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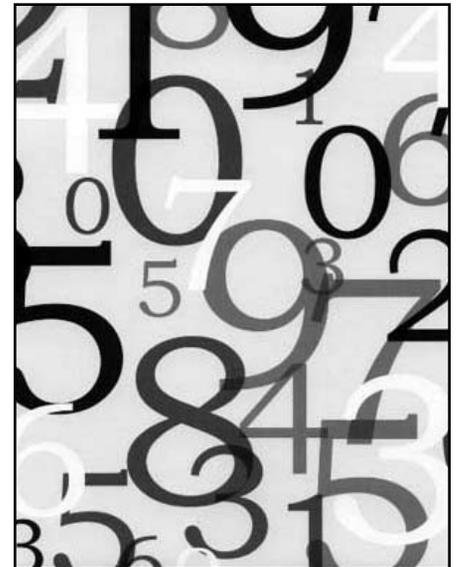
## Director's Report

Debbi Laidley, Co-Director

What processes best support collegial dialogue and enhance collaborative learning? What characterizes an effective protocol? How can we tell when we have a process that we're ready to try with other educators? These were some of the questions that members of my CFG and I started wrestling with, even though we didn't know at the outset that we'd be going in this direction.

I've been a member of the same CFG for nearly three years now. Our membership has changed slightly; we've lost some of our original members when major career moves made getting together really tough, we've gained some new members who've added new facets to the group's work, and we've struggled to overcome challenges in scheduling. In other words, we're a very typical group of critical friends.

When we convened at the beginning of the school year, we began – as usual – by brainstorming goals for our work. As we tossed out several questions that we might want to pursue, one area for study kept coming up over and over, worded in different ways: What do we know about looking at hard data about student performance? Schools we're working with are generating so much data, and people keep saying the data is supposed to inform instruction, but how can the data inform instruction if we aren't really analyzing the data? We have lots of protocols for looking at student work – written prod-



ucts and other artifacts – but how do we look at the hard data, the numbers and graphs, in ways that are productive?

We agreed that we wanted to put forth a concerted effort to develop a protocol that would encourage teachers to see data as nonthreatening, non-evaluative, informative, and worthwhile. Since the members of our group were all in some way connected to the Los Angeles

Unified School District (LAUSD), either as teachers or administrators or as consultants from the UCLA School Management Program, we decided to focus our development efforts on the LAUSD Periodic

Assessment Program for English/Language Arts.

Through this district-wide program for secondary schools, the LAUSD  
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*We wanted to encourage teachers to see data as nonthreatening, non-evaluative, informative, and worthwhile.*

# Protocols in Practice

## A Different Kind of Classroom: Using Protocols to Increase Student Understanding

Dave Schmid and Cindy Gay, Colorado

Sixteen biology students sit in a circle with their teacher working to gain a better understanding of an article on memory. Today the teacher is using a Rich Text Protocol and taking on the role of a facilitator. She is not sure where the discussion will go, but trusts in the process and the students' ability to thoughtfully explore complex ideas. Nicole makes a strong case for the group to explore the idea of confabulation, or how the brain makes up things when there is a void in the memory. Other students listen to Nicole's case, but they want to discuss the idea of rehearsal when trying to memorize different ideas or facts. Nicole concedes, but the facilitator, sensing her strong desire to explore this idea, promises to return later to confabulation. Students return to the section on rehearsal in the text, knowing they will present their perspective and how it applies to their own learning. Each student interprets the text, although not everyone agrees with what is written. Justin presents a different point of view and Anisa challenges his interpretation. There is further discussion (including some time on confabulation) and the students recommend ways teachers can apply some of the concepts from today's class to enhance their instructional practice. The teacher asks students to write about rehearsal from their perspective and share the ideas from their writing in pairs. Even though there is not enough time for the last step of the protocol, it is obvious that the students now have a greater understanding of the complexities of memory and how it relates to their own learning.

Protocols can be used to create a different type of classroom that impacts students' learning. In a classroom, such as the biology class we described, that values the use of protocols, students are grappling with difficult and abstract ideas. They are asking each other questions, referring to quotes and figures in the text. They

are digging deeply into the content and connecting it both to their prior learning and to their own experiences. Students are engaged because they have a desire and a need to understand the content. Students are aware of what they do and do not understand and they ask specific questions to complete their understanding. At the end of the period, the students are fatigued, but excited



about what they have learned, and will ponder questions after the class is over. The questions naturally recur throughout the unit of study and the students know there is not just one correct answer.

In this classroom there exists a community of learners: they work in pairs, triads, small groups, and as an entire class. Students are respected for their unique insights and strengths. Each member of the class encourages others to take intellectual risks. Students feel safe, respected, listened to and cared for as individuals. They value each other's diverse backgrounds. They are interested in each other's lives beyond the classroom and share in each other's successes and disappointments. They are learners - individually and collectively grappling with the content and its implications. They work to improve not only their understanding of the content, but their skills as scholars. They are learning the art of

thinking and reflecting. The teacher is a part of this community and is learning along with the students.

In this classroom, the students are the workers. They have prepared carefully before class because they are fully aware of their individual responsibility for the success of the class. Their role is that of a scholar. Their responsibility is to push their own thinking and that of their classmates to a deeper level. They monitor their own learning and their interactions with others. They reflect on both the content and the process of learning. They challenge their own assumptions and the assumptions of others. All information, regardless of its source - from teacher, textbook, media inside and outside of the classroom - is critically examined for inaccuracies and bias.

The teacher in this classroom does the hard work of teaching long before the class begins. She has studied to obtain a rich understanding of the content. The teacher has identified the understanding that she wants students to construct - understanding which will endure long after the course has ended. Each lesson's protocol has been carefully chosen to meet the learning goals of the lesson and individual needs. The teacher becomes the facilitator, allowing students to construct their own learning. This means that the teacher must be willing to give a large degree of control to the students and trust in the process of the group. The teacher does not guide the conversation to a specific outcome. Because the teacher has been thoughtful and purposeful about the understandings of the unit, and has communicated the desired learning to the students, the teacher in this different kind of classroom

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# 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 makes sense 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 inequity 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 regularly tried to make that 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, despite my intellectual understanding that these issues lie at the heart of our failure to successfully breach the persistent achievement gap.

Recently, as a grad student, I have been reading Jacqueline Jordan Irvine's book, *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with a Cultural Eye*, and I have been struck by her analysis that we all can work to see with a "third eye," an eye that "sees a different picture and examines alternative explanations." Dr. Irvine goes on to call for collaborative action research wherein outside/inside

educator-researchers like myself "assume the humility of good anthropologists." By calling myself an outsider/insider I am making explicit my role as a white educator who works and observes "inside" settings where I am the "outsider" from the dominant culture of power, despite my being in the minority numerically in buildings and systems where children of color predominate. I understand Dr. Irvine's call for humility as a demand

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## NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

## CONNECTIONS

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# Indiana Center of Activity Report

## Daniel Baron, Indiana

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**W**e call the Indiana Center of Activity the Hoosier School Reform Faculty (HSRF). The name HSRF evolved out of an inquiry question: What is the potential of a local Center of Activity to influence public schools to put equity at the center of their work as they transform schools and districts into democratic learning communities?

HSRF grows out of the Harmony School's history of support of democratic school reform in high-poverty schools, a history that was greatly influenced by my initial NSRF coaches training in 1995.

