group pinpoint its needs by using paraphrasing, giving guidance, and building consensus.

___ 7. Change the agenda if necessary to meet the group’s needs, keeping focused on the purpose and goals of the group, and the work at hand.

___ 8. Know what to do when problems inevitably arise. For example, if the group is floundering, the facilitator might:
   • ask the group where they think they should go
   • give the group a couple of minutes of reflective silence to calm down and center themselves
   • put the issue on the “parking lot” to deal with at a later time once the group has gathered more information and benefited from reflection and distance.

___ 9. Transparently admit to mistakes they’ve made. Mistakes (and acknowledgement of them) are great opportunities for learning—for yourself and the group. Transparently discussing flaws and inelegant choices is also a great way to model the importance of growing from our errors.

___ 10. Resist taking matters personally. Groups or individuals sometimes vent their frustration, anger, and fears on the facilitators. To use that discourse effectively, breathe deeply to calm yourself, then acknowledge these emotions and draw connections to the context, actions, or communication that may have caused them. Recentering the conversation on the problem and not the people can help everyone move forward.

___ 11. Work for balance between process and content, but when you have to choose, put more energy into the process. Calmly staying on-task and within the agreed norms and steps results in safe, bonded communities, which are ultimately more productive.

___ 12. Celebrate when groups transform from a congenial gathering of individuals to a collegial collaborating community with a common purpose and goals! Drawing attention to and celebrating when groups work together effectively to achieve their goals (solving problems, improving work, creating new processes, etc.), emphasizes the importance of collaboration. The attention and celebration will help groups remember how to collaborate and facilitate effectively in the future.

___ 13. Keep a sense of humor! Developing a light, humorous tone (when appropriate) can go far when building relationships and doing great work together.
A few years ago, I made the intentional decision to start every Monday morning in one of my seventh grade social studies classes by engaging in the Connections Activity (ed. note: now updated as the Transitions Activity, and referred to as such throughout this article) with the students. This was not an unusual decision for me; I had used Transitions in a number of my classes prior to this, and it had always had a profoundly positive impact on the classroom culture.

I can’t recall exactly why I chose to do it with this particular group of students, this particular school year. Was it that the students coasted into class Monday mornings silent and shut down, carrying that closed off demeanor into each day’s lesson? Was it that the students didn’t seem to gel as a group, and I wanted to find a way to bring them into community with each other? Was it that I had the sense that these students had stories to tell, but the class periods went so fast and there was so much to do that those stories just weren’t surfacing? Was it that a few gregarious students dominated every class and much of my time, leaving the quieter students unknown?

I don’t know exactly why I chose to integrate this particular activity into this particular class, but I decided to and I knew that it was going to be great! I had an instinct that this was the structure that would allow the students to feel safe to share about their thoughts and experiences in and outside of the classroom. It would give our classroom community the space to witness each others’ important thoughts and life events.

As we learned about each other, our community would grow stronger, and our knowledge of each other would enhance my ability to teach my students well and their abilities to see each other as fully human. Our classroom would become a safe space for deep, connected learning to happen. It was going to be powerful. I just knew it.

With no hesitation, on that Monday morning several years ago, I explained Transitions to my students. After fielding several questions, I felt confident that my students understood the intent of the protocol. With anticipation in my heart, I announced, “Transitions is now open,” and started my timer for 10 minutes.

Silence.

I can wait it out, I thought. This is totally normal. The protocol is new, and the students need time to think of what to say.

Still more silence.

I noticed the seconds ticking down on my timer. Just wait a little bit longer, I coached myself. It will only take one student to speak, and then students will be sharing in waves. Be patient.

The silence was becoming unbearable for me. Did I do a really bad job of explaining this, I wondered. Concern tinged with panic started to creep into my consciousness. What if no one said anything at all, I worried.

And then, a student cleared his throat. This is it, I thought. The magic was about to happen.

“I like pie!” The words danced off my student’s tongue, a broad smile upon his face and an impish twinkle in his eye.

