

Eddying Out: Helping Your CFG Share Ownership of Planning and Leadership

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In whitewater paddling and rafting, eddies are marvelous places. Calm spots of water just below rocks or bends in the river, they offer blessed relief from the often chaotic and turbulent currents and waves to the paddler who “eddies out.” More importantly, they provide the essential opportunity to take stock, check equipment, scan the churning water ahead, and plan the “best line” accordingly. An eddy is never a final destination, but often a crucial step to reaching that destination.

Neither are CFGs ever really our destination (as all of our work is ultimately focused on improving student understanding and performance) but instead an essential, and at times delightful, means towards reaching that end. Most CFG participants have experienced that wonder of finding calmer water together, removed from the schedule/paperwork/madding crowd

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of the school day. Indeed, this time “away” is precisely what allows us to re-enter the daily chaos of our professional lives with new purpose, skill and support.

But CFG time, too, can develop its own sense of turbulence and chaos. Particularly for coaches, stress can build as agendas need to be developed, group members tracked down for pre-protocol conferences, time managed in a way that involves all group members but allows for individuals’ needs. For some groups, the best intentions to plan collaboratively and have no internal hierarchy run headlong into the reality of busy professional lives, and the coach becomes the default—planner. The coach feels the pressure to make meetings productive, and the group loses the powerful advantage of the collaborative process. A need emerges to create an eddy within an eddy, to find

time where individuals and the group as a whole can take a broader perspective on the work they plan to do together; CFG work, too, can use some time to eddy out.

With my own group, we decided to address this need this past fall. After some consideration of what exactly it was that we wanted as a group, we decided on the following desired outcomes: 1) some overall picture of what we hoped to accomplish as a group this year, 2) a shared sense of ownership/responsibility for future meetings, and 3) an opportunity to collaboratively identify our own individual goals for the year.

To meet these three goals, I developed the following structure. At the beginning of the meeting, I made three columns on the whiteboard: “individual work we want to bring to the group”, “topics we would like the group to read about and discuss”, and “school-wide issues for the group to discuss.” We wrote in our individual notebooks for ten minutes, brainstorming in each category. Then, in triads, people shared their lists with others, while in the process winnowing out our most important items in each category.

For the next step, we brought our individual lists to the whiteboard and wrote in one item under each category. After looking at the final list of items on the board, we each used a marker to put a dot next to our two preferred choices in the “reading” and “school issue” categories, identifying the two topics in each list that we were most interested in addressing as a group. (These could include the topics we put up ourselves, but did not need to if we saw others that now appealed to us more.) No marks were made in the “Individual Work” category.

As a last step, we posted our schedule of meetings for the year on the board, with one or two blanks left open next to each meeting, depending on the meeting’s length. We then went around the group, “signing up” for meeting



slots. As each individual’s turn came, they could either sign up to bring their own individual work (a choice kept sacred by no voting on the board) or to take responsibility for presenting one of the issues, or finding an appropriate reading in the other categories. For those choosing from the non-individual categories, selections invariably reflected the group’s preferences as shown by the dots.

Five slots were intentionally left open for different times of the year, and we also decided that anyone with a pressing need (a student whose work plummeted, an upcoming assignment that suddenly needed adaptation, a school-board decision with unexpected ramifications) could ask to be scheduled for the next meeting as necessary.

In the months since that meeting—months of exhilarating and draining negotiating of our school’s and students’ various currents and waves—the benefits of periodic eddying out as a group are clear. As coach I feel less on the spot for needing to plan month to month. Far more importantly, though, the group shares an authentic ownership for what we are doing, and also knows that the topics being addressed are the ones that need to be. We have taken the time to slip out of the current for a bit of perspective—the chance to sit in the eddy and look at where we need to go, individually and collectively as a group. Such perspective is well worth the time. ■

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teaching and learning, as well as how the implementation of their plans may result in less than desired outcomes. Each school has become a more reflective school culture as a result of the KnowledgeWorks Foundation and OHSTI.

