THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF A SELF-STUDY PROCESS FOR
CRITICAL FRIENDS GROUPS

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the development and evaluation of a reflective tool and process to support critical friends groups (CFGs) in a self-study. The developmental framework serves as a reflective tool for group analysis in seven different elements: Relationships, Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, Meeting Focus, Group Learning Agenda, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning. The self-study process is intended to help groups analyze their collaborative work, identify goals and concrete action plans for improvement, and develop a plan for monitoring their growth.

This study includes two phases. The first phase involves consultation with a panel of experts to validate and revise the developmental framework. The second phase employs a multiple case study approach to evaluate the developmental framework and self-study process as actually used by three CFGs. Analysis of data from observations, document analysis, interviews, and questionnaires provided a basis for which to further revise both the developmental framework and the self-study process. The data also support the conclusion that the developmental framework and self-study process both have merit as tools for helping CFGs to reflect on their work and set a course for improvement.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Educators today must continually learn and grow in order to meet the needs of a changing student population. McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) write, “success for all students depends ultimately on what teachers do in the classroom, on teachers’ ability and willingness to provide the kinds of educational environments necessary to meet the country’s educational goals” (p. 5). They continue by discussing how the diversity of contemporary students’ cultural backgrounds and family structures lead teachers to one of three options: (1) holding fast to traditional values and standards in schooling while growing cynical about “today’s students”; (2) lowering expectations for student achievement by watering down the curriculum, causing both students and teachers to disengage from learning; or (3) fundamentally adapting their teaching practices in order to meet the needs of their current students. In order to ensure that this third response dominates our schools, it is important for schools to increasingly focus on supporting teacher learning with a continual eye towards student learning.

In recent decades, literature on teacher professional development has shifted away from the traditional one day training seminar provided by a visiting expert. In its place, scholars are suggesting models of professional development that are ongoing, embedded in the daily work of teachers, grounded in teachers’ own questions and goals,
collaborative, and highly focused on improving student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999). However, implementing such models of professional development may require a dramatic rethinking of traditional school structures and the development of new school cultures. One model for restructuring schools that has gained recent popularity is that of reorganizing schools into professional learning communities. Such communities are praised for facilitating intellectual renewal for teachers, improvements in teaching practices, the enhancement of student learning, stronger teacher efficacy and morale, the development of teacher leadership, and school reform (Little, 2002, 1990; Conzemius & O’Neill, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

In 1994, members of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform set about designing structures for a very intentional type of professional learning community. They were convinced that schools should serve as learning organizations for both students and teachers and that collaborative and reflective learning communities can help teachers to translate theories and standards into teaching practices that support student learning (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Cushman, 1999; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; National School Reform Faculty, no date). They named these new professional learning communities critical friends groups (CFGs) to reflect the dual emphasis of friendly support in a trusting community and taking a critical look at teaching practice to facilitate learning and change. Though CFG participants may engage in a variety of community building and professional learning activities, monthly meetings structured by the use of conversational protocols for examining student work, discussing texts, or working through dilemmas of practice are the crux of a typical CFG’s work.
In the last ten years, researchers have only just begun to examine the impact of CFGs on schools, teachers, and students. Initial research reports provide strong evidence that CFGs foster a culture of community and collaboration among participants (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Nave, 2000; Armstrong, 2003; Curry, 2003; Seaford, 2003) and enhance teacher professionalism (Tice, 1999; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Franzak, 2002; Van Soelen, 2003), but evidence documenting teacher learning and any resulting improvements in student learning is sparse (Key, 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). This stems in part from the dearth of studies designed to systematically examine teacher and student learning.

Yet this is not solely a matter of research design, because developing a true professional learning community able to engage in challenging questions of teaching and learning can be a long and difficult process. It is “a journey, not a destination, a verb rather than a noun” (Grossman, Wineburg & Woolworth, 2001, p. 992). Though there is a wide degree of variability among CFGs, Dunne and Honts (1998) have identified three typical stages of development: (1) a support stage, characterized as a professional oasis or support group; (2) an improvement stage, focused on refining teaching tools and practices; and (3) a stage in which participants question the fundamental practices and purposes of schools. These researchers claim that the most mature group would easily move back and forth among the activities common to each of these stages in order to best meet their collective needs. Examining group development seems critical when considering the impact of CFGs on teaching and learning. Though the trusting relationships established in the first stage might help build a culture of collaboration and sharing among teachers, it seems unlikely that a group could engage in work focused
enough to lead to changes in teaching practice and improvements in student learning without entering the second or third stage.

Researchers have also identified several factors that have hindered CFG development:

- **School culture**: Examples include top-down styles of school leadership, the micropolitics of school reform initiatives, or an excessive emphasis on standardized testing (Curry, 2003; Murphy, 2001; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Nave, 2000; Dunne & Honts, 1998).

- **Implementation**: Examples include trying to create too many CFGs too quickly, insufficient training in asking meaningful questions or using protocols, and coach “burn-out” (Armstrong, 2003; Murphy, 2001).

- **Relationships**: A CFG may experience difficulties in establishing a foundation of trust among group members (Armstrong, 2003; Little, et. al, 2003; Murphy, 2001; Dunne & Honts, 1998).

- **Content**: Excessive focus on building community, insufficient goals or resources, or difficulties in framing questions and identifying appropriate student and teacher work samples for the group to examine all keep groups from broaching rigorous content during monthly meetings (Armstrong, 2003; Little, et. al, 2003; Murphy, 2001; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Dunne & Honts, 1998).

Though external factors, such as the school culture, are outside the control of CFG members, there are other barriers that a group might be able to overcome given the
opportunity to analyze group development and set goals for improvement. There are several structures already in place by which a group might begin this process.

First, the debrief segment embedded in each protocol provides group members with an opportunity to engage in “metadiscussion,” or a collective analysis of the group’s process. Schultz (1999) describes metadiscussion as “an intervention process designed to confront barriers that prevent groups from achieving effective performance by focusing on the deficiencies members perceive to be thwarting the group’s work, including task and interpersonal obstacles, while ruling discussions of members’ personalities to be out of bounds” (p. 387). In a protocol debrief, participants might consider whether the protocol chosen was a good fit for the work or question discussed, which questions really promoted deep thinking, how the protocol might be modified for future use, or how different members of the group felt about group interactions during the meeting. Though the debrief may last only five minutes, it can begin to help groups process their collective experience and consider needed improvements.

The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), the organization with which CFG work is now affiliated, also has a number of resources in place that might support a struggling group. First, the annual Winter Meeting provides an opportunity for many CFG coaches and participants to gather together to discuss their work, hone their facilitation skills, and learn from what is going on in other locations. Second, many resources for community building and looking at teacher and student work are available on the NSRF web site. Additionally, approximately half of the states in the U.S. have one or more NSRF centers of activity, organized in various ways to support CFG work on a local level, often through providing regular training for new coaches. Finally, NSRF
maintains a listserv through which coaches and facilitators can communicate with each other to ask questions, share resources, or help one another solve problems. However, the organization does not currently provide a tool or process through which group members can step back and systematically assess their group’s practice in order to monitor its growth, envision the future, or set goals to deepen participants’ collective learning. The development of such a process would enable CFGs to become more self-directed and capable of ongoing self-assessment and improvement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the development and evaluation of a self-study framework and process to support critical friends groups in stepping back to analyze the development of their community, collaborative work, and learning. Engaging in an intentional self-study process could help CFG members identify areas of strength in their collective work and areas that hold their group back, establish goals and appropriate action steps for improvement, and ultimately develop into a more mature group able to engage in rigorous work leading to improvements in teaching and learning.

**Research Questions**

It is important to emphasize that the purpose of this current study is not to sort critical friends groups into their respective stages of development (although one might potentially use the framework in that manner), nor is it to conduct a summative
evaluation on a group’s effectiveness. Rather the purpose is to develop a tool and a
process by which groups might study their own practice with an eye towards
improvement. Toward that end, the research questions focus on the developmental
framework and self-study process and not the characteristics of particular groups.

1. How can the developmental framework be further refined through the
   input of a panel of experts?
   a. What, if anything, needs to be changed or refined?
   b. What, if anything, is missing?
   c. What, if anything, should be eliminated?

2. How easy to use is the self-study process?
   a. How much time is needed?
   b. What is the best process for using the developmental framework?
   c. What specific knowledge or skills are required of participants in
      order to use the framework productively?

3. To what extent do participants perceive that the developmental framework
   and process are useful for CFGs:
   a. In stimulating discussion?
   b. In prompting individuals / the group to think more deeply about
      their purpose or providing a new perspective on their work?
   c. In leading to action steps for improvement?

4. How might the framework and process be further developed based on the
   experiences of groups that use the tool?
5. What are the advantages or disadvantages of using this framework and process?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is important for two reasons. First, there is currently no published formal process by which a CFG can assess its group practice. Developing and refining the developmental framework and adding it to the NSRF web resources could provide a useful tool to CFGs across the country. If the groups in this study find this developmental framework to be useful, then it is likely other groups will benefit from using it as well. Additionally, if the self-study protocols are useful for CFGs, then they might also be adapted for use by other types of professional learning communities. Second, the development of this framework might assist future researchers in assessing whether or not a particular CFG truly functions as a professional learning community. In order to engage in research examining the link between professional learning communities and teacher professional development or professional learning communities and student achievement, it is important to distinguish between a collegial group and a true professional learning community.

**Definitions**

Critical Friends Group (CFG) – “a professional learning community consisting of approximately 8-12 educators who come together voluntarily at least once a month for
about 2 hours. Group members are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning” (National School Reform Faculty, 2005). Groups frequently use one of a repertoire of conversational protocols to structure their meetings.

CFG coach – An individual who has been trained by NSRF in order to facilitate the work of a CFG in their local school or district.

Evaluation – “a systematic investigation of merit or worth” (Guskey, 2000, p. 41) that involves efforts “to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 10).

Professional development – “those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students” (Guskey, 2000, p. 16). Professional development also helps educators develop the capacity to act or react in increasingly complex scenarios through increasingly effective means.

Professional learning community – A group of professionals (perhaps a school, a team of teachers, a study group, or a network) characterized by a clear mission, or set of goals for student learning; collaborative professional inquiry and experimentation aimed at continuous improvement towards meeting goals; and a sense of collective responsibility for achieving those goals (Conzemius & O’Neill, 2001; Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Protocol – “A protocol consists of agreed upon guidelines for a conversation. This type of structure permits very focused conversations to occur. [Groups] use protocols for looking at student and adult work, giving and receiving feedback, solving problems or
dilemmas, observing classrooms or peers, to push thinking on a given issue and to structure a discussion around a text” (National School Reform Faculty, 2005).

Self-study – a reflective process for studying the self, in this case a CFG, in which participants systematically assess their work in order to align their beliefs and practices and improve their learning (Clarke & Erickson, 2004; Loughran, 2004a).
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Need for High Quality Professional Development

Society today might best be characterized by its rapid change. Technological developments and globalization are changing the needs of the workforce while urbanization, growing demographic diversity, and our increasingly mobile population are changing the composition of our schools (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). Simultaneously, research on the brain, learning, and effective teaching provides a better foundation for school curricula and teaching practice (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). In this context of change, society charges schools with the complex responsibility of meeting the educational needs of all students. While the crafting of educational policy is important in setting a national course, the current standards movement, with its emphasis on high expectations for all students and high standards for teacher certification, is not sufficient to facilitate the kinds of changes needed in schools. As McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) write, “success for all students depends ultimately on what teachers do in the classroom, on teachers’ ability and willingness to provide the kinds of educational environments necessary to meet the country’s educational goals” (p. 5). Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) add, “the vision of practice that underlies the nation’s reform agenda requires most teachers to rethink their own practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never taught
before”” (quoted in Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2006, p. 1). If there is any hope for reforming our schools to meet the needs of all our nation’s children, then the knowledge, dispositions, and practices of the teachers in our nation’s classrooms are of critical importance. In short, improvements in student learning require a strong foundation of teacher learning.

In the minds of many educators, professional development is synonymous with training. All too often in the history of professional development, training has consisted of a one day lecture or seminar given by an expert from outside a particular school setting. According to Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (2003), training models begin with the assumptions “that there are behaviors and techniques that are worthy of replication by teachers in the classroom” (p. 300) and “that teachers can change their behaviors and learn to replicate behaviors in their classrooms that were not previously in their repertoire” (p. 301). If there were one teaching formula, or one body of knowledge and one set of skills, that experts could pass on to teachers that would work for all students at all times, then training might be a sufficient means of promoting high quality teacher learning. However, brief training sessions are unlikely to foster opportunities for teachers to rethink their practice in relation to the needs of changing student populations or to equip them with skills to solve problems or make complex decisions.

Rather than delivering a specific skill set or body of knowledge through disjointed training seminars, researchers now suggest that high quality professional development should be an ongoing process embedded in the daily work of teachers, based on a combination of participants’ questions and research-based professional knowledge, and offering opportunities for teachers to collaborate and learn from one another while
maintaining a focus on enhancing student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 2003; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Rather than teach specific replicable teacher behaviors, the goal is to promote the development of teachers’ “professional intelligence.” When aligned with learning theorist Lauren Resnick’s (1999) views on intelligence, this means learning opportunities for teachers should promote three habits of mind: (1) an orientation towards persistently seeking to understand and refine teaching and learning, (2) a commitment to experimenting with multiple strategies in order to find workable solutions to problems, and (3) the development of meta-cognition – knowing oneself; knowing what one does and does not know about subject matter, pedagogy, children, curriculum, and schools; and knowing how to seek, organize, and apply new information to teaching practice. As teachers develop these three habits of mind, they simultaneously develop the capacity to act or react in increasingly complex scenarios through increasingly effective means. They develop an orientation that is more conducive to adapting their teaching practices to meet the needs of all their students.

The Need for Professional Collaboration

In addition to providing high quality professional development for each individual teacher, a number of scholars have begun to emphasize the importance of developing collaborative professional communities. Newmann (1994) writes, “Effective teaching is difficult. It usually requires information, expertise and support far beyond the resources available to the individual teacher working alone in an isolated classroom” (p. 1). This comes as no surprise to those in private industry, where developing effective work teams
is understood as an essential component of organizational success (Wheelan & Tilin, 1999). Buzaglo & Wheelan (1999) write, “Too much knowledge and too many different skills are required for any individual to successfully accomplish… complex tasks alone. As a result, more and more organizations are relying on the team as the primary vehicle for accomplishing goals and tasks” (p. 109). When the task is complex and the context is continually evolving, the application of knowledge and skill requires collaborative interactions in “an active, inventive process that is just as critical as their store of knowledge itself” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 9).

Although working in a group is likely to increase the amount of time required for a task, there are many researched benefits of collaboration. Groups make fewer errors in judgment and recall more information with a greater degree of accuracy than individuals (Barker, et al., 1979). Groups offer their members emotional support through affirmation and listening; informational support through giving advice, explanations, and demonstrations; and instrumental support through helping each other accomplish tasks (Forsyth, 2006). Groups can help facilitate personal change because they offer their members opportunities to recognize that problems are shared by many, to develop a sense of optimism through seeing others learn and improve, to receive advice and suggestions, and to learn vicariously from the words and experiences of other group members (Forsyth, 2006).

A number of research studies in recent years have specifically documented the benefits of collaborative work in schools. When Little (1982) examined the effect of school norms on school improvement, she found that continuous improvement occurs in schools sharing four critical components, all related to collaboration: (1) frequent, precise
discussion of classroom teaching practices; (2) mutual observation and critique; (3)
shared efforts to plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare curriculum and teaching
materials; and (4) teachers teaching each other the practice of teaching.

