

IF POLLY HAD BEEN THERE: AN UNCOMMON JOURNEY IN
TEACHER INDUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

by

THOMAS MICHAEL VAN SOELEN

(Under the Direction of Penny Oldfather and Betty Bisplinghoff)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the learnings of a novice teacher learning community. The researcher coached this Critical Friends Group, which was composed of six first-year middle school teachers representing a variety of content areas and specialties. The group met monthly during the second semester of the 2002-2003 school year, examining issues of educational practice emerging from their own classrooms. Structured conversations using protocols developed by organizations such as the National School Reform Faculty drove the use of time during meetings. The researcher used portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to position himself to collect data about the group, individual members' thinking, and his own facilitating and coaching dilemmas.

The principal of the building allowed one novice teacher to discontinue membership in the group after the first meeting. Her words from that meeting are used to frame the authentic topics that the novice teachers pursued during the study, such as accountability, authentic assessment, content, and relationships with colleagues. Paired stories pose what might have happened if she had continued her membership in the group.

These novice teachers did not view issues of classroom management of high priority, rather, questions surrounding assessment and meaningful learning activities permeated the conversations. Several members engaged in risk, offering their work or the work of their students for feedback. These artifacts often caused conceptual conflict (Wang & Odell, 2002), increasing the depth of the dialogue. Although the group was homogeneous in terms of years of full-time teaching experience, individuals' experiences both in and out of the classroom provided a diversity that fueled and generated important knowledge and actions. Finally, a notion of a mentoring community emerged in which novices assumed multiple mentoring perspectives (Wang & Odell, 2002) in their interactions with each other and the group.

INDEX WORDS: Novice teachers, teacher induction programs, Critical Friends Groups, teacher collaboration, learning communities, teacher mentoring

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It seems anti-climactic to say that “writing a dissertation is a process.” To say that “it was a long, long journey” reeks of a cliché. Even more significant to me is that neither of those oft-posed phrases approach the impact of this work on my life.

This is what I needed, what I had been waiting for – even though I did not know it. I *never* dreamed that higher education would be a part of my life, especially not in such important and meaningful ways. Certainly the content of my academic pursuits and my own research has altered what I think and how I think about it, but the relationships with other professionals was the most unexpected and the most amazing.

Although my wife was my best friend before we moved to Georgia to pursue doctoral degrees, now she definitively owns that role. Julie has accepted and loved a fragmented husband with too many interests, too much energy, and lately, too many computers. Her unconditional support never wavered, nor did her abilities to keep me grounded. It was never a matter of finishing; it was just a determination of when. I thank her especially for realizing how important it was for me to digress – to paint walls – during this experience.

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to be done, she's already doing it and encouraging others to wonder as well. Her courageous stance of presuming goodwill is slowly becoming a mantra of mine as well.

She questioned whether decisions were the right ones for the right reasons for a particular group of students or teachers. Through this process, she assured me that I was in the right place at the right time with the right people. She honors me every time that we engage in conversation or laughter, or often a combination of the two.

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His loyalty to organizations and ideals motivate me to behave in similar ways. He never forgets the things that people initially think are unimportant until they have to ask him. I thank George for helping me realize that I was making a difference and that it really mattered.

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CHAPTER 1

VOICE AS AUDIENCE: INTRODUCTION

Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) have been used as a structure to support veteran teachers that are creating substantive links between professional development and student achievement. The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) developed these opportunities so teachers could experience growth stemming from relevant, authentic inquiry which is rarely offered to novice teachers because most induction programs are not grounded in the belief that novices have knowledge, skills, and dispositions to offer. This study seeks to explore what happens when a CFG of novice teachers is created that honors novices' individual inquiries.

Teacher induction is a significant element in a broad reform agenda that focuses on recruitment, retention, student achievement, professional development, licensure, and preservice teacher education. Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Carver, and Yusko (1999) used the image of Janus, the Roman god of doorways, beginnings, and endings, to help them conceptualize induction. Janus is a bearded figure that is looking in opposite directions at the same time.

“Most policy mandates do not rest on robust ideas about teacher learning and often lack the resources to create effective programs. Even when formal programs exist, they may not help beginning teachers offer more ambitious learning opportunities to students” (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999, p. 5). In the experiences of some novices, these learning opportunities were created within the structures of university cohorts within colleges of education. Cohorts have the potential to serve as learning communities that support the novices' decisions. Similar structures are often curiously absent in induction programs (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Traditional professional development, characterized by short-term, decontextualized direct instruction, has been shown over and over again to be inadequate to the task of helping practitioners make deep and lasting changes in their practice (Lieberman, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 1991; Little, 1993; Lord, 1994; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). These skill-based programs deify their foundational studies, touting them as incontrovertible (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992).

Research on staff development was plentiful in the 1980s. Researchers' concerns began to grow a decade earlier as teachers overwhelmingly expressed dissatisfaction for staff development opportunities in the late 1970s (Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990). As a researcher for the RAND Change Agent Study, McLaughlin (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978) began to compile characteristics of effective staff development opportunities. As her work and the work of others (Yarger, Howey, & Joyce, 1980) became well-known, theories regarding implementation were published, such as peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1982), developmental supervision (Glickman, 1985), and differentiated supervision (Glatthorn, 1984).

Training became the buzz word of the 1980s, fueled by process-product research (Gage, 1963; Rosenshine, 1971). School districts across America hired educational consultants to design and provide training opportunities, heralded as "staff development," on topics ranging from peer coaching to phonemic awareness. Training was widely accepted as the most cost-effective way to reach and teach a teacher. "Teachers can be wonderful learners. They can master just about any kind of teaching strategy or implement almost any technique as long as adequate training is provided" (Joyce & Showers, 1983, p. 2).

Evolving concurrently with the training camp was a group of researchers with a less patronizing perspective dedicated to providing inquiry-based professional development. Loucks-Horsley and her colleagues (1998) offer the assumptions regarding this approach: (a) teachers are

intelligent individuals with legitimate expertise and important experiences; (b) teachers are inclined to search for data to answer questions and reflect to formulate solutions; and (c) teachers develop new meanings as they cyclically create their own questions and collect data to answer them. Teacher action research was also beginning to be reflected in the writings of educational researchers (Glatthorn, 1987; Glickman, 1985; Hovda & Kyle, 1984; Zeichner, 1983).

Many teacher education programs have identified with this camp of researchers, creating inquiry-oriented programs and numerous opportunities for action research. Treating preservice teachers as developing professionals – focusing on knowledge, skills, and dispositions (NCATE, 2000) – is antithetical to how novices are often treated in “professional development”, if indeed their gatherings are classified by central office personnel, administrators, or other teachers as such.

Now researchers, policymakers, seemingly all stakeholders, are demanding changes. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future set six goals for the year 2006. This group, realizing that long-term engagements are required, have set lofty aims, one of which is especially pertinent here: “All teachers will have access to high-quality professional development, and they will have regularly scheduled time for collegial work and planning” (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 198). The National Staff Development Council’s revised standards urge staff developers to organize adults into learning communities and provide educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate (NSDC, 2001).

Educational theorists call for fostering teacher learning communities (Barth, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989). The “learning” component of a teacher learning community identifies its inquiry stance that engages teachers in critical reflection that challenges implicit assumptions of teaching and schooling practices

(Achinstein & Meyer, 1997). Challenging ideas, theories, and societal “givens” are commonplace in teacher education programs. It is remarkably missing when novices are experiencing the larger sphere surrounding these issues (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

CFGs respect novices as developing professionals by maintaining learning communities during novices’ first years of teaching, encouraging critical examinations of school cultural issues and issues of student and teacher learning. I can highlight tenets espoused by the NSRF (with brackets) and link preservice teacher education and induction programs altering words from Judith Warren Little (1987) with my own bolded text: “Teacher’s work as colleagues promises greater *coherence and integration* [authentic experiences] to the daily work of teaching. It equips **thoughtful individuals** [reflective practitioners], *groups, and institutions* [learning communities] for steady improvement **by engaging in critical, professional dialogues about what they do** [making teaching public]. And it helps to organize the schools as an environment for *learning to teach* [everyone is a learner]” (p. 513, boldface, italics, and brackets added).

Background

History of the National School Reform Faculty

In 1993, Walter H. Annenberg awarded a \$50 million grant to Brown University’s National Institute for School Reform so it could continue to bring together reform organizations and networks that would dedicate themselves to improving public education. In order to build capacity in schools, the Institute wanted to investigate areas of critical reflection and continued professional development, school climate, strong leadership, and schools’ purpose and vision.

In 1994, a group of professional educators gathered to address these questions and brainstorm how to develop professional development opportunities for teachers that were

meaningful and long-term. These educators had formerly worked as the professional development team for the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) and were quite familiar with school reform. In fact, the director of the newly renamed Annenberg Institute for School Reform was TedSizer, who founded CES in 1985. Schools that subscribed to CES philosophy agreed to work on implementing Nine Common Principles, a set of ideas that summarizes Sizer's beliefs about schooling (Appendix A).

Research from the Stanford Study of the Context of Secondary School Teaching (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993) was fresh in the minds of these developers. They sought to develop collegial groups of teachers from scratch that would function with the high degrees of collegiality found in the 12 high school departments in McLaughlin and Talbert's study. They chose to call their groups Critical Friends Groups using a term used by Joe McDonald, Director of research at CES and the new Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Critical friends had been used in CES work for some time, referring to colleagues at partner school sites that would visit to evaluate the progress of change.

The Annenberg Institute assumed the implementation of this practitioner-driven and highly collaborative program and presented it to its professional development department: The NSRF. These developers immediately went to work, inviting schools to form groups of teachers that wanted to work collegially to improve their practice. A coach, either one of their own or a trusted outsider, would be trained by the NSRF to facilitate the work toward achievement of the group's goals. Groups would apply to the Institute for admission to the program, providing information on the history of reform efforts at their school, an essay from the intended coach, and a letter of commitment from administration of the school and district.

From the first pool of applicants, coaches from over 50 schools were trained during the summer of 1995, forming “Cohort One.” Cohorts Two and Three followed in subsequent summers, totaling over 200 schools after three years of operation. Today, a cadre of professionals who have worked as critical friends and coaches themselves has trained over 1,000 coaches in 700 schools (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000). These schools represent large and small schools, urban and rural, from California to Maine.

The Institute committed to supporting this work for two years, believing that a shorter amount of time might not provide enough momentum, change, and positive feedback for the teachers to continue on their own after official Annenberg support ends. Other reform groups continue to operate: CES, the Southern Maine Partnership, the Carnegie Middle Schools Network, Co-NECT, ATLAS, League of Professional Schools, The Galef Institute, or schools associated with an Annenberg Challenge grant (Dunne & Honts, n.d.; Nave, 2000). The Institute discontinued funding in June, 2000, focusing their attention on education in urban communities and in schools serving disadvantaged children (Murphy, 2001). Effectively July 1, 2000, the NSRF merged with the Harmony School Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana.

NSRF Theory and Constructs

Near the end of the first year of operation, the NSRF committed to hiring Bill Nave to conduct a formal evaluation of the program. Before Nave could design an evaluation strategy, he sought to understand the theory and assumptions of the program. Through his work *prior* to the evaluation, the document *NSRF Theory and Constructs* was born. (Appendix B). After several revisions, it is now a foundational document for training for coaches. Some of the CFGs that Murphy (2001) studied were from the first pool of cohorts and thus did not have the *Theory and*

Constructs document. Even though this document laid out beliefs and understanding pertinent to the founders, the development of standards for CFG work is left up to individual sites.

Teachers voluntarily participate in CFGs to discuss relevant issues of teaching and learning. Knowledge is constructed socially and personally: through examination of student work, their own work, and their teaching. External sources of knowledge are also included, such as discussions of professional readings, or attendance at conferences (NSRF-sponsored or not).

These conversations serve as a basis to accomplish the following:

- Set learning goals for students.
- Set standards for high-level student performance on these goals.
- Set standards for their own teaching.
- Use close examination of student work as the basis for evidence of student learning (and therefore of their teaching efficacy).
- Examine their own work for the purpose of determining how well their strategies address their student learning goals.

In addition, CFG members commit to forming peer observation dyads that will observe in each other's classrooms at least once per month.

It is expected that teachers will attempt to apply their new knowledge constructions in order to bring their practice in line with their emerging theories of teaching and learning. Two sources of evidence will emerge: peer observations and feedback, as well as student work. Close examinations of these artifacts with critical friends in a supportive environment is expected to lead to cognitive dissonance (Fullan, 1993; Smylie, 1995) or productive disequilibrium (Lord, 1994) as teachers begin to see that what they thought was happening in the classroom may not be

the case. Focused reflection ensues that attempts to analyze the disconnects that exist in their own classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create a portrait of a CFG whose members are novice teachers. This interpretation of their individual and collective experiences will offer insight into relevant induction activities and how to offer meaningful support.

The following primary research question and three subquestions guided this process:

Primary question:

What happens when novice teachers participate in CFGs?

Subquestions:

1. How do novice teachers that participate in CFGs make sense of their first-year experiences?
2. How do novice teachers that participate in CFGs make decisions about teaching and learning?

Organization of the Study

This work specifically addresses a portraitists' desire to reach a broad audience. Traditional academic text mixes with narrative and poetic forms to create a cohesive experience for the reader. At times, chapters are delineated traditionally; in other instances, thematic breaks are utilized.

Chapters 2-5 use traditional academic text to prepare the reader for the work. Chapter 2 is solely dedicated to an extensive description of my subjectivities. As a portraitist, considering multiple contexts is required: for example, geographical, personal, cultural, and spiritual. Traditional academic text is resumed in Chapter 3 as current educational literature forms a basis

for my working definition of CFGs. Chapters Four and Five mark the end of that form of text, describing the methods, as well as the local and district contexts.

The next section of the work, Chapters 6-14, represents the portrait. Chapter 6 begins to document the uncommon journey of this CFG. *A Gathering of Old Men* (Gaines, 1991) inspired the introductions of the CFG members found in this chapter. Chapter 7 builds on the data and my understandings to craft an excerpt of group life. Chapters 8-14 signify the largest segment of the data: paired stories that use a single event, a decision for one member, Polly, to discontinue her presence, as the lens to view the rest of the experience.

The last segment of this work resumes traditional academic text. Chapter 15 specifically addresses the scant research on CFGs, using these data as another way to make sense of that limited body of work. Conclusions represent the bulk of Chapter 16, while Chapter 17 uses the conclusions to craft implications for school districts. This work closes with a postscript to Polly; a letter that dually serves as a call for novice teachers.

Definition of Terms

Prior to embarking on this extensive review, it is advantageous to share definitions of guiding concepts and principles that ground this work.

Critical: Responses that encourage others to stretch their current beliefs and practices are critical in nature because they are essential.

Critical Friends: Teachers whose relationship is such that they can sit down with either's work on the table between them and talk about the work—its strengths, weaknesses, what can be improved, and make suggestions for how that might be done. This discussion of the work is clearly separated from the “me” of both. The atmosphere is one of mutual trust and freedom from fear.

Critical Friends Groups: Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) represent the basic unit of support for educators engaged in improving schools and increasing student achievement. CFGs generally range between six to twelve teachers and administrators who commit themselves to at least two years of learning to work together to establish and publicly state student learning goals, help each other think about more productive teaching practices, examine curriculum and student work, and identify school culture issues that affect student achievement.

Effective CFGs: CFG work that includes one or more of the following characteristics:

- CFGs meet consistently and have a consistently high attendance.
- CFGs spend a large portion of their time examining student work and teacher work.
- Evaluation data provide evidence for changes in teachers' thinking and/or practice.
- Evaluation data provide evidence for enhanced student learning (Nave, 2000b).

Learning community: A group of educators in a school who have developed a trusting and supportive relationship using a set of values, norms, and practices so they can and do open their practice for feedback and suggestions from their colleagues.

Novice teachers: For the sake of this work, novice teachers as members of the CFG are considered teachers in their first year of teaching. However, research that details novice teachers' understandings often includes experiences through the first three years of teaching to correspond to an often-cited definition for teacher induction programs (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999).

Potential Significance of the Study

“Despite the size of the body of literature, however, relatively little systematic research has been conducted on the effects of professional development on improvements in teaching or on student outcomes” (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001, p. 916). This premise guides my work in creating novice teacher learning communities, using a construct called Critical Friends Groups (CFGs), stemming from the work of the National School Reform Faculty. These supportive assemblies of heterogeneous groups of teachers analyze issues of educational practice and examine the links between personal professional development and student learning. Chapter 3 elaborates on data where teachers that are members of CFGs report improvements in their teaching and substantive progress among their students. Research has not been conducted and reported where this construct was used with a group of novice teachers.

Through this work I will contribute to scholarly knowledge in the areas of CFGs, novice teacher learning communities, teacher induction programs, constructivist professional development for novice teachers, teacher collaboration, and educational policy regarding novice teachers. In addition, my concurrent journey as a coach and researcher will be extremely relevant. Several of these areas are addressed in the literature review that is incorporates research addressing the five tenets of the NSRF:

1. Everyone is a learner and has expertise.
2. Only reflective practitioners develop and continue to improve.
3. Improve practice by making it public.
4. Groups working together provide better learning experiences for students.
5. People learn best when working on authentic work.

Rationale for Using CFGs with Novice Teachers

Teacher induction programs are often understood by program developers as part of a continuum, represented as follows.

Preservice---Induction---Inservice

Viewed in this context, induction programs must function like the Janus-figure (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999), being able to look forward and back simultaneously. What most administrators, central office personnel, university faculty interested in partnerships, and mentors have not discovered is that an induction experience can be considered part of preservice education by using similar structures. In most states, teacher education, licensing, induction, and professional development have operated in “splendid isolation” from one another (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Huling-Austin’s (1990) early review of induction literature displays the mindset that creating a program will support novices so *then* they may enter a staff development program that provides opportunities for continued professional growth. In her conclusion, Huling-Austin calls for induction programs that function as both a logical extension to a preservice program and entry piece to a career-long professional development program for teachers.

The compartmentalized outlook Huling-Austin (1990) describes is analogous to the conceptual paradigms that she poses by examining the underlying philosophies of early induction programs: assistance, assessment, transition into teaching, training, or socialization. She claims that the programs are still undeveloped and it is difficult to identify clear conceptual paradigms. In the second edition of the *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, Gold’s (1996) chapter on teacher induction and support minimizes the importance of discussing conceptual paradigms. In fact, Gold dichotomizes the elements of emotional support and instructional support, claiming

that the specific focus will dictate the components of the induction program. Gold only reviews literature about emotional group support of novice teachers. Her appraisal includes studies where the facilitators of the groups were counseling graduate students, counselors, or even psychotherapists. In her conclusion, she calls for collaboration with members of the counseling and psychology communities to design programs that focus on novice teachers' psychological needs. CFGs function in direct opposition to Gold's (1996) claim about the dichotomy of support. By supporting each other through the analysis of *instructional* scenarios CFG members *emotionally* support each other. Rosenholtz (1989) would argue that novices initially need collegial feedback on their classroom behaviors because they "have no special training for collaborative roles" (p. 431).

Constructivism for Adults

CFGs align themselves with tenets of constructivist professional development, which is grounded in the participants' beliefs and understandings. These beliefs and understandings are reconstructed through conversations where alternatives are examined, rejected, and altered. Experimentation is encouraged, and through those acts, the expertise of individual teachers is recognized and valued. Teachers implement long-term goals that are assessed at different times by different individuals (Richardson, V., 1997).

Several writers in the area of professional development identify this process as job-embedded learning (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wood & Killian, 1998; Zepeda, 1999). Job-embedded learning can be characterized in three ways. It is relevant to individual teachers, feedback is inherent the process, and it facilitates the transfer into practice (Zepeda, 1999). This attention to daily workday activities heightens teachers' consciousness of learning as a continuous process (Rosenholtz, 1989).

The issue of relevance (Zepeda, 1999) is problematic in the determination of whether certain professional development activities are job-embedded. The editors of the *Journal of Staff Development* classified Ponticell's (1995) recounting of ten veteran teachers assuming the direction of their development in a theme issue about job-embedded learning. In that work, the group agreed upon set topics of study each month and attempted to implement changes in their particular classrooms. One could argue that personal relevance in that context is subject to influence. Munger's (1995) unfolding of an Iowa school district's implementation of cooperative learning strategies was also included in the *JSD* theme issue. Munger maintains that job-embedded learning must include staff members teaching each other. She does not address personal relevance for the adult learner. This definition may be too specific, especially considering that the topic of cooperative learning in this school district was mandated as a district-wide initiative.

Thiessen (1992) coined "Classroom Based Teacher Development" (CBTD) as his answer to professional development opportunities that cause teachers to ignore, to co-opt, or subvert. For Thiessen, increased student learning is not enough: an overt focus on teacher development is required. In fact, one of the modes of CBTD involves students as knowledgeable and cognizant participants in teachers' development. This operational mode accounts for the power principle: "CBTD supports those who have the most influence on and stake in what happens" (p. 87). CFGs meet Thiessen's standards of centering on improving the quality of learning for students and teachers; combining personally meaningful, educationally defensible, and socially justifiable practices; and engaging in reflective and interactive experiences (p. 102).

A case study of two math teachers suggests job-embedded learning (Middleton, 1999). Implementing innovative curricula combined with professional dialogue offered in an

environment that supported change was key to these teachers. The researcher used interviews immediately after instruction to inquire about what made the lesson interesting for the students, what was most difficult to teach, how and why she made adaptations, whether the lesson changed the teacher's perceptions of her students' abilities, and what made the lesson intrinsically motivating for her. Their changing beliefs about which aspects of their curriculum are intrinsically motivating and their associated shifts in practices are indicative of job-embedded learning.

Negotiating Standards

As early as 1981, researchers were encouraging induction program developers to acknowledge the personal nature of teaching and individualize induction programs (Gold, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1990; Lewis, 1980 in Grant & Zeichner, 1981). When Educational Testing Services introduced *Pathwise®: A Framework for Teaching*, a prepackaged induction program, Huling-Austin, Putman and Galvez-Hjornevik (1986) argued that “a ‘canned’ program determined in advance will not be flexible enough” (pp. 52-53).

However, successful induction programs may use standards and not be “canned.” Connecticut and California have implemented statewide plans that are built on standards for the teaching profession that their particular state has developed. The partnership between the University of New Mexico and the Albuquerque Public Schools developed standards during the inception of their program in 1983 and has altered them to align with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) licensing standards and assessments are widely-used documents that guide groups of teacher educators and program developers.

The Georgia Systemic Teacher Education Project (GSTEP) has used multiple sets of standards as heterogeneous groups of educators jointly crafted the Principles and Framework for Accomplished Teaching and Learning in order to bring coherence to teacher preparation and induction (see <http://www.coe.uga.edu/gstep/documents>). Three institutions of higher education, over 15 school districts, and three Regional Educational Service Agencies were represented throughout the state. NBPTS and INTASC standards helped guide decisions as this project seeks to reformulate teacher education, creating a seamless experience from the first year of college through the second year of full-time teaching by recasting university curriculum, developing early community-based educational experiences, and supporting multiple induction programs.

“All of these documents and initiatives have a common view of teaching as complex, grounded in decisions that are contingent on students’ needs and instructional goals, and reciprocal, that is, continually shaped and reshaped by students’ responses to learning events” (Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996). This mission for teaching defies the single, formula approach that dominated the technicist era of teacher training and evaluation, staff development, and teacher testing instruments.

Support is required to realizing the flexibility that standards-based instruction actually affords. Leaving the comfort of routine behind and looking beyond initial attempts to implement a program or policy is a first step toward engaging in true professional development – developing as a professional interdependent on other professionals. Only then can colleagues assume a critical stance and open the conversation for shared meanings and productive disequilibrium (Lord, 1994).

Lord’s (1994) concept of “critical collegueship” supports teachers in their efforts in making sense of national standards, like INTASC and NBPTS, and also content-specific

standards (see the National Council of Teachers of English, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Education Standards) that are influenced by the constructivist approaches so richly described in these standards documents. Teachers' questions are honored and deemed legitimate (Rosenholtz, 1989) as groups of individuals struggle with creating learning environments that positively affect student achievement. The value of technical training is not ignored, rather it is contextualized in classroom-specific teaching practices. Only through this questioning and wrestling with standards can teachers articulate their own assumptions about teaching and learning and determine what their practice looks like in light of the standards.

These programs also align themselves with the shared agenda of school restructuring and teacher preparation. Creating learner-centered classrooms while not participating in learning-centered teaching experiences is paradoxical. It is problematic when graduates from university programs that tout themselves as progressive and claim to prepare teachers who will co-construct meaning with their students enter school district induction programs that view the novice teachers as recipients of knowledge rather than the generators of knowledge. Teachers teach in the way they have learned (Brooks & Brooks, 1996); therefore teachers need to experience what learning is like in constructivist classrooms. Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) insist that induction programs must engage and empower (Blase & Blase, 2001) novice teachers to own, use, and develop knowledge about teaching and learning.

Addressing the Paradoxes

CFGs also work to deconstruct the contradiction that exists when induction programs offer the rhetoric of reflective practice but only practice collective socialization strategies (Lawson, 1992). Lectures, workshops and demonstrations aimed at groups of teachers formulate a custodial work orientation that is paradoxical with the message of personal and collective

renewal. It is reminiscent of the training regiments of the 1980s (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). Novice teachers may be dominated into accepting the current school culture, in contrast to reflectively trusting their own voices, their own ways of making sense, and ground new learning in what they already know (Greene, 1995).

Trainings in the 21st century may boast constructivist philosophies but may inadvertently produce teachers that still practice “cookbook” approaches to teaching (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Professional development opportunities that focus on the transmittal of knowledge from experts in a field are working directly against the product that they wish to develop: reflective teachers that choose strategies and techniques based on student assessment and response rather than a predetermined list of steps received on a colored sheet one day after school.

Recent textbook adoptions by large states and urban centers that favor directed instruction techniques do not gel with the message of increased collaboration. The paradox is that teachers are urged to collaborate more just at the moment when there is less for them to collaborate about. Contradictory forms of discourse are working in the area of collaborative professional development: collaborate to generate authentic, critical reflection, or breakdown teacher isolation for the sole purpose of a smooth adoption of preferred forms of action (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990).

Table 1. Summary of paradoxes.

Reflective practice	↔	Collective socialization activities
Constructivist teaching practices	↔	Transmittal forms of professional development
Textbook adoptions that favor didactic instruction	↔	Teacher collaboration

Providing Supportive Structures

Opportunities or time to work with other teachers is perceived by beginning teachers to improve their teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; NCES, 1999). New teachers need an opportunity and a supportive setting in which to have conversations about practice. They desire a location where they can appear adequate and normal at a time in their personal and professional lives “when their confidence is shaken and they are constantly questioning their competence” (Rogers & Babinski, 1999, p. 40). A place is needed where novices can communicate their “private puzzles and insights” (Schön, 1983, p. 333). “Formalized teacher talk” is essential in helping new teachers attend to the educational needs of minority students (Kestner, 1994). Novice teachers also need practice working collaboratively with colleagues. Interactions can be awkward when objectives are not clear and political agendas are confusing (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1997).

However, the structure itself is not a panacea. Students in elementary schools will not show consistent increased student performance for the first three years of an implemented change. This number increases to six years for a secondary school (Fullan, 2000). The structure itself does not immediately create teacher empowerment or authentic pedagogy. In fact, Elmore’s (1995) in-depth study of structural changes at three elementary schools suggests the opposite. The three schools, characterized as exemplars of restructuring, report agreement on common constructivist approaches to learning. In two of the three schools, teachers were motivated and energized by the restructuring activities, but their espoused constructivist views stayed internalized, indicated by the traditional, transmittal approaches to teaching found in their classrooms. Elmore encourages future research to resist the temptation to causally link school restructuring with increased student achievement. Instead, educators must probe as to the

changes in teachers' practice and student outcomes that may "help specify what kinds of practice have to be in place for the structures to work" (p. 26).

An early induction study (Klug & Salzman, 1991) examined novice teachers' performance over a two-year period. Using a small sample size of 27 teachers, 14 were assigned to a group formal induction, while the remainder of the participants were assigned a mentor teacher. Videotape program analysis, implementation of various instruments, participant-observations, and structured interviews were used to collect data. Most of the data seemed to indicate advantages to participating in a structured induction program. The experimental group rated themselves higher on an opinionaire and observers noted increased instances of effective teaching strategies. However, much to their surprise, the researchers found that the videotape analysis did not support that novice teachers in a formal induction program perform better on rated teacher behaviors. It didn't make a difference that novice teachers attended four team meetings during the year where they "were made aware of their strengths as well as areas of concern "(p. 242). Nothing specific was shared in regard to the 72 hours that mentor teachers were required to log with the novice teachers in the formal induction program.

Reducing Attrition

Over 200,000 teachers are expected to be hired annually in the United States over the next six years. About half of these will be newly-prepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Although some areas of the country report surpluses of teachers (Northwest, Northeast, Rocky Mountain, and Middle Atlantic states), Georgia is not immune from the teacher shortage. The attrition rate for the entire workforce after the 2000-2001 school year was 9.4%, the highest in ten years. A large factor in this differential was the departure of 15% of first-year teachers, an increase from 11% in the 1999-2000 school year. High school teachers topped the charts with

one in every five first-year teacher deciding to either leave that particular school and/or leave the profession completely (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2001).

Teachers' main motivation and reward for involvement with one another will be found in the work of teaching (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Little, 1990b). Collaborating teachers invest in each other and in their students; therefore, they want to remain in the field and continue the work they began. Colleagues also receive feedback from each other. This knowledge about performance is integral to a teachers' perception of psychic rewards, an estimate of their particular worth in a performance-based context (Rosenholtz, 1989).

A critical friendship cohort may act as a mediating site for the individual teachers to make sense of themselves and schooling in the process of becoming a professional (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997). This community may situate the conversations novice teachers have in their head about the discrepancy between beliefs and practice. By making public this sensemaking, novice teachers may feel the support that will lead them to continue teaching. This setting may decrease interactions where novice teachers feel like they need to "masquerade as experts" (Wildman & Niles, 1989). Here teachers could verbalize the process of reconstructing themselves as teachers (Kagan, 1992) and not relegate the conversation to techniques and strategies that happens in some forms of collaborative professional development (Little, 1990b).

Shaping Professional Identity

Research on preservice teachers indicate a process of self-confirmation that starts with themselves in roles as teachers, moves to desiring affirmation from pupils, and ends with validation of their success using pupil achievement (Smith & Strahan, 1997). CFGs may be the environment where teachers can focus on student learning on their journey toward self-confirmation. Without a structure to foster and honor the process, novice teachers will continue

to focus on self (Kagan, 1992) and be identified as deficient by early models of teacher development (Fuller & Brown, 1975). Kagan's model, developed from a review of the literature, credits the novice's inward focus as a necessary and valuable behavior.

This thought is echoed by Bennett (1991), who examined whether the schemata that novice teachers acquire for pupils and their own roles as teachers evolve together. His analysis of concept maps created by graduate teacher education students at various benchmarks in the program suggested the knowledge of pupils, self, and classrooms do not develop separately. "In this sense, a novice's past and present experiences are ultimately merged, as professional growth encroaches on the novice's most intimate knowledge of self" (Kagan, 1992, p. 148). That professional growth, finding one's professional identity (Bullough, 1990), is conspicuously missing from lists of beginning teachers' problems.

Recognizing the Limitations of Mentoring

Wang and Odell's (2002) review of the literature on teacher mentoring acknowledges that a panacea does not exist for creating meaningful mentoring experiences for novices. They discovered that mentoring practices consistently reflect the assumptions of the programs, which often do not encourage and foster standards-based teaching. However, the perceptions of novices and mentors do not fare as well in terms of consistency: "Increasingly, states and districts have instituted formal mentoring arrangements, which pair novices with experienced teachers. Although on the surface this design makes sense, it seldom delivers what most new teachers imaging it will – personal encouragement, assistance in curriculum development, advice about lesson plans, and feedback about teaching" (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, p. 608).

Passivity. A mentor training guide was one of the artifacts that Feiman-Nemser, Parker & Zeichner (1993) analyzed in their study of mentoring. The *Leaders Guide* paralleled a list of

effective teaching strategies from process-product research. Mentors were expected to enact the prescribed strategies to offer novice teachers equitable experiences. “The training runs the risk of de-skilling mentor teachers by substituting neutral procedures for collective practical intelligence in the solution of practical problems” (p. 6). In the three case studies, there was little evidence of teachers thinking critically, neither by the mentor teachers nor the novice teachers. Novices were not prompted to reflectively analyze and the mentors did not share the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings that served as the foundation for their ideas and responses. Several educational researchers concur (Elliot & Calderhead, 1993; Haggerty, 1995). Little (1990a) adds that mentors may supply sympathy that dissuades novices from analyzing recurrent educational issues.

Daloz’s (1986) construct of varying levels of challenge and support is well-used by writers examining the interactions between mentors and student teachers or mentors and novice teachers. However, its limitation is not often acknowledged. The issue surrounding one person’s power in negotiating appropriate levels of challenge and support is problematic. Mentor teachers experience cognitive dissonance when deciding how and when to challenge novice teachers. At this juncture, mentor teachers often choose a safe, passive route that does not require the novice teachers to construct their own meanings (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1993). This powerful decision made by mentor teachers places novice teachers in the Daloz’s quadrant constituted by high support and low challenge: Confirmation. Only by offering a higher degree of challenge can mentor teachers support the novice teachers into the Reconstruction quadrant. Literature that examines these thought processes in mentors is lacking. Research-based studies on mentors, generally qualitative in nature, either focus on successful relationships (Feiman-Nemser, 2001)

or the tension that surfaces from the dual role of helping and assessing (Williams, Butt, & Soares, 1992).

In examining mentor teachers' relationships with interns, Jacques (1992) noted this tension between helping and assessing, describing it as a "temptation" that mentors face when conversations about practice enter arenas in which they are not comfortable. Jacques found that the mentors were "collaborators in avoiding" any issue of educational practice. "A conspiracy of silence reigned" (p. 345) when mentors chose not to engage the novices in conversations that would lead to reconstruction of beliefs and assumptions. These interactions between mentors and novices may be unspoken agreements where both parties retreat from their current challenges: novices analyzing their own teaching and mentors questioning their mentoring abilities (Hawkey, 1997).

Elliott and Calderhead (1993) speculate as to why mentors do not challenge their protégés. Several of the reasons seem quite pragmatic that mentors do not wish to jeopardize the relationship or mentors may believe that beginning teaching is difficult enough without the challenges posed by a "trusted other." However, the researchers' final postulation is powerful and far-reaching. Mentors may only experience relationships with colleagues that are based on friendships, not learning. It would be difficult for them to supersede their personal socialization history and present school cultural experiences in order to provide a platform where a novice teacher can feel safe asking questions about his or her issues of teaching and learning. It is evident in Elliott and Calderhead's discussion that the mentors' preconceived beliefs and notions create a powerful impact on their interactions with novice teachers.

In examining 90 mentor teachers in England and Wales, Wright and Bottery (1997) pose school reforms as a possible culprit in mentors' propensities to discuss practical and shallow

issues of educational practice. The mentors in their study, working with student teachers, exhibited “practical professionalism” (p. 250), where knowledge of teaching as a craft was valued, but wider ecological issues were found wanting. Mentors reported spending considerable time on tasks that are commonplace in the mentoring literature: classroom management, pupil assessment, and planning. These choices are also indicative of the mentors’ passivity by not considering other broader educational issues, such as diversity and gender. In fact, mentors in Wright and Bottery’s study listed their mentoring activities as fulfilling “competencies,” which mimics the exact terminology used in England to mandate novice teachers learning experiences. Therefore, mentors may be equating “competencies” with “competent,” choosing activities that can be assessed and defended with measurable criteria, in order to assist in the production of “competent” novice teachers. This focus on competencies shrouds the induction of new teachers, producing competent but ill-equipped individuals that are professionals in name only.

Positivistic. Most mentors will propagate and promote conventional norms and ways of doing things. This may become a limiting factor for states and local schools promoting wide-ranging reforms, especially reforms that promote conceptually-oriented, learner-centered teaching practices (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000).

In her year-long study of 21 novice teachers and their assigned mentors, Brown (2001) reported that six of the 27 novices were never observed by their mentor, even though that activity was an explicit requirement of the program. In fact, 21 of the 27 novice teachers in the study reported unsatisfactory mentoring experiences. Of these, Brown classified novices into those that are desperately seeking someone and those that gave up searching and decided to do it on their own. A pertinent factor in this study was a new mandated curriculum for language teachers that was being implemented that year. The curriculum’s philosophical basis was not acceptable to a

majority of the mentor teachers, thus causing conflict even prior to the arrival of the novice teachers. These novice teachers had been prepared in their preservice work to teach in ways that were supportive of the new curriculum and the philosophical basis that was being promoted by the governing agency. The conflict between old and new was a contributing factor in Brown's study.

Induction and socialization into unchanged and unchallenged school and social structures perpetuates the archetypes and biographical experiences that novice teachers share (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995). The "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie, 1975) has solidified novices' perceptions of teachers as caring individuals who slave away in isolated settings for the sake of their students. The years of students watching teachers teach often do not portray teachers as political or transformational professionals.

Privacy. Dyadic mentoring may inadvertently reinforce the individualism and privacy of teaching (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). If mentors do not present shared standards of practice, novices may not come to see themselves as part of a collective struggle for improved teaching and learning. By pulling away as soon as a novice shows elements of growth, the message may be that teaching is best learned individually with a dash of advice and a shake of support.

Brown's (2001) study of mentoring practices reports that novice teachers desire a setting for dialogue, especially about content-specific issues. It is "precisely the reflective practice, the critical analysis of their subject teaching and the engagement in debate about the wide professional issues in their new career that are missing" (p. 71). In an extensive study of a graduate teacher education program, 28 preservice candidates, 64 cooperating teachers, 6 university supervisors, and 10 program graduates were interviewed (Hollingsworth, 1989). A lack of common goals and perceptions was noted. In fact, candidates espoused publicly the

beliefs held by their supervisors while retaining contradictory personal beliefs. Hollingsworth noted very few instances of change in candidates' personal beliefs and images during the program; when change did occur, it involved cognitive dissonance.

Elliott and Calderhead (1993) wonder if schools' culture regarding the learning of all teachers plays a role. Although viewed by the public as a "giving" profession, reality in schools does not always epitomize that description. The freeflowing of ideas is not necessarily free. Sharing lesson ideas and units can be given with an invisible cultural price tag. Novice teachers are not viewed in a position to reciprocate the help that mentors often give (Little, 1990a) and this may perpetuate the mentors acting like "misers" (Allen, 1989) as their individual reputations and distinctive identities are eroded. Veteran teachers value their own work and have received feedback based on their classroom work. When novices use and possibly alter other teachers' material, a veteran teacher may feel slighted. These situations are related to the school culture in that reciprocity may be a cultural requirement that novice teachers cannot provide.

Veterans may be more apt to share ideas than open their classrooms for observations by the novice. Johnson & Birkeland (2003) note that schedules rarely allowed the novices and mentors to observe each other.

Conclusion. Even so, policymakers are slow to disparage mentoring. Feiman-Nemser (1996) calls for research that examines how mentoring fits into broader frameworks of professional development and accountability. Wang and Odell (2002) offer a comprehensive review of the literature that pinpoints numerous areas for further research; however, none of these gaps in the literature target how a mentoring community can prepare novice teachers for a thoughtful career. Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) claim that novice teachers will become overwhelmed assessing, diagnosing, and integrating concepts with diverse learners unless an

able mentor is available. They assert that a lack of mentoring is one of the reasons that knowledge acquired during preservice courses is often not put to use. They do not acknowledge the possibility that mentoring programs may inadvertently perpetuate problematic models for novice teachers. Field experiences in preservice teacher education programs often rely heavily on the mentor teacher to function as a teacher educator (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1993), sometimes in absentia of a university faculty member. This dyadic pairing may send a message to preservice teacher education students that teaching is not a collaborative activity. Some year-long teacher education programs anticipate this situation and provide a cohort as another structure where teacher candidates can make sense of situations (Hudson-Ross & Graham, 2000).

CFGs serve as a supportive structure to counteract limitations of mentoring. Mentors sometimes play passive roles, providing sympathy instead of questioning practices or when required to evaluate. A non-evaluative setting serves to alleviate the fear of being labeled inept or deficient. Basing CFG work on classroom artifacts focuses the conversations on meaningful topics. The actual dyadic structure of mentoring can reinforce positivistic teaching practices and privacy in teaching. CFGs seek to deprivatize practice, encouraging conversations about practices deemed acceptable by a school culture.

The next section examines myself as a researcher: exploring cultural, intellectual, and personal frameworks that are relevant to this work.

CHAPTER 2

VOICE AS A CONDUCTOR: ISSUES OF SUBJECTIVITY

The life story of the portraitist is a vital component of the voices that permeate the portrait. This autobiographical (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis, 1997) use of voice honors the “familial, cultural, ideological, and educational” (p. 95) experiences that shape the decisions portraitists make before and during the inquiry. Making these assumptions explicit allows for a “greater openness of mind” (p. 186) in being reflexive to the data, the design, and the relevant literature. Readers are invited to contribute their voices to add to the complexity of multiple understandings and interpretations.

My personal connections as a musician prompt me to think of this voice as a conductor. Excellent composers often write the same musical line to be played by several different instruments in unison. The struggle in rehearsal is for the unison sound to be balanced and still resonant like a solitary voice. At this moment in time, my voice can resonate so the floor vibrates and my sternum shakes. There are times when I play in symphony orchestras that the row of string basses can serendipitously create that moment. Consonance is often a fleeting experience, for we are all imprecise and imperfect in our intonation and execution. When that happens, the overtones ring and the bodies of the players and the instruments begin to shake. My moments of consonance as a researcher are disrupted by dissonant experiences that cause me to revisit my subjectivities, my design, and my potential learnings. But those moments of clarification, however brief, still ring. The overtones heard can represent the people and their experiments who have and continue to play and sing in my story.

The methodology of portraiture requires a discursive stance toward subjectivities. A separate chapter is offered to respect this journey and to provide a link to data that emerged and will continue to emerge from the study. As is my predilection and passion, the fine arts organically emerge as the schema through which I make sense of research. Ironically, the visual arts represent my challenge. Even so, I never viewed portraiture as a method reserved for artists that excel in that particular area. My background in the performing arts, both theatre and music, permeate the work. In fact, my purposeful mix of metaphors fluidly move between these forms of expression.

Subjectivities

Examining my subjectivities required me to scrutinize my personal and professional histories. Peshkin (1988) warns that subjectivity is inevitable, “therefore researchers should systematically seek it out, not retrospectively, but while research is in process” (1998, p. 17). By using epistemological questions – such as Who am I?, What was I?, and Where did I? – the experiences I once discounted as unimportant emerged in various arenas. The use of these guiding questions may make it appear that I am present in the writings about myself. On the contrary, all writing is a fictitious creation of another reality. My life is not fully represented in the following pages. Rather, I offer my narrative based on our agreed-upon conspiring to create an image of my life and what brought me to this point. Along the way, this text is cluttered with traces of the “real” person being written about (Denzin, 1989).

I am also cognizant of my audience. In telling about these experiences, I reconstruct a self – how I want to be known by you. In a different context, in a different place, with different people this work may have taken a different form. However, in any form a gap exists between the actual experiences and the telling. The language makes it real (Riessman, 1993).

During data analysis, I lived the words that Sharon Feiman-Nemser shared at a recent AERA discussion – “We need different explanations for different audiences.” The people representing various arenas of my life needed clarification about my experience: why I was growing a beard to encourage daily writing accountability, why I would scribble notes during songs on any available paper, why I sometimes wanted to drone on and on over long-distance telecommunication lines and other times I seemed disconnected.

I found poetry to be a useful avenue for exploration and presentation. However, telling the narrative is not enough. The interpretation, or hermeneutic (Hankins, 2002) must be twisted and turned in order to delve into my ideology (value and belief system) that forever permeates my decision-making. This process of recursively examining events, interactions, and decisions honors the interpretations as contextual and fluid (Denzin, 1989).

Writing this narrative was not strictly to examine my own predispositions and ideologies. I wrote to practice this form of method, so I could better consider it in representing experiences of novice teachers participating in a learning community. “Measuring the ingredient of self throughout all phases of portraiture . . . is guided by the contextual objective of informing vision” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 69). I also wrote to practice this form of thought, for reflection not deliberately practiced is shallow, indeed.

I had never been part of a professional learning community that extended longer than a semester when I began this study. I wasn’t sure how often I had even been part of a learning community that was consciously crafted by an instructor. Through this iterative process of examining my subjectivities, I have interpreted and continue to interpret previous experiences that have put me on this research path involving learning communities. My story is about affirmation, acceptance, and appreciation.

Who am I?

*A deep question
Requiring deep thoughts
Perhaps too deep.*

Dredging up *unquestioned ideologies
undiscussed assumptions
unfounded generalizations.*

*Shedding filtered light on
what makes me
me.*

*Once filtered through loving indoctrination
now seen through a concave worldview
shaped by* *experience
academia
colleagues.*

*But always the a priori is my culture:
deeply-embedded patterns
that answer*

the question *who I am.*

Like Bruner's (1986) claim that no "self" exists independent of one's cultural-historical existence, I find it difficult to discuss culture without addressing family. Infants' entire worlds are defined, developed, and dictated by families. As people grow and mature, we make culturally-expected, intelligent decisions, courtesy of our parents, tempered with our own uninformed, asinine choices that plague our future development. We enact roles in various dramas (Bruner, 1986) that grow in diameter as our interactions grow in diversity and frequency.

My family could not have blended more with the fabric of my geographic community. As public figures and leaders, my parents walked the line between debate and discussion, distinguishing between schemes and skills. Older siblings assumed culturally traditional roles and performed them admirably.

What was I?

*Was, and still am
the epitome of a little Dutch boy.
blonde, tall, blue-eyed
known as “a good eater.”*

*The baby in my family of five,
my reading prowess is attributed
to my siblings often reading aloud
and innumerable episodes of Sesame Street.*

*My parents: Marion and
Madame Librarian,
in a town in Iowa that had no pool hall.
Perhaps we were the inspiration for
Meredith Wilson’s The Music Man!*

*Dad’s required interscholastic sports
Mom’s required musical counterpoint
and their religious attendance and support
coupled with postdinner Sunday wrestling matches
in close proximity of the china cabinet
competitive matches of lawn darts
and
few well-performed chores that allowed us to
pursue what we loved,*

*late-night debriefings after school and work
helped me to see the parenting lessons in this arena of
Education rules!*

*Measurable goals and
Performance objectives offered
daily at suppertime.
Not, “What did you learn at school today?”
Rather, “Did you learn what you expected?”*

So with this perception of schooling I existed. My experience seems different than Cole’s assertion that schooling is where students “figure out things for themselves” (Bruner, 1986, p. 131). I have difficulty tolerating situations and the persons involved in which my expectations are not met: inefficient meetings, unreflective undergraduate work, even “non-drivers” on

highways. As I heard university folk and school-based educators talk about novice teachers, the notion of expectations was missing. By labeling them, either consciously or unconsciously as deficient rookies, very few colleagues seemed to have expectations of these newly-certified, fully-paid, and student-entrusted novice teachers. They are the recipients of “treatment” or “training” (Greene, 1995), and thoroughly lack any sense of agency. I started to wonder if they had expectations of themselves: as responsible adults, as official teachers, and as continuing learners. If they didn’t have expectations of their own work, how could *they* experience the affirmation, acceptance, and appreciation that I long for?

*A member of my nuclear family:
by default and by design
constantly encouraged to conform
to an acceptable standard.*

*I never wondered who set the standards
but they were there
and didn’t offer me what I sought*

*So I challenged and pushed
and stretched and prodded
searching for my reward.*

How do novice teachers make sense of their newly-adopted cultures and families? Do cultures that are governed by “sink or swim” mentalities develop teachers that demand rewards for surviving? Do authentic, collaborative cultures foster critical views of privilege among all staff members?

Criticized often for not focusing enough, I would backpedal to the claim of a good liberal arts education: being well-rounded. However, even in my liberal arts education, that defense did not fly. Advanced degrees and graduate work has not simplified this dilemma. When narrowing a research interest, unexpected theories and concepts intrude on the tidiness, creating an ever-expanding, messy web of connections.

Although my small-town upbringing felt claustrophobic at times, the overarching neatness of life was comforting. The Dutch would even clean the streets once a year during the Tulip Festival, perhaps quite incognizant of creating apparently tidy relationships. Webs of connections would be inappropriate, like cobwebs in a corner when company was coming to visit. If your web is too intricate or too large, you run the risk of revealing too much about yourself and your family. When the webs extend far away from the center the individual links seem weaker and control is gone.

Worship services in my religion are not the equivalent of student-centered classrooms. As the Dutch *domine* renders his (always **his**) divinely-inspired interpretation of God's Word, the congregation sits in silence, shushing their own babies or spending valuable thinking time debating how long it will take the young parent in the back to actually haul the crying child out of the sanctuary which would inevitably end the temporary reverie away from the sermon. These words are not bitter for they represent feelings that surface in my daily life. As I fidget during the waning moments of the preacher's message, I hear Dad's focused whisper of "Sit still!" along with the accompanying pinch in my right hamstring. As families I know walk in, I hypothesize where the missing member is. I just don't have that oblong bar in my mother's kitchen to sit at with my family at 12 noon sharp to discuss who wasn't present, and more importantly, why.

Sometimes worship is intentionally impersonal and omniscient, causing members to cast off egocentric feelings and embrace the notions of doing good for one's neighbor. Other times, members are barraged with hypothetical probes about their prayer life, their tithing record, or their relationship with their spouse. The intersubjective knowing of shared experiences and the knowledge gained from the common experiences is taken for granted. Experiences are seen as

similar, allowing for subjective ways of knowing, but the collective reflection and possible dissension that may result from a shared experience is problematic.

Whatever the tenor of the message may be, all of these activities are accompanied by music whose language promotes community: “We gather together...” “A mighty fortress is our God...” Being affirmed, accepted, and appreciated as part of a cultural or denominational entity was not the meaningful existence I desired.

Where did I?

My activity was not enough

*passivity plagued me
felt from a higher power—
the church.*

*Slowly, starting as a questioning lad of 14
I branched
 forged
 exposed*

*Causing tension
Causing unrest
Causing thought.*

*I wondered how much I would have to change
in order to cause change in others.*

*All institutions are not static
change comes, albeit slowly
Institutions of community also morph
but much stays the same.*

*Sometimes distance is required
to experience change.*

Although I was conscious of the changes I was making, they were far less noble and selfless than I once thought them to be. Simply the act of changing was important as part of my desire to achieve and garner instant, personal affirmation. Distance from this community of

believers and city-dwellers helps solidify change as a process, and more importantly, as a range of possible stances (Bruner, 1986), including an eventual assertion that my quest for appreciation needed to be primarily fulfilled internally.

Opportunities for teacher collaboration provide an internal satisfaction with external rewards. Capitalizing on collective expertise and experience shares validation and affirmation, resulting in a joint sense of change.

*Sioux Center
population 5,000
(with the college)
reeks of stereotypical farm
and standard red barns*

*Remembering the heritage of my grandparents
occurred in deed through age five
in Orange City during the Tulip Festival
moving ten miles from mandatory, contrived Dutch architecture
offered us a reprieve.*

*Possible amnesty from overwhelming episodes of guilt
viewing a bad movie
breaking the Sabbath
unfulfilled duties*

*It didn't work.
Moving to the "twin town" didn't change a thing.
(They even had the same population in the 1980 census!)*

*Teaching of duties is essential
a three pronged approach*
God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit
Sin, Salvation, Service
Church, home and school.

*Thinking about yourself too much--
in itself an oxymoron.
Focusing on self-improvement
could be construed as a sin.*

*Maybe I was too self-focused
to feel accepted*

appreciated
affirmed

Just to be acknowledged wasn't enough.
I felt like the Biblical prophet
that was rejected in his own town.

Even today I construe ludicrous excuses to family and friends as to why I am not interested in moving back and teaching at my alma mater.

“My blood has thinned! That cold weather is just too frightening.”

“I won’t be able to pursue my research interest at a small, liberal arts college.”

“That farm smell just does us in.”

“My wife really thrives in warm weather.”

“We just bought a diesel car.”

But it’s not about cars, cows, or cold. I struggle with the same fears that novice teachers may experience: being accepted, appreciated, and affirmed – both by others and themselves.

What does this have to do with my teaching and learning? I was being taught and I was learning. There doesn’t seem to be a time where I can click off, like the Internet, and say that it’s no longer activated: that feeling, that notion, that desire, that *compulsion* to individually and collectively make sense of situations. This character trait cannot be squelched; it surfaces when I now teach and desire others to learn. The events that have shaped, formed, molded, and wrestled with my version of whom I want to be now inadvertently and involuntarily affect others: my classmates, my students, my interns, *my fellow learners*.

I have become increasingly aware of the inevitable role that this context plays in decision-making. I had made sense of my own past by labeling the environment as stifling, unaccepting, even deficient. It was with that negative perspective that I exuded my willingness to be bold and make changes, which I claimed as subversive.

Why am I?

*Who I was
What I was
Where I was*

*Contributors into the larger query of why
Part of culture seems to be a choice—
especially if there is an outlet
but you choose not to take it.*

*As I subversively changed
and branched
and tried
safety nets were in place
although I did not know that they were there.*

<i>My grandiose ideas</i>	<i>tempered by tradition</i>
<i>My idealistic views</i>	<i>tested with reality's apparent truths</i>
<i>My impractical methods</i>	<i>altered to include practicality</i>
<i>These reality checks that I never seemed to master on my own.</i>	

One of those nets stemmed from my staunch indoctrination that one master narrative exists (Clifford, 1986), a divinely-inspired work that guides our life decisions. As I taught preservice teachers and developed a rationale for induction programs, Bruner's (1986) range of possible stances emanating from change troubled me. It made sense that children (and adults) construct their own ways of making sense of what they see and experience. When "truth" is introduced in that context, I ran amuck. How could I use such an intersubjective worldview such as constructivism to guide my work?

A timely editorial in *Christian Home and School* sent from my father, the Christian school administrator, perpetuated the struggle. The author reveals his perceived danger regarding constructivism as a worldview: each of us can construct our own reality. He proceeds to base his fear of constructivist teaching practices as rooted in the premise that all truth is not relative. "Students must hear teachers say, 'Here is what the Lord says' and 'God owns the whole world

and loves it; here's how this little piece fits into the whole picture'" (Vander Ark, 2001, p. 34).

Other writers in the Christian arena share his concern. Van Brummelen (1994) fears science instruction in which students confront evidence that contradicts their non-scientific thinking, so that by changing their conceptions they may bring order to their world. Van Dyk claims that constructivism arises from a postmodern spirit by seeing the individual teacher dealing with an unstructured classroom reality rather than responding "truthfully" in normative ways (2001, p. 44).

Perhaps these writers were reacting to the strong words of radical constructivist von Glaserfeld: "[W]e cannot know such a thing as an independent objective world that stands apart from our experience of it" (Schwandt, 1994). His words stand in direct opposition to words from John 1:1-3 in the Bible: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (The New International Version Study Bible, 1985).

I hoped that Gergen's (1985) work with social constructivism would alleviate my theoretical fears. Unfortunately, his ontological stance is rooted in linguistic relativism, claiming that language is the only reality people know, stemming from social interactions. I was comforted by his attention to the "systems of communities of shared intelligibility" that will be "governed by normative rules that are culturally and historically situated" (p. 271).

These readings left me frustrated, confused, and angered. As Christian conservatives such as R. C. Sproul proselytize the conspiracies of liberal government and schooling, I do not wish for an ignorant community of believers. I want to see Christians teaching in ways that dignify learners and coaching with a dual concern for process and results. I want to see Christian schools full of informed teachers and administrators that thoughtfully consider constructivist strategies

because these strategies align with the basic, organic thrust of their mission to serve unique children of God.

I am beginning to see my dilemma in terms of context. As a CFG coach, I can offer an environment that encourages novices to make sense of their schooling and teaching experiences. I can support them as they seek to make changes in their teaching practices to honor students' voices and prior experiences. If I were to serve a novice teacher learning community in a Christian institution, my role as a Christian leader may not change our interactional structures and analysis of student work, but our personal and collective Christian worldviews would play a pronounced role in our discussions about a teacher's role in the generation of knowledge.

I once thought that I could place my K-16 Christian schooling experiences into a file drawer and pull out certain manila pieces when the time was right. As I place myself as a future educational leader, it isn't so easy. As we live away from immediate family for longer and longer periods of time, we lose track of the inner workings of small communities, churches, and Christian schools. I didn't mind that at first. Now I'm not so sure.

It's time.

*Time to review our canons
and reexamine our practices.*

*Time to recommit my faith
and replenish my draining devotion.*

*Time to reevaluate our ends
and release our predetermined explanatory frames.*

*Time to revisit my ends-in-view
and reconstitute my acceptance of plurality.*

*Time to reconstruct our mission
and re-conceptualize our singularities.*

Time to restore constructivism as Creation

and repair decaying relationships and environments.

*Time to rediscover our own learning
and renew our commitment to continue.*

*Time to revive my heritage
and reconsider its place.*

It's time to honor the struggle and live the questions.

My first-year teaching assignment still plays in mind occasionally. Albeit in California, Ripon Christian Schools is a replica of a small, Midwestern town, fully equipped with a plethora of churches and pious folks. Considerably normal for a Christian school music teacher, 526 students/week depended on me to provide a rich musical experience in general and instrumental music. Highly-charged high schoolers at 8:30 am followed by fourth grade recorder students was typical. Attempting to revive sleepy Kindergarteners at the end of the teaching day capped the energy requirement. The other music teacher in this K-12 system was also new; albeit not new to teaching. She involuntarily served as my mentor, not an orientating mentor to organizational features and oddities, but an unknowing link regarding the complexities of student relationships and instructional interactions. She was not unwilling to assume this role I so developmentally needed, just not cognizant of her default position. Our interactions were not based on deficiencies I may have embodied as a novice teacher. She unknowingly affirmed my dedication to teaching by accepting my skills and appreciating what I contributed.

I teach preservice teachers that enroll in the same classes and move as cohorts. By creating learning experiences that capitalize on their common structure, I have learned a great deal about myself. Opportunities exist where students experience professional and personal affirmation, acceptance, and appreciation from their classmates. However, without their own positive self-concepts, growth is stifled. By watching and participating in these interactions, I

internalized the lesson and began to re-examine my teaching and learning history for experiences where I claimed to be desiring affirmation from others but truly wanted it from within.

I also came to realize that the cognitive dissonance (Fullan, 1993; Smylie, 1995) occasionally present within the cohort was powerful for them and myself. The structure that fosters acceptance also allows the productive disequilibrium (Lord, 1994) to develop. Those moments are when I felt the most positive about myself: struggling with deeply-embedded issues without easy answers. It was a different feeling than what I experienced when process-product research impacted my third grade classroom during my masters work. Implementing instructional changes like increasing wait time or equitably acknowledging boys and girls' responses yielded quick results but short-term satisfaction.

The cohort model was the only avenue I knew that could offer a collective experience that could be so rewarding for the participants. When Betty Bisplinghoff introduced me to CFGs, it became readily apparent that this structure could be what I was looking for.

As I continue to experience the power of narrative for myself and novice teachers, I know that my story needs to be told again and again. I had lived a life and experienced a life (Bruner, 1986), but my interpretation was limited. It lacked the oral rehearsal and multiple interpretations over time that narrative requires. It was tempting to accept culturally predetermined metaphors and popular collective analyses of my geographical, familial, and school histories. Narrative analysis offers authentic and rigorous scrutiny of how these histories intertwine to effect the construction of our current knowledge and theories.

My learning history has not included the conscious use of learning communities to assist in my development as a teacher and as a person. It may become what Greene (1995) envisions for community: "a space infused by the kind of imaginative awareness that enables those

involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming" (p. 39).

I offer these facts and facticities, how facts are lived and experienced (Denzin, 1989), to develop my hermeneutic at this point. I hope that it creates believable experiences, verisimilitude, as you further read my work with novice teachers. There is no final stanza or guiding question in this narrative. The cultural myth that lives have endings is not subscribed to here. My story continues through the methodology of portraiture.

Another Rehearsal

As a researcher, as an educator, and as a human, I was a different person one year ago when I offered a narrative representing my current understandings of my subjectivities. Just as the novice teachers in this study changed throughout our experiences together, as a portraiture, I acknowledge that I am a dynamic part of the research process as well. In fact, the ongoing portrait of this novice learning community is also a portrait of myself.

The research process changes us. Some qualitative researchers accept this fact, albeit tacitly, and proceed – their writing seemingly unaffected. Others choose research methods that descriptively document their own journey, appreciating that their selves are co-constructed by the participants they interact with.

My choice of portraiture indicates my allegiance to the latter group, a group that initially I thought was a bit too "touchy-feely" and out-of-touch with classrooms and students. Now I think I was more scared of the risk than anything else.

To choose risk certainly seems perilous. Reality television shows display humans who love the attention associated with publicly accepting hazardous situations. What seems more interesting to me is when people enter situations and accept risk, not for the fear of what will

happen if they do, but what might happen if they don't. If contestants on a television show choose not to participate, the ramifications are slight. What happens if the stakes are higher?

I don't believe that I entered research naïvely or ignorant of the risk. I had read studies that had documented the twists and turns of researcher's journeys. I had talked to educational researchers who had engaged in risky research and lived to tell stories about the messiness of the work. However, it was completely different when it was your own study, your own participants, and your own learning.

I wish I had kept a "bullseye" like my participants: three concentric circles, the outermost labeled "comfort," next "risk," and finally "danger." Mine could have focused on the elements of the research process. I still offer some of my insights here using that tripartite framework.

Comfort

Like Shanna in this study felt about her students, I wanted the CFG members to feel comfortable in the group. It was important that we could develop a sense of a learning community in a short amount of time – not for the sake of having "positive" results to write about in a dissertation; instead, so the participants would experience the substance and sustenance of professional conversations.

I felt comfortable believing that. I have lived it in a CFG in which I am the youngest member. My university students have indicated that their program is forever marked by the community-building in my classes. Those experiences allowed them to dig deeper into themselves and into their students' learning because they felt more knowledgeable about themselves as learners.

To say that the meetings seemed to get easier as we progressed might sound like progress. Instead, I report that the work grew harder as we got to know each other and brought

our work forward. The first meeting, characterized by a text-based discussion about accountability and assessment, seemed like a conversation that was being taped for analysis. The participants commented on the presence of the recording equipment. I asked specific questions that I hoped would yield “juicy” material. I got my wish – an AERA presentation about novice teachers making sense of accountability.

However, as soon as authentic work entered our agendas, I found that my agenda also changed. I no longer found joy during meetings when I heard particular *a vivo* phrases. I did not wish to capitalize on situations, like a research vulture waiting for just the right dialogue. Instead, I entered the opus. I didn’t become attached to my participants per say; instead, I became attached, I daresay addicted, to the composing process. The conversations lured me in. The intense respect offered when one person’s work was examined intrigued me. The genuine affirmation and feedback provided for each other made me leave wanting more – more of those experiences for myself and more of those experiences for the newest members of our profession.

Risk

No more was available unless risks were taken. The novice teachers certainly assumed risk when they brought their work to the group. Katrina accepted the first invitation, offering a rubric for public consumption. Since it was the group’s first experience with analyzing each other’s work, it may have initially felt like the group was a collective lion, treating Katrina’s rubric like a young gazelle. If it felt like that for some, it did not deter their desire to participate. Shanna and Holly brought dilemmas and teacher work. Katrina even made a second appearance as a presenter with another piece of student work.

Comfort was approached through the sharing of success stories, which I participated in as well. However, these stories were not left suspended in the air between the storyteller and us. We

embraced the stories, searching for elements that may have made a difference for the storyteller and her characters. By embracing the stories, we also embraced risk. We accepted the risk as supported experiences and used it to continue building our relationships together.

I am not a risky person by nature. Ironic considering my tall stature, I despise heights. Consuming unknown foods causes instant indigestion. However, these risks were different. The structure not only allowed for the risks, it encouraged them. The group heard of my dad's stroke and my sister's new dating relationship. They silently wondered with me why I couldn't land a teaching job while my former students signed contracts. And it's all on tape. This wasn't about modeling for the group how to take risks. It was simply me, taking a risk, so I could continue to grow.

I reconstruct myself every time I engage in the work of collaboratively learning in meaningful ways. The experiences are not wishy-washy moments – Charlie Brown-esque scenarios where Lucy accuses him once again of not being able to demonstrate consistency. Instead, these experiences cause me to reconsider, to re-think current assumptions and understandings.

I co-facilitated a NSRF coaches' training two months after the data collection was completed. As the four facilitators lived collaborative work, demonstrated fluid, responsive agendas; and engaged in meaningful conversations about authentic dilemmas and student work, I willingly and joyously declared that I like the messiness of it all, not because it was risky, but because it was risky not to engage in the conversations that drove our decision-making.

Wheatley (2002) describes it as a “willingness to be disturbed.” Risking the comedic syntax, I wonder if these experiences prompt me to exhibit a “tendency to be disturbed.” Willing to be disturbed still implies choice – a conscious decision whether or not to be disturbed at that

particular moment. The decisions I make in terms of how to continue growing professionally and what work I choose to engage in as a vocation reflect an impulse to participate in meaningful work that requires a risk, for the alternative is unacceptable.

It was risky, methodologically, to assume that group members would eventually work through any issues with video and audio recordings. It was risky to pose a blank agenda to the group, hoping and praying that someone would email a response. It was risky to not take voracious field notes during meetings after I sensed that the group was concerned about what I was writing and how I was documenting my research.

Research without risks might seem wonderful to a member of an institutional review board. To a portraitist, it is devoid of meaning, absent of life.

Danger

Danger insinuates an immediate move to a safer place. It does not always imply physical harm or peril. In this experience, danger sometimes meant logistical challenges that directly impacted the group.

Meeting at my house for the January meeting seemed like a fine idea. Teachers would be able to leave their school environment, experience relief that they are removed from their students for an afternoon, and feel respected that their learning is valued enough to spend paid time experiencing it. Leaving school isn't always an easy task. Teammates have last-minute requests. Substitute teachers arrive late. Teachers sometimes worry about how their students will behave for a substitute. Stoplights do not realize that green is the only option. It became apparent to me in the minutes, and even hours, we waited for our colleagues that a change would be warranted.

A change in the building administration constituted a danger for me. I reacted by crafting complex nightmares of how to build relationships in record time, develop undying support in three steps or less, and provide a supportive structure for the novice teachers as they processed the change.

My nightmares were definitely unwarranted. The administrative change was smooth (see Chapter 5) and the novices didn't choose our time together to sort out their perspectives on the situation (see Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 3

VOICE AS A COMPOSER: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review of pertinent research studies is important for the portraitist. Since his voice is omnipresent in the work, it is vital to create an intellectual framework that details the assumptions he brings to the inquiry. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) call this activity “Voice as Preoccupation” (p. 93) and links to the autobiographical voice detailed previously.

My musical interpretation of preoccupation focuses on the composer. A composer of a symphony utilizes various musical themes and motifs to create a unified work of multiple pieces, multiple tempos, and multiple styles. Rarely is a musical motif played only once or not varied in some way. The musical idea can be inverted, added to, deleted from, played backward (retrograde), or even played in inversion and retrograde simultaneously. Empirical research is interpreted in similar ways to how composers alter their musical ideas. I have searched for the essential “motifs” in educational literature that will show relationships and links to my framework. I have selected relevant literature that can be viewed (or heard) together as a unified framework for using CFGs as induction support. The motifs that you hear presented are fresh because they have never been organized or interpreted in exactly this way.

This literature review builds on my understanding of what constituted this CFG of novice teachers. Instead of assuming a pre-determined definition by the National School Reform Faculty or other researchers, I created my own melody, using educational research to construct a harmonic backdrop for the work. The inclusion of other empirical work also provides boundaries for the gap in the literature that this study addressed. It is important to note that qualitative

research about novice teachers' experiences is quite thin. I built my case using the available research as well as the extensive studies focusing on preservice teacher education students.

Throughout this chapter, bolded words represent the definition I formed using grounded data. The definition grows throughout the chapter, adding a sentence at a time while providing rich educational literature as a backdrop.

**This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator
preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs.**

Perceptions of Induction Programs

Teacher induction is viewed in the literature as describing one of three situations: (a) the first year of a teacher's career in the classroom, (b) a period of transition where novices are socialized into the culture of teaching, and (c) a specific program, either formal or informal, often mandated by a legislative or governing body (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999).

In an early review of teacher induction practices, Huling-Austin (1990) described induction as "a planned program intended to provide some systematic and sustained assistance specifically to beginning teachers for at least one school year" (p. 536). Fideler and Haselkorn (1999) define induction as programs that "are designed to support, assist, train and assess teachers within the first three years of employment in public schools" (p. 13).

Huling-Austin's (1990) definition places the program squarely in year one of a novice teacher's career. It successfully avoids the inclusion of evaluation as part of the program, which is still a debate in the field of teacher induction and mentoring. "Assistance" connotes a wide variety of scaffolding activities, but "systematic and sustained" precludes orientation meetings that focus solely on district-mandated paperwork and insurance plans.

The second definition includes assessment as a component in a multi-year format. Critics problematize the relationship between a support provider and an assessor. However, induction programs are no longer limited to a framework of mentoring alone, so one person does not necessarily provide these seemingly dichotomous roles.

Some proponents of formative assessment strategies see induction programs as serving a developmental function and as a “gatekeeper”. The school district in Columbus, Ohio uses a Peer Assistance and Review program that provides assistance and offers recommendations regarding license renewal. Connecticut’s Beginning Educator Support and Training program delays licensure until standards are met using student work as evidence in a portfolio format (Lohr, 1999).

Fideler and Haselkorn’s definition also includes training as a purposeful factor. Alternative paths to teaching, especially in urban districts, are unavoidable in order to staff classrooms. Training employees in traditional teacher education courses, or specifically for teaching diverse populations is commonplace in districts in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999).

In their synthesis of 119 research-based teacher induction studies, Arends and Rigazio-DiGilio (2000) note program features and issues relating to induction, including mentor training, release time, reduced teaching load, role of the administrator, and specific topics for novice teachers (e.g., classroom management, stress management). What is not inherent in these programs are issues raised in particular contexts of teachers and student-specific issues related to child development, curriculum, and learning theory. Critical to their review is that moderate support exists for the claim that induction improves short-term retention rates, but no evidence exists that induction programs produce long-term results.

Teaching and Learning to Teach

The first year is an intensive and formative experience, full of complex interactions with a wide variety of stakeholders. Fuller's (1969) developmental model of teacher concerns postulates an initial phase where novices are focused on their own adequacy, a middle phase when they focus on their teaching behaviors, and a latter phase where the focus is on student learning. Veenman's (1984) influential review spanning 20 years of research offers teachers' perceived problems and concerns. Wang and Odell's (2002) recent review adds to this impressive line, focusing especially on the role of the mentor in novices' development.

While studies of beginning teaching do highlight common challenges experienced the first few years of teaching, they also legitimate a focus on self-defined problems (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999) and concerns rather than on the primary tasks of learning to teach. As Wildman and his colleagues so brilliantly shared: "New teachers have two jobs to do – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach" (Wildman et al., 1989, p. 471). It is certainly easy to follow this line of thinking, assuming predetermined deficiencies for novice teachers. These studies were focused on the content of mentoring relationships. What these researchers do not wonder about are novice teachers that meaningfully discuss their teaching practices within the context of a learning community.

The tendency in this perspective on teacher induction is to create programs that reduce stress and address problems and concerns but do not promote teacher development. Guided by a reform agenda that strongly correlates increased teacher learning with increased student achievement, two schools of thought exist as to how to serve novice teachers: offer individualized assistance (Fuller, 1969) and emotional support (Gold, 1996); or opportunities to develop common standards and improve practice through observation and professional dialogue

in a community of practice (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Either way, more research is needed about the place of induction in policy frameworks, especially the degree to which induction is integrated into a teacher development continuum (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999).

The Rookie

Induction in occupations other than education can involve the internalizing of occupational norms. This is difficult for educators where individual buildings often cannot agree on shared standards, much less the profession as a whole. Lortie's (1975) landmark ethnography on teacher socialization indicated that a dramatic conversion does not generally occur in the process of becoming a teacher. Starting at age five, many prospective teachers slowly assimilate culturally accepted practices and start to formulate their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

Teacher education programs serve as the gatekeeper into the profession, often forcing students to negotiate between their preconceived intents and practices of education with new professional readings and experiences. Goodlad (1990) describes the negotiation in classrooms as an operational decision rather than an intellectual one: "what works" is what goes.

Induction experiences grounded in this perspective focus on induction into *teaching*, not into *the profession*. Schools that seek to induct novices to help them fit into the existing structure are promoting continuity, not change (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). Even schools that claim to be restructuring may not be "reculturing" their community (Fullan, 2000). By altering structures, such as schedules to facilitate learning communities or offering mentoring and induction programs, administrators and external school reform movements can use highly visible changes as proof of positive growth (Elmore, 1995). Zeichner and Gore (1990) call for research that examines how novice teachers reconstruct the existing structures they are being socialized into.

