has undertaken to ensure that the California State Standards for English/Language Arts are made accessible to middle and high school students throughout the district by reorganizing the structures to make them more manageable, coherent format. Rather than continuing to work from the state’s list of any-where from 46 to 63 standards for each grade level, LAUSD has organized the standards into separate components, such as narrative, exposition, literary response and analysis, and persuasion. The standards most relevant to each component are addressed during a given period of instruction, and those standards are assessed periodically (roughly quarterly), hence the name Periodic Assessments.

Each of these Periodic Assessments can provide educators with, literally, tons of data about student progress. Our CFG spent one of our early meetings simply getting acquainted with all the different types of data from these assessments. We were all amazed, maybe even a bit overwhelmed, by all the data in front of us. The data are available as broadly or as specifically as the person examining might like: individual student, individual teacher, period by period, grade level at a single school, grade level per local district, aggregated or disaggre-gated by subject, with individual item responses, with information by specific content standard, and on and on. The district has remained true to its commitment that these assessments are not high-stakes; the purpose of the assessments are to inform instructional practice and enhance student learning.

The dilemma that our CFG saw was this: the data were, at least in schools where we worked, rarely being used effectively, if at all. Most teachers were as overwhelmed as we were by the sheer magnitude of the data. Even more daunting, because most teach-ers had had previous experiences that had taught them that “data are not our friends,” there was widespread distrust of how the data would be used.

As we continued to plow through mountains of data reports, we became clear about a few principles that guided our protocol development. We wanted to be sure to:

• think about ways to help teachers, individually and collaboratively, reflect on these data reports so that they are not viewed as threatening or as a basic for evaluation;
• keep the focus on evidence of what students are learning, not on how teachers are teaching;
• set up conditions so that teachers approach the data analysis in a spirit of inquiry, bringing to the process their own questions. We connected to our own experiences in using protocols to learn from student work. We knew that there were road maps to guide us in both the ATLAS Protocol and the Collaborative Assessment Conference. Our first attempt to use a protocol-like approach to analyzing the data went something like this:

1. We were clear that the data analysis should not be a “fishing expedition.” There were just too many reports for us to go in without ques-tions to guide our inquiry. So, before we looked at the data, we did a two-minute quick write in response to the question, “What information do I hope to find out by looking at these data?” Or, what do I hope to learn by looking at these data?” We shared our thoughts and generated some guiding questions for our group.

2. We agreed on one type of report, and made sure we all had copies of the same report type for one grade level. We then asked the following questions, in rounds:

• What do you see/notice/observe?
• What surprises you? What makes it surprising?
• What questions do the data raise for you? OR What else do you want to know?
• Where might you go to get that information?

This got us started, and helped us to see where we were stuck in the process. Some of the new questions that came up were:

• Should we identify standards that will recur from one component to the next?
• Should we provide this information to group members up front, or is it important for participants to seek out this information and make sense of it for themselves?
• Once we’ve identified an area of student work that isn’t going well, how do we make the connection between evidence of understanding in the classroom and performance on the assessment?
• How can we tell if students’ struggles are more related to the construc-tion of the test item than to the students’ mastery of the content?
• Where is it important to look at dis-aggregated data? When is it important to examine individual students’ scores?
• We managed to sustain our focus on this development over five of our monthly meetings. We ended up with two protocol drafts. One protocol is for individual teacher reflection, called “Learning from Student Data Protocol – Individual Teacher Self-Reflection.” The other is for a grade level or team of teachers examining Student Data Protocol.” I recently shared these protocols with literacy coaches in my local district, who have agreed to introduce some new ways of working and then to be absolutely transparent about it. We aggressively encourage bold action by participants to “go home and try it” and come back and talk about it.

A principal of a very large high school, after participating in a text-based discussion using an NSF Protocol, changed the school’s planned professional development for the following week and engaged the entire faculty, for the first time, in reading and discussing a common text. The principal shared that when he had been wanting to do something like that, he simply had had no image of a way he could pull it off until he experienced it himself. A teacher who participated in an NSF training session where participants silently responded to a prompt in writing on a common large sheet of paper, reported that the next day she used this as the basis for introducing a new book to her class, saving the paper for a reflective activity at the end. She was thrilled at how well it was received.

We have also offered more formal “facilitation training” in various configurations in order to build vibrant professional communities that support student achievement for all students, even those who have traditionally been marginalized and thought of as terminally at-risk.

One recent example: Alan works with twelve high schools in New York City. After he had had new leaders in a process of inquiry and reflection over the course of months, it became clear to three of these school leaders that while they weren’t realiz-
Learning to See with a Third Eye:
Working to Understand the Full Impact of Inequity
A Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

This is not a standard book review; rather, it is a glimpse into my transaction with the text Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with a Cultural Eye by Jacqueline Jordan Irvine.

A few years ago we revised NSRF’s mission statement to include language about working to “foster educational and social equity...” and since that time I realize I have often been responsible for trying to just “add on” a focus about issues of equity. The revision of our mission statement’s reference to me as a former Philadelphia Middle School teacher, as a current Urban Education grad student and as a facilitator of CFGs. In each of these roles I have become increasingly convinced that racism and other forms of bias are the greatest barriers we face in our efforts to positively transform the educational experiences of our kids, especially when our kids are poor, inner city, kids of color.

A first step in moving forward around issues of equity for me has been getting in touch with what I don’t know. As a white, female, heterosexual educator, I know I need to consciously incorporate a focus on those differences that I don’t “know” by virtue of my own lived experience. In other words, I have to choose to acknowledge the presence and impact of racism, cultural chauvinism and homophobia in our system and in my own practice continuously. As a facilitator, I have the choice by adding an activity or protocol here and a reading there, without thoroughly reworking the framework of the coaching support I offer as an external coach in a number of districts and schools.

By treating equity as an “add on” to an already full agenda, I have unwittingly set up the context for it to be “left off.” Consequently, when time gets short, the articles and activities that explicitly deal with equity are given less time or they are postponed.

I believe nothing happens by chance. Sometimes along the path of life an event causes an individual to pause and seek the greater meaning of his being. It is during these moments of reflection that we study the path and contemplate the future. There was a reason why I came across Miss Kerberger’s boxes. Maybe that memo-ry was the spark that is now allowing me to step forward in a leadership role. Maybe it was to help me remem-ber how important teachers are in the lives of the children. Where I once only saw memories in boxes, now I see the future unfolding. Reaching the destination at the end of a journey is not the important part. What we learn, and who we share those experiences with along the way, are the things that give meaning to our journeys. Creating a smoother path for those who follow in our footsteps is the precious gift which we can offer.

Conversations: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty