NASHUA HIGH SCHOOLS

North & South

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES TRAINING

Session 5

August 18, 2015

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Overarching Guiding Questions

❖ How can collaborating with colleagues improve educator practice and student learning?

❖ What can I learn about my own practice by looking collaboratively at student and colleagues' work?

❖ How do I foster adult conversation and dialogue that directly impacts student learning?

❖ Which facilitation skills and practices can help develop an effective teacher work group?

❖ What tools and structures, such as protocols can help a group use time effectively to accomplish a task?

❖ Why use protocols? How do I match a protocol to a task or need?

❖ What kind of feedback encourages and supports reflection and professional growth?

Guiding Questions: Thursday, June 25, 2015

❖ How do I continue to deepen my facilitation, listening and questioning skills?

❖ What can I learn about my own practice by working collaboratively on colleagues' work & dilemmas?

❖ How can sensitive, courageous enhance how we learn from each other?

NORMS
(Adopted June 23, 2015; Modified August 17, 2015)

• Be open to new ideas and understandings—note them during the session

• Speak directly, bring appropriate candor & professionalism to the table

• If you wonder about it, ask it

• Withhold judgment … presume good intentions

• Encourage participation

• Balance speaking and listening; watch time

• Be constructive and stay positive

• Trust and believe in the process

• Vegas rules

• *Be mindful about using terms unfamiliar to new members*

• *Do regular checks for understanding*

• *Challenge yourself to take risks*

8:30 Opening Activities
- **Reflections**
- **M&M greetings**
- **Review**
  - **Agenda**
  - **Norms**

10:00 Text-Based Discussion (1)
- **(A) Thompson-Grove *Prologue*: The Making Meaning Protocol, p. 63**
- **(B) Dufour, Professional Learning Communities: Text-Rendering, p.69**

10:30 Protocol Session 1x2

11:15 Text-Based Discussion (2)
- **(B)Thompson-Grove *Prologue*: The Making Meaning Protocol, p. 63**
- **(A) Dufour, Professional Learning Communities: Text-Rendering, p.69**

11:45 Brief Study: What Do Facilitators, Presenters and Participants Do? p.128

12:00 LUNCH

12:30 Protocol Session 2x2

1:20 Protocol Session 3x2

2:20 Closing Activities: Snowball Fight

TELL US...

▸ **RED...**   *Something you did during summer vacation*

▸ **O RAN G E...**   *Something you are really good at*

▸ **BLU E...**   *Something you learned in the 2014-15 school year*

▸ **BRO W N ...**   *Something you can't live without*

▸ **G REEN ...**   *Something you want to accomplish in 2015-16*

▸ **YELLO W ...**   *Something about your childhood*

Foreword by Gene Thompson-Grove
to A Facilitator's Book of Questions:
Resources for Looking Together at Student and Teacher Work
By David Allen & Tina Blythe
New York: Teachers College Press, 2003

Facilitating protocols can be a tricky proposition. The task requires the facilitator not only to "show up," but to be fully present and completely attentive to the group and its learning. The protocols can help as a kind of co-facilitator. Protocols help build equity into the conversation; they help group members build new skills and habits; they help make efficient use of time; and they help build a useful agenda for almost any kind of meeting. However, they don't stand on their own, and they require a firm, yet gentle hand on the part of the facilitator. A skillfully facilitated protocol not only creates the possibility of a group doing new, significant learning together — learning that will ultimately benefit students. It also can help a group build the kind of trust that allows it to tackle the really important questions about teaching and learning. Addressing such questions requires individuals' willingness to share and, often, reconsider their own privately held beliefs.

I think about this kind of facilitation as being full of tensions — tensions that as a facilitator I want to manage rather than resolve. I want to be an advocate for the presenter's success, yet also be in service to the whole group and its learning. I want to facilitate with a light hand, yet be firm in helping the group stick to the agreements it has made about how group participants will talk together. I want to honor the steps and intention of the protocol, yet not feel by the end of the session as if the protocol has somehow used us. I know the protocol will demand a certain rhythm by its very structure, yet I want to tap into the natural rhythm of the group. I want to be an active facilitator — one that group members can count on to keep the process safe so they can have potentially risky conversations with each other. Yet I know that sometimes the best thing I can do or say as the facilitator is nothing, because sometimes it has to be uncomfortable for group members to learn and grow. I want to be a fully contributing member of the group, yet I know that good facilitation sometimes demands that I give my full attention to focusing on the process of the conversation.

