NSRF
National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

Connections
July 2014

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From the Director

The importance of reflection

We don't learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience. – John Dewey

Most of us believe that learning takes place through experience. When you were younger, if you put your hand on a stove and got burned, you probably learned a valuable lesson about "things that get hot." In my childhood, I often heard the reprimand, "That'll teach you," spoken with a knowing look when the choices I made resulted in painful consequences.

However, for us to truly learn from our experiences, we have to take another step: reflection. It is often said that reflection is what gets us from experience to understanding. Research shows that, without actively thinking about our experiences and questioning ourselves about what they mean, learning won't happen. We also know that by writing down our reflections, the learning becomes even more "sticky" and chances are we'll be able to retain it for longer periods of time.

Reflective practice plays a paramount role throughout our work as CFG™ coaches. Every protocol and activity is set up to take the participant (the adult or younger learner) through a particular cycle of thinking: we are asked to actively listen and take notes, to ask questions that fill in the gaps of our understanding, to reflect on what has been presented, to analyze the information through the lens of a focusing question, and then, finally, to brainstorm solutions.

The presenter in protocols must spend time reflecting before the protocol begins, sorting out exactly what outcomes they desire from the protocol. Then they must carefully craft a focusing question that will guide the group to deliver that result. Presenters provide context around their question and spend a great deal of time listening and noting any important points that arise. In most protocols, the presenter will have the opportunity at the end of the protocol to reflect on what was helpful and relay any next steps that they may take.

Finally, everyone in the protocol is asked to debrief the experience by answering questions such as: *What did you think of the protocol? Did you learn anything useful? How might you use something like this in your work (or with your students)? What might have made this experience more useful?*

NSRF® National Facilitators model and employ this reflection and debrief process whenever they conduct a Five-Day CFG New Coaches training. After experiencing every new activity and protocol, participants are asked to debrief and do some reflective writing to enrich their understanding. Facilitators also emphasize how crucial this step will be when the coaches begin leading their own CFG meetings.

At the end of every training day, NSRF National Facilitators ask participants to take five to 10 minutes to do some reflective writing around a prompt. Once the reflections are turned in, the national facilitators read

through them, marking anything significant to share out with the group the next morning. When reflections are shared, there are no names attached and "negative" as well as "positive" comments are read. Why is this such an important part of the training?

1. **Sharing these reflections helps build trust and encourage bonding within the group.** When a facilitator is willing to share the "negative" notes as well as the positive, it models the importance of transparency, the need to replace defensiveness with curiosity, and an attitude of continuously striving for improvement. Listening reminds the participants that it is up to them as individuals to determine what works for them and to tweak or abandon what doesn't. When participants hear their words read to the group, they know that their ideas and opinions are taken seriously. Others hearing those comments are also validated when they realize that they have similar experiences, thoughts or feelings as other members of the group.

2. **Sharing creates buy-in.** Sometimes a group includes a "resistor" or two. These are people who are not attending the training voluntarily, or have previously experienced such bad "professional development" that they are highly skeptical that they can learn anything remotely useful this week. These folks are obviously predisposed to dislike what they are experiencing—to create reasons why "this" will never work. After the first day, the facilitator asks everyone to reflect on **"What worked today? What didn't work for you today?"** Believe me, you will hear what didn't work! So, how does this create buy in? It seems as if it would just fan the flames of discontent. Let me illustrate with an example.

Let's say that someone reflects that the tight structure of Microlabs "didn't work" for them. They resented that they ran out of time during their turn to speak. When it was someone else's turn, they wanted to ask questions and were told they couldn't. All in all, they felt very constrained by this protocol and felt it would have been more beneficial to just have a conversation about each of the questions.

Email:
Michele Mattoon
NSRF® Director and NSRF National Facilitator

The next morning, the facilitator reads that comment to the group, without judgment, naming names, or replying. Soon after, the facilitator reads a different person's comment that revealed how much they liked the Microlabs protocol. They liked that there was time built in to really think about their answers to the questions before it was their turn to talk. They liked that they actually had time to talk without being worried that others would interrupt them. They liked being able to simply listen to their colleagues without the pressure of having to comment on their comments. They liked the fact that all voices were heard—each one given equal time.

Once the "resister" hears the positive comments from fellow members of the group (not just from the facilitator's perspective), they are more inclined to give the experience another chance. This is a very non-confrontational/non-personal way to show the resistor that others in the group found the experience beneficial and perhaps they might too, in the future.