McLaughlin and Talbert’s (1993) landmark study, *Contexts that Matter for Teaching and Learning*, similarly emphasized the crucial role that professional
communities played in the high schools that were able to dramatically change teaching
practice to better meet the needs of their students. They write, “teachers define standards
for their classroom practice through interactions with other teachers and administrators;
and the communities of practice that evolve in the day-to-day work of schooling tend to
support…alternative adaptations to students” (p. 8). They continue to emphasize this
point later in their research report:

> Strong professional community provides context for sustained learning
> and developing the profession…The path to change in the classroom core
> lies within and through teachers’ professional communities: learning
> communities which generate knowledge, craft new norms of practice, and
> sustain participants in their efforts to reflect, examine, experiment, and
> change. (p. 18)

Two studies have established a relationship between the ability of a school faculty
to function collaboratively and student achievement (Wheelan & Tilin, 1999; Wheelan &
Kesselring, 2005). After studying the relationship between faculty perceptions of group
development and standardized test scores at ten schools (including elementary, middle,
and high schools), Wheelen & Tilin (1999) wrote:

> This is the first study utilizing a valid and reliable instrument to measure
> group development in school faculties. These results demonstrate that
> there are significant connections between faculty group development and
> student performance. It leads to the likely conclusion that structuring
> schools in such a way that faculty members are afforded the time,
education, and support to improve the functioning of the faculty group as a whole would result in improved student outcomes. (p. 77)

A follow-up study of 61 elementary schools with varying demographics yielded similar results. Wheelan and Kesselring (2005) write:

Our findings suggest that although staff size, rural or urban location, and district poverty level do influence student outcomes, the manner in which faculty members work together as a group also is influential, particularly in high-poverty schools. Professional educators have minimal or no control over school or district demographics. However, teachers and administrators have significant control over the way they work together as a group. The results of this study suggest that if faculty members work to become more trusting, cooperative, and work oriented as a group, student learning and performance will improve.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) also summarize two particularly relevant studies based on statistical data supporting the claim that developing professional communities in schools leads to improvements in teaching and learning. Valerie Lee used data from the National Longitudinal Study of 1988 to demonstrate the positive effects of teacher community on student achievement gains, effects that were even stronger than the effects of student socioeconomic status. Yasumoto, Uekawa, and Bidwell used data from the Longitudinal Study of Youth to examine high school math and science departments. They concluded that several factors related to “professional discussion networks,” such as communication density, intensity of instructional practice norms, and consistency of practice, intensified the positive correlation between good teaching practices and student outcomes.

Together these studies send a strong message that professional collaboration supports teachers and schools in meeting challenging student achievement goals for all students. Efforts to establish strong professional learning communities in which teachers
bring their specific areas of expertise together to solve complex problems, to generate ideas, and to support one another in experimentation are likely to result not only in high quality professional learning for the teachers involved, but also improved student learning.

The Development of Professional Learning Communities

Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Though professional learning communities may take many forms, such as collaborative grade level teams, study groups, professional networks, or whole school professional learning communities, there are a number of characteristics that would set them apart from the traditional school or departmental culture. These characteristics relate to community, professionalism, and learning.

First, traditional school cultures are characterized by privatism and individualism. On average, teachers identify only one person without whom they would not be able to do their work, with a potential of only four additional consultative types of relationships (Little, 1990). Teachers are often consumed with the details of their own classroom practice, are used to making their own decisions about what goes on in their classrooms, and tend to seek out professional development opportunities that meet their own individual needs and interests. In contrast, the word community implies commonality and connectedness. A professional learning community emphasizes collaborative work, collective goals, and collective decision-making in an environment that honors the
contributions that each person makes. A community orientation also asks teachers to allow others into their private practice. Dufour (2004) writes, “collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been private – goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results” (p. 9). This can feel risky. Norms of safety and support are necessary in this community in order for teachers to open up their classrooms for observation and critique, to disclose their uncertainties about practice, or to present classroom artifacts (e.g., lesson plans, student work samples, assessments) for discussion (Little, 2003, 1990).

Second, teachers may be viewed as technicians in many settings, implementing a curriculum handed to them in great detail, participating in training programs required of them, and following the decisions of those in administrative positions. Professional learning communities acknowledge the complexity of teaching and view teachers as decision makers and problem solvers. Instead of merely implementing dictates from the top, teachers in a professional learning community are actively involved in questioning ineffective routines, examining new conceptions of teaching and learning, and finding new solutions to problems (Little, 2002). They engage in intellectual work, such as curriculum development, program evaluation, collaborative questioning, reflective conversation, and observation and feedback on performance, so that they actually make decisions for policy or practice based on data about students and research from the field.

Third, school communities may often do more to perpetuate tradition than to reach for challenging new goals. Little (1990) asserts that close community is an instrument “both for promoting change and for conserving the present” (p. 509). She goes on to ask several poignant questions:
Do we have in teachers’ collaborative work the creative development of well-informed choices, or the mutual reinforcement of poorly informed habit? Does teachers’ time together advance the understanding and imagination they bring to their work, or do teachers merely confirm one another in present practice? What subject philosophy and subject pedagogy do teachers reflect as they work together; how explicit and accessible is their knowledge to one another? Do some collaborations in fact erode teachers’ moral commitment and intellectual merit? (p. 525)

These are important questions to ask because some communities enforce traditional practices that lead to cynicism among teachers and failure among students, while other communities support lower standards for students and a watered-down curriculum that leads to disengagement for both teachers and students (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993). Wenger (1998) adds another caution: “Communities of practice should not be romanticized; they can reproduce counter-productive patterns, injustices, prejudices, racism, sexism, and abuses of all kinds. In fact I would argue they are the very locus of such reproduction (p. 132)” (in Little, 2002, p. 935).

If a community is to support the development of practices leading to academic achievement for all students, then it is critical that it transition away from bonds of tradition that reinforce bad habits and reproduce injustice and take on a spirit of collective inquiry. Characteristics of a professional learning community include curiosity, questioning, reflection, openness to new possibilities, and a commitment to work towards common goals for improvement. As a learning community begins to examine actual school data or student work samples and teaching practices, its members collectively learn to think and act in new ways, and they begin to base decisions on real information about students rather than on perceptions, traditions, or preferences. It is in this way that a
professional learning community sits at the intersection of professional collaboration and high quality professional development.

**Group Development**

With the necessity of such dramatic cultural shifts, it is not surprising that Grossman, Wineburg, and Woolworth (2001) describe community as “a journey, not a destination, a verb rather than a noun” (p. 992). The journey does not even end once these cultural shifts have occurred, but rather continues for the duration of the community’s existence. Researchers from many different fields of study have examined group development through many different perspectives. Even when limiting the focus to models of group change over time, the perspectives are many. Life cycle models, describing group development as an unfolding of sequenced stages, are one common approach to looking at group development (Arrow, et al., 2004). Several types of life cycle models contribute to an understanding of the potential growth and development of professional learning communities.

Wheelan & Hochberger (1996), scholars in group dynamics, developed and validated an instrument for measuring group development synthesizing the research of many scholars in their field. Their model of group development describes member interactions, goals, leadership needs, and actions typical during each of five stages in the process by which a group moves in the direction of productive work.

1. Dependency and Inclusion: During the first stage, concerns for personal safety and inclusion lead to tentative participation, polite communication, and high
levels of conformity. Participants look to the leader to provide safety and direction for the group.

2. Counterdependency and Fight: Increasing comfort levels in the second stage lead to greater group participation, but also to conflict among group members over values, goals, or tasks and to challenging the leader.

3. Trust and Structure: Successfully working through conflict leads to a deeper sense of trust and cohesion as well as increased goal clarity, consensus, and commitment in the third stage. The leader steps back into a consulting role, and each group member takes on roles and tasks to help the group achieve its goals.

4. Work: It is not until stage four that a group enters a time of really efficient and productive work. By this time goals are very clear, and roles are well matched to group member abilities. The group really seeks to monitor its collective work by seeking and using feedback on its effectiveness. Group norms encourage high performance, quality, success, and innovation as group members define problems, plan solutions, make collective decisions, and implement plans. Group members quickly work through conflicts.

