changes took place is usually devoid of dates, persons responsible, priority, and feasibility. It usually requires more inspection and then some follow-up to begin acting upon the information. Some have mentioned that the protocol leaves the group with much more to do. I absolutely, rather, certainly agree. What has been wonderfully exciting has been the variety of ways for which the Futures Protocol has been used and the discoveries its use has created. The following are some of the ways folks around the country have used it:

• To set agendas for a semester’s worth of meetings with a teacher work group
• To guide a school’s mission and vision work
• To help look into structures for moving into smaller learning communities
• To set a course for staff development for a year
• To review guiding documents that had lost their fire
• To problem solve communication issues with a parent/teacher group
• To plan with a student council group for the year’s direction
• To clarify a staff’s core values and beliefs about teaching
• To help a national organization gain clarity on how it might continue to move forward

Some folks have commented that doing the protocol with their staff was a culture builder. It allowed for discoveries about their colleagues’ beliefs and values, hopes and frustrations. It allowed them to understand the tenor of their staff. It was their team building while still doing the “real work.” Yes, there may be different individual realities that emerge from the protocol, but most often there is a collective core and central theme upon which the group can reflect and from which it might ultimately grow. And in growing, it must continue to move through the challenges and obstacles, seeing not only the trees, but the spaces through which it can flow.

The Futures Protocol is reprinted in part below. You can get a full version by calling NSRF at 812.330.2702 or visiting www.nsrflorum.org. Scott Murphy can be contacted via e-mail at smurphy@jeffco.k12.co.us

1. Present what you are trying to accomplish:
   Presenter: shares what he/she is trying to do and how it might look when it is all done.
   • Present: presents with each other what it would like to accomplish and how it would look when done. (5 minutes)

2. Clarifying Questions:
   • If presented by a single person and not a whole group, the rest of the group asks clarifying questions. If a group presents together, no clarifying questions. (5 or 10 minutes)

3. Probing Questions:
   • If a presenter, the group asks probing questions to further the presenter’s thinking. The presenter may choose to answer, think aloud or quietly consider it.

4. Project into the future (whatever timeline seems appropriate) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished this endeavor.
   • Must talk in past tense.
   • Describe what is in this best case-scenario. Do not yet describe how.
   • Must talk in past tense.

Examples:

• 5 years later in a school’s reform efforts
• The end of a team’s project with students

What We Did Over Summer Vacation

Understanding “Our Work” Chris Jones, Indiana

Part of the vocabulary that gets thrown around at the national center, at the office or at national meetings is the term “Our Work.” I have been confused by this term for a while. I know what my work is: building websites, answering phones and e-mail, helping to put together institute materials, but what is “Our Work?” I finally got to see “Our Work” recently. I have been working at the NSRF National Center in Bloomington, Indiana, for over a year. It is never easy to integrate new people into an existing institution and there is not exactly a manual for working at NSRF. I was told a few things, had some questions answered, and was integrated into our NSRF staff CFG.

This arrangement worked well, but eventually the time came for my initiation: attending a coaches’ institute. I never like to ask anyone to do things that I am not willing to do, so when a chance arose to go to a new coaches’ institute in Indianapolis as part of the first Leadership Institute, I knew I needed to go. I had spent the last year making a website to try to encourage educators to become coaches and start CFGs, so I owed it to myself and the people I want to help to gain a better understanding of “Our Work.”

I saw educators with real concerns take the time - a full week - to try something new. I’d read all the protocols countless times, I knew at least the titles of most of the articles (and the content of many), but how do you address the starting place and how you moved from that to the project. In this case, I really needed to chart steps 4, 5 and 6 so that everyone can see what is being said. (10-15 minutes)

I was overjoyed at the results from a group of new teachers that focused on student achievement. I know what my work is: building websites, answering phones and e-mail, helping to put together institute materials, but what is “Our Work?” I finally got to see “Our Work” recently. I have been working at the NSRF National Center in Bloomington, Indiana, for over a year. It is never easy to integrate new people into an existing institution and there is not exactly a manual for working at NSRF. I was told a few things, had some questions answered, and was integrated into our NSRF staff CFG.

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I saw educators with real concerns take the time - a full week - to try something new.

Many of them have been to several seminars, but what could make this one different? How could this one matter in a sea of seminars focused on improving schools? But it did. Over the week, you could see the change in everyone. I could see it in myself.

The “aha” factor is so high, it feels like it is something you always knew but forgot. At the same time it is one of the most difficult things I have done in my life. Distrust and competition are a part of my (and I suspect many others’) culture. It is a hard thing to rewire your work to be more open and collaborative.