3. **Reflections give valuable information to the national facilitator.** Reading what works for a group and what doesn't gives the facilitator a window into the thinking of each participant. After reading "what doesn't work," a national facilitator can choose to (a) address points that might have been misunderstood, (b) ask the group to share their thoughts around the comment, or (c) admit that that particular piece could have been better and perhaps talk about what changes they may make in the future. Again, when facilitators are open and honest about their own learning, they create an atmosphere of trust so that others can do the same.

Often, people will divulge details on these reflection sheets that they don't want to be shared out in the group, but they want the facilitator to know. In our daily instructions for reflections, we give them the option to "put a box around anything they do not wish to be shared with the group." These private notes often offer incredible insights into the culture of the school or district or about the writer specifically. Either way, the information is bound to be helpful when the facilitator fine-tunes the agendas for the upcoming days.

> ***Making time for reflection ensures that greater understandings will arise from any experience. Although solitary reflection can be beneficial, we know that reflection is enhanced when we share our learning with others.***

How might all of this work for you? CFG coaches often use the last bit

of their CFG meeting time to allow participants to reflect on what happened during that session, and to write reflections to be read at the start of the next CFG meeting. In this way the group can benefit from this process the same way participants of a Five-Day CFG New Coaches training do.

Remember—as a facilitator or coach, your prompts for reflective writing will determine what kind of responses you'll get! For example, if you feel that you have a group that might be more on the negative side, you may not want to start with the *"What works/what doesn't"* prompt. Instead, you might want to start with a prompt more along the lines of *"What is one learning or Ah-HA! moment you had today?"* This prompt will reasonably ensure that you'll start the next CFG meeting on a positive note, as you will be reading out one positive learning after another.

Making time for reflection ensures that greater understandings will arise from any experience. Although solitary reflection can be beneficial, we know that reflection is enhanced when we share our learnings with others. Framing "mistakes" as opportunities for growth is an important part of continuous improvement as professionals. However, this will never happen if we don't actually make the time for this to take place. Five minutes of reflection, followed by sharing is a powerful tool for developing our skills, confidence, and motivation.

REFLECTIONS PROMPTS LIST developed by Michele Mattoon for the NSRF

1. In what ways have you gotten better at this kind of work?
2. In what ways do you think you need to improve?
3. What problems did you encounter while you were experiencing this (CFG meeting, protocol, activity)? Did you solve them? How?
4. How do you feel about this work? What parts of it do you particularly like?
5. What did/do you find frustrating about it?
6. What were your goals around this (CFG meeting, protocol)? Did your goals change as you went through this experience?
7. What does this work reveal about you as a learner?
8. What have you learned about yourself as a result of this work?
9. Did this (CFG™ meeting, protocol, activity) meet your needs?
10. What is one goal you would like to set for yourself in the future?
11. What might you need more help with?
12. What are your hopes around this work? Fears (or concerns)?
13. In what ways have you improved as a coach/teacher leader/facilitator? What brought about those improvements?
14. What skills did you acquire in this experience?
15. What are your challenges? How will (could) you address them?
16. What surprises came up?
17. What felt risky to you? Did anything put you in the danger zone?
18. What knowledge or understanding do you wish to gain? What skills do you wish to develop?
19. Why are you here? How is this related to your professional goals as a teacher,administrator, etc.?
20. What was the best thing that happened today/this week?
21. What was the most difficult/satisfying part of this work?
22. What do you think is your most valuable contribution to this group?
23. What did you contribute to the day?
24. What was accomplished?
25. Were you comfortable today or uncomfortable? Why?
26. Did anything frustrate you? What?
27. What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?
28. How will these news skills you developed benefit others?
29. What were your interactions like?
30. What feelings or emotions (if any) did you experience?
31. What did this experience make you think about?
32. How have your assumptions been challenged by this experience?
33. Where will you go from here? What's your next step?
34. How will you share this experience and your learning with others?
35. What do you want to do with this experience?

MOMENT BY MOMENT REFLECTIONS, developed by Tonio Verzone for the NSRF

1. At what moment during the training did you feel the most engaged? Why?
2. At what moment during the training did you feel the most disengaged? Why?
3. What activity did you find most helpful? Why?
4. What activity did you find most confusing? Why?
5. What moment during the training did you most enjoy? Why?

QUICK TIPS ON EFFECTIVELY WORKING WITH "RESISTERS" WHEN USING PROTOCOLS

Use an audible timer with a bell ... and let it ring

When beginning to work with NSRF protocols, we often think that that if we watch the timer count down and then turn it off before it rings, that our voice will be less intrusive to those speaking. The opposite is actually true: if you, as coach, interrupt someone speaking, it's seen as "personal," but if the timer's bell or chime interrupts, that's just part of the protocol.