5. Termination: Whether because the task is complete or because members retire, the group’s work comes to a close. The group may regress to earlier stages of development as its members look back at what has been accomplished and begin to withdraw emotionally. Group members may take this time to talk about their reactions to the separation of the group.
Whereas the Wheelan and Hochberger model emphasizes evolving relationships and coming to goal consensus as foundational for productive group work, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) attend to the importance of defining a community’s focus and establishing the community as valuable in order to sustain a community of practice over time. Their model also includes five stages of development.

1. Potential: The first stage is one of discovery. Individuals discover that they face similar problems, share passions, and can contribute to each other’s work and learning, so the idea for creating an intentional community first forms.

2. Coalescing: Building trust through deepening relationships is important in the second stage so that community members can genuinely share problems relating to their work. At this stage communities are fragile. The initial enthusiasm drops off as the realities of working together set in, and it is important that community members begin to value the opportunity to work together and share knowledge if the community is to continue.

3. Maturing: The third stage involves coming to a clearer sense of the community’s identity and purpose within the broader context. Members begin to really get to know the strengths and weaknesses of other members so that they are able to use each other as resources more effectively. As the group congeals, tension may arise over whether or how to get new members involved.

4. Stewardship: The fourth stage is one of maintenance. The challenge is to keep the community fresh, energetic, productive, and on the cutting edge. At this stage group members may more clearly reflect on the knowledge the
community has generated and desire to share that knowledge with others outside the community, rising up as a voice for change in the larger organization or society.

5. Transformation: Similar to the Wheelan and Hochberger model, the final stage in this model involves the ending of the community. The community may digress into merely a social club, split, merge with another community, or simply fade away. Group members deal directly or indirectly with closing the community and whatever emotions accompany the change.

While several scholars have used stage models similar to the two above to describe the growth and development of professional learning communities in terms of relationships, goals, and collaborative work (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Dufour and Eaker, 1998), McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) provide a unique model of group development based on a cross-case analysis of ten school learning communities. Descriptions of each of their three stages address five elements: teacher community, shared leadership, focused effort, data use, and inquiry procedures.

1. Novice: Learning communities at this first stage of development are in the process of developing norms of collaboration and relationships based on trust. They must begin to define the focus that will help guide them in school reform. They experiment with inquiry and begin to discover the value of various sources of data about students, but they struggle with how these sources might be used to inform their work. Community leadership may be limited to one or two people, but leaders focus on helping school faculty to
develop strong respectful relationships and technical skills in using inquiry and data.

2. Intermediate: A community in this second stage is developing a norm of questioning and a shared language that supports their efforts to come to common understandings about teaching and learning. Such communities are working to clarify their understanding of the challenges they face as a community and to create action plans to help them enact their vision for the future. Not only do they collect data, but they are also learning about what kinds of data to collect and are working to understand how that data can help them make decisions to support student learning. More teachers have stepped forward to participate in the leadership of the community as they have engaged in successful cycles of inquiry, while others may remain cynical about the purpose for inquiry.

3. Advanced: By this stage a community has developed a culture of inquiry and can truly be described as a professional learning community focused on improving practice and shared accountability. Faculty members typically use the inquiry process to really examine links between classroom practice and student outcomes. As they become more proficient in generating knowledge as a community, they also become more discriminating regarding the external services or resources they use, only selecting those that would align with their goals and plans. These communities also use inquiry tools to help them address external pressures and accountability measures. So many members of
the community are on board with a common language, vision, and practice that there is a broad leadership base within the community.

Though each of these three models provides a unique description of group development, each contributes to an understanding of professional learning communities in an important way. In any type of group the development of relationships, communication, and roles is important. Clarifying the goals and purpose is important for communities engaging together in a task, and each group member must come to recognize the value of working together. Developing skills in inquiry, the use of data, and problem solving are important for a community that desires to learn and change. Each of these models also serves as an important reminder that a professional learning community will not spring up over night. It will require much time and concentrated effort in order to become a strong learning community, and it will require continued efforts to maintain its strength as an effective community.

**Facilitating Group Development**

Groups functioning at higher stages of development are more productive, but not all groups reach the higher stages of group development. They may get stuck or even regress (Wheelan & Kessilring, 2005). In fact, some studies indicate that 80-90% of groups have difficulties with performance (Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999). Having established the importance of collaborative work, it is also important to examine ways to facilitate group development in order to enhance group functioning. Akrivou, Boyatzis & McLeod (2006) assert that change in groups is not only possible, but also can be
facilitated by conscious and intentional processes. A number of other scholars provide examples of intentional processes aimed at improving group functioning.

According to Lewin, an early scholar of group dynamics, a process of observation, feedback, diagnosis, and training facilitates group change (Schultz, 1999). An observer collects data on group characteristics, such as patterns of communication, power issues, conflict management strategies, roles, evidence of leadership, or the nature of group achievement; or perhaps the group watches and analyzes a video of their own work together. Then the group looks at the data, or feedback, to interpret what it says about their strengths and weaknesses in relationships, processes, and outcomes. The diagnosis step involves collectively determining the kinds of changes that would help the group to be more effective. Finally, training helps support group members in practicing new behaviors. An individual facilitating an intentional change process such as this one needs to “encourage group members to talk about and explore the reasons for their current performance, set their own goals for improved performance, try out and practice new ways of behaving, and engage in feedback sessions that analyze the effectiveness of the new behaviors” (Dyer in Schultz, 1999, p. 384).

Buzaglo and Wheelan (1999) conducted an intervention with three work teams with the hope of enhancing group effectiveness. Their intervention involved nine steps:

1. Each team member completed the Group Development Questionnaire (GDQ), an instrument designed to measure group development. The consultant then analyzed and organized the data.

2. The consultant presented information to the group about the five stages of development (Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996).
3. The consultant presented the group’s GDQ results.

4. The group members had the opportunity to react to the results and provide additional information.

5. The group discussed what the results meant for the group.

6. The consultant solicited member commitment to participating in a change process.

7. The group members prioritized areas for change and decided how to sequence the change process.

8. They established a plan to improve the group’s functioning.

9. They established a time frame and a date for a follow-up session.

At the end of a three month period, two of the three groups in the study had a higher perceived level of group effectiveness. The authors attribute the improvements in these two work teams to the detailed assessment of the group’s developmental level provided by the GDQ, the focus on the group as a whole instead of on individual group members, and the opportunity given the group members themselves to decide what and how to change.

Hustedde and Score (1995) suggest that there are numerous forces both within a group and in its external environment that influence group change. They assert that collectively analyzing and discussing these forces can support group success. They suggest that a group must begin with clearly defined goals. Then a discussion leader asks two questions, “What forces will help you achieve your goal or objective? What forces will hinder you from achieving your goal or objective?” (p. 3). After brainstorming a list of forces that might maintain the status quo, restrain a group’s work, or drive the work of
the group forward, the group discusses whether or not the goals are practical given the forces at work and which forces they might be able to increase or reduce and how. The authors believe that this process results in improved goals, a better understanding of what it will take to accomplish goals, and the minimization of needless conflict.

Taken together, these three examples suggest several factors that will likely facilitate group development. First, groups need a way to assess their current group functioning in terms of both relationships and task achievement. Second, they need the opportunity to identify the most important areas for change. Third, they must consider the factors that might help them or hinder them in making these changes. Fourth, they must establish a method of following up for monitoring and accountability purposes. Finally, whether or not an outside consultant is involved, it is important that the group have ownership of the goals and plans for change. As Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder write, “the success of a community will depend upon the energy that the community itself generates, not on an external mandate” (p. 36).