Several students giggled softly, while I felt frustration and disappointment rising in me. Keep calm, I thought. Keep your expression just as it is. Don’t react.

The subsiding giggles were replaced by still more silence.

Maybe they just don’t know what to say, I thought as the silence pressed in around us.

Clearly, I need to set the example, I decided. Like other details of the day, I’ve now forgotten exactly what I shared at this point. I probably shared a story about one of my dogs getting into some kind of mischief. Or maybe I shared a great joy or disappointment rising in me. Whatever I said, it was honest and it worked. After I was done, several different students shared stories from their weekends. These stories weren’t dramatic or intense, but they were real — real things that happened to my students.

And then the timer rang.
“Transitions is now closed,” I said, somewhat thankful that we got through it and hopeful that students would grow into the protocol over time.

After this initial introduction of Transitions, it didn’t take long for my students to catch on to the protocol and relish in taking part in it each week. We actually had to extend the time because so many students wanted to speak, and as the year went on, they increasingly shared incidents from their lives that required a level of honesty and vulnerability that surprised me — the death of a loved one; the joy of a baby sibling being born; the excitement of having a family member come home from military service overseas; illness in the family; disappointment in any number of adults.

As the students became more willing to open up about their lives, we periodically found ourselves sitting with the hard-to-bear truth of someone in the room. We actually had to extend the time because so many students wanted to speak, and as the year went on, they increasingly shared incidents from their lives that required a level of honesty and vulnerability that surprised me — the death of a loved one; the joy of a baby sibling being born; the excitement of having a family member come home from military service overseas; illness in the family; disappointment in any number of adults.

As the students became more willing to open up about their lives, we periodically found ourselves sitting with the hard-to-bear truth of someone in the room. When students shared about car accidents, bullying, catastrophic illness in their families, or death, heaviness would hang in the room. It was the kind of heaviness that allowed us all to know that we stood together in empathy for the person sharing their story. It was also the kind of heaviness that can be difficult to move on from, the kind of tension that just has to give.

I distinctly recall one of those heavy days. I can visualize the student who shared, but no details about what she said. I can also recall how brave I thought she was for being willing to be so honest about her feelings in front of her peers. After she spoke, the heaviness set in. It seemed like there were no words appropriate to follow her words, nothing left to say of greater importance.

As I scanned the room, allowing us time to sit quietly together in community and wondering how long to let that quite last, I heard a nervous giggle and the familiar words, “I like pie.” Giggles erupted throughout the room. The tension in the room seemed to abate, and Transitions rolled on.

At first, I didn’t know what to do with this event. Was the pie comment disrespectful and insensitive to the girl who had shared so openly? Should I be angry? Or was the student who spoke of pie simply a 12 year old, uncomfortable with the quiet weight of the room, doing what he knew how to do to help lighten things up and move on? Should I be thankful?

With the knowledge that the latter was most likely the case, but that the former might also have been felt by the student who shared (or others in the room), I decided to speak to our class’s lover of pie, at the end of the class period. We talked about how natural it is to want to release tension in a group, the power of words, when humor works and when it may not, and how to be sensitive to others in the room.

After our conversation, I was fairly certain the student would be a more sensitive member of our classroom community. However, I also knew that I needed to be more responsive to students who struggled to sit in heavy silence and needed something to lighten the moment so they could move on.

Once the students got the hang of Transitions, they absolutely would not let go of it. I was not allowed to cancel it. Period. It had become our Monday morning ritual. So, when my assistant principal walked in one Monday morning to observe my teaching for 20 minutes, I had no choice. He was going to observe Transitions, which technically had nothing to do with the 7th grade Social Studies curriculum.

He watched. He listened. He left.

A couple of days later, I had my meeting with him to discuss the observation, and I went in armed with my rationale for taking the time to do Transitions. I was ready to defend the value of a safe and caring classroom community and a teacher who knows her students well enough to tailor instruction to their interests and the realities of their daily lives. My defense was unnecessary. My assistant principal immediately picked up on how important Transitions was to the students and appreciated the community he witnessed in my classroom.