Fast forward to June of 2000, when the Harmony Education Center became the home of NSRF. For the next two years, all of the energy of the Harmony School Outreach Office was focused on the survival, growth, and new mission of NSRF. Our local work came to a standstill while we worked to establish NSRF's national office in order to make NSRF a permanent national institution committed to the creation and sustainability of democratic learning communities with a focus on educational equity for each student.

By 2002, NSRF had grown dramatically and was providing services to national organizations, school districts and schools all over the country. It was now time to direct our attention back to the work in Indiana. Our theory of action was focused on our local school district and the Indianapolis Public School system.

Our first move as a formal Center of Activity was to build on our previously strong relationship with the School of Education (SOE) at Indiana University. Cathy Brown, an Associate Dean of the School of Education, was involved in a three-year project working collaboratively with the I.U. Math Department, the SOE Mathematics Education Department, and local secondary math teachers in Monroe County. The project design was based on the Japanese Lesson Study model. After the first year, Cathy was con-

cerned that the study group had not built a professional community where members felt safe enough to take risks, ask the tough questions, or expose their professional vulnerabilities. She invited me to introduce the concept of Critical Friends Group to the Lesson Study Group.

It was a great match, and working together with NSRF facilitator Ross Peterson-Veatch, the group made the transition from study group to CFG. This early success led to HSRF facilitating two full-day retreats of the I.U. SOE faculty in two consecutive years.

Indiana University has also sponsored coaches seminars for I.U. faculty and Monroe County Community School Corporation (MCCSC) teachers and administrators for the last two summers, with another seminar scheduled for this August. Betty Bisplinghoff from the Athens, Georgia Center and Ross have been invaluable members of the facilitation team.

Last June, HSRF and Indiana University entered into a formal partnership to offer professional development services to I.U. faculty as well as to offer our services to every district in Indiana. The services are offered through I.U. by HSRF.

Those first two coaches seminars have evolved into an extraordinary partnership between MCCSC and HSRF. The critical incident that led to our deep relationship with MCCSC came on the last day of coaches training, when the Superintendent, Dr. John Maloy, and his Associate, Bruce Law, came for lunch.

Over twenty-five teachers engulfed them both. They wanted their central office administrators to know about the power of the work. Perhaps equally important, they wanted to communicate the need for cultural transformation that had to occur in order for the work to take root in their schools. They insisted that their principals had to know and understand this work so that it could become the core of professional development for their buildings.

Dr. Maloy invited these impassioned teachers to attend the Administrators' Advance (retreat) on August 15th. That respectful invitation led to the new coaches planning and facilitating the afternoon of the Advance. The coaches facilitated their administration through a Collaborative Assessment Conference on the Chalk Talk document from their June seminar that responded to the questions "What makes this work so powerful and what will it take to sustain the work back in your schools?"

They also created small groups to have text-based conversations and to participate in looking at student work sessions for all administrators. I had the great pleasure to observe my daughter Heather, a teacher, facilitate a group with Dr. Maloy and to hear her ask him "and what evidence do you have to support your perspective?"

Over the course of this school year, MCCSC has demonstrated its commitment to CFGs as the heart of their professional development for the district. This year, HSRF provides:

- Monthly two hour meetings of the entire Leadership Team (all instructional and noninstructional administrators in the district)
- Monthly principal CFGs for 14 of the 22 MCCSC Principals (with plans for all principals participating next year)
- Monthly two and a half hour meetings for all CFG coaches to deepen and sustain their work in their school
- Monthly HSRF facilitation support for every coach of a CFG in this year's seven identified schools (tier-1 schools)
- Monthly support for the district-wide "Human Understanding of Diversity Initiative"
- An introduction to the seven tier-2 schools that will be implementing CFGs next year

HSRF's other major initiative is in the state's largest, and lowest, achieving district in Indiana. The Indianapolis Public School (IPS) system is chal-

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*Alan Dichter, an NSRF National Facilitator, has been active in school reform for more than 20 years and is currently a Local Instruction Superintendent in New York City. He was part of the team that helped give birth to the National School Reform Faculty and, after helping establish NSRF NY, now serves as co-director.*

*Vivian Orlen is also an NSRF National Facilitator. She was a co-founder, in 1993, and is now Principal of Landmark High School in New York City. Landmark HS opened as, and remains, a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools.*

When you consider the power of networks and their impact on school reform in New York City, you realize that New York is really, in many ways, a small town. Just a handful of us at NSRF have worked with more than four-hundred superintendents, principals, assistant principals and other teacher leaders in NYC over the last few years, embedding NSRF work into all professional development that we do. If you add our NSRF NY Endorsed Facilitators and others we've trained, the number of people we have worked with expands geometrically.

We have found that responsive facilitation and the use of NSRF's principles of reflective practice, collaboration, and shared leadership can be effective means of working with people in districts to create respectful, thoughtful, and safe conditions that will encourage them to look critically at their practices.

So, while the NSRF community is very much alive and well in New York City, it is a community of ideas and practice far more than an organization. We are fairly certain that only a small number of that community would think to identify the work they are doing as NSRF work. What they understand it to be is an approach to working with colleagues and students which values inclusion and multiple perspectives and sees leadership as being responsible for

creating an environment where learning is enhanced by collaboration.

The use of protocols and the recognition that skilled peer facilitation is important are becoming mainstream rhetoric in NYC. Practice, of course, lags. What many of us have done, in our different roles within the NYC Department of Education and partner organizations, is to take advantage of professional development opportunities that exist 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 NSRF 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 while 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 NSRF 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 same strategy to introduce 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 engaged school leaders in a process of inquiry and reflection over the course of months,

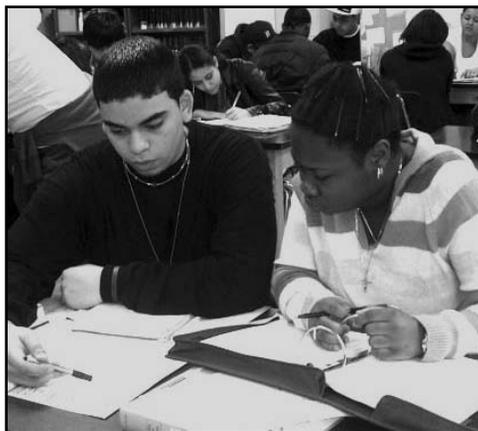
it became clear to three of these school leaders that while they were working in various teacher team configurations, they weren't realizing sufficient pay-off. Meetings were going off on unproductive tangents.

Decisions

seemed to take forever and often became bargaining sessions instead of creative problem-solving experiences. They wanted the groups to be able to set agendas, follow through, seek solutions, assess progress, critique plans and be creative. A tall order. Through a series of consultancies and other problem-solving protocols, it became clear to all that teacher-leaders needed to strengthen their facilitation skills and broaden their repertoire in order to be effective leaders in these collaborative communities.

An institute was hatched by Vivian, Alan and two principals for teams of administrators and teachers from these three schools. The institute was led by NSRF-trained facilitators and was rooted entirely in the work of these schools. After three intensive days, participants went back to their schools to apply what they had learned, having committed to return a month later to talk about their efforts. Teachers looked at how their work

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# Serendipity

John Pieper, Wisconsin

Since 1989, the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney's American Teacher Awards, saluting outstanding members of the teaching profession. Specifically, the program honors those teachers whose approaches exemplify creativity in teaching and who inspire a joy of learning in their students. In 2003, John Pieper was one of 30 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG Coaches training was one of the benefits included with this special recognition. This is the last of three installments following John's journey as a new CFG Coach.