Critical Friends Groups

In 1994, members of the Annenburg Institute for School Reform initiated the first critical friends groups (CFGs), a new type of professional development rooted in the ideals of professional learning communities, because they were convinced that schools should serve as learning organizations for teachers and for students and that collaborative and reflective communities of educators could help turn educational theories and standards into effective teaching practices and improvements in student learning (Dunne
The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) now coordinates CFG work. NSRF researcher, Bill Nave, assisted the founders in articulating the theory of action by which critical friends groups might bring about school reform (Nave, 2003). According to this theory, the change process begins with a professional community whose members make a commitment to meet together, to set goals for student learning, to establish high standards for student performance related to these goals, and to set high standards for their own teaching. Built upon the foundation of challenging goals and standards, the community engages in collegial reflective practice through monthly meetings and peer coaching. Monthly meetings allow CFG participants to collectively construct new knowledge about students and teaching practice through two types of sources. Internal sources include examining student work to learn about students and find evidence of their learning and examining teacher practices to determine their effectiveness. External sources include discussions of readings, such as research articles, that relate to questions of practice. The goal of new knowledge is to apply it to teaching practice by holding high expectations for student achievement, by creating a more positive classroom culture that will support student learning, by adapting lessons and teaching strategies so that they are more coherent, and by engaging students in the work of learning. Peer coaching then provides teachers with opportunities to receive feedback that helps them better reflect on their efforts at adapting practice. Developing portfolios to show evidence of professional growth and student learning provides a further layer of reflection on practice and acts as a measure of accountability for CFG participants.

In summary, the NSRF theory of action rests on the following chain of events:
1. “Teacher joins CFG
2. Teacher engages in conversations about teaching and learning
3. Teacher begins to think differently about her teaching
4. Teacher decides to try a different way to teach
5. Teacher tries a new way to teach
6. Teacher invites CFG colleague to observe her new way of teaching
7. Colleague offers candid but friendly feedback on what she observed
8. Teacher realized she wasn’t doing what she thought she was
9. Teacher tries again with colleague observing
10. Colleague gives candid but friendly feedback on what she observed
11. [Numerous iterations of steps 2-10]
12. Teacher’s pedagogy becomes more student-centered
13. Teacher’s students begin achieving better” (Nave, 2003, p. 10).

To put this theory of action into practice, the first CFG participants, with the support of at least one trained coach at each local school, committed to engaging in three professional development activities for a minimum of two years. First, they agreed to meet with a group of six to twelve teachers at their school site for a minimum of two hours each month to establish goals for improved student learning and to collaboratively work towards attaining those goals. Conversational protocols for examining student work, discussing texts, or working through dilemmas of practice provided the structure for each monthly meeting. In a second commitment, participants agreed to form peer coaching partnerships, in which teachers would observe in each other’s classrooms and offer feedback at least once a month. Finally, participants agreed to develop a portfolio to document their own learning and that of their students over the two years of participation (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Cushman, 1999; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000).

Over the last decade NSRF has continued to train new CFG coaches, and the work has expanded to many more school sites. Due to NSRF’s belief in empowering
local leadership to meet the needs and interests of the local school site, implementation
varies widely (Dunne & Honts, 1998). CFG members have been veteran teachers,
administrators, novice teachers, and preservice teachers. They have been coworkers in
one school building and teachers who meet in cross-building groupings. Some have fully
implemented all three facets of the program as NSRF initially intended, while other
groups have primarily focused on holding monthly meetings to examine student and
teacher work samples. Participants claim to be satisfied with their CFG experiences
(Dunne & Honts, 1998; Tice, 1999; Armstrong, 2003), and some have named CFGs one
of the most powerful professional development activities in which they have ever
participated (Dunne & Honts, 1998).

**Review of Research**

Though the body of research documenting the work of CFGs over the last decade
is sparse, there have been enough studies to draw some initial conclusions about their
effectiveness as professional learning communities, particularly in relation to the way
they foster a culture of community and collaboration and enhance teacher
professionalism. Evidence relating to their impact on teaching and learning is less
conclusive.
Community and Collaboration

First, CFGs do appear to foster a culture of community and collaboration among teachers. Survey data from two studies support this claim. First, the Professional Climate Survey used in the NSRF evaluation study indicated that CFG teachers collaborate more with each other than non-CFG teachers through such activities as sharing ideas and student work samples, meeting to discuss problems, working to develop materials, and seeking advice about professional issues and problems (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). Second, Seaford (2003) found that CFG coaches perceive that the disciplines of systems thinking, team learning, and shared vision are manifested to a very great extent within critical friends groups, also pointing to a high degree of collegiality and community.

Qualitative case study data also supports this claim. Though the three schools in Armstrong’s (2003) case study differed in their initial school culture, each moved a step further along her collegiality hierarchy: from isolation to moral support; from congenial to engaging in technical reflection; and from technical reflection to interpretive reflection and practice. Similarly, Curry (2003) found that participation in CFGs interrupted the norms of isolation at one high school, creating collegial ties across departments, promoting a shared awareness of the school’s reform philosophy, a more school-wide orientation towards teaching practice, and greater curricular coherence in the school. Nave (2000) found that CFG participants engaged in collegial interactions outside of formal meeting times, while Fahey (2002) describes how a school leadership team developed more of a collaborative approach to their work through participation in a CFG. Clearly CFGs have an impact on school culture, bringing teachers together to talk about
their work, deprivatizing teaching practice with public discussions, and creating ties of community and collegiality.

Enhanced Professionalism

The research also indicates that CFGs enhance a sense of professionalism among educators. Research examining preservice teachers, novice teachers, and veteran teachers all indicates that CFGs promote the development of the professional self. First, Franzak (2002) presents a case study of a preservice teacher whose sense of professional identity was very much tied to her participation in a CFG at the site of her student teaching placement. This student perceived other CFG members as models of the kind of professional she wanted to be: continuously learning and collaboratively inquiring into practice. Next, Van Soelen (2003) describes a CFG for novice teachers that took the place of a mentoring program. Rather than sit through training sessions on classroom management, rather than struggle through the year in mere survival mode, these teachers engaged in discussions of curriculum, assessment, and motivation, enriching each other’s thinking and supporting one another in professional decision-making. These teachers had the opportunity to conduct themselves as professionals by initiating their own learning experiences as they asked their own questions and analyzed their own work through participation in a CFG. Finally, testimonials from veteran teachers indicate that their lunchroom conversations grew in professionalism and that they gained new respect for the professionalism of their colleagues as a result of their participation in CFGs (Tice, 1999).
NSRF’s use of the Professional Climate Survey also indicates that CFG participation promotes professionalism in teachers (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). In their survey responses, CFG members exhibited greater professional engagement than non-members. They more strongly agreed that they felt they improved each year and that they were always eager to hear about ways to improve their teaching. They also more strongly agreed that they would put in a great deal of effort beyond what is typically expected of teachers. The Professional Climate Survey also indicated that CFG participants had a higher sense of efficacy and responsibility in their teaching, maintaining high expectations for students, changing their approach if some students are doing well, and more strongly agreeing that they can affect student achievement by trying new teaching methods. Their teaching practices were also less likely to be influenced by district or state policies.

Participation in CFGs supports a teaching identity that is more profession-oriented than technician-oriented. Group members seek to continually experiment with teaching in order to learn and improve. They exhibit a sense of agency in figuring out how to best meet the needs of their students. These professional qualities also form a foundation upon which CFGs might work to impact teaching and learning for school improvement.

**Impact on Teaching and Learning**

Though the evidence in this area is less definitive than for CFGs’ impact on community and professionalism, research reports indicate that CFGs do at least have the potential to facilitate teacher learning that leads to improvements in student learning.
Two studies lend weak support to the claim that CFGs have the potential to impact teacher practice. Nay (2002) cites interviews in which teachers claim to have made small changes in practice, such as revising a rubric, trying a new instructional practice, or using protocols with their students, but these are certainly not the type of changes that indicate dramatic growth or change over time, nor were they confirmed through observations. Tice’s (1999) survey results indicate that CFG participants perceived they had grown in their willingness to take risks, to implement new strategies, to re-evaluate old teaching practices, to provide students with clearer rubrics and learning expectations, and to use student reflections to help them refine their practice; but again these assertions have not been confirmed through direct observation.