If the person speaking doesn't stop upon hearing the bell ...

Say, "I really value your time, and don't want to take more of it than this protocol demands. Let's continue with the next step now. We can always talk more after the meeting is over." (Thanks to Abigail Newport, new CFG Coach in Connecticut, for the phrasing!)

SHARE YOUR SHORT TIPS WITH US SO WE CAN PASS THEM ALONG!

Please email them to luci@nsrfharmony.org so we can share them with everyone!

NSRF protocols used in diversity training for Leadership Lancaster

Tony Hernandez, CFG coach in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, uses NSRF protocols in the classroom and also within a leadership development program in his city

For the last three years I've been involved in diversity work both within my classroom at Lancaster Country Day School (LCDS) as a Pre-K and Second Grade Teacher and as a community leader in Lancaster, PA. During my time as a Pre-K Teacher at LCDS, most of my diversity work involved sharing my personal story with my Pre-K students and building a cohesive classroom community by acknowledging our similarities and differences. Since February, I was asked to take over a Second Grade classroom which presented a new opportunity for both personal and professional growth. Creating ground rules and bonding together through Connections were very instrumental in establish a new relationship between myself and the students to end the year on a positive note. I also have been advising the Upper School's Student Diversity Council.

Email:
Tony Hernandez
CFG Coach in Pennsylvania
Antonio Hernandez, Jr. has been an educator for 18 years working in both public and private schools teaching Pre-K, Kindergarten and Second Grade. He continues to serve on the Leadership Lancaster Board of Directors.

Since attending CFG training last summer, I have integrated community building protocols such as Forming Ground Rules and Connections in my work with second grade students. I hope to continue refining my practice in using protocols particularly in the area of teacher practice by getting better at looking at assessments and student work to guide and inform the way I deliver instruction.

I've also begun to use NSRF protocols as a diversity practitioner within a citywide leadership development program called Leadership Lancaster (LL). The LL Core Class is one of the programs offered which brings a cohort of diverse adult learners together challenging them to become more active volunteers and leaders to address local community needs. Participants work together for nine months to learn more about the city and how, as developing leaders, they may increase their abilities to impact it positively. I was so moved by my participation in the 2013 LL Core Class that I accepted when I was asked to join the LL board. Working with the executive director and program director, I realized I could incorporate NSRF protocols within the Core Class Curriculum with success.

This past October I had the opportunity to blend my passion for diversity work and facilitation together when Deb Rohrer, the Executive Director for Leadership Lancaster, and her partner Kate Zimmerman asked me to lead participants in a session on Understanding Differences. The objective of this day long session was for LL Core Class

participants to demonstrate the importance of diversity by understanding and appreciating differences through mutual respect. The skills that needed to be incorporated throughout the day were:

1. Inclusion: having an understanding and openness to similarities and differences.

2. Consensus Building: creating "win-win" situations that ensure all have been listened to and honored for their expertise, experiences and feelings.

3. Conflict Mediation and Resolution: being open to and improving dialogue to help reach an agreement.

With this information in hand, my co-facilitators Shayna Watson, Angelique Arroyo and I got together to begin drafting and creating a possible framework for the day. While each of us had experience facilitating, our backgrounds made us approach facilitating quite differently. Shayna is an Executive Officer with NAACP Lancaster Chapter and a Chaplain Associate at Penn State Hershey Medical Center and Angelique is a personal life coach and a Racial Justice Facilitator for the YWCA. With my experience in preschool and elementary classrooms, we made quite the trio! But, as so many of us have found attending Open Trainings for New CFG Coaches, the differences in perspective turn out to be much more fruitful than one might expect!

Barriers or Bridges Activity

Once we formulated a plan, we took it to Kate, LL's Program Director. She was able to give us pertinent feedback and also provide us with logistical details that we would need to keep in mind as we fine-tuned our workshop. Kate really stressed that this day is vital to the growth and development of participants because of its placement during the nine month program. "Understanding Differences" is the third session in Leadership Lancaster after the Opening Retreat and County Tour. Up to this point, participants have only had congenial interactions with each other. After listening to Kate's suggestions we knew it would be important to provide a safe space for identity development.

These were the focus points we developed:

- We devoted time for participants to share their hopes and concerns for the day.

- We worked together creating group norms and agreements. We adapted NSRF's Forming Ground Rules activity for this.

- We relied on the Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger to set up the day and to consider accommodations and issues we would need to address.

- We built in moments of silence and check-ins for participants.

- Each of us led portions of the day we felt most comfortable with and highlighted our backgrounds in diversity work.