A few years ago I picked up extra money working for an auctioneer. We were in the process of combining a number of small estates when a particular group of boxes caught my eye. The word "Kerberger" was neatly printed on the side of each box. To most people, the contents were a worthless assortment of faded papers, outdated textbooks, black and white class photos, and old Valentines. A deeper connection flashed through my mind. I was gazing at a part of my childhood. Like little snippets from a home movie, my memories carried me back to 1964 and Dale School.

Miss Kerberger was my fourth-grade teacher. She was kind and caring. Teaching was her life's passion. I looked through the boxes with reverence and sadly realized how much had been lost when she passed away. Through experience, teachers accumulate a wealth of knowledge. Unfortunately, most of that wisdom is never effectively shared with colleagues. Several days later, while sitting in my own classroom, I envisioned the school as one large compartmentalized box where teachers rarely engaged in meaningful

interaction. The potential for opportunities missed was unsettling. Time passed and fate revealed a new and wonderful destiny for me. I experienced CFG training. The power of collaboration opened up a whole new world.

A little over a year ago, my principal, Mrs. Patti Vickman, and I were putting the final touches on an ambitious CFG action plan. First we would introduce the staff to CFG ideas, and then we would gradually develop a core group for our school's first CFG. We also shared a vision of what this work might look like if it was utilized throughout the district. We thought it would take a great deal of time and effort to get our colleagues in Oshkosh to buy into the CFG work. Fortunately, we were wrong!

Without the CFG training, the teachers had a hard time relating to the benefits gained from regular collaborative practices, but as additional staff members received the CFG train-

ing, momentum for the creation of a CFG gradually increased. The Critical Friends Group at Webster Stanley Elementary School is just beginning to realize how empowering this work can be. Now each time we meet, we gain a deeper understanding of the value of collaboration. We have developed a greater appreciation for the ways in which the protocols can push our think-



Dale School

ing and, in turn, make us more effective in our work. Professional articles now drive our intellectual development. Protocols are widely used throughout the district to improve the effectiveness of our meetings.

We have recently decided to incorporate regular classroom observations as part of our CFG strategic design. We are fortunate enough to have the flexibility within our building to provide opportunities for classroom observations. The observations are strictly voluntary. Members of our CFG who have completed observations have gained

new insights into their own practice. By sharing our enthusiasm, other teachers have expressed interest in what we are doing. We have discussed the possibility of starting a second CFG next year.

There have also been changes in my classroom. At the beginning of the year, the students created a list of classroom rules. We revisit them often, and they have evolved into classroom norms. Reflective writing

has become a regular part of our school day. Various protocols, such as The Final Word, Success Analysis, Chalk Talks, and Gallery Walks are helping the students achieve greater meaning from their work. The learning takes place within the framework of a caring learning community.

Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that in only one year, our  
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Miss Kerberger's Class

# Interview with Gene Thompson-Grove

Katy Kelly, Indiana

**T**he following interview with Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director of NSRF, was conducted on November 11th, 2004, by Katy Kelly, National Coordinator of the NSRF National Office.

**Katy:** Gene, you are one of the founders of NSRF. How did that come about?

**Gene:** Faith Dunne, Paula Evans and I were working for the Citibank Project at the Coalition of Essential Schools at Brown University.

**K:** Let's back up a bit. How did you get involved with the Coalition?

**G:** In 1987 I was working for the Boston chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility. I had announced my resignation effective the end of the school year. Joe McDonald, who was a Clinical Professor in Brown University's Education Department was going on sabbatical, and invited me to apply for his position while he was on leave for two years. Ted Sizer was chair of the Education Department at that time and he hired me. At the time the Coalition was not a separate organization from Brown's Education Department. As the Coalition grew, it moved across the street to a separate space. It had some of its own staff, but the chair of the Coalition (Sizer) was also the chair of the Education Department at Brown.

**K:** Okay, now back to the Citibank project. Was the purpose of the Citibank project to offer support to teachers in Coalition schools?

**G:** Yes. What we did was to bring together a group of teachers from around the country that met for one week in the spring. They developed a curriculum centered on an essential question. Working together, they really deepened their learning about teaching practices in Coalition schools. They then came to Brown for a month to

teach the course that they had developed at the Brown Summer High School. They taught for four hours in the morning and then spent the afternoon in a seminar to debrief the morning, give each other feedback, and to talk about how to support their colleagues in other Coalition Schools.

**K:** So how did Critical Friends Groups come about?

**G:** We had managed to stretch our Citibank project money from a four-year grant into five years, and we were at a point where we were thinking about what was next.

We knew that a large grant to public education was going to be given by Ambassador Walter Annenberg - but we didn't know how much or when. Then, one day, we walked into our offices at Brown and found out that the money had been given and that we now worked for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR). We didn't have a director and we didn't have a clear mission, and there was a fair amount of confusion about who exactly we were.

Paula Evans, the Director of Professional Development, was visionary and action-oriented. So, we gathered about twelve teachers and administrators from around the country with whom we had been working, and said to them, "We could apply to AISR for a large grant to do professional development the way we think it ought to be done, using what we have learned over the last five years. If you could do anything, what would you do?"

We used people's own experience - what they said they needed and what they had learned about effective professional development - and we read the research. The beauty of it was that the kind of professional development that we described as being most effective was also being mirrored in the research. People like Milbrey McLaughlin, Joan Talbert, Ann Lieberman and Judith Warren Little were writing about pro-



Gene Thompson-Grove

fessional development that was job-embedded, and done within the context of one's daily practice. We knew that summer institutes, where you go to get re-energized or maybe even transformed, were in many cases ineffective. Practitioners said that even though they had made a commitment to be different when they got back to school, by October they pretty much did things the way they always had, not because they hadn't made a commitment to do things differently, but because it was too hard to change one's practice all by oneself.

We knew the professional development needed to be in the context of the classroom and counter to the way schools are set up in which teachers work in isolation, don't make their practice public, and are not accountable to each other and there are no norms in place for giving or receiving feedback on their practice. So, in 1995, the National School Reform Faculty and its Critical Friends Groups became the first professional-development initiative of AISR. Paula Evans, Faith Dunne and I were the first co-directors of the program. Financially, the program was well supported by Annenberg, but our focus was on developing work that would eventually be self-sufficient.

**K:** What are some differences between how you envisioned the work then and now?

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## Introduction

**H**ow can we use peer observation to help us grow in our roles as coaches and facilitators? This was the question that emerged for us this fall as we began using peer observation in our specific context here in Vermont. We hope that our descriptions and our questions can help all of us in NSRF think more clearly and deeply about our coaching and facilitator roles. (Note: In what follows we are using the term “NSRF facilitator” in a very specific way to refer to

## Introducing and Practicing Peer Observation With New Coaches

Edorah Frazer, Vermont

**I**n our continuous effort to improve our practice, the NSRF facilitators in the Vermont Center of Activity have begun a process of peer observation as we facilitate New Coaches Seminars. David Leo-Nyquist and I have been coaching a CFG for three years in the context of a graduate seminar in educational leadership that we teach together. It is our intention that over the course of our three-year seminar, we will have introduced all of the elements of a five-day New Coaches Seminar and practiced them in many ways. In this, the third year, David and I decided to introduce peer observation to the group, and it was during this peer observation “lesson” that David and I also engaged in peer observation between us for the first time. Our intentions were both to model good peer observation practices and to improve our teaching. In my own practice as a teacher, I have found peer observation to be the most transformative part of Critical Friends work. I was eager to share the power of peer observation with our students and with David, who had never engaged in it before.