In contrast, three studies provide substantial evidence of the role CFGs played in positively affecting teaching practice. Interviews and observations at twelve schools in NSRF’s evaluation study identify several broad impacts of CFGs on the teaching and learning process: a shift in concern from covering the curriculum to making sure students have the basic skills needed for reading and writing across subject areas; a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction and a pace that allows for mastery of material; and more thoughtful connections among curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). Additionally, two studies provide more specific examples. Meyer & Achinstein (1998) present a “pivotal moment” that defined one novice teacher’s further professional growth over the course of the next year: presenting a video sample from his math class provided the impetus for him to reframe the way he thought about class discussions and to bring about changes in his facilitation style.
Nave (2000) acknowledges several significant changes in teacher thinking as a result of participation in CFGs: an increased desire to know and understand student thinking, a change in focus from teacher practice to student learning, and thinking through protocols for assistance in lesson planning. He also found evidence of dramatic changes in teaching practices through both interviews and observations. The members of one of the CFGs Nave studied demonstrated significant changes in their approaches to writing instruction over the two years they focused on improving student writing. Nave collected actual samples of student work during those two years that indicate marked improvements in student writing. Similar improvements were not evident in student writing samples from classes whose teachers were not involved in the CFG. Though he is the only researcher to have connected CFG work to concrete indicators of student learning, Nave’s research indicates that when CFGs bring about changes in teacher practice, they also have the potential to positively impact student learning.

**CFG Development**

Based on what is known about group development, there are a number of structures intentionally embedded in CFG practices that should support their development as professional learning communities. First, beginning CFGs are encouraged to discuss norms outright. Norms relate to various aspects of a group’s work, such as making a commitment to schedule meetings at a time when every member can come and to begin and end on time, making space for everyone to participate in the conversation, and refraining from judgment of the work or questions that others bring yet asking
challenging questions. Crafting and reviewing these norms lays a foundation for respectful, honest, and trusting relationships. Second, protocols provide a structure for meetings that facilitate productive work. Though protocols do not guarantee rigorous content, they point participants in the direction of asking questions about their teaching practice and their students’ work and bringing data to examine in light of those questions. Third, the debrief segment at the end of each protocol provides the group the opportunity to reflect on their work together. Participants might consider whether the protocol chosen was a good fit for the work or question discussed, which questions really promoted deep thinking, how the protocol might be modified for future use, or how different members of the group felt about group interactions during the meeting. Though the debrief may last only a few minutes, it can begin to help groups to reflect on their time together and consider needed improvements.

Even though these structures may support the development of CFGs into effective professional learning communities, group development still takes time. Dunne and Honts (1998) note that CFGs typically move through three stages as they mature: (1) a support stage, (2) an improvement stage, and (3) a stage of questioning fundamental practices and purposes. In the first stage, the CFG functions as a safe space, an oasis from the pressures of the profession, and a support group for discussing general problems related to teaching and learning. The second stage is marked by a focus on classroom practice and improving lessons. Group members ask one another challenging questions that help them think more deeply about their teaching practice and about how students learn. In stage three, the CFG begins to examine underlying questions about teaching and the purposes of education, connecting more specific practices to larger issues of the school and community.
Just as the development of any group is critical to its functioning, this developmental process typical of CFGs seems critical when considering the impact they might have on schools. The trusting relationships that develop in the first stage have the potential to provide the foundation for a culture of community and sharing among teachers, but unless the group enters the second or third stage, it seems unlikely that a CFG would engage in the type of focused work that could result in changed teaching practices or improvements in student learning.

**Contextual Factors Affecting CFG Development**

Two research studies in particular report on the shortcomings of CFGs in meeting their potential. Curry (2003) concluded that CFGs were insufficient as a resource for transforming the high school setting she studied. Though CFGs bridged departmental divides and provided a variety of perspectives, they limited opportunities for growth in subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. The use of protocols did enhance the level of professional discourse in the school, but the structure of the protocols also inhibited teachers from fully pursuing some lines of inquiry. In sum, the researcher noted a waning interest in CFG participation over time as group members sensed their participation leading to diminished returns in professional growth. Additionally, Armstrong (2003) asserts that the CFGs she studied only partially supported teachers’ reflection on teaching practice. Group members became more aware of their practice and of their need to grow. Peer observations, when conducted, provided opportunities for problem posing while tuning protocols and observations both provide
evidence of inquiry into practice. However, she observed little indication that members of these groups were experimenting, taking action, or implementing any new teaching practices.

Looking at the current body of literature as a whole, it seems much more likely that a critical friends group will affect the school culture in bringing about a greater sense of community, collaboration, and professionalism than it will bring about changes in actual teaching practice that might lead to greater student learning. With this in mind, it is important to ask what factors hinder or contribute to the development of a CFG into a mature group able to reach challenging goals for improved practice and student learning. Research studies indicate that the school context and administration, the implementation process, the characteristics of participants and their ability to develop trusting relationships, and meaningful content were key factors in the success or failure of critical friends groups.

Not only do CFGs have the potential to impact school culture, but school culture can also inhibit or facilitate the development of healthy CFGs. First, district priorities make a difference. Testing pressures passed down from the district administration can hinder a teacher’s interest in experimenting or changing practice, while a CFGs preoccupation with testing and accountability eliminates time for content focused on student work (Murphy, 2001; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). Second, the values and support of local school administration are crucial. A school administrator whose leadership style supports teacher decision-making and fosters a shared responsibility among the staff for student learning is much more likely to support the development of a CFG than one who approaches school leadership with a top-down style. Additionally, a
principal who models inquiry, provides time and space during the school day for groups to meet, and who articulates the connections between CFGs and the school mission facilitates the growth of a CFG (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Nave, 2000; Murphy, 2001). Third, the micropolitics of other local school reform efforts can hinder full participation in CFGs and squelch possibilities for developing the kinds of trusting relationships needed for collegial work (Curry, 2003).

The implementation process is a second factor that has bearing on whether or not CFGs attain their intended impact. Nave (2000) and Armstrong (2003) found that the more faithfully a CFG followed the intended program design of group meetings, peer coaching, and portfolio development, the more likely it was to engage in the kind of meaningful reflection and focused work that leads to changes in teacher practice. Armstrong (2003) suggests that a lack of training in asking good questions, in using protocols, or in the processes of peer coaching may hinder full implementation, while Murphy (2001) indicates that peer coaching requires such a deep level of trust that many CFG members feel uncomfortable with the process. An additional barrier to successful CFG development is a push to create too many CFG groups too fast without taking the time to promote an understanding of the purpose and process that lies behind the initiative. Committed volunteers who recognize why they make the commitment are much more likely to engage in meaningful work (Murphy, 2001).

A third factor that influences the development and potential of a critical friends group is the individual characteristics of group members and their ability to develop trusting relationships. When individuals voluntarily participate and are already reflective professionals, open to new ideas, a CFG has more capacity to engage in meaningful work
A coach with well-developed skills in building community and supporting group goals and processes is a tremendous support to a CFG (Nave, 2000). In fact, Murphy (2001) suggests the need for continual training and support for coaches beyond the initial training opportunities since coach “burn-out” was one of the factors leading to the termination of several CFGs in her study. While participants’ concerns for personal comfort and relationships might hinder the work (Little, et al., 2003), trusting relationships and a sense of personal responsibility for the success of the group are two important aspects of group dynamics which contribute to a CFG’s ability to truly engage in the work of asking one another challenging questions and critically examining work samples (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Murphy, 2001; Armstrong, 2003).

Ultimately the rigor of the content broached by a critical friends group has enormous bearing on its potential to stimulate professional growth and improved student learning. Unlike training programs that automatically bring with them specific research-based content, content for a CFG depends upon the ability of participants to set goals for student learning, to access relevant outside resources, to identify appropriate student and teacher work samples for the group to examine, to develop questions for framing protocols and observations, and to challenge one another to think in new ways (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Murphy, 2001; Little, et al, 2003; Armstrong, 2003). If a group spends most of its time building trust through activities unrelated to their teaching practice or focuses more on engaging in the process of a CFG than connecting that process to specific improvement goals, it is unlikely to see improvements in student learning. Time spent in the rigorous task of analyzing student work has a strong correlation to changes in teachers’ thinking and practice (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000).
Intentional Examination of Group Development

There are numerous factors that may impede a CFG’s ability to engage in meaningful collaborative learning. Though it might be difficult for participants in a CFG to influence district cultures stifled by testing pressures or characterized by a top-down approach to leadership, a group’s focused reflection on the implementation process, the level of trust found within the community, and the content of the group’s work could yield fruitful results. Just as various interventions have facilitated the development of groups in many other contexts, engaging in an intentional self-study process could help CFG participants identify areas of strength and areas that hold their group back, establish goals and appropriate action steps for improvement, and ultimately develop into a more mature group able to engage in rigorous work leading to improvements in teaching and learning.