I asked Deb, LL's Executive Director, to add to this article. Here's her perspective:

Understanding Differences holds a very important place in the curriculum of Leadership Lancaster's Core program. It is held in the beginning of the year so that participants are provided an opportunity to share their stories as well as be exposed to different perspectives. It gives the cohort an opportunity to build trust among the group.

In past years, Leadership Lancaster has, I believe, fallen short of this goal. Often we are hesitant to put individuals in uncomfortable situations. We walk a fine line between providing a safe environment in which to share our experiences and pushing individuals out of their comfort zones. As leaders, we need to recognize that stepping outside ourselves and seeking to truly understand others and honoring their experiences is part of leadership. It is perhaps the most important attribute a leader must demonstrate to be fully aware of the impact they have on others.

With the implementation of this year's curriculum

PROTOCOLS IN THE CLASSROOM

I'm excited to use Text Rendering [O] [M] with my senior English classes as they compose their college-application essays. This protocol will allow students a safe framework for receiving feedback, as their classmates won't make direct value judgments or critiques of the essays. Rather, readers will highlight what resonated for them in each essay, in effect giving writers a realistic sense of the image of them the admissions committees will likely draw from their reading.

~ Laura Johnson, new CFG Coach in Utah

Click on the [O] or [M] icon above to download the protocol. Please email your own tips to luci@nsrfharmony.org for future issues.

provided by Tony Hernandez and his co-facilitators, I believe that we are giant leaps closer to meeting the goals and outcomes we desire with this session. The session evaluations reflected that 87% of the participants felt the session and its contents were very effective or effective and their knowledge of the topic increased.

One participant appreciated Tony's ability as a facilitator to personally relate to the topic. When asked for additional comments about the session, this participant said, "Respect and honor over charity — it is better to stand in solidarity with, not over others. I really appreciated hearing Antonio's story. He was a vulnerable leader in action."

Another participant appreciated the authentic facilitation style, stating, "This was a great session, and I'm surprised it was the first time presented by these facilitators in this format. They were genuine in their approach, and I think that increased everyone's comfort level in terms of sharing openly. Amazing what you can learn about an individual when you listen to them!"

As we look to planning the 2015 session of Understanding Differences, Leadership Lancaster has a great foundation on which to build because of the style of facilitation used last year.

(Back to Tony:)

This experience came from a collective effort and I have gained so much from the people who have helped me in my endeavor for continued growth and development. First, to NSRF National Facilitator Ursina Hastings-Heinz

and NSRF intern Jim McKean for a dynamic CFG New Coaches Open Training. To Kate Zimmerman and Deb Rohrer for their support and encouragement. Finally, to my co-facilitators, Shayna Watson and Angelique Arroyo, for the beauty of our synergy together.

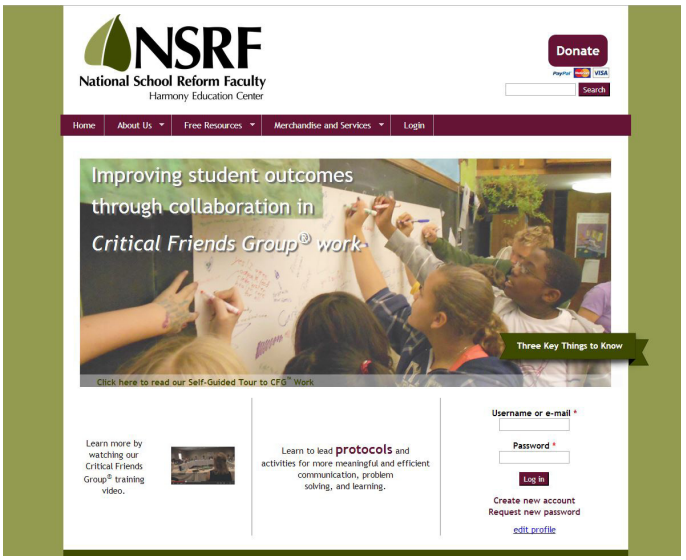
ENLIGHTENMENT AT THE HEART OF WHAT WE DO

In early 2014, the logo for the National School Reform Faculty underwent a redesign to make it more contemporary and useful at small scale. The leaf in the NSRF logo is now more stylized, but the original was based on an actual, heart-shaped leaf from a Bodhi tree.

"Bodhi" is both a Sanskrit (ancient Indian language) and Pali (Ancient Thai language) word that translates as "enlightenment" or, more accurately, "awakened."

It is our hope that by working under the shade and structure of NSRF protocols and activities, we all achieve greater wisdom and clarity that we can share with other learners of all ages.