So Transitions went on that year. And occasionally, when it was too quiet for too long and the tension needed to be released, that one student would break the silence and give us the gift of giggles by saying, with a kind smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye, “I like pie.”
Using the Demands of Change Activity for “active” learning

By Terry Daugherty, NSRF National Facilitator

Attendees in our Critical Friends Group Coaches’ Training consistently write glowing recommendations of the work, but we do hear one request a lot: “Please add more activities that get us out of our chairs!” For that matter, sometimes a CFG meeting comes at a time when participants could be more energized on their feet.

We hear you! Our training agenda is focused and we get a LOT done in our limited hours together. And we do understand that sometimes it’s important to get up and get the blood moving!

Obviously the Internet offers hundreds of icebreakers and games, but since any addition to our agenda means we have to cut something else out, every activity during CFG Coaches’ Training must add meaning to the whole of the training. No matter how “fun” an activity is, we won’t be adding it just for the sake of movement.

Ideally, we want to add something in which a lot can be accomplished in a little time, and the length of time can be adjustable to fit whatever opening that arises (while waiting for a lunch break or just returning from lunch, for instance).

Educators working within The NSRF created an activity years ago that we have Tuned and improved over the last few years. The new Demands of Change Activity can run as quickly as 10 or 20 minutes and, with a thoughtful group of people interested in debriefing deeply, can meaningfully last three quarters of an hour. Let’s talk about the reasons this activity is so powerful for groups.

Change in schools

Throughout my teaching career, there has been an endless parade of new philosophies, programming, and edicts for teachers to adopt and implement in our schools. I’m sure it also happened before our time, but now that pace has become faster than ever. Many of us struggle to cope with the newest, latest thing, and what makes it even more taxing is the fact that we’re instructed to incorporate these new mandates without dropping initiatives added from last year and the year before, as well as standard good teaching practice we learned in school.

New initiatives are always cropping up around instructional pedagogies, classroom management, technology use, student evaluation, professional collaboration, instructional design, and more. Yet we cannot forget that our lessons must also be rigorous, authentic, real...
world, flexible, and fun! Many modern educators feel like they’re under siege, and there’s plenty of evidence to support that feeling of stress!

When I interact with educators throughout the country, I hear how they have been sent to an endless stream of trainings, while being expected to keep up with the older initiatives. They are concerned about how many ideas they can juggle at the same time and which strategies can be “moved to the back burner,” paused momentarily or indefinitely. At the same time, many administrators and classroom coaches seem sometimes perplexed about why staff members have a difficult time keeping track and being faithful to the new initiatives.

Using the Demands of Change Activity

In response to both sides of this common story, I started consistently using the NSRF Demands of Change Activity in trainings. It begins with an experience of honing one’s observation of others, giving a nod to the variety of Observation Protocols available from NSRF. Rapidly and intentionally, the activity becomes more challenging. By providing trainees with a visceral experience of the demands of rapid change, the resulting reflection delves far more deeply than a simple conversation around “change in schools.”

In debriefing their frustrations, educators and administrators can brainstorm how to make changes easier to accept and to carry out. Administrators are encouraged to consider how they ask staff to adopt new initiatives, and teachers to think about how their students respond to rapid change requests. Self-reflection may also give participants insights as to why older initiatives get pushed aside during the school year.

At the start of the debrief, participants tend to focus on themselves and their struggles with rapid change. But the debrief reminds us to “turn it around” to consider how our own requests for change can feel. Classroom teachers typically feel pressure toward changes they did not invite, but which are “inflicted upon them” by higher administration, but is not the same thing often true for students? Considerations for our requests’ effect on others is powerful learning!

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~ Unknown

Insanity: (n) doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.
NSRF website in transition

It’s time for a refresh and reboot of the NSRF website. We already have plans for some surprise improvements, but today we’re asking for your input.