Self-Study

A self-study is a systematic cycle of inquiry, reflection, and action driven by a desire to improve learning and practice (Clarke & Erickson, 2004; Loughran, 2004). Though a self-study has elements of evaluation, or self-assessment, Loughran (2004b) suggests that it is primarily driven by a learning purpose. The “self” in a self-study might represent an individual, group, or institution, but regardless “active, engaged, self-directed reflection on…experiences is key” (Wilcox, Watson & Paterson, 2004, p. 276). Contradictions between intentions and practice frequently lay tacit beneath the surface of consciousness, so a self-study process aims “to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather
than confirm and settle” (Bullough & Pinnegar in Laboskey, 2004, p. 818). Questions, such as, “What is really going on in our practice?” or “Who are we really as practitioners?” frequently guide those engaging in self-study (Wilcox, Watson & Paterson, 2004). Whitehead (2004) outlines the sequence of a typical self-study:

- I experience a concern when my values are negated in my practice.
- I imagine a way forward, a possible solution to my problem.
- I act in the direction of this solution.
- I evaluate the outcomes of action.
- I modify my concerns, ideas and actions in the light of my evaluation.

Assumptions About Teachers

The very notion of self-study carries with it certain assumptions about the professionalism of teachers. First, teachers desire to learn, grow, and improve. Second, teachers can identify questions, problems, or areas of concern within their own work. Third, teachers are intellectuals who can engage in systematic inquiry and experimentation.

As self-study values and promotes these characteristics of teacher professionalism, it also values and promotes teacher leadership. O’Hair & Reitzug (1997) describe leadership acts as those which “[engage] people in processes that cause them to examine their beliefs and ways of doing things” (p. 7), while Nirenberg (1993) mentions “‘those behaviors that propel the work of the group forward’ (p. 198)” (in Crowther, Kaagan, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002, p.27). Spillane, Hallett, & Diamond (2003) define
leadership as “an influence relationship that motivates, enables, and supports teachers’
efforts to learn about and change their instructional practices” (p.1). Forster (1997)
expresses similar thoughts as she describes leadership as “a professional commitment
and a process which influences people to take joint actions toward changes and improved
practices that enable achievement of shared educational goals and benefit the common
good” (p. 86). Self-study processes reinforce the important leadership qualities mentioned
by these scholars: an orientation towards improvement, a commitment to moving
forward, and the motivation to learn and take actions to change their practices.

**Connections to Participatory Inquiry and Evaluation**

Several areas of literature, including reflection, action research, teacher research,
participant research, and practitioner research, have shaped notions of self-study
(Loughran, 2004a). Because the self-study process in this study is a collaborative group
process, I focus here on its roots in participatory inquiry and evaluation. Since CFGs and
participatory inquiry and evaluation share many of their underlying assumptions and
values (collaboration, equality, honoring the expertise of all members, inquiry, reflective
thinking, seeking evidence, and taking action), a look at this literature shows how a self-
study process is especially appropriate for CFGs.

Patton (2002) describes participatory evaluation as working with people as co-
investigators rather than working on them as research subjects and as “a formal, reflective
process for their own development and empowerment” (p. 183). He continues to describe
authentic participatory and collaborative inquiry as a process in which all participants
own the inquiry and are involved in every step. The evaluator serves as a facilitator to help participants learn the logic and skills of conducting inquiry, such as formulating questions, deciding upon evidence to collect, interpreting data, and making decisions as a result of that data. Then participants all work together as a group of equals to conduct the inquiry. Perceived differences of status or power between facilitator and participants are minimized as much as possible. The facilitator intentionally recognizes the perspectives and expertise of each participant and works to help all participants recognize and value the expertise each participant brings to the group.

One might wonder why a group should conduct an inquiry together when group processes frequently take quite a bit of additional time. Scholars have documented a number of program and participant benefits in cases of participatory evaluation (PE):

- PE focuses participants on program goals and aligning activities to reach those goals (Johnson, Willeke & Steiner, 1998);
- PE promotes organizational learning through the social construction of knowledge (Cousins & Earl, 1992);
- PE enhances the credibility and use of evaluation findings in terms of informing program changes and persuading others of the value of a program (Garaway, 1995; Cousins, 1996; Brandon, 1998; Turnbull, 1999);
- PE builds an organization’s capacity for conducting its own future evaluations of work (Quintanilla & Packard, 2002);
- PE empowers participants with voice and the ability to take action (Garaway, 1995; Fetterman, 1999); and
- PE promotes representative decision-making (Garaway, 1995).

One would expect that a collaborative self-study process would promote similar benefits for a CFG in terms of aligning intentions with practices, promoting group learning,
empowering participants to take action towards improvement, and increasing the group’s capacity for ongoing self-directed assessment of practice.

Summary

The literature clearly links both high quality professional development and collaborative work with improvements in student learning. However, developing the relationships and the skills for a collaborative work and inquiry that will facilitate teacher learning and make a difference in student learning is a challenging process that takes time. Many groups do not meet their full potential. Therefore, it is important to encourage intentional processes of group analysis and goal-setting in order to help groups function as true professional learning communities able to make a difference in the lives of their students.

This research study contributes to this body of literature in several ways. First, it documents the development of a new tool and process that can support an intentional reflective process for promoting group development. Unlike some processes that require a group to hire an outside consultant who is an expert in group development and in a particular improvement process, any group can use this tool and process without specialized training or expertise. This study also examines benefits and drawbacks of engaging in this type of process, information that can help groups decide when is the best time for them to consider using the process. Finally, this study provides a foundation for several additional research directions. The developmental framework can serve as a basis for further research on CFG functioning and is foundational for research studies seeking
to address the connection between group development and outcomes of CFG work in terms of teacher and student learning.
Chapter 3
RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the development and evaluation of a self-study framework and process that would support critical friends groups in a self-directed process of continuous improvement. The following research questions more specifically framed this study:

1. How can the developmental framework be further refined through the input of a panel of experts?
   a. What, if anything, needs to be changed or refined?
   b. What, if anything, is missing?
   c. What, if anything, should be eliminated?

2. How easy to use is the self-study process?
   a. How much time is needed?
   b. What is the best process for using the developmental framework?
   c. What specific knowledge or skills are required of participants in order to use the framework productively?

3. To what extent do participants perceive that the developmental framework and process are useful for CFGs:
   a. In stimulating discussion?
b. In prompting individuals / the group to think more deeply about their purpose or providing a new perspective on their work?

c. In leading to action steps for improvement?

4. How might the framework and process be further developed based on the experiences of groups that use the tool?

5. What are the advantages or disadvantages of using this framework and process?

This exploratory research study involved two phases. In the first phase, I used feedback from a panel of experts to refine the developmental framework. In the second phase, I analyzed the use of the developmental framework and self-study process by three CFGs in the field. The purpose of this second phase was both to continue refining the framework and process and to evaluate their usefulness.

**Phase One: Refining the Developmental Framework**

The developmental framework used in this study emerged as I grappled with how to merge my vision of the optimal CFG with the reality I experienced in my own group. As I worked on a literature review of studies relating to CFG work, I began to develop a mental list of criteria that should lead to optimal group functioning, including the logistics of time and space, learning to use protocols well, developing trusting relationships, a skilled coach, and broaching rigorous content based on challenging questions and goals (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000; Nave, 2000; Murphy, 2001; Armstrong, 2003). As my thoughts shifted first to program evaluation and
then to developing a self-study process, I expanded upon this initial list of criteria through continued analysis of the literature and of my own experiences and ideas of what a CFG should and developed a tool, which I’m terming the developmental framework. This tool, similar to a rubric, includes seven elements related to CFG functioning (Relationships, Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, Group Learning Agenda, Meeting Focus, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning) matched with descriptors at three levels of development (Beginning, Developing, and Highly Functioning). Chapter 4 provides a more detailed description of the development of this tool.