I remember the day I turned the corner in my thinking about myself as a facilitator. The conversation that day had been challenging, and the group confronted some deeply held beliefs about expectations for students. I knew that individuals in the group had moved to a new, more productive place in their thinking. As I read the reflections about the session written by group members, I was struck by how all of them talked about their learning, about their students, about their practice, about how other group members had challenged them to see the student work and their assumptions differently. There was not one mention about the role I had played as facilitator. That is when I understood what is for me now the most important maxim about facilitating protocol conversations: "This is not about me." Facilitators with a broad repertoire of responses and sophisticated ways of thinking about their craft are critical to the collaborative work of teachers. But, in the end, the work is not about the facilitator, or the facilitation, or the protocol. It is, first and foremost, about the learning the presenter and the group do together on behalf of students.

WHAT IS A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY?

By Richard Dufour

The term "professional learning community" is used to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education. In fact, the term has been used so universally that it is in danger of losing all meaning. Initial enthusiasm can give way to confusion, followed by implementation problems, abandonment, and the search for a new initiative. Educators can avoid this cycle only if they understand the "Big Ideas" that represent core PLC principles and how they can sustain the PLC model until it becomes the school's culture.

BIG IDEA #1

ENSURING THAT STUDENTS LEARN

The PLC model assumes that the core mission of formal education is to ensure that students learn. When schools take the mission statement "learning for all" as a pledge to ensure the success of each student, profound changes occur. The school established a solid foundation of shared knowledge and a common ground that will allow them to move the improvement initiative forward. As the school progresses, every professional in the building must engage in the ongoing exploration of three crucial questions that will drive the work of the PLC:
• What do we want each student to learn?
• How will we know when each student has learned it?
• How will we respond when a student experienced difficulty in learning?
When a school functions as a PLC, teachers become aware of the incongruity between their commitment to ensure learning for all and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some students do not learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing timely, intervention-based strategies to ensure that struggling students receive the time and support they need to succeed.

BIG IDEA #2

A CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

 Educators building a PLC recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote the powerful, collaborative culture that characterizes a PLC: a systematic process in which teachers work together in teams to analyze and improve their classroom practice, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. Their collaborative conversations require team members to make goals, strategies, materials, questions, concerns, and results public. These discussions are explicitly structured to improve the classroom practice of teachers—individually and collectively.

BIG IDEA #3

A FOCUS ON RESULTS

PLCs judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Every teacher participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress. The results-oriented PLC then turns this data into useful and relevant information for staff.

Educators who focus on results must also shift their attention to goals that focus on student learning. They must stop assessing their own effectiveness based on how busy they are and instead ask, "Have we made progress onthe goals that are most important to us?"

HARD WORK AND COMMITMENT

Initiating and sustaining the PLC model concept requires hard work. A school staff must focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold its members accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement. When educators work hard to implement these principles, their collective ability to help all students learn will improve. The success of the PLC concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—thecommitment and persistence of the educators within it.

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THE SNOWBALL

The snowball "fight" is a useful way to air issues a group may be grappling with. It allows a group to put reality in the room by acknowledging the "elephants." Because it is an "anonymous" activity no one needs to take personal responsibility. This allows the group to list outstanding issues and then decide on which protocols would be most appropriate for dealing with them—and to avoid polemics. It is a safe way to approach "hot button" issues and devise how to examine them productively.

Instructions:

1. Give each member of the group (including the facilitator) two half sheets of paper, [Members can have more sheets of paper if the leader feels that there are more significant issues to address and people may have more to say.]

2. Instruct the group to write a hope or a concern (or perhaps an accomplishment and a frustration) on each paper. These need to be written legibly as another member of the group will read them. It is important to be clear that what group members write will be shared, but that it will be anonymous as someone else will be reading it. [The focus of the hopes and concerns can vary according to the perceived needs of the group. They could be about school, about personal issues, or about the group's work together, as examples.]

3. When members have finished writing, the facilitator asks them to ball up their pieces of paper, like snowballs, and begin tossing them, around the room, at each other, having some fun and play as they "toss" their issues away.

4. After a few moments the facilitator signals a halt to this activity and asks each member to pick up two pieces of paper.

5. Members then read what is written on each paper, taking turns reading one paper at a time, until all the hopes and concerns have been aired. [It is important to establish a safe and respectful environment for this activity, particularly at this point, since many in the group will be sharing real concerns.]