The new www.NSRFHarmony.org website is launched at last and ready for you!



JOIN OR RENEW YOUR NSRF MEMBERSHIP

Everything that was previously available for free is still free, but paid NSRF members ($25/year) now get access to more new and updated content (as well as discounts on training and other purchases). If you've completed NSRF Coaches Training, you can purchase a coaches membership ($75/year) for even more access and discounts! See our Membership Benefits page (under the "Merchandise and Services" menu) for details. Click a blue link at the top of the table for your appropriate membership purchase.

IF YOU BECAME A COACH THIS YEAR ...

With coaches training through NSRF, you automatically receive a one year's membership in the organization. Use your email address to login (as login AND password, then change both your login name and your password if you like). If you have any difficulties, email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org or call us at 812-330-2702. The site just launched last week so there may still be "bugs," and we're scrambling to fix them all and add everyone as quickly as we can!

STILL MORE CONTENT COMING

In our plan to update all the protocols and activities and add newly created materials, we began with those we use in trainings. If you have special requests for protocols, or new protocols you've written that you'd like to add, please let us know!

Featured TEDTalk: Science is for everyone, kids included

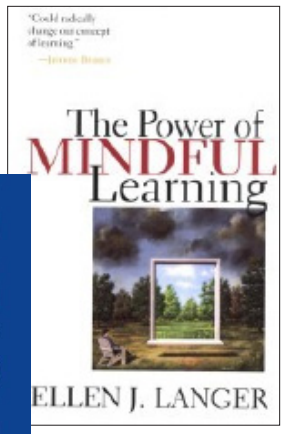
What do science and play have in common? Neuroscientist Beau Lotto thinks all people (kids included) should participate in science and, through the process of discovery, change perceptions. He's seconded by 12-year-old Amy O'Toole, who, along with 25 of her classmates, published the first peer-reviewed article by school-children, about the Blackawton bees project. It starts: "Once upon a time ... "

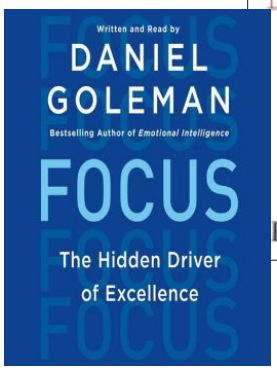
http://bit.ly/1q2gMOS

TEDTalks are a wonderful resource for educators, parents, and anyone interested in new ideas. If you've attended an open training in Bloomington in the last few years, you may know that the Connections Managing Editor, Luci McKean, volunteers as the curator of TEDxBloomington. We'll be sharing TEDTalks of particular interest to educators and collaborators. If you have any favorites, Luci would love to hear from you: luci@nsrfharmony.org

Two Book Reviews

By Dave Lehman NSRF National Facilitator in Madison, WI





The Power of Mindful Learning

By Ellen Langer
Paperback 1997
Lifelong Books, Da Capo Press

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence

By Daniel Goleman
Hardback 2013
Harper Collins Publishers, New York

The Power of Mindful Learning

Recently my wife, Judy, heard Ellen Langer interviewed on NPR, and we immediately went out and found three of her eleven books — her first book, ***Mindfulness***, her most recent book, ***Counter Clockwise: Mindful Health and the Power of Possibility,*** and the one I'll review here; ***The Power of Mindful Learning***. Ellen Langer is a Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, and winner of numerous awards including a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Award for Distinguished Contributions of Basic Science to the Application of Psychology from the American Association of Applied and Preventive Psychology.

Throughout ***The Power of Mindful Learning***, Langer effectively uses stories and fairy tales at the beginning of each chapter, such as her retelling of the familiar excerpt from Little Red Riding Hood (see sidebar).

Langer then goes on to begin her Introduction with these references to seven "educational myths" which form the structure of the book. Although the book was published in 1997, these myths unfortunately still seem all too familiar today:

Certain myths and fairy tales help advance a culture by passing on a profound and complex wisdom to succeeding generations. Others, however, deserve to be questioned. This book is about seven pervasive myths, or mindsets, that undermine the process of learning and how we can avoid their debilitating effects in a wide variety of settings.

1. *The basics must be learned so well that they become second nature.*
2. *Paying attention means staying focused on one thing at a time.*
3. *Delaying gratification is important.*
4. *Rote memorization is necessary in education.*
5. *Forgetting is a problem.*
6. *Intelligence is knowing 'what's out there.'*
7. *There are right and wrong answers.*

Langer feels these debilitating myths point to yet another educational myth — "only a massive overhaul can give us a more effective educational system."