Hollingsworth's (1992) collaboration with novice teachers heeded that call by offering opportunities for novices to clarify their own beliefs and to "recognize they were not wrong for holding other than standard school beliefs" (p. 400). Although not presented as a form of induction support, Hollingsworth's work offers a key finding for induction specialists. The novice teachers began to see themselves as knowledgeable for critiquing structures and content that were either supporting or hindering their work as teachers and learners. It took a learning community and a facilitator to offer this space in which these understandings could develop.

Gehrke (1991) concerns herself with the socialization aspect of teacher induction programs. She has looked to other social sciences, namely sociology, anthropology, and psychology, to formulate her theory. "It is unlikely that adults will become indiscriminately socialized to any role they really do not choose for themselves" (p. 234). Novice teachers may submit internally to behave within the norms of a chosen group, or may decide not to submit. Many socializing agents can be offered, even assigned, to the novice teacher, but they will have varying levels of success because the adult has some choice in the matter. From anthropology, Gehrke encourages the use of ceremonies and rituals, in the vein of cultural rites of passage. It is important to avoid the "Robinson Crusoe" phenomenon (Lortie, 1975) and not let the spatial, temporal, and organizational structures of school allow novice teachers to feel isolated.

These rituals are a way to develop a "helping community" (Gehrke, 1991). Dialogue is an integral, regular part of interactions. Novices can see that each week time has been sacredly guarded as time for professional dialogue. Everyone can take part and individual's process of making sense is accepted as valuable, natural, and right.

Programmatic Waves

The national shortage of teachers in the late 1950s prompted the Ford Foundation to offer grants to institutions of higher education that would create fifth-year programs that would extend teacher preparation. This internship year would focus on the integration of theory into practice. Some of these programs offered masters degrees and others targeted people with college degrees that wished to teach—alternative certification in its infancy. Master of arts in teaching (MAT) programs were born as was The Teacher Corps, that was federally funded in the 1960s and created another alternative path into teaching (Serpell, 2000). These programs were not designed to ease entry into teaching, rather they were dedicated to providing warm bodies to teach even warmer children. Combined with wage increases, these programs were successful in almost obliterating the teacher shortage. However, the cancellation of most of these recruitment incentives in the 1980s led to renewed shortages when student populations again soared (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

Induction programs, although many not labeled as such, existed prior to 1980 but were subject to the prevailing winds of budget cutting and legislative unresponsiveness. Three waves have existed (prior to 1986, 1986-1989, 1990-1996), but a fourth wave is predicted (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). The educational reforms of the 1980s produced a plethora of beginning teacher induction programs developed mainly by state education agencies. In numerous states, this action also served in response to state legislative mandates. The induction programs were crafted to help novices acquire teaching competence more comprehensively and be socialized into school district and specific school cultures more quickly (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Gold, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1990, 1992). Either overtly or covertly, these programs also sought to

increase teacher satisfaction, thus increasing teacher retention especially in the first five years (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000).

In 1992, 46 states had enacted beginning teacher evaluation programs or requirements and three states were considering programs. Some states labeled these as induction programs, and others did not because the programs may have included a component of evaluating novice teachers. Nebraska and Rhode Island were the lone states without policy addressing novice teachers (Serpell, 2000). This statistic was soon antiquated as funding for programs dissipated, leaving induction programs, whether or not they evaluated novice teachers, back to square one.

Since the plethora of induction programs in the 1980s, there is disagreement among the states regarding statewide induction programs. The landscape is a “crazy quilt” (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999) of activity because of the extreme variation in requirements and policies. Some of the specific squares are intentionally radical, as in the case of California that offers several models from which can districts can choose. Some have discontinued induction programs totally (Idaho, Arizona) and some still legislate their existence (Connecticut, Virginia). Some legislate without providing funding (Colorado, Texas), and others do not mandate their existence but still have them (Florida, Maine). New Mexico’s plan doesn’t seem to fit in any single category: not legislated, not funded, but exists and is required of all novice teachers. Specific school districts have constructed induction programs that have demonstrated effectiveness (Baltimore, Maryland; Medford, Oregon). Institutions of higher education have partnered with school districts in order to provide induction programs that serve both parties (Albuquerque Public Schools – University of New Mexico, eight school districts – Southwest Texas State University). Even local teachers’ unions have taken part in sustaining programs that support novice teachers (Peer Assistance and Review Program, Columbus, Ohio). It is difficult to stay abreast of

impending legislation in each of the fifty states. Consolidating several sources reveal that 34 states have induction policies as of December, 2000. Of these 34 states, 22 mandate and fund these programs. Seven states mandate them and do not offer funding (American Federation of Teachers, 2001; Education Commission of the States, 1999; Sweeny, 1998).

Recruiting New Teachers, a non-profit organization dedicated to addressing the shortage of qualified teachers in the United States, recently completed a national study of urban teacher induction programs and practices (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Surveys were the primary source of data collection, with telephone follow-up, site visits to exemplary programs, focus groups with first-year teachers, and document analysis of program evaluation studies, curricula and handbooks, and teacher contracts. Response rate to the 1,050 surveys mailed was particularly poor (8%), even after an additional 450 surveys were sent to members of the National Staff Development Council. However, the response from Great City School Districts was an impressive 81%. Membership into the Council of the Great City Schools includes one (or more) of the following: districts serving the largest city in a state, city population greater than 250,000 people, or student membership in excess of 25,000 students.

In their key findings, Fideler and Haselkorn (1999) report that only 16% of induction programs include any sort of self-assessment on the part of the novice. Without this valuable source for planning, 90% of programs include classroom management as a major focus. 70% of the programs that returned the 16-page survey report individualized induction-related activities. This statistic is misleading because activities conducted with a mentor can be considered individualized. Concerning group activities, 39% reported any time dedicated to reflecting on practice and 21% offer teacher-led inquiry. As for the socialization aspect, 91% qualify orientation to paperwork in this regard, as well as the 31% (only 36 surveys) that view

psychological report as a valuable activity to include in inductee programming. This does not connect with the 90% of the respondents that rated “reducing stress/burnout” as one of their most important program goals. The word “psychological” may have been misleading to the respondents because numerous programs cited “personal support” as a high priority as well. The differentiation between “psychological” and “personal” may have been problematic.

Possibly the most profound finding of the Recruiting New Teachers study were the areas in which program directors reported the highest achievements in their programs: improving new teachers’ knowledge, skills, performance; providing personal support; introducing inductees to school system norms/procedures; and acculturating inductees to school system values (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Lack of program evaluation and disconnects between reported activities (e.g., 31% offering psychological support) and achievements discount these program director perceptions.

A paradox exists between labeling novice teachers as a group with deficient knowledge and skills but requiring them to perform the same job with the same expectations as veteran teachers. Induction programs seek to pacify this situation by seducing, “influencing by attraction” (Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995), novices into specific school cultures that harbor norms and expectations that may remain foreign to the newcomers.

Purposes of Induction Programs

Several reviews of teacher induction literature agree on the current five major purposes of induction programs:

1. to improve student achievement through improving performance of beginning teachers.
2. to promote personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers.

3. to transmit the culture of the school and school system to beginning teachers.
4. to increase the retention of beginning teachers.
5. to satisfy legal requirements related to induction, most recently to evaluate fairly the work of beginning teachers so judgment can be made about employment and state licensure. (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000; Huling-Austin, 1990, 1992)

In addition, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has revised standards and criterion in recent years that require relationships and support to graduates (Ishler & Selke, 1994; NCATE, 2000). The Georgia Board of Regents followed suit in 2001, requiring universities to guarantee the quality of their graduates, assessing their abilities after two years and providing training free of charge to the student or district (Georgia Board of Regents, 2001).

These differ from original purposes of induction programs from the 1980s. Student achievement, teacher retention, and satisfying mandated requirements were missing from the list. Many programs overtly set goals of improving teaching skills and resolving beginning teachers' predictable concerns (Serpell, 2000). Based on their program evaluations of three large high schools, Zepeda and Ponticell (1997) advocate induction programs that are clear as "to what they want the beginning teacher to learn and from whom" (p. 20). They assert that lessons learned from a silent school culture are debilitating to the novice teacher as well as their students.

In recent years, researchers have begun to examine more deeply the content embedded within induction programs. Veenman's (1984) review guides many induction program developers into believing that instructional support must be founded on providing classroom management and discipline techniques. Feiman-Nemser (2001) disagrees, asserting that these types of management crises arise because teachers are unclear about larger issues. Teachers may have an ambiguous lesson purpose, offer vague directions, and plan inappropriate learning tasks.

She advocates for assistance in these areas. The “missing paradigm” is subject matter, according to Shulman (1986). Content is not included in most research designs when analyzing classroom interactions and lessons. Including this paradigm in research on teacher induction programs is an important addition.

Overall, the research on induction program success is survey-based and assesses program effectiveness in terms of participant satisfaction. There is very little empirical support that validates induction as a construct (Lawson, 1992) or an opportunity to impact students’ learning or teachers’ practices in meaningful ways. Therefore, regardless of the propensity of induction researchers to create volumes of case studies, the lack of cross-program comparisons does little to establish a strong theoretical model (Serpell, 2000).

This study offers descriptions of dialogue between novices as they struggle with accountability, colleagues, and their own expectations. It provides needed research examining an induction practice in Georgia that prioritizes teachers’ learning.

This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs. The group of first-year teachers formed a learning community, building on each other’s expertise and experiences.

Everyone is a Learner and has Expertise

Expertise is often reserved for individuals that demonstrate a proven effectiveness in a certain function. Research designs in sports studies examine the intuitive powers of expert coaches. A growing body of research exists in instructional supervision that poses a relationship between intuition and effective supervisory experiences. Instead of being reserved for a distinct few, expertise viewed broadly seeks to break down the power structure that exists when someone

is labeled as an expert, resulting in a more horizontal structure in which all members are respected as knowledgeable members of a common learning community.

A problematic consideration of the nature of expertise is found in the work of Scardamalia and Bereiter (1993). They see expertise composed of formal and informal knowledge. “Formal knowledge is publicly presented knowledge, which is socially negotiated and can be explicitly taught and shared. In contrast, informal knowledge is hidden and tacit, not existing as rules that can be explicated” (Lohman & Woolf, 1998, p. 284). Informal knowledge is gained through numerous past experiences as well as specific experiences where formal knowledge was put into practice. In this frame, novice teachers are classified deficient on a teaching faculty simply because they do not have the quantity of informal knowledge-building experiences that lead to expertise.

In Sergiovanni’s (1992) discussion about congeniality versus collegiality in schools, he notes the necessity of mutual respect as the foundational virtue for collaboration to take place. “One who has respect for someone’s special knowledge and skills will be confident that he or she will act knowledgeably and skillfully” (Ihara, 1988, p. 58). In the case of novice teachers, deficit-ridden statements by veteran teachers negate contributions of beginning teachers. Even well-intentioned colleagues often believe that they just need to learn what capabilities these new educators could tender. The power of expertise in all staff members requires a respect for the teacher as a professional, a member of the profession: “Respect for a professional’s commitment to professional idealized standards also entails [a] kind of confidence – concerning not the person’s capacities, but his or her intentions” (Ihara, 1988, p. 58).

Newmann and associates (1996), in a study of 24 restructuring schools, note that in more successful schools, professional development tended to be focused on groups of teachers within

the school or the faculty as a whole. Making use of internal as well as external expertise, staff development activities took advantage of local skills and sharing of effective practice.

Including internal experts as staff developers reinforced teachers' sense of commitment to their school's goals. It appears in this situation that the restructuring schools may have been successful in reorganizing existing structures, but not in reconceptualizing the interactions of teachers and the nature of teacher learning.

The last twenty years has elevated the importance of teacher learning in a quest to reform public education. A tacit assumption has been made that teachers who know more teach better. This supposition has surfaced in the arenas of policy, research, and practice. Dueling camps press for studies and professional development opportunities that promote knowledge either as codified and research-based or practical and normative. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) label these groups as "knowledge-for-practice" and "knowledge-in-practice" respectively. They propose the construct of "inquiry as stance" in which "knowledge-of-practice" is the guiding principle. Using this frame, both knowledge generation and knowledge use are inherently problematic. Knowledge is socially constructed, intimately connected to the knower, and relevant in a variety of situations. Teachers use this constructed knowledge across their career lifespan to make judgments, forge connections, and theorize across practice. Their classrooms are sites for inquiry, where individual students and occurrences are linked to the experiences and perceptions of other practitioners and theorists. This theory of knowing does not recognize a chasm between expert and novice. In fact, expertise "is inconsistent with the image of the teacher as lifelong learner and inquirer" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 293). Expertise may imply certainty while lifelong learning implies experimentation and a cycle of inquiry that is context-

specific. CFGs offer teachers a space to honor their contexts and particular students while clarifying their areas of inquiry.

Lohman and Woolf (1998) have a limited scope of teachers' opportunities to learn. "Schools are thought of as places where students learn...they are also places where teachers work" (p. 276). By choosing "work" instead of "learn," a dichotomy is formed implying that teachers are either learning or working. In their synopsis of teachers' learning needs, Lohman and Woolf cite four areas: developing expertise in teaching and learning, special education, computer technology, and participation in school management. However, in a further section, the authors mention lack of context specificity as a major problem with current professional development opportunities. If learning and working cannot exist concurrently, then any list of teaching needs cannot meet the standard of context specificity. Cochran-Smith (1991) poses the paradox of context specificity: "It is only in the apparent 'narrowness' of work in particular classrooms and in the 'boundedness' of discussion of highly-contextualized instances of practice that [student] teachers actually have opportunities to confront the broadest themes of reform" (p. 307).

Respecting all teachers in a school is a positive step toward creating a school climate that is conducive for profitable teaching and learning. Respecting all teachers as learners cuts deeper into the fabric of the community, exposing contradictions between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and teachers and structures. Respecting all teachers as learners that are capable of change using reflective self-analysis is the mantra of educators who believe that CFGs are meaningful structures that make a difference.

Learning Communities

Researchers offer remarkably similar (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) conclusions about organizational improvement, regardless of their backgrounds of leadership, business, educational research, and educational policy:

“Every enterprise has to become a learning institution [and] a teaching institution. Organizations that build continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century” (Drucker, 1992, p. 108).

“Preferred organizations will be learning organizations” (Handy, 1995, p. 55).

“If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37).

“The Commission [National Commission On Teaching and America’s Future] recommends that schools be restructured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching, and teach for understanding” (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 198).

In their synthesis of research on learning communities, DuFour and Eaker (1998) posit characteristics of professional learning communities. Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) pose strikingly similar tenets in their oft-cited list from the literature on school reform.

Table 2. Characteristics of learning communities.

DuFour and Eaker, 1998	Kruse et al., 1994
shared mission, vision, and values	shared norms and values

collective inquiry	reflective dialogue
collaborative teams	collaboration
action orientation and experimentation continuous improvement	deprivatized practice
results orientation	collective focus on student learning

The task of preparing students to function as a part of a global and collaborative culture dominated professional development opportunities of the 1980s. Cooperative learning strategies were claimed as the cure-all and group work was the accepted structure in conference rooms, laboratories, as well as public school classrooms. Slowly developing behind this trend were the adult variations: learning communities, communities of practice, and learning organizations.

In the work of Newmann and his associates at the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, preliminary findings of 15 restructured schools suggest that human resources are more critical to the development of a professional learning community than structural conditions (Kruse et al., 1994). The culture and climate of a school are constituted by the amount of trust, respect, openness to improvement, supportive leadership, and socialization present. The generation of these characteristics have a greater impact on the effectiveness of reform and restructuring than structural components, such as time to meet and talk, physical proximity of colleagues, and teacher empowerment. Extensive mixed method analysis of 24 of the restructuring schools concur (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996).

Portraits of schools in *The Good High School* by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) reinforce the power of local actors on the scene to create conversations and find shared

meanings. Voices of teachers were significant and each individual context was prioritized in making sense of local decision-making processes.

Whole-faculty Study Groups

Whole-faculty study groups have been one form of learning community that has emerged out of calls for reform from researchers and legislators (Mullen & Lick, 1999; Murphy, 1992, 1995; Murphy & Lick, 1998). This approach is designed that teachers can set their own learning agenda and implement their findings for the benefit of their students, themselves, and their school. The study groups are “teacher-centered, inspire reflection, give opportunities for experimentation, provide authentic learning experiences, and motivate teachers to go beyond traditional boundaries and construct new learnings and meanings” (Lick, 2000, p. 44).

Lick (2000) and Murphy (1991) report the findings of a middle school that implemented required whole-faculty study groups, where members either studied a book together or explored new teaching strategies – all in support of increased student achievement and decreased negative student behavior. For two years, all faculty attended similar training programs and met in study groups. Over 60% of the students reached promotion standards, the school’s rank in writing skills rose from eleventh to third, and out-of-school suspensions decreased from 343 to 124.

It is important to note that the researchers did not account for other sociocultural factors that play a role in change among teachers’ beliefs and practices: “Other factors stayed the same as they were during the year prior to the initiative” (Lick, 2000, p. 45). Also, using the ranking of other schools’ writing skills is problematic to assess the student achievement at the school where the intervention is taking place. Finally, it is concerning that the researchers claim that study groups provide authentic learning experiences for teachers, but in this middle school initiative teachers were *required* to attend specific meetings, implement specific teaching strategies, and

read certain books. It seems clear that the end-in-view for this project was not for teachers to learn but to perform.

Murphy's (1991, 1992, 1995) extensive work with whole-faculty study groups places context at the center of the problem-solving cycle for a faculty. This is problematic because she assumes the same context for all teachers at a particular site. It would be more accurate to state that a piece of the teachers' context is the same, but each teacher's individual classroom context is unique. Murphy's claim that the study group process "takes the focus off the individual" (1995, p. 41) further exacerbates the focus on collective responsibility without claiming focused time examining personal assumptions and practices of teaching and learning. Only then can individual transformation be used as the foundation for organizational learning. It is the shift of mind that transforms who we are and how we act (Marsick & Watkins, 1992) and is at the heart of organizational learning (Senge, 1990).

CFGs can provide a space for teachers to engage in authentic inquiry that must address sociocultural factors present in any description of students and their work. Individual accountability prerequisite for the collective accountability that whole-faculty study groups claim to offer.

Communities of Practice

Although it bears resemblances to learning organizations, the community of practice framework did not originate in the organizational development literature. Lave and Wenger's (1991) seminal study of various communities, including midwives, tailors, and butchers attempted to capture these members negotiating meaning and how these shared meanings influenced their daily practices. Like learning organizations, communities of practice (or "learning communities") surface from a common desire to improve existing conditions,

participate in collaborative reflection and dialogue, and ultimately, share common tools, understandings, and a worldview (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). One way in which these two groupings are different is that communities of practice are not limited geographically or organizationally. Their members may be diverse and members of other communities of practice concurrently. Also, communities of practice seek to share their knowledge publicly to improve the field at large.

Wesley and Buysse (2001) approach this distinction from their field of early childhood intervention in special education. Their analysis of group collaboration strategies differentiate between communities of practice, learning organizations, action research, learning communities in higher education, and professional development schools. Even though similarities exist regarding ongoing reflection and inquiry practices, the authors seek diverse expertise in their work with community organizations and families because children “do not fall neatly into disciplines” (p. 118).

Educational researchers have usurped this concept to help make sense of teachers’ thinking in various contexts. Kinnucan-Welsch and Jenlink (1998) offered professional development opportunities to teachers who wished to explore constructivist pedagogy. Three cadres of teachers were formed over separate summers that met for two weeks for an immersion experience at a campsite. The first week encompassed participants examining and questioning their own philosophies, values, and beliefs about teaching and learning. Dialogue was elicited through shared readings that questioned the validity of teacher-directed, behaviorist instruction. The second week was a key component to the process. Area students descended on the campsite and participated in a student-directed exploration of solving a real-life problem. As co-learners

with the students, the teacher participants approached the problem context without predetermined solutions that the students were expected to discover.

The researchers discovered the importance of sociocultural contexts in creating relevant and authentic opportunities for teachers to learn. In Cadre Two, the organizers attempted to implement an activity that Cadre One had created to benefit their work. The activity was executed in Cadre Two but lacked any real meaning, as shared by the participants in their personal reflections (Kinnucan-Welsch & Jenlink, 1998).

A community of practice was created with elementary science teachers as part of a professional development effort (Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). In response to national standards and local mandates, the two university educators, Palincsar and Magnusson, crafted constructivist learning experiences that would help the teachers focus on inquiry-based science teaching. Even though the group worked together for a short week, the experience was powerful enough to instigate two separate learning communities that continued meeting after the study concluded. The authors note interdependency as the key tenet to their community of practice. Responsibility and authority were shared, thus offering a professional development opportunity markedly different than the teachers' past experiences.

Learning Organizations

Starkey (1996) visualizes the learning organization as a metaphor for individual self-development within a continuously self-transforming organization. The organization has no agenda for change, either internally or externally mandated. Rather, individuals' desire to learn drives the system.

The learning organization concept is based, in part, on Schön's (1983) work on reflection and was first popularized by Peter Senge (1990). Although developed for the business world,

Senge's work has been used to examine the structures of education that claim to be constructed for optimal learning. His five disciplines (personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systemic thinking) are lifelong programs of study and practice that share reflective practice as their common core (Wesley & Buysse, 2001).

Although all five of the disciplines may apply in meaningful ways to using CFGs, systemic thinking is particularly relevant. Systemic thinking focuses on the interrelatedness of forces at work within an organization (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). The systemic structures are often invisible until conscious participants examine choices that have been made or are being made to institute the structures. Learning organizations that embody this discipline have crafted a community where it is safe and acceptable to engage in generative conversation that critically examines environments and structures. These groups experiment with new ideas. A common language is developed that further provides a basis for these conversations.

A learning organization may have several distinct learning communities present within its structure. Each of these communities may function discretely with varied interpretations of the shared vision and mental models the organization may claim to demonstrate. Educators who participate in CFGs may align themselves closely with Senge's thinking about critically and systemically "troubling" their contexts. However, CFGs may claim a specific agenda for change. Their members' occupation requires a realization that humans are constantly reconstructing experience, which changes their current understandings. Without an overt declaration of change, a CFG would be attempting to understand and possibly solve the past, instead of creating new understandings for present and future work.

Collegiality

The conception of collegiality in Little's (1990) seminal work is guided by the examination of the strength of collegial ties and the content of the relationships. The strength is scrutinized through the degree of influence the collegiality has on teachers' practice or commitments. Content is determined by pursuing the beliefs, ideas, and intentions that are collectively held.

Privacy and collegiality have been framed in dichotomous ways, failing to distinguish between strong or weak forms of teacher interactions (Little & McLaughlin, 1993). Little's heuristic regarding collegiality utilizes four conceptions as ideal types. *Storytelling and scanning for ideas* may involve teachers socializing, swapping tales of their own children or recent junkets across the state. These opportunistic contacts exhibit casual camaraderie but remain far from the social ramifications of daily practice in the classroom. This ideal type is founded on teacher autonomy: "the freedom from scrutiny and the largely unexamined right to exercise personal preference" (1990, p. 513). Competence is achieved through independent trial and error, thus condoning a culture of individualism. Little is careful to acknowledge the scant research base; she calls for more case studies on teachers' stories that display deep analysis and reflection on specific incidents and children. Certainly action research (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998) and narrative techniques (Hankins, 1998) have helped to address this deficit. Anna Richert Ershler's (2001) work with narratives in novice teacher learning communities is also encouraging.

The second ideal type Little drew from her own work and previous studies is *aid and assistance*. Perhaps the most pervasive expectation among teachers is that colleagues will give help when asked. However, there is a closely guarded line between offering advice and appearing to interfere in a colleague's work. The problem appears to be one of talking about

teaching or talking about *teachers*. Veterans even have difficulty surpassing this occupational norm when functioning as a mentor of preservice teachers (Elliot & Calderhead, 1993; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1993; Haggerty, 1995).

Routine *sharing* is the third ideal type. The intent is for widespread, routine sharing that allows for a pattern of choices to be formulated. This is a step beyond the fragmented, atomized periodic advice-giving and sharing. Even though the term sharing seems to invite extensive opportunities for robust dialogue, the occasions vary in scope and depth. Examining student work is not enough to automatically classify a grade level discussion as meaningful and worthwhile.

Interdependence is the nucleus of *joint work*, the final ideal type. Joint work does not presuppose that teachers must agree on a common topic or a common course of action, although this may be the case. Teachers may also agree that they will design their time together using a common set of basic priorities that will guide the independent choices of individual teachers. Interdependency in schools is rare; teachers generally identify one “essential” faculty member without whom they would be unable to do their job (Pellegrin, 1976). Even schools labeled as collaborative, by researchers or themselves, often “highlight the socioemotional support that teachers offer one another ... they offer fewer examples of teachers who somehow balance personal support with hard-nosed deliberation about present practice and future direction” (Little, 1990b, p. 520). A collective autonomy is accepted that does not require consensus of thought. Staff members’ beliefs are more publicly known and considered, possibly considered the most by other staff members that espouse conflicting beliefs.

Teachers’ defensive behaviors, aimed at those who attempt to minimize their time spent with students in lieu of collegial interactions, increase teacher isolationism (Bakkenes et al.,

1999). The response is spending increased time with students and attending to their needs. This can lead to increased self-efficacy, which is directly correlated to teacher retention (Smylie, 1995).

Therefore, the key is to create a learning community in which teachers want to be involved because their students will benefit (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997). To collect data on five Coalition schools, researchers used an interactive methodology called collaborative inquiry where weeklong site visits were condensed into written snapshots constructed by observations, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts collected from teachers and students. Multiple researchers reviewed snapshots and one composite image was created of each site. In preliminary findings, the researchers report that civil discourse was a “puzzle piece” that was integral in the construction of these productive learning communities. These thoughtful conversations were respectfully conducted and, more importantly, were relevant to intellectual discussions of student achievement. “Discussions to develop simple policies concerning attendance, tardiness, hats, or classroom behavior – crucial concerns in our five study schools – could rarely be sustained” (p. 696). Teachers in these restructuring schools began to see how conversations with colleagues could directly benefit their work with students, thus discouraging teacher isolation.

Wallace (1998) observed three pairs of teachers involved in a program called Supervision for Growth. He contracted with the teachers to be a morning teaching assistant once/week during the five-month study. In addition, Wallace observed colleague interactions before, during, and after observations made by the pair in each other’s classrooms.

One outcome from the program was that the teachers focused their thinking on one aspect of their practice. However, most of this reflection occurred individually. The program did not offer any structures that would support dialogue between colleagues to positively affect teachers’

thinking or practices. Wallace (1998) questions whether any significant insights resulted at all, posing that much of the interaction was contrived for the purposes of the program. “The failure of these teacher development approaches has been attributed to various factors, one of which is lack of teacher commitment to the process due to conflicts between teachers’ own norms and values and those imposed externally by the approach taken” (da Costa, 1995, p. 407).

It is apparent that the conversations between the pairs were dependent on the prior relationship between the individual members. Amanda and Geoff were friends and claimed to be colleagues prior to the program, but conversations between them focused on superficial aspects of teaching. For instance, neither of them recorded any observational data in each other’s classrooms. If any reflective conversation occurred, it focused on the lesson and what would change “next time.” No data were offered that supported “reflection-in-action” (Schön, 1983). Wallace (1998) asserts that one of the teachers “constantly examined how well she was delivering her program by considering its effects on individual students” (p. 87), but no context is offered to determine whether these occurrences were connected to the presence and inclusion of a colleague in the professional development plan.

Meier identifies that with friendship comes responsibility. She advocates that “teachers ... accept responsibility for both their own and their colleagues’ teaching” (Meier, 1995, p. 143). Two fourth grade teachers had been involved in several formal collegial activities—“carefully planned activities to promote conversation about practice” (Hole, 1997, p. 6). Hole’s study describes an informal scenario between himself and another fourth grade teacher where he offered feedback on a classroom process to another teacher in front of students. As students became involved in the social construction of teaching knowledge, they offered alternative methods of approaching the process.

Barth (1990) points out that collegiality is often mistaken for congeniality. A tight-knit social group may exude kindness, loyalty, a sense of trust, and easy conversation. These conversations are often a welcome diversion from teaching (Johnson, 1990), supported by social norms that have emerged as a by-product of leadership founded on psychological authority. Collegiality does not need congeniality in order to exist; rather, it requires mutual respect. The foundation for collegiality is formed on the norms and values of meaningful and authentic collaborative work, not the social norms of an informal culture.

These norms are summarized by Little (1987) as she addresses professional reciprocity. “[Team members] create trust as the consequence, not the precondition, of close interaction by displaying professional reciprocity clearly and concretely” (p. 512). Guarantors of reciprocity are developing a *shared language* for describing and analyzing classroom dilemmas, *predictability* for the structures that guide time spent with the group, professional dialogue that concentrates on *practices and their consequences* rather than on people and idiosyncrasies, and *equal sharing* in the risk to work hard and possibly fail.

A case study of two Flemish primary schools focused on the tension between autonomy and collegiality (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000). Researchers pose a theory that requires a circular tension, not a polar tension between autonomy and collegiality. In these schools, “even modest learning experiences originate more easily” (p. 98). They assert that learning spaces must be fostered where teachers can have conversations. In their review on literature, Clement and Vandenberghe synthesize Little’s (1990) continuum of collegiality: storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing, and joint work. The researchers criticize Little’s definition of joint work as leaving little room for teachers’ autonomy because it is responsive to larger institutional purposes and vulnerable to external manipulations. However, they ignore Little’s

own struggle with retaining “a place for respected and competent independent practice” (Little, 1990b, p. 513). With this bias, Clement and Vandenberghe err on the side of autonomy, offering shallow findings. Teachers’ lunch conversations about individual students are qualified as “more profound” variants of collegiality. Little would vehemently disagree, qualifying these interactions as weak collegial ties based on social connections rather than professional ties.

Critical colleagueship (Lord, 1994) moves beyond sharing ideas or supporting colleagues in the change process. “It involves confronting traditional practice – the teacher’s own and that of his or her colleagues – with an eye toward wholesale revision” (p. 192). Critical colleagues embody virtues that increase each other’s comfort level with ambiguity, which will be a regular feature of teaching for understanding. They develop and hone skills associated with improved communication, resolution of competing interests, and understanding colleagues’ dilemmas. Productive disequilibrium is achieved and sustained through personal and collective reflection and struggle. Collective generativity is realized – the inquiry cycle continues with ongoing critique. Although Lord’s work is not referenced, Hollingsworth (1992) noted similarities to this concept in her work with novice teachers.

McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) concluded that subject area departments with a high degree of collegiality seemed to have teachers who were continuously trying to improve their practice. They defined collegiality as teachers talking freely with each other about their practice and visiting each other’s classrooms.

Only school leaders who are serious about the value of collegiality can and will foster an environment where collegiality can thrive. Rosenholtz (1989) found that fiscal considerations and bureaucratic scheduling shackles did not hinder effective principals from promoting collegiality. Little’s (1987) research noted that leaders dedicated to norms of collegiality clearly

communicated these expectations, as well as modeled them. They worked directly with teachers in matters of school improvement and renewal and rewarded collegial behaviors in faculty members.

However, administrators who push for collegiality by altering existing structures and introducing innovations without examining the norm structure and existing culture of the school may be superimposing a false sense of collegiality that will not be accepted by the population (Grimmitt, Rostad & Ford, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992). Lord (1994) terms this “artificial collegiality,” while Hargreaves (1991) introduced the phenomenon as “contrived collegiality”:

formal, specific bureaucratic procedures to increase the attention being given to joint teacher planning and consultation. It can be seen in initiatives such as peer coaching, mentor teaching, joint planning and specially provided rooms, formally scheduled meetings, and clear job descriptions and training programs for those in consultative roles. These sorts of initiatives are administrative contrivances designed to get collegiality going in schools where little has existed before. (p. 6)

These sorts of measures can actually compromise teachers’ professional autonomy and serve to undermine the intent of the collegial opportunities, which can be seen by the comparison in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparing forms of collegiality.

Contrived collegiality	Collaborative cultures
Administration regulates	Spontaneous
Compulsory activities	Voluntary activities
Implementation-oriented	Developmental-oriented
Fixed in time and space	Pervasive across time and space

Hargreaves (1991) noted these dichotomous characteristics in his study interviewing 14 teachers and six principals in six elementary schools. Each site had a mandated shared planning time that required consultation with special education teachers and participation in a peer coaching program. A major finding indicated that contrived collegiality is not just indicative of individual administrators, but representative of systems that offer rhetoric about teacher empowerment but employ tactics that centralize responsibility and control.

Members of CFGs yearn for the interdependency that exists in truly collegial and collaborative learning communities. The joint work in which members engage is authentic and public. It is foreseeable that a CFG may reflect all of Little's (1990) four descriptors during the course of a year, or even in one particular meeting.

Teacher Isolationism

Privatism (Lortie, 1975) can progress to isolationism in public school teachers. Empirical work details the isolated existence of some elementary school teachers. Novice teachers, often subject to the lowest-valued classrooms, may be physically isolated from other teachers. Novices may also feel lonely adjusting to the lack of adult contact that occurs in schooling practices. Administrators may unknowingly isolate teachers by not supporting their decisions on assessment or discipline.

Leading researchers in the area of teacher isolation have used the following as a guiding definition: the extent to which teachers are limited from or limit themselves from collegial interactions in a school (Bakkenes, deBrabander, & Imants, 1999; Forsyth & Hoy, 1978). Isolates in a school environment are influenced very little by colleagues and have little influence on their co-workers.

The opportunities for novice teachers to partake in professional conversations may be diminished even further simply due to the isolation of being the only adult in the classroom. To meet this need, opportunities to interact with adults often becomes social and not a platform for professional conversations about practice. They rarely discuss or request assistance with significant classroom issues (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, as cited in Gratch, 1998). Clarke (1995) reports that peer interaction, and interaction with pupils and instructors bring about development and change in student teachers (Talvitie, Peltokallio, & Männistö, 2000). These collegial environments are imperative for self-confidence, reduced anxiety, and changes in behaviors to occur in novice teachers (Wilkins-Canter, 1996).

However, other empirical studies of teacher isolation found that the phenomenon was not due to physical or social arrangements or even the way teachers interpreted their workplace (Bakkenes et al., 1999; Rosenholtz, 1989). Instead, teachers were conscious of their isolation and used it to carve out instructional quality in the face of time restraints. These teachers sought to avoid interruptions and unnecessary communication (Flinders, 1988). Using the social exchange theory to interpret their findings in primary schools (PreK-6), Dutch researchers posit that teachers utilize defensive behaviors in order to guard the time that they spend with their students (Bakkenes et al., 1999). The work with the students is of primary importance when teachers formulate their professional identities. When collegial exchange is an option, teachers make decisions about when to communicate and whom to communicate with in light of the work with students. In fact, isolated teachers avoid tasks that may require teacher collaboration, such as shared governance (Little, 1990a) or school policy (Bakkenes et al., 1999). Even though the 76 teachers in the Dutch primary schools shared their distaste for excessive grading, they viewed it as pupil-oriented as opposed to school-oriented activities, such as meetings and consultations.

Isolated teachers may engage in self-fulfilling prophecies by “convincing themselves that they are alone, that few others suffer similar teaching dilemmas and are in need of collegial assistance, and that many classroom problems simply have no solutions” (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 430). This individualism weakens social unity and compromises the public good. Individuality can offer principled dissent and supply initiative for other colleagues (Huberman, 1992).

Huberman (1992) notes that classrooms are structurally independent, and furthermore, teachers report that the most important professional value is working alone on their craft. Lieberman and Miller (1991) suggest that teachers respond to the unspoken role, “be private,” because to admit any failure in the classroom is to lose face.

Instead, collaborative schools inherently view and define teaching as a difficult task (Rosenholtz, 1989). When examining schools as workplaces for adults, Rosenholtz visited 78 elementary schools in Tennessee. She notes that the norms of self-reliance in isolated teachers appear selfish. The New Teacher Groups formed by Rogers and Babinski (1999) attempt to circumvent that selfishness. They desired to honor the voices of new practitioners and give them a scheduled opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and to investigate the novice teachers’ perception on whether this framework for providing support was helpful. The first group began in 1995 with five elementary teachers from four diverse schools. Eight groups were added over the next two school years.

Two-thirds of the participants faithfully attended the meetings in order to receive the support that they perceived to not be available anywhere else. Participants valued the discussions of new ideas and insights about themselves. The most intriguing finding was that the novice teachers placed importance on listening to others and having others listen carefully to them (Rogers & Babinski, 1999).

CFGs support the collective, public acknowledgement that teaching is a difficult task. The CFG itself privileges time spent with students and uses those interactions as a basis of the inquiry, thus encouraging isolates – that may view collaboration as another powerful influence drawing them away from their students – that CFGs are relevant and authentic. The use of protocols provide focused looks at work that isn't ancillary to teachers' work; rather, participants are focused on the hearts of who they serve – their students.

The educational literature examining novice teacher learning communities is scarce and largely anecdotal. Researchers have pursued opportunities that placed novice teachers in a deficit model, lacking the expertise to participate in critical work. This study is grounded in the belief that all teachers are learners and have experiences that shape their perspectives about their students, their content, and their practices.

This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs. The group of first-year teachers formed a learning community, building on each other's expertise and experiences. Publicly sharing authentic work, dilemmas of practice, and successes constituted meeting agendas.

Improve Practice by Making it Public

Little (1987) jokes that open-space schools offer a public viewing of teaching by default of the architectural design. A body of research exists that examined the amount of mutual influence teachers exhibited in the open school era of the 1970s (e.g., Bredo, 1977; Meyer, Cohen, Brunetti, Molnar, & Lueders-Salmon, 1971). However, it takes more than sheer visibility to achieve a reciprocal respect and influence on the practice of teaching.

In his landmark work, Lortie (1975) offers “privatism” as one of the three essential characteristics of teaching environments. Since this analysis of teacher socialization was

published, Little (1987) offers three developments that may have altered that environment. Since her writing, additional data have been offered in support of her assertions.

First, preservice programs have been mandated to reform their curricula to better reflect the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that teachers need in order to effectively work with students and colleagues. Institutions of higher education have tackled this directive through various means: organize cohorts of preservice teachers, develop partnerships with school districts and individual schools, increase the duration and diversity of field experience requirements, examine university supervision of field experiences, construct professional development schools, and reconstitute the university curriculum.

Secondly, awareness of novice teachers and teacher induction programs has increased. Policy briefs (Darling-Hammond, 1996, 1997, 2000) provide shock value for legislators and human resource personnel in school districts as to a looming (or possibly present depending on the context) teacher shortage. A majority of states have mandated teacher induction programs, although funding such ventures is problematic (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Some induction problems include differentiated teacher evaluation for novice teachers (e.g., Florida, California) and link with tiered certification systems (e.g. Connecticut, North Carolina).

Finally, the performance and activities of veteran teachers have been addressed financially through the career ladders of the 1980s, pay-for-performance programs of the 1990s, and current systems of tiered certification. Veterans are beginning to be viewed as assuming other duties besides teaching students: heading accreditation committees, mentoring novices and interns, coordinating programs, and assuming leadership roles in school reform movements.

Some of the privatism Lortie (1975) discussed has been ameliorated by these three major developments. Other situations indicative of privatism have been obscured from view by

program implementation such as mentoring, peer coaching, and collegial staff development. It may appear that a particular school functions collaboratively simply by claiming or actually implementing these structures.

The work of Newmann and his associates (1996) offer quantitative and qualitative evidence about the deprivatization of practice. From survey data of 24 restructuring schools, the researchers constructed an index of professional community that incorporated their self-defined elements of professional community, of which deprivatizing practice was one element. At schools that showed high marks for professional community, teachers shared uncertainties about their own practices. For example, teacher struggled with how to introduce new, unfamiliar material in ways that will build on students' prior knowledge or how to balance breadth and depth of content. Interviews with teachers at a restructuring elementary school suggests that teachers' efficacy increases as relationships between teachers grow beyond social congeniality (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996). Another restructuring school attempted to deprivatize teachers' practice by engaging school-wide participation in evaluating student work from other teachers' classrooms. These teachers had already used interdisciplinary groups to develop the standards for assessment. Even during this potentially threatening activity, teachers shared with the researchers that they were not concerned because the result of the activity would be help for each other (Louis, Kruse et al., 1996).

“The most likely outcome when any function is privatized is that people will perform the function conservatively, refusing to stray far from the silent consensus on what ‘works’ – even when it clearly does not” (Palmer, 1993, p. 8). Involvement in a community of pedagogical discourse is not optional for Palmer. He advises all educational institutions to have this

expectation, for “the privatization of teaching not only keeps individuals from growing in their craft but fosters institutional incompetence as well” (Palmer, 1998, p. 144).

As Palmer (1993, 1998) has used his consultant role in opening up conversations with higher education professionals, Hudson-Ross and Graham (2000) have created a network of mentor teachers and preservice teachers that furnishes the opportunity to make their teaching and learning explicit. In the UGA-NETS (University of Georgia Network for English Teachers and Students) framework, Hudson-Ross, Graham, and 1-4 graduate assistants team teach a sequence of courses that fluidly exist in a yearlong construct. Preservice teachers read, analyze, plan, execute, and debrief communally within the context of peers and respected “others.” “From the beginning of our partnership, we asked students to make their histories, thinking, decisions, and actions public so that they could reflect upon them. We have made an even greater difference by doing the same ourselves” (p. 9). Hudson-Ross and Graham came to know that their theories of teaching and learning are found in the tenets of social constructivist pedagogy.

People Learn Best When Working On Authentic Work

Joyce (1992) reports that ten percent of teachers trained to use a new procedure actually use the procedure in their classroom to the level that impacts student achievement. CFG work isn’t about training; it is about teachers learning from their students and for their students. CFG members implement changes, not from an external mandate or as a result of a training session, but rather to improve the learning space: for them and their students.

Based on her interviews with teachers from 78 elementary schools, Rosenholtz (1989) asserts that people must experience work as meaningful. She explains that the meaningfulness of work can be constituted by having opportunities for professional growth, a positive self-efficacy, and a significant impact on students. Teachers who have low commitment may have low

performance-based self-esteem. To make up for this deficit, teachers often exchange experiences with colleagues that focus on non-teaching situations or negative workplace conditions. These conversations support the underlying assumption that the job required is impossible, confronted by such overwhelming odds. Secondly, to maintain their self-esteem, teachers create substitutions for their measures of student learning. These substitutions include preserving friendships instead of collegueship, befriending students rather than instructing them, and maintaining student control rather than academic progress.

Ponticell (1995) unexpectedly became part of an exciting professional development cycle at a large urban high school in Chicago. While working as a university outreach coordinator with the public schools, a group of veteran teachers approached her with an instructional improvement project that would rely on collegial support. After writing and receiving grant monies to pay for substitutes and materials, as well as receive stipends for out-of-school time spent, these ten teachers, representing four different subject areas, embarked on a cycle of inquiry: identify a burning topic of interest to all of these teachers, study relevant readings provided by Ponticell, jointly develop a checklist of behaviors that each teacher may exhibit, video and analyze teaching incidents, engage in peer coaching pairs, and debrief as a group to share celebrations and determine the next topic of inquiry. On a 14-item collegiality inventory, Ponticell claims that “increased substantive and structured interaction with peers” (p. 15) changed their collegial relationships. These teachers became colleagues to each other, encouraging growth and offering support. They felt an increased responsibility toward one another and the profession in general because they viewed their work as intrinsically meaningful.

Lack of Professional Conversations

Unfortunately, the culture of schooling does not foster an environment in which weaknesses are made known (Johnston, 1994). The existing culture is deified by novice teachers (Ost, 1989). In preservice teacher education programs, status and role differentiation provides the cooperating teacher with power that often cannot be reconciled. The opportunity to converse reflectively is also diminished by the role of evaluator that the cooperating teacher is required to play (Kleinsasser, 1991). Stanulis (1994) notes that most experienced teachers have not explicitly practiced articulating their teaching philosophy or been supported in developing the ability to analyze and question the unchallenged culture. They are often unable or unwilling to provide analyses of their own or the student teacher's teaching practice (Staton & Hunt, 1992).

Why then does the instruction and insistence of reflective teaching stop after preservice training? Novice teachers, although they are inundated with other concerns (Veenman, 1984), must continue to reflectively teach, and better yet, start to develop a Deweyan notion of reflective thinking. Novice teachers have reached a plateau of graduation, but the diploma cannot be equated with knowing how to teach. In fact, Feiman-Nemser (2001, p. 18) reminds us that new teachers “really have two jobs to do – they have to teach, and they have to learn to teach” (Wildman, Niles, Magliaro, & McLaughlin, 1989). CFGs offer the safe space where both of these jobs are honored.

For novice teachers, the opportunities to partake in professional conversations may be diminished even further, simply due to the isolation of being the only adult in the classroom. To meet this need, opportunities to interact with adults often becomes social and not a platform for professional conversations about practice. They rarely discuss or request assistance with significant classroom issues (Feiman-Nemser & Floden, 1986, as cited in Gratch, 1998). Clarke (1995) reports that peer interaction, and interaction with pupils and instructors bring about

development and change in student teachers (Talvitie et al., 2000). These collegial environments are imperative for self-confidence, reduced anxiety, and changes in behaviors to occur in novice teachers (Wilkins-Canter, 1996).

Structured opportunities for critical reflection (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997) must be provided as teachers work on improving their practice. These opportunities are places that foster multiple layers of reflection. First, teachers involved in consistent and meaningful collaboration feel a sense of responsibility to their colleagues. They enter group meetings with several notions of reflection: reflections-in-action (Schön, 1983) from actual teaching and learning experiences, reflections reconstructed after the events from reading the teaching situation (McDonald, 1992), and further thinking from having a conversation with the situation (Schön, 1987). The second notion is collective in nature. By providing the safe space to have professional conversations about practice, knowledge is socially reconstructed as the event is recast and decisions about teaching and learning are shared. Hollingsworth's (1992) multiple-year collaboration with her graduates as they began full-time teaching provided participants a space for professional conversations. The novice teachers shared the transformative results of their "evolving understandings" (p. 387) based on group interactions. A third layer of reflection will occur after the formal, structured time has ended. As the teachers re-enter their classrooms and work with students, their meaningful and relevant conversations travel with them, prompting them to visibly (and possibly audibly) question their own environments, activities, and decisions. At the core of increased reflectiveness is learning to question current understandings of teaching and learning. By problematizing or questioning assumptions, teachers are able to "build a more coherent conceptual foundation" (Lord, 1994, p. 195) that supports practice. McDonald (1992) encourages teachers to participate in "textmaking:" starting to hear your own teaching voice,

reading your teaching scenarios, and gripping them with the support of another text or fragment (Bisplinghoff, 2001). Hankins (1998, 2002) investigates the creation of narratives to test interpretations against the social text of the classroom.

Five Midwestern colleges collaborated with a suburban school district to offer Reflective Practice Groups that included a district administrator, three mentor-mentee pairs, and a university faculty member (Cady, Distad, & Germundsen, 1997). The groups met monthly, discussing issues of educational practice generated by the novice teacher members. Although the authors do not discuss the group dynamics of teacher-administrator, veteran-novice, and school-university present in the group, their survey data and group summaries (written by the university faculty member) lead them to conclude that the novice teachers “immediately benefited from the scaffolding afforded by shared reflection and higher order professional thinking” (p. 466). No specific data were offered to support this assertion. The authors also briefly mention that the novice teachers in the group perceived that the group had increased their abilities to meet the needs of their students.

Kagan’s (1992) seminal review of 40 learning-to-teach studies reinforces the reflection that first-year teachers experience. She poses that novice teachers engage in three major tasks over the course of their first year: (a) acquiring knowledge about their students; (b) using this knowledge to modify and reconstruct their personal image as a teacher; and (c) build effective routines in regard to classroom management and instruction.

Figure 1 represents my assimilation and reconstruction of the literature on learning communities, CFGs, and collaboration. No graphic could possibly embody the complex web of relationships that learning communities, teacher collaborations, and analysis of student and teacher work would entail. This graphic has yet to visually demonstrate the reciprocity that exists

in beneficial collegial relationships or the interdependence (Little, 1987) that can develop. What the graphic does reveal is my notion of three levels of reflection that drive teacher learning communities. Individual reflections, collective reflections, and revised individual reflections perpetuate the cycle of inquiry and continuous “wondering” that exists in effective learning communities and effective CFGs.

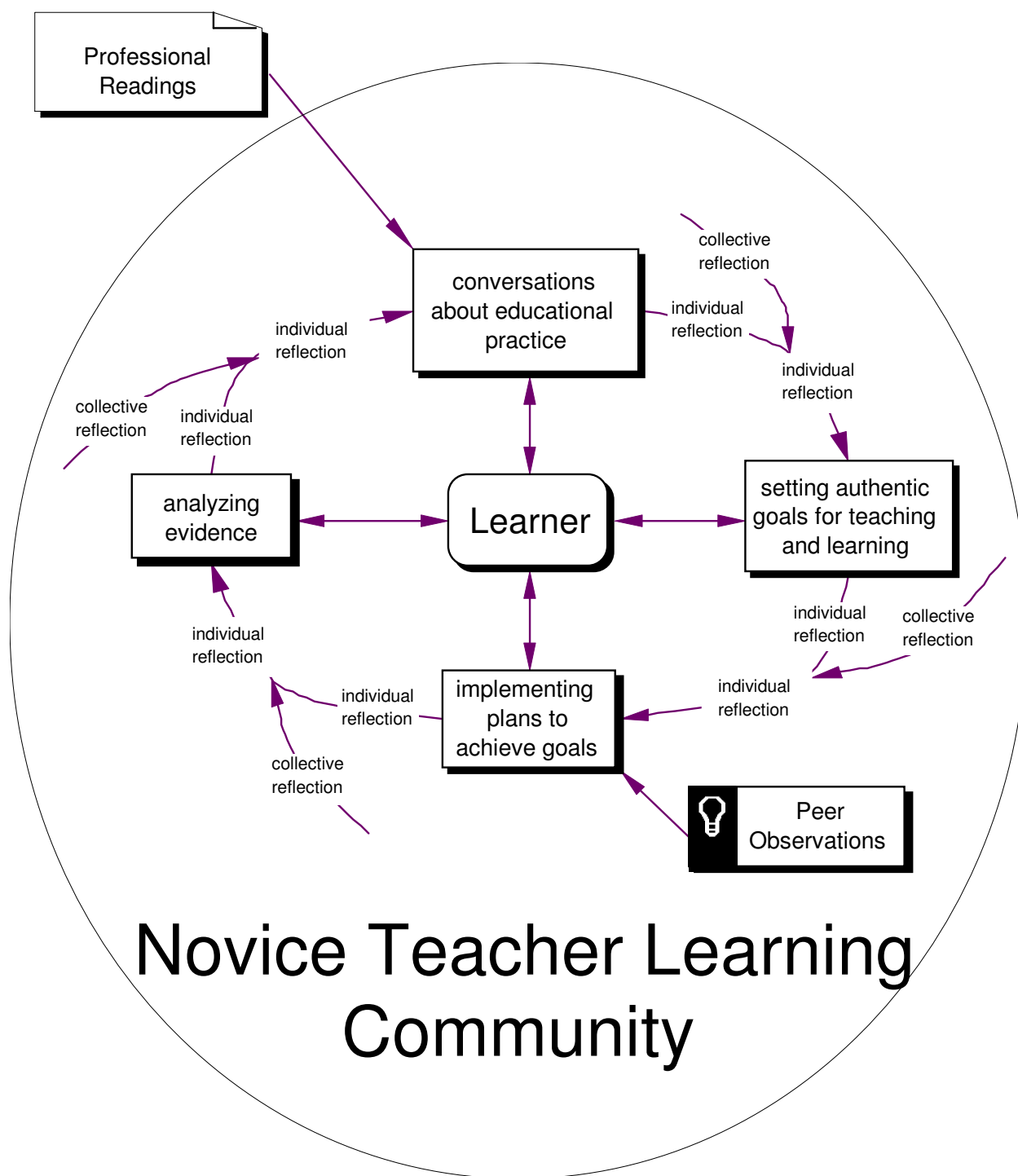


Figure 1. Novice teacher learning community.

Conversations About Practice

Shanker (1996) pointed out that teaching may be the only “profession” in which regular opportunities for colleagues to engage in professional dialogue is not the norm. Although professional developers have encouraged active engagement in meaningful discussion, planning, and practice (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998), these experiences are not normative of the broader teaching force.

However, research provides examples of outstanding professional development opportunities that use conversations about practice as a guiding construct. The National Writing Project (NWP) is a 26 year-old nationwide network, hosted by universities, that offers a variety of teacher-led programs. Participants are led to develop their own writing and use writing as a tool for reflective practice (Kelly, 1999). The NWP demonstrates that when teachers come together for extended periods of time, change can occur. In an internal study, the NWP reports increased student achievement in terms of academic grades and holistically scored writing samples (NWP, 1999). Teachers who received writing instruction through the NWP implemented more varied composition activities than teachers who did not receive the instruction (Pritchard & Marshall, 1994).

The National Writing Project’s (NWP) professional development approach asserts “that engaging teachers in teaching teachers empowers teachers them to meet the challenges of educating an increasingly diverse student population” (Kelly, 1999, p. 426). The study does not address issues of collaboration where teachers are teaching each other. CFG work clings to the tenet that all learners have expertise and are valuable to conversations about teaching and learning.

Kratzer (1995) designed a new teacher support group at a small Christian school in Los Angeles that served a minority population. She used weekly meetings as opportunities for teachers to air their frustrations, both with faculty and students. One member felt that the meetings provided a safe place to share those incidents, especially situations she did not want the rest of the faculty to know. Although Kratzer reports that teachers were not always supported in the environment, she claims that none of the members felt negatively about the program, rather, “they realized that group dynamics are complex” (p. 14). This shallow interpretation represents the weakness of the study.

Hofstra University (New York) began a New Teachers’ Network in 1996 that serves its graduates who teach in urban schools. They use a multifaceted approach, including mentors, collaborative teams, professional conferences, and an email network to foster the connections built with students during the preservice years. Hofstra researchers have noted the crucial role of discourse communities in the creation of learning experiences powerful enough to transform teachers’ classroom practices (Hines, Murphy, Singer, & Stacki, 2000).

Two researchers have explored critical friendships in the context of a novice teacher learning community (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997; Meyer & Achinstein, 1998). The voluntary group began by meeting weekly as a nontraditional academic class during the final year of the teachers’ preservice experience. The collaboration continued the next two years by meeting monthly with the members who were now second-year teachers at different school sites. Achinstein and Meyer’s work focused on the “uneasy marriage” between critique and friendship, merging the literature on critical reflection (Freire, 1985; Schön, 1983) and teacher communities (Little & McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). This group is currently in its seventh year of existence.

Members would bring specific teaching and learning dilemmas and pose them to the group. These conversations were analyzed for themes that would elucidate the tension that exists in groups between critique and friendship. When members would frame their context, they would request the kind of feedback that they desired. These are exposed moments, both for the presenter and the members that will need to negotiate how to offer their feedback. Members may disembody themselves from the work; therefore the critique, by asking the facilitators to present the material. Dialogue is sometimes used to voluntarily or involuntarily shut off the collective from inquiry: “I’ll sort of go through the things I’m doing and see if I still have questions” (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997, p. 14). Some members invite the members to harshly view a work, seeking the critique of the collective.

During the presentations, termed “charrettes” from the architectural community of practice, members exhibited behaviors that would elicit or shut down critique. Simply by choosing whether to respond, defend, or ignore feedback, members sent messages to the group about the value that they were attaching to the feedback. Members who chose whether to share their critique regarding a charrette affect the dynamic of the group. Some topics remained unexplored: one of the members teaches in a private religious school, two members left the group after its second year, and one group member disclosed that she was thinking about quitting teaching.

Stemming from their preservice dialogue, the group spent considerable time examining their interpretations of *Fostering a Community of Learners* (Brown & Campione, 1997). They used this shared text to scrutinize their own classrooms and practice. Data suggests that the members used this work as a foundational piece for their work (Meyer & Achinstein, 1998).

Institutional barriers which hierarchicalize the relationship between critique and friendship surfaced in their work with the group. The researchers shared their own bias by admitting that they debated whether to continue the group upon graduation because they did not want a group that commiserated only about first-year teacher woes. Secondly, structures set up during the meetings actually served to perpetuate this dichotomy. Members arrived and emotionally checked in and then shared professionally (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997). This group served as a Janus-figure, fostering “inquiry-as-stance” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) while using a supportive learning community in order to develop professionals.

The cognitive dissonance that novice teachers experience is often not recognized by others (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Veteran teachers have learned to amalgamate messages from various sources and entities, ignore others, prioritize some, and substitute equitable replacements. Novice teachers need a forum in which to acknowledge the dilemma and sort out the cues in meaningful ways that will bring about collective and personal understanding.

Cochran-Smith (1991) discussed teacher education programs that promote student teachers to “teach against the grain.” She coins “collaborative resonance” as an approach for student teachers to be placed with mentor teachers that are active in the issues of school reform, action research, or collaborative inquiry. The end-in-view of this system is not to homogenize ideas but to intensify through co-labor student teachers’ opportunities to teach “against the grain.”

This construct is applicable and appropriate for novice teacher learning communities as well. Teachers who teach against the grain observe individual students and make decisions in support of their learning. They see beyond conventional labels and practices accepted as status quo and raise unanswerable and uncomfortable questions that invite critical reflection. These

teachers make connections between theory, either newly acquired or newly practiced, and authentic teaching practices. In novice teacher learning communities, all teachers are equally responsible for “raising questions, interrogating their own knowledge and experiences, and then beginning to take responsible and reasoned action” (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 290).

These teachers are reconstructing their novice teaching experiences. Daloz (1986) posits the characteristics of support and challenge as a perceived dichotomy that must be intertwined in mentoring relationships to enhance learning. He offers the function of support as “opening a gap between student environment, a gap that creates tension in the student, calling for closure” (p. 213). Transferring this construct to teacher learning, it is compatible with the concepts of productive disequilibrium and cognitive dissonance.

Table 4. Learner responses to varying levels of challenge and support. (Daloz, 1996)

	Low challenge	High challenge
Low support	Stasis	Withdrawal
High support	Confirmation	Reconstruction

Individuals in stasis may exist in that state indefinitely either voluntarily or involuntarily. By not problematizing issues of teaching and learning, the status quo is accepted. This acceptance is also indicative of those who feel confirmed in their work situation. They too, do not feel challenged or experience feelings of disconnect as they “teach.” At the other end of this emotional continuum are individuals who withdraw because they feel overwhelmed. Information could be too voluminous, information sources too varied, or their response to the information too difficult to handle. Reconstructing individuals accept high challenge, relish the support, and

experience the productive disequilibrium and cognitive dissonance that cause a questioning of assumptions and analysis of practice.

Educative mentoring. These experiences can be realized through the process of educative mentoring, coined by Feiman-Nemser (2001), built on Dewey's (1938/1991) notion of educative experiences. Researchers and educators alike quote Dewey for his ideas and his use of language. Unfortunately, he is often misquoted because excerpts pulled from his voluminous works are taken out of context. To read Dewey effectively, longer texts must be furnished to the reader.

Growth depends upon the presence of difficulty to be overcome by the exercise of intelligence. Once more, it is part of the educator's responsibility to see equally to two things: First, that the problem grows out of the conditions of the experience being had in the present, and that it is within the range of the capacity of students; and, secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experiences in which new problems are presented. (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 53)

"Educative mentoring rests on an explicit vision of good teaching" (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Like effective teachers, educative mentors attend to pressing issues and concerns without losing sight of long-term goals. Mentors interact with novices that encourage inquiry in and through their practice. Most importantly, they use their own knowledge and expertise to assess the direction novices are heading in order to create opportunities for teacher learning that positively benefit the quest for student learning.

A passage from *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902/1964) parallels these activities in the context of teacher and student:

The value of the formulated wealth of knowledge that makes up the course of study is that it may enable the educator *to determine the environment of the child*, and thus by indirection to direct ... Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that *their own activities* move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves. (p. 357, italics original)

The practicing of offering direction via indirection is what sets effective mentors apart. They allow novice teachers to take the journey on their own, all the while, functioning as their guide, *who is also on a journey* toward the “culmination of themselves” (Dewey, 1902/1964, p. 357). They respect previous experience and acknowledge it as a force in current decision-making.

The principle of habit so understood obviously goes deeper than the ordinary conception of a habit as a more or less fixed way of doing things, although it includes the latter as one of its special cases. It covers the formation of attitudes, attitudes that are emotional and intellectual; it covers our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living. From this point of view, the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. (Dewey, 1902/1964, pp. 18-19)

“The purpose of teacher education is to help student teachers in their development from student teacher to qualified teacher and to *encourage change* in their earlier views of teaching (Talvitie, Peltokallio, & Männistö, 2000, p. 86, emphasis added). The literature is rich on the development of reflective teachers in preservice teacher education (Ross, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987). The concept of reflective teaching is based on Dewey’s work about reflective

thinking, entitled *How We Think* (1909/1989). “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends constitutes reflective thought” (p. 118).

Each novice teacher has experiences that involve deconstruction and reconstruction of past experiences. The key to reflective thinking for Dewey is that that process is not enough; the *plan* that is formulated from the experience is critical. To help teachers reflect and then not act is problematic.

Natural impulses and desires constitute in any case the starting point. But there is no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking, or impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves. This remaking involves inhibition of impulse in its first estate. The alternate to externally imposed inhibition is inhibition through an individual’s own reflection and judgment. (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 41)

In an *educational* scheme, the occurrence of a desire and impulse is not the final end. It is an occasion and a demand for the formation of a plan and method of activity. Such a plan, to repeat, can be formed only by study of conditions and by securing all relevant information. (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 46)

Keeping track [of ideas, activities, and observed consequences] is a matter of reflective review and summarizing, in which there is both discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing experience. To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind. (Dewey, 1938/1991, p. 59)

I acknowledge the powerful role that mentors can assume in the experiences of novice teachers. However, realistic pictures of mentoring in Georgia often portray experienced teachers, with or without specific training about mentoring, assigned to multiple novices geographically distanced in the building without any release time in their academic schedules to support their protégés.

I pose that CFGs could redefine educative mentoring as a multidirectional, horizontal process. Members of CFGs focus on critical issues stemming from their own inquiries. The collective expertise, experiences, and human capital encourage self-assessments that, in turn, prompt risk-taking within a supportive environment.

Peer observations. Several researchers report a relationship between peer observations and changes in teaching practice (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Little, 1982, 1990b; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Showers and Joyce, 1996; Smylie, 1995). Peer observations can be a forum for relevant and meaningful conversations to take place around issues that are pertinent to individual teachers. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) note that these observations are often associated with teachers attempting something new and desiring feedback from peers. Fullan (1993) describes peer observations that had powerful impact due to the collegial community context for analysis, discussion, and reflection.

Garet et al. (2001) searched for coherence in professional development opportunities within their sample of 1,027 science and mathematics teachers. An Overall Index of Coherence was determined using three criteria: “the extent to which professional development builds on what teachers have already learned; emphasizes content and pedagogy aligned with national, state, and local standards, frameworks, and assessments; and supports teachers in developing sustained, ongoing professional communication with other teachers who are trying to change

their teaching in similar ways” (p. 927). The researchers asked the participants to rate the extent to which their professional development activities was consistent with these three criteria.

Enhanced knowledge and skills were more likely to be found in sites where professional development was consistently coherent with individual teachers.

CFGs are inherently coherent in respect to building on prior constructions of knowledge and in developing sustained, ongoing professional dialogue. The criterion regarding alignment with standards can be a focus of individual or collective teachers’ work in a CFG, especially in sites that may have high-stakes assessments for students.

Beginning teachers desire peer observations in six districts that geographically cluster the University of Georgia. The GSTEP initiative’s Beginning Teacher Survey (GSTEP, 2002) clearly noted novice’s desire to engage in reciprocal peer observations.

da Costa (1995) examined 26 teachers involved in a variety of teacher collaboration strategies in British Columbia. He concludes from his quantitative analysis that peer observation is an essential element of collaborative consultation if the aim is to increase personal teaching efficacy and pupil achievement. These were the goals of Murphy’s (2001) work where she notes that CFG members didn’t participate in peer observations because they were too hard to plan, not useful enough for the teacher, and took too much time.

In a critical review of technical coaching practices, Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) use peer coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1983) as a platform to introduce “contrived collegiality.” By centering inservice models on the adoption and mastery of particular teaching models, Joyce and Showers reduce teaching to a technically manageable problem of skill and competence. “Provocative ideological differences of purpose and value” (p. 237) are denigrated from “critique into technique.” In their study of peer coaching situations, Hargreaves and Dawe found that the

work was not relevant or “organic” (Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998) for individual teachers. Peer observations within the CFG framework seek to expound on the ecological, contextual, personal, and biographical factors that technical coaching practices ignore (Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990). The reflection that professionalizes and empowers teachers is not overlooked; instead, it is capitalized on as a learning opportunity to further explicate what, whom, and how they teach.

Educational research has not consistently documented experiences where teachers’ practices are made public, especially involving novice teachers. A portion of this gap in the literature could be explained by the experiences of novice teachers that are involved in teacher induction programs. Stories of constructivist professional development opportunities for novice teachers are not present in educational journals.

This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs. The group of first-year teachers formed a learning community, building on each other’s expertise and experiences. Publicly sharing authentic work, dilemmas of practice, and successes constituted meeting agendas. Protocols capitalized on teachers’ reflections regarding process and product in order to focus participants’ dialogue.

Using Protocols

In Palmer’s (1998) work with university faculty, he supports the use of ground rules for dialogue between colleagues. A recipe is evident in academic settings that spells disaster: start with the cultural, conventional norm of “talking nice” to each other, add a generous portion of competition by questioning others’ claims and quickly responding, and drizzle on notions of self-indispensability. If anyone can survive the first two layers and actually name a real problem in

his or her teaching—now completely vulnerable to the group—the person is met with the sage advice of the group, offered as a sincere gesture of help or as a vehicle to feel superior.

The Quaker community offers a concept for interacting that Palmer (1998) shares in *The Courage to Teach*. This particular branch of Quaker thought communes in groups that do not have clerical leadership. Thus, they needed to devise a structure that would allow themselves to work with and for each other. The structure of focus here, the “clearness committee”, dates to the 1660s. This time-honored process invites people to help each other with problems while preserving the honor of the person.

In the clearness committee, the focus person invites four or five others to assist them in finding clarity on an issue that is problematic. The group dedicates two hours to the focus person, attempting to rid themselves of self-serving actions, as if their only purpose on earth was to help this human being. After explaining the issue, group members ask clarifying questions of the focus person. The questions are devoid of judgment and do not promote the speaker’s agenda. The goal is to assist the focus person to hear the guidance that comes from within.

Palmer (1998) sees the value as reciprocal. “[Yet] in that space we receive ourselves as well as the other. As we reach for questions that will help the focus person go deeper into his or her truth, we find ourselves drawn more deeply into our own truth” (p. 154).

The charrette is a comparable protocol used by Achinstein and Meyer (1997) in the novice teacher learning community they formed in California. This protocol is used in architecture schools and firms. The process involves an architect’s presentation of a project to a critical cohort that is dedicated to collaborative problem-solving. The responses are pertinent to the presenter so she/he can revise before a presentation to the client. This ritualized, participant

structure encouraged individuals to share teaching beliefs and practices in a social setting where “hard questioning can take place in a climate of trust” (Meyer & Achinstein, 1998, p. 51)

Only Reflective Practitioners Continue to Develop and Improve

Over the past twenty years, researchers and teacher educators have examined individual teachers, often using qualitative research methods in order to better understand their thought processes regarding classroom events. A body of literature regarding reflective teaching has evolved from these studies.

Johnston (1993) describes a case study participant who completely changed his image of teaching in order to conform to the culture of the school. Roger was concerned about individual children’s learning and delved into their backgrounds in order to better plan for their experiences. He truly desired to be an inspiring and inspired teacher. During his second practicum experience, a discussion with his college supervisor and cooperating teacher regarding his style of classroom management was the turning point. “Roger now saw the need to involve children in learning in a new light—more as a control mechanism” (p. 74). He had been searching for strategies to reconcile his image of teaching with his current situation, but was unable to pinpoint the object of his search. Neither his cooperating teacher nor college supervisor were aware of his embedded image of teaching or of his quest to make sense of the discrepancy. Without the support he needed, Roger’s isolated experience prompted a change in his very nature of approaching children and the curriculum.

In Roger’s case, reflecting on specific teaching and learning instances in the classroom was not a fruitful venture. In fact, it directly led to a less desirable change in approach. Roger attributed a lack of professional dialogue during his experience to differences in age and background with his cooperating teacher. Feedback was minimal, general, and not timely. He

was not led or guided through the process of reconciliation, or as Dewey would say, reconstruction of experience (1938/1991). Roger was not able to reflectively think; therefore, he was unable to grow and participate in richer subsequent experiences.

Perspectives and Definitions

Teacher educators and researchers have created opportunities for preservice teachers to plan, instruct, and reflect on the experience. “Reflection is a much over used term within teacher education ... reflection used here ... [is] ... interactions which provoke thought on the part of students [teachers] so that they are actively involved in their own learning rather than receiving information or guidance passively” (Williams, Butt, Gray, Leach, Marr, & Soares, 1998, p. 229). This definition has oversimplified reflective thinking. By only reflecting back on the experience, Dewey’s (1909/1989) true construct of reflective thinking is slighted. His own definition requires “further conclusions” to be a direct result of the reflective thought.

Grimmitt, Mackinnon, Erickson, and Riecken (1990) have identified three general perspectives on reflection from the literature. The first views reflection as a process that leads to thoughtful action, such as implementing research-based teaching practices. This view is comparable to the concept of teacher as technician. The second perspective is based on the context and involves “deliberation and choice among competing versions of good teaching” (p. 25). The final perspective requires a reorganization or reconstruction of experience, leading to a revised view of self as teacher.

This final perspective is based on Dewey’s theory of reflective thinking. His perspective encompasses the first two perspectives, relying on the global nature and implications of reflective thought. For example, feeling the desire to implement findings based on research is a result of reflective thought. These thoughts are reconstructions of what you thought previously

about the concept, idea, or strategy. The social constructivist slant of Dewey's work would also preclude the use of the second perspective apart from the third, for all decisions are based on context.

Byra (1996) cites Ross' (1990) definition that has evolved from researchers (Kitchener & King, 1981; Schön, 1983) and teacher educators (Goodman, 1984; Ross, 1989; Zeichner & Liston, 1987): "reflection is a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (p. 49).

The previous definitions are both passive notions of reflective thinking; therefore, teaching. Ross' definition leaves the choice up to the educator whether he or she wants to make a rational choice that involves action. The definition by Zeichner and Liston actually uses the word "active" in it and seems to be a dynamic notion of reflection. However, just because a belief yields consequences doesn't make it truly active and emancipatory. In the second definition, a teacher can reflect and actively choose the passive route. The consequences from that route will be negligible. Truly reflective teachers, that is, teachers who reflectively think, make those choices and set goals. After the experience that prompted responses from others and from the self, making a plan of action and setting it into motion is critical. This event is what sets the reflective teacher apart.

R e f l e c t i v e t e a c h i n g

see differently \longrightarrow think differently \longrightarrow act differently

Figure 2. Reflective teaching. (Canning, 1990, as cited in Sparks-Langer & Colton, 1991, graphic original)

This study tracks novice teachers' reflections about instruction, organization, and relationships with colleagues. The literature has failed to provide descriptive cases in which the thrust is not placed on structural conditions that impede novices in their development. In this portrait, the CFG is the support structure. Feedback is offered by novice teachers: for the speaker to hear her own words, for the receiver to hear the opinion on the work, and for the group to seek to understand one teacher's context. Protocols assist the members in directing their dialogue in productive ways. Educational studies have not documented the work of collaborative cultures in which protocols are consistently used.

This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs. The group of first-year teachers formed a learning community, building on each other's expertise and experiences. Publicly sharing authentic work, dilemmas of practice, and successes constituted meeting agendas. Protocols capitalized on teachers' reflections regarding process and product in order to focus participants' dialogue. Our group was called a Critical Friends Group, a term that was familiar to some teachers within the context of this research site.

Research on CFGs

Five studies have been conducted on the effects of CFG work, four internally and one by an external individual. Each study is offered in detail because of the relatively small number of empirical studies.

