

THIS I BELIEVE TO BE TRUE: A New Protocol

By Ellen O. Nelson, Connections contributor, NSRF coach in Pennsylvania

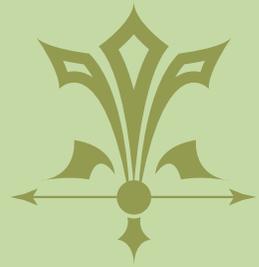
Probably the most rewarding aspect of receiving the coaches training for Critical Friends Group, is realizing that the techniques, skills and protocols that I learned were all-encompassing, not just restricted to professional development or work with my students in the classroom. With increasing confidence, I made forays with my newly-found skills. I applied CFG strategies in many areas of my life, from orienting my new Honor Council members, developing dorm activities with residential students, to even communicating with my husband. It's exciting to come to the realization that CFG protocols and activities can meet the needs of almost any group or individual with which I come in contact. I also exercise creativity when I read an article or hear a snippet of a conversation and realize that I have the groundwork for a full-blown CFG activity, ready to be shaped in the CFG way.

The activity below is an excerpt from a protocol I developed as a dorm activity to help students further refine their definition of the word "honor." This activity could easily be modified to suit individual group needs by replacing the word "honor" with words like "racism," "sexism," "integrity" or "justice."

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There are certain things that we hold to be true, things that we know for sure. Maybe you think it is true that when you are open to receiving positive energy, the positive energy just keeps coming in. Or maybe you believe that the library is a good place to be. Or maybe you know that your favorite color is orange. Or maybe you believe that tomorrow the sun will rise. During this exercise, we will focus on what we believe to be true about HONOR.

- 1- Discussion leader reads the introduction out loud to the group.
- 2- Read the question: "What do you know to be true about honor?" Have all students reflect by writing their responses to this question down on paper. Leader repeats the question. Silence is maintained while thinking & writing. (4 minutes)
- 3- To start the "round," ask if anyone has a birthday in January. The student who has the next closest birthdate will "go" first. The first student reads his/her response to the question, by stating, "I believe this to be true about honor..." (1 minute)
- 4- The next student to his/her left will do two things:
 - A. Build on what the previous person has said. They may agree or disagree. Give reason why he/she agree or disagree.
 - B. Then give his/her response to the question by beginning the statement: "I believe this to be true about honor..." (1 minute)
- 5- The "round" proceeds until everyone has had a chance to respond to the previous speaker and then give his/her answer to the question. During the round, there should be silence except for the one student whose turn it is.
- 6- Debrief: Now is the opportunity for students to talk about the activity itself. They no longer talk about the question based on honor, but talk about the way in which the activity fostered discussion and thought. Did they like the way it was structured? Did they have enough time to speak? Was it too long, too short? Did they feel frustrated by the fact that they only had one chance to speak and no opportunity for rebuttal? How could this activity be improved?



Ellen O. Nelson has been a visual arts instructor at The Hill School, Pottstown, PA, for over twenty-five years. Her lectures on art and art history have taken her to area art leagues, colleges, and museums. In addition to being the Arts Department chair and Faculty Adviser to the Honor Council, Ellen exhibits her art throughout the country.

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