Those of us within the National School Reform Faculty (note - "Reform") certainly do not subscribe to that last myth. We have seen many teachers and administrators change their practice at the grassroots level to make a real difference for kids. Still,

"Once upon a time there was a mindless little girl named Little Red Riding Hood. One day, when she went to visit her ailing grandmother, she was greeted by a wolf dressed in her grandmother's nightclothes. 'What Big eyes you have, Grandma,' she exclaimed, clueless as ever, although she had seen her grandmother's eyes countless times before. 'What big ears you have, Grandma,' she said, although it was unlikely that they would have changed since her last visit. 'What a deep voice you have, Grandma,' she said, still oblivious to the shaggy imposter beneath the familiar lacy nightcap. ' What big teeth you have,' she said, too late, alas, to begin paying attention."

we do not disagree that changing school curricula, changing standards for testing students and evaluating teachers, increasing parent/caregiver and community involvement in education, and increasing school budgets would also help.

The term "mindful" is used in a very specific way in this book: *"A mindful approach to any activity has three characteristics: the continuous creation of new categories; openness to new information; and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective."* Likewise, the word "mindlessness" is characterized by these characteristics: *"an entrapment in old categories by automatic behavior that precludes attending to new signals, and by action that operates from a single perspective."* What follows is seven chapters, each devoted to one of the seven myths listed above with wonderful examples and alternatives.

I encourage you to read this book so I won't review the content of every chapter, but let's look at how Langer responds to the first of the seven myths, *"The basics must be learned so well that they become second nature."* She begins by drawing examples from her experiences as an educator and in other aspects of her life. She follows with examples from extensive research into the myth, much of it research she herself conducted with colleagues and/or graduate students. This quote provides an overview:

One of the most cherished myths in education or any kind of training is that in order to learn a skill one must practice it to the point of doing it without thinking. Whether I ask colleagues concerned with higher education, parents of young children, or students themselves, everyone seems to agree on this approach to what are called 'the basics.' Whether it is learning how to play baseball, drive, or teach, the advice is the same: practice the basics until they become second nature. I think this is the wrong way to start.

Langer relays an example: learning to hold a baseball bat a certain way as a child in a summer camp, then re-learning a different way to hold it as an adult. [As a college baseball player who was an All Star third basemen for Ohio Wesleyan University, I can attest to how players change holding the bat. As a boy in Little League I was taught to hold the bat straight up at shoulder height. In college I held my bat straight back at virtually eye level. Next time you watch a professional baseball game, notice the varieties of ways the bat is held and the variation in stance, in the placement of feet.]

Langer also describes having to change her "second nature," driving a car in the U.S. on the right, and then switching to the left when she went to England. Clearly, developing a "second nature" about driving is unhelpful when driving in certain foreign countries, likely to get you into an accident if you're not exceedingly mindful at intersections.

Then on a trip to Singapore, she asked her taxi driver the size of the Chinese population in Singapore. The answer was "76%" to which Langer wryly responded, "Are you sure it isn't 77%?" Happily, the driver laughed, realizing his long-ingrained response to that question isn't necessarily still accurate: population percentages change all the time with births, deaths, emigration, and immigration.

Additional examples draw on Langer's research, such as one impact study on changing an approach in teaching high school physics. Here they found that teaching the material conditionally allowed students to manipulate the information creatively in a different context, rather than being taught that there was only one way to explain particular physics concepts.

Based on these and other examples, Langer summarizes her response to this myth, using the term "sideways learning:"

Sideways learning aims at maintaining a mindful state. As we saw, the concept of mindfulness revolves around certain psychological states that are really different versions of the same thing: (1) openness to novelty; (2) alertness to distinction; (3) sensitivity to different contexts; (4) implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspectives; and (5) orientation in the present. Each leads to the others and back to itself. Learning a subject or skill with an openness to novelty and actively noticing differences, contexts, and perspectives - sideways learning - makes us receptive to changes in an ongoing situation. In such a state of mind, basic skills and information guide our behavior in the present rather than run it like a computer program.

Another myth, *"Rote memorization is necessary in education,"* is addressed in chapter four, "1066 What? Or The Hazards of Rote Memory." Langer provides this response:

Closed packages of information are taken as facts. Facts are taken as absolute truths to be learned as is, to be memorized, leaving little reason to think about them. Without any reason to open up the package, there is little chance that the information will lead to any conceptual insights or even be rethought in a new context. We can think of such encapsulated information as overlearned….