The first internal study was an evaluation commissioned by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 1997 (Dunne et al., 2000). This evaluation team gathered quantitative and qualitative data with the faculty in the third cohort of schools whose applications were accepted by NSRF. Of these 62 schools, 12 were selected for the evaluation: five high schools, five

elementary schools, and two middle schools. They were geographically and ethnically representative of CFG work across the country. Data collection at eight of the schools occurred twice a year for a week's length, and four of the schools' data were collected once a month on the day of the CFG meetings. All faculty at the 62 schools, regardless of CFG participation, in the third cohort were invited to complete the Professional Climate Survey as part of the evaluation. Other forms of data collection included observations of CFG meetings, observed and interviewed CFG and non-CFG teachers, and collected samples of teacher and student work over a period of two years, beginning the spring before each school's coach was trained. The second internal study was an off-shoot of this evaluation work. Nave (2000a) extended the research by focusing on three schools (elementary, middle, and high) involved with the Southern Maine Partnership. Data for both studies are presented together, as the findings are similar.

It was the intent of the evaluation team to observe all phases of the CFG process to determine if interim outcomes were met, although these outcomes were unstated in the study. The final piece of data collection and analysis was to determine if increased student achievement was evident, which is the long-term objective of CFGs.

CFG teachers' interviews echo researchers' work regarding traditional professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1995, 1996; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Little, 1993; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998; Richardson, 1994; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1989). Members of CFGs found the work more satisfying because it is continual, focused on their own teaching and their own students' learning, and takes place in a small group of supportive and trusted colleagues. CFG teachers were more engaged in their professional work, as supported by statistically significant results in the survey data. These teachers felt like they were improving every year, and that they were always keen to hear about ways to improve their teaching. Collaboration was

more evident with teachers that were members of a CFG. They viewed their environments as cooperative and reported more instances of working together to develop teaching materials or seeking each other's advice about classroom situations (Dunne et al., 2000).

The researchers report that CFG teachers became "more thoughtful about the connection among curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy" (Dunne et al., 2000, p. 10). No data were offered to substantiate this assertion, as well as the statement that CFG members' concerns moved from covering the curriculum to offering enough time to ensure that students were proficient in reading and writing.

Survey data also showed differences between CFG teachers and non-CFG teachers in regards to changes in classroom instruction. CFG teachers reported themselves as having high expectations of students and that they adapt their approach to increase student achievement. Both groups disagreed with statements that reflected that all students cannot learn, but there was a significant difference in the mean responses between the two groups, with CFG teachers disagreeing more than did non-CFG teachers. In fact, for each of the eight categories on the Professional Climate Survey, CFG teachers reported statistically significant differences than non-CFG teachers.

Student Achievement

The researchers claimed that the final phase of the evaluation study was to show increased student achievement. No data or assertions were made in the study to support this claim. In an unpublished manuscript documenting the same evaluation study, Nave (2000b) offers a representative "mini-case study of one school's CFG to illustrate clearly the connections between teachers' work in a CFG and the improvements in their students' academic skills" (p. 5).

The situation involved a CFG of elementary school teachers that decided to focus collectively on improving their students' writing skills. After developing a definition and rubric for "good writing", the CFG wanted to transfer the rubric to "kid language." During this discussion, the CFG coach challenged them to have students participate in the same process that they just completed.

With student-created rubrics in hand, the teachers had students write on common prompts and exchange papers with other classes for assessment. Students enjoyed the process and appreciated the feedback but desired a face-to-face conversation with the assessor about their work. The CFG responded by offering a similar scenario to its own experience when first bringing writing samples to the CFG. Cross-class writing groups were formed that analyzed each other's work.

Analysis of the student work by the NSRF evaluation team suggests "improvements in student writing skills for most students in these classes, some improvements quite dramatic" (Nave, 2000b, p. 10). In addition, students who participated in the exchanges more often "seemed to improve more than did students in classes doing fewer" of the exchanges. Example criteria included length, complexity, amount of detail, author's voice, and coherence. One student in five showed improvements in writing skills according to the teacher-created rubrics in classrooms that seldom participated.

Teacher Transformations

When interpreted in the context of this particular school district, the results are increasingly positive. Historically, teachers in this district had not participated in conversations about reading and writing. The excitement this experience brought spread to other non-CFG teachers in the building (Nave, 2000b).

Nave's (2000b) unpublished work also qualitatively documents supports assertions made from the survey data (Dunne et al., 2000). Interviews with over 150 teachers shows a strong trend of teachers struggling with their former planning methods, wondering about their student-centeredness. Elementary teachers that felt they needed to "cover" material described CFG conversations that helped her make evidence-based decisions to support her notion of mastery versus coverage.

The evaluation team tracked slow shifts in the appearance of CFG teachers' classrooms. The physical spaces began to embody the shifting philosophies of teaching and learning of their teachers. Learning spaces became more fluid, cooperative groups were often used, and student work became the foundation of purposeful and authentic decorations. Observers noted changes in interaction patterns; students started talking primarily to each other instead of to the teacher.

Another internal study, this one longitudinal in nature, was conducted over the course of three years. Dunne, one of the program designers back in 1995, crafted an internal, qualitative study with Honts (Dunne & Honts, n.d.) that included 300 classroom observations and interviews at 14 schools: once near the beginning of the process, once near the end of the two-year program, and finally once after the Annenberg Institute support was completed. Interviews included administrators, CFG members, and non-CFG teachers. The data were amassed in the context of site visits required by NSRF membership.

The researchers offer three stages of development within a CFG. In the oasis stage, teachers begin to describe the CFG as a trusting setting where they may spend uninterrupted time with colleagues—a rarity in schools. Specific student problems or external factors are discussed as teachers seek support to enact effective teaching and learning.

The second stage involves teachers seeing their CFGs as more than support groups. Practitioners use their time to discuss how they teach and how students learn. These conversations lead members to question their habits of instruction.

CFGs in the third stage attend to matters of educational purpose and contextual factors that impede on learning. For example, teachers in this mode may be connecting standards to their own work, conducting action research projects, or using student work to make long-range curricular decisions. In these environments, one query begets another, as the cycle of organic inquiry continues (Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998).

Because it is organic and focused on the learner, these stages, or more aptly termed “phases,” are fluid. Organizational changes can easily cause a CFG to move from an effective data-driven group back to a “storytelling, support group mode” (Dunne and Honts, n.d.). This does not mean that a group has reverted; rather, mature CFGs move between phases in order for to be most effective for that particular dynamic context. These phases coincide with Little’s four kinds of collaboration: storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and assistance, sharing, and joint work (1990b). Dunne and Honts found that CFGs in the third phase demonstrate the kind of functional interdependence that Little notes in schools where “joint work” takes place.

The final internal study was conducted at the request of the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES). CES work has been decentralized, thus placing more responsibility on local chapters. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has funded CES work in Michigan and funded this study as well. CFGs in these schools looked different than those in the northeastern United States: principals were required to attend CFG coaches institutes and schools had to engage in self-assessment activities to determine if they wanted to continue their involvement in the project. The 23 schools that participated represented urban, suburban, and small schools.

This MCES CFG Coaches Project report similar findings to the internal studies by the NSRF and Annenberg Institute for School Reform. Teachers' practices have changed and student achievement has improved. A causal link is not argued by the authors. A culture of inquiry among CFG members was noted, as was a larger network of meaningful connections with educators across the state. The MCES project noted specifically that teacher leadership is prominent in schools where CFGs were instituted. These teacher leaders felt empowered and they were involved in the leadership structure and restructuring of schools (Tice, 1999, as cited in Murphy, 2001).

The only external study reported involving CFGs is a unpublished dissertation work by Murphy (2001). Her study markedly differs from the internal studies by school reform groups. This case study deconstructs the five-year history of an urban high school that was included as part of the first cohort of schools to be accepted into the NSRF. As a former teacher, member, and coach of CFGs at this school, she attempted to assume an indigenous-outsider (Banks, 1998) role in her data collection. Banks uses this term to describe someone who was socialized in a culture but has, through higher education, assimilated into an outside culture or community. While a teacher at the school, Murphy was the CES coordinator and became the first coach trained by the NSRF at that site. Murphy does not detail how she sees herself as an "outsider," whether she sees this status attached to her doctoral studies or whether it stems from her working position no longer with the school.

As one of her research questions probes, "What aspects of the implementation effort may have contributed to the failure to sustain?" (p. 53), it is concerning that she does not offer more description about her intent to honor the voices of her participants and detail how her former position as professional development coordinator will impact her findings on why a professional

development initiative was not sustainable. Murphy also does not address her impressions of whether her participants were able to reflect openly with her, as the previous coordinator of professional development. She poses a research journal as a way to increase validity. She lists the following three categories as entries: impressions from the interviews, examinations of archival documents, and perceptions of CFGs. It is noticeably absent that she does not intend to document her research process, notably the problematic nature of her researcher role and bias. She does include peer debriefers as part of her research design. However, one of these debriefers is a founder of the NSRF, which may be problematic.

Through interviews with coaches, current and former administrators, and former CFG members, Murphy crafted a descriptive history of the nine groups that were formed by ten coaches over a five-year period. Especially imperative to her study is why these CFGs were not sustainable. Over half of the CFGs were not able to honor the two-year commitment to membership. Effective CFGs, of which only 30% of the groups perceived themselves as successful, were those cluster of teachers that created a high level of trust, shared values, and a focus on student achievement.

Two of these CFGs were designated for novice teachers. These specialized groups were not intended by the administration to continue past one year. The hope was that members would join a CFG during their second year of teaching. This insinuates that a CFG comprised of only novice teachers is not effective in the same terms as a CFG composed of veteran teachers. In Murphy's study, all but two of the novice teachers joined a different group their second year. The decision by the administration and the professional development coordinator to conduct CFGs composed of novice teachers for the sake of orientation does not align with the basis premises of CFG work. The group was given an external agenda and could not function like

other CFGs when their deficiencies were the entire reason for their existence: induction (or seduction) into the current culture.

Contextual Factors

School culture. Dunne and Honts (n.d.) report that successful CFGs work on substantive educational matters together. In some of these schools, teachers felt a constant burden of guilt regarding the time spent in personal reflection on practice (Dunne & Honts, n.d.). It was difficult for these teachers to make sense of “joint work” (Little, 1990b) ventures where individuals set personal, not collective, goals. These teachers had not realized what teachers at The Four Seasons Network had appreciated: the end goals they had committed to were broader and more inclusive than their initial concerns (Lieberman, 1995).

CFGs that needed to overcome teacher isolation and privacy had more difficulty progressing to increased levels of interactions. “Trust” versus “congeniality” was found to be an important differentiation. CFGs that functioned congenially were able to support each other but not offer the kind of feedback that fosters meaningful change. They were not able to withstand the “torpification” (McDonald, 1992) involved with torpedo-like critique that McDonald used to describe his own teaching aims with high school students and the heartfelt analysis his secondary educator reading group offered.

The cultural overlay of privacy is not the only factor related to school climate that affects CFG work. A disconnect between the guiding principles and goals of CFGs and the school can be problematic (Murphy, 2001). Meetings helped teachers realize that change was needed, but the environment did not support teachers as they struggled to make positive changes for teaching and learning. At Thoreau High School, CFG members diligently worked to create a culture that was reflective and collaborative with shared values. Unfortunately, this culture was completely

separate from the wider school culture where meetings were administrator-led and controlled, inservice was in the form of direct instruction, and shared governance tenets were in name only. When teachers at Thoreau moved from their CFG world to the “real world,” the challenges and barriers became too much, and CFG members needed to disengage from one of the parallel worlds in order to make sense of the situation. Each CFG eventually disbanded.

Leadership. These parallel worlds that exist in schools pose a problem for administrators. By believing that initiatives should be grassroots efforts and applying a laissez faire policy, the disconnect between the two worlds is encouraged. CFG members and coaches perceive this lack of support to also be a lack of interest in the work (Murphy, 2001). In the NSRF evaluation study of 1997 (Dunne et al., 2000), each school that documented changes in teachers’ thinking and practice employed an administrator that was publicly supportive of the CFGs and were CFG members themselves (Nave, 2000b), either in a group primarily made up of teachers, CFG coaches, or administrators.

Shared decision-making was noted by Nave (2000b) as a commonality at sites where CFGs showed changes in teachers’ thinking and practice. These school leaders desired and received input from teachers, especially around issues of teaching and learning.

However, shared decision-making and site-based management is not enough to support a restructuring school. The administrator’s role is extremely crucial, even down to his or her title. Most successful restructuring schools in Newmann’s work have titles that indicate more clearly their functions: coordinator, teacher-director, chief educational officer. These administrators viewed themselves as the center of the organization rather than at the top. This lateral view fostered teacher leadership in various arenas of the school (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996).

As an educational officer or intellectual leader, principals who lead in ways that model these values support a thriving community where principals and teachers “build bridges to the world of research and development outside the school” (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996, p. 192). Innovations are not seen just as innovative and new, but as possible conduits that will enhance the intellectual quality of students’ learning experiences. After implementation, the assessment of the innovation is collegially examined, student work scrutinized, and the cycle begins again.

Unfortunately, well-wishing administrators can also be problematic. An administrator that provided time and financial resources for the work decided to join a group the second year. Her leadership style made it difficult for teachers to function in a group with her. The group dissolved in a few short months (Dunne & Honts, n.d.). Theorists in the micropolitics of school cultures examine how administrators use their power to achieve preferred outcomes (Blase, 1988).

Another principal used her power to require membership by staff members. The forced entry promptly ended the groups’ development. In the third year of the initiative at Thoreau High School, a new administrator allocated one Friday a month for “CFG work.” Although this was an honest attempt to incorporate CFGs into the working schedules of teachers, adding uninterested teachers to existing CFGs slowed down any progress as well as change the types of discussions that took place at the meetings.

CFGs are self-governing bodies; therefore they need to make decisions about membership. Two CFGs from Nave’s (2000b) study wrestled with administrators’ presence in their groups. In both situations, either an individual teacher or a group of teachers felt uncomfortable with the dynamics. After conversations that spanned several meetings, both groups decided to support the teachers and asked the administrators to not take part in the CFG.

In one CFG, the decision seemed to be the right decision because after the administrator's departure, the group returned to a productive focus on issues of teaching and learning. However, the other group started to regret their decision as they began to view their administrator as a collegial and supportive leader. Effective leaders of collaborative environments do not unilaterally resolve differences but manage conflicts successfully (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

Administration plays a key role in supporting or hindering CFG work. Relationships, habits, and structures that have taken years to build may unravel in a matter of weeks (Little, 1990b). Changes in administration sealed the fate of CFG work at several schools (Dunne & Honts, n.d.). An entire collaborative culture, where almost every staff member was involved in a CFG, was dismantled in weeks by a hierarchical administration that sought to establish a "new order." The collaborative work was viewed as being a threat to the power of the decision-makers.

Competing voices. It is important to note that all of Newmann's schools were also part of a larger, external reform movement. Reform movements are highly susceptible to failure, especially in schools where the agendas are driven primarily by the external agencies. The school leaders at these restructuring schools successfully negotiated the politics of reform within their specific contexts. They communicated often to apprise "significant others" of developments and controversies (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996).

District, state, and national accountability measures are also important considerations for CFG success. CFG members in Murphy's (2001) case study reported challenges from other staff members due to the increased high-stakes testing that was being implemented over the five-year study. The staff did not feel empowered to change what took place in their classrooms. Instead of

seeing standards as guides, they viewed them as standardized restraints, unlike some of the participants in Nave's (2000b) analysis.

Novice teacher learning communities can be problematic for members at their individual sites (Achinstein & Meyer, 1997; Meyer & Achinstein, 1998). One participant in a Stanford study described the animosity within his department regarding his curricular collaboration with another teacher. Several relayed feelings of frustration in sharing their constructivist practices with colleagues at their own schools. Novice teachers in Illinois experienced similar results when they attempted to share innovation (Zepeda & Ponticell, 1997).

Although the possible sites for this study do not subscribe to whole-school reform movements, a district accountability system plays a strong role in the community and in each school. CFG members negotiated between standards for students and developmentally appropriate practices experienced elsewhere (see Chapter 13).

Time. The ever-problematic time factor in schools (Stanulis & Jeffers, 1995) is not a barrier for the effective CFGs in Nave's study (2000b). CFGs that meet during school hours, often during professional development time, boasted 100% attendance rates. Groups that met at different times each month seemed to have less influence on the teachers and their students. On average, researchers noted more changes in teachers' thinking and practice in sites where CFGs met for half days instead of two hours or less each time.

Lieberman's (1995) discussion of professional learning that makes a difference notes longevity of more than one or two days. "Instead, they [professional learning opportunities] become part of the expectations for teachers' roles and form an integral part of the culture of a school" (p. 593).

However, offering time and substitute teachers is not enough. In the high school in Murphy's (2001) case study, these structural components initially had administrator commitment, but the guiding philosophy of the work did not have loyalty from teachers and administrators alike.

The issue of time is connected to some schools' dilemma of whether CFG participation should be mandatory or voluntary. A school in Nave's (2000b) study arranged a school calendar of one half-days of professional development time each month for CFG work. Teachers who were not CFG members were then required to join a CFG, create a new CFG, or construct their own "comprehensive professional development plan". Nave reports that "although they suspected this policy was designed to coerce them to join the CFG, no staff member decided to create his or her own plan" (2000b, p. 27). End-of-the-year interviews revealed that most of these teachers new to CFG work agreed that the work was congruent with their school's vision and mission. Some even acknowledged that the feedback they received was helpful. No specific data are given to support these assertions.

An elementary school that modified to whole-school CFGs halfway through the first year presumed that mandatory participation would not be problematic. In this situation the teachers that were actively or passively resisting the process were not vocal to the administration about the work, instead other CFG members reported that the CFG work was suffering because of staff members who were not engaged. Two years later, Nave (2000b) reported that all but one of the five "resistors" had come to see the value of the process. For the lone holdout, the administrator altered the annual evaluation to include CFG contributions. "After that, his resistance became much less apparent" (p. 28). Regardless of appearances, Nave does not indicate whether the resistance was still evident in this staff member.

Schools that require CFG membership may be involuntarily subscribing to inconsistent goals. CFG work is based on a tenet of teachers bringing authentic, relevant work experiences to the group. The structure is organized as an invitation for professional development that can directly impact student achievement. Although the research on CFGs is sparse, leadership has been reported as being a factor both to support and hinder the CFG work (Dunne et al., 2000; Nave, 2000b).

The administrator controls this factor at a school site. Negotiation with the building principal offered this novice teacher learning community scheduled time during the school day to collaborate.

Lack of clarity. Murphy's (2001) extensive analysis of one school's journey involving CFGs identifies an additional contextual factor. CFG coaches, after participating in an intensive week of training with other outstanding teachers that are excited about collaboration and improving schools, needed recharging. Continuous coaches training was not available for coaches in the infancy of the NSRF's implementation of CFGs in the early 1990s. Coaches in Murphy's study felt unsupported, both by the administration and the larger NSRF initiative.

The coaches came to realize, individually and collectively during a CFG coaches meeting, that they were unclear about the goals and intents of the NSRF as a whole. The coaches' training they participated in focused on creating trust in groups, analyzing student work, and starting new CFGs. The coaches believed in the work but did not know whether or not to believe in the initiative. Murphy asserts that the individual activities planned for CFG meetings were valuable, but were not connected to a larger principle or goal. Coaches planned activities that they had participated in during their training without a clear articulation of how these experiences lead to the creation of a learning community, or why that was important. This

shortsightedness limited the amount of input that CFG members gave to the group, thus devaluing their experience.

This lack of clarity about the initiative also made the coaches reflect on their lack of clarity about how to set achievable learning goals and provide documentation to reflect those goals. Conversations about goals were too broad, such as the goal of exploring practice or improving learning. This lack of concrete goals made it difficult to connect the work to practice; therefore not perceive positive results in teacher and student learning. When tangible evidence was missing, participation dwindled and interest faded.

Murphy's interviews and analysis suggest that CFG members were "sick and tired" of protocols at meetings. They viewed the use of protocols and building trust activities as a waste of time when they could be focusing on increased student learning due to the district's increased focus on standardized testing. Both teachers and coaches alike reported a lack of new learning within their respective CFG. Murphy suggests that the overuse of protocols at Thoreau High School allowed the members to reach one level of discourse. The presenters felt safe using the structured conversations that protocols foster. The data suggest that teachers wanted and needed deeper conversations that critically examined the work being presented. How collegial they wanted to conversations to be is not clear. I contend that the CFG members were not invested enough in their groups to engage in meaningful enough ways that the protocols would be useful.

Several CFG members suggested peer observations as an additional activity that, when coupled with protocols, could have enhanced collegial discourse among the members. Four of the CFGs made attempts to implement peer observations as part of their CFG work; none executed their plans. Members and coaches report time constraints as the main reason for not

including this process. Murphy suggests that the higher levels of trust and collegiality needed to support peer observations were not present in the CFGs.

This scant treatment of CFG work around the country is also a concern of the NSRF, who have prioritized the documentation of their work in the coming year. We have yet to make sense of dialogue and group dynamics using portraiture. Thick description is missing from the internal studies that NSRF launched. Also, using CFGs as induction support has not yet been documented in a rigorous way.

Conclusion

This study has been designed to capitalize on a research method designed to allow the researcher to fully enter the study. As a coach of a CFG being used in a dissertation study, portraiture is an appropriate choice to document the work of the group and my reflections about the process. Portraiture also serves to address significant gaps in the literature in terms of dialogue and group dynamics.

Novice teachers have been stereotyped in mainstream and educational literature as deficient 22-year olds that need someone to hold their hand. Educational texts fail to document stories of novice teacher learning communities, especially those that are built on the tenets of constructivist professional development. Few studies exist that record novice teachers' reflections about their own classroom decision-making. Even fewer track situations where novices offer each other feedback about their work, particularly using protocols that encourage equitable voices in dialogue.

This CFG represented a meaningful response by an administrator preparing for a state directive mandating induction programs. The group of first-year teachers formed a learning community, building on each other's expertise and experiences. Publicly sharing

authentic work, dilemmas of practice, and successes constituted meeting agendas. Protocols capitalized on teachers' reflections regarding process and product in order to focus participants' dialogue. Our group was called a Critical Friends Group, a term that was familiar to some teachers within the context of this research site.

Using CFGs as induction support is a timely topic, in Georgia and in the nation. This study will inform policymakers and program developers that seek to improve teacher induction experiences for novice teachers.

CHAPTER 4

VOICE AS AN ARRANGER: METHODOLOGY

A musical arranger uses existing musical ideas to construct a new piece that is fresh for the listener. Inherent in this activity is the construction of new material that will tie together the existing pieces. If the new material didn't exist, the resulting piece would be redundant. My chapter on methodology arranges and constructs in similar ways, all the while conscious of the nature of qualitative research. New material is constantly added while old material is reconstructed as data emerges that cause me to rethink my intellectual framework and design. Musical connections were particularly important in making sense of my coaching and facilitating experiences.

Each chapter referring to *voice* is my conscious reflection on the choice of methodology: portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Portraitists must own their work and the decisions they make in regard to it. References to music are one way in which I attempt to own the process and make it organic to me, yet continuing to relish the aesthetic connections between the visual arts and music. As a scholar, I am learning to examine work critically: standards documents, research articles, even email messages. I am less prone to accept work based on the authors' credentials; rather, I am beginning to see flexibility within words and concepts, and while internalizing the intents and purposes of the research, shape the work for my particular contexts.

Portraiture

Portraiture requires a calibration between my conceptual framework, my developing hypotheses, and the collection of data. It is a “dance of vigilance and improvisation” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 43). It forces me to explore binaries, both my own and those embodied by actors and their environments. I was drawn to it by the weaving of aesthetics and science, of education and art, and of relationship and scholarship (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It feels organic to my construction of self as a researcher and to the actors with whom I wish to interact.

In developing portraiture, Lawrence-Lightfoot was heavily influenced by a “long arc of work, reaching back two centuries that joined art and science” (p. 5). Novelists and philosophers, like Rousseau and Diderot, wrote treatises and novels in the 18th century; clinical occupations like medicine, melded patients’ stories and science into clinical tales during the 19th century. In *Art and Experience*, Dewey (1934/1958) encouraged educators to find strategies for representing the aesthetics of teaching and learning without distorting its texture and richness. Later 20th century scholars have continued to be troubled by binaries and seek to integrate and bridge problematic gaps. DuBois integrated numerous social sciences through his work in sociology, philosophy, literature, and social activism. The notion of “thick description” by Geertz (1973) is underscored by an imaginative “tableau” that still requires a rigorous and systematic attention to the details of social realities and human experiences.

Portraiture is a form of inquiry that honors the actor foremost as an individual that wishes to feel seen – “fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected, scrutinized” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 5). Its deeply empirical nature is grounded in systematically collected data. Featherstone (1989) describes portraiture as a “revulsion against the reigning style

of . . . imperial social science” (p. 375), not to be confused with portraiture as an empirical methodology in which “scientific facts gathered in the field give voice to a people’s experience” (p. 375). This experience is believable: verisimilitude.

Relationships

Portraiture is an appropriate avenue for exploring what happens when novice teachers participate in a CFG because it resists social science preoccupations with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies. Through the search for what works, inevitably imperfections and agendas emerge. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) explored “good” high schools in her first published portrait, *The Good High School*. She used her stance to define goodness: “the counterpoint and contradictions of strength and vulnerability, virtue and evil (and how people, cultures, and organizations negotiate those extremes in an effort to establish the precarious balance between them)” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9).

Individuals and sites that are explored through the portraiture process feel respected and valued. Instead of studying teachers like “fruit flies” (Featherstone, 1989, p. 376), portraiture seeks an emic perspective (Wolcott, 1999) and honors voices, especially those belonging to novice teachers, a highly publicized subgroup of teachers who are rarely spoken of in a positive vein. This full disclosure aligns with my own perceptions of novice teachers as intelligent individuals that have gifts and skills to offer students and the school culture at large. The dialogue at our CFG meetings certainly support novices as reflective practitioners that seek to improve.

The process of preparing to conduct research, especially the construction of poetry has made me aware of binaries in my life and in my thinking. Portraiture acknowledges binaries in lives and thoughts, offering discovery and generosity in the process by seeking to understand

how people deal with these margins. In fact, these struggles can serve as the guiding force for the exploration: strength and vulnerability, beauty and imperfection, mystery and openness. My own portrait may be about acceptance, affirmation, and appreciation.

Portraiture is an appropriate methodology for my study because I am central in the creation of this novice teacher learning community. As Eudora Welty makes the distinction: I am “listening *for* a story, not *to* a story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12). The latter is a more active stance, where the portraitist keenly uses contexts and environments to co-construct an image that rings true for the actor. Similarly, the coach of a CFG must actively listen for elements of classroom stories that require further clarifying and probing. To coach effectively is to create a portrait of a group.

My school presence was felt through the focus of the inquiry, the relationships with the actors, the interpretation of the action, the tracing of the themes, and in the creation of the narratives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Building and maintaining relationships has been an important part of my professional life. As a teacher in a private school, parent relationships were pivotal. Directing the music program at churches has required sensitivity to a variety of adult agendas. The field placement process for preservice teachers necessitates negotiation and understanding at various school sites.

The relationships with the actors in particular is deserving of additional attention. Ethnographer Michael Jackson (1989) connects the building of relationships and the development of knowledge: “Knowledge of the other is not just a product of our theoretical thought and research activity; it is a consequence of critical experiences, relationships, choices, and events both in the field and in the quotidian world of our professional and family lives” (p. 34). He also connects the building of relationships to validity: “To compare notes on experience

with someone else presumes and creates a common ground, and the understanding arrived at takes its validity not from our detachment and objectivity but from the very possibility of our mutuality, the existence of the relationship itself” (p. 35). Feminist writer Carol Gilligan (1982) articulates the value of the relationships when she writes about the paradoxical truth of human existence: We know ourselves as separate inasmuch as we live in connection with others and differentiate ourselves from others through relationships (p. 63). Portraitists see relationships as nurturing self-understanding and fertilizing the “common ground” that Jackson refers to (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). “As portraitists, we enter people’s lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint . . . and leave . . . [W]e create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 11). Silences certainly are apropos for meaningful, collaborative work, for silence may often indicate that members are giving space for thinking and listening. These relationships demonstrate a more responsible ethical stance and are more likely to yield authentic relationships (Oakley, 1981). The NSRF values authenticity in relationships and activities.

Context

Context is key to the portraitist. Contextual cues help the portraitist make sense of how actors negotiate their experiences. Portraitists employ context in five ways. For each component, I offer a brief description and a narrative that supports its presence in the study.

Detailed description of the physical setting. The ecological context of the school site must be offered, moving from a macro perspective to a micro perspective as the site comes more clearly into focus. The physical characteristics of the neighborhood, the student population, the teacher population, the administration, and the staff are all pertinent to the portrait. The vision and actual operations of the school district must be included to set the stage. Moving closer to the

meeting space, the material characteristics of the school building are necessary, especially the situational specifics that place our meeting place within the larger school: grade level hallways, access to resources, distance from administration.

The meeting space itself is crucial to engagement with the portrait. I created a feeling of embeddedness in the portrait. Photographs and sketches assisted me in the construction of a narrative that captures the many uses of our meeting space. I did not attempt to capture the physical nuances of each CFG member's classroom; in fact, I never was invited into any of their rooms.

Every school I have entered in Marion County contains the same furniture made out of cherry wood – quite an austere choice for places that hopefully will celebrate students and their accomplishments. Our conference room is located across a hallway from the principal's office. The two giant conference tables in our meeting space were crafted out of the same wood, topped with a plexiglass protector against water rings and leaky ink pens. Other pieces of cherry adorn the room: a credenza, lateral file cabinet, and a book shelf. Binders of various shapes, sizes, and colors form a collage on the bookshelf, their vertical titles indicating this room is a storehouse of state standards, local initiatives, and "effective" teaching strategies. The cinder blocks do not gleam in the florescent light, but they are not in ill-repair either. The state of the carpet, an institutional tradition using flecks of many colors to disguise stains, does not draw our attention. A paisley print frames the top of four windows that give a glimpse into a major hallway of the school. Mini-blinds offer a respite from the sea of students that swim by every 55 minutes.

Researcher's perch and perspective. As I sketch myself into the portrait, I offer my perspectives and biases on what I see and I experience. Others' responses to my presence are critical to report. My research journal inextricably links this necessary component of portraiture

to a feature of generalizability I deem important for this study. The impressions of students, other novice teachers, other veteran teachers, and administrators are vital to note and interpret.

Inclusive in the description of environments and people are my own “inner stirrings” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 52), opening myself up for scrutiny, and most importantly, allowing space for the reader to make his or her own interpretations.

My own academic and cultural history makes it difficult sometimes to have conversations in which I feel examined. However, pieces of my past have demonstrated a rebellion against collective notions of acceptance. I am ready to open myself up for scrutiny, both academically and personally, as portraiture requires that stance.

Take Eleanor. Here's a lady with her doctorate that has been runnin' CFGs for years. She doesn't take slack from nobody. That's why I was really afraid to tell her I was comin' here today. She nabbed me right before I left and asked if we could meet durin' plannin' to talk about report cards. I told her that I couldn't because I had CFG. It's such a rub to her that we get time to meet durin' the day. I think it really ticks her off.

History, culture, and ideology of place. In alignment with the physical setting, the history of structures, signs, and symbols is pertinent. The portraitist is particularly interested in the consonance and dissonance between physical signs and the interior culture of the school. Multiple buildings and trailers may be indicative of the disconnected experiences of novice teachers. A well-manicured outdoor façade might match the ideology of a particular administrator.

Trailers that lined the perimeter of the school were not part of the dialogue at CFG meetings. Each novice teacher was located inside the building in a classroom that did not need to be shared with other teachers. When a school-wide “Hat Day” triggered controversy about

inconsistent definitions among teachers and administrators of what constituted a hat, some members of the CFG remarked that they saw each other from across the lunchroom. “We never see each other – except here.”

Central metaphors and symbols that shape the narrative. The *a vivo* themes that actors unknowingly share drive the use of metaphors in a portrait’s narrative. A fragment of a casual conversation with a mentor teacher, novice teacher, or administrator may resonate, lending coherence to a variety of other experiences. The process of making sense of situations is propelled by each additional use of an educational acronym, school pledge, or popular slang expression.

“I want to be a part of it. I want to hear it. I don’t have time to mix all of this right now and put it into practice. I don’t know if I could this year until I really get a handle on things. I think it’s a good thing. I really do.” William is on “the edge” – the same edge the group noted in Holly’s journalism class, the same edge that seemed to produce students that own their work, the same edge on which where middle school teachers and students seem to teeter back and forth. William is on the edge of making the connection that what he wants is also what he needs.

Actor’s role in shaping and defining context. This piece of context consideration is integrally relevant to my stance regarding novice teachers. Portraitists, then, must be attentive to how contexts change, from their perspective and the perspective of their actor. No context is static; all actors affect context in some way. The powerlessness of novice teachers in many sites still is a factor in context construction and constant reconstruction. Aside from my own perspective on school context, the ways that actors “shape, disturb, and transform environments” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p.58) must be attended to each visit.

I am particularly worried about this meeting. On Monday and Tuesday, the local newspaper printed numerous stories about the principal at Greenville Middle suddenly “resigning amidst a district investigation.” Curiously absent in the stories were voices of teachers. Apparently it sells more papers to interview parents in the “car-rider line” that offer shallow quips like, “I heard he was a nice man. I think he did good things for the school.” Then as abruptly as the story began, it halted, without a word or explanation.

Interpretively Speaking

Qualitative research scholars classify portraiture in different ways. Wolcott (1999) would categorize portraiture as a participant observation strategy while Yin (1994) and Merriam (1998) label it as a descriptive case study. Van Maanen (1988) views portraiture as a type of auto-ethnography, within the genre of “impressionist tales.”

In its focus on experience, portraiture pushes the constraints of phenomenology in several arenas: (a) to combine aesthetic and empirical description; (b) focus on convergence of narrative and analysis; (c) speaking to broader audiences; (d) standard of authenticity; and (e) recognition of the use of self as the primary research instrument (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 44).

Combining the aesthetic and empirical. Researchers do not “give voice,” but they hear voices that they record and interpret (Riessman, 1993). To rely solely on empirical values negates the very nature of the actor. All actors have aesthetic qualities, and analytic rigor alone may not bring these to light. It is through community building – creating a scholarship that is unique, respectful, and utterly human that allows the portraitist to combine the art and science, the aesthetic and empirical.

Portraiture also encourages the actor to offer explanations and analysis in addition to description. Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims that objectivity is reached through intentional acts of

consciousness that demonstrate fidelity to the phenomena. This would preclude aesthetic responses and presentations. Portraitists are dedicated to the actor or institution that is being portrayed and do not claim to be objective. Their presentations are faithful to the multifaceted and complex nature of the actor/institution.

Converging narrative and analysis. “Doing” and “writing” are dialectically related and interdependent activities (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 15). When using portraiture, one can be responsive to the very nature of the actors, who do not reflect only during meetings, interviews, or when asked. Instead, creating a portrait with consistent attention to subjectivities, diligent attention to context, and permeating respect for the actor will allow the narrative to emerge.

Riessman (1993) discusses the use of narrative with ethnographic techniques because the events are important as well as the stories informants create about them. These levels of interpretation, the double hermeneutic, is critical to the work of the portraitist. However, Welty’s commentary on story is significant: ethnographers listen *to* a story, portraitists listen *for* a story.

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) liken ethnography to building a puzzle: starting with a frame (outside pieces), adding emerging themes (pieces with striking patterns), and finishing with smaller details until no holes remain (other pieces). The goal of the puzzle is to create a finished picture, or a “credible” story in researcher terms.

Portraitists resist the urge to finish any such puzzle. The construction of the whole may not render a simplistic logic or imply consistency. The final product(s) is resonant; aligned with the “referential adequacy” Eisner (1985) recommends. An intense familiarity with the setting is required for referential adequacy. These discerning critical observations, tested against empirical evidence, can only be perceived by someone with a deep understanding. Then the portrait may

embody verisimilitude for three audiences: the actors reflected in the story, the readers, and the portraitist himself.

In listening for a story (or a wealth of related stories) researchers place value on the narrative, what the actor has chosen to release. But we also place value on the process, encouraging the forum for conversations about matters that are important. Maxine Greene (1995) poses that imagination exists for its own sake, to “awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard and unexpected” (p. 28). Portraiture places an equal right for narrative to exist.

Writing broader. By using portraiture, I have the opportunity to address a more eclectic audience than academia. I write not only to inform but also to inspire readers. I hope to “deepen the conversation” (Geertz, 1973, p. 29) about teacher induction and collaboration. Although my original intent at the onset of this degree program was to “write as required,” I wish to now “write as needed.” The utilization of various writing genres forces me to focus on audience and work even harder in the field to co-construct something that resonates with readers.

Authenticity. Validity within a qualitative frame does not imply the existence of some objective truth for comparison purposes. Instead, validity correlates to the generalizability and trustworthiness of a study (Glesne, 1999). Portraiture chooses to address *authenticity*: “capturing the essence and resonance of the actors’ experience and perspective through the details of action and thought revealed in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 12).

I created a portrait where readers can see themselves and be identified. However, in addition to the resonance that a well-crafted portrait provides, I also desire to use criteria for validity accepted in the qualitative research arena. Scholars in qualitative research often provide procedures for enhancing the trustworthiness of a study (cf. Leininger, 1994; Muecke, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Popay, Rogers, & Williams, 1998). Oakley (2000, pp. 64-65) has

synthesized several researchers' perspectives. Table 5 indicates which criteria from Oakley's synthesis will be relevant in this study. I grouped the criteria for ease of reporting.

Table 5. Characteristics for Examining Trustworthiness. (Oakley, 2000, headings added)

Examining Self	Working with Participants	Reporting Data
Constant monitoring of subjectivities	Full immersion	Multiple observations
Linking researcher's conceptual frame to data	Member checks	Collecting adequate, appropriate and broad data
Responsiveness of research design to social context	Protecting anonymity and integrity of participants	Collecting repeated observations/evidence
Peer debriefing	Establishing rapport	Negative case analysis
	Acknowledging relationship between researcher to researched and examining impact	Thick data/description
		Making sources of data clear
		Exploring and contrasting diverse sources of data
		Writing a literarily competent report

The strategies within the chart will be expanded in subsequent paragraphs to demonstrate their role in this study.

“Prolonged engagement provides scope [and] persistent observation provides depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The CFG lasted an entire semester, from January to May.

Multiple data resources offered triangulation of possible emerging themes and interpretations; a believable portrait of this novice teacher learning community requires it.

Artifacts, focus group transcripts, and CFG meeting transcripts converged to offer credibility to the findings.

My plan for analysis included iterative cycles that demanded mindful attention to subjectivities. Gergen (1985) links this to the constructivist concept of sense data. Creswell (1998) describes this component as the “clarification of researcher bias.” Using response data (St. Pierre, 1997) is a form of member checking. The continuous return to actors offers the opportunity to create verisimilitude by encouraging the reciprocity of creating an accurate and subtle portrait. Response data was also collected from significant others in my life: doctoral committee members, fellow doctoral students, my wife, other CFG coaches, and members of conference presentation audiences.

Negative case analysis (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1998), or external divergence (Guba, 1978), paralleled my process of examining pieces of data that did not fit the current scheme. Quantitative researchers could liken this to the process of identifying outliers in the data set.

Patti Lather (1986, p. 78) offers suggestions for minimum expectations to include in research designs: (a) reflexive subjectivity, some documentation of how the researcher’s assumptions have been affected by the data, reflective journal analysis notes; (b) face validity, a notion of conceptual integrity where the respondents are part of the recycling of categories, analysis, and conclusions; (c) catalytic validity which searches for “documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents;” and (d) triangulation of multiple methods, data sources, and theories.

Self as the primary research instrument. The identity and voice of the portraitist is large and explicit in this form of inquiry. Balancing my personal predisposition with disciplined skepticism and critique were central to my efforts to create an authentic portrait.

The portraitist's voice is everywhere – “overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the central themes” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). However, the portrait is not a solo for the portraitist; rather a performance of the participant/actor, sometimes solo, other times with harmony and counterpoint. The voice of the portraitist is then “poignant with paradox” (p. 86), judiciously placed yet omnipresent.

Heuristic inquiry (Patton, 1990) is organic to portraiture. My personal experience as a novice teacher and as the coach of the CFG are both pertinent to the study and are inherent throughout the narratives. The second element of heuristic inquiry requires the actor(s) to share “*an intensity of experience*” (p. 71, italics original). Surely the first year of teaching qualifies as an intensive experience.

The uniqueness of heuristic inquiry is the legitimization of the personal experiences, reflections, and insights of the researcher. A connectedness between researcher and actor develops and promotes opportunities for shared reflection.

Donald Freeman (1996) offers a categorical analysis of qualitative researchers' ideas about voice. Voice can be an epistemological stance about knowledge, a sociopolitical stance about who is talking and why, and a methodological stance toward what lies in the data. Portraiture encompasses all three of these orientations, as well as adding concerns about interpretation, relationship, aesthetics, and narrative (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Portraitists capture the terrain and its inhabitants with new eyes, from the perimeter. This open discussion of perspective leads to a quest for interpretation, using a framework already inherent in their lens through which they see and record. Publicly offering autobiographical accounts that position the reader to make an informed, personal interpretation, the portraitist is

ready to document words, gestures, tones, and silences; sometimes joining in dialogue with the actor.

Coaching and Facilitating

It is not realistic to assume that a group of novice teachers would immediately view an external educator as a peer or a “critical friend.” I did not want to embody these roles in a CFG. I am their coach, a trained facilitator who uses differentiated skills to support trust-building, team-building and conversations typically difficult for teachers to engage in; provides connections to resources and knowledge from the larger community of education research and practice; and sustains CFG teachers as they begin peer-observation work. I am conscious of inequitable power relations between university researchers and teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994), but also aware of exciting, relevant collaborations (Allen, Michalove, & Shockley, 1993; Bisplinghoff & Allen, 1998).

Jon Appleby (n.d.) kept a journal during his CFG coaches’ training that documents his thinking about coaching and teaching. Particularly relevant in Appleby’s thoughts are descriptions of his prior assumptions about cooperative adult learning.

Undergraduate teacher education programs may encourage collaboration and even require it at times, but individual assessments (grades) are the inevitable product. No part of the accountability movement focuses on teacher collegiality and collaboration. Teachers are trained to work as independent units.

State organizations, or occasionally large counties, certify individuals as “knowing all they need to know” (Appleby, n.d.) in order to teach. Temporary, provisional, or Level I certificates around the country are awarded to individuals with marginal schooling and/or no experience working with children. Educators in Texas with provisional degrees can retire in the

school system never having completed the coursework required for an undergraduate degree in education (Darling-Hammond, 2001). When school districts offer classes on cooking or relaxation techniques as teacher professional development, a message is sent to teachers that they do not need to develop in areas of curriculum or instruction in order to impact students.

All teachers are not consistently supported in creating rich learning environments in their classrooms. This is a deadly combination when mixed with a culture that does not value that teachers continue their own learning. There is a link missing that connects ongoing professional development with an impact on student learning. Moments in the life of this CFG bridged that important gap.

How then do teachers view themselves? Appleby (n.d.) poses that many of his colleagues view themselves as supervisors of student activity. School mission and vision statements proudly tout students that reflect on their learning but miss the adults in the building.

The teachers that are motivated to develop themselves professionally must battle this culture that focuses *solely* on the learning of students and arrange their own adult learning experiences outside of the school building. In these cultures, it would seem ridiculous to think that adults could learn from looking at the work done by students.

Educators in Miami-Dade County are using CFGs to negotiate a state mandate requiring all school districts to adopt a school reform from a menu of choices. Two educators from this district started to keep a list of school reform terms and what meanings were attached to the terms in various contexts across that large school district. In comparing coaching and facilitating, Bermudez and Lindahl (n.d.) see coaching as a broader and more long-term activity. Coaches take responsibility for the *overall* direction and progress of a group while a facilitator takes responsibility for the direction and progress of the *process* being used. This is not to say that a

coach exerts dictatorial control regarding topics to study and protocols to use; rather, a coach uses a variety of facilitation skills so the members trust him to create a constructivist environment that values and honors their individual and collective voices.

To write a portrait of the group and not include the work of the facilitator would be problematic, for coaching experiences are so similar to the experiences of a portraitist.

Qualitative methodology requires the researcher to take stock of his role in the process and in the resultant data. Portraiture invites researchers to become more aware of their own stance in the process of research and in the decision-making required for coaching. Thus, as a CFG coach, creating a portrait of the group is an appropriate choice because my voice and actions permeate the work.

Polyphony

*“Wondering about them because there was wondering to be done,
not because there were answers to be found.” (Smiley, 1991)*

Jane Smiley’s words from *A Thousand Acres* encourage my revisits to the data, to the design, and to the dissertation. What will I find this time? I have consistently questioned what this dissertation represents: is it a portrait of a group of novice teachers, or is it a portrait of a doctoral student coaching a group of novice teachers? Although I, like Charlie Brown, could be labeled “wishy-washy” by a pugnacious Lucy-type character, I choose a third option – it is a portrait of both.

In line with my predilection to musical analogies, I do not see a single melody, or portrait, in this work. Instead, I see individual melodies co-existing. Sometimes they move in similar ways, creating harmonies that move in parallel motion, reminiscent of hymnody. These strong, chordal compositions often evoke piety and definitiveness. Other times, the melodies

move in counterpoint, creating polyphony, that is, harmonies that are independent of each other but still coexist, creating necessary dissonance that intrigues the listener.

I represent a melody, just like each of the members of the CFG. At different points in the composition, we move in similar ways, creating strong statements that we can use and build on. We created motifs: musical ideas that do not stand alone unless they are developed. In developing elements of success, our emerging stories were mined for themes that represented the essences of our experiences, hoping that the list would inspire us to repeat the behavior to achieve further successes. The statements were solid and thoughtful: “Having a plan or a goal was needed in order to achieve success.”

Other times, our melodies did not move in parallel motion. Instead, we independently developed a shared motif – a dilemma, a piece of work – but then developed it in individual ways. Some flipped their motif and played it upside down. Others chose retrograde – a backwards approach. Another slowed it down, augmenting its length while still another may have chose diminution to speed things up. These moments of shared motifs with individual developments creates dissonance, not just musical dissonance, but cognitive dissonance that is essential for critical collegueship (Lord, 1994).

In the sharing of individual melodies and the opus that was created from their performances, I want to share pieces of my story as a facilitator that may be absent from some of the thick description present in other chapters. This is part of my melody.

Wondering

Steve Seidel (1998) poses a paradoxical view of wondering, using the *American Heritage Dictionary* (1993) as his inspiration.

To wonder (verb)

1. a. To have a feeling of awe or admiration; marvel.
 b. To have a feeling of surprise.
2. To be filled with curiosity or doubt.

Seidel finds wondering to not always be either magical or passive as the two definitions seem to pose. At times, wondering is an “active effort to be filled” (p. 37).

Along with the many tacit goals I had for these experiences with novice teachers, I hoped to increase my facilitative leadership skills. In “wondering” about how I look different now as opposed to then, Seidel’s words cause me to re-think my choices through a different lens.

“I wonder” is a phrase I choose in various settings for various reasons. This particular idiom has even found a place the language of my marriage relationship, where both parties are completely cognizant of its presence and probable rationale(s) for its use. I have read Seidel’s words numerous times, often using them as silent validation for my own stance that embodies an acceptance and exploration of multiple perspectives while presuming the goodwill of others.

However, in making sense of my choices as a coach, I examined how the group “wondered” throughout our time together. Although members began to use the particular phrase “I wonder” more frequently each meeting, I questioned as to what definition they may have been using.

When Katrina brought her slave diaries to the February meeting, we had engaged in a preconference virtually, over email. In those messages, I used questions to try and help Katrina focus her question about the work. Based on what I believed her intents to be, I posed a “tuning” for Katrina to use as a way for her to receive feedback about the first rubric that she had ever created.

What was also evident in Katrina's electronic words, and especially her verbalizations as she shared the context surrounding the work at the meeting, was awe about one particular student's performance on this assignment. Laticia had not fared favorably in Katrina's social studies class thus far. "She's on the floor ... [I gave] her 50 minutes to write an essay and she writes a paragraph" during a practice for the district writing assessment. However, this assignment forced Katrina to reconsider her view of Laticia's abilities. "She wrote eight pages of really great material." Laticia "is failing four classes and doesn't turn in any work but took the time to come up with a creative story and rip her pages like she was hiding out somewhere doing this, y'know?"

The results of the group's effort in support of Katrina were notable. She left the group determined to improve her rubric-making abilities (see Chapter 12). She also left wondering more intensely about Laticia and what this student's impetus may have been to produce such outstanding work.

I assert that the group was able to wonder about Katrina's rubric with curiosity and doubt, using the stem, "I wonder" to negotiate the uncomfortable waters of openly discussing a colleague's work. What was missing was the awe, not for the teacher's rubric, but for the students – the 23 students whose work was colorfully strewn on the table. We engaged in the work, superficially, citing it when we needed to support our contentions about Katrina's rubric.

We did not engage with any of her *students* in meaningful ways. Laticia remained on the table, not in our dialogue or in our hearts. There were moments in which the group hypothesized why this assignment seemed to invoke different responses from some of her students. Holly posed that the format was a draw for some students: "Kids need some free time to just write whatever, and not penalized for not having a period or a comma." William echoed her thoughts

later after I probed our thinking about content (see Chapter 11), “It wasn’t a matter of, well you don’t know this and you don’t know that, then this is incorrect. It wasn’t a standardized test, it was a creative assignment with flexibility. Just experiment and write it without the restraint of, man, I didn’t cross that t or dot that i.” William also used Katrina’s use of a rubric and a model to make sense of students’ motivations. Overall, Katrina did not hear her colleagues deeply wonder about one of her students – the one she wondered the most about.

Why is this analysis present in a section that examines facilitation? I want to own my role in the decision that met some of Katrina’s needs. As the coach of the group, I was familiar with numerous protocols, at least, in theory. I had been offered experiences with a few of these in my preliminary coaches’ training. As a member of another CFG, I had experienced various protocols as a participant or as a presenter of my own work. I had not, however, facilitated numerous protocols and did not have extensive experience preconferecing to help presenters hone in on their question and choose an appropriate protocol. Even as Katrina was answering clarifying questions, I wish I had stopped the process and chosen another structure to better meet what Katrina wanted.

As I debated about the impact of our work together, I wished that we had engaged in experiences that more explicitly attempted to “mine” students’ thinking. A Collaborative Assessment Conference may have helped Katrina come to some clarity in her thoughts about Laticia. In this experience, participants create a picture of a particular student by examining a piece of her work and crafting statements that wonder about her skills, her aspirations, and the impact her needs have on classroom decision-making.

Community-building

In my own classes at the university, I prioritized community-building activities as part of our rituals and routines. It was important that my preservice teacher education students developed collegiality, not congeniality. False delivery of critical feedback could not cause growth and dissonance in these budding teachers. Unknowingly, my students showed me that these activities also provided a model for adults, in this case preservice teacher education students, to problematize how their young students can become as engaged and connected as they felt as adults.

Engaging in an experience called Connections was a way for members to bridge from their experiences to a place that demanded a different kind of thinking and reflection. This process is a set number of minutes (we chose ten minutes) where members can say anything they need to in order to position themselves to meaningfully participate in the CFG meeting. Other members do not respond to anything that has said – they show their support and respect through their silence. This consistent attention to their lives outside of the CFG meetings may have served to develop community, although the CFG members often chose not to speak (see Chapter 6).

I did not engage in any other specific community-building exercises with this CFG of novice teachers. I often included the experiences on preliminary agendas, thinking that I *should* engage the members in thinking about what it takes to develop and sustain an effective learning community. At two meetings, I was thrilled that other activities emerged from the group, which I declared as more worthwhile and meaningful.

As I begin a new job with a school district, I am charged with supporting learning communities in various schools. As I worked with 55 faculty members in an elementary school

before school began, we did not analyze student work. We did not engage in consultancies. Instead, we played a game. We processed different behaviors teachers may exhibit in groups and reflected on our own tendencies when discussing matters of student achievement. One month later, we helped prepare themselves for change, as they embark on a three-year school improvement process.

I was scared, plain scared. I found myself more at ease with a small mob in a cafeteria than a group sitting around a table in a conference room. I wanted to use time in meaningful ways which, at the time, I defined as examining teacher's dilemmas and looking at their classroom work. I hoped that the members would become hooked on the processes, addicted to the stimulating conversation, and appropriately disturbed by the dissonances. I wanted them to experience my own story, my own melody from the last movement in my opus. By not carefully crafting a learning community, I may have involuntarily stifled dialogue and predetermined the depth, the undertones, of analysis.

I may have also distanced myself further from the culture of the school. By not interacting in ways that break down hierarchies, I did not offer opportunities for these novice teachers to see me in ways other than their CFG coach who worked at a nearby university.

The priorities of CFG members were sketchy at times (see Chapter 8), yet I never posed a connection to community-building until I analyzed the shape of my own melody. Even in describing and analyzing our shared experiences around dilemmas and work, I was not drawn back to community-building. It took self-reflection about my facilitation and coaching skills to posit a link.

Moral and Ethical Dilemmas

Moral and ethical dilemmas will exist within the process of two people developing such a relationship that portraiture provides. The ethical principle of beneficence means “that the risk of harm to a subject should be the least possible. The sum of potential benefits to a subject and the importance of the knowledge gained should outweigh the risk of harm to the subject and thus warrant a decision to carry out the study” (Kvale, 1996, p. 116). I created a research design that minimizes risk to the CFG members. They may have initially felt discomfort in the CFG, but community- and trust-building activities attempted to address their feelings.

The aftermath of the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) is also an ethical consideration. I did not wish to add to the prevailing educational winds that blow here and there, never the same place twice. As the study concluded, I attempted to initiate conversations with the new administrator at the site about plans for induction in the coming school year. She has not responded to my request for a conversation.

I shared my preconceptions about CFGs and about educational research with the CFG members. By doubling as a coach and a researcher, it is foreseeable that members may have consciously or unconsciously edited the quality or quantity of participations in the CFG. A video camcorder and two external microphones certainly “sterilized” the environment initially. The members referred to the equipment less frequently in subsequent meetings. When they did reference the equipment, it often was jovially suggesting that their sarcastic comments or sardonic tone was captured on tape for others to hear and see.

Regarding Methodology

Morality can be defined “as peoples’ views of what is good, right, or proper; their beliefs about their obligations; and their ideas about how they should behave” (Feeney & Freeman,

1999, p. 5). Reflecting critically on moral issues is the study of ethics. Duty and obligation are attributes to consider in this light.

Although explored in my statement of subjectivities, I struggle morally with the multiple truths that constructivism implies. In an article in *Educational Researcher*, Fenwick English's (2000) frank appraisal of portraiture prompted me to further examine the use of portraiture in my study and why I am drawn to it.

Grounded in postmodernism, English's argument centers around three points: (a) although Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis frequently contrast their method to positivism and classical scientific procedures, their language use reflects a closer connection; (b) the claim that a reader can make their own interpretation at the end of the portrait is faulty; and (c) a problematic power issue resides between the portraitist and the actor (English, 2000, p. 21).

English asserts that the intent of creating the portrait is to offer a "literal, encompassing, and stable *truth*" (p. 22, italics original). By equating *story* and *truth*, he insists that the portraitist marginalizes the context and the actor by creating a particular, unwavering narrative that is "actually true" as opposed to "how someone understands something to be true." Although the reader is presented with a portrait, English claims that a personal interpretation cannot be made because the portraitist has already accomplished that work. By employing "thick description" and rigorously attending to context, the portraitist presents a "grand narrative" that represents *the* truth for the actor.

English cites specific pages of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis's introductory chapter as foundational to his argument. "Unitary reality" and "singular essence" were offered at different points to reinforce his case, although these words or related concepts do not appear on the page numbers cited. He fails to acknowledge that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis search for the

“deviant voice” that reinforces their counterintuitive stance (Hackmann, 2002). I do not equate *story* and *truth*, or *narrative* and *truth*. Instead, I reflect on the multiple interpretations of narrative (Denzin, 1989), the “fluid and contextual” (Riesmann, 1993, p. 15) meanings that actors and readers/listeners involuntarily assign. Although English claims that logocentrism, the desire for a fixed ground, is the purpose of portraiture (and possibly narrative in general), I view portraiture more holistically, as an opportunity to come to multiple understandings and insights through the creation of a portrait that uses multiple stories to reveal an essence about an actor: an essence that may or may not *look* like them.

With caution I proceed. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis acknowledge the need to attend meticulously to detail but do not claim that missing one detail will result in some partial truth. The omniscience of the portraitist is not required or even possible. I take heart in the acceptance of this impossibility as a novice researcher and portraitist. In light of my actors I also firmly ground my work in that light. To claim a heart for novice teachers and then use a methodology that strips them of their voices and agency would be paradoxical indeed.

Noddings’ (2001) ethic of caring guides my methodological decisions. By defining caring as “a way of being in the world” (p. 99) as opposed to the limited definition of “attitude” impacts decision-making in a variety of arenas. Similar to teaching, caring is relational and interactional; requiring someone to embody a list of caring researcher attributes is problematic. Her notion of fidelity as faithfulness to the participants aligns with the goals of portraitists.

Regarding Data Presentation

I take refuge in Richardson’s (1997) reminder that there is no innocent writing and Michelle Fine’s cue that researcher-writers are not transparent and are “chronically and uncomfortably engaged in ethical decisions” with their storytellers (1994, p. 75). Although

confidentiality within the CFG will not be a problem, pseudonyms are used throughout this work.

English (2000) posits that the process of choosing details and experiences to include force the portraitist to wield power. These “structured silences” are not offered to the reader; therefore, to offer this to readers under the guise of constructing individual meaning is ludicrous because the narrative is transcendent, beyond reproach. The reader cannot reject a portrait because that would be rejecting truth.

His argument regarding what to include in the data presentation of qualitative research is misguided, in that such a critique is appropriate for all forms of research. All qualitative researchers must make ethical decisions in this vein. Portraiture encourages a heightened awareness of this process by publicizing their biases and subjectivities. Reader Response theorists (cf. Rosenblatt, 1978; Suleiman & Crosman, 1980) would disagree with English’s assertion that readers of portraiture cannot construct their own interpretation of the text.

I do not claim to see everything in a setting, in a person, or in a relationship. It is similar to a painter attempting to recreate a realistic still life. Regardless of her talent, the painting still represents her selections regarding color, texture, and light; her view of the world and how these items and images interact; and her decisions about what to include and exclude. I position myself similarly; ready to offer my *view*, my *narrative*, accepting of the multiple stories and realities that result from that stance.

During the course of this research study, I made a decision that had ethical impact on this study. I decided to not further pursue a job offer at Co-NECT, a school reform movement. Discussions with Dr. Bisplinghoff helped me realize that compartmentalizing educational theory and practice is impossible; that is, concurrently working for a particular school reform initiative

and implementing a structure like CFGs would be problematic. It is highly likely that the two would work at cross-purposes, even though the reform would not be in place at the school site.

Selection of Actors and Site

This section articulates the thoughts and processes that pervaded the selection of CFG members, termed “actors.” Traditionally labeled “Sampling,” I desire to be consistent in honoring the actors in the portrait.

When we first started teaching, my wife and I found that we could not walk into restaurants without redirecting children’s behaviors. When we shop at Target, we lust after paper supplies that might work for specific school projects. Last spring, I walked into elementary schools and began to size them up for possible research sites. Principals were not seen as educational officers but as possible research collaborators. I couldn’t shut “it” off.

A large elementary school in Marion County represented everything I desired in a research site. The school had hired 13 new teachers for the next school year. The administrator was well-respected and well-known in academic circles. Even logistically, it was within 10 miles of my house. After a very promising initial meeting, additional contacts were problematic. I sought support from other professionals in the district.

After consultation with Dr. Chandler McDaniel, the Director of Research and Accountability and Dr. Freida Davidson, the Chief Human Resource Officer, eight of the remaining 54 elementary schools were under consideration. The following criteria were used for selection: (a) higher teacher turnover than other elementary schools in the county, thus in the past resulting in a higher percentage of novice teachers; (b) administrators who have been open to studies occurring on site; (c) administrators who may appreciate extra support for novice

teachers; and (d) high percentage of diversity in race and social class as compared to other elementary schools in the district.

It was a struggle whether to open this CFG opportunity to all novice teachers in the district and then make selections. Consultations with Dr. Shockley Bisplinghoff and Dr. McDaniel encouraged me to make pragmatic as well as methodological decisions. As my work as a coach, it would be simply easier geographically in a large school district to have all CFG members at one site. For the CFG members themselves, engaging in peer observations would not entail driving or needing directions.

After sending a letter outlining the study, repeated attempts were made to contact principals at each site. Most schools had very few novice teachers hired for the next school year. The geographical clusters used in the district were a consideration in order to use multiple sites. Clusters are a grouping of 3-4 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and one high school.

None of these sites seemed like workable venues for this research. A colleague met just a few months prior became the connection I needed. Our story is presented in Chapter 5.

Methods of Data Collection

McLaughlin and Allen's (1996) suggestions for teacher action researchers were helpful in grounding my plans in portraiture. The authors encourage thinking about data sources as *resources*. This shift away from temporal restraints links to my belief that a portrait can be completed but always is reconstructed and reinterpreted. Strauss (1987) warns researchers that "data collection never entirely ceases because coding and memoing continue to raise fresh questions that can only be addressed by the gathering of new data or the examining of previous data" (p. 27). The concern for honoring context permeates McLaughlin and Allen's work. Portraiture dignifies this concern in multiple ways.

All forms of data collection that I chose are congruent with my beliefs about how knowledge is constructed, honoring individual and collective reflection. At the conclusion of this writing about the data (for there will inevitably will be more to say about these experiences), I would pose an extension to McLaughlin and Allen's description of data resources. It was extremely important for my work to have data resources *and support*. I connect support structures with data because it was not emotional support that I was seeking; rather, I didn't realize that I needed support in talking about the data. Writing provided a medium to process pieces of the data – to make sense of it using a keyboard where attacking the backspace and delete keys were always viable options. Nevertheless, other media were necessary for me to make sense of these experiences. I realized that these outlets emerged from surprising sources.

Actor-observations

More commonly known as participant-observation (Wolcott, 1999), I will write myself into the portrait, opening up the opportunity for the reader to make his or her own interpretation.s This constructivist approach acknowledges intervention instead of passive observations of actor's lives. Researchers are more effective when they can act upon their hunches and interact with the people they study (LeCompte, 1999). As a member of the group, I constantly acted on my own impulses in deciding when and how to enter conversations.

Professional Organizations

The AERA annual meeting was the first group of educators that had an opportunity to hear about the data in this study. Accepted first as a poster session, I was not sure how I would present the group's discussion about accountability on visuals. An email message shortly thereafter alerted me that I was now assigned a roundtable discussion instead, in the late afternoon on the first day. Although I would like to consider the time slot as a possible factor, I

also have to accept the title of the session, the content, or even the presenter's name as reasons that two educators chose to sit at the table. This intimate setting initially caused me to abandon my plan for the 45 minutes: a Consultancy, in which my work would be the dilemma, particularly a current concern I had in regard to coaching a group that seemed hostile towards the district accountability directives. The participants were to engage in the work that was my work – meaningful learning experiences with others. In the split seconds that I had to make the decision, my own words seemed to seep to the surface – words about how everyone is a learner and has expertise, words about how meaningful experiences occur within the contexts of groups, and words about how feedback pre-empts growth.

The three of us participated in the Consultancy and reaped results. I sat dumbfounded as the two women wondered where I was in the work. I claimed portraiture as heart and constructivism as the soul of the work, and I was nowhere to be found. That writing was necessary in my sense-making of the data and that trio was necessary in how I approached how to present it to others.

NSRF Support

The NSRF maintains an electronic listserv for CFG coaches and trainers. I have taken part in this exchange since November, 2001 and have noted weekly interactions. Coaches have shared insightful articles and books and community-building exercises. For instance, a coach has shared her frustration with her current CFG and asked for assistance in a targeted area. I used this forum to consider my own data with the group.

In fact, during the month of April, a NSRF facilitator posed a query to the group: Who out there is using CFGs as mentor assistance? This strain of the listserv conversation continued for several weeks, resulting in over twelve additions to the dialogue. Although I did not

participate by adding my own developing experience, I collected the postings and now have a support list of school districts and a university that are attempting to use CFGs in ways that can support new teachers.

The NSRF Facilitator's annual meeting was held in Chicago in May. Financially supported by a federal grant, I attended the meeting, primarily interested in how the two days could serve as professional development for my facilitation skills. I did not leave empty-handed in terms of my original goal, but my experience far exceeded my initial goal. Engaging in professional conversations with educators around the country who use collaborative tools in multiple arenas was inspiring. I was able to again live some of the norms that I set for my own CFG, such as no hierarchy of expertise and allow space for speaking and listening.

It was also an important moment in my journey as a researcher as I concluded that assuming these behaviors and roles are still conscious decisions. As I allowed space for others to think aloud and wonder, I also took note of very experienced facilitators that made decisions that I questioned. Some even apologized later for their impulsivity or a discounting of their own "air time." As I transferred to my data back in the hotel room, I reflected about my own facilitation of this CFG, realizing that lens is another approach through which to mine these data.

One of the most critical pieces of the week involved bringing authentic work to this assembly. Groups of four wrote small vignettes related to CFG work in which they were currently involved. The protocol called "The Final Word" allowed a presenter to present the situation and hear three responses. The final word is reserved for the presenter at the conclusion of the round. That experience provided another opportunity to voice a piece of this work. I chose to present the group's interpretation of "Profile of a Student" (Chapter 11). 45 pieces of super-

size post-its later, each participant posted their current thinking about their work, inviting others to offer caring feedback in a “Gallery Walk.”

An experienced CFG coaches’ trainer mentored the experience, providing personal contacts or email exchanges in response to methodological and coaching questions. The two of us also co-facilitated an NSRF coaches’ training during this semester that specifically targeted mentoring and induction. I had opportunities to weekly interject my experiences in a community of interested others.

Other Artifacts

Examination of material brought to the CFG was a natural part of coaching the group. In developing the portrait, teacher work, student work, and email messages were all part of artifact analysis.

Research Journal

St. Pierre’s (1997) discussion of emotional data helped me understand the importance of keeping a research journal. In her dissertation research involving elderly women in her home community, St. Pierre realized that her subjectivities were playing a very pertinent role in her work. The reflexivity that her research journal allowed is an excellent model for my own work. As a portraitist, I documented contexts, interactions, and my own interpretations in detail. I know enough about myself as a thinker and processor to know that a consistent physical document needed to be in place in order for me to record my impressions whenever they may occur. It may not resolve research dilemmas, but it offers a space where I played with ideas, mapped connections between people and objects, and guided my epistemological stance.

My journal is a lined notebook with apples surrounding the front and back covers. My wife and I were conscious to unpack this wedding shower present before my parents arrived for a

visit. Obviously noting the presence of her carefully-chosen gift, my mother asked if we were going to use it as a guest registry for our new home. Nodding vehemently, more in response to my wife's equally-active response behind my mother, Jan Van Soelen – 07/15/96 represents our first, and according to this book, only guest. Now I see her name and interpret it as her acceptance of what is in the book: a rubber stamp indicating her approval.

Data Analysis

The goal of data analysis is the reduction of data into clearly-defined categories. It is an “iterative and generative process” – empirical through description, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis – and aesthetic through the construction of narratives (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 185). These categories formed the base from which I reported the findings. These categories became clearer upon coding field notes, transcribed meetings, and archival documents into readily-analyzable units.

Logistics

In the portraitist tradition, after observations, it was imperative that I would transcribe the CFG meeting as soon as possible. This always happened within one week of the interactions. As soon as logistically possible, the analysis continued – for it already had begun during the observation (Merriam, 1998) – by constructing emerging themes using five modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast. The portraitist looks for five key pieces that inform the construction of emerging themes: (a) repetitive refrains, spoken or appear frequently, forming a collective expression of commonly-held views; (b) resonant metaphors that resound with meaning and symbolism; (c) cultural and institutional rituals, in which values are revealed, priorities named and stories told that symbolize an institution's culture; (d) triangulation of sources that weave together threads of data from various resources, looking for a chain of evidence (Merriam, 1998);

and (e) revealing patterns from the dissonant views that do not seem to belong with the data set (cf. external divergence, Guba, 1978).

Transcripts were read as entire documents searching for threads within single meetings which I labeled “vertical reading.” Subsequent readings searched for themes across meetings – “horizontal reading.” Additional analysis investigated similar structures (e.g., tuning protocols, success analyses) across various meetings. The margins of each transcript were used to identify common words (e.g., assessment, purposeful activities, colleagues) that were used across all the meetings. These codes were grouped into larger categories (e.g., authentic issues, nudging each other to find the edge, content).

In Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’ (1997) process, they chose to these codes and categories as an iterant cycle, informing their choices of interview questions and probes. I did not make a similar choice, as I developed different understandings as I read across several meetings. However, I posit an extraordinary link between coaching and using portraiture; thus, my coaching was impacted by the data analysis. My growing understandings about individual group members, their classroom decision-making, and their stances about children, curriculum, and purposes of schooling influenced how I interacted with them and the entire group during our meetings. For instance, Shanna brought a dilemma to the group for the February meeting. The feedback she received did not align with her current understandings of “active teaching.” At the end of the process, she was unsure about how to assimilate the feedback of her peers. My coaching was affected at the next meeting as I listened to her conversations and the dialogue of the group. I used a community-building experience to reinforce the agency teachers have to process colleagues’ feedback and behaviors, rather than simply “download” decisions others have made.

Although I intellectually understood that data analysis would be a powerful process, I could not have been prepared for its magnitude – not the actual task, but the “call” of the data to mine its meaning. An anthropomorphism of sorts – the data became a living, breathing mass of words, thoughts, hopes, and dreams.

My research journal was the central storehouse of the “call:” codes, categories, and current conceptions of what these data might mean. It was the unexpected moments in which lucidity seemed to preempt whatever I was doing. I was thrilled during a slow section of An American Tribute that I had brought my apple journal with me to a rehearsal for a Fourth of July celebration. As my bassviolin perilously perched on my knees, I dropped my head behind her soundboard and scribbled furiously about possible implications for institutions for higher education. After an interview with a school district, I sat in a stuffy car for several minutes, not willing to take the time to open a window or the sunroof lest I lose the thoughts about how content was a slippery subject for these novice teachers. Even the preacher’s words on Sunday nights were not immune from my interpretations. My apple book looks like a dual-entry journal on many Sabbaths: notes about the sermon on one half and what connected with me about induction, novice teachers, and relationships on the other.

These emerging themes are always tentative. Preliminary conclusions were drawn which continued to be verified by returning to the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), reconstructing my interpretations as I proceeded. This return to the very resource where I began has been labeled response data (St. Pierre, 1997). By connecting again with the actors, I did not seek to verify a truth I have uncovered but rather to help me think about the portrait I was constructing. Portraiture involves a natural inclination toward the reciprocity that response data insinuates. How accurate and subtle those actors’ lives are represented is a form of reciprocity echoed by

ethnographers (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). A focus group of CFG members convened in August to discuss what this experience may have meant within the context of their first year of teaching. Their words are featured throughout this work.

The final step in my process necessitated a return to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis' (1997) modes of synthesis, convergence, and contrast. All themes were considered within the framework of repetitive refrains (e.g., "I wonder," use of second person), resonant metaphors (e.g., "the edge"), cultural and institutional rituals (e.g., pre and post tests, Marion County Standards), and dissonant experiences (e.g., Shanna's reaction to hearing her colleagues talk about her use of time in the classroom, the difficulty of assuming student voice during Profile of a Student). Transcripts were again examined with each of these framework elements in mind, revising my current conceptions of what constituted a theme.

Insights

All five meetings had been transcribed and initially analyzed before Polly's voice emerged as an organizing feature for describing the work of the CFG. An early attempt at making sense of the data resulted in a paper: *Making Sense of Accountability: Novice Teachers in a Learning Community* presented at the AERA annual meeting in April. As I crafted thick description about two particular CFG moments later in the semester, I was drawn back to the January transcript to search for a particular piece of dialogue. I reread the piece I needed, and I noticed Polly's clear delineation of her needs and desires. It was then, in the month of May, that I started to wonder what our group would have been like if Polly had stayed. However, I wasn't ready to organize this work around that premise. Not yet. I needed a broader lens to look at the agendas across all the meetings in order to seriously consider the viability of what this group *could have meant* for Polly and her students.

That broader lens represented itself in a colleague's suggestion of using literature to broaden my thinking about data representation. Specifically, the intent of offering Ernest Gaines' *A Gathering of Old Men* was to offer a unique example of characterization and point of view. I wanted to read it in order to think more expansively about how to introduce the readers to the members of the CFG, including myself. That desire definitely came to fruition. Chapter 6 presents each actor in this study in an exclusive way, drawing on all available data to create each portrait. Care was taken to model fragmented thoughts instead of clear, carefully-worded sentences. All dialogue from the meetings represented a large part of the data set. However, unique to the introductions are what the members of the CFG discussed when they walked into the conference room, what they chose to talk about during break, and what was on their mind when they left our collaboration. The video of each meeting was vital in creating the introductions – examining physical responses offered potential to more accurately interpret members' own verbal responses across time. A final piece of data used to support the introductions were artifacts where CFG members recorded components of school life that were comforting, risky, and dangerous.