I am not sure if there is a standardized model of a New Coaches Institute, given the individual needs of different groups. It seemed so obvious to me: CFGs are an amazing tool, therefore most educators will buy in easily and quickly, and trust will follow. Since I had grown up in a place where collaboration was the norm, I assumed that
parallel to ours. The overarching goal of the institute was to help with the transition of the five big Indianapolis High Schools into Small Learning Communities. It was a brave adventure, with high goals, but success was achieved in the very act of bringing all of these stakeholders together in a meaningful way for them, collaboration.

I am not sure if collaborative processes can be learned without collaborating. I can see now why our facilitators set straight to work in building us into a learning community. You have to model your goal. We were made responsible not only for our own learning, but also for the learning of everyone else. By sharing this responsibility, we were empowered to work together in ways that are meaningful and welcoming, but not necessarily easy. If collaboration were easy, it would be the norm. “Our work” of collaboration is hard and it does not help unless we make it possible by sharing this work with others.

I got a chance to share my work a few weeks after the institute. I recently attended a wedding where I ran into the mother of a college friend, who has been teaching for years. In the standard catch-up, I told her what I do, and when I mentioned CFGs, she lit up. She had been to the Institute the previous week and had heard about them. We started to gush. What resulted was a debriefing for both of us. It was done against the backdrop of the evergreen hills of Northern Idaho and after the contemplative silence of a Quaker wedding. It gave me a chance to reflect on what I had done and what “Our Work” really means. It is based on collaboration for student success, it is hard work because collaboration is not easy, but powerful in its ability to focus multiple resources on our practice, dilemmas and students. “Our Work” is driven by my commitment to this collaboration possible for every educator who cares about students. “Our Work” is as hard as changing the world and as simple as asking other people what they think. The scary part is that I am sure that I am not done changing. It is a frightening prospect that one week can change your life, so I am not sure if we should add that to the institute utopia), I am striving to apply the tools I gained. All staff at the Harmony School Education Center (including NSRF staff, of course) are members of a CFG, and there is also a Coaches CFG. I will be starting a CFG at Rhino’s within the next month or so, and will be joining the Coaches CFG. I am excited about this new stage in my professional development— I can’t wait to begin coaching.

As I have heard so many times before without really believing it, this institute was life altering. It changed not only my approach to work with others, but my thoughts about teaching and learning, but also my approach to human interaction, and my idea of my self and my place in the world.

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The labyrinth at the Fatima Retreat House, site of Chris and Camellia’s Coaches Institute

most people wanted to collaborate. Now I know that it’s not that simple – CFGs take time, commitment, energy, and above all, work. They are not “easy”; they don’t just “happen”. Buy-in is not instinctive for most people, and collaboration can be scary.

Another assumption that I held was that everyone involved in CFGs, including all trained coaches, know something about NSRF. During the course of this institute, it became clear that many of them do not, and some CFG members and even coaches may have never even heard of NSRF.

The personal assumptions I came face to face with are somewhat more difficult to articulate. I’d never really thought about what I assumed about other people and how that affects my interactions with them, let alone what other people may assume about me and each other. The institute inspired me to reevaluate what we all bring to our relationships with other people, and to be more aware of my own assumptions about others. I try to really listen to people, to really hear what they are saying rather than thinking about what I am going to say in response, so that I may better understand where they are coming from. In this way, I hope to reduce the amount of miscommunication in my life.

Now that I am back in the “real world” (outside the CFG institute utopia), I am striving to apply the tools I gained. All staff at the Harmony School Education Center (including NSRF staff, of course) are members of a CFG, and there is also a Coaches CFG. I will be starting a CFG at Rhino’s within the next month or so, and will be joining the Coaches CFG. I am excited about this new stage in my professional development— I can’t wait to begin coaching.

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The New Meaning of Educational Change, Michael Fullan’s latest book, The New Meaning of Educational Change, reads much like a college text or required reading. The storyline is not full of personal accounts, but the message is outstanding. In this edition, Fullan clearly identifies that educational reform is based on the improvement of relationships. “Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the culture of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, the universities and so on.” Changing culture is paramount to introducing, developing and sustaining educational reform. The heart of any school is the people and the relationships between the people. These relationships dictate how work is done or not done. Making and growing relationships at all levels and creating cultures to support inquiry, reflection, trust and innovation is essential for school reform to occur. As I read this edition, I saw my own school, C.W. Henry. Henry, emerge with all of the struggles and triumphs we encountered as we move toward supporting teaching and learning better for everyone. As principal of C.W. Henry School, I quickly discovered that students, as well as teachers, passively or aggressively resisted any new initiative that did not make sense or have meaning in the context of their lives. In order to introduce the work of CFGs we first created a school vision that gave context to the work and used the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Common Principles as a framework to align directives from local, state, and federal levels. Taking the time to develop meaning and achieve coherence reduced or nullified resistance to our educational reform and change endeavors.

The Critical Friends Groups at C.W. Henry School depended on each other to help implement mandated changes in the District’s curriculum and textbook adoption. This became the focus of our CFG work for the school year. The criteria that Fullan says an.