Some teachers try to provide opportunities for the development of knowledge through flexible understanding of course material. In ***math****, teaching for understanding in-*

Regarding
The Power of Mindful Learning

"Most of us are often mindless in our learning. How this happens and what can be done about it - these are Ellen Langer's important questions. Her lively answers could radically change our concept of learning." — Jerome Bruner, The New School for Social Research

Regarding
Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence

"Attention is so important that ordinary people take it for granted, while scientists subject it to microanalysis. Steering deftly between these extremes, Dan Goleman synthesizes what is known and what we need to know" *— Howard Gardner, Professor of Cognition and Education, Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Email: Dave Lehman is the former founding principal/teacher of the Lehman Alternative Community School in Ithaca, NY. This public middle-high school was named for him and his wife by the Ithaca, New York Board of Education upon their retirement after 30 years. Dave was a member of the very first "Principals Seminar" leadership group at the beginning of the NSRF, under the umbrella of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Soon thereafter he was trained as a CFG coach and then an NSRF National Facilitator.

volves teaching students to think about what a problem means and to look for multiple solutions. Studies have confirmed that ***science*** *is better taught through hands-on research and discovery than through memorization alone. In English, teaching for understanding means emphasizing the process of writing and exploring literature rather than memorizing grammar rules and doing drills. Understanding is encouraged in history by turning students into junior historians. These methods, all more effective than having students memorize material, are usually used sparingly and primarily with high-level students even though virtually all students seem to be able to learn without memorizing. Too many students still suffer the hidden costs of learning in the more familiar manner."*

Each of these statements is backed-up with footnotes to extensive research supporting each of them.

Last, as a reviewer "of a certain age," I want to briefly share Langer's response to her myth number five, *"Forgetting is a problem."* Here, Langer presents "alternative views" of memory and aging. Evidence from cross-cultural studies with hearing impaired and the elderly in China that indicates the gradual loss of memory as one ages is not necessarily true.

For that discussion, and the other myths she dispels, I strongly encourage you to read, ***The Power of Mindful Learning***. You may also want to visit her website at www.ellenlanger.com as well as her blog and her other books.

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence

Daniel Goleman's latest book is ***Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence***. Goleman is a former science journalist for the New York Times, author of 13 books, and cofounder of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning at the Yale University Child Studies Center (now at the University of Chicago).

I pair this book with Ellen Langer's largely because of Langer's myth #2: *"Paying attention means staying focused on one thing at a time."* Goleman, who is familiar with and cites Langer's work on mindfulness, describes three kinds of focus:

Inner focus *[self-awareness] attunes us to our intuitions, guiding values, and better decisions.* ***Other focus*** *[empathy] smooths our connections to the people in our lives. And* ***outer focus*** *[systems thinking] lets us navigate in the larger world. A leader tuned out of his [her] internal world will be rudderless; one blind to the world of others will be clueless; those indifferent to the larger systems within which they operate will be blindsided.*

Goleman notes that the "science of attention" has grown well beyond the early years of vigilance research in World Wars I and II, showing us that focus, paying attention, is essential to how well we perform any task. Our very "nimbleness in life" depends on our ability to focus, rippling through virtually everything we want to accomplish. This "supple tool" is embedded in countless mental operations including comprehension, memory, learning, sensing how we feel and why, reading emotions in other people, and interacting smoothly with others.

Goleman is concerned about the decline not only in young people's ability to focus, but adults as well, as the age of the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, with ever faster cell phones, laptops, and iPads continuing to dominate our lives around the world. This is a world

in which young people are tuned-in more to machines than to people, and that's troubling. Goleman states –

…[T]he social and emotional circuitry of a child's brain learns from contact and conversation with everyone it [s/he] encounters over the course of a day. These interactions mold brain circuitry; the fewer hours spent with people — and the more spent staring at a digitized screen — portends deficits.

Digital engagement comes at a cost in face time with real people - the medium where we learn to 'read' nonverbal [cues]."

Analyzing the anatomy and functioning of the human brain, Goleman notes that there are two main varieties of distractions — sensory and emotional:

The sensory detractors are easy: as you read these words you're tuning out the blank margins surrounding this text. Or, notice for a moment the feeling of your tongue against your upper palate - just one of an endless wave of incoming stimuli your brain weeds out from the continuous wash of background sounds, shapes and colors, tastes, smells, sensations, and on and on.

In contrast, the emotional turmoil in our lives is particularly challenging as it keeps intruding in our thinking, demanding a response. Only when we figure it out (or at least learn to notice and set aside the intrusive thoughts), can we cease obsessing over that topic that has caused such turmoil in our thoughts. The more our focus is disrupted, the worse we do in all kinds of life's activities, as athletes can attest. This *…means that those who focus best are relatively immune to emotional turbulence, more able to stay unflappable in a crisis, and to keep on an even keel despite life's emotional waves."* And "we learn best with focused attention."