What was not purposeful at the onset of *A Gathering of Old Men* was the impact of the work on the format of this dissertation. In Gaines' work, African-American senior citizens slowly congregate at the farm of a friend who has killed a white man. As each character arrives on the scene, a different character's lens analyzes the action. The slow collection of characters intrigued me as a reader and eventually as a researcher searching for a format that would appropriately represent our shared experiences in the CFG.

What if one of the characters in Gaines' book hadn't arrived? How would that have impacted the gathering? The link was obvious to me – what if Polly had been there? That actual

piece of dialogue, “what if Polly had been there” stemmed from the original conversation with a colleague about how *A Gathering of Old Men* could shape my introductions.

Rationale for Organization of the Study

A work of visual art offers multiple layers of experience for humans. As the piece, possibly a portrait, enters a viewer’s field of vision, an initial experience begins to occur. The viewer processes the work holistically, a “washed-over” encounter of form, color, line, and texture. Only over time does the viewer begin to deconstruct the piece, categorizing elements of enjoyment and distaste. Readers of this work may be “washed-over” in Chapter 7, as the introductions of the CFG members are contextualized within the framework of a CFG meeting – an excerpt, setting the stage for more focused views in pursuant chapters.

By using her words as various lenses to look at the CFG’s experiences, I became convinced that this stance would yield engaging, grounded text that would incorporate the themes and categories that already had been developed through initial analyses. Polly used her only CFG meeting to declare her stance about students, teaching, schooling, district policies, and colleagues. Although these could have served as possible headings and organizing features, assuming an emic posture aligned more closely with the portraitist tradition. Chapters 8-14 benefit from Polly’s openness in our only encounter within a CFG meeting. Each vignette featuring Polly from the January meeting is accompanied by a parallel narrative from another CFG meeting in which similar themes were explored by the members of the CFG. These narratives are marked by thick description layered with analysis. These narratives often reference multiple meetings and experiences. Appendix C delineates the agenda of each meeting.

Another layer of analysis emerged from new and renewed readings pertinent to learning communities, teacher collaboration, and reflection. My previous work in the literature review

served as a new lens to re-view the data. New readings I encountered during data analysis reshaped my growing understandings about the topics of the readings, as well as my data and what it might mean. I returned to my categories and reorganized using a modified lens.

So appropriate for a portraitist, other contexts prompted broader themes represented in Chapter 16. An unpleasant experience at my new job triggered a frustrated conversation with a reflective colleague who challenged me to use that experience to connect to this work. Thoughts about the potential power of mentoring communities informed this writing – writing which reshaped my prior generative thoughts. Finally, thirty boxes of Harry Wong books and videos sat in a professional development room, staring me in the face, seemingly calling out my name to challenge their presence. The assumption that all novice teachers needed his collection of classroom management tips, simply because they were novices caused me to think about more concretely about implications for school districts (Chapter 17). This writing led me back to the data to explore the substance of our conversations more broadly, comparing it to the work of Fuller (1969) and Kagan (1992).

The portraitist's process for analyzing data is appropriate for this study because I seek to document social processes and relationships – “the iterative adaptation of methodology and insight paralleling the dynamic quality of human interaction and experience” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 189). Yet these interactions and experiences are exactly what cause tensions among portraitists – the tension between developing discrete codes and searching for meaning and the tension between the researchers' desire for control and the actors' reality. Instead of trying to account for the tension through a positivistic medium, portraitists attend to the tensions and appreciate the dialectic between the approaches. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis

found that the tensions are often reflected in the final text where the emerging themes frame the text while the descriptive detail of the narrative allows for expression.

Conclusion

I developed a research design that reflects my understanding of a “seamless synthesis of rigorous procedures that unite in an expressive aesthetic whole” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 274). Thoughtfully-modulated voices offer their first-year experiences in this portrait. A supportive structure assisted the CFG members in developing their professional selves. Respect and care (Noddings, 2001) for the actors guided ethical and moral dilemmas.

Portraiture embraces my need to be intimately involved in the construction of CFG meeting agendas, dialogue, and debriefs. My presence in this study is not accidental; instead, it equalizes the risk that novice teachers brought to their group interactions.

CHAPTER 5

CONTEXT

District Context

This study took place in Marion County, a mostly suburban county, located in the southeast United States. Marion County serves over 123,000 students and ranks in the top 25 largest school systems in the nation.

The county has been ranked as one of the fastest growing counties in the nation several times in the past ten years. The school system has been obviously impacted by this growth; in 2002-2003, 6,000 new pupils to the district were registered. These 6,000 reflect a growing diversity in Marion. The county's full-time geographer and demographer predicts that the next school year will mark the first year where white students represent less than 50% of the student population.

The school system is divided into geographic clusters that provide attendance zones. Each cluster is composed of elementary, middle, and high schools. 13 comprehensive high schools provide the basis for this structure, with alternative schools grouped in an "other" category. Each high school is fed by one or two middle schools, which in turn are fed by two to four elementary schools.

The need for expanded schools and new schools is certainly a well-conversed topic in Marion. In August, 2003, seven elementary schools and one high school will open for the first time. More schools are slated to be built over the next several years.

A “world-class education” marks the website and promotional materials of Marion, who often cite the above-average Scholastic Aptitude Test and American College Test scores as an indicator of the rigor of their academic program. This program is marked by the Marion County Standards (MCS). The MCS was developed in 1996 by a team of stakeholders that represented parents, students, teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, national curriculum experts, and community and business leaders. The curriculum standards mandated by the state Department of Education was the basis for this development; however, Marion exceeded state standards at each grade level and in each subject area.

The MCS includes high-stakes assessment as a crucial link in its structure. Students in grades four and seven must pass all curricular portions of a district-developed standardized test in order to be promoted to the next grade. Grade 10 students must pass a test by the time they would be eligible for graduation. The “Access” examinations are referenced often in this study, as middle grades teachers often organize their instructional scope and sequence around the content and date of the test.

Local Context

Greenville Middle School is in the South Marion Cluster. The 1,800 students, 70% of whom are classified white, are fed from three elementary schools. 18% of the students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches compared to 20% for the school district. Sixth and eighth grade students traditionally achieve slightly higher scores than the district’s average scores. Of the 97 teachers, one-half of all teachers at Greenville Middle School have less than ten years of full-time teaching experience; in fact, one-third of all teachers have less than five (Department of Education Report Card, 2003).

Marion County Schools developed their own reporting system for improving schools. These accountability reports stem from the program called the Data-Driven Evaluation Plan (DDEP). Each school furnishes quantitative data related to three goals outlined in the school's local plan for improvement. The reports also pictorially represent the data from the state's report card. Marion chooses to represent the performance levels (exceeded standards, met standards, and did not meet standards) using stacked bar graphs with students that exceeded the standards at the top of each bar. The Department of Education represents their data in a chart, choosing to group the students who did not meet the standards first. Marion County School also chooses to report percentages of students who were classified as "excellent" and "effective" on the seventh grade Access Test. They do not list the percentage of students who fail the district-developed test. For instance, during 2001-2002, 51% of the students taking the Access test in science did not score in the excellent and effective categories.

The accountability report also purports changes that were instituted for school improvement. Block scheduling sixth grade classrooms for language arts and math was used to "allow them more time to fully develop the skills being taught" (Greenville Middle School Accountability Report, 2002). A common vocabulary list has been compiled for all academic subjects, and "every teacher is emphasizing and testing that vocabulary on a regular basis." Regarding the results of the eighth grade writing test, the report claims that all eighth grade students and their parents are taught how to use the writing rubric.

Other highlights included represent extracurricular and fundraising activities. For instance, 90% of eighth graders taking German and Spanish during their Extensions classes were placed in second-year foreign language during their freshman year in high school. The school received a "Beautification Project of the Year" from the county. Dr. Davenport was named

specifically as he fulfilled an obligation by kissing a live pig after the students read one billion words as part of a reading incentive.

The context at Greenville Middle School was greatly impacted by a school reform initiative that the school was piloting for the district. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) represents the work done in Brazosport, Texas in raising student achievement scores on the state curriculum examinations. Marion was exploring this initiative for possible implementation in all schools in the district by 2004. Greenville Middle was using CQI in all the core subject areas (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies), with language arts and mathematics receiving additional intensive and intentional focus. The CFG in this study was composed of teachers from a variety of subject areas and grade levels in the middle grades. However, no teachers of only mathematics were represented; thus, specific contextual information about that subject area is not offered here.

For language arts, an assistant principal and a teacher leader developed the scope and sequence the summer before the 2002-2003 school year. This document delineated what concepts each regular education language arts teacher should teach on which days of the first quarter of the school year. After the school year began, all language arts teacher at each grade level met in Curriculum Area Teams (CAT) to develop curriculum maps for the duration of the school year. For instance, the seventh grade language arts CAT did not develop a daily scope and sequence. They devised a list of topics that should be “covered” for each of the remaining quarters of the school year.

Assessment is the cornerstone of the CQI initiative. Although “every child can learn” is represented as its mantra, “every child is repeatedly tested” is another representative maxim. Each CAT was charged with collaboratively developing quantitative methods that would show

the gains students achieved through each unit of study. Each CAT represented in the CFG used pre and post tests to fulfill this administrative mandate. However, each CAT also took liberty in defining the nature of this mandated collaboration. For example, eighth grade science teachers jointly developed pre and post tests that were used in all of their classes. Eighth grade social studies teachers adopted a test already used by one of the teachers. Seventh grade science teachers did not jointly develop and adopt any particular document. Each teacher was responsible to pre and post test their students as she or he deemed.

Accountability

Marion developed a method for informing the public about student achievement at individual schools and as a district called the Data-Driven Evaluation Plan (DDEP). Each school is responsible to report quantitative scores that indicate how students did or did not meet goals set by individual teachers. For instance, a teacher could decide to integrate vocabulary instruction in a new way with one of her classes. She could collect quantitative data on their achievement and attempt to draw a connection with her instructional intervention. At Greenville Middle, teachers used the CQI pre and post tests as the foundation for their DDEP goals. Teachers were encouraged to set goals of what percentage of students would pass the post test at the end of a chosen unit of study. It is the intent of the district that the DDEP functions as the basis of instructional supervisory practices, in that the results would be the conversation starter between supervisor and teacher.

Buck: Part One

The first time I talked to Dr. Davenport was over the phone to invite him and any pertinent staff members to present a break-out session at an induction conference sponsored by my university. I had heard from a colleague that Dr. Davenport and two staff members had

presented at a statewide conference recently about their school-based induction program. He brought two staff members and the three of them shared their program with six other counties present at the meeting. I was not able to attend their session.

Again, I saw Dr. Davenport at a CFG Coaches' Institute the summer before this past school year. I was interested in getting to know him better for several reasons. He was worked in the county in which I lived and eventually wished to work. I was interested in his perspective on CFGs as an administrator. Finally, simply put, he was a man. In a culture largely dominated by women, I was happy to see another man interested in K-8 education and especially teacher collaboration.

Dr. Davenport, or Buck, as I called him that week, had a wonderful sense of humor and a sharp wit. After lunch each day, we would participate in "Group Fun," to build community and demonstrate the benefits for our own incorporation in our various contexts. He heartily engaged in the fun and participated fully. He even taught us a rhyme about a brown squirrel that necessitated us to "skake our silly tails." I reminded him of this squirrel poem often, and even told my novice teachers at the first organizational meeting that I own "documented dirt" on Dr. Davenport if they ever wish to use it against him.

Even before the Coaches' Institute in July, I began to seriously court my dissertation site and principal. Dr. Garner was a state-respected staff developer and public speaker who had moved to assume the principalship of a growing school four years prior. This school, approximately five miles from my house, was located in booming region of the county, population-wise. The school reached its maximum capacity of 800 students in its first three years and now was approaching 1600 students. With such a large student population, I assumed that a number of novice teachers would be on staff and in need of induction support. I also knew of Dr.

Garner's work in staff development and was quite motivated in meeting her and brainstorming how I may be an effective link in her vision of induction.

After various email messages that went unanswered, I physically went to the building in late May and remained in the lobby until she was able to see me. 30 minutes later, she walked to the lobby and introduced herself. As we walked into her office, she seemed excited to talk to me about my project; in fact, she had all my emails printed out on a pile on the right side of her desk. We sat on the same side of her desk in chairs facing each other. After she shared a bit about her work at the school, she wanted to know about me. She didn't use a traditional prompt, like "Tell me about you." Instead her words were important to me: "Tell me what you're all about." Her short quip seemed to indicate to me that she was a principal of principles: a woman that stands for something and seeks to embody those standards.

After I shared my vision of using learning communities in meaningful ways to support novice teachers in their current and future inquiries, she asked for a moment to invite another staff member into the conversation. Dr. Garner returned with Pauline, newly hired from Texas, whose job in the coming year was to support all teachers in the adoption of a new math curriculum, but specifically work with novice teachers on a regular basis, perhaps twice each month. Dr. Garner asked me to reiterate a few of my statements and then the rest of the 90 minutes was spent brainstorming how I could support Pauline in her work and how Pauline could support me in using the novice teachers in my dissertation research.

The school had 12 novice teachers at that point for the 2002-2003 school year. Of those 12, six were slated to teach Kindergarten. I never dreamed such an opportunity would present itself. I shared with Dr. Garner and Pauline the tenets of CFGs and the work of the National School Reform Faculty. I talked about shared inquiry and how the math curriculum could

function as a cornerstone of each meeting in conjunction with honoring their individual needs and dilemmas. I offered to look into coaches' training for Pauline, so she could be co-facilitate protocols with me, perhaps dividing the group into home groups of six teachers each. Some activities could be planned and executed together; others would benefit from a smaller number.

Dr. Garner also offered conjectures into the mix: Pauline and I could function as co-teachers to bridge the space between university work and first year teachers. This would be a new way within the county for novices to explore teaching experiences and strategies. She saw the group as a way to minimize the learning curve of new teachers.

A possible program name was even born: The New Teacher Network. The 20 hours of work would be folded into a staff development proposal. The conversation was winding down, but yet I was winding up. It was exciting planning such a venture, and I was ready to take the challenge.

I floated to my car, ecstatic with the charge of researching where and when the next coaches' institute would be for Pauline, considering she couldn't attend the institute in July. I emailed the information that night. Dr. Garner said that she would be in touch. Not a single cell in my body believed that not to be true. Even next month, I still had hope. I accompanied the hope with an email message looking forward to our work together. Next month, she went on vacation. I remained faithful. The week before school started in early August I was still presuming goodwill. Again, I reinforced my positive perspective with an email and a drop-by visit while teachers were involved in preservice meetings. She was unavailable, but I remained optimistic. The next week I went to the school at different times over three days, once almost making it to her office, but I was thwarted by a planned fire drill. Not to be overrun by 1,600

students, I left, vowing to return the next day. She apologized for not being able to see me and was still excited about the work.

I did not return the next day. Pessimism started to enter my thoughts as I was lamenting the fact that I missed the first weeks of school with the novice teachers. I had spent the last year dreaming of working with them during pre-planning days, offering to punch out silly shapes, put up bulletin boards, tape on nameplates, even cut out laminating. I dreamed of interactions where I listened to their hopes and dreams for the school year and encouraged them in their aspirations.

A hot Tuesday in mid-August marked my last visit to the school. After teaching four hours at the university and waiting 45 minutes for Dr. Garner, who “should be just a second,” according to her receptionist, I officially withdrew. I wrote a note – “I’m sorry, ma’am, do you have something larger than a yellow stickie?” – that may have sounded something like the following:

Dr. Garner,

Thank you again for your support in finding a dissertation site for my research. I am excited for the novice teachers at your school and hope that they have a wonderful year of learning together. As you know from your own work at the university, finding a possible site is important work. As the school year has already begun, I am anxious to begin the work supporting novices by honoring their own inquiries and interests. If you are still interested in me offering my services to your novice teachers, please let me know by next week Monday. At that time, I will need to make a decision about whether to look for a new site.

I did not wait by the phone for it to ring. However, I did check my email several times each day, hoping for a reply. None came. In fact, almost twelve months later, I still haven’t

heard. My wife finds it quite strange that a part of still thinks that someday I'll get an email from her. I guess that I'm still presuming goodwill.

The process then began to find a site that supports a large enough number of novice teachers. In the county in which I lived, it seemed that two factors could result in such a staff: a large number of students or a highly diverse population. I examined the 55 elementary schools in the district, particularly looking at the 2001-2002 Department of Education report cards, which reported the number of teachers in particular categories regarding years of experience. The first category offered was 0-1 years of experience. Thus, for any school that reported a number that I would consider large enough for a CFG (6-12), I needed to call and find out whether that trend continued for the school year that had just begun. I contacted eight elementary schools, of which none met my parameters. I wasn't even using a criterion the research on CFGs reported to be crucial: Is the school run by a respected administrator would support the work?

In early October, without a site, I began to use the county's own geographic mechanism of clusters as a new way to approach my problem. If I put three elementary schools together, I would have enough novice teachers for a group. Perhaps I could use the three that are by my house and all feed into the same middle and high school. As I began to explore that option further, the dilemma of multiple contexts seemed problematic. If I wanted this work to be replicable for schools interested in induction support, then a single site seemed valuable. My consistent emails to Bill started then.

Buck: Part Two

Buck had asked me to attend a PTA luncheon at Greenville Middle the day before students arrived in August. The talk he wanted me to give should be around 15 minutes and focus on the benefits of being part of a CFG. He reminded me that sometimes teachers listen

better to a person that isn't their administrator. In this scenario, my message should be his message, just with my mouth doing the articulating.

Now two months later, I asked Buck if he knew of possible principals I could contact that would be open to the work. I asked him if he knew of other elementary schools that I had omitted from my winnowed-down list. I never thought of asking him about his own school. It was a middle school, after all.

Buck replied not answering my questions. Instead, he told me to call so we could talk. That phone call began the work that culminated in this dissertation. We met on October 31, Halloween, to begin formal discussions about a plan.

I first offered to reschedule because of my perception of what his middle school might look like on Halloween, but he declined. He said that if I could handle pie on his face, then we could meet. I assumed he was talking in metaphor, but as he walked into his office with towel in hand and banana cream still lodged in his ear, I was wrong. As part of a fundraising promise, a petite seventh grader with long, brown hair reluctantly took a fresh pie and placed it gently in her principal's face.

He would continue to remove his organic costume during the first several minutes of our meeting. However, through the wiping and re-wiping, he started to paint a picture of his school. He described CQI, the Brazosport model from Texas as primarily the vehicle to raise test scores to achieve Pay for Performance, a state-funded initiative where all staff members receive a monetary bonus when the students reach achievement test goals that indicate a marked improvement in language arts and mathematics. Although CQI, especially the scope and sequence, was cited by CFG members often, Buck was clear that his "primary focus is on meeting our objectives for Pay for Performance."

Yet he did not see a tension between instituting a CFG and reaching the achievement test results. Perhaps he did not see a correlation there either. However, it made me think back to why he attended the coaches' training the summer before. He told the group then that he had teachers operating CFGs "underground" for several years. After enough prodding, he decided to find out what all the "fuss was about."

Buck claimed that his new teachers were "overwhelmed" and were concerned about "parent issues." They really needed some "stress reducers," and William specifically needed some observation and "some pointers." William referred to one of those "pointers" in April, six months later, as a directive to cease using a round-robin reading approach in his social studies classes.

The induction program that school year had consisted of meetings with the mentors and mentees one time each month before school for 45 minutes. Topics had included the following: how to write essential questions for CQI, special education referrals, acronyms at Greenville Middle – offering an acronym book that had received rave reviews at both conferences Buck had presented at, and November's planned topic was how to deal with difficult parents.

Buck was happy to have me "assume leadership" of the induction program for the second semester because "the ball had been dropped." A teacher leader in charge of the program had been charged through the first semester, but the plan for second semester had "fallen through." A staff member at Greenville Middle had been a CFG coach since 1997. She and an administrator at another school wanted to offer their own version of a coaches' training as a staff development offering on Saturdays for the county. After teachers across the county signed up for staff development, their course did not have a required number to exist. It was Buck and the teacher

leader's hope that several mentors from Greenville Middle would take the course, and one or two would take leadership in coordinating a CFG of novice teachers for the second semester.

Perhaps unknowingly, Buck did not continue on a "traditional" road for teacher induction programs. Besides using novice teacher learning communities, using an external coach was an unaccountable variable. Schools that induct novices into the existing culture are common (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999); however, I was not a member of the existing building culture. My membership was not an expectation and certainly wasn't an outcome.

At one point, Buck picked up the phone and asked his bookkeeper to find \$3,000 for him to spend on a "pet project." He started to take notes and began to formulate a staff development proposal for three staff development units, which would pay each member around \$450 for the semester's dedication to the CFG. After an extended discussion, \$300 was an acceptable amount. He later emailed me the proposal, which I edited and resubmitted for his approval. He agreed and submitted it to the district.

After this hour-long meeting, I found myself joyous again. I was not flashing back to my feelings back in July. I skipped to my car with a new list of items to conquer, fully believing that if I did these things, it would happen.

1. determine a meeting date to talk to the new teachers
2. create a brochure to put into the novice teacher's boxes about the meeting
3. look into a federal grant program at the university for possible grant funding for the CFG
4. call the executive director of staff development in the county about (1) the mentoring task force just set up; and (2) possibly running a pilot of using CFGs as induction support

5. look into a partnership between UGA and Greenville Middle for connecting university coursework to the first years of teaching

Although I had very little success with drumming up any funding, I did fulfill each item on the list. An introductory meeting was set for early December, with one very important item to be determined before then: membership.

Buck had agreed on first-year teachers comprising the CFG. However, his comments about encouraging their attendance left me uneasy. He had mentioned the “power of the principal” as a way to encourage attendance (Blase, 1988). In fact, he posited that having the meeting in his office would be a way to send an important message. Later, I asked that the meeting be moved to the conference room, to which he obliged. He also insinuated that as a principal, he offers “incentives” that sends his staff a message: “I owe you.”

Using email as our primary communication device, I offered several options as meeting arrangements. The two that seemed most feasible to Dr. Davenport were (1) meeting every other week after school for two hours; and (2) using a half-day each month to amass four hours for an equal amount of time. Since middle schools in Marion County are the last in terms of busing children to and from school, a two-hour meeting after school would keep the teachers at school until 6:30 pm. Dr. Davenport was much more inclined to find professional development funds for substitutes one half-day each month. Although I suggested 8:30-12:30 or 12:00-4:00 (as teacher hours are stated as 8:30-4:30) as possible time slots, Dr. Davenport asked if we could use 12:30-4:00 instead in order to accommodate half-day substitutes that are paid for 3 ½ hours of work. I gladly obliged.

Also through email, we came to a common understanding that the CFG was the required component of the second semester induction program at Greenville Middle. Although a

requirement would certainly come from him as their administrator, I used specific language at our first meeting: “I invited Buck here today to hear us plan our semester together.” Perhaps that language was too open and negotiable. It may have appeared to demonstrate a lack of commitment from Buck.

Polly certainly appeared to interpret it in her own way. Two days before our February meeting, Polly’s email posed a potential problem:

Thomas, I’m sorry that I haven’t written sooner, but I am really swamped. My teammate has been out for several weeks now because of a car accident and I am really feeling the added stress.

After careful consideration, I have decided that I cannot participate in the CFG group you are sponsoring. I really am in a position where “one more thing” is just too much for me. My husband is in Korea for a year, and I have two small children. My youngest is suffering from some health problems (she’s had pneumonia, bronchitis, constant ear infections) and now I have appointments with an allergist that will require time away from work. Throughout the year, both my mom and dad have missed work to keep her so that I could be here, but at this time we all feel that I should be the one to take her to these appointments.

I really don’t want to be out of my classroom more than absolutely necessary. I have several important MCS [Marion County Standards] to cover before the end of the year, and time is running out.

I hope that you understand. I think you are doing very valuable research, and I wish you the best of luck.

This message was carbon copied to Buck, whose reply to my query about how to proceed seemed to indicate that he knew beforehand: “Without going into details regarding her situation, I would suggest we excuse her from your CFG class. Have you heard from anyone else?”

I wanted to reiterate our valuable work to Buck and also help him think about Polly’s situation. Viewing the CFG experiences as a “class” is important in unpacking his next response:

I haven’t heard that anybody else wants to bail. One teacher is bringing projects to the CFG, so we can look at student work and another is bringing an issue that she would like some clarity on.

Are there any repercussions that we need to think about by excusing Polly from this responsibility? I’m thinking what to tell the CFG.

Buck’s response: “Just tell them that I have excused her for personal reasons.”

Although William and Jade had clearly stated at the first meeting that they were aware of my perceived power and hoped that the time would be “worthwhile,” I still hoped for a democratic process where the group would provide the necessary guidance for decision-making. I chose to wait the two days until the February meeting and see who spoke. No one did, and neither did I.

Buck: Part Three

It may be more appropriate to change this heading to Dr. Davenport: Part Three, as I never used “Buck” in referring to Dr. Davenport again after the organizational meeting in December. The CFG members were very clear in addressing him by his degreed title and even seemed uncomfortable when I mentioned my friendship with “Buck” as one of the reasons I wanted to come to Greenville Middle and work with first-year teachers.

Dr. Davenport was a “carbon copy” member of many of the first email exchanges that I initiated with the group. These messages were attempts to set CFG meeting dates collectively. I already had examined the master calendar with Dr. Davenport and accepted his delineation of Fridays as the best day to meet because of various grade level and curriculum meetings associated with Pay for Performance and CQI.

I assumed that the new teachers would arrange for their own substitutes or that the dates had been provided to an administrative assistant in the front office that might handle the coordination. A panicky email from a CFG member one day before the first January meeting piqued my attention: “Are we having a meeting this Friday? How do we handle the subs?” I noticed that she had carbon copied Dr. Davenport. Before I even responded to her query, an email from Dr. Davenport arrived:

I need to ask you to postpone and reschedule the CFG meeting tomorrow – mostly due to my fault in not notifying my leave clerk to get subs for the teachers. Plus, there is a good chance that school will be out due to the cold temp. Anyway, call me at home if you get this message. I apologize for screwing up.

The next day I sat down and emailed all the teachers requesting them to check their calendars to move our first meeting two weeks into the future. Four of the six responded, so I emailed Dr. Davenport and offered the new date.

When he emailed everyone solidifying the new date, I noticed something interesting: I didn’t recognize two names that received the email. I prepared CFG binders for them in preparation for our first meeting at my house. I set up eight places to sit in my living area, struggling to place the video camera in a place that would accommodate all nine of us. It ended up right behind the front door, thus that I needed to move it when anyone walked into the house.

As the teachers arrived, we began the stumbling process of re-introductions, as it had been six weeks since we met at a large rectangular table in the conference room fifteen minutes before school began on a cold December morning. One of the names I didn't need to ask about for she was the first to arrive. Stella was a newly-hired special education teacher who was moved from a community clerk office to a classroom at the semester break. I eventually asked about the other name I didn't know and one teacher who had yet to arrive. Ironically, Stella's presence negated Tracie's participation in the group because Tracie took an early maternity leave from her special education classroom, vacating it unexpectedly. Stella was moved to fill that position.

I may have reinforced in some members' minds the fact that I was an external coach by not knowing the other name and her role at the school. When I asked if anyone knew if Ivy was on her way, their confused looks worried me. I first wondered if they didn't know that a new teacher had been hired at the school, but Jade soon straightened me out: "Ivy? She's the sub coordinator. Why would she come?" I had been emailing her as part of the group now for several weeks, not knowing her role and not receiving any response from her either. I finally met Ivy in April and apologized for flooding her inbox with unnecessary messages.

Other Email Use

At least one week before each CFG meeting, I would email the members a reminder about the meeting place and time. More importantly, the email would include a call for anyone to respond to the message with a dilemma or work to bring to the group. Here is an excerpt from an April 14 email message: "I hope your spring break was fabulous – Jade, included!!! [who got married over break] Does anyone have a dilemma that they wish to bring to the group, some student work, or something they would like tuned?"

This particular message in April received no responses from the six group members. A follow-up email was sometimes sent: “Hope to see you Friday in the conference room at 12:30. Have a good week!”

The date of the May meeting was changed when I decided to fly home to be with my family after my father experienced a minor stroke. When we were negotiating other dates and times over email, I received short responses from Holly, Jade, Katrina, and William.

Three of the CFG members did respond to early emails and chose to bring work to the group. Shanna and Katrina responded in February and each presented at that meeting. Shanna wanted to share a dilemma she was facing, and Katrina brought student work that she wanted assistance in thinking about how to assess. At the March call for work, Holly responded the day before the meeting and said that she could bring a rubric she had been using – only if no one else had anything to bring. No one else responded, so the group “tuned” Holly’s rubric and examined her students’ work.

Katrina brought student work to the April meeting even though she had not contacted me beforehand. While Holly was preparing to share her success, Katrina and I conducted a brief conference to determine what her question might be and what structure might work best to address it.

The group began to demonstrate indicators of Little’s (1990b) fourth ideal type of collegiality: joint work. The time we spent together was negotiated, and a common set of priorities guided any teacher who chose to bring work or a dilemma to the group. These teachers did not identify one essential faculty member (Pellegrin, 1976); they appeared to work more interdependently with each other. As the group engaged in discussing each other’s dilemmas of practice and successes, their own beliefs became more public. They began to demonstrate a rarity

in schools: socio-emotional support coupled with consideration of present and future decision-making (Little, 1990b).

Professional reciprocity (Little, 1987) marked the actions of the group. The predictability of protocol use proffered structure to meetings. Professional dialogue focused on teaching practices and their results. A shared language began to be developed after the group developed elements of success. The only indicator Little mentioned that was not represented by group interactions was equal sharing. Although I did not intend for every member to make the choice to present a dilemma or a piece of work at a CFG meeting, each member presented a success over the course of three meetings (see Chapter 8). In terms of peer observations, four of the six members engaged in visiting each other's rooms (see Chapter 14).

During the May meeting, Holly and Stella were debriefing their peer observation experiences with the group. As Stella was describing what she learned from watching Holly's class, the group became interested in an organizational strategy, inspired by Holly, that Stella was thinking about implementing next year. As William and Katrina especially asked clarifying questions of Holly about her system, Holly admitted that she did not know how this system would look for her next year in her new role as an eighth grade language arts teacher. I interrupted two comments later: "It sounds like you have a Consultancy right now. You have this issue that just came out ... Do you mind if we help you with that issue? What we're doing right now is asking clarifying questions – are you hearing that?" 30 minutes later, Holly had a solid idea of how she might organize her portfolio so (1) it wouldn't be too unwieldy to bring home in order to assess, (2) students would be able to take ownership of the logistics each day, and (3) a coding system that would keep the different facets of language arts (grammar, creative writing, mechanics review – Daily Oral Language) clear in her mind and in the minds of her students.

Buck: Part Four?

As in poetry and nature, many things come in threes. Working with Dr. Davenport would certainly not enter a fourth phase, as he resigned his position in March, the week of our March CFG meeting. As I was driving home from a university class, my wife called on her cell phone, alerting me of the news that her colleague had read in the newspaper that morning. When I arrived at home, I collected the newspaper from the flowerbed where it had been thoughtfully placed at dawn, and read the sketchy account the reporter had accumulated thus far: principal resigns, under district investigation, parents confused, district spokesperson reveals nothing. The next day's update in the newspaper revealed no new facts other than adding his salary and his previous appointments in and out of the district to the public record.

Although I was interested in how the CFG members felt about the news, I was also selfishly worried about the status of the group. On Thursday, I saw a friend who works in the superintendent's office of the county. I asked her advice on how I should handle any transition to a new administrator. She informed me that a dear friend of hers had already started serving as an interim principal, and she would send him an email tomorrow alerting him of my imminent contact. Before the meeting in the afternoon, I sent a message detailing the research, the work thus far, and the agreement of future meetings. I never received a response to that email or to any phone messages I left. Whenever I stopped at Greenville Middle, he was not in his office. The secretaries in the front office described "interim" as "occasional."

An assistant principal from another middle school was named the principal of Greenville Middle School three weeks later. I attempted to meet her at the April meeting, but her duties as the assessment coordinator at her previous school kept her quite busy during the month of April. I met her prior to the May meeting, being introduced by her administrative assistant who I had

known through scheduling the rooms for our meetings. She introduced me as the “university person doing the CFG with the new teachers.” After thanking her for her support, I wished her the best in her new position, offering to talk to her any time about her plan to support new teachers next year at Greenville Middle School. In less than a minute, I was in and out.

I had been worried about the change in administration, even though we were late in the school year. Changes in administration sealed the fate of CFG work at several schools in other research on CFGs (Dunne & Honts, n.d.). In August, the teachers had not received any staff development credit for their work last year. It is unclear whether this administrator will continue the program or will ask any of the members regarding the value of their experiences.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTIONS TO THE CFG MEMBERS

Meet Thomas

12:30. Doubting again if I correctly emailed them the right time. No sign of life in the conference room at Greenville Middle, other than the artificial life my videocamera and audio tape recorder offer. It appears that we will not start on time. Again, despite a norm our group adopted: “Honor time.” Maybe that’s their expectation of me. It was “my” group – they didn’t ask for it. Wonder if they really see this as my dissertation project and nothing more. This conference room, two tables heavier than lead, still doesn’t seem inviting to me, even though we’ve met here before. The cream cinderblock walls are the same as all the other conference rooms at the 90 schools in Marion County. No creative license here either. The bookcase on the north wall has been “binderized” with separate three-inch binders for each subject area. How fitting – the school improvement plan is the largest binder of all, perhaps insinuating that it either took the most time to put it together or it’s full of paperwork that shows what they think they don’t need to work on. The windows on the south wall open to the main hallway by the media center. Need to shut the ½” mini-blinds for my own concentration; bet the other members need them closed, too. The whiteboard rarely has anything written on it. Anything that is legible, that is. Smudged remnants of student support team meetings, school improvement team sessions, and administrative councils may be present, but are undecipherable. Today a few dates indicating standardized testing serve as accountability reminders that I doubt the teachers will forget.

The first meeting wasn't in this room, so small that the video camera is crammed into the corner and a bit too high (according to some filming recommendations I received once) in order to get everybody in the shot, at least part of their bodies. That first meeting at least had ambiance – the great room at my house with warm, caramel-colored walls, red overstuffed furniture, lit candles, and bamboo accents. Sure didn't feel like school. Even Zeena took part in the filming – probably the only calico cat on a dissertation video. Perhaps there I felt a real part of the group, even the instigator of the work. Here I even claim to be the instigator of this work that I hope will be meaningful, but I'm concerned that they see me as the *owner* of the work. If I feel a tension, what are they likely to feel? At school I'm a visitor. Dodged the green VISITOR badge due to my silver metallic nametag that differs from the fake gold tags that the teachers here wear. The university logo emblazoned on mine reminds them that I am a "university person" not a "school person." It comes off. So does my lifeless, gray suitcoat.

Life got in the way today. Wanted to be here early to set up and make sure the camera microphones were good to go. The funeral I agreed to play organ at was long. Too long. Wanted the precious memories to stop, so I could have my own with the CFG. Irony.

It was me that emailed Dr. Davenport six months ago. It was me that took a big proverbial breath, albeit virtually, and asked if his new teachers needed support. It was me that was desperate for a dissertation site since school had already started. It was me that knew him from training last summer. It wasn't them. It was me. Hopefully this work will be about them and their students. Think it has so far.

Particularly worried about this meeting. On Monday and Tuesday, the paper printed numerous stories about Buck (I guess I should say Dr. Davenport) suddenly "resigning amidst a district investigation." Curiously absent were voices of teachers. Apparently it sells more papers

to interview parents in the “car-rider line” that offer shallow quips: “I heard he was a nice man. I think he did good things for the school.” As abruptly as the story began, it stopped, without a word or explanation.

Hoped that my wife would be able to tap the sources at her school to broaden my understanding of what was going on. Her email probes yielded nothing, as did my probe at the superintendent’s office with Brenda. When I saw her last night at choir, besides words of advice of how to contact the new principal to share my research with him, she lamented, “Sometimes smart people just do really dumb things.”

Maybe Holly will want to talk about it. Or perhaps Stella. Both of them had been hired midyear by Dr. Davenport and seemed to talk about him more than the rest. They name him, as opposed to Jade, who talks about “the administration.” How will I open this conversation? Do I need to? Connections time at the beginning of the meeting could be the buffer we need to get it out there. I always tell them that it’s an opportunity to “leave some of your stuff” at the door: that it’s a way to bridge where you were at a month ago to where you might be in our four hours together. Quite certain there’s a part of me that wants the news to come out, not for some insidious need of tawdry gossip but to see how I’d facilitate it all. Probably won’t happen. They haven’t spoken often during Connections the last couple times.

Maybe I’m just expecting them to use Connections like I do. Certainly have had a different voice here. Connections in the Baxter CFG is different. At the university, too. Feel like I’m the model here; the inevitable intonation that breaks the silence when it’s been several minutes since anyone’s said anything. That why I offer such personal information? The dating dilemmas of my divorced sister living in small town America. Lamenting my pitiful attempt to land a teaching job. Unloading the story of my dad’s recent stroke. I know they have stories,

situations, sensitivities that are weighing on their minds. What's missing for them to use the time to transition to our work?

My classes at the university use Connections, and I'm reminded of their "process points" each day – not who shared and what they shared, but how and why: an analysis of the structure that allows or disallows everything to happen. Remember Laura last month posing a completely different take on silence. Said something about her roommates' Connections time (I wonder who she rooms with? Must have been somebody I had in another class) was full of talk, right after each other. She used to think that our time was not as good – that it lacked a closeness that the other group had. Now she's reversing her perspective, thinking that the silence is supportive, especially when we know that others need it.

Maybe Lauren's in her office. Double check that I reserved this room for today. "Flowers! Is it a special day?" Secretary's week, oops. At least I remembered it at the university. Makes me think about the projects my third graders and I used to do – just tearjerking enough to keep us in good standing with the front office for awhile.

Thank goodness I'm on the right day. Could have been 90 miles for nothing. Nearly walked into William back in the room as he was balancing his water and his lunch. The first to arrive to our third meeting of the second semester: March. Remember how excited I was to see a male's name on the list? Wonder if he feels as isolated as I did when I taught little ones. Had a few relationships with other male teachers, but they were quite shallow. Had hopes for William and I. Maybe we would really enjoy talking to each other, both about teaching and just life in general. Haven't forgot about what he said at the first meeting:

I'm not sure yet how I feel about it: if it's going to be a beneficial thing or something I'm dreading. I had a hard time leaving my class today with so much going on and grades due

today. There's so many things I could be doing. It's hard to be away from my class. I think it's okay right now, but to be honest, I don't need this warm fuzzy, this "going around the circle time". I need something fruitful to come out of this.

This table is a hard rectangle. Wonder if he sees it as a circle anyway. I start with the first casual question.

"How's the baby?"

"Any job leads yet?" Ouch.

"Any new tenants at your house?"

Still referring to time. Talking about where the others are. Is he uncomfortable with me? "I wonder where Holly is. I saw her today ... You did say 12:30, right?" Then the moment strikes – what I've been waiting for, just not in the context I expected. "I didn't know with the, um, change in leadership, if we would have a meeting today." Direct. But carefully-chosen words. "I wasn't so sure either, but I'm glad to be here."

Meet William

Walked in. Didn't even look at the clock. Of course. Late, as usual. Empty room? Where's the clock? There he is. Does he know that Friday is Jeans Day? Slightly-wrinkled, too-big, button-down white shirt and striped gray tie. Not looking like a teacher today.

Set this down – nachos and cheese from the lunchroom combined with my own sandwich from home – I'm not setting anything else down – I forgot my CFG binder. Of course, white like all the others we get almost weekly here. Never in my life, so many binders. Like if they give us a binder they expect us to read it all and do everything inside. The binder for this wasn't filled with stuff like the others. Didn't know about the blank 70-page composition book. But then he said that we would be reflectin' in it. That bullseye on the first page. Three circles, each getting

bigger, with the labels comfort, risk, and danger. Each week we take some time to add new feelin's and move others 'round. Talkin' about feelings. Like I'm home with my wife. A guidance counselor, y'know. That first week I was fed up with "standardized test score analysis." Student records files driving me crazy! I think I may have admitted to everybody that I didn't really know how to do that "standardized test score analysis." Not sure why I said that. Maybe figured that'd probably be one of the things we do in here. Thomas might listen to what we need and then provide staff development. Get plenty of "staff development." At least they call anything that takes up our plannin' time "staff development."

Already talkin' to me. Maybe eat a little bit and grab my binder when somebody else comes. Nice enough guy. Sometimes sounds like a university professor – talkin' about *student learnin'* and gettin' *multiple perspectives*. Other times reminds us he's a teacher, too. Remember last time he said that he's forgetful like me when it comes to recognizin' students for special dorky little prizes, like free Chik-fil-A coupons or whatever. Enough email about all that free stuff. I never go and get the stuff. I just hit delete. Over and over again. Enough email period. Think I'm going to use his idea about letting the students be in charge of it next year, though. Those comment cards. One less thing gotta think about. That's the goal.

"Baby's doin' great. She's startin' to sleep through the night, so that's a big relief." No surprise that first year teachin' and first year being a dad is tough. But the amount of work at home certainly was! Never felt so much before that teachin' is such a thankless job. Wasn't like that when I parapro-ed at the elementary school in Carrollville. Seems I'm learnin' this history content along with the kids. Doin' my best to stay just one page 'head of them. Been askin' them lately if they get what we're doin'. "You get it?" Blank stares from middle schoolers. Always helpful. Well, at least, some of my PROBE kids talk and give me some feedback. Shanna really

made me think last time when she said that she never sits down in class. I sit down all the time! Seventh grade, so it's totally diff'rent. My eighth graders need to be able to work silently. That's what they're gonna do in high school. Better get with it. Can't do it now you won't be able to do it then.

"Yeah, Have a new tenant movin' in upstairs. A new one downstairs this comin' weekend." Great. Totally forgot 'bout the one downstairs. Hope the sub is usin' the answer key I left her. Might as well not take those tests home – won't get at 'em anyway. "I should've done stuff to get the apartments ready earlier, but I just didn't.

"I wonder where Holly is. I saw her today." Hate it when everybody's late. Supposed to start on time. He tells us that each meetin'. At least these are different than the other CFGs I went to. Eleanor's was just too up there. A diff'rent level. Wasn't interested in readin' articles. Sayin' how they related to my classroom – at least not when I'm still thinkin' about how to get my content across. Just don't know where I stand yet. When we read that article the first week in here I was pretty nervous that these meetin's were gonna run the same way. No. It's diff'rent. Get stuff done, sometimes kinda slow though.

"You did say 12:30, right?" Wonder if he even knows what happened here this week. Should I tell him? Had to have heard. It was in the papers. They told us not to talk about it. Not even to each other. Maybe his wife heard over at, uh, forget the name of her school. Why did I get these nachos? Bendy. This dip is virtually calcified. Here goes: "I didn't know with the, um, change in leadership, if we'd have a meetin' today."

Can't quite hear him – Holly just walked in and un-Sarah Wrapped her lunch. Think he said that he wasn't sure either. Started to put up my trash, and remembered my binder. Really

hate bein' at school when my kids are with a sub. Think 'bout them enough. Now they're gonna see me, too. "I'll be right back. Promise."

Meet Holly

Well, certainly was no need to rush. Know I could've come without my lunch, but I don't think I'd have made it 'til break before getting something to eat. No Chex Mix today. Good thing I grabbed something. Those two bucks in the desk were a lifesaver. No just a little guilt for buying this stuff. Saving for a down payment brutal. Actually excited about going into debt, but lunch comes first!

"Hey, William. I'm doing fine, thank you." Thank God not in my classroom this afternoon. They might have to drag Anthony out in a body bag, one of the black, slick ones like from *C.S.I.* In fact, I might kill the whole class. Just 8A. Whoever invented Extensions Journalism really needs to get checked out. Highly doubt that whoever wrote the syllabus has ever actually *taught* the class. What makes anybody think that kids who don't write in their regular ed. classes are going to write for me? Wonder if this'll be better next year when I have a homeroom. If I get a homeroom. Wish they'd tell me. With a new principal now they'll probably delay all the decisions.

How great that'd be. Only 110 students instead of 220. Students I'd see every day. Routines that could be learned twice as fast. Colleagues I'd actually want to talk to. Regularly. Willingly.

Y'know, Anthony really hasn't been as bad this week. No moments where he just won't look me in the eye. I just hate that. His eyes dart all over the place, looking at the ceiling, at his shoes, at the back of his hands. I know he's not listening when he's not looking at me. Granted,

he has done *nothing* in my class lately, but at least he's not screwing around. Maybe Jade knows something about what's going on with him.

"No, I didn't get an email today. I got the one yesterday." Not even sure why I responded yesterday to his email about bringing work to CFG. Maybe just felt a bit guilty that Thomas had sent out another call for anybody with a dilemma or something to bring. Maybe read into his message too much, past the kind words to a guy who needs us to buy into this group. Maybe I didn't want another meeting where we might read an article if nobody brought something. Guess it doesn't matter because I responded, and he took me up on it.

Got some news articles one of my journalism classes wrote where the kids learned about how to write a news story. One step each class and a few days to write the drafts. Didn't make them peer edit this time. Maybe next time I'll push it a bit harder. Last time in CFG, we looked at a rubric that Katrina made. Figured that I could bring mine and see what everybody says. She said that it was the first rubric she ever made. Not afraid to bring mine.

Thomas said his email was a bunch of questions to help me figure out my focus question. Don't know what my question is. Not sure if I even have a question. Maybe just ask what to change on the rubric. That's pretty general. Don't want to talk so long at the beginning. Having everybody look at me is not my idea of fun. Katrina isn't here yet. Wonder if today is the day that she has to go to her priest for the wedding. Kind of hope she comes for the meeting, at least the part where I have to do this. She's language arts.

Hope Shanna comes, too. She says really important things that make me think. She sounds like a really good teacher. Wonder how she learned how to do that. Maybe she'll have her degree next year. She was concerned last time about alternative assessment. I thought that she'd be all over that! Surprised that she backed off when her team leader and AP said that she

would have to give alternatives for the all the students. What they don't know won't hurt 'em, I say.

Wonder if I can believe what Tracy said about next year. If what she saw on Ms. Gilbert's desk is right, I'll be teamed with Anderson and Collier. They are complete veterans. Going to have to work my ass off this summer in order to be ready. I'd be mortified if they were like, "She's young. She doesn't have it together." I certainly am not going to ask them constantly what to do. They'll think I'm a first-year. It won't be like this year, taking over in November. My mentor was supposed to help. Not really working out. Sort of on the "hello" plan in the hallway. That's about it. Next year I won't have to change things that are already there. Just start it the way I want it. Then change it if it isn't working. It'll be mine to change. I hate staying the same for too long. Don't like that feeling of being comfortable. That's why I left retail work. Don't want to get stuck in a rut.

Haven't written anything in my notebook for CFG. Haven't had any – wonderings, does he call it? Yeah, here it is. We certainly use that "wonder" word a lot in here. Looks like last time I was wondering about Anthony. Wonder what he did that day to make me think of him. Funny. There's an "I wonder." God, I'm catching it. Well, if he asks, I can put that in the "wonderings turned into actions" column. I emailed Jade last week about him. Pulling him aside and talking privately worked for her. Certainly hasn't worked for me. One more time and see what happens.

"No, nothing about next year yet." I wonder if he knows about Dr. Davenport. This definitely messes up my newspaper schedule for ELT. Bet Dr. Buchanan won't want Dr. Davenport's editorial in there about Hat Day. He probably won't write one because I heard he's

only interim anyway. Maybe Nick and the other editors can go talk to Dr. Buchanan and ask. They'd probably like that. This whole controversy has been quite empowering for them.

Can't stop thinking about that behavior plan that Thomas described last week. Jade and William said it'd never work. Not sure they heard him say that plan is what his wife uses at her school. Students are accountable in all the classes at the same time rather than running up a tab in each class separately. I like that. If we can just get rid of that part where the students go back into their homerooms – it probably won't matter anyway. If I'm with Anderson and Collier, they'll probably have their own system they've been using for years.

Wonder what it will be like to have team meetings all the time. Will it be like William's? God, I hope not. Those four don't sound like they get along. Doubt it will be like Katrina and her teammates. They're pretty close. Maybe like Shanna's. Wonder if she decided to ask her team to make agendas. Whose idea was that? Can't remember. Certainly hope we don't need that. What would they think of me if I come in and ask for that? Scary.

Excellent. There's Katrina. At the locked door again.

Meet Katrina

Hate it when I go to the wrong door. Never know if that door is locked or not. Wish it would be either always locked or always open.

"Hi, everybody. Hey, Holly. What's ... Where's Shanna?" Man, she has the worst luck. No matter who Ivy gets to sub, the sub's always late or needs a whole bunch of explanation about *how* to sub. Man, can't believe it happened again.

Don't mind these meetings. In fact, hearing what others are doing in their classrooms is kinda nice. Michelle, Joanne, and I are so alike we tend to do all the same stuff. I think kids need

unique things to keep them interested. When the others talk about hating being here when a sub is in their room, I just listen.

“I am so poor. I can’t believe how poor I am.” Listen to me – I sound like Eric: “I’m going to stop talking. Me. I am actually going to stop talking. You won’t believe how quiet I am going to be. Me. I am totally going to be quiet.” If only that boy would actually grace us with his silence.

“Planning a baby shower for Michelle next week, a wedding shower for Shanna, and a surprise birthday party for my fiancée. I have expensive friends.” If only Marion could actually get my check right, I could afford all of this. Hey, I’m up by the office – maybe I’ll go talk to Lauren after this and see what’s up. Been avoiding the office all week. Wonder if it slowed down. Certainly wouldn’t want to be there right now.

“What are you eating, Holly?” More stuff from the cafeteria that’s prepackaged. All except those nasty French toast sticks. What are they thinking? Giving middle schoolers such sticky, foul items first thing in the morning? “Those remind me of the French toast sticks from breakfast. Yeah! Don’t you hate those? Oh, you don’t have kids in your room after breakfast, do you Holly? Oh, hey, William. Do you have a lot of kids that go to breakfast? Do they come back all nasty after those French toast sticks?” I’m a bit fastidious (ooh, good word. That one kind of slams into your front teeth if you say it right. I love good words.), but those sticky hands absolutely drive me up the wall. Actually, the wall is the problem. If they just wouldn’t touch the wall with their sticky fingers, everything would be fine. And if they wouldn’t be late for my class.

“Are you serious, Holly? You have breakfast duty? I didn’t know that. They leave the lunchroom when? At 9:23?” They’re lollygagging (oh yeah, another good one) back to my room. We’ll have to have a little talk about that, I guess.

Was I supposed to bring something today? Holly has some work there. Just forgot. Could have brought my language arts projects. I don’t know how to grade them again. Maybe I should think about that before I give the assignment. Duh. When I brought those slave diaries, I thought my rubric was okay for the first time. Needed some work. Last time was different. My Kente cloths really threw me for a loop. Thought that I’d come out of here with a rubric set to go. Idea about devising the questions for the missionaries really intrigued me. They loved having kids ask them questions from the readings. The CFG was right: it showed me that they understood the material. Should have seen their faces when we gave them the quilt as a gift. She started to cry just a little bit. I almost did, too. Probably the best part was that the kids wanted to give it. Could have just told them that we were going to do it. Love it when they vote to do things my way!

Didn’t know what this whole CFG thing would be like. I missed the first one with Rudy’s mom’s funeral, so I didn’t know what everybody thought about it then. They said the house was pretty. Would have liked to see that. Having the meetings here is handy, but it’d be nice to go off campus, too. This room forever reminds me of Access meetings my sick stomach.

“Yeah, I heard about the CRCT. Did you hear it on the radio driving here?” Hope that I get to tell Shanna. We still have to prepare for the Access, but at least we get some days back. She was worried about those nit-picky science questions on the CRCT.

“Hey, Shanna. Hey, Stella. Did you hear ... yeah, I know where the paintball course is. You just go up, oh, what’s that road? Stella, do you know?” Wow. I actually forgot about paintball for a minute there. Surprising since I’ve been obsessing about it all day. “Shanna and I

and our fiancées are going paintballing tonight. One of my students said, ‘See you there.’ Yikes. I said, o – kay.” Sure didn’t mean it, though. That would be just too close.

Not too close, like I don’t want to know them. I mean, when you’re young sometimes these kids think that you’re the bomb. I love my kids. I really do. Told everybody in here that I’d keep them an extra three weeks if I could. Boy, Jade sure flipped out when I said that. Don’t know. Maybe it won’t be that way next year. Maybe that’s just the first year talking. Hope not.

Meet Stella

“Sure. You just go up Harrison until 137. Go past the Hardees and the Borders and you’ll see it on your right. Kind of near a whole bunch of magnolia trees by an antique store.” Certainly know where it is. Been there how many times with Brittney’s cheer squad, the travel soccer team, Clint’s birthday party, who knows what else. Bet my ex-husband even knows where it is. He was supposed to take them there last week. Guess I shouldn’t be shocked that didn’t happen.

I hate being late. Sub ended up not showing up. I didn’t recognize the name. Maybe in the back of my head I half-expected it. I knew almost all the names last semester. Feel for them, though. I remember what that was like subbing before I clerked here. Subbing half days was no fun, especially after lunch. Wonder if my sub knew that she would be in a special ed. class. Thank goodness the stellar sub hadn’t scheduled herself for a room. She at least likes some of my kids. Even complimented fourth hour in advance – said that she’s looking forward to seeing them.

Not pleasant now. This time of year. Been out of my room so much these past two weeks. Didn’t help that I had to go proctor testing because another teacher was out. Bet the kids will be thrilled to have me back next week. My kids don’t like subs. Really need the structure: the same person and the same routine. At least I got to see my ELT class today. So excited to read *Holes*

every day! Brittney and her friends sure liked it when they read it, too. Hope they do well on the AR test next week. Pray they do well. That could be just the boost they need to keep reading. So fun when they like the book. Teaching. Sometimes doesn't even feel like teaching. We've got our own little community, encouraging each other to try and comprehend what's going on. Even though LaJoya fussed at first because she had already read it, she came around. That class keeps me going all morning. Sure glad I have them right away.

Doesn't help either that Robert is being such a jerk. Making my life miserable right now. With moving out, trying to buy a new house, getting my masters and certification, and just plain being a mother, it's about all I can take. But, knew it would be hard. See it in kids all the time. Why would it be any different for mine in a divorce? Doesn't help to complain about it. Hear enough of that here.

At least I had Brittney here in eighth grade with me this year. Sometimes I feel like more of a sister to her than a mother, but that's probably not unusual, right? Don't know what I'm going to do or feel when she and her friends are gone to high school next year. Won't have that person to talk to all the time. It'll be like a part of me is gone. Even though Clint'll be starting here, doubt that it'll be the same with him. After almost failing fifth grade, we aren't exactly buddy-buddy.

Been thinking about next year, a lot. Especially after going to Holly's room for that peer observation thing, I need to work on math. Even though I'm more confident with math than language arts, my students aren't getting what they need. Like my 14 kids have 14 different levels. Maybe some kind of system where they did leveled work. Brittney had a teacher in elementary school that used centers. Maybe that'd work.

Holly has a great system for student work. Mine, well, the one that I kept using from Tracie before she went on maternity in January, didn't work for me. Bet there's something from Holly's plan that I can use with my kids next year. Even those brainteasers at the beginning of class. Wonder where she gets those from.

"Hey, Jade, I sold my house! No, nothing yet. We're going to rent from Mr. Blankers this summer, so we'll have to move twice." Sounds like I'm whining. I'm really not. It'll just be tricky with summer school and all. Jade is so confident. Puts it right out there and doesn't worry. Hang back and listen. That's me. Process it at my speed. That's nice about CFG. We don't have to do everything so fast. Time to catch my breath.

Never brought work here to CFG. I don't do the same kind of stuff that these teachers do. My kids need really targeted instruction: "direct instruction" my mentor calls it. What's there to "wonder" about with that? Of course, I'm talking about Betsy, who comes in while teaching and tells me how to deal with Javonte and Willem. Right there, when they're in the room. As a first-year teacher, need to know those things, I guess. Just listen and process it later. Don't have rubrics like Holly or colorful projects like Katrina to bring. At least I can talk about Melissa's experiences with rubrics and self-assessment like last meeting.

Hope we have Connections again. Last time I actually spoke after all that silence. Kind of surprised myself. Felt good to just get it out there about Robert. Also kind of nice to not have to talk about it more, even though I can. It's no problem. But still, it was kind of, well, cathartic.

Oh, no regular Connections today. Oh, well. Don't know what I would have said anyway. It's not like I have anything real important going on.

Meet Shanna

“I’m sorry. I can’t believe I’m late again. It doesn’t matter who they get!” Thomas thinks I’m so irresponsible. It’d be easier if I didn’t have to come to these meetings. My kids would agree. That little petition they created last week was so cute. A protest that I was out of class for too many “meetings.” True, though. How can I help them if I’m not there? They really do need me. A sub can’t talk to them about their problems. Well, could, but they wouldn’t talk to her. That sub looked like it was her first time. Hope the kids are good. If they smell fear, it’s all over.

Hope they studied for this test. Seemed like they really understood the labs. They did good on the new little 10-point quizzes, so we’ll see. Did I remind third hour that this was 25% of their grade? Hope so.

Looks like Holly brought something today. Journalism, right? Maybe I can learn more about middle school writing for my Thursday night class. Supposed to bring some authentic work. Too bad just can’t talk about something we did in here as authentic. My Consultancy last time certainly was. So nice to just give up my problem to everybody and back out. So cool to not interject and clarify all the time. I just listened and understood. I felt like Stella. She listens all the time in here. I probably talk too much.

They said I was spending too much time with individual students. I’ve been struggling with how five or so problem kids take all my time away from everybody else. Just need to do what I can and let them go. Not fair to the others.

Not sure what to think about the guided reading conversation. Sounded like William and Jade think I need to do that less to get them ready for eighth grade. But what’s the option? Round-robin reading? William said that Dr. Davenport nailed him for that. Heard he talked to others, too. My class has nothing good to say about it. But Thomas was so supportive of not

sitting at my desk and really focusing on children while they are reading, asking questions and stuff. Wish we could have talked about that longer.

Started to grade in Katrina's room now. Much better. And more peaceful. I'm actually getting work done at school. What a concept! My teammates have been a bit more understanding lately. Maybe because I suggested the agenda for our meetings. We still haven't done it ever, but at least the meetings don't go the entire planning any more. As a sports trainer, we met whenever we weren't with patients. Hope this doesn't get like that. Too much to do.

Will Turlock be like this? Ever since Scott got the job offer at TFU I've been wondering about teaching in another district next year. Hope they at least hire me. Everybody keeps telling me science is no problem and I'll get scooped up quickly. It'd be really sad to be in a new place, just married, and no job. Not sure if I would even want to sub. Sounds awful.

Should check if Turlock has a test like the Access. Maybe they do but they don't teach to it like here. Let's be real. Tell us we're not supposed to, but have meetings that tell us exactly what to do in order to teach to it. So excited when Access is finished next week. This huge burden lifted from my shoulders. Being my first year, I have no earthly idea if what I'm doing will make a difference on this test. I can defend what work my students do for me. Still don't know if that's how and what they will be tested on.

Everyone knows about the other science teachers that graded the Access before and how they told me what to cover. Still worried. Yeah, they'll know the kidneys produce urine. That one I've heard about enough that they'll get it right. It's the other stuff. They *knew* it for my test and they might *know* it for the Access. Do they really *understand* it? Getting them to really understand it takes time. Too far behind the scope and sequence. Hope my little "see me" notes on their tests and their remediation papers help at least a bit.

“Hey, I need directions to the paintball course.” Scott and I will miss Katrina and Rudy next year. Never had it that a couple could be best friends with another couple. Hope I get summer school even though I’m leaving. Then Katrina and I could live together for a month and Scott could just move to Turlock first.

I wouldn’t mind so much if my kids saw me out of school. I’ve talked to almost all of their parents. Probably wouldn’t be too awkward, unless if it was the parents of one of our problem kids. Might be hard for me to talk to them since I know they aren’t supporting us at home. That’s certainly been a surprise for me. Who knew that homes were such an important part of school?

Meet Jade

“Don’t you hate that? I hate it when we’re at a restaurant and we’re ready to order a margarita or somethin’ and then, Bam! There’s a kid. And his parents. Wavin’ and similin’. Uh, yeah. I’ll have a ... diet Coke. With lemon. I just hate that.” Sometimes these kids think we’re their friends, like when they find out we listen to the same music, it’s, “Oh, my God! Can we go to a concert together?” Can’t imagine what it’s like for someone straight out of college, like Katrina. Other day, standin’ at my door, I got a, “Whad up, shorty?” I was like, whoa, that’s Ms. Zaleski there, Bub.

That kind of stuff is what I’m afraid of. When we’re out of the room here at CFG. As a first-year teacher, if they misbehave for me, okay. Well, not okay, but I can deal with it if I’m there. But for a sub, that’s different. When I get back, I’m all like, tell me what you could have done better because I’ve got it all right here. I really don’t – just a blank piece of paper. After last month’s CFG sub fiasco, I was ready not to come today. She was a beaut.

As a first-year teacher, I'm really proud that I can manage everythin': behavior, paperwork, plannin', my time. See some vets around here that are like all over the place. Do not have it together at all. Thank God none of my teammates are that way. Take Eleanor. Here's a lady with her doctorate that has been runnin' CFGs for years. Doesn't take slack from nobody. That's why I was really afraid to tell her I was comin' here today. She nabbed me right before I left and asked if we could meet durin' plannin' to talk about report cards. Told her I couldn't. Had CFG. Ouch. It's such a rub to her that we get time to meet durin' the day. Think it really ticks her off. I thought, I can't really deal with you right now. I've got critical friends to be with.

"Congratulations! Wow, that's awesome." Thank God the house sold. Stella so needs a break. Those ex-husband stories. Last week, I wanted to jump over the table and ask her what he was doin' to her to be such a jerk. Held myself back though.

"Three weeks." If Thomas worked here he'd probably know how many days 'til the weddin' because it's the same countdown until spring break. I clue him in on how stuff works around here. Y'know those university types – full of books they wrote but no idea how it really is here in schools. Like that behavior system he described last week – where the kids interrupt classes to go back and sign their books. Like that would work. It'd be horrible.

"Yeah, Holly. I know what's up with Anthony. He got his retention letter in the mail on Monday. He's not doin' any work for us either." Told Thomas, "So you see, we don't get any work out of these kids after those letters go out." Bingo. There's a perfect example. He just doesn't know. Not working here.

Holly just needs to chill. Classic overachiever – always worryin' about documentin' interventions and stuff like that. Like last week. Talked about the books she's readin' about portfolios and some other language arts thing. Why would she want to spend her summer by ... ?

Oh, well. To each their own. As a first-year teacher, I'm goin' to spend my summer goin' through my bulgin' folder of ideas from the CAT meetin's. *That* stuff I can use.

Like anythin' would happen with Anthony anyway. Administration here does virtually nothin' to support us with student issues. Keep mountin' intervention after intervention until we are plum out of everythin'. *Then* we can talk to someone. So frustratin'. Now that Dr. Davenport's gone, who knows what'll happen.

The kids just have to do it. Suck it up. Get their work done and perform. Goin' to be in *high school* next year, for God's sake. Science, I pretty much get 'em all. As a first-year teacher, get special ed. all across the board, ESOL from not speakin' English to proficient. Modify for all of them. Yeah, right. Science is good for those kids because of the hands-on activities and stuff. I worry that kids are fallin' through the cracks with me. Can't modify, can't. I *can* modify, but can't apply them in 55 minutes in every class with every student. I'd still be on the first six weeks of curriculum.

That's what I try to tell Thomas. This stuff sounds fine, but you can't do it all. The vets tell you that. I'm a first year. Don't want to ruffle too many feathers. Don't know if they give out black marks this fast. They'll tell ya. Only act in the best interest of the child. That's all you can do.

Looks like we're ready to start. Here we go.

CHAPTER 7

AN EXCERPT

As a church Director of Music, I do not rely on a repertoire of choral music that I have previously performed or directed. Instead, I engage in a capitalistic act courtesy of music companies: CD samplers. These CDs arrive in the mail, full of possibilities. I am using the model of a particular company for the organization of this work. This CD arrives, appearing quite similar to all the others. However, the first track cannot hide a major difference: the listener only receives excerpts of the works. The piano or symphonic orchestra fades in at a particular place, and the choir joins, seemingly unaware that we begin our experience somewhere in the middle. After an experience whose length is determined by the music company, the music fades, and the track ends.

“It is so exciting to have everybody here today. Shanna, your sub came! Hooray!”

Thomas always seemed to be excited about these meetings.

“Yep. I guess there’s a first time for everything.”

“Who do you have today?”

“I don’t know, Jade. I wanted to get here on time, so I didn’t even get her name. Maybe I’ll go peek in on her at break to check everything out.”

“I don’t know why you guys like to do that,” Katrina laments. “I’m thinking, hey! I’m out of room, I’m not teaching, I’m with my critical friends!”

William knows why he always wanted to check. “It’s hard to concentrate here when I know they’re just down the hall. I always get nervous about how they’re going to behave.”

“Yeah,” agrees Jade. “If they misbehave for me, that’s one thing. But if they screw around for the sub, then that’s something totally different.”

Several heads nod in agreement, a shared understanding among many of these novice teachers. Although the group never formally addresses issues of classroom management during their meetings, moments like this pop up during informal conversations and transitions.

“Let’s begin our time with Connections. Remember that Connections time is a way to bridge where you were regarding the week – month, I guess I haven’t seen you in four weeks – from where you were to where you’re going to be the next four hours. A way to think about how to put some of the stuff at the door; some of the things you’re thinking about doing after this. It’s an opportunity for you to come to where we’re at right now. We’ll take a few minutes to do that, and I’ll let you know when there’s a little amount of time left so you can gauge yourself if you do choose to participate. And our Connections time is now open.” The sound from Thomas’ watch indicates that time is being monitored.

Jade takes a hiatus from her crunchy salad when the silence begins. William leans back in his reclineable chair, occasionally rocking back and forth, back and forth. Intermittently closing his eyes and breathing through his nose, Thomas removes his glasses and rubs his eyebrows. Holly and Katrina suppress smiles as their eyes lock during a slow scan around the table. The silence continues.

Katrina chooses to engage after 60 seconds of quietness: “I’m glad that my kids don’t have to take the WCAT after the Access. I’m really happy.” No one responds, as per the protocol’s norms. Katrina has one last piece to share: “I feel like I’m on vacation now that the Access is over.” Shanna, another seventh grade teacher clearly agrees.

A few croutons audibly crunch as Jade's salad bites extend past Katrina's comment. Stella and Holly smirk and giggle inaudibly. "Sorry," Jade offers with a mouth partially full.

Although silence is an *acceptable* component of Connections, according to its norms, silence may not be *comfortable* for these CFG members. Katrina eyes other members, perhaps encouraging others to respond to her comment or offer something else to break the silence.

"I have a new tenant moving in tomorrow, so I have lots to do tonight that I should have already done." Wayne has chosen to speak at each Connections – the only member to make that choice.

Perhaps Kim got what she needed – another voice heard so she could continue with her thoughts: "I'm giving a surprise party for my fiancée tomorrow, a baby shower for my teammate Wednesday, and Shanna's bridal shower is the following Wednesday. I have no money left. These are very expensive people." Shanna grins at her friend and her colleague but does not break the silence or respond.

Silence. Thomas nonchalantly checks his watch. William notices the glance and continues to look in that direction. More silence. Another peek at the racing digits on his watch prompts Thomas to speak this time. "On Easter I had several services to play at church. During one of them, I ducked out and checked my phone messages. My sister had called on the way to the hospital because my father had had a stroke. Then I had to leave for a conference in Chicago a couple of hours after that. My parents live in Iowa. They forbid me to come home. 'Do not come home. We'll get through it.' He's 64 and really healthy. It's been an interesting week being at an education conference, doing all of that and thinking about my family all being together." His eyes gently fade downward as he ends his moment – a risky, honest moment shared with his

research participants. The racing digits catch his eyes and remind him to facilitate: “There’s about a minute left if anyone else would like to speak.”

No crouton crunching. No paper shuffling. No fleeting looks across the wood table. Calm. Not even the interruption of a public address system announcing the illegal parking of a mini-van or that the Anime club has been cancelled for today. “And Connections is closed.” This experience, bookmarked by 60 seconds of silence, exemplifies the risk that some members took during meetings. Some chose to risk their practice, bringing work samples of their own or belonging to their students. Others offered dissonant perspectives, risking possible alienation from their peers. Some even discovered a larger danger –disconnects between their own practice and their beliefs.

However, Connections rarely functioned as a risky place for most. Thomas introduced the experience at the February meeting, using similar language to how he re-introduced it at each meeting. Everyone except Holly spoke. No one responded to each other’s comments or disregarded the norms. Most spoke about their current feelings about being out of their classroom for the afternoon. Stella spoke last and spoke honestly: “My ex-husband is making my life very complicated right now.” Perhaps too honest for a fledgling group. Perhaps another example of the members taking turns pushing each other into risky areas.

However, since that meeting, participation has been sketchy. Stella, Jade, and Shanna have not spoken again. For Jade and Shanna, these behaviors are not representative samples of their usual participation during the rest of the meetings. Holly remains silent during each Connections time. William and Katrina often speak, as does Thomas. For Thomas, these moments seem cathartic, truly using the time to momentarily break from the life events that

impact his thinking and decision-making. Last month he spoke about not finding a job, before that, a familial situation.

Meetings that took place early in the semester required an active norm review where Thomas attempted to unearth from the members some remnants of the six norms that guided each meeting. Today, in the April meeting, he chooses to summarize their collective expectations. “Just wanted to remind you about some of the things we had agreed upon in thinking about our time together. We try to honor time in protocols and in our own ‘air time.’ Today we will definitely think about some space for thinking and speaking in what we’re going to be doing. We always presume goodwill, no matter what feedback we offer to each other. There’s no hierarchy. We all have different levels, different regions of expertise that are important for us. Finally, if you wonder it, hopefully you’ll always think about asking it.”

He’s used these norms in so many situations. Wonder when they became so internalized? He doesn’t consult any notes or even turn around to see the poster that documents their existence. His hand moves downward, parallel to the floor, flicking to the side for each new point on the poster. However, his eyes do not reflect an equal confidence. With eyebrows raised, he seems to be wondering, what are they thinking? Is this more of the “university” rhetoric William and Jade identify so readily?

No hierarchy. That’s a nice change, considers Jade. Today that norm resonates with her. Recent battles with “administration” about some of her students place her on the offensive. It’ll be refreshing in here that none of that crap matters, she decides.

Space for thinking. Wow, do I need that. Stella wonders if teaching will ever give her any space to stop, think, wonder, and regroup. Even when she’s certified, will it get any easier? She remembers watching and listening to teachers when she was a community clerk. Lots of

listening. Some certainly had it easier than others. Does that mean that some chose to make it harder? Maybe that's what all of this is about. All of this wondering. Making it harder. Making it better. Yeah, I'm for that.

Thomas interrupts her thoughts, providing a structure for their four-hour block of time. "Here's how I thought we could organize our time together. First, we needed to finish our success analyses with Holly's story. And it looks like Katrina has something today as well?" Thomas genuinely wants the group to bring authentic work – it is the "oxygen" that breathes life into their conversations. However, his chagrin can be detected, if one is looking for it.

"Yeah, this is a last-minute thing I brought."

Last-minute, indeed, judges Thomas. "Holly, do you need a minute to review your story?"

"Yeah. Do you want me to pick multiple things or just one?"

"The very first time we all picked a success and wrote about it. I believe the next time folks could choose whether they wanted to continue thinking about the initial success or write about a new experience. Either is fine. Remember, how we've processed this in the past was a few minutes to share your story, we ask a few questions, you back out, we discuss what contributed to that success, then you pop back in again. Sound alright?"

Holly's nod propels Thomas to continue his delve into Katrina's mystery work. "Tell me about this work!" If only I had known about this before, he thinks. Responding to email really isn't that hard, right? Just knock it off and be glad that she brought something, he chides himself.

He cues into Katrina's words just as she indicates a possible purpose for bringing the work. "...more like, even an idea for the other teachers to get to know their students. It's a social

studies thing and I know some of the others here are social studies and journalism. It's a good idea."

Warning. Red flag. Thomas's brow began to furrow as Katrina explains her intent with the work. Most of this group's work together has been about more than sharing "good ideas." They have addressed substantive issues, like student equity, empowerment, authentic assessment, and colleague relationships. Sharing a craft project may be problematic for him.