It has been an honor to be a part of this initiative. I have met and worked with some very caring, astute and insightful educators in Ohio public high schools, and I have formed collaborative relationships with a lot of the KnowledgeWorks staff. In addition, there are several NSRF members (Lois Butler, Marcy Raymond, Steven Strull, Nancy Sutton, Dyanne Alexander) with whom I have had the pleasure of continued and continuous collaboration. Whether or not a school is selected by KnowledgeWorks to engage in the deep planning year followed by the

September 2004 opening as 2, 3, or 4 small autonomous high schools, I know that all schools involved will have benefited from this long and arduous journey.

The journey also has been extremely painful. It is not easy as a school community to document and provide evidence to support the low levels of performance on every indicator for school success. Most schools know they are not meeting the needs of all of their students, and they are not used to emerging themselves in a deep analysis of their current reality. They know they are failing because they are being told they are not doing well. The lack of success is documented and appears in numerous newspaper articles. It is a different dynamic and the potential for transformation is more intense when you have to create and

document your current reality of failure. KnowledgeWorks had schools inform themselves of their low levels of performance. Now that this initial period of intense introspection is over, not one school can continue to do business as usual. With or without further assistance from KnowledgeWorks, with or without continued funding from the foundations, these large, mostly urban, high schools will continue to do things differently so that more students can succeed. ■

To find out more about the KnowledgeWorks Foundation Ohio High School Transformation Initiative please visit the web site: www.kwfdn.org

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Ridge Arts Actors... (continued from page 11)

they hone their skills. Beautiful wood carvings are everywhere, and in a place of honor is the work of students. Learning is natural and celebrated... Until the Priests of Logic and Science arrive, sent by the King to see if people were really good at woodcrafting. Their theory is that if one were to break woodcrafting into basic skills, it could be more easily taught and mastered. Once identified, teachers are mandated to teach only these skills, focusing on only one skill at a time. Students are told to forget “making things,” and to hammer, hammer, hammer. Pretty soon, the bent nails from hammering drills pile up, and no one is too interested in classes. Everyone is blamed—the hammer-impaired students, the parents who weren’t providing drill time at home, but mostly the teachers who could not follow simple directions. Because the schools are now falling apart, it is decreed that students would

be tested, and compared with students from nearby towns. (The only happy people at this point are the people who make nails!) The masters, who can no longer find joy in their work, leave the town...

After sharing the story with my students, they asked, “Is this about FCAT?” I knew we had the right piece. We adapted it for the stage, looking for the “actable moments.” We even found wonderful wood carvings done by our shop teacher (a member of the Woodturning Guild of Miami) to use as props.

To close the show, the character Mary (a little girl who once loved to carve and is now drowning in hammering drills) comes to the mike, looks out at the audience and says: “It’s too late for Woodcrafters’ City, but it’s not too late for us. You’re the principals, you can make a difference... you can be our heroes.” Then angel-

voiced Juliana sings, “Hero.” I was not crying alone this time.

One of the principals commented that we should send this tape to congress for viewing before any other legislation is passed.

These students will always have the memory of being heard by a roomful of adults who really cared what they had to say. Frequently, students view education as something that is done *to* them, not necessarily *for* them in any way they value. The idea that *they* were taking a stance about their education in a very public forum is an experience they will carry with them forever.

And for that, I am forever grateful to everyone who made it possible. ■

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At Harmony we have three CFGs made up of teachers and staff, one Coaches CFG that includes coaches from Harmony School, Indiana University, and the Indiana Department of Education, and one CFG made up of faculty, students, parents, and community members. The effects of CFG work on the Harmony culture have been profound. The first thing that I noticed as director was the expanded level of teacher leadership that I observed in faculty meetings. This from a faculty that was already empowered to make all curricular and budgetary decisions.

However, even within this engaged faculty of 16, there was a gap between

has risen. The use of the Descriptive Review process has also provided a great boost to our ability to reflect on and design implementation strategies to support many of our neediest students and their families.

The Cleveland work began when NSRF National Facilitator Dave Lehman, from the Alternative Community School in Ithaca, NY, and I met with a Cleveland team that was working on a Gates Foundation project that planned to start a new small school in Cleveland. As part of this work, Dave and I introduced the notion of CFGs. Two Assistant Superintendents on the Cleveland team became so excited about what CFGs could contribute that they asked us to begin discussions with their Director of Professional Development about training two coaches in each of Cleveland's eighty-nine elementary schools.