We know that many people visit our website only for the protocols and activities that we’ve shared freely for years. In fact, organizations around the world link to our materials, and publishers request permission to reprint, too! We’re transitioning all those requests to our new materials whenever possible.

Paid members and member-coaches get access to the updated protocols and activities marked respectively with an $\mathbb{M}$, or a $\mathbb{C}$. Are you using the new materials?

We’re planning to expand upon our “A-Z Index” to give you better tools for selection … what would help you most?

When they’re logged in, member coaches and National Facilitators see a new submenu with even more content. Coaches, are you seeing and using those materials? Do you have special requests for us to add?

What else would be helpful?

We’re about to add a new Guide to CFG Work to replace out outdated PDF on the home page. Stay tuned for that even before the new website launches.

Send us your suggestion and maybe win a prize!

We’ll add your name into a raffle with every submitted suggestion, and send the winner a free goodie bag of NSRF materials. Please help us out by emailing luci@nsrfharmony.org with your ideas.
Have you ever met someone who felt they’d had exactly the right workload, with time to fulfill beautifully all their responsibilities and keep a balanced life outside of work as well?

Me, neither. (But if you do know someone, please introduce me! I’m sure I could learn a lot from them.)

Most people feel they have a “full plate” if not “too much on their plate,” and are more or less stressed about it all. Universally, people experience meetings as a waste of time. What’s a new CFG coach to do, convincing colleagues to commit to attending a new monthly meeting? How do we quickly communicate that CFG meetings are emphatically not “just another meeting?”

Author and educator Parker Palmer encourages everyone to develop a “circle of trust” for themselves. He says “People who feel at risk of losing touch with their souls will say that they need such a circle. Yet they often claim that their fragmented and frenzied lives—the lives that put them at risk—make it impossible for them to join! The very situation that creates our need for safe space seems to prevent us from getting what we need.”

At NSRF, we speak of CFG work as NOT “one more thing on your plate,” but the “fork, spoon, and knife” to help you resolve everything that’s already required of you. Some have even gone so far as to describe CFG meetings as “fancy tablecloth affairs” in which people are on their best behavior.

Last fall the CFG community I coach added several new people. I developed an activity to illustrate and demonstrate our philosophy. By introducing “What’s on Your Plate?” as an opening activity, we transitioned from our busy day into being present in the meeting. I explained that I greatly valued their time and attention, taking time to join to this meeting, and that I knew they all had a lot on their mind. This activity was designed to honor all those issues and tasks that they’d been thinking about.

I brought out paper plates, markers, and a plate I had already completed as an example. Distributing blank plates and markers, I asked them to begin by writing notes or drawing small pictures to illustrate what was on their minds, the unfinished tasks and problems they had tabled in order to join this meeting. I said, “This is a good place to jot down those problems that wake you up at night, or that you can’t help yourself from thinking about when you’re not busy at work.” And then I showed them my example, crowded with content, with some “portions” demanding more attention than others.

Everyone got started, some with great enthusiasm. After four minutes, I asked if anyone needed more time, and we proceeded. Next I suggested that they silently review their own plates and acknowledge all that was on their minds. Then I asked them to pass their plates to me, and I would hold them for safekeeping, and we’d review them later, together.

Then we proceeded with our first meeting of the year. As we got to the end of our agenda, and everyone was silently writing their Reflections for the meeting, I brought the plates back out and arranged them so everyone could gather around. Now I said, “I look forward to reading your Reflections and I hope you got enough value out of this meeting to want to return to the next one. As we proceed through the year, you will experience how the trust we build together, and the protocols and activities we use throughout our meetings will actually help you with all of these things. With your permission, I’ll hold onto these plates, keep them safe and private in my files, and bring them out again later in the year.”

At our last CFG meeting of the year, I’ll bring them back for review. We’ll see what tasks and problems we’ve already addressed directly and what has been improved indirectly as a result of our collaboration, and the new thoughts that have arisen. I expect we may have a few “seeds” for our early meetings for next year.