In our first session on peer observation, David observed my facilitation using the Observer as Coach protocol. My focus question was,

“Am I giving the group members the skills they need to try the Observer as Coach protocol with a peer observation partner in their schools?” My approach to teaching this material was to begin by asking everyone to read the protocol, “Peer Coaching: Observer as Coach.” (protocol available online at [www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html)) Then I explained that I would be taking the role of a classroom teacher whose class they would observe on videotape, using this protocol. I asked the participants to form small groups and to plan the questions they would ask me during the pre-conference. Then, in character, I fielded questions from each group in a mock pre-conference. I paused and stepped out of character to debrief the pre-conference, then we watched a video of “my” class engaged in an inquiry science lesson. I chose a 20-minute video clip of an ambitious science lesson that presented some complex teaching challenges. Following the video, the small groups reconvened to plan the debriefing and again I fielded their questions in character and stepped out of character at the end to debrief the debriefing.

David observed and took notes throughout all of this without participating or interrupting. In debriefing with me later, he first restated my focus question: “Am I giving the group members the skills they need to try the Observer as Coach protocol with a peer observation partner in their schools?” He then offered his impression that the participants were very ready to engage in the protocol back in their schools, citing data from

his observations. He noted that they had skillfully engaged in both the pre-conference and the debriefing. He also mentioned that in the final debriefing of the process, the participants had asked many insightful questions.

During our debriefing, David asked me the following probing questions:

- What did you intend for them to be planning in the pre-conference triad? Do you have some stock pre-conference questions that you want them to know/arrive at?
- Why did you choose to show this particular video? What are its strengths and liabilities for this purpose? How might this video be made more useful?
- You role-played an essentially confident teacher who was very open to challenging feedback. How will you help these participants deal with embarrassment and defensiveness if they should encounter these in future peer observation partners?
- Does it serve your purposes to combine your roles of role-player and facilitator, or would it be more effective to have your co-facilitator take one of those roles?

I found these questions to be very provocative and useful. Over the course of a 45-minute debriefing, I struggled with them and concluded that when I introduce a group to peer observation in the future, I will: (1) provide some stock pre-conference questions upon which the group can build; (2) seek other classroom videos and/or edit the one I used to better suit this purpose; (3) ask my co-facilitator either to role-play the teacher or to facilitate the

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# Facilitators as Peer Observers

those people who are experienced CFG coaches and who have completed the preparation required to facilitate CFG Coaches Seminars. We use the term “CFG coach” to refer to a much larger group of people who have participated in a Coaches Seminar and are engaged in some way in coaching a CFG. We’re using these terms in order to clarify different kinds of roles and responsibilities within the common body of work that we’re all engaged in, not to establish an unnecessary sense of hierarchy.  
- Edorah Frazer and David Leo-Nyquist

## Preparing for Peer Observation: Addendum to the Observer as Coach Protocol

Full protocol available online at [www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html)

### Peer Observation Pre-Conference Questions

(The following questions were developed by Edorah as a result of our debriefing.

- What should I know about the class and lesson I am observing?
- What do you want me to look for? (What is your focus question?)
- What data do you want me to collect? Is there a particular way you would like me to collect it?
- Where would you like me to be in the room? Do you want me to be involved in class, or quietly observing from one place in the room?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me before I observe your class?

### Peer Observation Debriefing Steps

**Step One:** Observer asks observed, “How do you think the class went, relative to your question?”

**Step Two:** Observer shares data relative to the focus question, starting with warm feedback.

**Step Three:** Observer asks probing questions relative to the focus question in light of the data.

**Step Four:** Discussion between observer and observed. Observed takes the lead here – might ask for direct suggestions.

**Step Five:** Observer ends with warm feedback and thanks for the opportunity to watch a lesson. Variation: Combine steps two and three to ask questions specific to each part of the data being shared.

## Exploring Possible Applications of Peer Observation in Our Work as Coaches and Facilitators

David Leo-Nyquist, Vermont

If peer observation is a powerful catalyst for reflecting upon and changing our professional practices with the support of a trusted colleague – and we truly believe that it is – then how can it be harnessed to support and improve our specific practices of CFG coaching and Coaches Seminar facilitation? We have worked over the past three years with a cohort of K-12 educators (mostly teachers) that has functioned as a monthly CFG, with a focus this school year on peer observation, thinking about the CFG Coach role, and implementing CFG work in their home schools. Our positive experiences with peer observation have led us to think more deeply about the complexity of our responsibilities as CFG coaches and as NSRF facilitators in various contexts, and we have found it to be extremely useful and supportive for our own growth in those roles (*see Edorah’s description on page 8*). As usual, we’re left with more questions than answers. Here are some of our questions for CFG coaches and for NSRF facilitators that were prompted by our experience with peer observation.

We believe that an important factor in our ability to sustain a very high level of protocol-based colleague conversations each month and to nurture a high level of trust in our now-flourishing learning community has been our ongoing practice of planning and debriefing together (prompted by the detailed written Reflections generated by participants at the end of each monthly session). During the current school year this informal feedback has taken the form of a more structured peer observation process. We’re convinced that we’re better and more effective CFG coaches *together* than either of us could be working in isolation. If that’s our experience as veteran coaches, then why wouldn’t that also be true for most *new* CFG coaches?

The new coaches in our cohort are overwhelmed by the enormity of the task of starting CFGs in their home schools, in addition to continuing their full-time teaching (and often other) responsibilities. In Vermont we don’t have precise data on how many teachers and other educators who participate in five-day New Coaches Seminars

(continued on page 15)

## The Harmony/VISTA Project Helps Indianapolis Students Research Student Engagement in Their Schools

Megan Howey, Indiana

The Harmony/VISTA Service Learning Demonstration Project, an NSRF brainchild, works with educators, students, parents and community members to create sustainable opportunities for youth voice and leadership, service learning, and parent engagement. In Indiana, most of this work takes place in Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS), Indianapolis' urban school district.

With funding from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) and What Kids Can Do, the Harmony/VISTA Project coordinates a student-led research project in five IPS high schools.

The purpose of this research is for high school students to examine the beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of their peers related to school. Ten-member research teams were created at IPS' five large high schools in the fall of 2004. Students applied to be on these teams, and created contracts to hold themselves accountable for their attendance and participation. Students who participate fully receive a \$150 stipend. The Harmony/VISTA members serve as adult sponsors for each team.

Indianapolis Public Schools is currently transitioning their five large, comprehensive high schools into small schools through funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This offers a powerful backdrop for students to research exactly what their peers believe about school currently, and how they think school needs to change in order for every student to graduate ready for college or a challenging career. The data they collect is used to inform the school change process in their schools.

The student researchers began their year by distributing a survey at each

high school campus to assess students' beliefs and opinions about their relationships with teachers, school climate and safety, academic engagement and aspirations, and perceptions about small schools. This survey was adapted from one used by the Gates Foundation in other school districts.

Over 4,100 students were surveyed district-wide. Some of the findings included:

- 53% of students felt that their teachers had given up on some students
- 75% of students said their schoolwork was really interesting only half of the time or less
- 80% reported that many students at their school do not respect one another
- 71% believe that they will graduate from high school and will complete a 2-year, 4-year, or graduate degree program. (Reality check: only 27% of IPS' 2003-2004 class graduated in four years.)

Each research team analyzed their school's data and compared it to the district data. With the support of Harmony/VISTA Volunteers, two students from each school prepared a synopsis of what their team thought to be the most pertinent data for their school and presented this data to members of the district administration, principals, teachers, parents, and community partners at a district reform meeting, helping these adults understand the real issues their students face. They were given 90 minutes to present their synopsis and lead a data-driven discussion with their school's teachers and administrators in attendance. Many educators reported this meeting as being their most productive discussion to date because they were able to hear what students needed directly from the source.