The results of that meeting and ensuing conversations have led to a brand new small school in Cleveland—Success Tech Academy—and the widespread use of CFGs throughout many of Cleveland's elementary and middle schools. The small school work was facilitated by monthly visits from Philadelphia NSRF Facilitator Debbie Bambino. Debbie's work there over the course of nearly 14 months resulted in the opening of the school last September. The training of over 200 coaches has been facilitated by a team of 20 NSRF National Facilitators who have been making monthly visits to Cleveland since November, 2001.

Members of this national team come from Ohio, Florida, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Georgia, Oregon, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania. Amazingly, even with the brutal Cleveland winter, they never missed a day that they had committed to be there. The NSRF team has made monthly visits to Cleveland over the last sixteen months, and though I have only been there three of those days, each time I have had the opportunity to participate

in sessions and talk to many Cleveland coaches and district leaders.

The main thing that stands out for me about the Cleveland work is how the NSRF team has been able to instill a sense of hopefulness into a group of over 200 educators in a fairly typical urban district and, even more importantly, provide them with some "tools" to actualize that new-found optimism. This year, NSRF Facilitators Pete Bermudez, from Florida, and Connie Chene, from New Mexico, have facilitated a Cleveland Principals' CFG with 13 elementary and middle school principals. They hope to expand on that group next year, as the leadership in Cleveland has come to understand how pivotal principal support and understanding of CFG work is to their ultimate success. Next year we also hope to expand our work to high schools and to begin apprenticing some Cleveland coaches with the NSRF National Facilitation Team.

The presence of the kind of "authentic community" I referred to earlier is apparent in both Cleveland and Harmony NSRF work. In Cleveland, the manner in which some twenty NSRF facilitators have been able to come together, whether or not they were previously acquainted, and immediately find a common language and set of experiences upon which to build, has said volumes about the authentic community that runs throughout NSRF. We certainly want to build upon that sense of community in the future as more and more educators get involved with NSRF.

As we grow, the challenge of maintaining the sense of community that I have known at Harmony for nearly 30 years and have now found within NSRF is both daunting and exciting. I believe that with the creativity, commitment, and powerful minds that permeate the NSRF network, we are up to this challenge. ■

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When I first heard about the KnowledgeWorks Foundation's Ohio High School Transformation Initiative (OHSTI), I was intrigued, hopeful, and eager to be a part of this initiative that is unlike any other high school transformation initiative. The key elements of the OHSTI that appeal to me are

- the 15 Non-Negotiables
- the ongoing modeling of supportive and equitable relationship building through the community engagement practices
- the collaborative relationship building and support built into the program for the high schools and the school coaches.

Overall the common thread of this work of transforming large, urban high schools into small schools is the impor-



tance of structuring, and restructuring positive relationships aimed at increasing student achievement.

The 15 Non-Negotiables (see sidebar), which are a major part of the OHSTI, made it evident to me that the KnowledgeWorks Foundation had knowledge about, studied, and looked at other high school transformation models and learned from their mistakes. The 15 Non-Negotiables made crystal clear the level of support, commitment, and innovation expected from all of the stakeholders in order to provide an academically rich, student centered, and standards based educational environment. Positive and supportive relationships are recognized as a key ingredient for success for high school students in low performing, mostly urban districts. Going one step further, KnowledgeWorks required school districts to sign documents agreeing to abide by the 15 Non-Negotiables

in order to be a part of the OHSTI and these 17 school districts are

publicly held accountable for supporting the high schools' transformations into small schools. There are no hidden agendas, and ongoing support is built into all the levels of engagement.