Oblivious of his reaction, Katrina continues to describe the work. "They have to – we usually do it step by step. I was wondering ..." There's a key word for him – Thomas takes notes now. His pencil certainly appears to be engaged. "... about the process because I was very happy about the process of the project. I had them write 10 different things about what was important to them. Then they have to develop a Kente cloth on, well, it's kind of abstract, then they have to describe it. I'd like to describe the process and I wasn't sure how to grade them. That's my question – one of my social studies questions."

A gold mine, declares Thomas. More about assessment but references to process – this could be an exciting conversation. "You mentioned process a moment ago."

"The process – I broke it down. Not that I was wondering, but just happy how I came up with it. I just broke it down and they didn't know what was ahead. The first thing I gave them was to write 10 things that are important to you. Then I said, now assign a color to each. They still didn't know what was ahead, so it was very intriguing to them. I haven't graded them yet. I just kind of looked them over. Some of them are lacking a summary, but they have done all this work, so ... So."

Her question lacks the specific focus required for a profitable experience with a protocol. Instead of tuning the question, Thomas defers that conversation until later. "What we'll probably

do during break is decide what kind of process will work well for you, then when we get back from break, we'll do it. How does that sound?"

"Fine, except I do have to leave at 3:30 today – an appointment with my priest."

"Confession?" jokes William, the first words from the audience to the pre-conference between Katrina and Thomas.

"Basically. Okay, quit laughing. I didn't do anything. We are getting married in Connecticut, but I can't do it up there, so I need to do it here."

"We will make sure to look at your work in enough time for your appointment," assures Thomas. "Holly, are you ready?"

Holly is not the only member that "needs" to leave early, nor will she probably be the last. Commitment identified by regular and prompt attendance has been problematic this semester.

"The first thing I wrote about was my newspaper class when I took it over from Dr. Woodrip. She was doing all the work and they were doing as little as they possibly could in order to get by. So what I did was to have them vote for editors, proofreaders, writers. I bought lanyards and had them make press passes. They began to get more of a stake in what was going on. Now it was their newspaper and their responsibility. They did their own work. They had to come up with their own story ideas and help each other get their story ideas. They had to make sure that everybody in the class would meet their deadline. They have more ownership in the paper. I mentioned one class where a couple of students wrote an editorial that Dr. Davenport didn't like. Well, the new principal ... we still haven't got that issue out, and the new principal doesn't want Dr. Davenport's article in there. Now two students have to meet with the principal

again, but they are willing to do that again, which I think is great instead of just giving up and say forget the beanie article.”

“Beanie, did you say?” Kim jumps the gun on asking clarifying questions.

“Beanies. Wearing hats for Hat Day. Controversy. They are willing to go talk to the new principal and figure out how to still get the article published. Everyone’s behind them giving them ideas for what to say. They don’t come to me every second anymore. It’s definitely their paper.”

“Thanks, Holly. Let’s think about some of the clarifying questions we might have. This is the time where we can ask questions to figure out more about the success that she was telling us about. Remember, these questions are for *you*, not for Holly,” prompts Thomas.

“What’s a lanyard?” poses Shanna.

Holly grabs her school identification badge hanging from her neck and indicates: “This. A rope with a space on the bottom. They decorated their own press passes and I initialed them. I don’t have to sign their agenda. They can just get a press and go do an interview. The managing editor knows where they’re going and they don’t have to come to me.”

Thomas asked the next question. “You said that they had voted for each other at the beginning for managing editors. How long did you wait until they voted?”

“It was about three weeks, I guess. Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks were in there, too.”

“What grade is this?” asks Katrina.

“Eighth.”

“Were you happy with whom they voted for?” questions Stella.

“Yes, I was surprised. Some of them, I was leaning toward this person because he’s much better at grammar. If they hadn’t nominated that person, I guess maybe I would have. They did the right thing. They voted for the right people.”

William also asks a question. “Have you had to change any of the roles?”

“Nope. We had one dispute but we sat down as a group and talked about the dispute. They wrote their opinions down. They took turns discussing and we came up with a solution.”

“How many students?”

“20.”

“How often do you see them?”

“Twice a week.”

“Was the decision to keep the Dr. Davenport editorial out made without the students?” asks Thomas.

“Yes.”

“What was the impact of that?”

“They were like, oh, yeah, you know, principals. But they’re going to talk to her and see if she wants to replace his with hers. They just want to go through the steps in order to keep their editorial in the paper.”

William remains confused. “So the beanie is not the issue? I thought there was an article about beanies.”

“The editorial about the hats is part of the issue, and the other part of the issue is that Dr. Davenport has his feelings about the issue in there, too.” Puzzled looks stimulated Holly to continue. “The students wrote about how some teachers rejected hats on Hat Day and others

didn't. Dr. Davenport saw the article and said it could stay as long as he could write a piece, too."

"What are beanies?" Laughter permeates the group, all except Shanna who had asked the question.

"Like grandma knits. Not the old ones with wheels on the top." Holly provides the translation.

Thomas moves the group into the next phase of the protocol. "Any other clarifying questions for Holly? Okay, Holly, this is the time that you can back out, of the conversation at least, and give us a few minutes to talk about your success. We are especially thinking about the factors that contributed to her success."

Katrina wasted no time. "I didn't ask, but I wonder if these are the 'top' kids in each class that go, or if they have to apply to go."

"They had to apply. I have several that are in the class," answers William.

"Me, too," adds Jade.

"That was one of the issues with journalism, period," continues William. "There were kids who were in there who had to take it during Extensions. Number one, they are not going to write in their regular classes, so they aren't going to write in journalism. The newspaper was voluntary; you had to want to do it. The kids that I have are great kids. She may think differently, but I wonder if when Ms. Holt takes over for Holly next year if she will keep the system in place, and it will keep running it smoothly. I wonder if they have discussed this at all."

Katrina's thoughts were more immediate: "I wonder if she did the same thing. I wonder if she had taken over for Dr. Woodrip and kept the same system, how long it would take her to realize that she had to change this."

“Exactly. Sounds like it is running very smoothly. The kids are enjoying it. If they want to go meet with the principal, that’s right up their alley,” adds William.

“I wonder how excited they are about that!” exclaimed Katrina.

“Totally,” agrees Jade. “Anything they can do or say to disagree with someone else. And that whole ‘visit the principal thing’ gets them out of class.”

Shanna doesn’t see the same ulterior motives as Jade. “Passion they love ...”

“To get their point across. Otherwise they won’t have a passion they love when they go into high school,” predicts William.

“I’m thinking about them defending what they think is right. We do a lot of debates in my class, and the students like to give their opinion and actually be heard. I don’t think it’s always about disagreeing with someone. This whole controversy here they thrive off. Something they really seem to enjoy and get really enthusiastic about. They get to tell the principal what they really think. It might not get through about the beanie hats, but they will have a good time doing it.”

Thomas poses a theme thus far: “This sounds like a story of empowerment.” The purpose of a Success Analysis rests with the group’s ability to delve into what elements made a particular experience or set of experiences successful.

“I think at this age group their opinions don’t hold much validity; don’t count for much. You have to stay on these kids so much. Sadly, rule with a pretty stern fist,” admits William. Some of William’s other comments, especially about curriculum, have begun to shift over the last two meetings – on the edge of making important changes in how he wants to shape teaching and learning experiences. Comments like this prompt Thomas to press him (and the group) forward.

“Didn’t she say in her story that they don’t come to her all the time anymore? Maybe there’s something in her story about empowering kids in a way that they become more motivated,” presents Thomas, “and you can feel like you’re not on them all the time. That’s my last question I wrote here: how can this connect to all the other classes she teaches?”

“I was thinking along the same lines,” adds Katrina. “I was thinking with my question, how could this connect if you didn’t have the top-notch students? If you had the students that didn’t always hand in their work, don’t always come to school. How would they react to the same thing – being empowered instead of being knocked down, like, ‘you didn’t do this.’” Katrina once again assumed her occasional role in the group as the dissonant voice. Her friendship with Shanna rests partly on their similar approaches to planning learning experiences for students.

“It won’t work. I can tell you that,” claims Jade. “In science we have everybody, from the gifted kids down to the bottom feeders. Down there, those kids just aren’t ready for that kind of responsibility.”

William continues wondering aloud, this time seemingly unaffected by Jade’s claim. “I also wonder how they choose how they write about, do they come together? If you give them topics that they are interested in and controversial, they are going to love it, especially the kids that are at the lower spectrum there. That’s what they know, that’s what they enjoy. I wonder how they come to decide what they write about, who they interview.” Wayne has begun to probe deeper into instructional decisions Holly made that may have impacted students’ reactions to her class.

“This is kind of like Stella and her students during extra learning time,” Shanna referenced Stella with her hand while she continued. “She allowed them to choose a novel to

read, and they read it together. They felt empowered, too, even though they are kids with learning issues.”

“These kinds of comments sound helpful for any of us as we plan for whatever range of students we plan for and think about. That was really wordy, wasn’t it? What I mean is that each of us could use this idea for our own students,” backtracks Thomas. “I’d also like to know more about that: how some teachers rejected the hat and others didn’t. I’d like to know the beginning of that story. Did they walk in the next day and were they mad?” Thomas inadvertently leads the group away from Holly’s success to the kind of unfocused talk that can permeate gatherings of teachers.

“That was a starburst, starfire controversy. On one side of the building they were saying okay to the hats, and on the other side of the building, absolutely not. Different assistant principals on each side.”

“You’re totally right, William. It was Hat Day, so we figured that Hat Day meant Hat Day. You could wear a hat,” reported Katrina. “We didn’t know that it was designated that you couldn’t wear this kind of hat or that kind of hat. They didn’t say that it was Baseball Hat Day; they said it was Hat Day.”

Jade didn’t wait any longer. “This is just another example of administration not being clear on things ...”

Katrina didn’t wait for Jade to finish. “I got yelled at by Arliss from the other side of the cafeteria that this one student couldn’t wear this hat. At first I didn’t think that she was even talking to us, but it turned out that he was wearing one of *those* hats. I’ll be honest. Here I can tell ya. I told him that he couldn’t wear it to Extensions, but he could wear it in my room because it was Hat Day. He was fine with that. I wasn’t, but he was.”

Thomas began to worry that the tangent was not productive for Holly's developing understandings about her success. "It sounds like it was quite charged for many of the adults in the building."

"It shouldn't have been a big deal. It was just one day," resigns Katrina.

Wayne spots a connection. "It's like that with dress code around here. One teacher sees this, another sees that."

"There's a lot of gray," finishes Jade.

A metaphor starts to form in Thomas's mind: "Maybe it's the gray things that students find intriguing."

"Yeah, what they can get away with!" jokes Katrina.

"True, they always want to know what *defines* it," theorizes Shanna. "'What do you mean by we cannot talk? Can we say please, excuse me, thank you? Is that being polite? Can we say god, bless you?' No, that's talking. 'But it's being polite!' No. They always want that edge, where they can stop at, like the hat issue."

His mind focused in more clearly on the metaphor: "I wonder how the *edges* – that's such a neat picture for middle schoolers always being on the edge of something – shape her class. Is there an edge in her journalism class when they do the newspaper? Do they know where the edge is?"

Silence. Space for thinking. The first real moments of quiet since Connections.

"Obviously it borders the edge if they can't get something published," poses Katrina.

Shelley continues, "They can kind of show an argument for it. They can fight for it."

Katrina's next thought focuses specifically on context: "If you have 20 kids who agree on something, you have to listen to them about it, if they are coming to you with a proposal or an article."

"That was interesting that you said 20 kids agree. I wonder if they do," interjects Stella.

"Or if Holly knows that and how she could find that out," finishes Thomas. "Any last thoughts on Holly's success?" Eyes begin to shift toward Holly for the first time in the last 12 minutes – finally looking at the person whose work has been the center of focused discussion. "Holly, what are you thinking now?"

Holly had physically removed herself from the table after clarifying questions, shoving her chair back about eight inches. As she rolls back toward the wooden table, a full notebook page revealed her activity during our discussion. "They do decide as a class when they want deadlines, when they want stories due. The students did have to apply. They did not have to be PROBE students, but they had to be A and B students. I think that Dr. Woodrip interviewed them, but I'm not 100% sure. For next year, only three students have signed up for journalism class. I've sent the kids out to the seventh grade classes to give out applications and stuff, and they've done some announcements. I guess because she's had the baby, she hasn't done any action on her own." Up to this point, Holly uses her opportunity to speak as a voice to clarify misconceptions or answer questions raised during the discussion.

The possible transfer of the success comes next. "As far as my other classes, I really don't think it would work. In those classes of 32 students, I have so many behavior problems. They are too out of control and would take advantage. Yeah, they love to feel like their voice is heard, like they love to write editorials. In all my journalism classes we write editorials, but as far as doing a newspaper, I don't think it would work." Although she acknowledges the

motivation inherent in her instructional decision-making, Holly retreats into familiar rhetoric: it can't work with my kids. Holly has not chosen to teach near the edge. Not yet.

However, she isn't finished. A particular story stands out for her as so rewarding that she elaborates: "I love Rick. He's the one who came in on Hat Day. He threw his beanie on the floor and said, 'Ms. Starkweather, I'm writing an editorial!' He was really upset. 'Two of my friends on another team got to wear their hats!'" Holly's eyes light up as she relays the account of Rick. "He was also part of the committee of students that went to Dr. Davenport and asked if we could have a Hat Day in the first place. During that meeting, Dr. Davenport never said that there was a difference between what hats you could and couldn't wear. Rick was very upset. He wanted to go right up to Dr. Davenport's office that day, that *second*, and talk about it. I love Rick – he's great."

A Success Analysis is not designed to place the presenter in an uncomfortable situation. Although Holly remains uncommitted about transferring her newspaper structure to another situation, Thomas chooses to offer another option: "Writing a story about Nick would be great. We could learn a lot about teaching kids just by hearing about Nick in that moment. I also think about how to transfer your success to other situations and classes. That could be a really productive experience sometime, for all of us – you could bring it as a consultancy: I would love to be able to do this, but I'm not so sure that it will be able to work." Holly nods but says nothing.

"That represented our last Success Analysis. It took us three meetings, but we got them all in! Let's debrief this process. What was this like?"

William begins, "I can't really debrief my success because it was so long ago, but I can talk about today. Holly's felt different than some of the others, though I'm not really sure why."

A chorus of “me, too,” came from Shanna and Katrina, followed by a flurry of giggles and smiles.

“You two *definitely* spend too much time together,” comments Jade.

“It’s all those scope and sequence meetings,” jokes Katrina. “What else are you going to do other than write notes to each other?”

“Katrina!” chides Shanna. “We do *not* do that. Really, we don’t.”

Thomas smiles and laughs, sneaking a peek at his watch at the same time. “Did any of you feel like William, that the conversation around Holly’s success felt different?”

Back on track but still giggly, Shanna jumps in: “I did, really. Sometimes the success stories focus a lot on what *we* do as teachers. Y’know what I mean?”

“Like in mine?” Jade offers.

“Yeah, maybe,” responds Katrina. “You made the decision not to go ballistic on a student, and then the two of you were able to make some workable plan in order to get him through.”

“Well, then, mine was probably like that too,” admits William.

“Sorry, William. I forgot. What was ...?” confesses Shanna.

“Mine was ... y’know what? You weren’t there anyway. You don’t need to be sorry about it.” Shanna mocks relief, rubbing the back of her hand across her forehead. William continues, “Mine was that I stand at my door in the morning greeting everybody when they come to school. I really get to know them that way.”

“So, am I hearing that we are categorizing successes somehow?” offers Thomas.

“Well, you asked if we felt like today’s was different, and I think maybe it was different because it was all about students,” summarizes Katrina.

“But aren’t all of our successes at least a bit about students?” wonders Shanna. “Think about Stella’s and mine. We both had students in our stories, but it was about us, too.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” agrees Stella. “But my reading group was made up of students ... that sounded profound, didn’t it? And the success was about how they responded.”

“But there wouldn’t have been any response without you. Or for that matter, any success!” points out Jade.

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.”

“This conversation leads us amazingly well into the next step of Success Analyses, which is answering the big question: what is success? That is, what is success for us in this CFG?”

Bodies begin to shift uncomfortably in their chairs, perhaps due to tired bones or just tired minds.

“After we create it, this list can be something that we refer to and use when we are planning. It will represent what are successful experiences for *us*, not all Marion County employees, not all Greenville Middle School teachers, but *us*. Here’s how I’m thinking we could attack this. Tell me what you think of this plan ...”

CHAPTER 8

NO HOPE FOR BUY-IN/NO NEED TO SELL

As Dr. Davenport and I met before second semester began to discuss the members of this first-year teacher CFG, I realized that the membership would be diverse in terms of age, experiences, and teaching certification. Polly was one of the members that I was most excited to learn from and with. She is a mid-career changer, leaving her children when they entered elementary school in order to teach. Her husband serves in the military, which afforded her multiple opportunities to live overseas during the early years of their marriage.

In describing something that they were proud of at the first meeting, I knew that I would enjoy hearing from Polly during our meetings: “Surviving my first year of teaching. I didn’t think I could do it. I didn’t think I wanted to do it. Now I see the light at the end of the tunnel, and I feel a lot better.” In debriefing a period of structured conversation in groups of threes, she admitted: “I was afraid not to listen. I was afraid there’d be a pop quiz as the next step.” Her humor continued as she boldly stated about the data collection component of this CFG: “And quite frankly, that camera creeps me out.”

As Polly conversed openly during the meeting (her phobia of the camera was temporary), I began to have high hopes for what our CFG could do in support of Polly’s work. She envisioned a one-to-one direct relationship between teaching an objective and student performance: “If I didn’t teach that MCS correctly, then the kids miss that question on the test.”

No Hope For Buy-in

Each week, CFG members updated a bullseye that included three areas: comfort, risk, and danger. Members were encouraged to add features of teaching and being a teacher in each of the areas. Each week new pieces could be added or arrows could be used to show movement of previously included components. One in six induction programs include any self-assessment, so 90% use classroom management issues as their predetermined focus. Contrary to research that reports this interest for novices (Fuller, 1969; Veenman, 1984), this CFG did not spend their time discussing this issue. In fact, as the coach, I did not predetermine topics like many induction programs (Serpell, 2000). Polly determined that assessment was an area in which she felt “extremely uncomfortable.” As a language arts teacher, grading essays were problematic for her as they are “more subjective than math.” Her mid-year assessments were on her mind when we met. This day, she was making sense of the scores by placing more weight on student motivation: “I wasn’t happy with the scores, and the problem was that I have so many MCS to teach ahead of me, and some of these I had gone over several times, but the kids have no buy-in for it because it wasn’t a grade for them.”

Polly has questions. In fact, as she talks, she appears to develop more questions. More importantly than the quantity of her queries, Polly needs a place to clarify her questions and search for answers. “I really don’t know what to do with it [mid-year assessment scores]. I figured for the post-test I’m going to have to lie to them and tell them it’s a grade, or actually make it a grade because I can’t get them to buy into it.”

No Need to Sell

Starting with the February meeting (see Appendix C for an agenda), members shared a success that was related to students. Each teacher took turns presenting their success: William in February, Jade, Katrina, and Shanna in March; and Holly and Stella in April. The experience follows a process.

We spent just over two hours analyzing these successes over the course of three meetings, wondering about what were the elements that made the presenter feel successful.

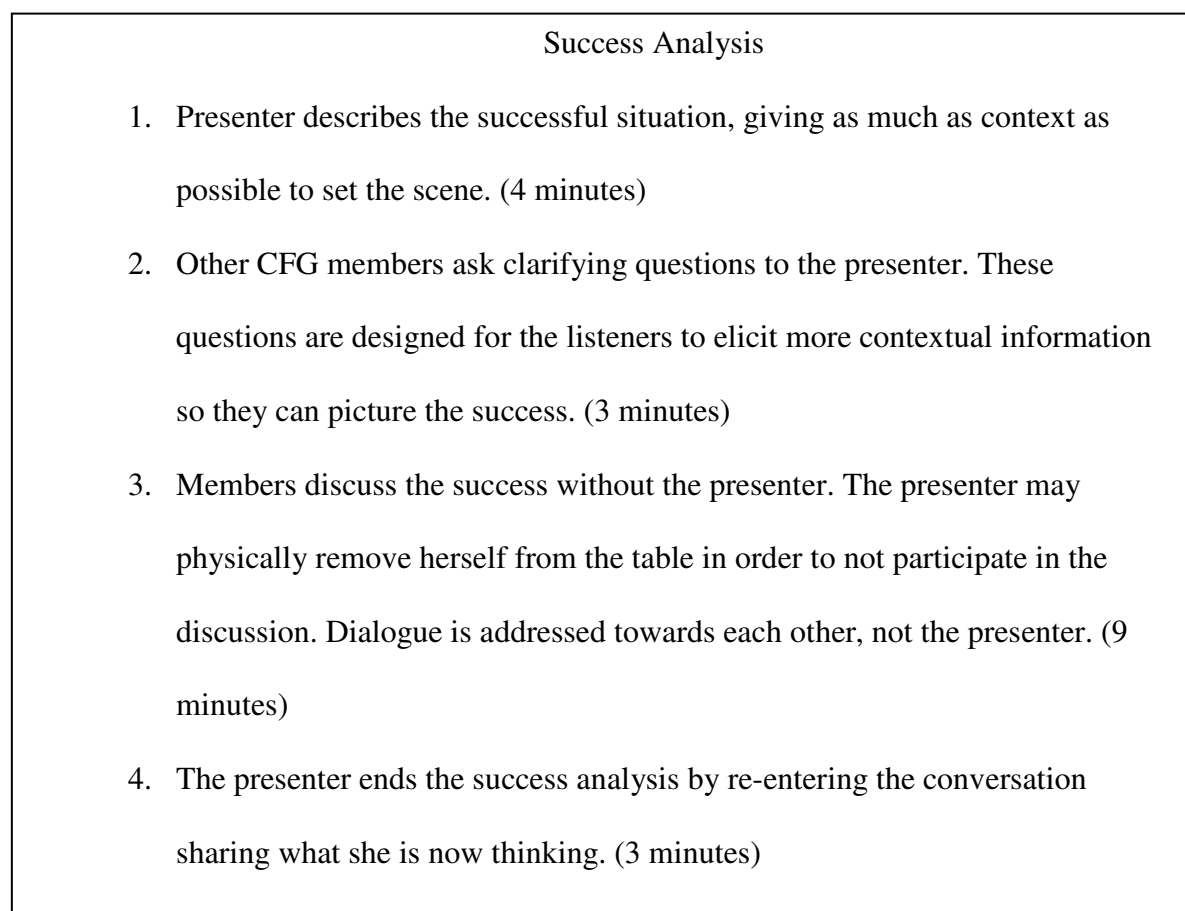


Figure 3. Success Analysis protocol (National School Reform Faculty).

William volunteered to share his success at the February meeting. At the completion of Holly's success she described in April, we brainstormed a list of elements that may have been

common in all of the successes. In May, the group took the list and grouped like indicators together to create categories that they could refer to in order to repeat their feelings of success.

Figure 4 at the end of this chapter graphically depicts this work.

Although everyone's stories could be interpreted as connecting with each category, certain stories can be powerfully interpreted using one of the specific categories created by the group. William and Shanna's stories are indicative of the investment described by the three indicators in that category.

William's Success

William starts his four-minute success description afraid of the four minutes that he "has" to speak, afraid that he's not on "the right page," and afraid that his story is "not academic with my kids in my classroom [but] more with my kids on a personal level." As a new father, William took six days away from school to spend time with his wife and new baby. Although he admits that he "really didn't miss kids that much," he was extremely gratified when he returned that the students were inquisitive about his new family member and enjoyed being in his class, at least "for the most parts." His success hinged around the commitment that he made early in the year to stand at his classroom door, greeting each child as they arrived. These relationships were formed in an "appropriate" way, "that keeps a boundary there, to where they don't go too far, to an extreme with a friendship or anything like that, with you still being in charge."

William continued to talk and realized that up to the point of returning from his paternity leave, he "really struggled with the academic part. I'm not getting this across. This isn't working. I'm not sure that I'm teaching this in the best possible way." He ended with his stance about what it means to be teacher:

Of course, I'm going to teach them something, get some history across, but y'know what? They are going to hear history their whole lives, and the stages they're at in their lives right now, more of them just need to know that you care about them and that you actually have an interest in them, instead of pounding academics down their throat each and every day. They might enjoy school a bit more if we take time out to do that. Has it been four minutes?

After I assured him that the four minutes was a maximum time, he chose to continue, noting that three years will be his rough entrée into teaching. He disclosed his fear that he may have made a bad choice coming to teach middle school and teach in a county where teachers are required to stay at a school for three years before transferring.

I love ... the spirit of an elementary school ... I did teach in the community I lived in. kids would come over and we would play football in the yard, load up and go to Six Flags and things like that. Things you don't get to do in a middle school. We dare not let them know where you live. Your house may burn down. I miss that. It drives me crazy some days. I think, I'm stuck here for three years. I made a bad decision. What was I thinking? I didn't take time to think it through. Then on other days, I think, this is okay, you just need to get through the hardest part. The first year, the first three years will be tough, then you'll get to know the kids, which is what I want to do. But, this kind of went back and showed me that you can still get to know them, and I've done it.

During the next segment when William sat out of the conversation, CFG members started to explore how he may have set the boundaries between himself as a young teacher and his students. However, after Jade and Stella relayed stressful moments of redefining professional lines with students, a new wondering was posed that dignified William's confession regarding

his struggles in presenting material: “When he says that he struggles as a teacher because I’m sure all of us do, because I know I do, knowing that he has a personal connection with the kids: if that really makes up for most of it.” Katrina’s brave words were short-lived: “but being there for them makes up for different aspects where you lack, where you probably don’t – it’s probably in your head.”

Regardless of words that may have been offered to because the group had yet to develop a community, what emerged from this conversation was when William admits he is wrong or doesn’t know, the students are more apt to trust him and view him as a “real” individual. I posed that this assumed role as a learner is powerful, and students may choose to have moments with him at the beginning of the day because of this role. I also challenged whether the role was a conscious choice or not.

A final piece of the conversation without William also centered around his declaration of inadequate teaching at times. Jade said, “I wondered if, I never have time to jot down, ‘that went really good’ or ‘use it again next year.’ I think, I’ll do that on one of my staff development days. I wonder if William ever gets a chance.” Jade did not know until the last meeting of the school year that William would then begin keeping index cards on the corner of his desk to jot down ideas for the next school year. He shared some of his postings with us during that last May meeting.

When William re-entered the conversation at the fourth stage of the Success Analysis, he commented on all three major themes of the conversation. On setting boundaries with students, William claimed his gender as the primary force for his “good presence with kids” in addition to his interest in sports that coincides with theirs. This common interest can be problematic when he forgets that they are “kids. A lot of times I treat them older than they are ... Then they start

talking about their go-carts and playing army, and I'm like!" On his role as a learner, William used the Civil War to make his case: "I've told them, hey, the Civil War. I like it. I love the tidbits and the facts, but sometimes it's tough to keep all that organized in your head." He mentioned not knowing the answer to specific content questions and offering incorrect answers that are corrected by his students. "I'm like, Oh, yeah, you're right. Geez. You were watching the History Channel!" William even reiterated my own words in a response: "I tell them that I learn alongside them, just like you [Thomas] said. I use that exact phrase. I do." On being self-reflective and documenting his thinking, "I probably don't have enough time to do that ... Most likely, it will be that I've already done the lesson and I'll think, I don't think that went very well last year either." After again claiming a lack of time he challenged himself, "maybe try to pound in your [my] head to be self-reflective." His index cards may have provided an initial jolt.

Shanna's Success

Shanna became more attuned with her success after hearing William. As she shared her success the month after William (March), she cited William's story about connecting with students, especially the quiet students that are seemingly free of behavior and academic challenges. "Those are the students I specifically wanted to target," Shanna stated. As she developed times and routines that made herself available to her students for private conversations, she noted improved levels of participation in class and attributed this to her intervention. "I see them more active. They're wanting to help me. They're wanting to communicate and work in pairs and with partners."

One specific student was mentioned as an example: "Her mom will disappear for days at a time. I didn't know what was going on with her, but she'd be quiet. I noticed that some days she'd have her work, and other days she didn't." After Shanna "befriended" her, the student

asked to share with Shanna her situation. The recent addition to the story involved the student walking in on her mother having an extramarital affair. Shanna convinced her to speak to a school counselor and contacted her father. “Her family was completely torn apart, and they’ve got family members in Iraq ... It’s amazing that through all of this, she’s – I gave her a little project. She’s in charge of our little care package.”

Shanna started to define her job more acutely at the end of her story: “As a teacher, it makes me feel like I’m doing my job, not only by teaching the material but allowing them to feel that they have someone to come to.”

Clarifying questions gave Shanna an opportunity to give more specifics of these encounters with students: more boys than girls, often during transition times, and if parents came forward with similar concerns, Shanna shares what she knows. Shanna offered an insight into her classroom when she answered my question about when students are made clear about the routine of talking to her about issues. “That was one of my expectations at the beginning of the year. Y’know when you set your goals? Respect and manners.” Manners functions as an umbrella term that encompasses the behaviors that students need to exhibit here: when it is appropriate to approach Shanna and not interrupting when two people are talking.

The third part of the process, where Shanna sat silent and took notes about her thinking and the conversation, started with a fear among several members that Shanna may be entering areas that could prove problematic for her role as a teacher. Katrina pulled us back to Shanna’s success by reminding us that Shanna’s success focused on bonding with students that are quiet and sometimes get overlooked. Shanna’s job-defining quote became then even more potent as we thought about Shanna’s success as being two-pronged: focused on *content* (emphasis on first syllable) and focused on students feeling *content* (emphasis on second syllable). Jade heard a

definite hierarchy between teaching and connecting: “That’s what she [Shanna] said: she didn’t just want to teach them; she wanted to connect with them.”

Holly offered an unexpected addition when she revealed that her roommate is a sister of the student that Shanna described. As Holly described what they had done to try and help this seventh grader deal with her familial situation, she noted that “the only reason that she [the student] went to talk to Shanna was that she felt like she had a connection with her because she had shared some of her life.” Shanna apparently shares with her class decisions that she is currently trying to make.

After the group had discussed Shanna’s dilemma, Shanna returned to the conversation and referred to her previous work experience as a trainer in that it “mirrors me teaching ... I naturally enjoy being there for people.” However, her strongest response referenced content, which Shanna talked about at each meeting. “Students that I’ve talked with personally one-on-one are more interested in my classes. Our students rotate in social studies, so I’ll see that their grades jump in my social studies class but not in others.” But her final note on that subject again focused on students feeling content: “They feel really comfortable.” To close her success, Shanna wiped her eye gently and looked at Holly: “Thank you. I didn’t know that.”

Stella’s Success

Stella and Holly both shared stories that were indicative of the second category, empowerment. The context surrounding Stella’s story was initially not detailed. In fact, at the April meeting, Stella was sure that she had shared it with us already. After examining our collective memories, William reminded us that at the first meeting he had requested that we all give a snapshot of our successes, but we didn’t pursue the success analysis process with everyone’s success at that point. After a brief overview as stage one in the process, over 20

clarifying questions were then used by the group to elicit information helpful to framing Stella's success.

As a resource teacher at Greenville Middle, Stella assists sixth grade students that come to her from all over the school. Students that are not served by resource teachers or teachers for the gifted remain together in teams for the entire school day. For ELT, Stella's responsibility was to work with six students who read at a third grade level, according to a district-required computer-generated reading report. Her goal is "to raise their reading comprehension, their reading level."

As Stella took over this class in January, she continued with the group's daily process. At the beginning of class, they would complete worksheets in a remedial decoding book. As a warm-up, students chant new vocabulary words as dictated by the teacher. The next part involves a reading selection where numbers indicate that students should stop reading there in order for Stella to ask comprehension questions. The remainder of ELT time is spent completing work independently in a SRA Laboratory box of small stories that include comprehension questions at the end of each story.

"We decided – or I decided to try them on a higher level novel, reading it altogether as a group. The first time we did that we took the AR test and every one of them made a 100." After an approving gasp from members of the group, Stella quickly qualified, "Even though some of them can't read it, we had to read it as a group in order to comprehend it." The computerized Accelerated Reader (AR) program encourages children to read books from a predetermined list and take a 5-20 question multiple choice comprehension test at the completion of the book. Certain percentages qualify as passing the book, earning points based on the reading level of the book tested.

Shanna immediately began her own clarifying questions, gently probing about the style of the class. “Round robin reading?” “Each with a turn to participate?” “I’m sorry. I started the clarifying questions.” Although some questions asked for specifics about where Stella borrowed the books and which books were read, Shanna continued to investigate what reading strategies Stella was using in order to assist these struggling readers by including questions about vocabulary, participation, journaling, and predictions. She also wanted to know if Stella will continue her process of eliciting student consensus in choosing the next book.

This conversation between provisionally certified teachers reminded me of preservice teacher education candidates in a reading methods course. Shanna was taking a required course each week the night before CFG about reading and writing strategies to use with middle school students. Stella was enrolled in classes two nights/week toward her certification as a multicategorical special education teacher.

What prompted this success is perhaps most poignant in Stella’s story. The prescribed curriculum for these students included the decoding book and SRA for the entire year of ELT. However, “the teacher before me had gone through most of it by the time I got there. I kind of had to substitute things to fill in for the rest of the year with the reading group. We just finished today [April 25] the SRA book ... so we’ll do novels.” How Stella “does” novels may change after today’s conversation. Through the process of asking clarifying questions, Stella revealed that her procedures for reading the novel were very similar to the decoding book (stopping periodically, often at the end of chapters, asking predetermined comprehension questions she found on an Internet lesson) with the inclusion of a few reading strategies of her own choosing.

The very first comment in discussing Stella’s success focused on students’ empowerment, posing a connection between student motivation in reading the novels and their

participation in choosing the particular titles. We offered possibilities regarding the learnings of one student in particular that Stella casually mentioned: a student who had read the last book, *Holes*, previously and “fussed about reading it again, but then by the end, she was into it again.”

Katrina’s concern, couched in a “I wonder” statement, addressed students’ comprehension when other students read aloud as opposed to when a teacher is reading aloud. Shanna speculated about how the students may or may not have corrected each other’s pronunciation, and Katrina was curious about some students’ “flat tone” as they read aloud, especially with struggling readers.

Stella had quickly mentioned that students encouraged each other as they read. I posed to the group that this process may be key to Stella as she seeks to repeat her success, especially with students that may have been marginalized in a school system for several years. “Why do I [students] feel good when I leave this time?”

Although the group did not continue to address this topic of equity (the next comment offered in the meeting focused on using audio tapes for students to hear correct pronunciation), I tried again at the next open space:

That may bring up an interesting issue of grouping. If all the students are grouped because they have similar problems, who is the model? Who do they listen to? ... I wonder if that is already built into Stella’s class among these six – is there actually someone they defer to?

Shanna extrapolated this notion and queried whether students’ confidence levels changed in other classes, especially language arts, as a result of Stella’s work with them in the area of comprehension.

William finally addressed the topic he found most pertinent: round robin reading. After he admitted that he was “chastised by Dr. Davenport” for using this strategy, Shanna admitted her own reaction: “When Stella was first talking, the first thing I thought was, round robin!! Gasp! [laughter from group] Everybody says it’s bad.” However, as Shanna continued to process Stella’s success she posed that the encouraging tone and comfortable nature of the group of six readers made the process of round robin reading legitimate for these students.

The tone of legitimizing processes that had been deemed unacceptable continued in the group. Katrina tentatively offered the following about grouping:

I think it almost might be, I’m not sure, I’m guessing, is that we group our ELTs almost by ability. If you have PROBE [gifted] students and students on a third grade level, you don’t feel comfortable. Maybe grouping them by ability has helped in addition to the small group.

“Remember – that is taboo here! We don’t group that way!” William quickly added.

“Round-robin reading and tracking!” Katrina exclaimed.

Shanna and William made sense of students being ability grouped in very different ways in their next statements. Shanna’s positive presumption is apparent: “I wonder if that encouraged them, too, knowing that the person next to them wasn’t a higher level or superior to them. Maybe part of the encouragement was just the comfort that this person wasn’t going to make fun of me if I couldn’t pronounce the word.” Contrasting this with William’s deficient response: “Chances are they couldn’t [pronounce the word] either.”

Groups that engage in meaningful work connect previous work to current issues. Katrina referenced our group norms in extending the conversation about grouping. “Even in here, on that paper over there, it says, no hierarchy of expertise. If they feel like that in their class, they feel

empowered.” Shanna and Katrina began to describe their own grouping strategies. Shanna keeps groups consistent so students can get to know each other, and Katrina admits that she changes groups too often.

When Stella returned to the conversation as the final part of the process, she found it “funny” that we, as a group, thought the students were “all the same.” She sees their different needs: fluency, decoding, and comprehension, as the markers that make them different, even though they might be at the same “comprehension level.” She describes them as a “good mix.”

In similar style to Shanna’s presentation, she briefly addressed several issues that she may have been wondering about. She added another layer and perspective to the tracking discussion: “Some of them in special ed have come through these classes in elementary school together and know each other. They are in that bond.” She may have been questioning her instructional decisions about the novels: “That’s how the whole reading program [decoding book] works. I just took that into the novels because that’s what they were used to doing.”

After Stella’s success, discussion ensued about her future plans with her class, especially the process of how they might choose their next book. She ended our time with a reflection from a substitute that had been spending a great deal of time in her class the last two weeks due to a alternate standardized testing schedule: “One sub said that you start the day off so well this group and one of my language arts classes, a small group of six, is at the end of the day. The three inbetween – I have several EBD children – at least you begin and end well.”

Stella’s success analysis was markedly different than the work we offered other members. Issues of substance were explored: tracking and grouping, round robin reading, student empowerment, legitimizing decisions made by teachers for the welfare of students. Ironically, one of the very issues that the group was exploring in Stella’s success: group dynamics, may be

another factor why Stella's success looked so different. Stella was the last to share her success. In this April meeting, the group had examined six successes and had worked together for over 10 hours over the course of the semester. To quote Shanna, "comfortableness" may have finally been achieved. It is important to note that Jade was not present in the first half of this meeting when the success analyses took place. Other members' participated more often and for longer periods of time.

Holly's Success

Holly's success also took place during the ELT time that characterizes the beginning of the day for students at Greenville Middle. At the beginning of the school year, eighth grade students who earned As or Bs in their academic subjects were permitted to apply for acceptance into a journalism ELT experience. Dr. Wilson, who Holly replaced at Thanksgiving, accepted 20 students into then her elective.

Holly's perception of what was going on when she arrived was grim: "They were doing as little as they possibly could in order to get by." She continued Dr. Wilson's schedule and classroom activities until mid-December, at which time she told the students, "This isn't working. This is too much work on me and you don't care still ... I decided to change."

Not only did Holly change, but the students did as well. Starting with a voting process for editors-in-chief, proofreaders, and typesetters, students made press badges out of lanyards, so they could have access to the hallways without needing Holly's permission each time they left the room. They collaboratively set their own deadlines and developed story ideas. "It's definitely *their* paper."

The students' ownership of the paper was recently called into question during the "Hat Day Controversy." During the second step of the analysis, asking clarifying questions, the group

gained clarity about the students' concern in that an editorial that questioned the consistency of hat definitions across the building was possibly being removed from the paper.

The background to the story is necessary in order to understand the controversy: this group of eighth graders went to Dr. Davenport and asked if students could use a Friday to wear hats. The big day arrived and students assumed their regular schedules. In this school of 1,800 middle schoolers, the regionalism of separate buildings, wings, and hallways is quite powerful. Administrators and teams of teachers were making sense of hats in their own unique ways. No incidents were reported prior to lunch.

The lunchroom is scheduled by grade levels not by locations of classrooms. Thus, students from across the building on different instructional teams can visually see each other in the lunchroom. This also applies to teachers – they can see other teachers' students from across the lunchroom. Teachers observed students from other classes and chose to speak their minds. William recalls, "It was a starfire, starburst controversy!" "I got yelled at by [another teacher] from the other side of the cafeteria that this one student couldn't wear this hat. At first I didn't think that she was even talking to us, but it turned out that he was wearing one of those hats," remembered Katrina.

"Those" hats are beanies: not the ones with propellers on the top, reminiscent of some readers of this manuscript, but the modern-day beanie, knit stocking caps that come down over the ears. In certain regions of the building, beanies were not allowed. Katrina made sense of it for her one of her students: "I'll be honest. I told him that he couldn't wear it to Extensions, but he could wear it in my room because it was Hat Day."

Holly later talked about Nick, a student who entered his room, threw his beanie on the floor, and declared, “Ms. Stevens, I’m writing an editorial! Two of my friends who are on another team got to wear their hats!”

Nick did indeed write his editorial, but Dr. Davenport would not allow it to be printed unless he could compose a companion piece. Shortly after this interaction with representatives from the journalism ELT class, Dr. Davenport chose to resign as principal for issues completely unrelated to beanies or hats.. “The issue with Ms. Berg [the new principal] is that she doesn’t want Dr. Davenport’s editorial, and she’s not sure about the beanie issue. So the kids have a meeting to talk about the original editorial.”

As the third step, discussion without Holly, began, I hoped that the group would detect the student ownership element working in Holly’s story. As Shanna said the word leadership, William concurrently used ownership to describe the situation. However, what came next was surprising. Shanna characterized Holly’s shift in democratic praxis as a “nice idea to get them to care about what they are doing.” Katrina wondered if the class was composed of “top kids”; “top-notch”, as described by William. Katrina assumed that the students “would have to be self-motivated.”

As quickly as an issue of equity was approached, it was left. Instead of inserting a question that might bring us back to exploring the roots of Holly’s success, I chose to wait and hear the next strand of conversation that focused on the nature of middle school learners.

Shanna explored students finding a “passion they loved,” in this case, defending what they think is right. “This whole controversy here they thrive off. They get to tell the principal what they really think.” William continued Shanna’s line of thinking when he lamented that middle schoolers are often not taken seriously. “Their opinions don’t count for much.” His own

perspective then emerged even more fully: “You have to stay on these kids so much. Sadly, rule with a pretty stern fist.”

I chose to interject:, “Maybe’s there’s something in her story about empowering kids in a way so that they become more motivated and you can feel like you’re not on them all the time.”

Katrina, who earlier was pondering whether the journalism class was composed of a majority of gifted students, now flipped her perspective: “I was wondering with my question, how could it connect if you didn’t have the top-notch students if you had the students that didn’t always hand in their work, don’t always come to school. How would they react to the same thing?” William’s response to Katrina represents a closer frame on Holly’s process with her students in how the students negotiate what stories to write. Even in his response, the work is teacher-centered: “If you give them topics that they are interested in and controversial, they are going to love it. Especially the kids that are at the lower spectrum there.”

The end of the discussion marked an important point for the group in developing a common perspective in thinking about middle schoolers. As more details of the Hat Day Controversy were shared, William likened the issue to inconsistencies with dress code, dealing with “gray” areas. The notion of gray was altered as Shanna spoke. The students even used her own classroom rule of using manners in their argument. As Shanna finished speaking, a clearer metaphor emerged:

They always want to know what defines it. “What do you mean by we cannot talk? Can we say please, excuse me, thank you? Is that being polite? Can we say, God, bless you?” No, that’s talking. “But it’s being polite!” No! They always want that edge, where they can stop at.

Is there an “edge” in Holly’s class? If so, what is it? Katrina referenced the editorial not being published, claiming that the class must “border the edge.” This question remained elusive for the group. They did not make connections back to the topic of empowerment and ownership.

Neither did Holly when she returned to the conversation. She shared many details that clarified moments in our discussion, and brought up a new issue of who is going to teach it next year, and how that teacher may shape the class.

Holly did speak definitively about the issue of class composition:

I really don’t think it would work in my classes of 32 students when I have so many behavior problems. They are too out of control and would take advantage. They love to write editorials. In all my other journalism classes we write editorials, but as far as doing a newspaper, I don’t think it would work.

I closed with an offer to Holly that she may wish to bring the issue about transferring this concept to a Consultancy, where the group can process her dilemma in support of her move to a core classroom next yaer. Holly did not bring that to the group at the next meeting. Perhaps it was our issue, not hers.

Katrina’s success

The final category of success elements center around assuming a proactive stance, especially involving the teachers initially resisting practices that once failed but were now successful. Jade and Katrina’s stories both are indicative of the elements listed under this broad title.

When we first wrote success stories in February, Katrina wrote about a student project that involved studying Africa and creating slave diaries. When she volunteered to share her

success at the March meeting, she claimed that hers was “very, very small. I feel like it is a work in progress.”

Katrina and her teammate had been offering their students a “mini-recess” in lieu of walking inside the building after lunch. The day before CFG, Katrina was observing her students and noticed a particular young man that was completely by himself. “We had 60 kids out there, and nobody wanted anything to do with him. It really breaks my heart.” It was not surprising to Katrina that he was ostracized by the other students as she painted a picture of this student in his “typical” school experience:

We have a student on our team who, to put it as politely as possible, grosses me out.

Honestly. He’s a bigger kid and other kids really make fun of him ... He picks his nose all the time in class. He’ll come up and talk to you one-on-one with his finger up his nose. He scratches his head a lot. He is always touching his face. He picks food out of his teeth ... He’s very smart, but he doesn’t do his work and doesn’t have very good handwriting so he won’t do his work. He copies pages out of the book and just underlines words ... He’s trying to be very helpful in our classes.

Katrina hasn’t allowed him to be helpful in the past because of his hygiene issues. In fact, she admits, “sometimes I’ve been very, very short with him.” However, after the outside experience when she noticed he was alone, she made a conscious decision for the next day: “Yesterday I said ‘Hi’ to him and tried to talk to him and I let him collect the papers in class and it made him very happy.” The next day she continued implementing the things she had refused in the past:

This morning he came in and said hello and I tried to have a conversation with him about the lesson we're doing. He seemed to get excited. He asked if he could shut the wall. I don't let him shut the wall because I have to touch the wall, too. I let him touch the wall.

As she noticed how happy he became from "these three little things:" engaging in conversation, closing the wall, and collecting papers, she also noticed that there were fewer disturbances with other students. "I'm trying to learn how to balance him and my feelings toward him and trying not to be grossed out and trying to allow him to help and get him confident in himself."

This issue was obviously raw for Katrina as she described this student's idiosyncrasies in detail, including hand motions that showed her distaste for his actions. Shanna, a close friend of Katrina's, later shared that this was a "major success for her [Katrina] personally."

The second stage, where members ask clarifying questions of the presenter became questions couched as strategies: "Have you included the counselor? Has he been assigned a peer? Have the parents been involved? Is he involved in any clubs or sports?" The group seemed a bit subjugated when it became time for group discussion without Katrina. The Success Analysis had felt like a Consultancy, in that Katrina's success is also a dilemma that is not resolved. In fact, at the end of the discussion, I acknowledged these feelings aloud again in order to re-focus the group.

The group may have felt a similar disequilibrium in their discussion, as it quickly diverged into stories of being grossed out by students, including William's animated account of a student that passes gas consistently in his class.

After I brought the group back to a common focus, "Let's really try to focus our talk on Katrina's success so we can use her time well," Shanna was still attempting to solve Katrina's

“problem” by focusing on other stakeholders in the issue: “I’m still curious about the counselor ... It seems to me that the parent ...”

Reflecting Katrina’s own words at this point was an attempt to reshape the group’s dialogue:

If I heard her correctly, she was thinking about intently trying to balance her feelings toward him ... and raise his self-confidence at the same time. That seems to cast a whole different light in my idea of her success – how to raise his whole self-confidence by setting aside her own ...

Jade added, “phobias” to my sentence before I had a chance to use “idiosyncrasies.” As I explored the notion of accountability with this student as being a facet of her success, William transferred this to the student: “I also wondered if you set up certain consequences for certain behaviors.”

Jade and Shanna cycled back to parent support, perhaps with the key word “consequences.” After acknowledging our innate desire to problemsolve, I used Katrina’s words to bring us back again:

She was talking about the students testing him. I’m wondering, in a sense, if she’s testing him at the same time, while testing herself. In a sense, are we secretly doing this with lots of students? Do we give a little bit of rein, and when they don’t meet our expectations we react? I’m wondering how much she’s including him in that, and I’m wondering how that will impact her success in the future.

Jade may have understood the push at this point to focus on Katrina’s work. She posed that perhaps it was that moment outside that Katrina knew she had to act. “I wonder if she got that positive reaction and is that what kept her going? Or did he at one way, and she kept going

with it.” Now the dialogue is starting to explore what Katrina can do in order to continue the success.

Unfortunately, that marked the end of the group discussion, and Katrina was invited back into the group. After a testimonial that she is trying to not reflect how young she is (22 years old) in responding like a 12-year old might respond, she delved into how she is testing him. “Seeing how he will react because he has to encounter the students and collect their papers, asking ‘Do you have your homework?’ if they don’t have it out.”

As Katrina reflected some of what she heard during the discussion, she also diverged into talk that questioned the role of the parent and counselor in this situation. She also remembered other vignettes that helped to paint a picture of his interactions with others. In the middle of a small vignette about a meeting with a counselor and the mother, in fact, in the middle of a sentence, Katrina turned her focus inward again, focusing on how she is testing him on different things. She continued her inward focus consistently to the end of her reflection, ending with a proactive metaphor about his feelings toward her and that effect:

Every day he leaves, he says goodbye to me. We haven’t – this is sad. I haven’t been the nicest to him and he loves us and loves me. All the time he will come up and talk to me. It’s just an attention thing, so I think I just got to work on this and try. I think I’m going to do more with holding open the doors. I don’t have to always *touch the door, just walk through it.*

Jade’s Success

When the group first wrote successes, Jade was still thinking about the Space Bus program for which she had handled all the arrangements. This Friday was the last day that the physical bus would be present on campus. In a “Go-round” where members quickly share the

nucleus of their respective success, she said, “I’ve put myself in the role of the person being in charge of everything because it’s so much easier.”

However, in March when she shared her success, she decided to talk about a specific student instead. Her success was prompted by an email from Holly that asked for strategies to assist her with a student that they had in common. Jade quickly referred to the “behavior plan that I’m supposed to follow for him.” It’s the same behavior over and over, and I’m become so fed up with it ... not feeling like it’s working.” Instead of sharing the behavior plan with Holly, she came back the next day and built on an individual interaction that they had shared earlier. “When I talk to him one-on-one, that generally works, but it’s frustrating to talk to him one-on-one. Let’s try it again.”

The result of this intense hallway conversation was that the student was feeling singled out by Jade for actions that other students were equally exhibited. Jade’s solution was for the student to immediately document when he felt like a victim of injustice. She remembered another important detail during the final reflection: “He brought up, ‘I’ll get in trouble for writing in class.’ I said, that’s a good point ... I’d rather that you get that out, so you can be involved.”

Jade’s synopsis of her success did not initially focus on collaborating with a student: “My success is curbing myself. Getting toward the end of the year, dealing with the same kids over and over, it’s getting to the breaking point ... I caught myself.” However, before Jade ended her success description, she brought the student back into the picture: “We came up with a solution.”

I was especially interested in this idea of “working together” and how that fit into her definition of success. When Shanna began the discussion portion (she was the first to speak on each person’s successes other than her own) with a compliment about how the idea was an

“excellent way to work together and come up with a solution,” I pressed. “How did they work together?”

Shanna continued to describe the one-on-one conversation tangentially, so I pressed again. “I must have missed that part of the story when Jade said that they worked together.” Shanna’s next words are key: “I *assume* that when she pulled him one-on-one that she was working with him, and she let him help her come up with a solution.” One last probe left Shanna admitting that she was probably inferring.

Jade was basing her success on her definition of working with students. “Working for students, working with students, I wonder what the difference is,” I added.

Discussion drifted until we reminded ourselves of Jade’s words: “curbed myself.” We needed to explore the context surrounding what led Jade to curb what she wanted to do, which she earlier admitted: “I left Tuesday feeling as frustrated as I could be with him with all intentions coming back the next day saying, so and so, you need to decide whether you want to be in regular education classes.”

The electronic prompt from Holly was never used in the discussion as supporting material in Jade’s success. No possible scenarios were offered to why Jade decided to curb herself. After nine seconds of silence, discussion drifted into a direction that examined the consistency between academic teachers and Extensions teachers, like Holly.

The quality of discussion surrounding Jade’s success is lacking when compared to Stella and Holly’s successes that were analyzed in the April meeting. Jade used her time after the group discussed her dilemma to defend her decisions and thinking rather than pose how her thinking may have changed as a result of hearing her success being discussed by her peers. She relegated time as the only method to approach curbing yourself: “When things like the child is bothering

me with behavior, getting worse and worse, I have to step away from it and give it some time, whether a day or a week, to come up with what is really the better solution.” Jade closes her time not focused on the development of her thinking. Instead she offers broad advice for the other first-year teachers, probably quite similar to what she hears from who she calls “the vets”: “Like I said, the quick solution pretty much never ends up being the good one. So, try and stay away from them.”

“Mining” Stories: Delving Deeply

Facilitators often encourage the use of non-judgmental statements as a way to build trust in a group. I used the stem, “I wonder,” often as a way to push the group’s thinking about particular issues and concerns. In tallying my own use of this conversational device, I was relatively consistent in its use during the February – May meetings (ranging from 9-14 times in a 3½-hour meeting).

Other participants rarely used that exact phrase; in fact, I outnumbered all of the other participants in the use of this particular statement in all the meetings. However, the April meeting’s tally sheet looked very different from the other meetings’ results. “I wonder” was used seven times in the April meeting before I ever uttered it once. As the novice teachers were publicly wondering, I used it as well, boasting my largest use of the phrase. The percentage of use by others compared to my use was the highest in any of the meetings. Had the phrase become colloquial, like Jade’s use of “whatever?” I don’t think so. Instead, I pose that the phrase became a common piece of language (Senge et al., 1994) that allowed the participants to engage in generative conversation, moving toward authentic reciprocity (Little, 1987). This “systemic thinking” about structures and practices was made possible because of the foundational modeling of group procedures.

The intent of success analyses is for participants to delve deeply into colleagues' success stories, "mining" the stories for factors that can be replicated for further successful experiences. Holly and Stella's stories at the April meeting were the last two success stories shared. Their stories also represent the greatest depth of thinking. Participants did not attempt to solve dilemmas within the story; rather, they genuinely inquired about students and teachers' motivations and decision-making. William and Katrina engaged in dialogue about what made these stories different than the others. Their "wonderings" were often related to how these experiences may have felt for students.

It may be interesting to note who was in attendance during these April success stories: Holly and Stella the presenters, William, Katrina, Shanna, and myself. Jade, the member who seems to speak most definitively about educational issues, was not present. Perhaps her absence allowed the group to assume a different stance toward the success stories that were shared.

Elements of Success

After Holly had shared her success in April, the group spent time developing elements that were common to all the success stories. As I offered guidance for how we might develop such a list, I offered a direct connection to classroom practice. Holly had brought a rubric to the group for "tuning" two months prior. "This is the same kind of thing you can do with students at the beginning of the year in creating elements of exemplary work in this classroom," I shared.

We decided to first examine our own success and create a list of qualities that are indicative of our own story. The next part involves remembering each other's stories and adding, deleting, or modifying the list. Katrina saw a tension in my directions about our "teaching success" stories, noting that perhaps all stories were not "teaching": "I didn't know if we were doing ... what to us makes teaching special or what were the qualities we want to have. I didn't

know if we were doing five qualities of our own success or just teaching in general.” My response directed her to our experiences that we shared in our group instead of reflecting on teaching moments that may not have been processed in meaningful ways.

A brainstorm list emerged that included nine features of the success stories (see Figure 4). In the May meeting, we revisited this list and grouped items. The last item to be approached was “modeling.” At that point, discussion ensued about the possible meanings for modeling in each success story. To Katrina, who originally offered the term at the April meeting, modeling meant “appropriate speech and behavior.” She accepted the term, relational modeling, as her descriptor. William and Jade included their modeling moments in that category, while Stella viewed hers as instructional modeling. Holly did not participate in the discussion, and Shanna’s story is where we ran stuck. Shanna relationally modeled for students, but that work seemed to have a direct connection on her instructional impact with those students.

I posed that the terms may occur concurrently. Using Stella’s example with her remedial reading class, “I’m picturing you with your students ... In your mind, you may be instructionally modeling, but as a student, I’m wondering if they’re thinking, that’s what I want to do. That’s what I want to be. That’s how I want to behave ... I think it could be relational.” Jade accepted the connectedness between the terms, but not the concomitant nature of their existence.

William could picture their connectedness when he thought about himself relationally modeling, and how that might also be instructionally modeling. “I think that you’re teaching traits that a lot of kids don’t know or otherwise don’t see a lot, as it being modeled ... I think you’re building relationships, but you’re also teaching characteristics or traits – they coincide.”

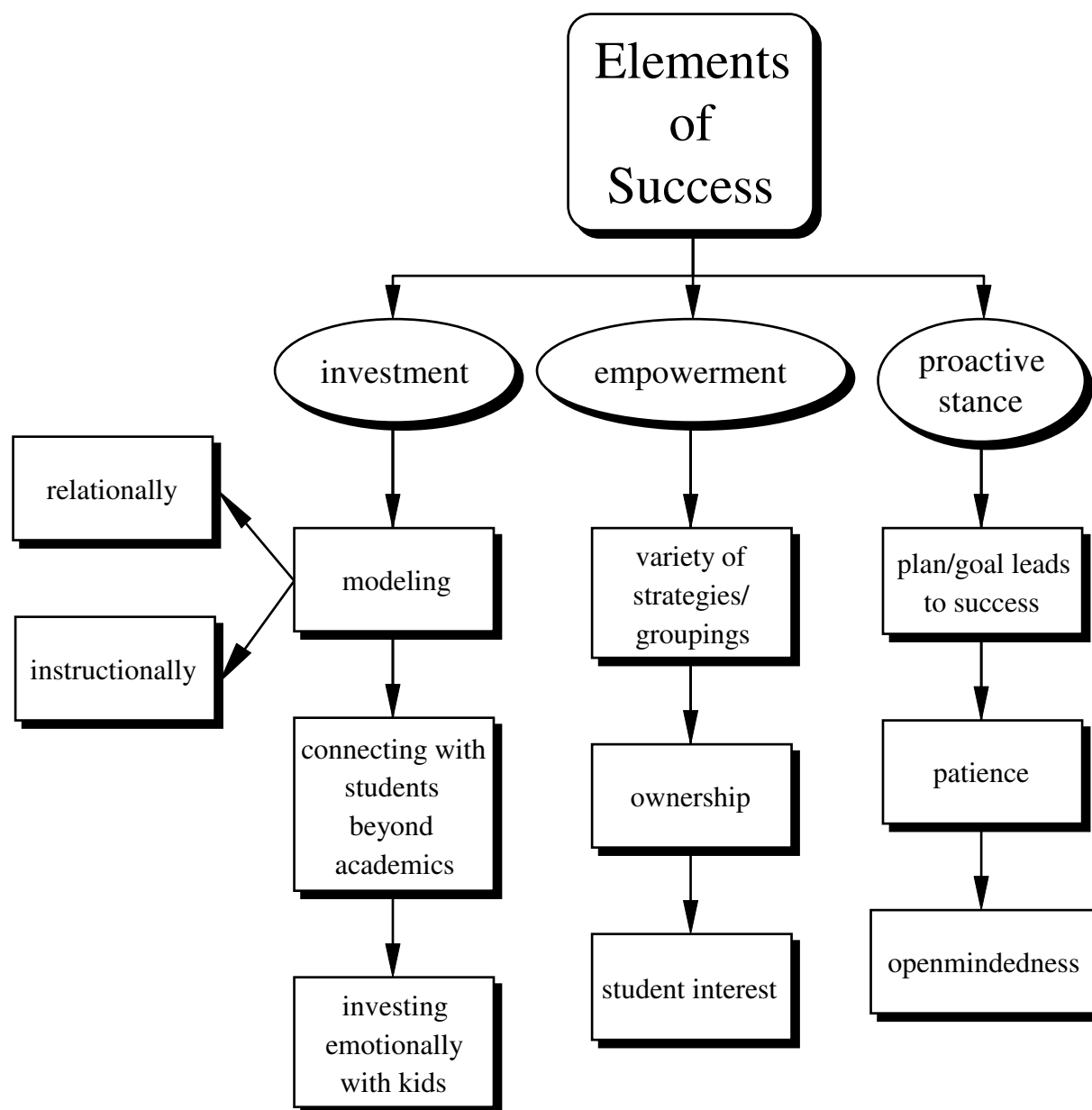


Figure 4. Elements of success.

None of the elements of success listed “buy-in,” which is where Polly needed assistance. However, student interest, ownership, variety of strategies and groupings certainly qualify as appropriate substitutes. The elements were built using experiences of first-year teachers where they felt successful. They shared their stories openly and allowed the stories to be explored in

deep ways without having the immediate power to redress any unpleasing responses or interpretations. Trusting the process allowed members to use the results in meaningful ways both in the present and in the future.

Priorities and Leadership

Priorities

As an external coach and a researcher, it seemed that this group was a negotiable in the lives of these first-year teachers. No comments were offered that led me to believe that they looked forward to the meetings and would have missed not having them. The April meeting in particular was particularly problematic for attendance. William announced at the beginning of the meeting that he had to leave halfway through the meeting in order to attend seven sequential Student Support Team meetings that afternoon that involved administrators, teachers, parents, and a counselor. It could be argued that these meetings may have been very hard to schedule with all of the stakeholders. However, the dates of the CFG meetings had been co-constructed by the CFG participants prior to the first January meeting. William's own responses to meetings, emails, and paperwork seem valuable in this vein. He often lamented how far behind he was on paperwork and reading emails. Jade would joke with him about not knowing about various meetings until right before they began. It is foreseeable that William could have informed the SST coordinator that he would not be able to attend meetings that afternoon because he had a CFG meeting. However, he also might have chosen not to cause tension on his team by changing dates.

Katrina also informed me when I came that she would need to leave an hour early. Her excuse was also a meeting; however, this was with a priest. Katrina's marriage in Connecticut this summer would take place only if a priest here would approve the marriage between Katrina

and her fiancé. I did not press about other times the priest may have had available other than 3:00 on this Friday when CFG met. It does make me wonder if she would have accepted a 3:00 meeting on another day of the week when she had students in her care until 4:30, and if she signed out in the office when leaving campus early.

Stella and Shanna were over 25 minutes late for this CFG meeting. Shanna's tardiness for each meeting was considered a joke, not because she tended to be late, but that her substitute teacher always tended to either be late or rather needy in terms of instructions before Shanna felt comfortable leaving.

Jade's Priorities

The final person to create her own attendance frame for the April meeting was Jade. Jade got married in mid-April and took a few days away from work in addition to the district-scheduled spring break. Our CFG meeting fell on the Friday after her return. Her response to my email probe if anyone had a dilemma or work to share was the following: "Due to the time off for my honeymoon, I will only be able to join CFG from 2:45 – 4:00 this Friday. I apologize for any inconvenience and I hope you understand!!!!" This email message was not a request directed to me or her building administrator. Instead, it was an indication to me that she had made a priority of staying in the classroom for her fourth academic hour of the day (which lasted until 2:35; she had a planning period from 2:45 – 4:00).

In February, she chose to miss the last third of the meeting when the Space Bus was on campus. She indicated that she was in charge of its schedule and presence at school, so she needed to leave early.

The CFG meetings were considered staff development by Dr. Davenport. In fact, he and I collaboratively wrote the SDU proposal, so first-year teachers would receive staff development

units for their participation. Jade's impetus for missing part of this meeting was not financial: pay was not being usurped from her paycheck for every minute that she was out of her room. Instead, her experience during the February meeting may have played a part in her decision.

The group took a break that generally fell halfway through the meeting. On this first meeting that took place at Greenville Middle, I told the group that they could head back to their respective rooms if they desired, use the restroom, grab some food, and return in 15 minutes. The piece about returning to their rooms was my facilitation decision based on a comment made by William in Connections: "I'm having a difficult time being on campus today with my kids in the classroom today. I keep thinking I should go down there." Jade decided to walk down to see how her substitute was doing with her students. When she returned to the conference room, she was incensed:

I was like, was I unclear about what they were supposed to be doing? Our whole team is reading right now, and if my class is playing games, running around, and being loud, then no one else can be reading right now. She was like, "They weren't doing what they were supposed to be doing." I said, that's what you're here for. If you're having problems, flip through the sub manual, if you're having a problem, you can send them to one of my teammates and they will take care of it. "No, I haven't looked at the sub manual yet." I marched right to Ivy Ivey's office [sub coordinator] and said, I don't care if that woman subs again. Don't ever put her in my room. She's never been here before. There's people that do good with our class. Her child was sick here today. She was out last minute today so this a sub that she got last minute, this morning. This is the *peace de resistance*. So, I run down to see if I could see [another staff member], who wasn't there. I see her [my sub] poking her head in Eleanor's room [another team member] saying, "Can you guys

keep it down? It's a little loud." My sub is telling Eleanor Hulme this. Do you know Eleanor Hulme? I'm surprised she still has a head. When I went to my room, they were so loud, y'know what I'm saying? I can just imagine Eleanor saying, "Well I guess we can't read over here." I can't wait to hear – she's going to go crazy.

As she spoke, Jade seemed to relax and resign herself to her current role in a professional development:

I'm surprised she [Eleanor] left that lady with a head. So I think I heard Eleanor saying something like, "well, yeah?" And I'm like, I'm out of here. I've got critical friends to be with right now. I don't blame my kids one bit. If a kid says to a sub, "Can we get a game out?" And the sub says "Yeah," well I'd do it, too! She let them do it. They do whatever they can get away with. That's just what they do.

It is unclear whether Eleanor was supportive of Jade's monthly hiatuses from her students. Eleanor has been a trained CFG coach since 1997. In fact, Dr. Davenport attended the coaches' training on Eleanor's prompting. Jade's perception of Eleanor's support was not positive. In fact, Jade was worried about her response at the very first meeting in January:

Right before I left [school], I gave my report cards to Eleanor, my team leader. She said, "Can we meet during planning?" I said, no, I'm out of the building with CFG. She had negative thoughts about that because she's been running a CFG for a long time and hasn't had the support. So when this came up – half day subs – she's really unhappy.

In March, Jade was still worried about her students not behaving in appropriate ways when she was going to be out for her honeymoon. She included that in the "danger" zone of her bullseye: "I freak out just leaving them now. I just hate it. They behave fine when I'm there, but I'm really worried about it."

Jade reliably volunteered as the interpreter of school-specific language and rituals. She would turn to face me directly and give me the details about her perceptions regarding the school's position on alternative assessment (April), student retention (May), and how to purge student evaluation records (May). Towards the end of the May meeting, she asked directly if I knew what others were talking about during a conversation after a break. Despite my nods of affirmation, she explained anyway the process of using Comment Express Cards to show appreciation to students.

I found myself citing my own school-based work in order to build credibility in the group. One moment particularly seemed to backfire with Jade. As the group was discussing behavior management plans, I included a plan that I had worked with several times as a substitute. Although Stella initially verbalized support especially for the intent of the plan, Jade immediately torpedoed (McDonald, 1992) the plan, using her students as the main reason that the plan wouldn't work in her context. In fact, she claimed that the plan couldn't work in middle schools in general. She didn't hear the fact that this plan had been in operation for three years with my wife's instructional team at another middle school in the county. Since the specific plan hadn't worked with her kids, it wouldn't work at all (Goodlad, 1990).

Jade's use of email to inform me of her absence may also be indicative of how she made sense of my role as an external coach. I was not a teacher in the school; in fact, the group never knew that I had actually taught middle school. The accountability Jade felt to the group could be minimal at best. She never chose to bring a dilemma, student work, or teacher work to the group.

Leadership

The January meeting was held at my house – an experiment in controlling the environment. Sitting in comfortable chairs and couches and stroking a friendly kitten were

benefits that were not likely to be replicated at school. However, I did not open the meeting until 1:00 pm: 30 minutes later than the sent time. One member arrived at the agreed-upon time:

12:30. Shanna was the last to arrive at 2:30.

Dr. Davenport had emailed me earlier in the day to let me know that Shanna and Katrina would be “a few minutes late:” “I’m going to hold a couple of teachers here at school for a ‘called’ 7th grade meeting ... I need to do a little ‘coaching’ in preparation of the Access Exam. Thanks.” Shanna’s “few minutes” began to worry me as the minutes turned into hours.

When she arrived, she informed us that Katrina was at a funeral out-of-state. She merged into the group’s activities, participating actively in a text-based discussion about standardized tests. It didn’t take long for Shanna to include in her text interpretations the focus of her latest meeting:

A month and a half before the Access, I had to sit through an hour and a half meeting about how to improve my students’ scores on the gateway and that I should focus our ELT [Extra Learning Time] time toward teaching for the Access. You really don’t have an opportunity to focus on topics that you feel are important: focus on items like what the students need a better grasp of understanding. Here I am, six weeks before the test, I’m being told that they need to score well because this many ranged in the middle. How can I get them up to just average if I need to get this much material into them?

This meeting included specific structural conditions (e.g. ELT) that were being altered in order to focus the next six weeks on the Access test. Dr. Davenport viewed this meeting as a more important use of Shanna’s time than the first meeting of the CFG that was serving as her second semester induction experience. Shanna may have also inferred from her experience that Access preparation is more important than her classroom issues and dilemmas.

Anyone in the group could have perceived Shanna's tardiness as a lack of support from Dr. Davenport. Lack of support has been linked to a lack of interest in the work (Murphy, 2001). NSRF's evaluation study of 1997 (Dunne et al., 2000) noted that each school that documented changes in teachers' thinking and practice employed an administrator that was publicly supportive of CFGs. Dr. Davenport certainly was publicly supportive by offering half-days for the group to meet and asking me to speak briefly at a pre-planning luncheon. However, personal support and interest were not present from Dr. Davenport in these teachers' experiences. Dr. Davenport also did not provide an equitable amount of support to an existing CFG at the school coached by Eleanor Hulme.

CHAPTER 9

STRESS OVER SLIPPERY SQUIRRELS/CONTEXT IN KENTE CLOTHS

Stress Over Slippery Squirrels

Polly had “gone over” prepositional phrases several times with her students but to no avail. She seemed utterly defeated as she described her preposition battle with the students, for the students, against the students ...

I personally thought that prepositional phrases were one of the easiest parts of speech to learn, so I really, in the beginning when I approached it, I thought no big deal. I explained to them that this was a preposition, it would have a noun, and maybe an adjective, but it wouldn't have a verb, and Pam [another teacher] makes her students memorize 60 prepositions. Well, I didn't want to do that, so I'll have them memorize 25 of the most common prepositions so you can recognize them easily. The first time I tested the students – clueless, no clue what a prepositional phrase was. Okay, I didn't teach that well. Let's try that again. Okay, you got a log, you got a squirrel, let's talk about the relationship between the log and the squirrel. You go through the squirrel in the log, you got the squirrel on the log, the squirrel around the log. We're making a relationship between these two nouns using prepositional phrases. Tested again. Clueless. Okay, I reach a point where I don't know else to teach it. I try to use the data, I'm trying to appreciate that they don't know it and go back and revisit it, and still coming up empty. At what point do you say, we have got to move on?

Content in Kente Cloths

Katrina brought Kente cloths that her students had made reflecting their own culture to the April meeting (see Appendix C for an agenda). She inquired if we had time to examine her students' work. The agenda was altered, and a Consultancy convened after break to focus on her question, which at the time centered around how to assess this project.

As Katrina and I talked during break to set up her Consultancy, I asked her questions to help her focus her query. Although she immediately claimed assessment as her concern, she also confessed to an ulterior motive: she wanted to share this as an idea for other teachers ("some of the others teach social studies or journalism") as a way to get to know your students. Even though this project took place in April, Katrina found herself profoundly affected by what she learned about the students that she had been working with the entire school year.

Katrina's Context

Katrina teaches on a three-person team where the three teachers share one subject between them: social studies. They divided up the curriculum and each took a world region that they taught three times over the course of the year. This time of the year represented the third time that Katrina had taught African content to her seventh graders. This is also the third time that the Kente Cloth project was attempted.

However, this time was different. As this project necessitated many steps, Katrina decided to add an element of mystery: "not letting them know what was ahead." Students identified ten items about their culture that they found invaluable, items that could not live without. After assigning a color to each, students were instructed to create designs on a piece of paper representing their culture. Each item need not be represented in the cloth, and the colors more than the symbols would tell the story. The project is loosely based on Kente cloth, which is

worn by native Ghanians to pay homage to their heritage by telling their family stories. In addition, students were to write an essay explaining their color choices and how that best represented their culture.

Students had read a section on Ghana in their social studies textbook, read two articles about life in Ghana, heard from a class member who had lived near Ghana for several years, and participated in a class discussion about the culture, land, and climate of Ghana. This discussion “went so well” that Katrina decided to forgo the written test on this unit. She also used the Access test as a rationale for why she didn’t want to give a written test during the weeks the students took a standardized test.