As I’ve submitted this article for editing, I learned that Christina Birbil and the CFG Coaches’ team at the American Community Schools of Athens came up with a similar activity last year as they launched their accreditation review process. Using paper plates, everyone identified their attention to individual professional goals, professional passions, life passions, and their time on the Action Research key to accreditation. They asked “Who’s in the room and what are they serving up?” NSRF National Facilitator Penny Kynigou pointed out that “Everyone was feeling like this meeting was just one too many and we wanted to show them that CFG meetings could be not only the knife and fork, but also the excellent dining companions to make it all digestible and even fun!”

We’ll post this activity on our website this summer. Stay tuned!

*In support of gender equity and gender neutrality, NSRF uses “they” as a singular pronoun for individuals of unknown gender.
Protocols in the classroom

Teaching the foundation of collaboration: setting classroom agreements using ChalkTalk protocol

This article was reprinted from Penny’s blog with permission and with slight editing.

In the previous post I described a complex culminating project, the creation of a living museum, in which groups of students collaborated to research, write and perform scenes about life in Ancient Athens. Teaching upper elementary students to collaborate over complex projects does not happen overnight. In my classroom the foundations start way back in the culture of the classroom established at the very beginning of the year. Collaboration requires each student to grasp the idea that the long term common purpose is more important than their individual immediate impulses. In fact “We, not Me” needs to become the class’s code of conduct.

This positive shift in the culture of the classroom happens through a process of setting classroom agreements in the first few months of the school year.

Most teachers introduce their class rules in the first lesson with a new class, and I did so myself for many years. This has the benefit of making explicit your expectations and, when they are posted on the wall, gives you a convenient third point to refer to when correcting student behavior. This helps to make it more of a procedural issue and less of a personal one. This is certainly way better than having no explicit rules at all and the class running on tacit agreements such as only becoming quiet when the teacher has become really angry. (You may read more about Agreements in the Classroom, and about the Importance of Agreements in the linked NSRF Connections articles and in the Setting Agreements Activity.)

However, I have discovered over the years that there is a great power in investing some time and involving all students in identifying and agreeing upon the necessary ‘rules’ for the class. My Rules become Our Agreements. This brings about a fundamental shift in the dynamic of the classroom from one of power and opposition to one of trust, collaboration and cooperation: what “I am doing to you for your own good” gives way to what we are doing together to help us all learn.

So, how can a teacher facilitate the creation of class agreements?

I discovered these wonderful questions from Mrs Rouse on Pinterest and adapted them to create my own agreements setting activity. I start the year by rolling out two large sheets of butcher paper each with one of the following questions written in the center,

“What kind of teacher would you like to have this year?”

“What kind of students would your teacher like to have this year”

I have the students respond on the charts in a Chalk Talk Activity, one of my class’s favorites, in which you give time for all the students to silently write their responses, link to other students’ ideas with arrows and show agreement to points made by adding a check or a star.

Once the activity of responding has died down we gather around one chart at a time and identify the most important ideas. I like to write them out along the top of the paper as criteria. I review the criteria for the teacher, explain anything that might be a problem, and promise to uphold their expectations to the best of my ability.

Then I give each student four stickers and ask them to place them on the student criteria they think are the most essential. We can easily see where the data clusters by doing this. We discuss whether some criteria are actually covered by others, for example, the class this year decided that Be Ready was already covered by Be Responsible. We also ensure that we have phrased everything in terms

“Collaboration requires each student to grasp the idea that the long term common purpose is more important than their individual immediate impulses.”
of Does rather than Don’ts. If I think that something really significant has been omitted, I will suggest it at this point.

“This year we have just four agreements: Be Kind, Be Responsible, Be Resourceful, and Be Respectful.”

This year we have just four agreements: Be Kind, Be Responsible, Be Resourceful, and Be Respectful.

At the end, I like to add a little drama, so we all stand, put our hands on our hearts and say, “I solemnly swear that I will do my best this year to be kind, responsible, resourceful and respectful!” and then we ceremoniously hang the agreements on the wall in a conspicuous place.