At each school, the researchers have also planned and implemented "informal data collection activities." These activities include Chalk Talks during lunch periods and "Poll Boxes" for students to address issues in their school by writing anonymous answers to questions posed to them. These questions include:

- "In your opinion, what does it take for you to be successful in school?"
- "What does a good student-teacher relationship look like?"
- "What questions do you have about small schools?"

The final component of this research project is a documentary that is currently being created in partnership between the students, Harmony/VISTAs and the district's television station. This documentary will include interviews with teachers and students and an explanation of how this research project came about.

### Student Researchers Speak about Their Experience:

Rather than go on describing the students' work to you, I thought you would like to hear it directly from them. Here's what eight student researchers from four schools had to say recently when I asked them about the powerful work that they are doing:

# the Center

*Why did you choose to be a student researcher?*

“I thought no students had a voice and everyone needs to be heard.”

– Alex Edmondson, freshman, Arsenal Technical HS

“Because it gives me the opportunity to do what I’ve wanted to since I was little – to make a difference for others. I’m stepping up to the plate for students who don’t feel like going to school or staying in school. I’m showing them that there is a point and teachers do care if you get an education.” – Ronald Craig, junior, Broad Ripple HS

“At first I thought it would just be fun. Now I realize I am doing something productive, learning about research, and earning some money while I help others.” – Todd Willis, sophomore, Broad Ripple HS

“To learn more for myself about what is going on [with small school reform] and tell others what I learn.” – Shentoia McGowan, sophomore, Arlington HS

*How has this project made an impact on you?*

“It’s helped me learn to cooperate with people better and to listen to what they have to say.” – Erica Shovan, junior, Northwest HS

“I didn’t know about small schools until I became a researcher. Now I feel like I know most of the stuff that’s happening.” – Janessa Goodman, sophomore, Northwest HS

“It helped me a whole lot to get to know people. Now I have confidence to talk to people I don’t know. I can get my opinion out and voice it.” – Isaiah Owensby, sophomore, Northwest HS

“I’ve become more of a leader in school, and have become much more involved.” – Mersedees Calloway, sophomore, Arlington HS

“I can express myself. I feel like I am a part of the school, not

just going there. I need to have a reason to be there besides just learning. It helps me see that not only do students struggle but teachers struggle as well.”

– Shentoia

*How has this project made an impact at your school?*

“It’s helped a lot. Students are getting more involved in school and learning about small schools. It has helped us become leaders in our schools – I think that is really important.” – Mersedees

“[Teachers] are becoming more

*“Research is nothing but numbers and words unless you put it to good use and manifest something good.*

*– Ronald Craig, junior at Broad Ripple High School*

aware that students can be involved. Before, teachers were not interested in what students had to say and now they are more apt to listen to us.” – Erica

*Why is it important to have student voice in school?*

“Because most things in school affect students. If students don’t have a voice they won’t be interested. If they are not involved, it increases the drop out rate. If the students feel that people are listening to them, they’ll feel like people care about them. I mean teachers, principals, and the superintendent.” – Alex

“A lot of students have great opinions. [Because they’re] students, many teachers think they’re young and don’t have things to say. But they do have great ideas that can help the school.” – Isaiah

“Education should be symbiotic. If teachers and students were working together we would both benefit. School should be like a family.” – Ronald

“A lot of students don’t get to say how they feel right now. If they

did we’d have a better school.”

– Mersedees

“A lot of us are overlooked very easily. We need to have a common voice respected by students and faculty equally.” – Todd

“Teachers don’t always understand why students act a certain way. Not only will it benefit us by telling them what we think, but it will benefit them by knowing what they need to do to teach us.” – Shentoia

*If you were to advise other educators about how to support a student-led research project, what would you tell them?*

“Let students say what’s on their mind.” – Erica

“Help students put their ideas into effect.” – Alex

“Always listen to students if they have something to say. If you disagree, say you disagree but understand where [the student] is coming from.” – Isaiah

“It is not going to be easy. You have to put a lot of effort and time into it. Be willing to have an open ear and a heart that’s willing to learn.”

– Shentoia

“This [research project] takes a lot of time, work and commitment. It is fun and a great experience. I’ve gotten so focused on helping that I forget about the money.” – Todd

“Communication is the main key. If you don’t communicate (student to teacher) then nothing will work.”

– Alex

A final message to fellow students (and teachers): “If you really try hard to get your voice out, keep trying until your voice is heard. If you give up, your opinion will never be heard regardless.” – Isaiah

I couldn’t have said it better myself. ■

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lenged by the effects of a history of inequitable education provided to students of color. The system loses over 75% of all of its high school students. The situation is dire and the moral imperative is clear.

In the spring of 2003, Nancy Sutton, former NSRF principal and former principal of Manuel High School in Denver, invited Steve Bonchek (Executive Director of HEC) and me to the University of Indianapolis to discuss the potential of a new Bill and Melinda Gates Project. The intention of the grant was to transform all five Indianapolis comprehensive high schools into a total of more than twenty equitable small schools that demonstrate their commitment to social justice and the academic success of each student.

After several months of conversation, HSRF became the professional development/school transformation technical assistance provider for the University of Indianapolis through its Center for Excellence in Learning and Leadership (CELL). My fellow national facilitators Camilla Greene, Lois Butler, and Carol Myers and I began meeting regularly to co-construct a strong partnership between CELL, the IPS District, the Indianapolis Education Association and HSRF.

The HSRF coaching team in this initiative includes Lois Butler, Kevin Horton, Virginia Hardy, Wendy Brannen, Tom Gregory, Megan Howey and Naomi Milstein. HSRF tapped from both New York and Chicago facilitator talent to help build our capacity to lead an urban district through a transformation process. This cross-pollination has been invaluable to all of us.

Each coach was matched with one high school and has been supporting the school's orientation, exploration, and design and preparation planning process. The team explicitly promotes the cause of equity and our purpose is to provoke the interruption of past inequitable practices of the schools and district and to replace those practices with democratic, reflective, equitable,

and inquiry-based teaching, learning, and leading.

Students and parents have led the way. Megan and Naomi lead the Harmony VISTA Student Voice Initiative that works directly with students and parents in each school (see Megan's article in this issue). Each VISTA volunteer is trained as a CFG coach. The VISTAs have worked collaboratively with other community-based organizations. They provide student and parent leadership services, convene both Parent and Student Congresses, and facilitate student and parent leadership institutes. The Parent and Student Institutes meet concurrently during the CFG summer seminar. All three strands use CFG principles and practices and each strand works to "tune" and share each other's work.

Students initiated my most powerful memory of this project to date. I will never forget the official public launch of this initiative. Gathered in Union Station were government, business, and educational leaders who came to learn about the potential of small schools. A pair of young, inspired, and passionate student leaders facilitated every round-table conversation in the huge hall. Those young facilitators demonstrated what the adolescent youth of Indianapolis are capable of achieving.

NSRF principles and practices guide all of our work in Indianapolis. The school transformation coaches are totally committed to engaging their school teams on a journey toward social justice, equity, and small-school autonomy. Over the last year we have trained almost a hundred IPS coaches, facilitated every district leadership team meeting and created a Network Learning Community comprised of the leaders of all five schools. This summer's coaches' seminar will ensure that there are at least two CFG coaches in every small school.