The protocol begins with the presenter, Katrina, offering the context of the dilemma and the work. As she handed out her student work samples, Katrina’s relationship with her students was apparent as she struggled with how to assess this work:

She worked just as hard on her pictures, but didn’t hand in all the steps I wanted. This person handed in everything I wanted and worked just as hard ... That child in particular didn’t hand in a summary. He took another day. He’d rather take an incomplete for his summary in order to finish his drawings. He wanted it to be perfect.

Then she added another layer to her fear of assessment: “I wanted it to be fun.”

During the second step of the protocol, asking clarifying questions, Shanna asked about Katrina’s purpose of the activity. Even though Shanna’s question asked specifically if Katrina wanted her students to learn something about the culture of Ghana, Katrina’s response focused on her students and herself: “I also thought it would be a good project for me to get to know them, even though it’s the end of the year. Also, for them to get to know themselves in certain respect.” The next round of questions offered Katrina further opportunities to expand on her

purposes: “I wanted them to know that their culture is very important to them, like what we’re learning about Africa. Their family heritage is important; their ancestry is important.”

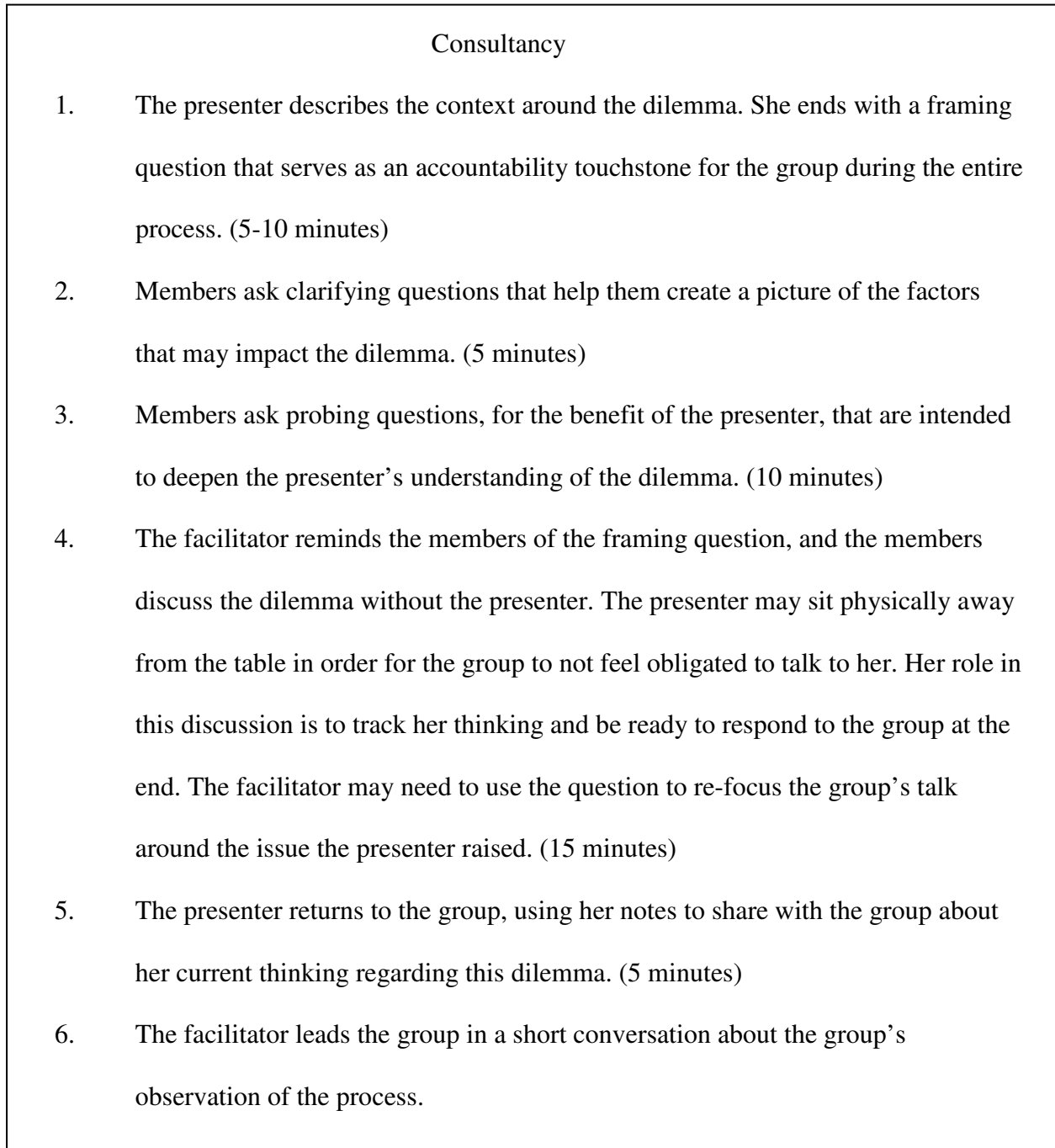


Figure 5. Consultancy protocol (National School Reform Faculty).

At this point, Katrina also clarified her notion of what the discussion was like that prompted her to not give a unit test.

I have a lot of kids that don't always participate. Some sleep. Everybody was talking, asking questions, listening, attentive to one another, respectful of one another when someone was speaking. They'd go back and forth and ask questions. If someone was describing the places that they live, they would say, "How did you know that? Where did you find that?" Then they would point it out, and the other would say, "Oh, yeah," like they remembered that.

As William pointed out "interest" as a key objective for Katrina's class discussion, it prompted a response from Katrina that focused less on discussions and more on developing a rationale for not always testing students at the end of chapters and units.

Shanna pushed Katrina to choose a piece of the project that was the most important. Katrina claimed her "language arts side" as problematic because she wanted to only use the summary "because those are words and they explain everything, but that student right there never writes. He only draws. He draws the entire time I teach. That represents him more than writing would." Although she is not exploring her assumption that words "explain everything," she realized that she had a problem with students that did not hand in all parts of the project. Without the written essay, she could not determine what they were trying to say about their own culture. As Katrina continued to refer to specific students' work and their color choices and abstract or concrete designs, it was clear that she knew some of this information without the written work that was attached to some of the projects. She had offered an opportunity for students to share their work to the class before they handed it in.

As Katrina used her time during probing questions to analyze her situation, she posed a question aloud about just assigning an effort grade for the project. “I was told that we needed, if we were to take an assignment, we needed to grade it for content and accuracy, not just, you did this, okay. I’ve also been told from other people that that is what we’re told, but that’s not what we always do.” Her struggle continued about judging students’ effort in that the content of this project was their understanding of their own cultures, not a specific battery of facts and figures about Ghana.

Discussion About the Work

Katrina backed out of the discussion segment of the protocol and the group began to process her dilemma about grading these projects. Conversation centered around what Katrina’s goals actually were. Were all parts of the process equally important? Could the project be verbally presented and then the cloth handed in for “full credit?”

The content of Ghana’s culture still weighed on my mind in the discussion. What had her students really learned during that discussion about the two texts and the firsthand account? Is there still a way to capture that learning? Katrina had mentioned that one of her student’s grandparents had been missionaries in Ghana. They were coming to the classroom to tell about their experiences there, and the students were very excited. “What if a list of questions that they write in preparation for a person coming to their class – that could be their ‘what do they understand about Ghana.’”

This idea sparked new thinking from Shanna in particular, who started to process some of her students that do not test well but show in discussions that they understand the material. Shanna wondered if there could be a way that Katrina could document what each student brings to a discussion and give a “group grade.”

Although that strain of the conversation focused on alternative methods of data collection, it did not help Katrina's current dilemma about her Kente cloths. Jade, who entered the meeting during this discussion, suggested that we pursue what a rubric might look like. After specifying issues related to the formatting and creating of the project, we realized that a very important link was missing on the rubric: Did the students connect their culture to the cloth? This was Katrina's main goal in the project – "how would you put that on a rubric?" asked Jade.

As the group struggled with how to word that indicator and how to levy points for it, I chose to push our thinking more: "What if this wasn't [graded] out of points?" Holly asked how she would enter the results into the district's computerized grading program. Perhaps her assumption is that all activities must be assessed and included in a program that averages scores. Jade was concerned why any student would participate if the assignment "doesn't count." Her thinking about student motivation stagnates at the topic of grades.

Shanna was willing to think of solutions instead of obstacles: "Maybe just making the blanket up and taking their picture with us versus getting a grade for this. This was a success of the classroom. We're going to put up this blanket to remind us, each and every one of us. It doesn't have to be graded." Shanna continued the use of "success" language, which had been an important part of every CFG meeting. Her words inspired me to hypothesize about student motivation, thinking especially on projects that we have toiled on in the past, and the students didn't respond. "Maybe it's so tied to the activity more than we know: the actual reason why kids work hard."

As we ended the discussion without Katrina, Holly was thinking again about the grandparents: "I can't wait for the grandparents to come in and see the cloth hanging up." Shanna, again focused on alternatives, suggested that the students could give the cloth to the

visitors as a gift for spending time with them and answering their questions. She was exploring student motivation in terms of how they can feel good about their work using feedback from strangers: “It may mean more to them to please someone who they haven’t met yet, someone who they are excited about meeting. To explain their cloth to them, just enough of a reward to feel like this person was pleased with what I did and they don’t even know me.”

Katrina re-entered the conversation, obviously pleased with hearing others talk about her dilemma. She appreciated the talk about the rubric, “but it really wasn’t until the end I liked the idea about the reward.” Katrina chose to not assess the projects, but use them as ways to connect to their visitors and hear each other talk about their cultures again. She had been resisting the urge to grade their work which many of her colleagues around the table said they would have “no problem” doing. Time given for the group to engage in collective thinking prompted an alternative she felt much more comfortable with. The group helped her, if only for a moment, teach “against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991).

What made Katrina’s African content so different than the prepositions that Polly struggled in teaching? The stance that each teacher assumed regarding content knowledge was certainly different. Katrina did not want students to leave their time studying Africa with a static body of knowledge composed of facts, figures, and maps. She expected them to move beyond the content and connect issues of family and culture to Ghanaian practices. Polly also did not want her students to memorize a list of prepositions, but she did not seek to have students synthesize and apply the new content in meaningful ways. In short, the elements of success regarding empowerment were not met. Students did not “own” the material, and it appeared that squirrels and logs did not heighten the interest of Polly’s eighth graders.

Making Sense of University Work and Other Learning Experiences

A first-year teacher CFG is unique in that the members may be very close chronologically to the last time they were in a university classroom. In this CFG, although only one was a traditional college-age graduate around 22 years old, four of the participants had just graduated from college the previous school year. Table 6 represents connections to teacher preparation programs and the comparison to whether teaching is a second career for members. The findings from this CFG offer an interesting perspective on how preservice teacher education students and first-year teachers connect their university experiences to school-based work.

Table 6. University and certification comparison.

CFG Member	College Degree	Graduate of Teacher Preparation Program	Second Career
Holly	X	X	X
Jade	X	X	X
Katrina	X	X	
Shanna	X		X
Stella	X		X
William	X	X	X

Two rubrics were brought by Holly and Katrina for the group to “tune.” A Tuning (Figure 6) offers the presenter an opportunity to provide a context, answer clarifying questions, hear others talk about the work, and reflect. Both tunings also offered insights into specific university teacher education content. Jade and William graduated from the same program at a local university. Several conversations reference inadequate preparation. William spontaneously offered his model teacher education program: “I think you should be immersed. General studies for two years, then be put in a classroom with a teacher, or a school system for a number of

years, instead of wasting all that money, time and energy to learn useless information.” However, William indicated that he uses rubrics “often” to show students his expectations on assignments. It is unclear if William picked this practice up from university coursework, in a field experience, or in his previous work as a paraprofessional in a fifth grade classroom.

Tuning

1. The presenter describes the context around the work. She ends with a framing question that serves as an accountability touchstone for the group during the entire process. (5-10 minutes)
2. Members ask clarifying questions that help them create a picture of the factors that may impact the dilemma. (5 minutes)
3. Members examine the work, taking note of issues they would like to pursue. (10 minutes)
4. The facilitator reminds the members of the framing question, and the members discuss the focusing question without the presenter. The presenter may sit physically away from the table in order for the group to not feel obligated to talk to her. Her role in this discussion is to track her thinking and be ready to respond to the group at the end. The facilitator may need to use the question to re-focus the group’s talk around the issue the presenter raised. (15 minutes)
5. The presenter returns to the group, using her notes to share with the group about her current thinking regarding the work. (5 minutes)
6. The facilitator leads the group in a short conversation about the group’s observation of the process.

Figure 6. Tuning protocol (National School Reform Faculty).

As the group examined each line on Katrina's rubric, we wondered what differentiated a rubric from a checklist. Holly and William "loved" the rubric the way it was. Stella and William agreed that a rubric removes "a lot of" the subjectivity in assessment. Individuals inferred scales in specific indicators on the rubric. For example, if a student created eight pages of text, they received 40 points according to the rubric. William and Shanna both assumed that a mathematical formula existed where each page was worth five points: $8 \times 5 = 40$. As we began to claim our own inferences about the rubric, William also wondered if Katrina offered a grace period and if so, how that may have affected each or any of the indicators.

Another indicator indicated the group starting to understand how their own perceptions color their assessment practices: "a creative cover." Shanna, William, and Holly spoke in cacophony as they each offered their version of a creative cover. Their descriptors were different, indicating their varied expectations of the indicator initially accepted as "not subjective."

The varied expectation was not problematic for William as he claimed "consistency" as the by-product of rubric use. It is not clear whether William equates consistent and objective, or whether he uses consistency as a justification for subjective assessment practices.

As I challenged the equating of checklists and rubrics, Jade spoke about her understandings of rubrics and their possible forms.

That's what my thought of a rubric is. This is what you do performance-wise to do this. If you want to do this, you can get this grade. I don't think that is the only kind of rubric. I think you can have a checklist rubric for them, a way of making sure.

She used performance terms (e.g., "exceeded expectations, met expectations") later to describe possible categories for Katrina's rubric.

Although we don't know if Jade's present understanding of rubrics stems from her university readings, Shanna's reading assignments in her reading and writing class on Thursday nights has a definite impact on our CFG discussions. This class is sponsored by the district and fulfills a basic certification requirement. Although she referenced the reading content and course often, Stella's success especially provided Shanna with an opportunity to explore what she was learning. Shanna was making sense of her class content in two ways, one of which seems particularly relevant in providing a rationale for CFGs of novice teachers. First, Shanna was implementing guided reading strategies in her science and social studies classes, especially probing students to find text that supports their position and attempting to find meaningful connections in vocabulary instruction. Secondly, Shanna could be using Stella's experience with fiction to create a school-based connection with content that she had not contextualized in her science or social studies classes. Without this CFG, Shanna would not have had an opportunity to explore this topic in meaningful, applied ways.

CHAPTER 10

SUBTLE SEDUCTION/INTENTIONAL INDUCTION

Subtle Seduction

During a text-based discussion on *The Seductive Allure of Data*, a short article in *Educational Leadership* (2003) by James Popham, Polly claimed activism as she used the text to provide a rationale on why the county's eighth grade writing test had test validity, but the validity could be improved by adopting one of Popham's suggestions. "I think I'll recommend," she stated as the discussion drew to a close.

A strand of the discussion centering around the article focused on the pre and post tests that teachers at Greenville Middle are required to complete as part of the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiative piloted by several schools in the district. (See District Context for additional description of this school reform.) In addition, the county has adopted a method for accountability and supervision called DDEP: Data-Driven Evaluation Plan. This system requires teachers to set two goals in August and provide data that support their success in reaching that goal in May. At Greenville Middle, teachers were "encouraged" to connect their DDEP goals to the CQI initiative. Some grade level subject areas collaborated, writing common pre and post tests to use in each of their classes. William and Jade were both in subject areas that did this. Other groups talked about collaboration but ended up writing their own. Katrina and Shanna were examples of this approach. Stella and Holly both started teaching midyear and did not set or show documentation of meeting DDEP goals.

The DDEP system claims “fairly and systematically measure a school’s progress, providing a process that clearly communicates expectations; reviews, monitors, and supports school performance; and evaluate that performance” (Greenville Middle School Accountability Report, 2002).

Polly experienced discomfort in the declaration of her goals, definitely disagreeing with the purported justice in measurement. As she cited the article for support, she noted that Popham suggests that a “non-partisan scorer” (2003, 51) be used to provide credible evidence of the teacher’s “instructional success.” She connected this to her DDEP goals, a system that does not overtly connect instructional success with student success.

We all [eighth grade language arts teachers] send the writing samples to a neutral party in order to pass eighth grade ... [but for the DDEP goals] we assess our own. We have the goals, so obviously you can manipulate it in any way you want. At the beginning of the year, you don’t rate them very highly, and at the end of the year you give them a better grade so you can have favorable data on your DDEP. Obviously, there’s no value for that other than a paperwork thing.

Polly’s continued references to paperwork and non-instructional tasks were a source of frustration to her, just like the participants in Johnson and Birkeland’s (2003) work. In regard to the DDEP goals, it was also an ethical dilemma.

They tell you that like a friendly person who likes you. They don’t ever talk about it in meetings! They say, “Okay, you have this goal, and you obviously have a pre and post test and have to reach 80% of your students going up a whole level, so what do you think is going to happen here, Polly?” That’s how they do it.

Her peers “disillusioned” her, and she succumbed to their years of experience when crafting her DDEP goals. At that time, induction at Greenville Middle consisted of two facets: creating your own time with your assigned mentor and attending monthly meetings around pre-determined topics.

Intentional Induction

When CFG members did not respond to a call for a dilemma or work to bring to a meeting, I created agendas around the topics that had emerged during previous meetings (see Appendix C). The April meeting was scheduled one week after spring break and immediately followed the Access test for seventh graders (and, according to Katrina and Shanna, for the seventh grade *teachers* as well).

As I reflected on the transcript of the March meeting, teachers’ comments about students became important in planning April’s agenda: “I took his arm, touched it like that ... He was like, ‘Let go of me!’ and I was like, I’ll let go of your arm when you look at me” (Jade). “He was going to fight this kid right there; it was going to go to blows ... I know you’re not supposed to get in between” (Holly). “I just wanted to nail him” (Jade). “I get mad because I see this, and I get a phone call where I’ve being yelled at because someone is making fun of him” (Katrina).

An activity called “Profile of a Student” (Figure 7) seemed apropos for our next meeting. This process involves teachers reading short blurbs (3-5 sentences) about “typical” students, labeled students 1-9. As they read each blurb, they gauge whether this child represents a student in their own classes with whom they may currently experience difficulty. If this activity was done with a large group of people (e.g., 30), groups of three or more could divide up and each assume a student role. In this setting, I modified the protocol to vote on the three students that

represented our collective difficulties. In less than 30 seconds of deliberation among the group, three students emerged as our focus children.

Profile of a Student	
1.	Each person assumes the role of the focus student, using first person to describe the student's experiences in school.
2.	Each person writes privately: identifying a student you know that is similar to this description. Use the following prompts to assist your writing: What have I done with this student? What's worked? What hasn't What else could I do?
3.	Each person assumes the role of the student again and talks about what people need to know about students like you if they want you to learn at high levels and do meaningful work.

Figure 7. Profile of a Student (National School Reform Faculty)..

The most votes were tallied for Student 5 (Figure 8). Holly behaved uncharacteristically during our meetings by taking initiative and jumping in first, albeit with trepidation: “Okay, I feel weird. ‘My teachers give me an assignment, but I’m going to raise my hand because I know that I won’t be able to do it anyways.’ Is that what you’re looking for?”

<p>In your mind, there is no way you can succeed in school. You have been a “remedial” student from before your memory kicked in. You read slowly, and seldom get a passing grade on an in-class essay. You do have strengths, but no one seems to notice or value those. You wonder if life after high school will feel like more of the same.</p>

Figure 8. Student 5 (National School Reform Faculty)..

The dialogue between the fragmented voice of Student 5 continued as every member offered possible slices of dialogue. Jade's responses focused on the stress induced and feelings of failure caused by reading and writing in class. Stella thought about the pace of completing work while Shanna claimed a good work ethic but little comprehension about the work itself.

The next segment became more powerful for the teachers as they continued to use the voice of their students to describe what Student 5 would like his teacher to know about him. Stella continued to participate more fully in this environment of offering thoughts without the threat of feedback. Her words started us off in this segment in a very meaningful way: "I would like a teacher to know that just because I leave for special ed. doesn't mean that I'm special ed. at everything." As it sunk in that Stella, as a special education/resource teacher at Greenville Middle, may be describing many of her students, she broke the pause again with an even more direct thought: "and whatever that means to my teacher." It is not clear whether Stella would have felt comfortable sending that message if some of the other CFG members actually taught sixth grade core subjects and sent students to Stella for extra assistance. Perhaps she wasn't sending a message at all, but was merely reflecting her own bias in working with children that come to her for additional help. Her voice representing her student population was heard specifically as she spoke as Student 5. Interestingly enough, she did not participate verbally in the next step when it was time to discuss strategies.

Holly and Stella shared a reciprocal moment when Stella offered her last response, "I'm not comfortable enough with the teacher to talk to him or her individually to get what I need." Holly immediately turned the statement around: "I wish I knew what I needed, so I could ask." I broke the assumption of student voice and asked Holly if she had been thinking that before Stella spoke: "No, I was thinking that the whole time."

After one more opportunity for each member to offer the voice of Student 5, a facilitation faux pas occurred: “Let’s do the next part, the part that will help us as educators. What are some of these strategies that help students, like us, to do high level work and meaningful stuff? What can we do?” From the dialogue over the next several minutes, the first part of this protocol may have been more useful than the strategy time. My assumption about what first-year teachers may have wanted out of this activity (strategies) was in conflict with why I had initially chosen it (to combat the negative remarks about students and the emotions those remarks seemed to cause in others). By assuming the voice of the very student that may represent tension in their school days, some of that distress may have already been diffused. Assuming student voice also builds pedagogical learner knowledge (Wang & Odell, 2002).

A broader problem with my directive is the consistent shift of voice, particularly pronouns: “us as educators,” “students, like us,” and “What can we do?” At that point, it was certainly unclear what the CFG members should be doing in order to continue the spirit of the protocol. We continued this activity in the May meeting, and my direction didn’t improve. In fact, I spoke almost twice as many minutes. Katrina immediately asked, “Are we talking as a student?”

As all these members chose to assume their own voice as we entered the strategy phase of the process, Jade, Holly, and Shanna relayed stories of interventions. Jade and Shanna both shared tales of positive work while Holly claimed that “the nine weeks ran out” before she could try more strategies.

As Shanna spoke, she focused her talk on one specific student that she sat with every day during bus call and organized her homework schedule for the evening because “she’s busy in the head of what she has to do after school for her brothers and sisters.” Shanna “tried to do the

grading differently. I was told that since she wasn't in special education, I couldn't grade her differently, and I could not give her different assessments." Although her assistant principal and team leader had spoken to her about the assessment policy, Holly encouraged a more covert approach: "I feel like saying, what they don't know won't hurt them."

Jade was quick to offer the alternative view that if a student fails a subject on the Access test and doesn't fail that particular subject during the school year, she would not be able to explain the disparity. I had shared in the very first meeting that CFG work involves questioning our assumptions, and this was an opportunity to build that capacity within our group. "The assumption is that, if I'm hearing that, what we do now, how we assess now, currently prepares them for the Access?" After a general affirmation, Shanna and Jade acknowledged that alternative assessments are allowed for all students but would just be impractical for teachers and inappropriate for students because all students don't need them.

Katrina had just left the meeting with her Kente cloths – artifacts that represented a discussion about meaningful alternative assessments that were built on student interest and motivation. When I questioned how Katrina's work with these squares may have prepared students for the Access, the group was unable to make a connection. The "narrowness" of the work made it difficult to talk in generalities about the district accountability system (Cochran-Smith, 1991). Jade was the only group member verbally trying to make sense of how Katrina's work connected to the Access. She and I exchanged several statements, but at my final press of how the Access test might test students' understanding of culture, she eventually retreated with a oft-used response: being a first-year teacher ... rather, just "first-year:"

I have so many teachers say, do it and get your apologies later. Don't act and get a note.

Do it and apologize later. Okay! I'm a first-year. I don't really know. I don't know if they

give out black marks this fast. They'll tell ya. That's all they say. You act in the best interest.

It is comforting for Jade to remind herself that she is acting in the best interest of children, albeit within a structure that she accepts: in this case, a “rule” that stipulates that alternative assessments may only be done for students that fall under the special education umbrella. She fluctuates being part of the larger group of well-wishing teachers versus claiming her first-year status as a possible reason for not attacking a problematic issue.

Uncharacteristically, Holly produced her second activist comment of the day: “Maybe you should do it as a first-year,” which drew nervous laughter that sparked me to bring us back to where we left the protocol of Student 5.

As the strategy list of Student 5 started to dwindle, it seemed logical to take our strategy ideas to our next student, Student 7 (Figure 9), and see if these strategies would be appropriate for her. Since I was adapting this protocol for a smaller group, I was willing to take this license. However, I did not realize that the process of working from student voice to strategy was important. Taking a laundry list of strategies and applying them to random students defeated the purpose of the activity, which was to build understanding of specific students' motivations and needs. The next part of our meeting reflected that mistake, which I readily acknowledged to the group.

Student 7: You are an efficiency hound to leave time for other things in your life – the lowest passing grade possible for the least amount of work is your mantra. Why pass a class with a 78% when you can pass with a 69.2% and a good sob story? You know all the tricks: make-up tests, rewrites, re-dos, extra credit points, parental pressure, coach pressure, group work (with the right partners). You put more effort into beating the game than learning.

Figure 9. Student 7 (National School Reform Faculty).

As we began to consider strategies for Student 7, members reverted to telling stories about individual students; especially the negative qualities reflected in the summary of Student 7. I requested that we back up in the process to the first step and assume the student's voice in order to focus on their school experiences. It was too late.

"I know I can fail one class, so I'm not going to do my work in science." (Jade)

"My parents don't really care as long as I get a passing grade." (Shanna)

"I'll go on to the next grade before I finish this grade. They don't want me in middle school if I turn 16." (Stella)

I acknowledged my own distress with reading this student's summary: "I am trying so hard to read Student 7 and say something different than what's around the table right now." After a brief silence, Jade thoughtfully responded, "I wish I understood why everyone cares whether I pass with an A or a D."

Although I admitted the process may have sabotaged our work, Jade and Shanna both accepted their own fault, claiming Student 7 as their collective Achilles' heel. Jade's self-

described “ruthless tactic” involves pressing students, “putting them on the spot” regarding their future plans; enlisting peer pressure to assist as negative motivation.

As the time ran out on this meeting, Shanna petitioned the group a final time: “Anybody with any other ideas on how to deal with Student 7? If you have anything, please email me!”

Profile of a Student: Part Two

As I developed the agenda for the last meeting, I wanted to acknowledge the fact that we didn’t complete all three students in the previous meeting. I also saw this as an opportunity to think about how all of us as teachers are unique and require different strategies in order for us to do our best work. I planned to extend the Profile of a Student and have the group write descriptions for teachers they know and work with. After processing these in similar ways to what we had for particular students, I wanted to end with writing about ourselves.

You are life smart, but not school smart. You would do almost anything to not look stupid in school. You are the class clown, or the loud political protester, or the persistent talker – on the edge of being a “behavior problem.” You don’t mind being sent to the office instead of having to give an oral presentation – and you know just how to get sent there. Everyone at the office knows you well and greets you with affection, as they know you as “really, a nice kid.” The things you are really good at seem to have little place at school.

Figure 10. Student 1 (National School Reform Faculty).

We used Student 1 (Figure 10) to re-introduce the process. Although assuming the student's voice started off with William who wasn't present at this point of the April meeting: "I don't know why I need to learn this anyway. I'm going to play professional football and make a million dollars. I might be a rap star," he also re-focused the group near the end: "I wonder if I'll have time to do my homework tonight. I have baseball practice."

As we entered the strategy portion of the process, Holly realized that she and Jade had picked the same student. This connection offered learning opportunities for both members. Jade addressed Holly directly and asked what strategies she was using with this student. As Holly listed her ideas, she pointed out a positive change in his recent behavior but a negative change in his work ethic. Jade informed Holly that he received a letter sealing his retention for 8th grade next year. As Holly was describing a particular intervention she utilized by offering this student another ESOL student to use as a partner, Jade reacted in surprise by the success of this strategy.

The future part of the work comes next: what else could I do? Jade was the first to admit her failure to act in her students' best interest:

The seventh grade ESOL teacher last year said that the only reason he passed seventh grade was that the teachers had him come in early every day and wouldn't let him go home until his work was finished. I couldn't do anything that extreme. I don't think I'm doing him a favor by sitting on top of him to get his work done, but by spending more time with him – it would be beneficial. That's laziness on my part.

After her testimonial, she immediately drew attention away from herself and any sort of follow-up that may come from her words. She jovially asked Katrina about a student that she had mentioned earlier.

Profile of a Teacher

The balkanization associated with the term “veteran teacher” was unexpected. Jade’s consistent adulation of veteran teachers’ experiential knowledge was present at each meeting. Her voice colored my perception that these first-year teachers were in positive mentoring relationships with caring, dedicated mentors. After some time to write profiles of their colleagues, I asked for volunteers to read their work. Again, Holly responded first. I did not anticipate profiles that contained solely negative traits: “Close to retirement, doesn’t want to take the time to go above and beyond. Doesn’t give behavior consequences because it feels like detention is a punishment for them. Complains a lot and looks for someone to vent to in order to validate her feelings.”

The group paused for almost two seconds before Jade’s lion-like roar prompted nervous laughter. Her own description included positive qualities as well: “Veteran. Easygoing. Planned for year because it’s the same as last year. Very helpful resource because you can get anything you want from them. Knows the rope. You can answer questions, too. Everything’s done. Nothing creative or new.”

After William used powerful words in his profile, such as veteran, opinionated, archaic, and stern, Katrina remarked, “Veteran teachers are getting a bad rap.” Katrina’s description differed from the others in that she seems to really desire change in her colleague: “Veteran teacher, teaching many years. Perfectionist. Criticize, but not constructively. Unaware that you are mean. Double-sided personality. You have the best interests of the kids at heart, but negativity doesn’t always build character.”

Although I was questioning whether this activity was detrimental to the larger teaching community at Greenville Middle, I asked Stella if she wanted to share hers: “Wants to do

everything right the first time, never ask anyone for help, don't communicate with other teachers."

Stella's lack of inclusion of the word "veteran" sparked our interest and offered me enough impetus to continue. We inquired as to which description seemed to reflect a common characteristic of our colleagues. William's profile was selected for us to continue the process with.

As we referred to the three questions (What have I done with this student? What's worked? What hasn't? What else could I do?) and altered the focus to teacher, Holly was absent from the conversation. As an Extensions teacher, she is a member of a curriculum team that contains teachers of music, visual arts, theatre arts, technology, foreign languages, and family and consumer sciences. The daily interactions with core subjects on middle school teams were not part of her experiences. However, her profile of a teacher indicates that she still needed assistance in learning how to make sense of relationships with other colleagues.

In August of the next school year, Holly described her experiences as part of a core-subject instructional team. "I love it," she claimed, and consistently used "we" the entire meeting. Her approach toward working with students now included a communal focus – not the isolated experience she felt as an Extensions teacher. "[I'm] thinking about discipline is more of a, 'What about everyone else?' I'm not just thinking about discipline in my classroom. I'm thinking about my kids going onto the next classroom and that sort of thing."

Jade again asserted her chosen role as a first-year teacher in her comments about other colleagues. "I fall into the trap that since they've been around and they're so opinionated, they are very persuasive to you. I've let it bite me sometimes. Oh, that must be what they do around here. Instead of checking with some other people for how things are done." Jade is not indicating

that she has any power in creating pathways to complete tasks, rather, she just wants more background historical data to support what she is about to do. Katrina used “avoidance” as an acceptable alternative.

As a special education teacher, Stella claims to “not have a teammate,” but later realizes aloud that she has to “collaborate with everybody.” Her input reflected her role in our CFG: “I try to associate with everyone, stay quiet, and listen a lot. Listen to everybody.” I queried what would happen if someone would assume Stella’s stance with an opinionated colleague – even to the extent that they were a two-person instructional team. Jade and William, both members of four-person instructional teams did not see this as a viable partnership. “You might need a mediator.” (Jade) “Can be dominated really easily.” (William) William even cited his role on his four-person team as playing an important role in his understanding of relationships between teachers. “When we have meetings, I see each personality come out at some point in that meeting. It’s incredible. It amazes me at how different the personalities are.”

William’s Team

William’s teammates, without naming or even referring to specific character traits, became the focus of conversation on how to productively work with colleagues. This declaration of his team’s inability to consistently work in productive ways was not new. During the March meeting, the CFG participated in a team-building exercise that focused on working together effectively within specific parameters. Five members attempted to build squares using cut-up pieces of paper that had been mixed up and allocated to the five “players.” One member that volunteered, Jade, was the process observer and watched for indicators of how each person reacted within the task.

In the debrief of the activity, obvious connections were made to their own styles of working together, or how they construed “working together.” In the activity, Katrina and Shanna took over the work while Holly, Stella, and William looked on, occasionally participating by moving a piece of a square. William assumed a similar role in his instructional team.

I strategically programmed the “bullseye” ritual next where each member added or moved items in the three areas of the bullseye: comfort, risk, and danger. The common language (Little, 1987; Senge et al., 1994; Wesley & Buysse, 2001) translated to our protocols in each meeting. In particular, this meeting included the first references to instructional teams by any member; in fact, Holly was worried about being prepared as part of a team next year and the expectations that “veteran teachers” might have for her. She was especially worried that she would be viewed as deficient because she was new to teaching. She did not desire “sheltered status” (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Shanna was concerned about how her team did not appear “unified” and how the students were starting to reflect that characteristic. William was the last member to specifically point out instructional team members as a risky area. “I thought about a new thing while doing this [building squares] in the teamwork and the personalities. I’ve been thinking a lot about my team, my teaching team. My partners are different personalities and some of the conflicts I see around me.” Although he wasn’t encouraging a specific response to his team, his reactions to conflict was clear:

I don’t like conflict. I just don’t deal well with me. I isolate myself, and say, y’all can argue, and I’ll just stay out of it. It’s not worth my time. It does affect me, of course. I can see that being the case. I think they’re still good, but there are some issues that I don’t particularly like.

Back in the May meeting William re-created a specific discussion from his team and reinforced his preferred method of working with colleagues – giving up:

We couldn't agree on a field trip at the end of the year. 'I want to go there.' 'Why do you want to go there?' 'Because it's fun.' 'What's the purpose of that?' 'Let's don't have a field trip.' It's crazy ... I just sit back in my meetings. I don't say a lot. I just listen and soak it in. I don't like confrontation. Man, my life is hard enough. I don't need to argue with ya'll.

The team eventually decided (or avoided the decision) to not take an eighth grade field trip. During the February meeting, William had indicated that his team was meeting "too often," and that the time wasn't productive, as indicated in his own example. In a Consultancy with Shanna about her struggles with time management, he suggested an agenda as a way to structure her team meetings.

Jade also remembered this earlier conversation in our May meeting: "I think that having an agenda – I think we talked about this before – his team needs an agenda for meetings that they need to follow, like we have one here. Like your CAT meeting has one." I wonder if Jade considers the agenda we "followed" in CFG to be co-constructed. Does she realize all the detours that we included in our journey? Are her CFG experiences with an agenda similar to her other meetings that use agendas?

As soon as Jade posed such a strong "need" statement, she flip-flopped after Holly wondered aloud about how his teammates might respond to him. Jade reacted: "They are going to be like, what are you talking about, William? You are so stupid!"

Katrina's voice had been missing from the conversation until she explained why: "You four-person team people ... just that added person. We had talked about changing, and we can't

add anyone in our circle ... Just one other person, their life's experience, their values, and what they think is so much harder to work with than three."

Stella's input was more productive than Jade's toward William's dilemma, and it encouraged William to take charge of the issue: "Have you ever thought about, 'Okay, we've been in here for 30 minutes. I've got to ...'"

William responded with verbatim words that he used earlier when defending his profile: "It's not all negative." He cited the various strengths that his teammates bring to the team. He also extrapolated the inevitable result: "confrontation."

I followed Stella's lead and after finding out that William was teaching with the team again next year, offered a slightly more direct approach, although with plenty of flexibility in delivery: "There might be a space to say, 'I'm thinking ahead to next year. Maybe we could ...'" William was ready to accept his current thinking on this topic, and transfer it to his current self-applied accountability system: "I'm going to write that on my list."

Interactions about team dynamics were important to these novice teachers. They had not developed an acceptance of ineffectual relationships over the longevity of a teaching career. Their cognitive dissonance may not be recognized by veterans as valid (Darling-Hammond, 1995). This space acknowledged their quandaries and supported them as they sought to make sense of their experiences.

Jade ended this time with a usual laugh-producing comment, "I can already hear your girls [the female teachers of William's team], though: 'We can't do it that way! How are we supposed to be that structured?'"

Amid the talk about meeting times is a hint at differences in teaching styles between William and some of his teammates. William and Jade exchanged knowing glances as he

described parallel teaching approaches in the context of his team: “strong disciplinarian or you’re a lax person who wants to give a learning environment where they can have freedom.” His voice trailed off in mock drama, laced with cynicism. Jade responds with more wit: “You don’t sound too sold on that!” She later indicated her solidarity with William on issues of classroom control: “That’s the kind of stuff that drives us nuts. Chaos.”

William made a substantial shift during the summer months after this school year. He decided to “pair up” with another social studies teacher and start over: “I’m not using much of what I did last year. I’m kind of starting over – kind of figuring out what I’m doing. I don’t really know where I stand this year – again. We’ll just see at the end of the year to see if it works.” What is so intriguing about this decision is the teacher that William chose: a colleague whose students often engage in projects, whose classroom is full of “stuff,” and whose noise level is “chaotic.” William had talked to former students of hers who described her class as “tough, but they got a lot out of it.”

In describing their first interaction, William said that he approached her and said, “Look, what do you do on a daily basis? What’s your routine? Your room – there’s stuff everywhere. How do you keep up with this?” It appears that William’s desire to provide meaningful experiences for his students outweighed his need for a particular kind of classroom environment.

So far the group had compiled four methods of dealing with teammates: getting other people’s opinions, avoidance, listening, and giving up. Ringing in my mind was the voice of a colleague who works with new teachers in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. At a meeting two weeks prior, she mentioned how sad she felt that when she would ask her teachers to bring concerns to her group, a majority of the time the problems centered around colleagues, not inquiries about students and their learning.

Although it would certainly have been easy to launch into an array of strategies that may prove more effective than the list they amassed, I wanted to connect their productive conversations about success and students to this problematic conversation about colleagues:

I think we're almost ready to make this leap toward our kids. Let's say that you have student one that we did today. What if you used these tactics with the kid? I'm just going to avoid him [laughter]. I'm just going to get other people's opinions about him. I'm going to complain about him in the CFG. I'm going to say his name. It's ironic how we work with adults in a building can be so destructive to us.

No definitive answers were provided for members to use in their concerns with colleagues. Perhaps more importantly, their own commitments to working with students were highlighted as a touchstone for thinking about working with colleagues. Although seemingly subtle, constructing behavioral standards based on their experiences was intentional. The benefit continued as an opportunity to extend their thinking into areas in which they self-diagnosed as problematic.

Polly needed assistance in working with members of her Curricular Area Team (CAT) in order to negotiate her DDEP goals. The dialogue in this CFG does not directly address content-focused talk between teachers of the same subject, nevertheless, parallels exist between CATs and instructional teams. In fact, instructional teams meet four times as often as CATs, and are a far looser structure in terms of dialogue and ownership. William's delay in implementing his own idea from the February meeting may indicate that he wasn't prepared at that point in his first year to make such a foray into the environment his team had created. However, his end-of-the-year index cards and CFG support offered him a framework to help him gain the confidence he needed in order to have this conversation with his teammates. It is doubtful that William will

discuss philosophical differences with his team if they are not addressed openly in the CFG environment, where issues of teaching and learning were the crux of our work together.

Give Me What I Can Use Tomorrow

My anecdotal conversations with teacher educators and mentors of first-year teachers reveal a general consensus that preservice teachers at the end of their programs and first-year teachers both desire the same thing: instant ideas that can be replicated and implemented immediately. Perceptions of mentor teachers about novices' desires agree (Wang & Odell, 2002). Program evaluations of induction programs reveal similar findings in regard to how program directors claim that participants spend their time in meetings dedicated to induction activities (Fideler & Haselkorn, 1999). Jade's responses in CFG conversations support that perception. She claimed in May that she would spend her summer sorting her "idea share folder" from her CAT meetings in which a teacher could say, "I did this and it works really good." Jade described running around after CAT meetings picking up copies of ideas from various teachers. Jade didn't even wait until the summer – she used a day of post-planning to re-organize her filing cabinet.

This stance reflected Jade's participation in all CFG meetings. Her desire and intent was to share and "steal" ideas. In fact, she viewed other situations with teachers to be closely aligned with the time she spent with the CFG: "I liked the idea sharing – that's my favorite thing about getting together with any other teacher."

Although Katrina's Kente cloth project generated important pedagogical considerations about student motivation, authenticity, and student assessment, Jade took something much different away from that experience. "Didn't we talk about how you could adapt it to other things?" For Katrina, this assignment seemed to represent an important shift in her thinking that she does not have to assess all her students' work because they can engage in activities for

multiple purposes. Jade viewed the act of teaching and planning on a different plane: “I think it’s like a neat little beginning of the year thing to learn about the kids.”

However, William’s ideal CAT meetings would look different than Jade’s. He replayed his silent conversation during CAT meetings: “I wonder how she teaches the subject.” He likened a worthwhile experience to Holly’s rubric tuning, where his own knowledge was activated and possibly expanded, as opposed to a Xeroxed copy of a lab that “works really good.” During the debriefing of a process, he even referred to the practice of asking clarifying questions as a way to help him make sense of her classroom work:

I think that when you clarified a lot of our questions, it made a lot of sense. It was like, oh, that’s why she did that, or she answered that well. So, I think your rubric was great for the purpose and it made sense for the MCS and the content.

His feedback was specific and focused, possibly indicating his level of engagement in the work.

Compare William’s response to Jade’s, which was offered as soon as debriefing time began after a tuning of Holly’s rubric for a specific journalism assignment: “I say it’s great, you don’t need to change a thing. That’s my debriefing for ya.” Although it may appear to be a curt response, its intent could have been more focused on her displeasure about the depth to which we “mined” Holly’s work.

Even in describing similar situations, Jade and William represent different stances. In August of the next school year, Jade described a student who moved to the United States one week into the school year. Her immediate response during CFG was to question the arrangement: “Legally they can only be pulled for two segments. I didn’t know that. I thought that if they didn’t speak any English, they could be pulled for four.” Then Jade sets her expectations for herself: “You just want to do things with them,” along with a proviso: “but it’s the time thing, the

communication thing.” When I offered the experience from the student’s point of view, Jade initially relented: “I’m sure it’s very frustrating for them,” and then added very quietly, “and same with me.”

Just before Jade spoke at that same meeting, William did not assume a deficient stance for a new student he had in his class who had recently arrived from Liberia: “She speaks English, but doesn’t read it, which is interesting.” William already had a sense of what he was going to do: “I need to talk to my resource teacher,” and did not offer any outlets for himself.

I reinforced a risk of mindlessly “downloading” activities and mindsets without examining larger pictures:

We can go grab activities, I can give you ... whatever kind of activity I’ve collected over the years, or from anybody who’s taught for years, and we can throw them all at you and you can implement but they might not work for you, but they might work in isolation because you might not know what the underpinnings of why they’re working for those kids and those kids aren’t the kids you’re teaching. So in a sense, there’s that danger of collecting all those ideas, putting them in a binder, and calling it the Good Idea Binder because there’s an assumption that it would be a good idea for my kids, too because it worked for you.

Shanna immediately provided a classroom example with her own students:

Katrina did something in her class with a quotation booklet and my teammate thought it was excellent and tried it with our class. Katrina’s class did excellent with it, all of her students. Our students, so far, are failing from it. It just goes to show that it worked for her students and not asking why it worked for Katrina’s and not for ours.

This response from Shanna has a markedly different slant than a comment Shelly made earlier in that same March meeting: “It sounds like a very nice idea to get them to care about what they’re doing at that age.” It seems that Shanna was beginning to grow her sense of what constitutes meaningful work for students.

These examples lead me to question the possibly hazardous generalization that teachers new to the profession need prescriptive forms of support and assistance. William doesn’t need Xeroxed copies of ideas. He wants observations of other teachers, so he can contextualize events he sees and make a judgment as to the possible inclusion and modification in his classroom. Shanna’s vicarious experience with her teammate may lead her to question the parameters surrounding a “good idea” or an “excellent” project.

CHAPTER 11

A CRAZE OF COLORS/THE COLOR OF CLARITY

A Craze of Colors

This January meeting found Polly needing help balancing the non-instructional acts of being a teacher. “I told my family that I was surprised that as a teacher there is so little teaching ... and so much of everything else. It is one of my big disappointments.”

Teachers were required to homogeneously group children for ELT for the express purposes of remediation and acceleration. Similar to her comments about DDEP goals, a paperwork story demonstrates Polly’s feelings about useless data. This time she facetiously includes the colors of the documents:

Remember after a couple of months of being in school, we had to get together, and remember the pink forms? We had to put all the standardized test info on the pink forms and transfer them to the green forms and make pie charts and graphs and what not and that was a lot of work. And I don’t think any of us were happy to do that. But the end result was that we had already, within a few weeks of having students, placed students in the remedial ELTs or accelerated ELTs. We already knew from working with them in the classroom and teacher assessments where they needed to be. So, what did that information tell us? We were bang on!

The Color of Clarity

Two CFG members used the opportunity to bring authentic work to the February meeting (see Appendix C for an agenda). Shanna’s request was for the group to assist her in thinking

about time management at school. Her courageous move indicated that she was interested in putting her decisions in a public place. This authentic dilemma for Shanna provided the group to engage in a powerful protocol called a Consultancy (Figure 11).

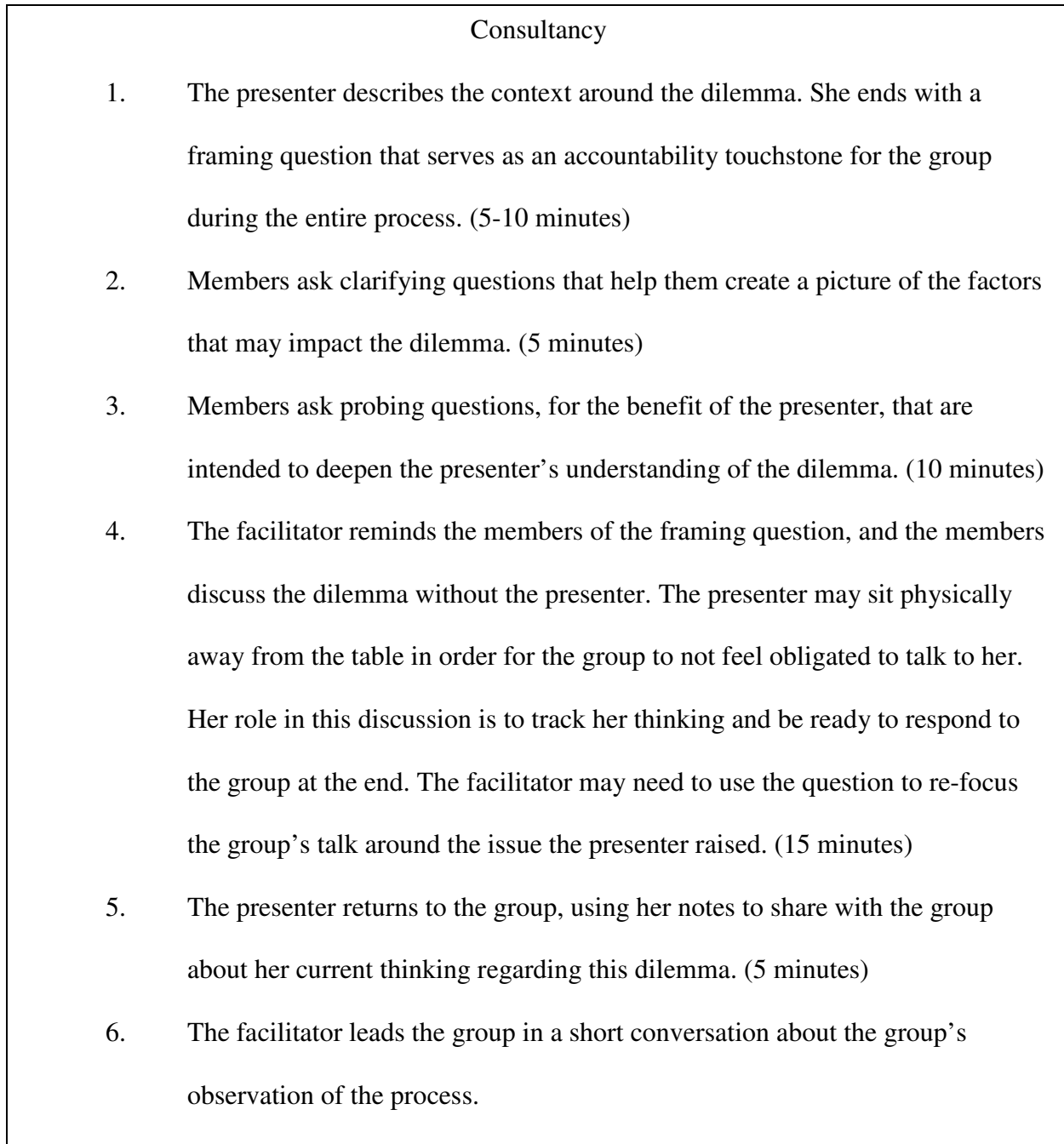


Figure 11. Consultancy protocol (National School Reform Faculty).

This process starts out similar to the Success Analysis, but then provides a forum for deepening the presenter's understanding of the dilemma.

As I explained the process to the group, I added a caveat: "The idea of a Consultancy is not to offer advice. The idea is to help her think about more deeply what her issues and alternatives are. Otherwise it just turns into an advice column out loud. That's not the purpose – that's something she could get in a different space."

Although an intent of CFG work is to bring personal, authentic work to the table, Shanna began her context-building talk by developing a rationale for the group to spend time on her issue: "I know all of us have a problem with time management." As she continued to set the frame for the CFG, she quickly abandoned the plural pronouns and focused on her own experiences with paperwork, grading, and parent involvement. "My whole question was I was trying to better organize my time so school doesn't become my life." Her question emerged during the midst of her talk. To clarify with Shanna and the group, I asked if her question really was about how to organize time at school or how to not have school take over her life. This differential is important in describing Shanna's position as a learner coming to this Consultancy. She has not brought the work attempting to solve a problem of the school; instead, she has brought a dilemma that would involve her changing her own behaviors. This is a key distinction when choosing a dilemma.

To prepare Shanna for this Consultancy, I had responded to her email with a list of questions that may have helped her focus her comments:

Why is this a dilemma for you?

Why have you done already to remedy or manage the dilemma?

What have been the results of those attempts?

Who do you hope changes?

What do you assume to be true about this dilemma?

The question about a person changing reflects Shanna's decision to bring this question to the group. If the answer to the question, Who do you hope changes? had not been Shanna, this question would not have been appropriate to bring to the group. In that case, Shanna's future actions would not have been in question.

Asking Questions

Already in the clarifying questions section, Shanna started to explore less about her assumptions of grading student work. Instead, she described her classroom and offered more contextual clues of why other times of the day may need to be spent grading and doing paperwork, due to the decisions she makes while children are in the room. Katrina's first question about whether Shanna graded everything was the recipient of Shanna's first narrative about her classroom:

No, the only problem is ... another problem of mine is that I'm a hands-on person. While they're reading, I don't like to sit at my desk and do grades. I go and look over their shoulders. I'm constantly probing them for questions. I think I've sat at my desk twice this entire year with my class actually being in there.

Indicative of Shanna's talk during CFG work, she quickly qualified her actions with a disclaimer: "That's probably not very good. I don't know if it's bad." As the teacher with the least amount of education coursework and teaching experience, Shanna may have become a model for certain group members. Katrina, who talks daily with Shanna at school, shared with the group at the April meeting that Shanna changes her teaching based on individual needs "a lot." In the March meeting, William indicated that he had started a practice of questioning

individual students after they started assignments to check for comprehension. I connected with Shanna about her desk – I actually had mine removed as a classroom teacher because I wanted the space for something else.

This section of the protocol is not appropriate for this type of reflective thinking. As she admitted her fear, perhaps searching for validation, I instead offered a reprieve: “You don’t have to say it now because it’s clarifying questions.” An exhale of pent-up breath and a definitive “Thank you,” from Shanna reminded me that the process’ structure is not only important for the group, but it protects the presenter, providing a safe environment to bring authentic work.

In this first attempt at crafting appropriate and focused probing questions, Jade couched her question in her own experiences: “I know that sometimes I really struggle with the real in-depth answers. Do you make sure that some of your tests are easily graded? It’s hard for me.”

It may have been Jade’s self-focused question that prompted Katrina’s words after Shanna’s response: “On another note, I totally agree with what you’re saying.” For a moment, the talk was focused on test items rather than Shanna’s dilemma. Jade’s immediate response, “By no means would I ever suggest that being all there is. There are pros to doing multiple choice, true/false, and fill-ins because the kids ...,” quickly spouted and carefully enunciated posed the first facilitative intervention: “Do you have a question?” Even at that point in the semester, I was afraid of Jade’s knowledge and quick wit – thus my added basis: “I’m just trying to facilitate.” This interaction provides a grounded exemplar of how focused conversation and facilitation are necessary for productive work.

Members continued to ask clarifying questions, but Holly’s query about the use of rubrics is particularly telling of Shanna’s knowledge base. “I had never seen what a rubric was until my partner showed me one the other day. I just didn’t know what they were. I just thought there

were writing rubrics that language arts used.” Holly broke protocol at that point and offered Shanna a CD that she recently had burned full of rubrics. As a journalism teacher, Holly thought she was receiving reading and writing rubrics, but the CD contained rubrics pertinent to science.

Katrina’s next question designated a shift of focus into probing questions: “Do you feel pressured to take grades on a lot of stuff?” Shanna initially answered with a one-word response – very appropriate for a clarifying question. As Katrina wanted Shanna to expand, I intervened and audibly signaled our move into probing questions.

Shanna addressed Katrina’s question by describing the amount of grades her instructional teams collect for each quarter. As she noted at the end of the first marking period that her teammates were collecting 39-46 grades compared to her 25, she made a conscious decision to collect more grades during the next nine weeks. “I tried to put in 30 grades, and it really honestly didn’t change their grades by having more assignments. So, instead I converted to how I was using it and made the assignments longer.” Shanna nonchalantly demonstrated her ability to respond to other teachers’ practices and routines. Instead of blindly adopting this grading policy, she strategically piloted the change and assessed its validity at an appropriate time. At that time, her agency is well-noted as she converted back to her own plan looking for more in-depth answers.

Katrina used the probing question time to ask a question that elicited contextual information important for the group to know. As she solicited the number of gradebooks that Shanna keeps, Shanna admitted that she has been implementing Katrina’s idea of keeping one gradebook: an electronic version which is required by the school. Prior to recently, Shanna had been recording all students’ grades into a paper gradebook prior to entering the grades into the electronic spreadsheet. Katrina helped Shanna offer the group what she had done thus far to work

toward solving this dilemma. Later, Katrina described a practice that Shanna had started where Shanna went to Katrina's room during her planning period in order to have focused, uninterrupted time to assess students' work. Katrina also relayed a consistent invitation that she made to Shanna that Shanna could use Katrina's room as a "different environment" for when "she's had problems" with students. Shanna has not taken Katrina up on this offer as of yet. The debriefing of this Consultancy allowed Katrina and Shanna to share how their friendship affected this process.

The topic of "problem students" entered into the discussion by Shanna as she was describing more context around her issue. Perhaps she felt that we were thinking too narrowly about her issue – focusing on an issue such as how to grade efficiently. These "problem students" were live variables in her issue, as she explains:

Although I've made my planning period, and my teammates will tell you, we have a lot of problem students. I'm on the phone so much talking to parents about, this person needs ISS; this person needs an academic contract. We have more on our team, I don't want to call them problem students, but they have behavioral issues, and it makes it very complicated to focus on yourself when you are spending most of your time focusing on five students.

Jade heard this new contextual information and processed it through her frame of wondering how many veteran teachers are on Shanna's team. She continued to ask questions for her own purposes: "What is administration doing to help you out? This gets toward one of my wonderings." Earlier in this meeting, members had listed wonderings about students, about teaching, or about school in general. In other meetings and conversations, it is appropriate and perhaps commonsensical to connect your questions to previous work – providing a justification

for your words. In this context, however, Jade was still practicing how to ask questions that are for the presenter to push her thinking. Shanna's response indicates the directionality problem of the question, as she gave specific problems of her students (e.g. gangs), and specific numbers of students serving in-school suspensions (ISS).

The focus continued to wander as Katrina used one of Shanna's teammates as a non-example of realistic expectations. Shanna had referred to this teammate's practice of arriving at school at 7:30 and teaching an after-school activity, so "she has plenty of focused time." Katrina added, "If you know [teacher's name], she has a different set-up. Everybody would strive to have that, but I think very few could keep."

After a facilitative redirection, Shanna offered her pedagogical rationale for not sending her students to ISS more often: "They're losing out academically. Yesterday I had to leave half my class in order to write up the referral for one of them. It's a constant battle between my time and the students' time."

This battle has led Shanna to partially abandon her commitment to in-depth questioning: I'm trying to think of ways to make my labs where I'm looking for one answer. I started doing that now – quizzing them for something in their labs that they've done, so I don't have to look at five pages of working instead of looking at ten answers: short and sweet. I pushed her thinking by using her earlier words: "Earlier you said that it takes time for you to grade something in order to see if they get the concept. Is that method that you just gave helping you see if they get the concept?" Her first lab quiz was the previous week, and her substitute was giving the chapter assessment that day. "Depending on how they did on their test will tell me how that lab worked for them." Although she made the decision to implement short quizzes to deal with her concerns about time management, she wants to use student assessment to continue

or abandon the change. This decision reflects on her dedication to students and their individual needs.

Supporting Shanna through Conversation

As Shanna sat out of the discussion in support of her dilemma, the dedication to students was of primary importance to the CFG members. William's description of "she doesn't wash her hands of them" rang in our minds as we thought specifically about the "problem students" that Shanna said took so much of her time at school. He even framed this dilemma as an issue "common amongst any new teacher here and from what I understand, a lot of veteran teachers."

Perhaps it was the solution-focused mindset of some school-based discussions that caused the discussion to turn. Perhaps it was related to the tendency of humans to solve each other's problems and offer advice. Perhaps it was some first-year certified teachers hearing another first-year teacher describe her classroom in ways that sound like vignettes from university textbooks. It wasn't long until William and Jade politely questioned the decisions Shanna made in support of students.

"If you're always up and hands-on, it's almost like you're setting yourself up to not get this stuff done," commented William. In an environment where Shanna may have been using her "air time" to describe her own teacher behaviors for affirmation, the result was certainly not a vote of support.

Jade used Shanna's own words from the clarifying questions part of the process in her consistent practice of using "first-year teacher" language as a pretext for decision-making: "I think that she made a good point that she brought up that she has realized that, made the mistake of all first year teachers, we want to be there with, for the kids." This "groupness" referred to lofty, idealistic, and stereotypical notions of first-year teachers giving of themselves and doing

all they can for their students. Jade related it to Shanna's issue of time, as earlier Shanna had stated that she often has students in her room before school each day taking care of classroom animals. She also has students that are just "interested" in science and like to spend time talking to someone about their interests. Jade applauded Shanna's "revolution" as Shanna shared what she had done thus far: "I'm trying to start a strict schedule with them. I realize that that is a problem." Jade's interpretation of Shanna's problem seems qualitatively different than how Shanna would describe her own situation.

I waited to offer an alternative view of Shanna's classroom behaviors until the end of the discussion. Especially since this was the group's first experience with a Consultancy, it was important to me that their voices dominate the discussion. After I signaled that there was about one minute left before we invited Shanna back in, I took my chance:

I have a question that the dilemma raises for me about how I would hate for Shanna to think that in order to teach effectively you can't spend so much time with kids. I think that could be construed sometimes when we encourage people to, you can't have kids come in, you can't be up, you gotta sit at your desk when you're teaching sometimes, to correct your papers while they're doing seatwork. I was so inspired when I heard her say that she was walking around during guided reading. I thought, "That's so exciting!"

I had just returned from a trip where I read Betty Achinstein's work (2003) about the necessity of conflict and controversy in learning communities in order to accomplish meaningful work. Perhaps her documented support was what I needed to push the group's thinking about how Shanna's actions were not only appropriate for her students but also motivational for us.

Jade defined her role as an eighth grade teacher as "getting them prepared," and William relied on the culture of his eighth grade instructional team to rebut my statement that wasn't

aimed specifically at him: “But it is also good to have a day or two when you say, this is sit down time, time to work because they are going to do a lot of that in high school ... We are told that a lot.” He disclosed that he uses that time to “get things accomplished.” William’s classroom experiences prior to this year had been primarily in elementary settings, especially in grade five classrooms. These experiences in the grades that culminate buildings, such as fifth and eighth grades, may help us understand his perspective.

Shanna Spontaneously Re-enters

In most Consultancies, the facilitator closes down the discussion and invites the presenter to re-join the group. In Shanna’s Consultancy, she couldn’t resist after I had indicated to the group that we would discuss her dilemma without her for one more minute: “I was wanting to interject another thing.” This “thing” was a detailed justification for her guided reading practices. As she described the fourth grade reading level of her students, I wondered if she was defending her practices for us or for herself. “I don’t feel comfortable, I give them an assignment, I’m done that before, I’ve given them an assignment, I’ve given them the book.” With a teaching philosophy built on students feeling comfortable coming to her and talking about their problems, she feels uncomfortable when her teaching decisions do not reach the students where they are. She appears to have built her classroom around the needs that she needs as a teacher. Did she negatively interpret the group’s response to her decision to circulate and assist actively during reading? Perhaps she needed to hear herself out loud: stating her rationale for the teaching practices that she adopted based on what hasn’t worked with her students and what she has been learning about in her required Reading and Writing in the Middle Grades class.

Shanna seamlessly merged from her practices of teaching reading in the content areas to specific phrases and ideas she found important in the discussion. She re-affirmed her

commitment to grading in Katrina's room during planning to avoid possible interruptions. While the group was thinking about her "problem students," Shanna wrote down that she may develop pre-determined packets of work for them to complete. She also appreciated knowing a hierarchical fact in terms of special needs students that have been labeled. She learned that special needs students fall under the auspices of one of the assistant principals. Thus, if problems arise, that assistant principal is expected to be involved.

At one point in the discussion, William relayed an example of not using planning time effectively when his instructional team meets too often during the week. As I suggested that Shanna and her team could develop a timeframe for these meetings when they first sit down, William used "agenda" to describe this process. Shanna agreed with this perspective about her team and wanted to start using an agenda.

Just like the discussion took a turn during Shanna's Consultancy, so did her reflection. As she reflected what she learned about her colleagues during ELT, she agreed with them: "As far as taking some of that time to yourselves. I agree with you." During the discussion, Holly had asked the group what they did during ELT. As an Extensions teacher, Holly is responsible for the school newspaper during that 40 minute block each day. Other core instructional teachers, like Shanna, Katrina, William, and Jade, are to "model reading strategies. We're supposed to sit there and read," according to Jade. This was not Holly's question, however. The answer of what teachers are "supposed" to do and what they do are often very different things. Jade continued, "You know what we're supposed to be doing, but I'm not gonna lie. I sometimes use ELT to getting things together. This report that needs to be written." William agreed immediately, claiming that time as valuable preparation time for his history lessons. Katrina reluctantly agreed, couching her response in that she taught reading strategies earlier in the year, but now

she does other things. Jade ended the discussion mimicking the very nature of the students she teaches by justifying her actions: “So we are reading ... our future lessons.”

Shanna may have come away from this Consultancy more settled about her time management concerns and with more clarity about how to work with her “problem students,” but the reality of her colleagues’ lives may have affected her more.

I’m there for the students, but at the same time, I need to back away. I know that there are going to be problems, and I shouldn’t sit and try to deal with them every time they have a problem. Today my focus is on the other 22 students in the class, not you. Goodbye. I’ve started to do that. You just gotta let go ... You feel bad when you do that. You feel bad. It made me feel a little better about that situation.

The CFG used a Consultancy several times during the semester, improving especially in the questioning process. Members started to internalize the difference in intent between clarifying and probing questions. The clarifying questions were asked to help them understand the context, while probing questions were used to push the thinking of the presenter – in essence, to provide more clarity for both parties. For example, the first time the group used clarifying questions, I waited and then asked the first clarifying question. When others didn’t follow suit, I continued to ask questions. As our three minutes was drawing to a close, I encouraged others to join in. Jade’s response for the group: “The kind of clarifying questions you are asking we already know from being here.” The assumption that everyone’s perception of context and school culture broke down over the semester as never again was there a time where I only asked a majority of the questions. However, even in this Consultancy, Shanna came away with different understandings because, in her own words, “I didn’t need to interject. I could just listen and understand.”

Polly's family knew about her paperwork experiences at school. In fact, she told her family that teaching involved more paperwork than time spent instructing and working with students. Shanna's specific paperwork requirement of grading student work certainly could have armed Polly with strategies that could have made a difference in managing her time at school, so she could dedicate the time at home to her extended family and children. However, the talk that surrounded Shanna's Consultancy appeared to be somewhat destructive for Shanna's child-centered instructional strategies and teaching philosophy. Polly's own statements about children from the February meeting may have been further reinforced by this conversation.

Was Shanna Assimilated?

Perhaps the most troubling in this Consultancy is Shanna's altered status as a risk-taker. Her teaching practices, which read like pages from *Best Practices* (Zemelman & Hyde, 1997), were inspirational to the group, particularly me. When she was describing her teaching behaviors, I was reminded of Polly's words from our December organizational meeting: "Shouldn't we have some veterans in here? What can we learn from each other?" We cannot assert that the conversation would have sounded different if Shanna had been a certified teacher, traditionally prepared in a college of education. How much of this conversation involved first-year teachers sheltering a novice (with less classroom experience than themselves) from "ends-in-view" they thought inevitable?

Despite my promotion of Shanna's stance as an active learner in her classroom, she seemed to assume the perspective of her peers, especially in terms of working with individual students to make better behavioral choices. She was "pushed one way or another" as William described his own experiences with particular student personalities. Jade used a metaphor as she built on William's tales of creating geographical maps out of cookies with his eighth graders:

“Part of why I think it [our decisions] gets so jaded, like doing a lab or a cookie map, you get done and you’re so burnt.” In this scenario, Shanna’s own colleagues “pushed” her to abandon her newly-forming beliefs about teaching and learning in order to manage time for her workload.

Feeling discomfort or allowing yourself to be “disturbed” (Wheatley, 2002) marks a group that has not settled into the trap of assuming agreement, based on the composition of the group. CFGs are traditionally heterogeneous in composition, often building on various years of experiences among veteran teachers. Some groups cross institutional boundaries, forming vertical learning communities from PK-16. Members of these conversations may question the creation of CFGs composed of seemingly homogeneous members.

What may not be readily apparent is the diversity in experience, philosophy of teaching and learning, and risk-taking in any group. Although this group represented some important “ones”: *one* race (White), *one* building (grades 6-8), and *one* classification by the district (new teacher in need of an induction program), its members also embodied a range of other descriptors: traditionally certified and alternatively prepared; core education classes, special education classes, and “special” elective classes; and the ages of the members: 22-38. Most importantly, these descriptors were a reminder to me that I could rely on something more powerful than these simple differences: each teacher is unique and the experiences and learnings of each member would produce an exclusive conversation that could never be replicated. The depth of the dialogue ranged – not from the *lack* of experiences present around the table but by the *type* of experiences members brought with them as they reconstructed their meanings with the new information they were processing at that moment.

In Shanna’s example, I was the person that assumed the role of “pushing” the group. However, this press is dissimilar to William’s experience of being shoved. I am reminded of the

difference in interpretation between “childish” and “child-like.” A similar perspective could be used in explaining the difference between “pushing” and “pushing.” William’s experience with students may have included involuntary pushing, where students may or may not be conscious of their current role in swaying teacher behavior, but probably do not have a long-term objective. In my conscious role of pushing the thinking of the group, I explicitly ventured into territory that was risky. It may have represented a contrary view to what had been presented by a group member. My words, or the concepts embedded in the words, may have labeled me a university intellectual. They could have been reminded that I was not a member of the school culture that included unwritten, tacit norms.

The role of “pusher” did not always fall to me. Holly pushed our thinking about the use of portfolios in language arts (Chapter 14). William’s confessions about his interactions with his colleagues forced us to examine our own communication patterns (Chapter 10). Katrina’s risk in using alternative assessment made us question our own purposes (Chapter 9). Even Shanna recovered from her Consultancy experience, refusing to abandon her set of strategies, demonstrated in the dialogue surrounding Stella’s success story (Chapter 8).

Although I acknowledge that a group of teachers representing various years of classroom experience may result in a different conversation, even a different outcome, I do not view our experience as deficient. By honoring each other’s wonderings and dilemmas, we modeled a reflective stance about teaching and learning. We moved. Our thinking changed.

CHAPTER 12

REQUIRING THEM TO TRY/REQUIRING THEM TO APPLY

Requiring Them To Try

Polly's consistently describes her "clueless" students in a simplistic manner. As the data discussion drew on teachers' experiences with Extra Learning Time (ELT), a recent governor-mandated addition to middle schooler's school days, she referred to the academic abilities of students as her team had deemed them in the first weeks of school. "I already knew this kid was low, this kid was high." Polly didn't view students in complex ways: "I had them figured out in a few weeks." In regard to her multiple lessons on prepositional phrases, she quipped, "I have a problem understanding as a teacher, understanding why is this so difficult? It's not brain surgery! What's the problem?"

The January meeting included moments of release for the first-year teachers, especially in terms of making sense of the accountability measures that were beginning to loom closer in the spring months. As another first-year teacher complained about students not being able to solve puzzles and problem-solve, Polly framed her description about her students with sarcasm:

It's the same when you ask them to do something creative. They complain the most when it requires them to think. Writing a sequel for a short story – they were awful. Some needed therapy, and I told them that. Some of them were frightening. They just, as quickly as they could, "Joe came back home and he lived happily ever after." Just stupid stuff. They didn't even try. They don't want to stretch their minds in order to think.

Requiring Them To Apply

Katrina's first work to bring to the group was a set of slave diaries her students created in February (see Appendix C for an agenda of the February meeting). After a study of the African slave trade, the students were given an option to write from the perspective of a slave or a trafficker, creating a diary of events that seemed plausible given the historical time period and culture. Her intent in bringing it to the group was to hear perspectives on how to grade the assignment. As she described her options as she saw them, she listed three possibilities: grading the assignments against a rubric, against an "impeccable" (her word from an email exchange) diary, or "effort based on ability." As she passed out samples of students' work, a rubric was attached to each, already completed by Katrina. Although she had already graded these, she still wanted the feedback of the group on the grading issue.

Her First Rubric

Katrina revealed that this was the first rubric used with this class; in fact, it was the first rubric she ever created. She was comfortable with what she had done until she reached specific students. She compared two children, one child labeled gifted who did an "exceptional" job, and the other student: "this girl is failing four classes and has, doesn't turn in any work, but took the time to come up with a creative story and rip her pages like she was hiding out somewhere doing this." The second student had recently written one paragraph over the course of 50 minutes for inclusion in students' writing portfolios.

Although she felt that the rubric worked for expediency of grading, Katrina continued to question her rubric during the probing questions component of the protocol:

I don't feel that I put in as much effort as they did in writing their diaries. They took all their time and all I gave them was this five-point rubric ... Normally I put in all the effort and they don't put it as much. I feel the opposite this time.

As she continued to explore this feeling, the real discomfort emerged as more than a feeling about grading but rather about a difference in student motivation after this project:

If I only had to grade these, I would have written more on the pages that gives them more feedback and possibly giving them more motivation to continue the effort they put into these. However, that one, who doesn't do anything, has put in more effort since she's gotten that back. So I don't know that it's in my head that I haven't given them what they deserve, but most of them, in social studies, have put in more effort since doing this project because they all did very well.

Perhaps it is her confusion about the increased level of student motivation that is most troubling to Katrina. It may also be unsettling to her that she was actually out of the classroom for a majority of this project. She left the state for three days to attend a funeral in New England.

When she returned, the projects were on her desk, completed. If she had spent more time on the assignments, interacting with students, providing more formative and summative feedback, she might be more willing to accept the change in some of her students. This change doesn't seem directly related to her grading practices. If the grade doesn't motivate them, then what is it?