Here I think its important to note some distinctions that Ellen Langer makes about focusing and attention as they may seem to disagree with Daniel Goleman. Langer notes that when we are distracted, it really means we are "otherwise attracted," and that it's important to note what it is that is attracting us. She goes on to say, *"The most effective way to increase our ability to pay attention is to look for the novelty within the stimulus situation, whether it is a story, a map, or a painting. This is the most useful lesson to teach our children, because it enables them to be relatively independent of other people and of their physical environment."* I believe Goleman would agree, but would want to note the importance of our "emotional resilience" — How long does our focus stray, and how quickly do we recover from upsets? Goleman points out that we can develop and strengthen our ability to focus.

Goleman's ***Focus*** is divided into seven sections, three of which are devoted to the three kinds of focus described above: "Self-Awareness," "Reading Others," and "The Bigger Context." Each of these sections contains three chapters in which Goleman cites examples from his own experience, from all kinds of different human endeavors, and from extensive research. Another section, "Smart Practice," looks at the "myth of 10,000 hours" of practice required to master anything. The last two sections of the book delve into ways to develop well-focused leaders who can make a difference. Looking particularly at the qualities needed in focused leaders, Goleman cites examples of leadership in Whole Foods, Zappos, Unilever, and Ben and Jerry's, noting what I believe applies to educational leaders as well:

If a leader is to articulate such shared values effectively, he or she must first look within to find a genuinely heartfelt guiding vision. The alternative can be seen in the hollow mission statements espoused by executives but belied by their company's (or their own) actions.

Then, from these values, good decisions will flow that allow for *"present needs as well as those of a wider web of people, including future generations. Such leaders inspire: they articulate a larger common purpose that gives meaning and coherence to everyone's work, and engages people emotionally through values that make people feel good about their work, that motivate, and that keep people on course. Focusing on social needs can itself foster innovation, if combined with an expanded field of attention to what people need."*

Goleman, who has worked with the Dalai Lama, ends his book with the following plea to leaders:

The largest lens for our focus encompasses global systems; considers the needs of everyone, including the powerless and poor, and peers far ahead in time. No matter what we are doing or what decision we are making, the Dalai Lama suggests these self-queries for checking our motivation:

Is it just for me, or for others?

For the benefit of the few, or the many?

For now, or for the future?

If you're reading on an electronic device, remember that all blue type and these symbols hotlink to more materials and email addresses.

Open Trainings JUNE 2014

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21

Our busiest summer yet!

This year, we filled five open trainings for new CFG® coaches, from Nashville, TN, west to San Francisco and Los Angeles, CA, east all the way to Athens, Greece, and then circling home again to Bloomington, IN! Nearly 100 new coaches joined the ranks of NSRF membership in these five trainings alone, and that doesn't even count all the on-site trainings we've conducted this summer, too! See anyone you know?

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Open Training in Athens.....

Open Training in San Francisco, CA.....

Open Training in Athens, Greece.....

Open Trainings JULY 2014

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2			
			9			
13	14	15				
27						

Open Training in Los Angeles, CA.....

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CONNECTIONS IS PUBLISHED BI-MONTHLY

The National School Reform Faculty™

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We are a professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through professional learning communities. We train educators to coach Critical Friends Group® communities. CFG™ communities use NSRF® protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving, and learning.

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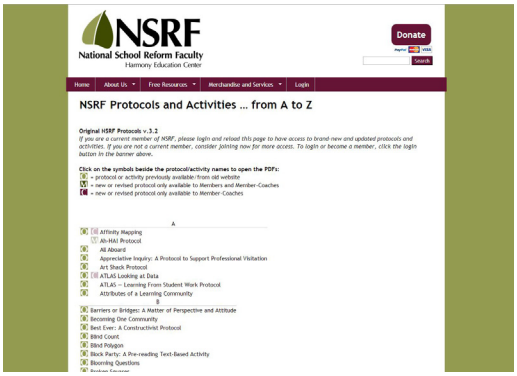
Shout-out to *everyone!*

What do you think? How are we doing with the new design and content of *Connections,* and with the new website?

We're working hard to eliminate bugs and add everyone to the new website, but we really want to hear from you, especially if you are having a problem! (Of course we also love hearing what you appreciate or suggestions you have for improvement!) Please send comments of any variety to luci@nsrfharmony.org. Thanks!



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