The OHSTI is collaboration among several foundations: the KnowledgeWorks Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Other funding sources include: The US Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Education. 41 high schools in 17 Ohio school districts accepted the challenge to begin the transformation to small high schools. This challenge includes



a pre-planning year, a deep planning year and two implementation years. This first year each school had to incorporate the language and intent of the 15 Non-Negotiables in their school portfolio. One of the Non-Negotiables is that the high schools must form small high schools of no more than 400 students. Another noteworthy Non-Negotiable is the level to which OHSTI requires the community of each school to be engaged in the transformation process from the very beginning. The involvement of the school community and all of the stakeholders must continue in the creation, implementation, and ongoing evaluations phases of each small school.

The Harwood Institute has partnered with the KnowledgeWorks Foundation to help districts involve their communities. Each district has selected a community organization referred to as a "Center of Strength." Each Center of Strength is required to meet with members of the community in groups of 8 to 10 people over a period of time. As a result of these meetings

large segments of each of the 41 school communities Ohio involved in the

KnowledgeWorks High School Initiative were asked a series of questions, such as what they value about teaching and learning, what they want their students to know and be able to do, and what they know about small high schools. Then each Center of Strength compiled the community responses and presented them to each high school design team to incorporate in its school portfolio. In addition, the Harwood Institute brings the community stakeholders together several times during the year to share strategies and design new platforms and arenas for community engagement.

The OHSTI is a very complex and comprehensive plan with many levels of engagement. While the Centers of Strength were actively engaging the school communities in the transformation initiative, each of the 41 Ohio high schools were engaged in a rigorous process of identifying their current reality, and creating a narrative vision of how they would be transformed into small, autonomous high schools centered on individual students' successes. Each high school then wrote a strategic plan to chart how they were going to go from their current reality into 2, 3 or 4 highly successful and academically challenging small high schools opening September 2004. Each high school put together a school portfolio which contained detailed descriptions of their current reality along with their narrative vision and strategic plan for transformation.

KnowledgeWorks provided a school coach for each of the 41 high schools in the transformation initiative. Each school coach worked closely and collaboratively with the district and the school to help create a school portfolio. These school portfolios were modeled on Victoria Bernhardt's "The School Portfolio Tool Kit" series. Dr. Bernhardt has constructed the 7 rubrics of continu-

(continued on page 15)

What do Chicago, Providence, Waltham, Santa Monica, Boston, Atlanta, Miami, Houston and L.A. all have in common? If you guessed that these cities have all been sites for NSRF's annual Winter Meeting, you would be right!

We held our first CFG Coaches/Principals Winter Meeting in December 1995 in Chicago. The previous summer, 94 coaches had been "trained" in one of four 6-day seminars in Providence, San Francisco, and Wisconsin. 91 out of that 94 showed up in Chicago that December. We were all struggling with implementing our very first CFGs, and we were desperate (or so it seemed) to talk to our colleagues from the summer. What were they doing that worked? How did they know it was working? What were their struggles?

That first year, we presented Consultancy dilemmas about our work as CFG coaches. We read a common text and discussed it, and we listened to a panel of our colleagues talk about their learning. We looked at our own students' work in home groups, and we even formed a 91-person continuum in the ballroom around issues of standards and CFG portfolios. Little did we know at the time, but a pattern — now familiar — had been established for NSRF's Winter Meetings.

Our work at the Winter Meetings has changed some each year — depending on the needs of the people who attend, and on our learning from previous years. One year, we tried regional Winter Meetings, but people yearned for a national meeting, so we went back. Home groups used to be the place where you saw the people from your summer institute session,



Consultancies on the terrace

but as our numbers grew and people had to pay their own way, we began to form heterogeneous home groups, and began experimenting with role-alike groups. The Atlanta meeting in 1997 was the first meeting at which we tried Open Space — one day and 32 sessions



World Café

later, 400 people declared it a success. The popular "coaches clinics" of this past year's meeting were actually first tried in Boston in 1998 — we called them workshops, and we didn't know as much as we do now, so we said they were just okay, and abandoned that format. We keep growing as we learn

more, and sometimes we find ourselves circling back. The World Café from last January may someday find its way back into one of our meetings as we learn more about how to use it well.