William may have sensed a different issue than what was first presented as well when he presented two questions with a "I don't know" from Katrina in between: "Do you feel that your job as a teacher should be easier when you give good assignments and your kids are into it?" and "Do you feel guilty that you're not putting in as much effort because you gave a good

assignment and they enjoyed it?” Katrina admitted her own lack of security: “Maybe that’s just distorted in my head, and that’s the way it’s supposed to be.”

Katrina continued to explore her own issue by examining key words, in this case, “good.” When she agreed that this had been a “good” assignment, she needed to clarify that word choice. She was metaphorically peeling an onion around her learning, revealing more and more layers each time she probed deeper.

To Katrina, “good” meant “creative and different.” Katrina’s teammates are “similar” to her, so much so, that they often exchange each other’s ideas leaving the children with similar experiences across the teachers. Katrina’s slave diaries were unique, which she found important. She used modeling in this experience to assist the students in visualizing what she desired in the assignment. Listen to Katrina as the pronouns vacillate between her teammates and the students:

I created two diaries of my own for them. I made up stories for that. They were just astounded, and I just said that I did it at the end of my planning. They’re like, “You can’t write like that in 20 minutes!” I said, I just started. I’m not finished yet. I think it showed them the level of what I expected.

She created the diaries for her students (them). Her teammates (they) were astounded and couldn’t believe she wrote that quickly. The models showed her students (them) her expectations. Her next layer was about to be clearly revealed: “I haven’t ever come up with something on my own. It really showed me that when I come up with something and show them what I expect, everything I get back is different. It’s a higher level.”

As the group moved into the discussion segment of the protocol, the rubric was examined line by line for specificity. Members realized how much a student may need to infer in order to ascertain what points represent on a given rubric. For instance, eight pages warranted 40 points.

William was sure that any amount of pages less than that would demand a five points deduction because 40 divided by 8 equals 5. In the spirit of Katrina examining specific words, we wondered what a “creative cover” might look like and what would warrant 40 points. Holly, William, and Shanna all had different expectations, ranging from doing anything at all with the cover to including necessary title and author information.

In this discussion that I thought was not moving toward clarity, William suddenly realized his most endearing feature of using rubrics: consistency. As he described a “that’s five points off, that’s five points off” practice, he endorsed rubrics as a way to not have to return through piles of evaluated work in order to see how he had evaluated other situations and students.

At this point, I used the focusing question, the accountability touchstone, to guide our discussion. We had yet to discuss her other options other than a rubric. I hypothesized about what an impeccable diary may look like, what Katrina would think an impeccable diary would look like, and what the students may think an impeccable diary would look like. As I related that to rubrics, Shanna wondered about “jointly created” rubrics that used the students’ perspectives to inform their own assessment.

William and Holly continued to engage with this notion, especially problematizing it with students who could use the rubric to determine how much work they could do and still “get by” with a specific grade. This began to involuntarily address the third alternative that Katrina had mentioned: effort mixed with ability. I posed another alternative: a rubric with dual entries for a teacher and a student. This idea may have mixed all three: creating a rubric that uses levels of performance, the highest being relatable to “impeccable,” and including effort as part of that rubric.

William may have been talking for himself or as an advocate for Katrina as he referenced Shanna's Consultancy about time management and the use of rubrics as efficient tools: "When you start stacking rubrics on top of rubrics to grade that rubric, what's the point?"

Why Was This Assignment Worthwhile?

When Katrina re-entered the conversation, her initial response focused on the defined success of the assignments. "Something I heard a lot of people say was that they had a lot of freedom with it. I had never put it together, but they did." Katrina was starting to develop her own list of successful elements: what makes an assignment a success for students and what makes an assignment a success for a teacher. As she reflected more on success, she used content to reinforce her own notions of what success involves: "It was for them to be creative, to see if they listened to the essays I had read to them, to see if they got an idea of what happened in Africa and by doing this, they produce that they knew what they were talking about." A non-example included a student who wrote a diary about the Underground Railroad, mistaking it for the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean. Katrina respected their current understandings, "She didn't understand as much as others did."

William joined the conversation during the debriefing of the activity this time, quite a different practice than he usually chose. "Both of those things [topics of the two consultancies] apply to me. Yeah, that's how they do it. You rethink things and that's great."

Katrina displayed what being a reflective practitioner is about: coming to multiple understandings about a single situation, creating and weighing options, and implementing an informed choice. Polly needed this example for her own work with students. She needed to see them as knowledgeable beings that behave differently and produce different products in qualitatively different environments. Katrina continues to wonder why this was a meaningful

environment for children. She currently wonders if it connects to the idea of student freedom and choice. The short story sequel that puzzled Polly might seem creative enough to some teachers and readers. Then is there more than the assignment itself that sets the tone for the success? Is it related to the attitude and ideology that the teacher espouses versus what she demonstrates? Thinking about students in more complex ways is what caused this dilemma for Katrina. She wondered about a student that wrote one paragraph one week and eight pages of “great stuff” the next. What changed? No one definitive answer was offered, for one answer probably doesn’t exist. Instead, the presenter (Katrina) and the members, like William, leave having rethought some of their own practices and assignments, hopefully viewing them through the lens of what defines meaningful work for students.

Confounding Content

As a group, certain topics seemed to evoke common understandings supported by the dialogue that surrounded them. When talking about content, members disagreed on how to define this slippery term (Huling-Austin, 1992).

Katrina’s slave diaries in the February meeting first piqued our interest in content in the context of rubric development. Katrina identified content on her rubric within the term “logical,” as it applied to the story development of the slave trafficker or slave. She viewed creativity as not related to content. Dialogue later explored how effort relates to content, especially how district grading practices differentiate between academic and effort grades. My reference to a district policy called “Truth in Grading” squelched any further conversation as no one in the room had heard those words used in succession referring to grading practices.

Content re-emerged in the conversation near the end of the discussion time without Katrina’s voice. I re-introduced it as my regret from an earlier part of the process:

I still have this nagging thing in the back of my head about content. I'm wondering what, I wish I had asked this of her when she was part of our conversation, what do you hope they learned about slaves through this assignment. I feel horrendously guilty that we didn't ask that. If it's an assignment, isn't it really about content and that they learned something?

Earlier, the group had explored what a rubric might look like that included a student voice. In the spirit of the conversation, I also probed about what students would say they learned from the project and how that compares to Katrina's hopes and dreams for the work.

William offered another view:

On the flip side, we're so content driven. Then again, I think this is why I haven't got into this so much. It wasn't a matter of, well you don't know this and you don't know that, then this is incorrect. It wasn't a standardized test. It was a creative assignment with flexibility. Just experiment and write it without the restraint of, man, I didn't cross that t or dot that i.

William's use of "this" is unclear. He may be referring to the actual conversation surrounding Katrina's tuning; however, his voice is as equally present in this process as other processes in other meetings. Perhaps he is referring to the practice of assigning projects that are not specific in terms of assessment. His final success described during the May meeting involved using more unique strategies aimed at increasing student motivation. He admitted his earlier teaching techniques were not inspired: "At the beginning of the year, I did a lot of the same things over and over throughout the year, especially with social studies – a lot of readings, a lot of questions, things like that."

I pushed his thinking one more time: “Yet some of them [the slave diaries] used content, didn’t they? They talked about traffickers ...” William uncharacteristically interrupted me, acknowledging differences in students, offering possibly two separate camps of students: “That shows the different ways people think. Some people think about content and others think on the creative side where they put themselves in the place of that slave or imaginary person.” In this remark, William is thinking about students who are creative might not use content. Perhaps he re-thought his statement or wanted to fill the silence after he offered this: “I don’t know.”

Shanna’s success at the February meeting included references to content. Shanna referred to individual students connecting to her class’s content in more powerful ways if she had engaged in meaningful conversations that they instigated. In fact, Shanna clearly stated this twice at the conclusion of her success analysis. In describing these students, she identified higher grades, a raised interest level, greater participation, and an increased level of feeling comfortable in her classes as indicators of this content connection. Her perception of content here seems quite broad compared to the conversation at the February meeting.

However, in March, Shanna seems to use a finer lens. Holly was describing a journalism assignment where students had “to show me that it’s kind of, kind of like a test, that they learned the steps that came before this: that they know how to do the 5 W’s and an H and they know what a headline is.” Shanna clarifies the assignment as more “structure-based,” not “content-based.” Holly seemed to agree adding, “to do the steps.” This information drove Shanna during the discussion part of the protocol to differentiate between content and “process.” She used previous work, Katrina’s rubric from February’s meeting, to compare. Shanna claimed that Katrina’s rubric had “some content in there, which is hard to evaluate sometimes.” She posed that the “process” rubric that Holly used with writing a final draft of a news story made it easier

because Holly could “watch them physically do it, and they earned points.” She cited a student work sample in front of her as having content that was “not very good,” but the “structure was correct.”

Jade added to this conversation, focusing specifically about rubrics using her interpretation of Holly’s words about content as her foundation: “Like we talked about, she’s not looking for content.” Not intended to promote ire, I posed the following: “I wonder how Holly feels that we don’t see any content in her rubric.”

My name was included in Jade’s response – the only time in five months that anyone used my name to address me. It is unclear whether Jade thought I was doubting her recollection of Holly’s words, or whether I disagreed with her assertion: “She specifically said at the beginning, though Thomas, that she grades very leniently on punctuation and grammar and all that stuff because I’m not looking for that. I’m looking for the process that they went through to get to their final.” Jade assumed the “I” pronoun in her response as if she was Holly. This is the only time that Jade exhibited this habit in her responses.

My goal was to stretch our current understandings of “content.” Shanna disagreed with me that what the students’ were writing about was actually the content – not the structure or function of particular paragraphs, but how they built ideas, used reaction sentences, and created relevant details. Her disagreement specifically focused on how Holly required students to use a quote in their reaction paragraph. She qualified that requirement as a “surface feature” of language, not personal expression. “Sorry, I had reading class last night,” she lamented. She inferred that Holly was looking for the actual punctuation called quotation marks, and not what was written between the marks. That did not constitute content in her definition.

I acknowledged our discontent with our current conceptions of “content:”

Maybe that word content is confusing. I'm sure we all have baggage with the word content and meaning all very different things to us. I'm thinking back to the first time when we talked to Holly and she said that there weren't specific MCSs. Do you remember that conversation? Maybe that was part of her struggle with this, thinking about what the content here is. And if I have one MCS that says, teach them a news story and what does that exactly mean for the kids.

Perhaps my words sounded like a summary. The group then moved to a topic that perhaps required less self-analysis: how students may have responded to the rubric of 70 points rather than a traditional 100 points.

Nevertheless, it didn't take long for the conversation to return to content; this time searching for how to handle grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling (GUMS) errors. Holly's description of her philosophy guided our discussion: "I don't grade real harsh with the spelling and grammar."

Although Shanna reminded us that GUMS errors were a target area for language arts this year on the school improvement plan, Jade and William admitted that they do not use writing conventions as a source of assessment. William also indicated that this year may be different than the future: "Usually mine [assessment practice] is more creative and content-oriented. I want to know if they know the facts and can explain it to me or write it out. That's what I look for, this year at least."

When Holly re-entered the discussion, she waited until the very end to approach content: "Oh, yeah, the MCS thing. I guess, you could say the content, according to the MCS, the content for this was a news story and can you write something that is current and has the 5Ws and the H in it." Holly's thinking may have changed, or she felt that she needed to provide a definitive

comment about what her content was. Earlier, in response to Shanna, she had claimed that the work was focused on process, not content. Here she appears to equate the two.

CHAPTER 13

I'VE ALMOST STARTED, I THINK/I'M FINISHED, I THINK

I've Almost Started, I Think

The scope and sequence developed for CQI determined for teachers when topics should be taught during the course of a school year. Polly felt obligated to teach direct objects to her eighth grade students at a specific point in the year. "How are they going to find a direct object if they don't know what a noun is? I had to do three weeks of grammar review, which I had to fly through, because it's not an MCS."

Polly was also the CFG member that mentioned hearing about a speaker that described a school system in Texas where "they are doing really well on standardized tests. This school has embraced the fact that standardized tests are here to stay, and what can they do to help prepare their students for the test." The other members had not heard about the system but realized that the situation equated to teaching to the test. The irony here is that the CQI initiative, which Greenville Middle School had adopted, is the result of that school system in Brazosport, Texas. These teachers were actually working in a system that embracing and acting on the mindset of teaching to the test.

Although Polly talked favorably about the Texas plan as being a viable way to raise test scores, later she referenced a nebulous group that play games with standardized tests:

To me that's a numbers game, it's not a true assessment of what we're teaching our kids.

I think they're up there trying to figure out how to make our numbers better in

relationship to other people, but does that mean that we're teaching our kids more or do our kids know more?

I'm Finished, I Think

Note: In this next section, Polly's voice appears because CQI and accountability were an important part of the work during the January meeting when Polly was present.

Previous research on CFGs (Murphy, 2001) indicated that district accountability measures are problematic in developing and sustaining meaningful CFGs. The findings from this study of a CFG composed of novice teachers do not address sustainability but do provide insight into how a particular CFG made sense of their district accountability measures.

Mixed Messages

CFG members struggled with the dualism that marks their work teaching in a county with high-stakes accountability.

We're told, "don't teach to the test, don't teach to the test", but then teachers will tell you that you are measured by how your students do on the test. Don't teach to the test, but here's a book with questions in it that you may want to look through. Don't give them the questions, but you may want to prepare them. (Jade)

William experienced colleagues not teaching material that was present on the standardized test. At a CAT meeting, "I asked if they taught the Georgia constitution. They said, 'No, they don't understand it.' If they aren't teaching the Georgia constitution, I'm not teaching it. I looked at the test on-line and there were three questions about the Georgia constitution ... Why aren't they teaching it?"

Katrina, a language arts teacher, received a scope and sequence that delineated Monday-Wednesday's "concepts to be covered" for the first nine weeks. Language arts and math were

chosen as the first subjects for daily scope and sequences as they were specific curricular targets on the school improvement plan. Her literal interpretation of the scope and sequence made it “real tough.” It “didn’t work” for her because of student’s “different levels.”

Shanna did not allow for mixed messages at the beginning of her experiences as an uncertified science teacher. At the first CAT meeting, she asked what she should focus on. “I wanted to show that I am a good teacher and that I want to continue teaching.” Her colleagues responded; in fact, colleagues that had been hired by the county to grade the seventh grade test were the most helpful for her. “I had an advantage,” she admitted. “They can’t tell me specific questions, but they can tell me the [standards] to focus on. If I was a first year teacher, and no one told me that I would be freaking out right now.”

CFG conversations about CQI did not exhibit as much variation as the descriptions of classroom decision-making. Members seemed to view the process as a form of teacher accountability disguised as primarily concerned about children: “It makes teachers accountable for their material that they’re getting across rather than the best way for the kids to learn it. It’s part of the Continuous Quality Improvement – making sure that everyone is getting everything they are supposed to” (Jade). This statement could be construed as a naïve interpretation of the adoption of a school reform. However, Jade’s response to my question in March about whether a giant assumption exists undergirding the philosophy of CQI: “That everyone in the entire school should be taught the same way at the same time? Absolutely.”

Pre and Post Test Value

In this context, “teaching to the test” was assigned different meanings by the CFG members as testing and data collection were no longer seldom, isolated experiences. Conversations in CFG meetings about accountability often centered around the pre and post

tests, whether they were worthwhile, substantial, significant, and teachable. Members agreed that the content of these measures was teachable. Disagreement was evident about the worthiness of the material, as well as the uses of the test data for teachers.

“I want to clarify that I’m not ‘wonderteacher’, and I do not stay until 9:00 and say, Look at these data!” After Jade disagreed with another CFG member’s negative interpretation of pre and post tests, she quickly re-established her role as a member of a club of teachers new to the profession that rely on a phrase to mark their work: “As a new teacher ...” This status functions as a license to miss deadlines, disregard school culture norms, and sometimes not to independently make instructional and curricular decisions.

Jade uses pre tests to take “shortcuts” in the curriculum. “What percentage of my class really knows this? I can really skim it. I don’t have to do a lab. I can just pass it on by.” Her post-tests, collectively created by the eighth grade science teachers, help her “see what they don’t get at all.” Although she staunchly defended pre and post tests as ways to determine whether she is teaching well or not, Jade also admitted that they are not helpful for these groups of students. She has claimed her summer as her time to make sense of the post test data and inform her decision-making for the next school year.

Shanna, an uncertified seventh grade science teacher, lamented the fact that her colleagues did not create common assessments:

As a first year teacher, I want to know how I’m comparing in how I’m teaching my students in the skills that the other teachers who have been teaching for ten years. I don’t have an education background, so it’s even more important for me to feel like that I’m teaching the same thing that everyone else is learning.

Her words echo a tenet of the CQI model that attempts to ensure that all children experience similar schedules of instructional foci.

Although Shanna and Jade claim to see the pre and post tests of CQI as an avenue for instructional improvement, William was more forthcoming:

The motive for it is for self-improvement as an educator, but the bottom line is to just push through this, if you want to know the truth. One more thing on a plate. So we come up with tests, we all share them – give me some kids this day and we'll do it at the semester, get around to it, throw around some data, compile it, and see how they did. Do we sit, look at it, and say, this is how I can teach this unit a better by way by looking at this test? I just don't think it works that way.

William also reflected upon his entrée into the environment of pre and post tests.

I was just handed one [set of pre-post tests]. They've had it for years, and I'm sure they've used it for years. When I first saw it, I looked at these words and wondered, what are these words? Why do they need to know those words? Why are they important? Who picked these words? All the teachers were using it, so I said, okay, give me a copy. I was still in [the mode of], is this due tomorrow? I give my own tests and that's what I look at. Then, the vocabulary test, it doesn't matter, it's irrelevant. It may be on a standardized test, but what does it really mean?

Although there was not a consensus on whether pre and post tests data was helpful in making instructional decisions, none of the CFG members asserted validity for the DDEP process.

Overwhelmed by Data

CFG members agree that they are teaching in a data-laden culture that assumes several things about data-driven instruction:

1. Data are driving instructional decisions.
2. Mandated standardized test data are valid and helpful for teachers making decisions about remediation and acceleration.
3. Teachers understand what the data means.

Although Jade uses standardized test data “as a small piece of a puzzle to figure out what’s going on with a kid,” none of the CFG members referenced situations where student records and standardized test data were used to help inform their work with particular children. William admitted being “lame” in interpreting and using standardized test data. Jade wished someone had sat down with her and told her about particular tests and scores: “‘She got a 192 on the COGAT.’ I’m thinking, what the heck does that mean? Is she above average, average, or below average?”

Members of the CFG also disliked the categories used to report performance: “What does a minimal score in social studies tell you? That they mastered or didn’t master what?” (Jade). “You have no clear idea what they struggled with and didn’t understand” (Shanna).

The consistency of how this group of novice teachers linked test shortcomings with nebulous categories parallels Jade and Polly’s repeated use of categorical labels to refer to children: “I already knew this kid was low, this kid was high ... I had them figured out in a few weeks” (Polly). “The [test] tells you that the kid performs minimal in math. You identified that the first week” (Jade). Jade’s use of standardized test data to put together a puzzle of students and their needs certainly is not difficult if the children are not complex beings that cannot be categorized into iterations of average or low/high.

Polly sees two significant pieces of her teaching life: the assessments that she uses and the ones that “are required by law.” When asked how she makes sense of them together, she

immediately responds, “I don’t.” The pink and green forms were a source of indignation for her (and visibly others as she talked):

Remember after a couple of months of being in school, we had to get together? We had to put all the standardized test info on the pink forms and transfer them to the green forms and make pie charts and graphs and what not and that was a lot of work. ... But the end result was we had already, within a few weeks of having students, placed them in remedial and acceleration groups. We already knew from working with them in the classroom and teacher assessments where they needed to be. So, what did that information tell us? We were bang on.

The value of their classroom assessments were reinforced for eighth grade teachers, but seventh grade teachers did not feel the same way: “Your teacher grades, what you know they are making, because the standardized test says something else, do not have any relevance” (Shanna). Seventh grade students can fail each course for the year but pass the standardized test and be promoted to eighth grade.

Shanna arrived late for the very first CFG meeting because she was in a meeting of seventh grade science teachers six weeks before the administration of the standardized test. She arrived, visibly affected. “You start to get overwhelmed with the fact that, yes, I am teaching toward the test; it’s what I’m supposed to be doing. I’m told that I’m not, but then I have meetings that are telling me that that is what I should be doing.” She was given a list of curricular strands that she interpreted to be class results of performance. As CFG members talked to her further about these data, she clarified for herself and the CFG that the strands are not indicative of individual children, or even a class of children, but is “a listing of strands and what percentage of questions are in each strand. I have no idea how it, what it relates to my students.”

Jade desires a list of specific concepts that individual students had difficulty with. This disaggregation of data would be more helpful in planning instruction. However, as the three social studies and science teachers talked, they agreed that even in that scenario, they could not use the information because their content was different than the material that was tested in the previous year. Shanna said it would be different for “math and language arts, yes, because they are constantly building.”

The district accountability requirements impacted conversations held during our CFG meetings. Acronyms like MCS and CQI were certainly used in storytelling, anecdotal sharing, and in the text-based discussion focused on standardized testing. When I probed about members’ experiences and feelings with CQI, they were forthcoming and willing to offer their current understandings. However, when student or teacher work was the focus of dialogue, district accountability did not seem to be a factor. For instance, Katrina’s slave diaries were accepted as valuable work. No one attempted to use the MCS or CQI to either validate or diminish the work. Conversation centered around what Katrina was attempting to accomplish and how the students did or did not meet those goals. In Katrina’s case, members also inquired to whether the rubric was representative to what Katrina’s goals for the project were. No one inquired about which MCS were relevant for the project and why they were absent from the rubric.

Consultancies held in support of Holly and Shanna were similar in how members did not reference or mention MCS or CQI. Holly’s organization dilemma was marked by Jade and William lobbying for a different treatment of eighth graders as almost-high schoolers. However, this does not relate to issues of teaching and learning specific to the school reform initiative or the curriculum standards.

It is particularly interesting that the structures developed to address CQI were not part of Shanna's dilemma about time. It certainly would have been palpable to talk about the CAT meetings and other "collaborative" ventures that took teachers' planning time. Instead, this Consultancy stayed focused on Shanna's issue, particularly on how she could develop student work assignments that allowed her to expediently assess their progress. The effect of CQI assessment practices could be inferred from the conversation, as members encouraged Shanna to use shorter, multiple-choice assessments. However, these suggestions could also be considered part of a battery of assessment options that would naturally surface during a discussion on assessment.

Katrina's Sensemaking

As Holly was presenting a journalism rubric at the March meeting for the other members to "tune", she indicated that she was not addressing issues of grammar and mechanics in this project because she assumed that their language arts teachers were handling that content. After her reflection, Katrina informed her, "We are not supposed to teach quotation marks until right now. So, I'm sure that many 7th graders didn't have a clue about quotation marks." The Daily Oral Language exercises that are such an accepted and common component of language arts curricula appeared to be exempt from this reorganization of the sequence. As Katrina marched through her teacher's edition chronologically from week to week, she chose to skip each sentence that included quotation marks.

I did [feel obligated] because I didn't have time because they would ask. 'Why does the quote go there? Why does it do this?' I wouldn't have time to teach them why it did or why it didn't when I'm not supposed to teach that until the fourth nine weeks, until actually right now, this week.

She wanted to stay as close to the predetermined timeline as possible, regardless of her own views about the content and the timeliness for her seventh grade students: “I thought that was something they should have learned in the beginning in order to write assignments, but I skipped all of them.” How did she make sense of this disconnect between her thinking and the scope and sequence? “I bought some flags:” the sticky kind, in order to mark the ones she skipped, so she could go back during the fourth quarter and use that content.

I posed my understanding of a possible philosophy undergirding Daily Oral Language: “A five-minute burst of instruction each day [would be] better than large blocks of time, but instead you’re feeling that you need to skip the five-minute burst of instruction so that you can have the forty minutes of instruction late in fourth quarter.” Katrina once again admitted that she skipped all the quotations – but for a specific reason: the topic was just too big. “I went over different things, apostrophes, that I’m not supposed to teach until after spring break but we did those.” Quotes was accepted to be a topic that could not be initially addressed during the Daily Oral Language time. To reinforce her decision, she asked other teachers. When they shared that they were not teaching the quotes, she acquiesced.

Although she chose not to challenge the decision regarding quotation marks, Katrina took a liberty from the prescribed scope and sequence in grammar instruction. Before beginning the required content of independent and subordinate clauses, Katrina “actually spent two weeks teaching seventh graders what the eight parts of speech are which wasn’t on the scope and sequence, which pushed me way back behind other teachers, but going over it now, they know it now.” The “now” part was extremely important to Katrina, as this meeting represented the one week warning until the Access test for seventh graders.

Back in March, Katrina started to realize she may have misunderstood some of the parameters of the scope and sequence. She realized that when first looking at the scope and sequence, she assumed, “If it’s not on there, I won’t ever teach it. This is all I teach ... I thought I could only do one [novel study] all year. I can do more than one. I just didn’t know that.” Her developing stance on the scope and sequence was evident: “I love it [scope and sequence] because it tells me what to teach or I wouldn’t know, but then, on the other hand, I don’t like it because it’s telling me what to teach when I might think that the kids could get it better in a different order.” In Johnson and Birkeland’s (2003) interviews, novices that stayed in teaching and in their particular schools cited knowing and following expectations were key to their satisfaction.

However, as the Access test loomed closer, the scope and sequence certainly became a checklist as she prepared them for the test: “I like it, but I’ve run into a problem – I have another week until Access, and I’ve done everything on my scope and sequence. I’m finished, I think!”

Although Katrina did not teach eighth grade, she taught language arts like Polly. How she made sense of her scope and sequence could have informed Polly’s choices. Katrina did not have other language arts teachers in the CFG – Polly and Katrina could have supported each other as they made sense of their first experiences with CQI together. Instead, Polly did not have an outlet outside of her instructional team and her curriculum area team where she could “think aloud” about her role as a teacher in a CQI school. This group could engage in those conversations, like the one that spontaneously took place after Holly’s tuning related to rubric construction. Assessment is a critical component of CQI, for that data is how a school can show their rigor in working toward improving school achievement. However, these teachers drew no

meaningful connections between their work with teacher-created classroom assessments and the pre and post tests mandated by CQI.

CHAPTER 14

IT'S ALL ABOUT "YOU"

Polly is not teaching this year. I contacted Polly numerous times during the months of August and September, but repeated voice mail messages did not produce any response from her. She was not part of this group of novices that spoke so definitively about mistakes they would not repeat. Polly is a casualty of a profession that does not always provide meaningful support for its newest members.

Systemic Support

William was afraid that time spent in CFG would be “touchy-feely” and would not yield noticeable and worthwhile results. This initial sense equated to emotional support (Gold, 1996), not to instructional improvement. The data indicates a systemic support structure that responded to the perceived needs of novice teachers. Peer observations began the process of breaking down the geographical and collaborative barriers between teachers. Responsive agendas built on the motivation of CFG members engaged these novice teachers in authentic work. Finally, an intentional lens of success viewed these beginning teachers as professionals who were making a difference in the lives of their students.

Peer Observations

This CFG partially defined support from observing each other. Between the March and April meetings, I sent out an email to the group outlining what peer observations can look like within a CFG context. Although I knew that we only had a few meetings left, I wished to implement peer observations as another layer of support. However, it was William’s words from

the March meeting that encouraged me more than the research (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997):

Sometimes I sit and think about it, when I sit in my CAT meetings, I think, I wonder how she teaches the subject, I wonder how she teaches. They all sound so different. I'm like, I'd love to sit in and see how these other teachers teach! I don't have anything to compare it to, really.

William was particularly focused on social studies instruction in this context, as his CAT meeting included all eighth grade social studies teachers. The last statement made me hopeful for his cross-grade level, if not cross-subject area observations in our CFG context. Hopefully, he would see reasonable ways to activate his learning in other teaching and learning contexts; and more importantly, realize that he indeed does have a framework of experiences to “to compare it to.”

Short observations of 10-15 minutes are appropriate, unless the members wish for them to be longer. The observations are not evaluation-based; instead they involve a partnership between two CFG members that grows organically from the needs they choose to articulate. It is helpful to choose a focus, or stance, before the observation. There are several stances an observer can assume; however, I offered the three listed in Figure 12 to the group from which to choose.

The email I sent to the group in April may have been poorly timed: the next week was spring break and the seventh grade accountability test fell the two weeks after break. That may have been a factor in the lack of response by the group. I had asked in the email for a response by anyone who was interested in being observed or who would like to observe someone else in the group. I volunteered to be the storehouse of the requests in order to match up members. When no one took me up on the offer, I used our meeting time to bring up the issue of peer observations

again: “Part of critical friends work is talking to other people, and seeing what they are doing in their classroom. I wanted to talk about how that might look and work among us.” The group appeared to be interested in this idea – especially the notion of three short observations that would not take up their entire planning periods. The members took over how to observe each other without missing time with their own students and within five minutes the three pairs were created: Stella – Holly, William – Katrina, and Jade – Shanna. Shanna wanted to know if the three observations had to assume the three stances. She was excited to observe Jade, another science teacher in the building, her first opportunity for such an experience all year.

1. *video camera*

In this stance, the observer functions as a video camera, documenting as much as possible in a short amount of time. This information is for the teacher, so the document is left in the classroom when the observer leaves.

2. *focus question*

A teacher may have a question that she would like some data about. In this case, the observer chooses a method with the teacher that can capture that information. Again, if possible, the information is left for the teacher when the observed leaves the room.

3. *observer as learner*

A CFG member may wish to observe another member because he wants to learn more about his own practice. This stance assumes that another person’s context and classroom is a ripe environment for his own learning. Here the observed takes his notes with him, making sense of what he saw and translating it to his own context.

Figure 12. Peer observation stances (National School Reform Faculty).

Perhaps I should have pushed the CFG to create the calendar then and there. Perhaps I should have emailed to find out how the observations were going. Perhaps I can rid myself of some coach’s guilt and accept the fact that adults make decisions for themselves. Jade and Shanna observed each other once, both assuming the role as observer as learner. Stella and Holly assumed the same stance, completing their single observation the day before our next CFG meeting. Holly and William never followed through with their plan, admitting their failure quite

sheepishly to the group in May. They did not exhibit a willingness to equally share in the risk (Little, 1987) outside the meeting space.

We took time in our May meeting to debrief our visits to each other. Although Shanna was not present at this meeting, Jade began by telling about what she learned in Shanna's seventh grade science classroom. Jade noted items in three arenas: classroom organization, strategy instruction, and student interaction. Based on Shanna's modeling, Jade decided to adopt an alternative vocabulary strategy. The accountability report for Greenville Middle claimed that all teachers were focusing on vocabulary across subject lines.

Jade left feeling more motivated to have "live action" in her room, in terms of animals that are alive and in cages. "I'm lazy about getting them in the room and getting them taken care of," but saw motivated students caring for and wondering about the animals. Perhaps the largest impact of her visit involved Shanna's individual interactions with a student in an isolation seat in the back of the room. Jade's "catbird seat" allowed her to see this student's actions and how Shanna demonstrated "such patience and never raised her voice with him." Jade seemed particularly intrigued by how watching a student is so different than teaching. If she had done further observations, she could have developed an observation protocol that involves watching one student, extrapolating what life is like for that student at her school. In turn, Jade also could have asked Shanna to observe one student in her own science classroom.

Although Shanna wasn't there to talk about her observation in Jade's room, Katrina admitted that she and Shanna had talked "at length" about it. "She had a blast in your room," Katrina shared. Similar to the "live action" Shanna had in her lab, she was intrigued by how Jade was "very lively – your demeanor and personality in the classroom, how you give instructions, your voice, they understand. It's very clear." Katrina further offered that Shanna was interested

in what Jade thought about her fourth period. Another missed opportunity – if Shanna really had a question about that class, Jade could have been a person to collect data to inform her teaching decisions.

Holly and Stella were certainly the most unique combination. As an Extensions journalism teacher, Holly teaches over 200 students in grades six, seven, and eight in class sizes of around 32 pupils. Her class periods are over an hour in length, and all students in the school except special education students with extreme physical or intellectual challenges attend Extensions classes.

Stella is a sixth grade resource teacher for language arts and mathematics. Her class times are around an hour in which she works with no more than 15 students, with one class of only six. Several students see her twice a day for service in both content areas.

As Holly shared her observation of Stella's class, she sounded intimidated by the environment. Even her opening line: "I went in as a video, just to see what it's like." Entering the foreign world of special education was a big step for Holly. She was amazed by the flexibility required to attend to students coming and going to and from various services and classrooms in other buildings. However, although she mentioned it in passing, what seemed powerful to Holly was the range of abilities in the classroom.

There were students that knew the answers without even trying to think about it, and she was like, tell the rest of the class how you came to get that answer. And there were students that couldn't even get it then. She was brave for having all these different levels. Holly saw more levels of performance in Stella's class as opposed to her own classroom, which most likely had far larger disparities in levels of proficiency. I wonder if she might see more differences in her own classroom now.

Although Holly claimed the role of video camera, her opening line indicated her true intent: “just to see what it’s like.” Video camera is usually assumed for the observed, not the observer. Here Holly adapted it for her own learning. She did not leave her notes in the classroom. In fact, she was reading from them at the meeting. Stella appeared to not be intimidated by this reversal. She smiled at Holly throughout the description and shared her reciprocal observation.

Two features of Holly’s classroom struck Stella: a classroom organization folder component and the behavior of a particular child that she also teaches. After joking about the “angelic” behavior of a sixth grade class that has a reputation around school, it occurred to me that these two teachers hadn’t had a chance to debrief their experiences together. I asked if they wouldn’t mind behaving like a “fishbowl:” having a conversation and allowing us to watch. Holly didn’t mind and Stella immediately asked an “I wonder” statement: “I kind of wondered what you do to one of my students [in order to have him behave so well].” After Holly inquired about which student they shared, she identified a strategic grouping strategy that seemed to work well for him.

Stella noted that his behavior in her classes has been fine, but she worried for a long-term substitute in another resource classroom: “He’s giving a hard time to [her]. Curse at her, throwing things.” After I found out that the student saw Stella in Holly’s classroom, I posed an option:

It might be interesting to use the information that you gained in going to Holly, not about him, to be open and say, I was going to see Ms. Stevens, and I noticed you were in there. What do you think I saw when I was watching you? And have him talk about what he saw. Now, what happens with Ms. [the long-term substitute]? You might be the actual

connection, the actual person connection, that has seen him in both areas and maybe no one else has that connection.

Following through on the sequence of three observations would have changed the conversation and learning of the CFG members. Building trust through multiple visits may have encouraged some to pose their own inquiry questions, using the observer as a “professional other” in their own development. This decision by the group members to engage in one observation limited the conversation to more shallow issues of instructional, relational, and organizational factors.

However, even in this setting, these conversations may be more productive than the traditional supervisory conferences at Greenville Middle that centered around the DDEP goals. Increased visits may have increased the impact of the formative feedback offered by peers.

Holly's Spontaneous Consultancy

The organizational feature of Holly's classroom ended up being more intriguing for the group as we broke the fishbowl structure. Stella's first question about whether Holly inherited this system from the previous journalism teacher began a series of questions that Holly calmly answered. It wasn't until the fifth question that I realized something was happening – an impromptu Consultancy. Katrina's question yielded a different response: “I don't know.” Katrina wanted to know how Holly would handle homework next year as an eighth grade language arts teacher as opposed to Holly's current position. As William began another clarifying question, I interrupted:

Can I interrupt a second? It sounds like you have a Consultancy right now. You have this issue that just came out – how can I make all these come out next year? Do you mind if we help you with your issue? What we're doing right now is asking clarifying questions –

are you hearing that? Let's do that, then you will have an opportunity to back out of the conversation and we can brainstorm some things for her. It might really help all of us.

Holly agreed, and we pursued the protocol that we had used before. In fact, we didn't time any of the steps. The next segment seemed to appear when the previous section exhausted its usefulness. After a extensive set of questions, Holly backed out of the conversation, and we tackled her dilemma about how she could use this successful organizational structure teaching language arts within an instructional team of four teachers.

William was especially concerned about time, for the teacher and for the students. After laying out his concern, he shared his experience with a similar structure. He abandoned it because he couldn't find a way to implement it within a timeframe he deemed acceptable. The group explored physical arrangement issues as part of his concern and in support of why Holly's arrangement may have worked so well in her classroom of tables instead of individual desks.

After three frustrated comments about students and desks, Jade brought us back to task: "We could talk about our desks all the time. For her, as far as what she could do, she could keep that system. I'm concerned about the responsibility issue in eighth grade." This issue from Shanna's time management Consultancy in February was returning to the table. Jade's last comment may have revealed her own view or the view that she perceives from eighth grade teachers in general "They just won't have that."

Katrina may have remembered the conversation about preparing eighth graders for ninth grade or teaching them as eighth graders as she changed the topic abruptly, choosing to use a neutral "I wonder" statement about the logistics of hauling home 110 portfolios. Stella continued her thought process, sharing her experience with her students' composition books.

William commented first on that subject, relaying how he would have to borrow his wife's sport utility vehicle in order to get his crates home, but then returned to an eighth grade issue he knew something about: "About what Jade said about responsibility, it's also an issue with your team. With my team, if I kept everything for them, if they didn't have to be responsible, I'd catch some heat from them as well."

I posed an alternative strategy that involved students beginning the year with a system similar to Holly's, followed by a weaning process. Jade's response surprised me because it seemed to alter her understanding of an eighth grader's responsibility:

I've learned from this first year is that the repetition of doing these tasks each day is when they get it. When I change stuff, then they are like, am I supposed to do it this way or this way now? I found that with 8th graders that the slightest bit of change really throws their world for a loop.

Jade may have been speaking first about responsibility from the perspective of an eighth grade teacher on an instructional team – concerned about "their" eighth graders appearing ready for high school. Perhaps her next concern about change was focused on her personal experiences with eighth grade students.

We still hadn't dealt with specifics about Holly's organizational system for next year. Katrina's concern about how homework would fit into Holly's framework was unanswered. After wondering aloud how Holly's philosophy about portfolios might inform our conversation, I posed a scheme that might address both: a system of coding where students would acknowledge the many facets of language arts instruction (e.g., creative writing, grammar, mechanics) and use abbreviations to organize these components in appropriate places that represent process work and product work.

Eight seconds of silence soon marked the end of our discussion. Holly was invited back to reflect to the group about what she was now thinking. She again cited as foundational a book on revision techniques that she had been reading. If she decided to adopt these strategies, that may dictate how her student portfolios might look. The coding idea sounded appealing to Holly, and she was conscious of the dance between responsibility and enabling behaviors. Perhaps a composition book kept by the students and process portfolios housed by Holly could be a workable solution. However, she pointed out that her philosophy on portfolios was still formative. She was experiencing a continuing impulse to learn (Oldfather, West, White, & Wilmarth, 1999), for she was reading books on that this summer as well. She read everything on her list over the summer and developed a procedural and pedagogical plan for implementing portfolios.

More Successes

As the group categorized the elements of success that had been built from their own classroom success stories, it seemed anticlimactic to not hear stories of students again. Each week had been marked by one or more stories told by CFG members in which students' lives had been changed by the instructional and relation decisions the teachers had made. Now that this encapsulated list had been created, it seemed to need more recent stories in order to make it more of a "living" document.

A "go-round" offered everyone a chance to tell another success story. Jade relayed a renewed student interest in her room due to an ecology project in which students made choices about presentation formats. For her, it was a success because she forced herself to try another strategy or grouping from which she thought the students might benefit. William was building on a new strategy one of his last units in eighth grade history: The Great Depression. Instead of

“covering” everything, William “picked five major aspects” and offered students opportunities to talk, research, and learn. His feeling of success came from his teammates when they shared with him that these students “really know their stuff!”

Katrina’s success also qualified as empowering students as she talked about “crawling students.” Katrina decided to read aloud a book about sharks to her language arts classes – partially because she is “fanatical” about sharks, and “they know that.” She had been noticing that while she reads the students had been crawling and creeping up toward the front of the room until the entire class is sitting at her feet as she reads. “3 out of 70” actually stay in their desks over the course of the day. She found the student interest so powerful that she could use the reading time as a threat when their behavior became unruly.

Stella thought about the third category of assuming a proactive stance. She had been assigned as the case manager for a new student for the last four weeks of school. In order to ease his transition into a self-contained special education setting next year, this student was spending extra time with Stella. Her openmindedness and patience were helping him achieve small successes in her classroom. She was also feeling successful in dealing with her own feelings of frustration about his behaviors and her responses to them.

Holly initially passed on her turn in the go-round, and later felt some pressure to offer a story: “If I have a to pick a success, I might do patience and a variety of strategies.” One eighth grade class had been problematic for her: “driving her nuts.” After noting that half the class had failed an assignment, she decided to qualify it as extra credit and give them time in class to work on a group project. Especially important in that direction was the proviso that students could sit with friends. To her surprise, a desired effect resulted: students worked quietly for an entire period which she attributed to the following: “I guess that they thought I was coming across as

being mean, and I let them have more freedom that day. Just being patient with them and trying something different.”

My own success focused on instructionally modeling for university students about building classroom communities. My students had written evaluations of our work together over the last year, and this piece surprised me and would certainly inform further decisions about devising learning environments for preservice teacher education students. Some of them felt that reading about how to build classroom communities was not as helpful as actually living it in my classroom each week. The decisions we made about rituals of practice, how to work together, and what constituted meaningful work were going to assist them in the development of their plans of working with elementary students.

Future Successes

Conversation in the group had several times referred to “next year.” In an attempt to continue using a contextualized process, I asked each member to think of something they wanted to implement or change next year in the classroom. Once again building on our experience stories, each group member then claimed an element to use as a rationale for making the change.

In the last “go-round” I was last, but in this random turn-taking, I started after breaking a long silence. “For me next year, whatever students I’ll be working with, I’m worried about how to provide ownership and empower my kids.” I particularly related to possibly working in a CQI elementary school and how dedicating the first few weeks to communitybuilding “might be an interesting resistance.”

Jade desired to think about a variety of strategies and groupings in sorting her filing cabinet, especially examining a folder where she has been stashing “things that have worked and are a little bit different.” Stella, focused on the same element of success, used a math class of 14

students to suggest that she has students at 14 different levels, and they need their own level work. She was debating the idea of using centers to provide some individualized instruction.

William's summer will be spent searching for artifacts to go with each historical era represented in the 8th grade social studies curriculum. He sees the use of artifacts as a way of building student interest. Recent words from 6th grade teachers spark Katrina's response:

The sixth grade teachers are scaring me ... I'm afraid that they [students] are going to be so bad that I won't have any patience whatsoever with them. I'm afraid that I won't be able to establish a community with them because I have this fear that they are going to be awful.

Although Katrina's reference to patience on the elements of success was valid, she was not leaving with anything tangible like William's plan to find artifacts, Jade's sort of her file cabinet, and Stella's pursuit of center-based instruction. Katrina needed a plan for reflection, a plan to engage in experiences that she could reconstruct (Dewey 1938/1991) in order to meet her need. She focused on the immediate future, to summer school, in order to provide herself with experiences that she can reference in the future when she needs support. "Say I have two kids that they are the two kids on my team that skip school and don't do work. My teammate said that summer school is 15 of them. You have to have a different approach."

Having a different approach for each new teacher could certainly be inferred from the previous collection of support stories. Although I draw no causal relationship between all six CFG members returning to teaching and Polly not returning, the varying forms of support that the CFG offered are particularly relevant. Peer observations gave members a chance to de-privatize their practice in ways their other groupings (subject matter, grade level, instructional team) did not. Although the intent was not focused on feedback in three of the four observations,

each teacher received affirmation regarding specific facets of their teaching: Jade's clear instructional decisions, Shanna's patience with individual students' behaviors, Stella's approach to differentiated instruction, and Holly's organizational structure. It is foreseeable that following through on several observations would have deepened the conversations and further de-privatized individual's classrooms.

Responsive agendas added another layer of support to these first-year teachers' experiences at Greenville Middle School. Dependable practices were set in motion that allowed members to bring authentic work to the group in a timely manner. Sometimes members even needed reminding that their wondering was valued and worthy of others' thinking and energy. Although Holly hated being the center of attention, she benefited from CFG members thinking together about her organizational structure for next year.

Finally, an intentional lens of success supported these members as they made instructional and relational decisions that affected the schooling experiences of over 620 students collectively between the six members. The CFG presumed goodwill, using an additive model rather than a deficit model to develop elements of success that served to describe the past and bolster the future. This process legitimized their experiences with teaching and learning while supporting their decisions for future work.

Novice Teacher CFGs

Murphy's (2001) research also recounted the story of her high school's practice of grouping first-year teachers into a separate CFG at the beginning of the school year. The CFG convened for the sole purpose of orientation into the district: inviting administrators and other teacher leaders to talk about topics such as management, special education, and differentiated instruction. The underlying philosophy implies that first-year teachers need remediation:

information funneled to them in order for them to “catch up” with their colleagues and peers. Murphy’s high school further cemented that notion by encouraging the first-year teachers to join a “real CFG” after their first year was completed.

Findings here begin to question the perception of first-year teachers as deficient. Polly’s voice again finds a place in this conversation. Her words are from the first meeting Dr. Davenport called in December to tell the first-year teachers about the induction plan for second semester. These questions rang to me as a charge to my belief undergirding the entire work: “Don’t we need some veteran teachers in this group? What can we learn from each other?”

The group members most certainly learned from each other’s dilemmas of practice and student work. They offered personal interpretations and relayed their own experiences. Although there were not veteran teachers from Greenville Middle School in our CFG, their voices were present. Some could read transcripts of meetings and wonder how often CFG members referenced veteran teachers’ practices in their responses to each other’s work. As solutions were sometimes brainstormed, these first-year teachers, as well as myself as an experienced teacher, cited other teachers we knew whose experiences and opinions were relevant in the current conversation. This inclusion of veterans’ voices does not provide support for Polly’s prediction that the group would not learn from each other; instead, it confirms one of the norms of the group: that when we provide space for thinking and listening, we learn from each other.

It is important to again reiterate the importance of the novice teachers’ direct experiences with teaching and learning. Although veteran’s work and advice were readily shared in various structures, the most powerful moments of learning for presenters and participants involved authentic dilemmas and work from novice’s classrooms (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Another important difference between Murphy's first-year teacher CFG and this CFG is the implementation of an external agenda. Authentic and relevant work was offered over the course of this CFG. Agendas substantiate that teachers brought bona fide dilemmas that they were concerned about. The group responded by providing quality thinking and processing to honor the work. I am reminded of checklists from evaluation instruments popularized during the 1980s from the results of process-product research. One of the negative indicators on a Florida summative assessment was "dwells on irrelevant details and information." The CFG used me as the coach to focus and re-focus their conversation, but also used each other. Jade's example of bringing the group back to Holly's Consultancy about her portfolio organization next year may indicate her respect for the process's focus: "For her, we could talk about our desks all day, but for her, as far as what she could do ...". Jade also very pointedly designates the intent of the feedback: "for her." Throughout this conversation strain, Jade does not make personal connections with the dilemma. She is quite satisfied with her organizational structure and even suggests it to Holly after the dilemma has closed.

Use of Second Person

Examining individual's dialogue in CFG meetings may offer insight regarding their successes and challenges in their own classrooms. At times, CFG members were forthright in the descriptions of their classroom composition and activities. When members like Katrina, Shanna, and Holly presented, clarifying questions were an effective tool to encourage them to clearly articulate their multiple contexts.

When members were not presenting, they may have been offering clues about their own contexts as well. As I examined Jade's behaviors during consultancies and tunings, I wondered how often she referred to the presenter directly, especially during the segment of the protocols

where the presenters remove themselves from the discussion. As I tallied and examined her direct addresses, her use of “you” seemed to change depending on her intent. It became clear that others in the group might have been speaking in second person for particular reasons as well.

All the first-year teachers in the group used second person to describe their own practices. Jade and Shanna used this mechanism most often, while Stella and Holly used it least frequently. However, these numbers seem proportional when compared to how often each person spoke, with Jade speaking the most often and Stella and Holly the least often. When examining my own dialogue, I never used second person to describe my own practice. I consistently used “I” and “my” in those instances.

Almost every quotation was found within the parameters of a focused conversation, a structure like a success analysis, Consultancy, or a tuning. Only one quotation was taken from a dialogue that was not based on meaningful CFG work, often grounded in student or teacher work samples. Categories emerged in the examples (32 in all over all five meetings): student relationships, behavior management, instructional decisions, assessment, parent support, colleague relationships, and protocol debriefs.

Student Relationships

Five of the six samples stem from conversations about members’ successes with students over the course of all five meetings. Shanna talked about the rationale for her success story:

Last meeting we talked about the quiet students, actually, I just may have talked about it with Katrina, about the students and how you kind of don’t take a closer look at them because they’re not a behavior problem, and they have great grades, and you don’t always pay attention to what’s going on.

Shanna found herself demonstrating the behaviors that here she attributed to the group (“you”).

Shanna found herself confident in her story as she reached out to students who appeared nonchalant. As Katrina started to depict the context around her success, she could not bear to use first person to describe herself in the story: “He’s a bigger kid, he picks his nose all the time in class. He’ll come up and talk to you one-on-one with his finger up his nose.” Katrina’s success centered around working with a student whose social and physical idiosyncrasies were hard to accept.

Jade’s response to Katrina’s story claimed the group as having similar experiences as first-year teachers, but none quite like what Katrina described: “I don’t mean to make light of it, but you come across so much but then here is another situation as a first-year teacher. I’ve dealt with hygiene, but not with the completely being grossed out by a student.”

William’s success stemmed from his response to an administrative mandate that informed teachers that they should greet students at the door each morning. Although he first started standing by the door as diligent obedience, he began to see his larger impact through developing closer relationships with students. Shanna admitted her own inadequacy when standing by the door; albeit disguised as a comment of the collective: “I think it’s great that he isn’t just greeting his homeroom but all students who are coming down the hall. Sometimes you just focus on your room.”

An activity called Profile of a Student encouraged CFG members to assume the role of a child they know who may demonstrate a set of characteristics. Katrina emotionally shared the story of a 15 year-old in her seventh grade that had run away from home and lived in his girlfriend’s closet for 15 days. She may have been responding for herself and her teammates with a collective “you:” “Now he goes to see his dad that he hasn’t seen his dad in 11 years. He told us about it, then skips for 2 ½ weeks. You get somewhere and you don’t.”

Some dialogue excerpts demonstrate members using first person to claim their own practice, but then switch to second person when defending the rationale behind their choice. When coming to consensus about our elements of success, William chose an element that closely resembled his success, and used second person: “Because I think that you’re teaching traits that a lot of kids don’t know or otherwise don’t see a lot, as it being modeled. How to greet someone, how to just be cordial or polite. I think you’re building relationships but you’re also teaching characteristics or traits – they coincide.”

Behavior Management

Jade used the strategy of second person more than anyone else to relay issues of student behavior. Holly and Jade occasionally discussed students they both had in classes before the meeting began. A particular student, Anthony, was a familiar protagonist in their stories. In March, Jade was animatedly describing her latest encounter that involved her “touching” his arm after he “yelled across the room, ‘You, shut up!’ You’re like, Whoa! Anthony, do you see how that’s disruptive?” This “you” seems to be used to elicit a common response from Holly, which did not work. Holly politely listened but did not offer any verbal affirmation to Jade’s decisions regarding Anthony.

Peer observations offered Jade an opportunity to see another classroom from a different perspective. She appeared reflective in her response about Shanna’s classroom, especially a particular student who was in isolation: “It’s different being in the catbird seat – just watching. When you’re teaching, you don’t see everything.” However, she did not take the next step, self-actualizing particular moments where she might not see everything in her own classroom. In the stance she assumed, observer as learner, the goal is to learn from another’s classroom. It is unclear if her observation sparked a change in action.

For Stella, a conversation about peer observations offered her a voice about a student that she and Holly shared. As she wondered aloud about Holly's management techniques, she shared her own experiences, and more importantly, may have used the "you" to offer advice: "I think he's just – he's been better with me. You have to give him his space."

Each meeting, members used a bullseye to record teaching experiences or concepts that are comfortable, risky, or dangerous. Sarcasm with students was a phrase offered at the April meeting by Jade. She self-assesses and gives the group license to feel the way she sometimes feels about middle school students. "I've done good [with not using sarcasm]. Sometimes you feel the easiest way to handle this situation is to put that kid right in his place." Stella admitted her own failure as a mother of a middle school student but phrased it in second person: "You have to catch yourself."

Jade's frustration toward the end of the year was apparent in a response at the May meeting. As the group was brainstorming ways to work positively with colleagues that are hard to get along with, she encouraged a model of retreating in order to not become "jaded" which she used multiple times over the semester to describe some "vets":

Part of why I think it gets so jaded, like doing a lab or a cookie map, you get done and you're so burnt. I get so sick of being PC, when I want to look at a child who's saying "Okay, it's me! It's me!" I just want to say, shut up and sit down. I don't know. Then I get with my colleagues and the buffers can get turned off sometimes. I feel like I need to remove myself.

This use of "you" may stem from William's earlier story of feeling "burnt" after creating a cookie map with four periods full of eighth grade students.

Words from Jade in August of the next school year continue the “jaded” words of her veteran colleagues. As Holly was describing her class of students that did not include students that were labeled special education or gifted, Jade offered her own slang interpretation: “Pulling out all the top and bottom feeders.”

Jade’s success involved a student that needed individual conferencing about his behavior. Jade chose to engage him in collaboratively developing a plan. I was pushing the thinking of the group in trying to define what could be meant by “working with” and “working for” students. Shanna may have responded with a collective you for the entire group or a singular you for Jade: “When you have a behavior problem, they eventually think that they’re being picked on and you’re purposefully seeking them out. They began to feel like the problem student and that might encourage them to misbehave anyway.”

Instructional Decisions

Trust was still building in the group up to the last minute that we spent together. Collaborative experiences that involve one person presenting to the group requires the presenter and the members to feel safety in the process. Dialogue that is shrouded by a “safety net” will look different than dialogue where members are posturing for each other and/or for a facilitator or coach.

All the references to “you” that focused on instructional decisions are contextualized within consultancies, tunings, or success stories. All the members except Holly demonstrated this tendency.

William started off the success stories in February with a heartfelt admission that he struggles with being a teacher. He used his skills in developing relationships with students outside the classroom to improve the culture inside his social studies classroom. In this example,

Katrina starts with a personal slant, moves to a collective “you,” and ends back with a personal focus, this time offered to build up William’s self-concept:

A lot of times I don’t know answers and I have to look up different things. They like it when you admit you’re wrong because they see that it’s okay to be wrong, but y’know not knowing everything is okay for them, but being there for them makes up for different aspects where you lack, where you probably don’t – it’s probably in your head. I would think.

Stella used “you” within her own success story, perhaps due to an extended conversation earlier in the meeting about the tenets of round robin reading and how Dr. Davenport responded to its implementation: “I have a very small group of six. They all encourage each other. I know that normally in a bigger class you wouldn’t want to do round robin reading and go around, but they all participate and encourage each other, and help each other.”

Shanna’s Consultancy about time management demonstrates three instances: one that includes Shanna and two from William. Shanna was setting the context for her dilemma, describing how she feels about the time restraints of a class period in trying to use lab experiments: “Labs do take time because once you get them started, it seems like you have to stop. I’m trying to think of ways to make my labs where I’m looking for one answer.” Her content may have been a factor in her use of “you,” in order to assist others in understanding her contextual factors. Only one other teacher in the room taught science and used a laboratory setting.

William’s examples were within one minute of each other, both in defense of providing silent work time for eighth grade students to prepare them for high school. “But it also good to have a day or two when you say, this is sit down time, time to work because they are going to do

a lot of that in high school.” William may have then remembered the focus of the Consultancy: to assist Shanna in her time management strategies at school. His next response focused initially on the teacher, not the students: “Then you get things accomplished, you plan lessons, you grade papers while they are on-task and working quietly. And it’s good that they know how to work quietly. It’s fun to get up and move around but it’s not going to be like that a lot in high school.”

William did not demonstrate this tendency of speaking in second person again until the May meeting. In Holly’s impromptu Consultancy about portfolio organization, he again had a history that he could have defended, like in the aforementioned February examples. However, here William is looking for a method to improve his work while concurrently helping Holly to think in different ways about her dilemma. He was concerned about losing time at the beginning of class when students need to distribute materials that the teacher stores: “If those kids get in and they have five kids to get settled, you lose them half the time. It takes another 5-10 to get them situated and you’ve lost fifteen minutes of class.”

Shanna, the member with the least amount of classroom experience, often modeled expansive thinking about issues related to teaching and learning. Her perspectives may not be labeled as “expertise” by some (Newmann, 1996), but we learned from her words. They served as professional development for us. In Katrina’s Consultancy about how to assess her Kente cloth projects, Shanna encouraged us to talk more about the limitations of tests: “Tests don’t accurately depict what they know. When they discuss in class, you can be amazed at what they know. When you give them a test, you’re looking at it wondering, what went wrong.” By using “you,” she acknowledged that Katrina was also “amazed” at what the students knew when they were engaged with text.

Although she never brought work to the group, Jade opened her practice for a brief view during Holly's tuning at the March meeting. Jade shared that "as a first-year teacher," she finds that she can make a wonderful rubric *after* the students have finished an assignment. In exploring her perceptions about the differences between expectations and standards, I posed a scenario that involved teachers using the standards to set their expectations and see if the students meet the challenge. Jade responded passionately:

Not lowering the standards of the MCS, I'm lowering my standards, which I recognize were too high for the age group I was teaching. It was an error being a first-year teacher with this age level. I think it's always good to expect of them, and you've got to be realistic, too.

This excerpt represents the longest response where Jade talked about her own practice in meaningful ways without assuming second person. At the end of her reply, she reverts and even cites the work on the table to support her point: "Look at these papers, you have kids who aren't even writing complete sentences."

Assessment

Instructional decisions specifically addressed assessment on a few occasions. Four CFG members demonstrated this tendency to defer ownership of an assessment practice. All four of the passages were embedded in consultancies that specifically addressed members' queries about assessments, particularly rubrics.

William was particularly invested in the Consultancy centered around Katrina's slave diary project in February. Of the CFG members, he appeared to use rubrics the most frequently, usually as a twofold benefit: (1) for his students to delineate his expectations for an assignment, and (2) for himself to expedite the time spent in assessment. However, as the group was

deliberating over how much inference is inherent in rubric construction, he excitedly relayed a benefit for the teacher and the students:

That's the thing – it gives you consistency. You can go back, you know what, you only did 6, so you got a 30 or whatever the case. In this case, maybe they didn't have their name on it, or whatever. That's five points off, that's five points off. It gives you some type of, with 108 students, it's hard to evaluate it the same way. Let me read, let me see, I've got to go all the way back.

Jade echoed his words two months later in another Consultancy about Katrina's work, this time Kente cloth projects: "We've talked before that when you grade a stack of papers, by the time you get to the end, you're not quite as strict. They are all making the same mistakes!"

Both examples display teachers who do not openly admit a practice that would be considered unprofessional: inconsistency in grading. However, by using "you," they are attributing the behavior to the entire group, of which they both are members.

Although both of Katrina's projects stemmed from social studies, the majority of her day was spent in language arts instruction. William even referred to her as a "language arts person." Much of the talk around assessment practices questioned concepts specific to a language arts teacher. Holly, who teaches journalism using her language arts background and university coursework, definitively supported Katrina's decision to have her students write in first person on the slave diary project. She may have even used "you" here to give weight to her opinion, although she prefaced it with her usual disclaimer of "I think:" "I think having them write it, putting themselves in the spot and writing it like a journal, you get better quality work."

In support of Holly's journalism Consultancy, Katrina offered her perspective on assessing work in a language arts classroom. Jade and William had already offered sympathy for

language arts teachers, claiming that they could “never” teach language arts because of the load of paperwork and the “subjectivity factor.” In her words in March, Katrina is basing her experience on her own construction of rubrics. This is one month after she informed the group that she made her first rubric for the February slave diary project. Perhaps the conversation around her work encouraged her to continue creating rubrics.

I was just going to say that sometimes when, actually I’ve done other rubrics for language arts, what I do, is that you can’t pick out every little thing, capital, period, question mark, comma, apostrophe, I just pick out, maybe three things that I look for and tell them, y’know, I put that in a grammar category and I say, these are the three, you need to do other things than this, but, I expect you to capitalize letters, but I’ll look for commas, apostrophes, and quotation marks. If they don’t put something else in there, or fail to put in a question mark, I don’t count off of that. At another assignment, I’ll say, okay, I’m looking for your end marks, your capitalization and something else, so they kind of work on it. But when you add that little part, you just pick a few things to put in the rubric for grammar.

In the first three lines, she is already using “you” to support her decisions not to “pick out every little thing.” Her “grammar category” is the focus during the rest of her dialogue, especially in the last line when she equates the grammar category to “that little part,” and again uses “you” to claim that only a “few things” should be in that section of the rubric.

Parent Support

Katrina and Shanna both used “you” in reference to parent contacts in the context of their own success stories. Katrina’s success story about a boy with unique traits involved the mother as part of a team helping to support the boy’s social development. As Katrina described scenes in

which the mother is included, she may have been using “you” to describe her other two instructional team members: “His different mannerisms and the way he speaks, you can tell when you meet with his mom, it’s not that she encourages them but she doesn’t stop them at all.” She may also have been orally developing support for her own assertion about this particular parent.

Shanna’s success story about how she takes time to talk individually with children that are having problems outside the classroom arena also tangentially involved parents. In the discussion around her success, Jade was concerned that Shanna may be involved in areas that could be problematic for her:

Jade’s concern is one that I have, too as far as ethics and how you respond and what you say. Let’s face it, there are a lot of people who take things the wrong way, or, parents that say – they came to talk to you and you didn’t respond, so there is always that concern about how you react to the information that they tell you. That is something I’m worried about.

Here Shanna may be using “you” to hypothetically describe parents she might come in contact with in the future. She did not share incidents where parents took “things the wrong way,” or were concerned because she “didn’t respond” after a child came to talk to her.

The last reference to parent support was also from Shanna, this time in the context of talking about a specific child in Profile of a Student. This particular student description, number seven, was troublesome for Shanna: “Student seven is the majority of our team.” She may be sharing her own frustration with her practice of including parents in discussions about student behavior: “When all the positives run out and you don’t have any parent support in order to make this work? How creative can you get?”

Colleague Relationships

Both references to colleagues are owned by Jade, in contexts that were impromptu. In March, a discussion about CQI evolved from Holly's tuning of her journalism rubric. Jade used first person in describing her own philosophy about the scope and sequence. She did not describe her own practices in first person, that was a trait that Jade consistently did not exhibit.

Y'know that scope and sequence that makes a first-year teacher, I love it because it tells me what to teach or I wouldn't know, but then, on the other hand, I don't like it because it's telling me what to teach when when I might think that the kids could get it better in a different order. But you have more input in our meetings to do that.

At the end of her dialogue, she notes CAT meetings in which teachers of the same subject area and the same grade level "collaborate" about designing the scope and sequence of their particular subject matter. The "you" in this case may be particularly directed at the members of the CFG who sit in different CAT meetings than Jade. She may be leveling her response at Katrina and Shanna who had just shared a comical exchange:

Shanna: You can't go away from your scope and sequence.

Katrina: Hell, no.

Jade's other reference to colleagues emerged from discussion surrounding William's index cards that delineated his goals for the next school year. As the group was lamenting their own non-use of Comment Express cards to recognize students for helpful behaviors, Jade used her team organization and delegation of tasks to parse blame: "There were three months we didn't do it. We had dictated who was going to do it each month and you don't worry about. You just don't think, did you do it? If it isn't your month."

Protocol Debriefs

When debriefing protocols, CFG members try to focus their comments on the process of the experience, not the content. In these exchanges, these CFG members consistently assumed first person to describe their own perspectives regarding the protocols. Only twice, both in the February meeting, did members use “you” to defer their behaviors.

Holly’s comment stems from Shanna’s Consultancy about time management at school. Although Shanna was satisfied with her experience, Holly was sad that she “didn’t have an answer for her [Shanna].” Later in the exchange, Holly assumed the second person, perhaps defending her earlier response: “But you feel that you want to help them out.”

The debriefing at the February meeting occurred after subsequent consultancies. William reflected on the multiple experiences: “I enjoyed both. They both felt different but both were helpful to me. Both of those things apply to me, yeah, that’s how they do it, you rethink things and that’s great.” He saw the experiences as immediately applicable to him, although that is not the intent of structure. Perhaps more importantly, he seemed to admit rethinking “things” as a result of his participation in the consultancies.

My Own Use of Second Person

As I searched each transcript for this phenomenon, I wanted to include my own dialogue in the analysis. I experienced what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1994) predicted: what is missing from the data may be as important as what was there. I did not find one instance where I used second person in the ways that the novice teachers did.

My role as a facilitator certainly could be a factor in this non-use. I wish to share the ownership of knowing in the group. As the only person in the room with more than one year of full-time teaching experience, I did not want to appear that I was “teaching” the group. However,

in refuting my own argument, I think about times when I've watched facilitators with similar agendas. They actually use second person more: "Well, you could...".

A byproduct of CFG work is a slowing down of educational talk; not immediately parsing blame or diagnosing deficiency. In this context, multiple constructions are not only accepted; but also encouraged. As the person in the room with organizational power, my vehemence for a particular construction may serve to counteract the environment I'm attempting to create. However, if that is the case, the video documentation should display various situations where I gently offer opinions but do not defend the tenets of my position. On the contrary, the transcripts reflect reciprocal dialogue where CFG members, including myself, defend their current constructions using craft knowledge and educational research.

The concept that may have more merit involves the ownership of decision-making. CFGs can provide an environment where educators talk about their classroom decision-making and the possible consequences of their actions. Over time, the walls of privacy erode and the posturing so prevalent in conversations dissipates. Louis, Kruse, and Mark's (1996) work with restructuring schools supports this notion of de-privatizing practice. Moving beyond social congeniality is necessary for meaningful conversations to take place.

I was unconsciously modeling how to "own" decisions. As I addressed other members in the group, I did not use collective descriptions to blur ownership. As I occasionally described my own decisions and the rationale behind them, I did so openly in first person narrative. Years of teaching experience do not automatically produce a security in conversation. The vacillating from first to second person could also be present in similar conversations from a transcript of veteran teachers.

The ability to “own” decisions and reflect that stance in dialogue seems more tied to a willingness to be disturbed (Wheatley, 2002). As I embrace the stance of teacher as learner, it would be false to represent my learnings in some misguided way. I offer my decisions, not to defend them, but to learn from the conversation that centers around them.

Conclusion

Although the use of second person varied across the participants and contexts, the data suggests that these teachers sometimes accept their instructional and relational behaviors and are willing to admit that within the group. Other times, they transfer the behavior to a singular or collective “you” in order to offer their opinions without accepting responsibility. The phenomenon seems akin to Little’s (1990) second ideal type of collegiality when teachers offer aid and assistance. The participants in her study appeared to make a distinction between talking about teaching versus talking about teachers.

However, CFG members used their bullseye to target areas of comfort, risk, and danger in ways that trouble this assertion. When prompted to share any addition or movement made on the bullseye during each meeting, members willingly and predominately offered risks and dangers, as opposed to comforts. Bullseye sharing was safe: no conversation stemmed from members’ comments. The scenarios offered in this chapter emerge from dialogue surrounding dilemmas of practice or teacher or student work.

The group’s use of the strategy declined over the meetings; February and March posted the highest use. These meetings also included more time spent in consultancies and success analyses, where these behaviors were demonstrated most often.

CHAPTER 15

PHASES OF CFGS

Using Dunne and Honts' (n.d.) assertions about how CFGs grow and develop, the following may offer a picture into how this particular CFG interacted during their five months of working together.

Before any group reflects the work that these researchers describe, moments exist between members that are conversational and social. The beginnings and breaks of meetings offered opportunities for members to connect with each other. They shared moments in their relationships with significant others, like Shanna's engagement or William's first baby. Members told stories of their students (Little, 1990), choosing what stories to tell and avoiding the analysis and inquiry present during protocols.

Dunne and Honts pose three stages of development within a CFG. In the oasis stage, teachers begin to describe the CFG as a trusting setting where they may spend uninterrupted time with colleagues. Specific student problems or external factors are discussed as teachers seek support to enact effective teaching and learning.

The second stage involves teachers seeing their CFGs as more than support groups. Practitioners use their time to discuss how they teach and how students learn. These conversations lead members to question their habits of instruction.

CFGs in the third stage attend to matters of educational purpose and contextual factors that impede on learning. For example, teachers in this mode may be connecting standards to their

own work, conducting action research projects, or using student work to make long-range curricular decisions.

I prefer to think of “phases” instead of stages, for these data indicates that the descriptions of each phase are fluid. The structure is organic and constructivist: focused on the learner. In the following examples, entire meetings are not represented in one phase. In fact, particular protocols and conversations vacillate between the descriptions that Dunne and Honts developed.

Table 7. Phases of the CFG and representative moments.

<u>First stage</u> Support and time	<u>Second stage</u> The “hows” of teaching and learning	<u>Third stage</u> Educational purpose and contextual factors
William’s success	Holly’s success	Katrina’s Consultancy about Kente cloths
Jade’s success	Holly’s Consultancy	Holly’s tuning
Katrina’s success	Katrina’s Consultancy about slave diaries	Stella’s success
Peer observations	Shanna’s Consultancy	
Profile of a student		
Shanna’s success		

Several of the success stories provided support for these novice teachers. William’s opening success story about building relationships with students by standing at his door in the morning set the stage for how these stories may be used by the presenting teacher and the others in the group. In William’s story, he admitted that his teaching decisions do not always work well; in fact, he acknowledged a deficit in terms of using varied instructional strategies. Although he

offered this in support of why his relationships with his students are even more important, the members of the CFG may have interpreted it differently.

Katrina appeared to be building William's self-concept when she talked about "being there for them makes up for different aspects where you lack, where you probably don't – it's probably in your head. I would think." Jade indirectly encouraged William to find his successes more often and record them for his benefit. She also used the popular slang expression "whatever" to downplay William's declaration: "William was talking about that maybe he's not teaching the best lesson plans, whatever."

In Jade's own success analysis, members of the CFG wondered about what it meant to "work with" students. Jade had claimed to work with a student in developing a behavior plan. When a presenter re-enters at the end of the protocol, it is the intent that the presenter does not need to endorse her decisions; rather the prompt is, "What are you thinking now?" Although the conversation transcript does not appear to be threatening from my perspective, Jade's defense during her reflection at the end may have limited the group's ability to move beyond supporting Jade's decision, as they did not hear about how Jade's thinking may have changed.

Katrina's success also dealt with one student, a young man that Katrina had particular difficulty in working with because of his physical and relational idiosyncrasies. Although the group had written success stories a month earlier, Katrina changed her success the day of her success analysis. That decisions along may indicate her need of the group to support her in how she termed it, "my very, very, very small [success]. It's a work in progress."

The peer observations that four of the members engaged in were not developed or repeated enough to become more meaningful. The risk level decided on by each member was further lessened in that Holly, Jade, Katrina, and Shanna all emulated the same stance: observer

as learner, although Holly claimed the stance as video camera in order to accomplish her own goal. They did not ask the observer to collect information about their classrooms for their own benefit and learning. The debriefing in the May meeting indicated that these two pairs had each observed each other one time instead of the three that were planned in the last meeting. Supportive statements of each other's instructional, relational, and/or organizational decisions and actions marked their conversations.

At times, Shanna's success differed from the other success stories in terms of the depth of conversation about her own teaching practices. However, when Shanna responded at the end of the analysis, she focused mainly on how her repeated interventions with a student had made an impact. At the very end, she thanked Holly for a comment that Holly relayed about how this student's sister had seen the impact that Shanna had made. This dialogue without Shanna posed how the teacher's personal relationships with students can make an impact on the student's motivation and performance in specific content areas. This intentional focus on student achievement marks the group's foray into more meaningful work.

The conversations around Profile of a Student also moved from support to strategy. This process first involved teachers assuming the voices of the students they found most frustrating. The members initially dealt with this juxtaposition of voices by laughing about the comments they made from the students' perspectives. They seemed to choose comments that reflected their own frustrations with particular students, possibly competing with each other's comments in terms of the outrageousness or intensity of the students' actions. They may have been looking for support or sympathy from their colleagues. However, as they learned to internalize the school experiences of some of their students, their focus changed to offering meaningful responses that began to uncover inequities inherent in the current school structure.

Three of the consultancies seemed to embody how a CFG can move into discussing meaningfully the “hows” of teaching and learning described by Dunne and Honts (n.d.).

Katrina’s Consultancy about her students’ slave diaries certainly posed an interesting dilemma about how to assess students’ work. Practically speaking, Katrina left the Consultancy interested in how to incorporate students’ self-assessment into her rubric. She also left with a larger theoretical issue of what constitutes successful assignments in her current constructions of teaching and learning.