Over the course of the last two years, HSRF has worked to build the capacity of IPS to convert its five comprehensive schools by:

- facilitating the district's transformation known as the Moral Imperative
- facilitating monthly District Leadership team meetings
- facilitating monthly Network Learning Community meetings for small-school leaders
- supporting a small-school leadership design that includes a full-time Facilitator of Teaching and Learning position (CFG coaches training is a requirement) in each school
- facilitating the steering committee that is made up of District leaders, small-school leaders, union leadership and building administrators. Its purpose is remove obstacles that get in the way of transformation
- facilitating monthly professional development of all of the district's Instructional Coaches
- providing all IPS Instructional Coaches with coaches training this summer

In August of 2005, 22 brand-new small schools will begin a "year of residency" with their autonomies in place as defined by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the President of the IPS Board of Education, the President of the Teachers' Association, the Director of CELL, and the Superintendent of Schools. This innovative residency design principle will help to establish the culture of inquiry and reflective practice.

Although there has been an extraordinary amount of intensely meaningful work over the last few years, HSRF is still discovering the potential of our work as we proceed on a journey of placing equity at the center. We are working tirelessly to interrupt inequities and transform current unacceptable practices into educational experiences that embody the words of NSRF's mission to "foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone." ■

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**G:** In the beginning, there was an application process that we don't have now. We had the money to pay for coaches to attend the initial seminar – as well as funds to provide ongoing support to the school. The principal and the school had to make a commitment to CFG work before they sent teachers to the new coaches seminar, and principals had to attend a three-day seminar as well. In the application, the school had to write about how CFGs would help them achieve their goals for improved student learning. During the first three years, we paid coaches a stipend of \$2,000 per year. Part of the commitment was to attend the Winter Meeting.

The application process also included the condition that CFG members, coaches and principals would work toward completing professional portfolios in which they documented changes they made in their practice and student learning as a result of their participation in a CFG.

**K:** Two things you mentioned – principals being involved and taking part in a principals' institute, and the portfolio component, are no longer required. What do you think about that?

**G:** What happened was that each year we had less and less money to support this work. It took huge financial resources to bring people together to institutes, meetings and conferences. It was difficult to require portfolios when we didn't have the funds to support either their development or ways to give each other feedback on them. We were just determining how we might use portfolios constructively in the context of changing practice when we left the Annenberg Institute and moved to the Harmony Education Center. Although schools and districts contributed a portion of the costs for preparing and supporting CFG coaches in the last two years we were at AISR, since we left nearly all of our funding has come from fees for service from

schools and districts.

**K:** Were principals integrated into CFGs in the first years?

**G:** Several of our CFGs had principals in them the first year. It was our belief that if we were going to change the culture of our schools, principals needed to do the work with their teachers.

**K:** I know that question still comes up: Should a principal be part of a teacher's CFG? Will their participation inhibit the CFG or will it enhance the whole?

**G:** That's not the right question.

**K:** What is the question?

**G:** The question is: What does the fact that we are asking this question about principal participation tell us about the culture of our school, and is that the kind of culture we want?

**K:** What has surprised you about the evolution of this work?

**G:** What has really surprised me is that the concept of CFGs has continued. As we did our work in the late 1990s, we were always conscious that schools were becoming more and more standardized, with a great deal of pressure, along with sanctions, being exerted from the "top." We were championing lateral accountability, as opposed to top-down accountability, and were interested in empowering ourselves to set our own high standards, and to take collective ownership and responsibility for the success and learning of all our students.

**K:** Why are you surprised that the work has continued?

**G:** It has surprised me that even though schools were wrestling with more and more mandates, including No Child Left Behind, people continue

to be willing to do work that runs counter to most of the profession's norms – that they have been willing to do the hard work of making their practice public for the purpose of receiving feedback, of situating themselves as learners, of believing that collaborating with their colleagues is time well spent. I think this work taps into the reason many of us became educators, because ultimately it is about empowering ourselves to trust our professional judgment and our collective wisdom.

**K:** Gene, what are your hopes and fears for the future of the NSRF?

**G:** My hope is that we can assemble the kind of resources that will allow us to bring together the expertise and knowledge that's in our network, as well as in our partner organizations. I think collectively we have a lot of knowledge and experience that we don't benefit from nationally, across all our centers of activity. I hope we can get to the point where that happens, and I believe a well funded and well coordinated research and documentation initiative will be key. We need to all reach for brilliance in our work – our students deserve no less, and we need each other to do that.

My fear is that CFGs and Professional Learning Communities will go the way of Cooperative Learning and Multiple Intelligences, where people do the work at its most superficial level. We need to tell the story about the roots and the principles underlying this work. I am less interested in having our work described in the educational literature, just for the sake of having our name out there. What I do care about is that our work is cited in the literature in a substantive way. I want this work to change the culture of our profession. I want our work to make a real difference for students. ■

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## Learning to See with a Third Eye

(continued from page 3)

for active listening and regular reality checks with “insider participants,” those teachers, students of color and their families with whom I’m working. I need to “check-in” about my observations and conclusions in order to examine and assess my assumptions for the inevitable bias I bring to the action-research and change processes. Basically, I hear Dr. Irvine’s words as a caution that I need “to know what I don’t know” before I can learn to co-construct valid meaning and propose positive interventions in support of “other people’s children.”

While Dr. Irvine’s analysis has given me much to chew on as a doctoral student in training, it has also moved my thinking about facilitation in the here and now. So I’m thinking about what I want to do differently this week in my meetings with new coaches of learning communities, and that has led me to revisit the reflective questions that Nancy Mohr penned a few years ago. Nancy wrote:

Reflections: Whatever activity you do, the reflection can be explicitly about equity.

How does this promote equity?  
What does this have to do with equity?  
What does this mean in terms of equity?

And I have added:

Who’s at the table? Who’s missing? Why aren’t those voices included? How can we include those whose perspectives have been silenced historically?

How does the work we’ve just done serve all of our students? How does it serve those students who have been marginalized in the past?

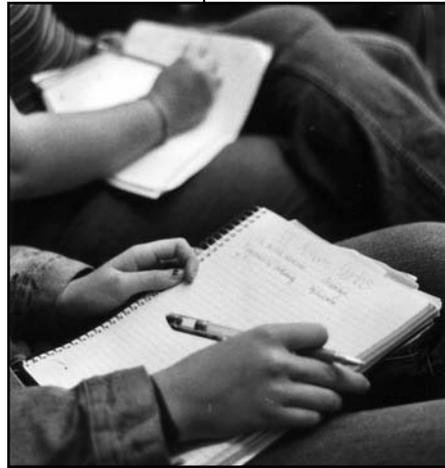
I don’t think these questions are the legendary “silver bullet,” but I do think that regular reflection and debriefing that considers them as possible prompts for every activity is a step that will help me move beyond an equity focus that is only addressed sporadically, as an “add-on”.

Yesterday, I facilitated a series of “Lunchtime Learning” sessions about

content literacy at a Philadelphia high school. As I thought about the reflection questions, looking for the ways these sessions were related to equity, I realized that I needed to go beyond the generic use of metacognitive strategies of reading instruction in order to bring the role of literacy in the struggle for equity to the surface. To that end, I added the introduction of *Reading, Writing and Rising Up* by Linda Christensen to the resources I was using with participants. In her introduction, Christensen quotes Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, Paulo Freire and a number of prisoners to situate the role of literacy and the impact of illiteracy in our current power structure. Christensen makes a strong statement about the purposeful use of reading and writing skills as tools needed to challenge the inequities our students face daily, in our schools and in our society. My addition of Christensen’s perspective helped me translate what I learned from Dr. Irvine’s analysis and Nancy Mohr’s questions into practice that can help kids. I hope that being given a context for the analysis of how and why these literacy strategies are keys to student success will enable more students to actively buy into their own learning process.