And our work has remained the same. We always read something together — the more provocative the better. In doing this, we acknowledge that if we are to construct our own learning, we must periodically introduce new ideas into the mix, as well as challenge our old assumptions. Sometimes the writer of the article or chapter we are reading comes and

provokes us further; Carl Glickman, Patricia Wasley, Gloria Ladsen-Billings, Tony Alvarado, and Rob Evans have all joined us at our National Meetings. Some years, our colleagues are our keynote speakers; Paula Evans, Kevin Horton, Teri Schrader, Khadijah Abdul-Aleem, Larry Myatt,

(continued on page 18)

ous improvement to guide schools as they take stock of their effectiveness as a school in each of the following areas:

- Leadership
- Student Achievement
- Continuous Improvement
- Information and Analysis
- Partnership Development
- Quality Planning
- Professional Development.

The schools used the 7 rubrics to chart their current reality and plan their future success. The school portfolio provided an accurate picture of the school's current reality, presented the school's qualitative and quantitative data as support and evidence for their self assessment rating on each of the 7 rubrics, included a rationale for their ratings; and proposed a strategic plan for how they are to improve in their small schools. Also included in the school portfolio was a narrative of their goals for students, their vision for small high schools based on their students' needs and their school community's beliefs, values and vision. All of the 41 Ohio high schools have engaged their parents, students and staff in this self-evaluation process and in the construction of their school portfolio.

I work with two high schools in the Columbus, Ohio school district. I and 18 other School Improvement Coaches work with Marcy Raymond, who is the School Design Manager. Our collaboration as school coaches is part of our work, and one of the reasons I am willing to travel from Connecticut to Ohio on a regular basis to work with KnowledgeWorks and my NSRF colleagues. In my two high schools I work with teachers, principals, students, parents, and community members on an ongoing basis as they work to create, submit, improve and resubmit their comprehensive school portfolio. Much of our work together is centered on discussions about what is it we value, and our beliefs about teaching and learning. We ask ourselves how we can create small schools that reflect the best of our values, beliefs about our

children and our schools, and what do we know about how our students learn. Our school portfolios are manifestations of those beliefs and values. The school portfolios were delivered to KnowledgeWorks in Cincinnati, Ohio on April 21, 2003. All 41 high schools submitted their portfolio on time. This was not an easy task for these high schools because they were meeting the challenges of the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative while in full operation.

OHSTI is a five year initiative. Of the 41 high schools in 17 Ohio school districts who have submitted their school portfolios to KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 8 high schools in 6 districts were selected to move to be early implementation schools. The selection process was based on three dynamics:

- the strength of the school portfolio- a portfolio that demonstrates and reflects a passion for what effective, small schools can do for students
- the school's participations in KnowledgeWorks events aimed at strengthening school personnel's ability to transform
- the school's presentation of their portfolio.

Those high schools that did not make the May selection to transform into small schools have received feedback on their portfolios, and they are eligible to resubmit their improved portfolios in August, 2003.

After a school is selected, it will move to the second phase of the Initiative. This second phase is referred to as the "deep" planning year. The deep planning year 2003-2004 will engage community leaders, school leaders and educators in defining the human, philosophical, physical structures and designs of each small school following the small outlined vision and strategic plans in its portfolio. Leaders for each small school will be chosen, autonomous budgets for each school created, and the standards based curriculum will be designed. The small

The 15 Non-Negotiables

- Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing; flexible use of resources
- Distributed leadership
- Open access and choice for students
- Identification of and release time for principal in first year of implementation
- Professional development that clearly links changes in teaching practice to improved student achievement
- A clearly-defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation
- A curriculum clearly aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well
- Non-traditional scheduling that promotes deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers
- Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communication resources
- Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement
- Performance assessment for students
- Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive community conversations that engage a broad array of stakeholders, and connect with and influence official decisions
- Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school
- Individual teacher advisors for each student
- Target maximum population of 400 students

schools will open September, 2004. It is the intent of KnowledgeWorks to continue to work with the high schools that have been a part of this initiative even if they are not selected to implement small learning communities for their students.

Every high school involved has reported that they have been positively affected by this initiative. They believe that they are better at being able to use their data to improve student learning, more reflective, have gained insights into their approaches to certain dynamics of

(continued on page 17)