Holly’s Consultancy about organizing her language arts classroom next year could be characterized as a “nuts and bolts” session. This spontaneous protocol held in support of Holly’s wondering about her new position also delved into deeper issues about what expectations are appropriate to hold for students and how the MCS fits into that framework.

What emerged from the conversation around the success story that Holly shared were issues more than supporting individual’s classroom decisions. Holly’s story about her newspaper ELT class prompted dialogue about student empowerment and ownership. As the CFG began to explore her story in a more in-depth way, Katrina also wondered about how to empower students who may not embody the same characteristics as the students that applied to participate in Holly’s elective class.

Although Shanna received support from the dilemma she brought in February about time management, the conversation that surfaced allowed the group to venture into a discussion that was far riskier for some of the members. As Shanna described her efforts to use the time away from students effectively, she also described what kinds of behaviors she exhibited while the students were in the room. Very casually, she mentioned her guided reading strategies and her practice of circulating around the room, probing students with questions while they are reading

silently. William initially questioned Shanna's active presence in her students' learning, questioning whether these students will be prepared for the environment that may lie ahead of them in subsequent grade levels. Jade reinforced William's perspective, claiming the entire grade level pushes a work environment that prepares the students for the transition to high school. Although Shanna may have received support from some members in her current strategies, she also appeared to leave accepting the words and advice of Jade and William who encouraged her to use class time for her own needs. Shanna initially imitated the participants in Hollingsworth's (1992) novice teacher group, who recognized they weren't wrong for behaving in ways that were different than the norm at their school.

Dunne and Honts (n.d.) describe a "mature" group as one that move between phases in order to be most effective for that particular context. Although five months certainly is short in terms of a group building trust and examining issues of substance, four exchanges appear to represent this group working in ways that were significant.

In the March meeting, Holly's tuning was important for the group. When Holly brought a rubric from her journalism class, she may have thought that the conversation would use a very focused and fine lens, similar to the conversation conducted around Katrina's rubric the month before. However, as all authentic work is unique, her rubric was multifaceted. After scrutinizing several components of her rubric, the group appeared to look inward and outward simultaneously. As they looked deeply into her rubric for where the content was located and what exactly constituted the content of the assignment, the group also stepped back to ask the broader question of the district-developed MCS. CFG members confronted a reality that their expectations of students do not always match the standards. What does this mean in terms of Holly's work and for their own

I wanted to know where Holly may have included content in her rubric. After Jade reminded us that Holly did not largely assess for issues of grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling; it became even more important to declare what the content of this assignment might be. As the terms “process rubric” and “content rubric” became more convoluted in the discussion, we again focused on what Holly’s purpose may have been – her content. This rich discussion, which did not lead Holly to state any new “a-has,” had relevance in the context of the group. It marked the first time that the group assumed multiple perspectives on work and troubled existing conditions, both at the school and in the district at large.

The work with Holly also marked the first time that members referenced our previous work. In this case, Jade and Shanna both cited Katrina’s rubric from the previous meeting. Shanna even asked permission: “Can I compare? Am I allowed to? Katrina’s rubric to this?” Subsequent meetings included several references to members’ consultancies and tuning experiences.

The second important instance occurred during the April meeting. Although a majority of the success stories concluded with support as a product, Stella’s success story, the last one offered by a CFG member, approached issues of student equity, grouping practices at Greenville Middle School, and empowerment. Her tale of six special needs students reading authentic literature with her every morning gave us shivers of hope. She described their practice of encouraging each other’s decoding skills, never once growing frustrated by a disjointed or lethargic fluency level. The group finally began to deeply explore a member’s success, unlike Katrina’s unique student, where we admitted that we were sometimes trying to solve her problem. In Stella’s analysis, we wondered about who the leader of this group was, and if it wasn’t Stella, who was it and what does that mean for the group and for us. Discussion centered

around modeling and how heterogeneous groupings may be more advantageous in certain situations. The local school culture was even discussed as William thought aloud about Stella's seemingly positive use of round robin reading versus the administrative observation that negatively documented his use of the technique. Katrina began to wonder what her ELT reading time would look like if her students embodied the same motivation level of Stella's students. Shanna continued to develop her notion that students must feel "comfortable" in order to demonstrate valuable learning.

Perhaps Katrina's Consultancy about the Kente cloths is the most substantive example of work that forced the group to re-consider matters of educational purpose and contextual factors. Students had prepared quilt squares that represented their culture, using a visual arts tradition from the history of Ghana, in West Africa. After students finished their work, Katrina ran stuck in assessing the work because she felt that because the students' work was so personal, she was assigning a grade to a child, not to a child's work. As the context emerged, the group helped Katrina realize that other elements she already had in place were useful in creating a meaningful assessment experience. A piece that did not come to resolution from this experience was how the district's accountability framework fits into Katrina's decisions made for the benefits of her students. This dialogue indicated the first time that the group comfortably left a topic with ambiguity still prevalent. Shanna's Consultancy in February left members uneasy, especially Holly, who wanted to offer a solution. The group may have been moving toward "critical colleagueship" (Lord, 1994) where disequilibrium is sought and sustained.

This Consultancy also marked the first time that the group was able to move from various components in the protocols without a timed indicator. I tried to make them aware of the markers

as well, often after a period of silence: “It seems like we are finished with clarifying questions. Any last queries?”

The final experience that seemed to mark progress in the group concerned the success stories and the subsequent elements of success. The meetings in March, April, and May all contain references by CFG members to other’s stories. Some of these mentions were factual references; however, in some instances, members used the discussion around the stories to build a case for their own thoughts.

CHAPTER 16

FROM A DISTANCE

Each set of paired stories in this portrait offers raw needs of novice teachers and actions taken within a learning community, a CFG, to offer support for similar needs. Each story could represent single musical melodies that begin with similar material, a motif, but end divergently. The chapters offer various ways of hearing the melodies.

In Chapter 6, readers began to meet the “actors,” the members of this CFG. An excerpt of CFG work contextualized the readers’ growing understandings of these novice teachers and what their work together may have looked like. After these broad, holistic moments, readers move closer, specifically targeting moments, people, and concepts. A single voice often sounds, sometimes in isolation, sometimes across several experiences. Other times many voices appear to move in similar ways, providing a hymn-like quality. Perhaps the most intriguing moments happen when polyphony is formed as voices move in conflicting directions.

This chapter represents a collection of the melodies heard from a distance, offering a broader view of what this opus may represent. This portrait documented the narrative of a group of novice teachers through the second semester of their first year of full-time teaching. Juxtaposed with their experiences are isolated moments from Polly’s story, a story not layered with the support and collaboration of our CFG. Although the narrative analyses of this CFG’s experiences are relevant in and of themselves, their parallel existence with Polly’s moments tell a different story.

A Medley of What We Have Heard

Polly wanted “buy-in” from her students, especially in terms of the pre and post tests that she chose to provide data for the school reform initiative. She viewed lying to her students as a valid option to encourage their attempts. During CFG meetings, each member alternated in sharing success stories from their classroom, moments where they felt positive about the difference they were making in the lives of children. At the conclusion of all the stories, we developed elements of success: three broad categories and several contextualized descriptors that we used in conversations about teaching and learning.

Although the administrator at that time required the novices to attend, I felt a lack of “buy-in.” Members prioritized other activities over our time together: meetings with other teachers, an appointment with a priest, even staying in their room to teach instead of arranging for the substitute. The leadership changed during our time together and a new administrator from outside the building was installed that was not familiar with CFGs. We still had moments of success, both in our classrooms and in the conference room where we met, but the duration of our experience prohibited deeper and more meaningful work.

Prepositions were a tangible example of Polly’s frustrations with her eighth graders. She relayed lengthy, comical examples of her discouraging instructional experiences, lamenting the students’ “clueless” assessment performances. A Kente cloth project from Katrina’s classroom provided a rich opportunity to begin conversations about meaningful and purposeful work. A most surprising result of our work demonstrated a shallow understanding of content (Huling-Austin, 1992), both for a teacher and a student.

Shanna, the teacher with the least amount of full-time teaching experience, consistently redirected our efforts back to content. Her weekly learning experiences with a professional

development class about reading and writing informed our deliberations about rubrics and student work.

Middle schools offer various groupings that can provide support to novices and veterans alike. Polly's instructional team did not help her as she struggled about setting DDEP goals. Her colleagues of similar content – eighth grade language arts – were less helpful. In fact, Polly felt “disillusioned” by this group of teachers as she was subtly seduced to unethically assess her students' work at the beginning of the year in order to show progress on the culminating state writing assessment. This CFG provided a unique grouping of teachers to support teaching and learning. Members were not from the same instructional team or the same content. This diversity of background and expertise effected the conversations around authentic dilemmas and student work brought to the group by its members.

This CFG intentionally inducted its members into questioning current practices using The Profile of a Student and modifying it to create The Profile of a Teacher. Stella continued her thoughtfulness about students and their schooling experiences into the summer months. Over the interim, she made an important shift in her thinking.

One thing I decided to do over the summer was to try to keep them as much on track with the regular curriculum. I've been working closely with the 6th grade language arts teachers trying to keep them using the regular ed. books. Most of their goals are trying to get back into regular ed. before high school. I just felt that was important. Last year when I took the position, the teacher before me was using all the remedial materials and things like that. I didn't feel that was good for the kids.

Stella cited CFG as a place that helped her re-think students – “helped me understand them a lot better.” When other members cited sharing ideas as the most beneficial feature of CFG, Stella

acknowledged “everybody else’s perspectives.” She also made the commitment over the summer to engage in a collaborative teaching situation during one period of the day with a sixth grade teacher who also had never taught using that structure. After two weeks of school she felt encouraged: “I think that’s the way to go.”

These examples also lead me to question the hazardous generalization that teachers new to the profession need prescriptive forms of support and assistance. The first semester of the induction program at Greenville Middle School represented this mindset. From August – December, the novice teachers and their mentors were invited to attend a monthly meeting focused on topics such as classroom management, special education, and parent conferences. These meetings were never referenced once during our CFG meetings.

This group did not always relegate their shared experiences to brainstorming ideas or sharing teaching tips. Teaching and learning were sometimes viewed and acknowledged as a pair of complex experiences, by some group members more consistently than others. In August of the next school year, William acknowledged that the beginning of the school year had been smoother, but that didn’t change the enormity of the task: “Especially getting started, it was nothing like last year. But there’s still so much to learn. I find that every day. How do you know that? Where was I when you learned about that? It’s just incredible. There’s so much to do. So much to take in. it’s unbelievable.” Paperwork at the beginning of the year felt “distracting” to William as he wanted to develop relationships with his students (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Jade’s perspective on the beginning of her second year was quite different. She was not assuming the stance of a learner: “We’ve done it all once.” She noted a significant change than the first year and even posed the following: “If every year gets that easier, then at year five,

we're going to be like, I don't know, it's going to be so easy that we won't have to come to school anymore!"

A piece of a conversation from a CFG meeting did stick with Jade. In August, she shared that she had started a process the previous spring in which she coded her plan book with stars to indicate success of a particular lesson. She is using this "reflection" to guide her decisions this year in planning lessons. She admitted that William's words from the February meeting caused her to make a change:

I probably don't have enough time to [be self-reflective on successes and challenges] because I'll think, I'll do that next year, or I'll think of it next year, that didn't go very well. Most likely, it will be that I've already done the lesson and I'll think, I don't think that went very well last year either. Maybe I'll get it right by the third year. That is an issue and maybe try to pound in your head to be self-reflective and make a journal.

Even with our experiences, Jade felt nourished professionally by her subject area team that provided copies of "effective" lesson plans. She also cited the sharing of ideas as the biggest benefit from our CFG work together. William doesn't need Xeroxed copies of instructional ideas. He wants observations of other teachers (GSTEP, 2002), so he can contextualize events he sees and make a judgment as to the possible inclusion and modification in his classroom. Shanna's vicarious experience with her teammate may lead her to question the parameters surrounding a "good idea" or an "excellent" project. These experiences seem to promote the practice of providing multiple avenues to support all teachers.

Polly was feeling the pressure of non-instructional tasks that enveloped her time spent at school. She described the rainbow of colored forms that needed to be filled out, analyzed, and submitted before particular deadlines. Shanna brought this very issue to the group as our first

experience with the Consultancy process. Despite Polly's prediction at the December organizational meeting that we needed veterans in the group, Shanna felt comfortable at the end of the process that she had new directions for addressing her needs. During the discussion that supported Shanna's dilemma, I waited to push the group's thinking until every member had an opportunity to take part in the conversation. Even though I, as the coach of the group, certainly felt obligated to offer alternative views, subsequent conversations were pushed by other members of the group.

Frustration was evident in Polly's talk about students and their perceived willingness to try. She reported only needing a few weeks to determine their academic standing of "low" or "high." Numerous group members physically agreed with her stance by nodding their heads during the January meeting.

Katrina began to question her assumptions about students' motivations to complete work. With a substitute in her stead for three days, her students created slave diaries that showed their understandings of the lives of slave traders and slaves. When she returned, the students she had deemed lowest in academic ability had created some of the highest quality diaries. At the end of her Consultancy, she still wondered what qualified as meaningful work for her students. Although she couldn't concretely answer that question, the fact that she wanted to know was extremely important. Katrina saw a connection between how students described meaningful work and the quality of work she wanted to see them complete.

However, these discussions about student work lacked a central and shared understanding about content. Katrina equated a logical storyline in the slave diaries as content. Creativity was placed in a parallel category that addressed effort, not content. William agreed with Katrina's actions, actually polarizing students into camps of children that think about content and others

that think about creativity. Shanna defined assignments in dichotomous ways at a March Consultancy in support of Holly's journalism rubric: "structure-based" or "content-based." She noted that it would be difficult to evaluate content if it had been included in the rubric.

A comment from William indicates that his perspective on assessment may be temporary: "Usually mine [assessment practice] is more creative and content-oriented. I want to know if they know the facts and can explain it to me or write it out. That's what I look for, this year at least."

William's perspective on assessment may or may not change in the coming year. Marion County Schools are rapidly moving toward a district-wide adoption of the CQI initiative which teachers may interpret as placing further restraints on using various forms of assessment. Polly seemed quite skeptical of district and school-based accountability measures, a "numbers game."

Each member of the CFG offered their perspective about CQI and accountability over the course of our meetings. The felt that the district sent mixed messages to teachers about teaching to the high-stakes tests. The data from various standardized tests overwhelmed them, both in terms of quantity and also in terms of expecting teachers to analyze data in a short timeframe. Opinions varied on the value of pre and post tests and the scopes and sequences that were components of the CQI initiative. What was shared was a disconnect between teacher-created assessments and CQI-required assessments.

Polly needed support. She needed encouragement. She needed a place to make sense of what constituted her first year of full-time teaching. She may have received the first two but did not engage in the third. Her absence from Greenville Middle School this year certainly is not causally related to her nonattendance of the CFG. However, this portrait indicates that the work of the group may have impacted her thinking, her decision-making, and her actions.

The group provided a place to deprivatize their own teaching and learning. Peer observations were designed to further support that dialogue. Each member claimed the experiences as beneficial; Stella's as "successful." Her observation of Holly generated dialogue about procedural decisions that were easily transferable to a variety of classroom situations. That dialogue morphed into a spontaneous Consultancy in which Holly received support in a dilemma about how to transfer her own plan to an eighth grade instructional team.

Even in deprivatizing their decision-making processes, this group of novice teachers used second person in their conversations about teaching and learning. Sometimes they would own their own choices; other times they would use a collective "you" to denote teachers in general.

Diversity in the Sameness

The context of this study was a middle school that used instructional teams to group students. Teams of two, three, or four core subject teachers (language arts, math, science, social studies) share the same group of 50-110 students all day except one common planning period in which the students enroll in elective classes. In order to teach in a Georgia middle school, teachers must either have a middle grades certification for grades 4-9 or a content certification for grades 7-12.

Katrina was a member of a three-teacher instructional team. She referenced her teammates in casual conversation, focused protocols, and in the work she brought to the group. Shanna was also a member of a three-teacher instructional team but referred more to her interactions with Katrina than her teammates.

Both Jade and William were members of four-person instructional teams: one teacher per core subject. William's team was the subject of several conversations, one of which prompted

William to add improving his working relationships with his colleagues to his card of “to dos” for next year. Jade never mentioned her teammates once.

Holly and Stella were not part of formal instructional teams. As a special education teacher, Stella’s students were members of many instructional teams. Holly’s elective classes included students from all three classes from every corner of the school.

It is interesting to think about instructional teams and the two members who presented work or a dilemma multiple times to the group. Holly, who did not have opportunities for collaboration used the group as a forum twice. In her role as a CFG member, she viewed herself “more as a listener,” and wondered in the first meeting if that would be a problem. Katrina, who seemed to enjoy the most congenial instructional team, also brought work to the group twice for feedback.

The polarity of Katrina and Holly’s experiences offer further support for using CFGs as mentoring communities for novice teachers. Although Katrina had teammates that she talked to regularly, she did not want to pass up the opportunity to receive feedback from her peers. On the other end of the spectrum, Holly was not receiving support from her assigned mentor and needed this CFG for instructional and emotional support.

This CFG was composed of six teachers, four of which were fully certified. All four are certified in middle grades education in a combination of language arts, science, and social studies. The other two members are provisionally certified, attending classes for degrees in science education and special education.

Although the group members were similar in terms of years of full-time teaching experience, the diversity of subject matter specialties enriched conversations, producing dialogue not indicative of content-area meetings in middle and high schools. Katrina and Holly drew from

their language arts content to discuss their perceptions of journal writing. They also gave pedagogical considerations for grading grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling across the content areas.

Even within subject matter specialties, diversity in teaching style was present. When Shanna and Jade engaged in peer observations, they described very different environments, both of which provided prompting for changes in their own teaching practices.

Authentic Issues

The issues in their teaching practices were not picked from a list of dilemmas commonly shared by first-year teachers in research studies (Fuller, 1969; Veenman, 1984). Induction programs that are developed from a deficit stance toward novices choose classroom management as the starting point, sometimes citing research (Fuller, 1969) or, more often, using accepted stereotypes of novice teachers. The dilemmas of practice for this group of novices were not grounded in problems with managing groups of students. Their substantive issues examined authentic curriculum and assessment, student motivation, and organization of student data. Classroom instruction became the central focus of our interactions, dissimilar to the peripheral status of instruction in other mentoring interactions (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Wang & Odell, 2002).

CFG meetings were not reflective of the current culture where teenagers and adults alike spout out a common insult: “It’s not all about you.” Although William was modeling the process of teaching and learning to teach simultaneously (Wildman, et al., 1989), he could have formed the following “wondering” on himself and his personal needs of safety and security. Instead of thinking about survival, William was thinking past Fuller’s (1969) first phase of teacher development.

In February, William had recorded that he wondered about how well his students understood his assignments and instructions. During the March meeting, he reported that he had taken action, starting to ask his students, personally, “Do you understand that? Did that make sense?” Although William is concerned about his teaching behaviors, which Fuller (1969) qualifies as the second phase of teacher development, he walks the line to Fuller’s third phase: using student input as his marker for success.

William used student feedback from their social studies experiences to determine his course of action for the next school year. Based on other students’ experiences, William chose a different colleague to “model after” because she was “tough, but the kids got a lot out of it.”

Other experiences in this CFG’s story reflect the categories that Wang and Odell (2002) pose as the problems of most novice teachers: emotional stress; lack of contextual knowledge, and conceptual conflict resulting from the discrepancies between their own preferred images and ideas of good teaching and learning to teach and those embedded in the context of teaching and learning to teach.

Shanna’s Consultancy about time is an exemplar of the emotional stress Wang and Odell (2002) refer. The ten-minute Connections time each week also provided a safe environment for members to have their current situations and contexts acknowledged.

A lack of contextual knowledge in novices often reflects mentor’s rationales for becoming a mentor. Although this CFG was composed of novice teachers, they were able to provide rich and helpful contextual knowledge to further each other’s thinking. The tuning of Holly’s journalism rubric offers a concrete example of novices using their own experiences as students and teachers to “tune” Holly’s rubric about how to write an effective news story.

Authentic, contextual examples can rarely be classified in such neat and tidy ways. In both of the above examples, the conversation eventually moved into the third category Wang and Odell (2002) pose: conceptual conflict. In Shanna's consultancy, two of the CFG members encouraged Shanna to cease her common practice of circulating during reading or written tasks. They posed that her practice of questioning her students during their reading prohibits her from accomplishing more immediate tasks, such as inputting grades into the computer-based grading program. In Shanna's reflection after the protocol and in further meetings, she was troubled by this notion – it was in conflict with her current conceptions and the strategies she was learning about in her evening class about reading and writing.

Holly's tuning of a journalism rubric quickly moved into powerful dialogue about what classified a meaningful assignment for a middle grades student. In fact, the larger issue focused on the structure and expectations for this elective class. Even after rich discussion and exciting hypothesizing, Holly could not transfer this structure into her "regular education" classes.

Perhaps the strongest example of conceptual conflict centered around Katrina's Kente cloth project. Katrina's focusing question steered the group into difficult territory from the very beginning: What made this assignment so meaningful for some students? For each CFG member, in order to further Katrina's thinking, they also needed to concurrently examine their own perceptions of meaningful teaching and learning: an obvious indicator of a conceptual conflict.

The story of these novice teachers parallel Kagan's (1992) seminal review of learning-to-teach studies. The transcripts document member's experiences with all three of Kagan's findings: acquiring knowledge about students, modifying and reconstructing self based on this knowledge, and building effective routines in regard to classroom management and instruction. Traditional induction programs rely heavily on the third assertion, especially the focus on

classroom management. This work pushes that line of thinking, offering a more complex and less prescriptive view of novice teachers' needs.

A Mentoring Community

Methodologically speaking

A recent training experience helped me think about Jade's melody, her portrait, in a different light. As I listened to Jade's words on audio tape and watched her expressions on video, I became entrenched in a dilemma about how to best represent her contribution to the CFG. I wanted to offer thick description, laced with my ongoing interpretations of the events and the discussion. I would set up a specific quote or interaction, but sometimes simply by providing her direct words, my narrative read like I was biased against her input.

Recently, I was required to attend a two-day training about a school reform initiative. As a trainer myself and a teacher of current and prospective teachers, I experienced difficulty staying focused during the workshop. One hour after the final day, I was describing the experience to a colleague, interestingly enough, in the context of a discussion about this dissertation. As I shared a particularly frustrating point, I lifted my shoulders, arched my back, furrowed my brow, and uttered a tension-filled, "Argh!!" After apologizing profusely for my response, my colleague smiled and raised his eyebrows, as if he enjoyed my spectacle. He likened my response to what Jade may have felt in CFG meetings.

As a self-described extremely confident person, Jade may have felt that these experiences learning from each other were unnecessary. She was required to attend the meetings just like the other novice teachers, but chose to not bring work or a dilemma. When group members shared comforts, risks, or dangers relevant to their teaching, Jade's dangers were often short-term instances that did not require a great deal of reflection and subsequent action to address. In

February, she was concerned about the organization required to schedule and execute a successful visit of Space Bus, a traveling planetarium she arranged for. In April, she was concerned that her students would not behave for the substitute teacher they would be learning with while she was on her honeymoon.

I sometimes found it difficult to facilitate when Jade was present. She had difficulty watching her own air time during discussions, especially when alternative views were offered that did not match hers. Her responses were often focused on her own students, former students, and former experiences, unlike others in the group that showed more skill in assuming alternative contexts in support of the presenters during consultancies and tunings.

Resources are available to help coaches think more deeply about the “Jades” of collaborative learning communities. I did not reach for my print resources, email my virtual colleagues via a listserv, or visit my favorite CFG national facilitator in person. I chose to tough it out. Strangely enough, that was my choice. My paradoxical preference prioritized support as a critical, an essential, component for novice teachers, but not for novice coaches. Just like the novice teachers in this group, I knew I needed assistance, but I chose not to ask.

Maybe I was like Jade. I placed myself in a role where I wanted to be perfect. I desired meaningful, authentic connections – that would be my version of “increased student achievement.” By asking for support, someone may infer that I was not a sage on the stage, but rather a learner in need of a scaffold.

Resonant are words spoken to my preservice teacher education students about claiming a stance as a learner. My profession of “going public” (Hudson-Ross & Graham, 2000) needs to be reconstructed. I feel ashamed as I write, genuinely moved that my coaching decisions, whether conscious or not, impacted the dynamics and dialogue of the group.

This is not a shocking revelation. Teachers' daily decision-making – almost *perpetual* decision-making, effect their classroom communities. What made me think this would be any different than a classroom?

Because it's not a classroom. A foreboding rectangular table in a sterile conference room couldn't possibly meet the definition of a classroom, at least my preconceived notion of one. But it was. That room represented our learning environment, where as learners, not experts, our decisions influenced each other's attitudes, thinking, even actions.

All of my educational jargon, properly placed in the abstract or a training session needed to be thoughtfully implemented. I read about the work. I wrote about the work. I was living the work in other contexts. It was time.

Maybe Jade wanted support but didn't know how to ask. Maybe the support she saw wasn't what she thought she needed. Maybe what she saw was dangerous for her. Perhaps she wasn't ready to de-privatize her practice, to make transparent a part of herself, her teaching persona.

Programmatically Speaking

An implementation issue stemming from my coaching dilemma is how to meaningfully include the Jades of the teaching profession in collaborative learning experiences. Voluntary networks of teachers are not immune from this concern.

As groups collaboratively define what it means to work together and how to learn from each other, school life becomes more transparent, less full of hidden agendas that need to be unpacked. We did not take time to co-create our norms of interactions. This group simply adopted them without any changes although time was offered each meeting for "additions, deletions, or modifications."

I pose that the timing of this CFG affected its impact. This group of novice teachers was not supporting each other in structured and consistent ways at the beginning of the school year. Our work together didn't begin until January – after each teacher had been “pushed in certain ways,” according to William.

Community is often built by sharing meaningful experiences. These teachers began a new occupation without horizontal relationships – interactions with other teachers that were not structurally or culturally placed in positions of power. The beginning of the school year encouraged assimilation into an already regulated culture, using a mentor teacher, not as quality control but to assure compliance. The emotions, dilemmas, and successes of new relationships with colleagues and students were not processed collaboratively with others who were experiencing similar events.

Relationships with mentor teachers are often built on this humanistic premise: one party imparting knowledge to the other, needy party. Administrator's expectations of mentoring and the mentor's own expectations concur (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Gold, 1996; Hawkey, 1997). Even student teachers practice their skills with expectations about mentors (Haggerty, 1995; Wright & Bottery, 1997).

It isn't clear if and how mentors function in the lives of protégés after the initial orientation and paperwork requirements of being a teacher. Some wonder if the connections are ever meaningful (Little, 1990a). Isolated cases exist (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Moir, 2003) of mentors that are released from their teaching duties full-time to support novices and sometimes veteran teachers. However, these programs certainly do not represent the norm of how mentors are supported in schools (Education Commission of the States, 1999).

How does mentoring relate to the portrait of these novice teachers collaborating in a Critical Friends Group? Each teacher was assigned a mentor at the onset of their hire at Greenville Middle School. Instead, this site chose to implement a common mentoring perspective: humanistic mentoring (Wang & Odell, 2002), in which the mentors function as “local guides,” smoothing the entry of novices into the profession by providing materials, policies, and methods to meet the novices’ immediate needs. The fruit of some of those relationships did not overtly enter our shared experiences. Stella, hired in January as a provisionally-certified special education teacher, was assigned the director of special education as her mentor. In a conversation about colleagues and collaboration, Stella and Holly were listening to the other members, teachers of core subjects and members of instructional teams, talk about their notions of collaboration. I asked Stella specifically about how she collaborates as a special education teacher (that Stella defines herself as a resource pull-out teacher, not a self-contained teacher):

But I’ve learned, the director of special ed is my mentor while I’m on a provisional, and I’ve talked to her and learned from veteran special education teachers. There’s a self-contained teacher that walks in my room to check on some of her kids and tells me how to run things. I take it and process it through and see what works for me.

The group responded predictably, especially Jade who wanted to know how Stella was being told to “run things.” Stella noted that most of this teacher’s responses involved strategies to use with specific students. As she closed the topic for us, she reflected, “I guess that my teammates are the other *resource* teachers.” We never heard about her colleague resource teachers or about any instances in which her noted that her decisions had been affected by interactions with them.

The only other reference to mentoring stemmed from a comment made by Holly in the January meeting. After being together for approximately one hour, in triads, members were discussing what they thought of their CFG thus far. Holly anticipated what she thought our time would be about: “just talking to others about my problems with other teachers – getting advice. I was assigned a mentor but that’s not really working out. I see her once a week just to say ‘hello’ kind of thing.”

William never referenced his mentor until the August reflection. The teacher that he student taught with at Greenville Middle School was assigned as his mentor. William’s perspective on that assignment is quite different: “She said, ‘Oh, you’ve got it taken care of.’ That’s why she chose me.” The teacher was “fixin’ to go out on maternity leave,” so William only had a few weeks with this teacher at the beginning of the year. “I really didn’t have one.”

The CFG functioned as a mentoring community for its members – a place to claim questions and a space to safely examine them. Feiman-Nemser (2001) posits “educative mentoring” as a mentoring process where the mentor engages in joint learning (Little, 1990a) with the protégé, qualifying the experience as valuable for both parties.

A passage from *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902/1964) parallels these activities in the context of teacher and student:

The value of the formulated wealth of knowledge that makes up the course of study is that it may enable the educator *to determine the environment of the child*, and thus by indirection to direct ... Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that *their own activities* move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves.
(p. 357, italics original)

The practicing of offering direction via indirection is what sets effective mentors apart. They allow novice teachers to take the journey on their own, all the while, functioning as their guide, *who is also on a journey* toward the “culmination of themselves” (Dewey, 1902/1964, p. 357).

What is lacking in the “exemplary” mentoring relationship Feiman-Nemser (2001) describes is reciprocity about *teaching*. The mentor in Feiman-Nemser’s study used his relationships with novices to build his skills as a mentor: to ask open-ended questions, to provide strategies within a supportive context, to use humor in his interactions. The mentoring relationships in this CFG were directly tied to issues of teaching and learning. Katrina’s decision to present a second time and Holly’s willingness to offer a spontaneous dilemma both indicate a trend toward interdependence (Little, 1990a), which may have been a more prevalent theme if the CFG had met for the entire school year.

The mentoring relationship in Feiman-Nemser’s (2001) work is built on the hierarchy of the mentor-protégé relationship that serves to create a dependent novice teacher. The “formulated wealth of knowledge” Dewey (1902/1964) notes is housed in a solitary vessel – the mentor. Wang and Odell (2002) categorize this perspective of mentoring as a “situated apprentice.” In these relationships, the mentor often models desired behaviors and the protégés demonstrate what the mentor expects. In our CFG, Katrina and Holly did not need a single perspective on their work or dilemma. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the collective gave them the feedback they needed in order to make decisions.

The final perspective Wang and Odell (2002) add to the first two perspectives of humanistic and situated apprentice, is a “critical constructivist” perspective. These cases include a mentor who is a collaborative equal with the novice. Wang and Odell pose that a potential

pitfall of this stance is that all knowledge is inherently problematic and cannot be accepted without inquiry.

I believe that this CFG was a beautiful blend of all three perspectives; the creation of a mentoring community that met the needs of its members during that particular period of time. Some members needed more emotional and technical support at times, in certain areas. Those same members may have benefited from the reciprocal peer observations that placed them as situated apprentices. Finally, those same CFG members may have pushed each other's thinking, problematizing current assessment practices or wondering what constituted a successful experience for a student. These members were "agents of change" (Wang & Odell, 2002) for each other.

These experiences are not ends in themselves. The group convened for a set period of time, examining particular issues. It was not a "treatment," that allows the members to cease the need for further mentoring and learning. In fact, William left the group needing more mentoring – more accountability for implementing what he heard. He claimed that the chaos of his first year was a deterrent for him to meaningfully process and implement what he heard at CFG.

I enjoyed coming. In the midst of things, being a first-year teaching. It was hard for me to take a lot out of it because I had so much going on. My wheels were always turning. I always felt two steps behind. I can't say that I practiced a lot of what we talked about. During the August reflection, William was amazed that he didn't remember more of what we did: "I'm sitting here listening to you all, and some of it is like, yeah, I remember that now. If I had to come in here and write a paper about what I remember from last year, there wouldn't be a whole lot there. I'm just being honest."

William acknowledged his need for mentoring and direction in his first year numerous times. In August, he framed his need again: “I’m not using much of what I did last year. I’m kind of starting over – kind of figuring out what I’m doing. I don’t really know where I stand this year – again.” In the August reflection, he cited assistance with English Language Learners and assessment as areas in which he needed immediate support.

A reader could conclude that William did not see the connection between how CFG could support his classroom work in meaningful ways. However, another possibility is that he saw the potential of how CFG could impact his practice and didn’t want to “mix” them together:

I want to be a part of it. I want to hear it. I don’t have time to mix all of this right now and put it into practice. I don’t know if I could this year until I really get a handle on things. I think it’s a good thing. I really do.

Summary

This group of novice teachers provided a mentoring community for each other, taking risk as license to push each other’s thinking. Conversations across content areas and grade level extended the dialogue, requiring members to claim their assumptions and explain their foundational beliefs. Children’s perspectives pervaded this work, nurturing reflective practitioners that questioned the value and intent of their own assessments.

These weighty conversations, full of conceptual conflict (Want & Odell, 2002) were indicative of each meeting, not what Kagan (1992) and Fuller (1969) report as common concerns among novice teachers. The structure of the work deepened the experiences as members presented authentic work and dilemmas to their colleagues, risking and trusting that the structure would safely provide them constructive feedback.

CHAPTER 17

CODA

In symphonic music, a coda represents a “tail” or a “tag” that could seem optional. To treat this coda as an addendum would be a mistake for it represents the “so what” of the work. Chapter 16 offered conclusions that emerged from the data and the experiences of the participants. This writing is about me: the CFG coach, the researcher, the portraitist, the learner.

I still believe in the power of CFGs, perhaps now more than ever. I still provide a dissonant voice in conversations in which some assume that novices’ experiences equate deficiency. I still engage in my own collaborative learning experiences. So what has changed as a result of this work?

The complex contexts of schools provide impetus for a renewed dedication to the work but also offer experiential knowledge in developing future experiences for novice teachers. As I dream about a larger-scale implementation of the work, I continue to question the exclusivity of CFG membership as only for novice teachers. Polly questioned this before we convened the first meeting, “Shouldn’t we have some veterans in here? What could we learn from each other?” Almost one year later, a majority of members did not recommend adding veteran teachers to the group.

However, veterans are prime candidates for becoming either members of CFGs or coaches themselves. Wang and Odell’s (2003) categories of mentors (local guides, educational companions, and agents of change) and review of mentor preparation indicate that current conceptions and mentor training often do not impact novices in meaningful ways, especially in

ways that directly impact instruction and student learning. Although I knew my preparation for meetings would focus primarily on processes, it was still surprising how often I felt guilty not preparing something else for them, like a PowerPoint presentation or the all-too-familiar “handout.” The prevailing notion in many school districts of trying to remedy deficient learners still ran through my mind, despite my documented and aggressive steps to change that line of thinking.

That kind of preparation wasn’t needed, for the organic dilemmas and issues of classroom practice created a far-richer curriculum. The motivation to invest in the work was inherent (Dunne et al., 2000, Nave, 2000b), unlike the first-semester induction programming.

Building administrative support in a climate where administrators claim little time to observe their own teachers, much less dedicate time to their own learning, is necessary (Dunne et al., 2000). I believe that unless administrators have engaged in meaningful collaborative learning experiences, they will be less apt to provide time, structures, and support to their faculty.

Mentoring literature has begun to acknowledge the power of mentoring for both parties (Feiman-Nemser, et al., 1999; Moir, 2003), not relegating the relationship to an experienced veteran and a protégé. I certainly am a prime example of this phenomenon. As a CFG coach and fellow learner, I have written several hundred pages about my learnings, dedicating some sections to how my thinking has changed: about teaching, about coaching, about research, about learning.

As the group functioned as a mentoring community for each other, I served as an agent of change (Wang & Odell, 2002), building a network of colleagues that collaborated, sharing common inquiries, and breaking down the isolation that existed between these middle grades teachers.

However, the most powerful moments of this work have been in reflecting on how this experience was an uncommon journey for its members. This second-semester induction support represented a series of “nots:” not one-shot staff development, not predetermined foci, not presented in isolation from principles of adult learning, not without risk.

Risk resulted in powerful moments of learning from each other and each other’s work. Risk supported a small learning community who acknowledged successes and challenges. Risk precipitated authentic issues that genuinely concerned members. Risk kept them coming back for more.

Common practice in schools attempts to shield novices from risk, protecting them from what others determine the novices do not know. Practical applications of this assumption may come to fruition in the humanistic mentoring perspectives (Wang & Odell, 2002) many mentors exhibit. These mentors help novices learn to survive, not necessarily learn how to teach or continue learning how to learn. Schools may also be protecting them from something far more important: meaningful learning experiences.

And that is what this work offers educational literature: a rare, uncommon portrait of a novice teacher learning community, authentically examining issues of practice, learning from each other, and taking each other’s experiences seriously. These experiences speak of the power of mentoring communities, a lovely blend of three mentoring perspectives (Wang & Odell, 2002) that respect novices’ experiences and meet their current needs.

Limitations

In my continuing effort to make the research visible, I must synthesize the limitations that you, as a reader, may have noted in the work. This decision to be vulnerable is certainly not surprising for a portraitist. It also is not surprising for me to once again open the work to scrutiny

for that decision was made long ago as I constructed my interpretation of how I engage in educational research.

This study took place during the second semester of a school year. My story of the struggles to gain access to a site chronicles why this is not a study that spans an entire year. However, that fact does not preclude this work from being viewed as a piece of a whole – a whole experience of novice teachers entering a profession that claims to induct them in meaningful ways. I acknowledge the limited length of the engagement, even hypothesizing how the group dynamics could have changed if this structure had been a meaningful component of their first semester induction program.

In my teaching experiences with preservice teacher education candidates, I found that with supported risk, students were able to engage with work in deep and personal ways. My decision to consciously make myself vulnerable developed over the course of three semesters packed with consistent, collaborative learning experiences. This dissertation differs from those teaching experiences, as it does not chronicle the power of a learning community over time.

As an external coach, I was not a thread in the fabric of this school community. Although I did not ask for the translation, Jade volunteered to keep me abreast of school events and situations. Before data collection began, my colleagues helped me define my role at the school. For example, instead of using my somewhat flexible schedule as a graduate student to substitute for CFG members as they engaged in peer observation, it became clear that this portrait needed to be grounded in the daily life of school, without extensive interventions. Although qualitative research is not conceptualized for replication, portraitists strive for transferability. This structure for teacher induction certainly can be transferred to a variety of settings and can provide a basis for comparability with studies conducted in other contexts.

It is unknown what the conversations would have looked like if I had been a practicing teacher in a P-12 school. When I referenced students in our conversations, I vacillated between my former elementary school students and my current university preservice teacher candidates. This was a conscious decision, for I sensed early in the work that some members only transferred experiences that were grounded in middle grades classrooms. I wanted to push our thinking how we could learn from a variety of situations and educators.

Links to Preservice Teacher Education

Theory into practice – certainly not as easy as it sounds, even as a journal title. I began this portrait thinking the narratives would build meaningful connections between university teacher education programs and the first year of teaching. I was hoping to provide answers. Now I believe that this work was worthwhile because I left with more informed questions. These questions remind me of a story about J.S. Bach's family. As each member in the family was a keyboard player and an accomplished musician, young Johann would anger his family members by masterfully performing compositions until the penultimate note, where he would stop before playing the final chord. He would then retire to his bedroom, only to watch to see which family member could not handle the lack of harmonic closure – running to the clavichord to produce the desired resolution.

Bach's experiences were more than just about performing. He was developing knowledge about harmonic structures and broader understandings of musical composition. Institutions of higher education need to encourage a broader vision of teacher induction as not a subtle seduction into buildings or districts that already have the answers, but an intentional induction into a profession that collectively struggles to live the questions. This study may serve to help institutions begin to encourage this broader scope and shared vision.

Partnering with school districts in meaningful ways to develop shared responsibility for teacher support is necessary to open opportunities for discussions about how to plan and implement significant induction support. P-16 conversations are critical to share current understandings about teacher education and how student impact is measured in P-12 schools. Only through these important partnerships can teacher education curriculum be reconceptualized to develop highly qualified teachers that can meet the needs of students with diverse backgrounds.

These partnerships can also provide something perhaps even more important – understanding of how structures that build on each other’s understandings can be continued from teacher education programs into the daily life of P-12 schools. When mentor teachers engage in collaborative learning experiences, their preservice teacher education candidates join them, beginning to build links from their program to their current and potential pupils.

In this scenario, induction programs do not rest the future of the profession on the shoulders of the newest, and sometimes the youngest, additions. “Teaching against the grain” (Cochran-Smith, 1991) can represent a shared goal of experienced mentor teachers and novice teachers that collectively re-think and re-consider choices about teaching and learning. Their work as continuous learners can “reculture” (Fullan, 2000) their schools.

This study also indicates that preservice teacher education programs may need to realign their focus to help their graduates make sense of high-stakes accountability systems. With the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), mandatory promotion and retention guidelines, and end-of-course testing in high schools, more school districts will develop systems and adopt reforms that do not look like the models present in many teacher education classrooms. By engaging in collaborative

experiences with mentors and practitioners, preservice teacher candidates can begin to develop links between university rhetoric and school-based realities.

Concurrent with accountability systems, confusion about assessment concerns both novices and veterans. Teacher education programs that embrace this reality and organize their coursework “backward:” that is, starting with assessment and ending with measurable objectives will assist novices in making sense of what their mentors may present as reality.

This study also indicates that the administrator in a building provides a vital link in collaborative learning. Institutions of higher education need to provide aspiring and current administrators meaningful, collaborative learning experiences. This principal became aware of Critical Friends Groups as a result of his own teachers “covertly” learning from each other for several years before he attended a Coaches’ Institute.

Finally, this work places risk at the center of learning, the impulse that brought novices together to tackle issues of teaching and learning. This risk, tangibly demonstrated by those members who brought teacher and student work to the group, resulted in the conceptual conflict (Wang & Odell, 2002) evident in rich conversations. Where does risk fit into an agenda for teacher education? How do teacher educators equalize risk in their university classrooms? I continue to wonder about this phenomenon within the community of preservice teacher education candidates.

For educational practitioners and researchers, this study is ripe for picking questions: about teacher education, about teacher induction, about Critical Friends Groups, and about teacher development.

Teacher education

1. Even though preservice teacher education students are graduating more frequently from programs focused on issues like inquiry, social justice, and constructivist teaching practices, does this mean that standards-based reform counter those emphases and lead to a new generation of teachers that want programmed scopes and sequences?
2. How does the presence of high-stakes accountability systems in a school district impact novices' current understandings about students, teaching, and assessment?

Teacher induction

1. What does it mean to learn to teach within the context of teaching?
2. What is life like for novice teachers in buildings in which they are taken seriously?
3. What do induction programs look like where mentors are not reified as sages?
4. What would the classrooms of novice teachers be like whose mentors experienced training that uses principles of collaborative work?
5. What does induction practice look like when not only is the practice made public but they document their work in a public way?
6. What cross-program comparisons are available through which we can establish a strong theoretical model for teacher induction (Serpell, 2000)?

Critical Friends Groups

1. How can CFGs work in tandem with collective mentoring by experienced others?
2. How do CFG members view feedback within the group compared to feedback in traditional supervisory experiences?
3. How can CFGs be a path of influence for novice teachers?
4. What are grounded theories that emerge from a year-long CFG of novice teachers?

5. How do CFG coaches offer a vehicle for distributed leadership?
6. How are teachers who are not part of CFGs impacted by the presence of one at a school?
7. What are the differences between novices who were involved in cognitive coaching relationships and those who were members of CFGs?

Teacher development

1. Do heterogeneous groupings of teachers (e.g., all novices) perpetuate separate subcultures?
2. How are teachers provided solace from the chaos and unsettling nature of student-centered work?
3. What does it take to develop accountability within a group that promotes teacher development?

A few questions exist that I continue to mine the data in search of better understandings. I hope to understand better how my facilitation influenced our interactions within this novice teacher learning community. As I work to help develop better facilitators within a school district, I must understand my own facilitation in more definitive ways. I also think a story lies in novice teachers' understandings about content (Huling-Austin, 1992). Perhaps further work with this group at a later time can offer more clarity about their understandings.

Implications for Marion County Schools

The rest of this chapter is formatted into a letter detailing the implications of this research for Marion County Schools.

The University of Georgia

Athens, Georgia

20 November 2003

Marion County Schools

Marion, USA

To the Director of Professional Learning and Other Interested Parties:

As your school district participated as a silent partner in this recently-completed research, it is appropriate and even urgent that your system and schools hear one researcher's perspective about what it means for a novice teacher to begin work in your county.

My research centered on the premise that novice teachers can and do support each other during their induction years into the profession. I coached a Critical Friends Group of six novice teachers during the second semester of the 2002-2003 school year. We met monthly, examining issues that grew from their classroom experiences.

Although Marion County pays novice teachers to begin the school year earlier than experienced teachers for the purpose of orientation, the content of those experiences is rooted in *orientation to a job* as opposed to *induction into a profession*. Novices that sit in district-wide meetings during the first days of their employment may not feel as if their previous experiences are valued. In contrast, the findings of our research indicate that Critical Friends Groups provide a setting in which to value members' experiences and license them to slow down their thinking in order to make sense of what the experiences may mean, for them and their students. Using

these experiences to craft an induction program honors novices' prior work as well as their current wonderings.

. This study indicates that teachers need a forum to make sense of accountability measures, school reform initiatives, and relationships with colleagues. That work did not naturally occur at this school. An induction program is needed that uses structures to encourage and model ownership of classroom decision-making. Although listening to advice about specific teaching strategies meets some novices' needs, this practice does not promote personal and collective accountability in novices. The findings of this study of a Critical Friends Group indicate that the novice teachers have participated in deep reflection, and have engaged in conversations that caused "conceptual conflict" (Wang & Odell, 2002) between their preferred ideas of teaching and realities. They feel ownership of the ideas developed and are committed to implementing what they have learned.

Teachers need to be part of an accountability system that honors their inquiries. This group spent considerable time wondering about assessment. These conversations led members to question the original activities level of meaningfulness or purpose. It is unique that these novice teachers did not dwell on issues of classroom management, as much of the research on beginning teachers indicates. Research on classroom management was the main focus of the first semester induction program at this site. The experiences in these meetings did not appear to affect the novices in meaningful ways; in fact, they could not articulate any changes made in their classroom practice as a result of these particular learnings.

There is growing evidence that professional development plans need to provide regular and ongoing opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn from each other. A quality induction program can only survive if it is part of a coherent professional development plan that

builds on local expertise in order to build teaching as a complex endeavor. Early conversations with these novice teachers reflect growing understandings about the complexity of teaching. Through the samples of teacher work and student work that members brought to the group, we began to wonder more deeply about content: who constructs and reconstructs it, what constitutes it, and where is it present in learning experiences. The very essence of content confounded the novices in this study, driving them into risky areas where some members explored their perspectives and others retreated. The issue of content was often relevant because our group was heterogeneous in terms of content area and classification of children served. The depth of the conversations troubles current mentoring literature that advocates mentoring relationships within content area or grade level.

Some educators may claim that present structures, such as content area departments in high schools, instructional teams in middle schools, and grade level teams in elementary schools presently serve as structures to support teachers in their work. I would agree. However, the results of this study support the conclusions of Johnson and Birkeland (2003) that teachers need various structures to support their decision-making. For example, assigning common planning time for the middle school instructional teams in this study did not automatically create meaningful collaboration that is so vital for successful schools. In schools where collaboration is scheduled and required, professional development must include conversations about what constitutes productive and professional interactions.

Since productive interactions do not organically develop as part of school life in many educational cultures, it makes sense to consider mandatory participation in Critical Friends Groups for induction support. One of the participants in this work claimed that he wanted and needed these experiences but still protested that he was too busy to internalize and implement

what he learned. However, the alternative seems more problematic: novices individually making sense of their experiences. Although all teachers constantly learn and develop their growing understandings about instruction, cognition, and curriculum, it makes sense for novices, in particular, to be accountable to others, within supportive learning communities, in order to articulate their current understandings.

Participants in our research had release time from their classrooms, which enabled them to reflect on their students learning and their own teaching and learning. Each member indicated a desire to reflect more but felt that the school days were structured in ways that prohibited that reflection. However, the four-hour monthly meetings were not viewed uniformly by the CFG members as the best structure to support their learning as new teachers. I pose that instead of one four-hour meeting per month, two meetings of two hours each may have provided more continuity for the group. One member suggested that a two-hour meeting once a month would have sufficed. Just as providing common planning time does not guarantee meaningful collaboration, a longer meeting certainly does not mean that more focused work will be completed. However, a longer segment of time, skillfully facilitated, creates opportunities to access the thought processes that are often subconscious acts of teaching. The moments that had the greatest impact on some of the CFG members were those in which we took the necessary time to consider issues with focus and depth. None of these moments would have been possible without the support of an administrator who believed in the power of focused conversations, and who provided teachers time away from students to center their thoughts and wonderings.

A primary outcome of teacher induction programs is the expectation of increased teacher retention. In the politically charged landscape of education in the 21st century, retention of novice teachers is not sufficient. The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) demands a more rigorous view

of evaluating teaching, one that is analogous to the concern for adequate yearly progress of *all* students. Solely focusing on teacher retention will not directly impact this federal requirement. Focusing on teacher quality will generate a larger impact, in students and teachers. When professional development opportunities, of which teacher induction *should* be included, reflect a dedication to rigor and purpose, teachers are likely to reciprocate the dedication, agreeing to engage in meaningful ways.

Educational leaders need a shared understanding of what effective induction programs look like and what the effects of these programs may mean. If your school district could implement an induction program in which new teachers are taken seriously, where they are respected as knowledgeable educators, your program will be unique, indeed. That could serve as the ultimate recruitment tool for a county that hires over 1,000 teachers each year. According to these novices, they need more than an assigned mentor to support them in their first year of full-time teaching. We found that a Critical Friends Group can provide a mentoring community that supports new teachers in working through their most pressing concerns in deeply reflective ways.

I hope you will consider developing a cadre of CFG coaches who specialize in coaching groups of novice teachers. Their intentional and focused work will benefit both the coaches and the novice teachers; perhaps in ways similar to the experience of our CFG. Wang and Odell (2002) identify three perspectives that do not adequately meet the needs of novices (humanistic, situated apprentice, critical constructivist): this work indicates that CFG coaching may be a splendid mix of all three. When teachers intentionally place themselves as learners first, their students, in turn, will benefit. Your county would be unique if the induction program assumptions extended beyond emotional support into the kinds of conversations that force novices to examine conceptual conflicts.

Finally, I suggest that Marion County build relationships with institutions of higher education so teacher induction can become a shared responsibility. When the Board of Regents (2001) directed universities and colleges to guarantee the quality of their teacher education graduates, they did not factor the quality of teacher induction programs. The Professional Standards Commission has yet to install standards for teacher induction programs in the state of Georgia. With large numbers of new teachers, Marion could be a state leader in crafting an induction program that meaningfully connects teacher education programs and school-based work.

As more Marion County schools develop plans to implement Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) at their specific sites, it is important to detail the effect of this initiative on all programs, in this case, teacher induction programs. I pose that CFGs can be of great value in implementing CQI.

The strategies of Critical Friends Groups, have the potential to be applied in the service of CQI in ways that support learning and risk taking on the part of teachers. Members of CFGs are driven toward continuity – of thinking, listening, and speaking. CFGs yearn for quality work – work that represents thoughtful implementation and planning. Finally, CFGs trouble the status quo for stalemate does not represent improvement. All teachers (and students and administrators) can learn, do learn, and continue to learn.

Thank you for allowing me to work with teachers in your county in this effort, and for enabling the teachers to have release time for their participation. I commend you for your efforts to create high quality learning experiences for students. I hope that you will consider the great potential of Critical Friends Groups in creating powerful learning experiences for your teachers, all of your teachers.

Sincerely,

Thomas Van Soelen

CHAPTER 18

A POSTSCRIPT FOR POLLY

Polly's name was never uttered in any of the transcripts of the remaining CFG meetings. She was not mentioned in the anecdotal conversations before the meetings began or the spontaneous dialogue over Chex Mix during break. She just seemed to disappear from our collective memories and experiences.

There is no way to predict what other needs Polly may have experienced during the second semester of her first year of teaching. Many induction or mentoring programs may use research on the needs of beginning teachers in order to pre-select topics that others have deemed relevant. Other programs may focus on the social connectedness that some mentoring systems rely on in order to elicit participation. Refreshments, colored flyers, and relaxing music may mark these meetings. Time here may be spent taking a break from the classrooms; getting physically refreshed and emotionally revitalized before returning to the daily life, perhaps thought of as the "daily grind," of their classrooms.

The agendas for CFG meetings may have changed to accommodate specific needs and desires indicated by Polly. Agendas were certainly shaped for Holly, Katrina, and Shanna who all brought work and issues to the group. Prepared agendas were altered on the spot for Katrina when she brought Kente cloths to the April meeting and for Holly when the group spontaneously provided a Consultancy for her organizational issue about portfolios in May.

We only know what Polly said she needed and what the group provided for each other. Where they connect is part of the story – the story of a learning community of novice teachers that had a member named Polly for a very short while.

This letter serves as a final connection between myself and Polly. These words are also important for all novice teachers as they create supportive structures needed to continue their work.

Dear Polly:

It has been a long time since we talked. Did I tell you that I got a job? I appreciated your kind words the first time we met. This county ended up not having a position for me, so I'm back where I started. It was probably the plan anyway.

I hope things are going well with your husband's deployment. With the state of the world I have thought of your family often. I trust your children are coping well with the situation. There were family health concerns last time I heard. Perhaps the time you now have will be the key to staying on top of all these familial issues.

You are a part of our story – a “hook” in our memory banks. At our January meeting, your passionate words about the district assessments made me excited that you were a member of the CFG. However, my favorite line was not about teaching at all: you said that the camera still freaked you out.

As part of our story, I wanted to let you know what kinds of things were important in our journey – an uncommon journey, I believe. This set of events and experiences were not indicative of many novice teachers, in fact, none that I know of except your colleagues. CFG is not a common way for novices to make sense of teaching and learning. It isn't even

commonplace for veterans – yet, I hope. The power of smaller learning communities seems evident in our experience.

Yes, *we* even had power. Although we represented an often disenfranchised group of “newbies,” as Jade would say,, our power grew from shared experiences that became common: clarifying questions to help set individual’s unique contexts, problematizing the norm – the accepted way of doing things at Greenville Middle School, and honoring individual’s questions and inquiries.

We didn’t always seem very powerful. Holly felt inadequate in helping Shanna think about a constant dilemma with time management. Were you feeling that squeeze of being productive at school, too? I remember how you felt swamped by paperwork. Shanna used our thoughts and wonderings to make substantive changes in her daily routine that allowed her to accomplish her goals. William had strong colleagues on his team, but that power was not productive for him. His teammates had difficulty engaging in valuable conversations about teaching and learning. He needed to have those conversations with us instead.

We wondered how the DDEP goals fit into our developing sense of meaningful work. Your words from the first meeting about your eighth grade writing samples stayed in my head for some time. What seemed so important from that conversation was your budding relationship with your colleagues. You used the word “disillusioned” in reference to that relationship and teaching in general. I hope that began to change over the second semester. William was often troubled by his interactions or lack of interactions with his teammates. At the end of our time together it appeared that he had a plan.

It seemed that William’s conversations with his team focused on problems: problem students, problem schedules, problems with district and local assessments. Our CFG opened up a

forum for successes. For us, the success stories served as a starting place to develop a shared understanding of what constituted success – for us and for our students. I hope that you were able to share your successes. If not, I hope you still can.

One of the characteristics of success we noted was empowerment of students. You talked about that the first time we met together. Do you remember your preposition lessons about squirrels and logs? I have often thought about how that frustration would have made a great dilemma for us to tackle together. Katrina helped us think about meaningful work when she brought some of her students' projects. She noticed that some of her students surprised her – the ones that she had categorized as “low” really tried. More importantly, their attempts were better than some of her students labeled as gifted. What Katrina needed to know was why.

Do you remember talking about your frustrations with the scope and sequence? Our group didn't agree on what CQI meant for them or for their students. Katrina was handed a pacing guide for the first quarter just like you. We wondered together what it meant for novice teachers to be handed such a document.

William once said that he was “pushed a certain way” in his first year. I think everyone agreed, some more tacitly than others. I often did the pushing which was my role as a coach. However, we seemed to take turns instigating the jostle. Holly pushed our thinking about the use of portfolios in language arts (Chapter 14). William's confessions about his interactions with his colleagues forced us to examine our own communication patterns (Chapter 10). Katrina's risk in using alternative assessment made us question our own purposes (Chapter 9). Even Shanna recovered from her Consultancy experience, refusing to abandon her set of strategies, demonstrated in the dialogue surrounding Stella's success story (Chapter 8).

I'm thinking that this group helped push us toward teacher development. We pushed each other, some days more than others, but consistently nudged each other to re-think our practices and our decisions. Maybe you felt pushed this year, too, but didn't have a place to process these changes. I hope that if you go back to teaching you can use that questioning frame you demonstrated in January to guide your own learning.

Do you remember what you said to me at the first meeting about student work? It was quite a challenge – something to the effect: “You’re going to have to show me that student work is the best issue to address when we are so overwhelmed with classroom management, administrative tasks, dealing with students from a spectrum ranging from illiterate to well-adjusted doing very, very well.” Your colleagues showed each other that student work is the focus because students are the focus of the work: they clearly were why they stayed in teaching. The school reform structure, paperwork requirements, colleague disputes, and glut of meetings certainly were not positive factors in their retention status! By honoring their primary focus with reserved time that allowed them to slow down and reflect on that focus, our CFG provided authentic inquiry.

Shanna’s perspectives about teaching, students, and learning indicate such a desire to participate in a place where she can make sense of the wealth of craft knowledge she processes each day. Her words at the end of Katrina’s Kente cloth Consultancy told the tale of her experience: “It makes us feel more comfortable that there are four other people in this room that wouldn’t mind doing that, who’s saying that writing that grade in there isn’t as important as I thought.”

I hope that you can be one of those people, too – an educator who continues to wonder: enjoying it, articulating it, and sharing it. In a learning community of your peers, you can take

the risks necessary for growth, in a supportive environment full of colleagues dedicated to your success. Your questions will become their questions; your inquiry, their inquiry. Decisions you make will be based on experiences other than your own. The isolation you felt in teaching would not be the norm; instead, it would be an anomaly. Your passion for teaching and learning will permeate your work. When you're with reflective colleagues, you'll be at your best!

When the group re-convened in August to talk about our experiences, William's words reverberated in my head just like yours did when we met in January. He detailed his needs in a similar way –talking about his experiences, thinking out loud, and citing areas of growth. This group is more timely for him now than it ever was.

This is something I noticed that I thought you may find interesting. In early correspondence with Dr. Davenport, I would use “novice teacher CFG” as a subject line in the email message or in the text. After the first meeting, I never used that descriptor again. It was not a conscious choice; it just seemed to be an unnecessary codicil to a group learning about teaching and learning. And that's what we did.

Sincerely,

Thomas

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APPENDIX A

The Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools

10 Common Principles

1. The school should focus on helping young people develop the habit of using their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be comprehensive if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose. Schools should be learner centered, addressing students' social and emotional development, as well as their academic progress.
2. The school's academic goal should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate. Curricular decisions should be guided by student interest, developmentally appropriate practice, and the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement. Students of all ages should have many opportunities to discover and construct meaning from their own experiences.
3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. Teachers who know their students well can individualize instruction, without limiting their expectations of any students. Strong habits of mind are necessary for all.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching and guiding, to enable students to understand how they learn and thus to teach themselves and each other as members of a community of learners.
6. Teaching and learning should be documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the learner to completion of specific projects, should be used to better understand the learner's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students should have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. The final diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation-an "Exhibition." As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.
7. Families should be vital members of the school community. Close collaboration between home and school yields respect and understanding. Correspondingly, the tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you and I expect much of you") of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance).
8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline).

Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional schools.

10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strengths of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity.

APPENDIX B

NSRF Theory and Constructs

The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is a professional development initiative, begun in the fall of 1995, that is focused on developing collegial relationships, encouraging reflective practice, and re-thinking leadership in restructuring schools—all in support of increased student achievement.

The National School Reform Faculty program

- Is rooted in local goals and integrated into the life of particular schools.
- Provides a structure for school people to work together as “critical friends” who look closely at one another’s practice and help improve it.
- Trains a coach, chosen by the participants, to help participants learn to work together most effectively.
- Offers additional learning opportunities for coaches and group members.
- Begins with work on individual practice, then builds toward an understanding of whole school culture and organization.
- Works with national school reform networks whose members use NSRF to accelerate their whole school change efforts.

A Critical Friends Group (CFG) consists of teachers and administrators who commit themselves to working together on a long-term basis toward better student learning. They set up at least one two-three hour meeting each month, preferably during the school day, at which they establish and publicly state learning goals for students, help each other think about more productive

teaching practices, examine curriculum and student work, and identify school culture issues that affect student achievement.

Group members also observe one another at work at least monthly and offer feedback to each other in challenging but non-threatening ways.

I. Theory

Teachers in a school apply for NSRF membership, volunteering to create a “Critical Friends Group” (CFG) that will meet together a minimum of two hours a month to discuss issues of teaching and learning. These meetings are expected to lead to new professional knowledge on the part of the teachers, knowledge derived from two sources, one internal to the group and the other external to the group. Teachers will construct new knowledge as a result of close examination of work: student work, their own work (e.g., lesson plans or exams), and their teaching. Teachers will appropriate new knowledge from outside the group as a result, for example, of CFG discussions of readings (e.g., research articles), or attendance at NSRF meetings, or at summer institutes with CFGs from other schools.

NSRF teachers agree to use CFG conversations to do at least the following:

- Set learning goals for their students.
- Set standards for high-level student performance on those goals.
- Set standards for their own teaching.
- Use close examination of student work as the basis for evidence of student learning (and therefore of their teaching efficacy).

- Examine closely samples of their own work for the purpose of determining how well their strategies address their student learning goals.
- Design personal portfolios that demonstrate their own learning.
- Set standards for evidence of learning in their own professional portfolios.

In addition, CFG teachers agree to form peer-coaching dyads. These peer-coaching pairs agree to observe formally each other's teaching at least once a month. Each observation includes a pre-conference and a post-conference for detailed discussion of the lesson observed. (The school's principal and the district's superintendent agreed in the original application for NSRF membership to provide the resources to support these observations—namely time and substitute teachers.) The CFG requirement for teachers to engage in peer observations and coaching is designed explicitly to overcome the pervasive “norm of privacy” so typical of American classrooms.

NSRF subscribes to the view that because students continue to change, in some places more dramatically than in other locales, teachers need to adapt their teaching practice to meet the needs of their students. McLaughlin and Talbert's research has found that students seem to achieve better in classrooms where the teachers attempt to adapt their practice to fit their students' needs, while still holding high expectations for student learning. An alternative strategy some teachers adopt is to lower their standards and expectations for students rather than to change their practice—that strategy, not surprisingly,

does not seem to result in high student achievement.

The NSRF developers train a coach (most commonly a fellow CFG teacher) for each CFG. The coaches learn facilitation skills to support trust-building, team-building, and to support conversations typically difficult for teachers to engage in: for example, conversations about race/class/gender, or conversations to explore standards for student work and for their own work. Coaches learn how to use various communication protocols, such as the “tuning protocol,” the “charrette,” or the “Consultancy,” as a framework for giving and receiving feedback.

Coaches learn how to provide connections for the CFG members to resources and knowledge from the larger community of education research and practice. For example, the coach may plan CFG meeting to examine the standards of good teaching practice as defined by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Coaches learn ways to support their CFG teachers as they begin their peer-observation/peer-coaching work. This is important because conversations which include giving direct, honest feedback about the teaching practice of their colleagues will be, perhaps, the most difficult conversation for these teachers to engage in.

Finally, the NSRF trainers introduce coaches to the ideas surrounding the portfolios that CFG teachers will produce to document their professional growth. These individual teacher portfolios serve at least two purposes. First, they require teachers to focus on evidence of improvement and

growth, an activity that supports reflection on their practice. Second, because the portfolios will be presented to a panel of CFG peers, from other schools as well as one's own school, they become a process that supports lateral accountability.

Close examination of work and focused discussion of that work during CFG meetings may take several forms. For example, teachers may share a lesson plan or a unit test for comment and feedback from colleagues. Or they may examine student work, for example a writing assignment or a quiz, so they can develop an understanding of what they may take as evidence of their students' learning. This examination of student work may also be used to explore what constitutes evidence that students have met the learning performance standards set for them. The NSRF developers believe that this CFG work will create a strong collegial community which will support its members as they reflection their work, both individually and collectively. This reflection is expected to result in the creation of new professional knowledge (knowledge new to the group, individually and collectively) about teaching and learning.

As this new knowledge is being created, NSRF expects that teachers will attempt to apply it by modifying their practice to bring it into line with their emerging new theories of teaching and learning. Teachers will then have at least two sources of evidence for changes in their practice. First, they may learn to do practitioner research in their CRG, an exercise that will also enhance their ability to be reflective about their practice. In addition, the peer observations will provide feedback on their teaching practice, and the examination of student

work will provide evidence about student learning in response to their teaching. This peer feedback on their teaching and close examination of student work with their "critical friends" is expected to lead to cognitive dissonance as teachers begin to see that what they thought they were doing in the classroom may not really be happening. The result is expected to be a more focused and more reflective attempt at improving their practice. The NSRF developers believe that this recursive cycle will lead to continuous improvement in CFG teachers' practice. His feedback loop is the component that was missing in Mrs. O's attempts to bring her practice into line with the NCTM standards; see Cohen, 1990.

The NSRF developers derived their theory of the CFG process as described above largely from the work of two research centers. The first is the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching (McLaughlin and Talbert, Stanford University). The other is the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Newmann and Associates, University of Wisconsin, Madison).

II. Constructs

A number of constructs can be derived from the NSRF theory outlined above. These include three overarching constructs: collegial professional community, reflective practice, and adaptive teaching.

NSRF defines a collegial professional community as one in which broad teacher collaboration is evident as teachers share among themselves the responsibility for improved practice and improved student achievement. They

demonstrate this by using their CFG time to develop goals and standards for themselves and their students, and by providing feedback to each other on their work and practice and on the work of their students. Their evolving knowledge and beliefs about good practice is informed by connections to the larger community of education research, standards, and practice.

A result of collegial community is reflective practice. NSRF recognizes two interlocking aspects of reflective practice. First, CFG teachers demonstrate individual reflective practice as they talk about what they do and why they do it. Second, the CFG demonstrates collegial reflective practice as teachers examine work together and discuss its implications for their practice. They are able to base their “why” on evidence, research, theory, and not only on feeling, opinion, or preference. Thus, reflection is both individual and collective, and is ongoing, not merely a one-time “aha” that sets a teacher’s practice for life. The teachers keep asking each other why they do what they do or why they think about things the way they do until they are satisfied (for the moment) with their answers. Individual reflective practice is therefore both informed by and supported by the collegial reflective practice of the CFG.

NSRF describes adaptive teaching as having several components. First, the central focus of teachers is on their students. Teachers learn what their students know and can do, how they learn, and what motivates them. Because teachers know their students well, they design their teaching around the needs of their students, while at the same time holding high expectations for their students’ learning and holding their students to those

standards. Put differently, teachers realize that students in the 90s are not the same as students in the 70s, and therefore adjust their teaching to begin where the students are, and then structure their teaching to bring students from there to high levels of learning.

NSRF breaks down adaptive teaching practice into four additional constructs. The first construct, press for achievement, includes teachers’ high expectations for student achievement. Learning goals set for students are nontrivial, and coherence exists among the components of individual lessons, and between individual lessons and the larger units of study of which they are a part. The classroom culture created and nurtured by the teacher supports the press for achievement by creating an environment that supports student learning, and that engages and motivates students in sustaining their own learning. As a result of the press for achievement and the supportive classroom culture, student engagement in learning is high, both in the individual lessons and in their commitment to work in larger contexts, such as homework and project.

APPENDIX C

Meeting Agendas

Agenda for the January meeting

1. Introducing norms
Norms are agreed-upon ground rules for interactions.
2. Microlab conversation protocol
Our version of this protocol asked participants to speak for two minutes on each prompt. Participants who were not speaking listened and did not interrupt.
 - a. What are you proud of?
 - b. What are you excited about?
 - c. What do you think about CFGs so far?
3. Introduce bullseyes
Bullseyes are three concentric circles: comfort as the largest circle, risk as the middle ring, and danger in the middle. During each CFG meeting, participants would record experiences and current wonderings on their bullseyes.
4. Text-based discussion about the *The Seductive Allure of Data* (Popham, 2003)
A text-based discussion seeks to honor everyone's voices and engage in a focused conversation.
5. Consent forms
6. discussion about meeting location

Agenda for the February meeting

1. Connections
Connections was a 10-minute experience in which participants could speak about what was currently on their mind or "in the way" of them connecting with what was going to happen during the meeting. Others did not respond to the speaker; it represented a safe place.
2. Norms review
3. Chinese fortune cookies related to educational practice
Each fortune was opened and participants related the fortune to their current understandings about teaching and children.
4. William's Success Analysis
Each member engaged in a Success Analysis over the course of three meetings. This 45-minute experience involved a protocol in which the presenter offered a description of the context surrounding the success. Members could ask clarifying questions, which are queries that prompt a quick, short response from the presenter. These questions are for the listeners to get a better picture of the success. The bulk of the analysis occurs as the presenter sits out of the discussion, taking notes on current thoughts and wonderings. The final piece requires the presenter to re-engage with the group, presenting current conceptions about the success.
5. Break
6. Shanna's Consultancy about time management
A Consultancy is another protocol used in Critical Friends Groups. This experience has similar characteristics to a success analysis: context, clarifying questions, discussion, and reflection by the presenter. A consultancy is a focused conversation about a particular dilemma that a member is experiencing. Thus, a vital component of this experience is a section called Probing Questions. After the clarifying questions, probing questions are

asked of the presenter that are *for the presenter*, not for the asker. These questions encourage the presenter to perform analysis while tending to the question.

7. Kim's Consultancy about slave diaries
8. Bullseyes

Agenda for the March meeting

1. Connections
2. Norm review
3. Jade's Success Analysis
4. Shanna's Success Analysis
5. Katrina's Success Analysis
6. Break
7. Broken Squares

Broken Squares represents an experience about working with others. Several paper squares are cut into pieces and given to members. Without talking and pointing to other's squares, the squares are re-created. The intent is to offer your pieces to others in order to scaffold their attempt at creating squares. The alternative would be to do the work for the other person, which is a common frustration for members.

8. Heather's Tuning about a journalism rubric
A Tuning protocol is designed to assist a member who has a document, plan, or creation that she wishes to "tune" to a standard or a goal. Members hear the context, ask clarifying questions, view the work, discuss it, and listen to the understandings of the presenter at the end of the experience.
9. Bullseyes

Agenda for the April meeting

1. Connections
2. Holly's Success Analysis
3. Stella's Success Analysis
4. Elements of Success

After the last Success Analysis, common elements were "mined" from the data that were sifted to three large categories.

5. Break
6. Professional Change Activity

This short experience asks partners to stand up and introduce themselves. Then, with backs to each other, each person changes five things about their appearance. After a given amount of time, the partners turn back toward each other and attempt to identify the five changes. As the experience is debriefed, many participants will frenetically change back whatever they temporarily altered, thus encouraging a conversation about sustained and systemic change.

7. Set up peer observations
Peer observations are critical in a CFG. They develop accountability with each other and within the group. Several stances are encouraged to focus the short observations.
8. Kim's Consultancy about Kente Cloths

9. Profile of a Student

This experience offers teachers a chance to strategize about students that are problematic in their classrooms. Several summaries describe particular kinds of students. Members of the CFG assume the voice of the students, specifically talking about what school is like for them. The members then become the voice of the students' teachers, focusing on effort and achievement. The final step involves brainstorming possible strategies in working with specific children.

10. Bullseyes

Agenda for the May meeting

1. Connections
2. Elements of Success Part II: synthesize list of elements
3. Recent Success go-round
A go-round simply means going around the group and everyone speaking, in this case, about a recent success.
4. Claiming an element of success for next year's classroom
5. Debriefing peer observations
Jade and Shanna
Holly and Stella
6. Heather's spontaneous Consultancy about portfolio organization
7. Break
8. Wayne's "next year" index card
9. Profile of a Student Part II
10. Profile of a Teacher

To continue the idea of Profile of a Student and capitalize on difficult relationships with colleagues, Profile of a Teacher asked members to write a summary of a colleague at the school site. These were shared and used in similar ways to the students: strategizing possible productive ways to work with these colleagues.