Creating buy-in by negotiating agreed-upon norms empowers the students themselves to become the ones who regulate them. I always post our agreements in the classroom and periodically spend time reviewing them with my class. My key questions are, “How are we doing with our agreements?” and, “Do we need to change or add anything?” I prefer to teach my students not to use names as they reflect on what has been happening, instead to say “some students have been…” because I want them to get the sense that the important focus is on the behavior not the individuals. This helps students to better hear the feelings being expressed rather than become immediately defensive.

I have certainly found that since using this method my classes are much more fun to teach! I am not engaged in a constant battle for control and I have the tools to gently, yet effectively, have students redirect each other’s behavior. In this way I start to teach the values of collaboration, model collaboration at the very highest level of the classroom and begin to bring in the language students will need to be able to negotiate amongst themselves as they move towards complex collaborative projects, later in the year. Although I prefer to use this process in the initial weeks of the year, it could be equally useful to introduce collaboration at the beginning of a specific project later on.

Acknowledgments:

As teachers we all learn from others. Combining ideas into something new and sharing them is, for me a great part of the joy in the work I do and a driving force behind this blog. I am committed to always try to attribute my sources and where possible link back to them. I would be grateful for any feedback if I omit anyone and will be only too happy to make updates to posts.

As a accredited National Facilitator, I have been heavily influenced by the work I am doing with Critical Friends Groups for teachers, using the materials created by the National Schools Reform Faculty (NSRF) and am interested in exploring how these materials can be used with children as well as adults. The activity above is based upon the NSRF Setting Agreements protocol and the Chalk Talk protocol and has been adapted by me for use with upper elementary students.

“We, not Me” is an slogan I learned from Laura Candler in her highly recommended Back to School Starter Pack available on Teachers Pay Teachers.

I would love to hear about other ways you establish collaboration in your classroom. Please email me or visit my blog and comment to join the conversation!

Have a great week!

Penny

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**Mini-protocol around using ChalkTalk to generate classroom agreements**

In advance of the students arriving, set up two spaces for the Chalk Talks. At the center of one, write “What kind of teacher would you like to have this year?” On the other, “What kind of students would your teacher like to have this year?” Cover focusing questions with spare pieces of paper.

1. Discuss the value of collaboratively-set agreements instead of teacher-created rules.

2. Explain the rules of ChalkTalk. Point out the location of markers, reveal the questions, and invite participation.

3. Watch participants have two simultaneously “silent conversations.” Feel free to add question marks if any comments seem confusing or incomplete.

4. When “conversations” die down, gather around the “teacher” chart and write the most important ideas along the top of the chart paper as criteria. Explain anything that might be a problem and uphold the students’ expectations.

5. Move to the “students” chart and hand out sticky dots to students. Ask them to use the dots to vote on the three or four most important ones.

6. Review the ideas with the most dots. Discuss whether some criteria are already covered by others, or might be combined or clarified. Add any crucial ideas if they’re missing. Ask for and chart the final list, then post it visibly within the classroom.
Shout-out to researchers

Have you written a thesis or dissertation on a topic associated with Critical Friends Group® work or NSRF® protocols?

Now and then, we hear from someone seeking published research on the efficacy of Critical Friends Group® work, or the use of protocols in the classrooms. We’re happy to share research we have on file, but realize that it’s a bit dated. We expect some of you can point us to fresher research. If you know of any studies we should know about, too, please contact luci@nsrfharmony.org. Thanks so much!

Want to see YOUR ideas, research, and work reflected in Connections?

We’re always interested in improving this publication.

Article submissions must be directly related to Critical Friends Group work and/or NSRF protocols, or reviews of organizations or media that closely align with the NSRF mission. We welcome submissions discussing protocol use in classrooms and in other settings in and outside of CFG community meetings, including non-education settings. If you’re unsure whether the idea you have for an article meets this guideline, email luci@nsrfharmony.org describing what you’d like to write about, and we can discuss it. Article length vary from a few hundred words to two or three thousand.

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