For my part, I will continue to read the contributions of Dr. Irvine and other educator researchers of color as I work to develop the lens of my “third eye” whose vision depends on regular collaboration, reflection and changes in my practice. ■

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## Introducing and Practicing Peer Observation...

(continued from page 8)

learning of the protocol; and (4) if I take the role of the teacher, make her less confident and perhaps somewhat defensive during the debriefing.

When David and I had debriefed both of our observations, we reflected on the process as a whole. We both found it very valuable and plan to engage in it regularly. David also

noted that the strength of the protocol as we experienced it was in our asking probing questions of one another during the debriefings, yet the protocol itself makes no mention of probing questions as a debriefing

tool. We found that to be a weakness in the protocol and will make that revision when we use it in the future.

We see a number of implications for our peer observation work with a group of new CFG coaches. First, when the 18 students in our seminar begin to engage in peer observations in their schools, we hope that classroom doors will begin to open wider throughout their schools. Second, in our roles as CFG coaches, as NSRF Coaches Seminar facilitators and as instructors in higher education, our own coaching, facilitation and teaching will improve as a result of our peer observation practice. We look forward to our future learning together. ■

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actually start and sustain a CFG in their local settings. Most of our evidence in this regard is still informal and anecdotal, although we've begun to collect this data through written surveys. We're certainly aware that there are many more trained coaches in the state than there are active CFGs, and that there's a fairly high attrition rate during this transition period from the introduction

of new practices (I.U. participating in a five-day New Coaches Seminar) to implementation/adaptation at the local level (I.U. starting a CFG). Our sense from talking with other CFG coaches and NSRF facilitators from around the

country is that this is a national issue and not just a Vermont issue. Could we increase the likelihood that new coaches will start CFGs by moving toward a co-coaching model for local CFGs, and by more extensive use of peer observation by pairs of coaches in local settings as a form of ongoing support? Because our own experiences with co-coaching and peer observation have been so helpful to us as we learn how to grow this work, we wonder how these supports might be made more widely available to other CFG coaches within our region and around the country.

We also wonder how we can bring our own positive experience with peer observation into our work with other NSRF facilitators who are part of our Vermont Center of Activity. How can we be more intentional and thoughtful about our facilitation and protocol-based work within our own group so that we are ourselves a CFG and a learning community? We're already using

an effective co-facilitation model for all five-day New Coaches Seminars within Vermont. How can we incorporate the practice of peer observation more systematically into our facilitation of these Seminars? We can teach the peer observation process to Seminar participants for them to incorporate into their work and to share with CFG participants in their local settings. We can

*We're certainly aware that there are many more trained coaches in the state than there are active CFGs, and that there's a fairly high attrition rate during this transition period from the introduction of new practices (I.U. participating in a five-day New Coaches Seminar) to implementation/adaptation at the local level (I.U. starting a CFG).*

use peer observation protocols to give each other feedback on our Seminar planning and facilitation. We can also make our own peer feedback sessions public for participants toward the end of the Seminar so they can begin to see how they could use peer observation to support and strengthen their own coaching practices. As a group of experienced NSRF facilitators organized into a Center of Activity, we've become very effective facilitators of introductory experiences for new CFG coaches, but we're still in the early stages of figuring out how to support those new coaches in their subsequent local struggles - often in isolation - to plant and grow this work in their very specific and complex settings.

We're now asking ourselves about the kinds of support NSRF facilitators can provide to new coaches *after* their initial training, and about the role that peer observation between two or more coaches might play at the school level as part of that process. Our questions include:

- How can we as responsible NSRF facilitators support new coaches in their complicated new roles as CFG coaches and change agents/leaders within their schools?
- What role could peer observation play for school coaches in terms of helping them to plant the seed of CFG work in carefully prepared local soil and of nurturing its growth through various - and often predictable - stages of development?
- How can we incorporate more planting-and-growing-the-CFG-seed conversations into five-day New Coaches Seminars, and what role can a co-coaching model coupled with peer observation play in that process?
- How can peer observation help us to move collectively, as a movement, beyond thinking of coaching and facilitating primarily in terms of technical skill and "technique" to understanding coaching and facilitating as important leadership and change agent roles?
- How can peer observation help us deepen the conversation about the local implications of our work and our roles and allow each of us to make a contribution to an emerging national conversation about the relationship between school reform and CFG-sized communities of practice?

These are some of the larger issues we're struggling with here in Vermont, and we welcome the opportunity to participate in an ongoing national CFG coaches' conversation about various ways to approach these important dilemmas of practice. ■

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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 standards into a more manageable, coherent format. Rather than continuing to work from the state's list of anywhere 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 truly 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 disaggregated, 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 and the data is 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 teachers 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 basis 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 questions 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 where students aren't doing well on the assessment, what is the bridge between what they know and how they perform in the classroom to how they perform on the test? 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 construction of the test item than to the students' mastery of the content?
- When is it important to look at disaggregated 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, the “Learning from Student Data Protocol.” I recently shared these protocols with literacy coaches in my local district, who have agreed



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to pilot them with teachers and give me feedback. The feedback that I've received so far has underscored the importance of setting the stage for the data analysis and reflection. To frame the conversation, we used an article titled "Using Student Performance Data Humanely," by Carl K. Chafin for the American Association of School Administrators. (The article is available at [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org). The

*Read the Learning from Student Data Protocol at [www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html)*

protocols are available at [www.nsrffharmony.org/protocols](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/protocols).)

A colleague recently shared The Data Dialogue with me and we may merge this process with our own newly designed protocols in the future.

Through the individual and collaborative versions of the "Learning from Student Data Protocols," our CFG has the sense that we have begun to address the questions we knew were guiding our inquiry: "What do we know about looking at hard data about student performance?" and "How do we look at this data in ways that are productive?" We'll be able to gather evidence about these questions when we have more feedback about the protocols as they're being used.

However, the unexpected bonus that I'm seeing, for myself and for other members of our CFG, is the learning that we're gaining about those underlying questions about protocol development, the questions we didn't even know we were asking: What processes best support collegial dialogue and enhance collaborative learning? What characterizes an effective protocol? How do we know we have a process that we're ready to try with other educators? Here are a few

of our emerging understandings:

What processes best support collegial dialogue and enhance collaborative learning?

- Framing the whole process as an inquiry the group engages in together is important. Nowadays many people feel that data can be manipulated in a variety of ways to prove any point. It is essential that participants understand and even trust how the data is generated to engage in a data protocol. Additionally, concerns about how the data may be used are never far from the surface. If anyone in the group (especially a facilitator or an administrator) appears to already have reached some foregone conclusions which the group now needs to reach, the process is likely to backfire. This is one of the realities that led us to set the context for the data analysis by reading the text mentioned earlier.

What characterizes an effective protocol?

- It is important for us to remember the context in which we expect these protocols to be used: in grade-level or department-level groups, with educators who have not necessarily signed on to work together collegially in a CFG and who, therefore, have probably not developed the culture of trust needed to look at these issues straightforwardly in the early stages of this work. (In our desire to push the envelope regarding issues of equity, it was tempting to want to design the process so that the issues that can be revealed by disaggregating the data are confronted head-on.)
- Creating a protocol because there is a need we feel driven to fill, a set of questions that we need to explore was key for us. I don't think this would have been meaningful if we had simply said, "Why don't we see if we can create some kind of a protocol?"
- Allowing room for the individual's and the group's own inquiry questions, and not feeling tied to the

questions that we've suggested, is an important point to remember. With respect to the protocols, the "Querying Data" process can be overwhelming. We came up with some very good questions to pose, but for someone who is getting started in analyzing the data, the sheer volume of questions (not to mention all the materials that are required for the protocol) might seem daunting.

How do we know we have a process that we're ready to try with other educators?

- We may never know that we're ready. There came a point when we decided, "It's good enough. Let's do it." In our case, I sought out a school site literacy coach who is also a CFG coach at her site. I knew she'd be willing to take risks, and would set a tone within the group that would support reflective dialogue in an atmosphere where it would be safe for the educators to take risks and learn together.

As our CFG worked our way through this creation process, we gained new insights and we reinforced something that we already knew about collaborative learning: holding real questions, and being willing to seek answers together, lies at the heart of this work. The following quote, by Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, describes the spirit that sustained us through the months of our inquiry and characterizes how we've learned to view data:

"All scientific knowledge is uncertain. This experience with doubt and uncertainty is important. I believe that it is of very great value, and one that extends beyond the sciences. You have to permit the possibility that you do not have it exactly right . . . So what we call scientific knowledge today is a body of statements of varying degrees of certainty. Some of them are most unsure; some of them are nearly sure; but none of them is absolutely certain." ■

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with colleagues and students changed. Formal leadership looked at how they supported staff, worked with teacher-leaders and helped others develop skills and begin to change habits. The cycle repeated twice.

Throughout the process, participants were encouraged to pursue NSRF NY Endorsement by ultimately presenting a portfolio of their work demonstrating their facilitation skills in action. Five of the twenty-five participants received endorsement. ALL participants left more skilled.

We see examples of formal and informal leaders at all levels within the district applying NSRF principles and practices:

- We model and encourage the use of feedback as teaching/learning and community-building tools. Not only does this allow us to take the pulse of the group, it engages everyone in a reflective process in which we experience how feedback can shape future events. This happens when a good leader is able to synthesize input on behalf of those they lead and is an essential dimension of building a reflective community of learners.
- Our practice of “transparent facilitation” (characterized by public reflection and sharing your thinking as facilitator regarding choices and intention) allows the group to see us not as leaders who with all the answers but as colleagues striving to help members learn to ask better questions and take increasing responsibility for their own learning and the learning of peers.
- In Vivian’s school (Landmark HS) the teachers have undertaken an extensive re-examination of their twelve-year-old portfolio process. This inquiry makes extensive use of feedback and NSRF structured protocols to guide them in this work. Staff trained as facilitators have emerged as leaders of this process of investigation and reform.
- Two of Alan’s largest high schools

are engaged in the process of forming smaller learning communities. They believe that facilitation skills acquired through applying NSRF principles and practices are absolutely necessary to sustain any change from within.

- Local Endorsed Facilitators have gone on to form Critical Friends Groups and still others have taken on teacher-leadership roles in their schools or stepped up to help plan and facilitate a variety of professional development opportunities.
- A recent series of professional development sessions for Assistant Principals (co-facilitated by Vivian, who was the only participating principal on the team of district facilitators) looked very much like a CFG coaches training, and participants went on to take responsibility for working with their colleagues in ways which closely resemble Critical Friends Groups.

These are a few examples of the way NSRF NY works. NSRF NY works almost entirely from within. You can’t “go to NSRF NY,” but you can find it in more places than you think. ■

*NSRF NY Endorsement requires participants to attend approximately 30 hours of training and then to present a portfolio of their work demonstrating their ability to apply what they have learned in their work. An alternative route to endorsement is through an apprentice experience, where the “training” takes place by working along with a National Facilitator. See [www.nsrfnny.org](http://www.nsrfnny.org) for a complete description of the Endorsement Process and Standards for Facilitators.*

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district would be committed to offering CFG training to a diverse group consisting of one hundred teachers, principals and administrators. This means that approximately one out of every ten teachers in our district will have had the CFG training. The seeds for success will be nurtured further by the bargained agreement to provide ample collaborative time at all grade levels. There has even been some

*I believe nothing happens by chance.*

discussion about the possibility of Oshkosh becoming Wisconsin’s first NSRF Center of Activity. We dare to dream.

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 memory was the spark that is now allowing me to step forward in a leadership role. Maybe it was to help me remember how important teachers are in the lives of the children. Where I once only saw memories in boxes, I now 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. ■

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allows students to find their own path to understanding.

To create a culture of conversation there must be guidelines for engaging in respectful conversation. This is the role of protocols in both Critical Friends Groups and the classroom. Using protocols in the classroom supports much of what we know about effective teaching strategies: they allow time for students to think about their responses before engaging in conversation, and they create practices of thoughtful listening. They provide a guideline for critical thinking, problem solving and inquiry.

This kind of classroom involves a different way of going about the daily rituals of school and learning. It requires practice and empathy for individual differences. It requires the creation of a safe, trusting and respectful culture where all voices are heard. This type of classroom mirrors the culture that is the vision of Critical Friends Groups. In this type of classroom, as in CFGs, participants think at higher levels and dig more deeply into the work at hand. In both, a culture of respectful conversation promotes greater learning and understanding through the synergism of working collaboratively. Can using protocols help to create a different type of classroom that really impacts student learning? Here is what the experts say:

“Using protocols helps your understanding.

Instead of just listening passively you have to actively think and be prepared to share your thoughts, and this enhances understanding.” - Justin, 12<sup>th</sup> grade biology student at Steamboat Springs High School

“A protocol helps students delve beyond mere surface details, allowing the participants to become immersed in the subject at hand. This allows more meaningful connections to be established and with them, the content.” - Patrick, 12<sup>th</sup> grade biology student at Steamboat Springs High School

“A protocol keeps the class on track and focused. It helps the group hit the important points of the article. It is a different way of doing things.” - Jessie, 12<sup>th</sup> grade biology student at Steamboat Springs High School ■

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## Rich Text Seminar

### Purpose

This protocol is useful for dealing with a text that is particularly dense or ambiguous in meaning, complex in discourse or complicated in structure. It enables a group to unpack the text (written, video, or still visual) that is, to take it apart slowly, element by element and layer by layer.

### Details

The protocol is designed for use by groups of 5 to 15 participants. It can run in variable amounts of time, but generally takes about an hour and a half. The facilitator must be deeply familiar with the text.

### Steps

1. Introduction/Review Text – (15 minutes)
2. Noticing (Go Around) – Each participant will identify one to three things they noticed in the text. (15 minutes)
3. Checking Out – The group will come to agreement on 2 or 3 items that need further discussion and exploration. (5 minutes)
4. Interpreting (Go Around) – Participants are given an opportunity to review the areas that need further discussion. Participants will present alternative interpretations in a go around. (10 minutes)
5. Perspective - Select one idea from the text under study and write about it from your unique perspective. You should define the perspective as an overarching idea that you bring to any text you read. (15 minutes)
6. Sharing in Triads – Share writing with partners, challenging each other as appropriate. (10 minutes)
7. Final Go Around – Participants will say one thing about the text based on their experience with the protocol. (10 minutes)
8. Reflection on Protocol (10 minutes)

*This protocol was developed by Joe and Beth McDonald and comes from the book *Power of Protocols* by Joe McDonald, Nancy Mohr, Alan Dichter and Elizabeth C. McDonald.*

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