**Consulting with a Panel of Experts**

Since the developmental framework relied heavily on my own experiences, interpretations of literature, and vision for the possible, it was important to establish a sense of validity and to refine the tool prior to having a CFG use it. Therefore, I called upon a panel of experts to serve as my “critical friends” in relation to the framework. Those with expertise in critical friends group work include the directors of the National School Reform Faculty, the editors of NSRF’s quarterly publication, *Connections*, and national facilitators for new coaches trainings. Since these individuals live throughout the United States, I decided the best way to request feedback would be to send out a questionnaire by email.

I developed a series of open- and closed-ended questions to include in the questionnaire. The intent of the first several questions was to find out how each
respondent would describe the optimal CFG and a typical trajectory of development prior to examining the framework. Then I included questions regarding the importance of each element, the clarity of each description, and the appropriateness of each stage with likert type response options. Respondents also had the opportunity to add additional comments or suggestions for improving each element. At the time, I thought about the elements in three groupings: professional community, vision or purpose, and professional learning. For each grouping I also asked respondents to comment on what they thought was missing and what evidence groups could collect to help them discuss their development in that particular area. See Appendix A for the full questionnaire.

**Analysis**

Analysis of the responses returned by the panel of experts involved several steps of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. First, I assigned a numerical value to each of the four likert type responses, with a value of four signifying the most positive response and a value of one signifying the most negative response. Then, I calculated the mean response for each of the items relating to the importance, clarity, and appropriateness of the elements and stages. I determined that a mean below 3.0 for any of the items would indicate a need for revision in the framework. Next, I compiled all the typed responses by question into one document. I looked for response patterns both by question and by respondent. I used these patterns to inform my revisions of the framework. Finally, I considered alternate wording suggestions offered by several respondents to further edit the document.
Phase Two: Field Testing and Evaluation

Evaluation

An evaluation is a “systematic investigation of merit or worth (Guskey, 2000, p. 41) that involves efforts “to judge or enhance human effectiveness through systematic data-based inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 10). An evaluation might be formative, aimed at improving a program; summative, aimed at providing a final judgment call regarding effectiveness; or comparative, aimed at facilitating a decision between options (Popham, 1988). Evaluations can also be designed to generate generalizable knowledge about effective practices (Patton, 2002). Though scholars have proposed numerous models of evaluation varying in the level of emphasis placed on program contexts, implementation, processes, and outcomes, Patton (2002) asserts that utility, or usability, is of the utmost importance when designing an evaluation plan.

This research study is an evaluation study at multiple levels. First, I developed the self-study process as a formative participatory evaluation process aimed at improving a CFG’s work. Since conversational protocols typically structure a CFG’s meeting, and since I wanted to provide a structure to help groups make the most of their time in this process, I developed three protocols for the self-study process. The purpose of the first protocol is to use the developmental framework as a tool to help a CFG identify group strengths and areas in which the group would like to grow, ultimately crafting several specific goal statements. The purpose of the second protocol is to devise an action plan for meeting those goals and to discuss what types of evidence the group could collect to document progress. The purpose of the final protocol is to serve as a check-point for the
group: an opportunity to revisit the goals, examine evidence collected thus far, celebrate successes, and devise next steps. Chapter 4 provides a more detailed description of the self-study protocols.

At another level, this second phase of the research study was also intended to serve as a formative evaluation. This evaluation has two aims: refining the developmental framework and self-study process and making provisional judgments regarding their relative worth or usefulness. Although examining the outcomes of the self-study process would be an essential component of a summative evaluation study, the primary focus of this exploratory study was participants’ experiences with the developmental framework and self-study process. Figure 3-1 provides a visual representation of the components of this phase of the research study. The figure illustrates the use of a case study approach to evaluation of the self-study process.
Develop a Framework to Depict Stages of CFG Development

Use Feedback from a Panel of Experts to Revise the Framework

Develop a Self-Study Process
Collect Data for Three CFG Case Groups Using the Process

Self-Study Process

Protocol 1
Use Framework to Evaluate CFG and Set Goals

Protocol 2
Develop Action Plan

Protocol 3
Assess Progress

Evaluate and Revise Framework and Process Based on Observations, Interviews, and Questionnaires from the Three Case Groups

Figure 3-1: Overall View of Study
Case Study Approach

The design of this phase of the study is also informed by the multiple case study approach. Creswell (1998) characterizes a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). In this study, each case will be bound by both time and space. A single case will involve one CFG in one location engaging in one cycle of the self-study process. Though qualitative methods automatically provide the researcher with the opportunity to look more deeply at a particular context than quantitative methods, the qualitative researcher must still make decisions of whether to pursue greater depth or breadth in a study (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of this study, the breadth of information available from examining multiple cases supersedes the benefits of a deep look at just one case. Multiple cases are likely to result in more robust findings with a greater potential for transferability (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 1998). Since the intent of this study is to develop a tool that would be useful for self-study in multiple settings, it is important to maximize this potential.

Case Selection

Creswell (1998) suggests selecting the cases for a study through purposeful sampling. A researcher might choose a case because it is a critical case, a unique case, an extreme case, or a fairly typical case; and when selecting multiple cases, each additional case should “either (a) [predict] similar results (a literal replication) or (b) [predict] contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (Yin, 2003, p.
In selecting cases for this study, three important criteria stood out. First, it was essential that the CFG coaches and participants be interested in trying out the self-study process. Second, it was important that each CFG be established enough to be ready to assess their work together. I decided that a group must have worked together for a minimum of a year in order to be considered for participation. Third, it was important that the groups be located within a reasonable travel distance to allow for observations. The unique characteristics of each of the three cases I selected for this study strengthen the research design.

Participation in CFGs at the first site is one of a menu of professional development options offered by the school. Though several teachers had unsuccessfully attempted to get CFGs going in the school a number of years ago, enough K-12 teachers had selected this professional development option that three CFGs had met regularly during the 2005-2006 school year. Many members from these three CFGs met together as one group to participate in the self-study process for this study.

Participants in the self-study process at the second site were all teacher leaders at their high poverty elementary school. They had had been working to incorporate CFG values and protocols into team meetings, inquiry support groups, and faculty meetings during the 2005-2006 school year and had all participated in formal CFG coaches training during the summer. They used the self-study process during several of their regularly scheduled teacher leader meetings.

Participants at the third site met voluntarily on Saturday mornings in a home. The group included school administrators from several school districts, including a large urban district, as well as others in non-teaching educational roles. At the time of this
study they were in their fourth year of working together as a CFG and were working to promote CFG work in their respective schools. The coach of this group is a national facilitator with NSRF, and several group members had traveled to other locations to help new CFGs get off the ground.

**Data Collection**

Data collection for case studies should be detailed and in-depth so that the researcher can develop a rich description of each case (Creswell, 1998). It is also important to collect data from multiple sources for each question, because the triangulation of evidence from various sources during data analysis supports the validity of the findings (Yin, 2003). Additionally, when qualitative methods are used, the researcher makes a commitment to represent others in their own terms, not just according to the researcher’s outsider view. For this reason, Lofland (in Patton, 2002) emphasizes four people-oriented mandates that researchers should heed:

1. Be *close* to people in order to understand in depth and detail.
2. Be *factual*, capturing that which is really said and done.
3. Be *descriptive* of people, settings, and interactions.
4. Be *quotive* of what people speak and write.

For the purposes of this study I used observations, field notes, document analysis, interviews, and a questionnaire to obtain data that would allow me to generate a rich description of each case that is close, factual, descriptive, and quotive. These case descriptions in turn facilitated the identification of themes within each case and the
process of cross-case analysis. Table 3-1 establishes the links between the data collection methods and the research questions, visually demonstrating the use of multiple data sources for each question.

Table 3-1: Questions Linked with Methods of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>PoE</th>
<th>Doc</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Int</th>
<th>Que</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can the self-study framework be further developed as determined by a panel of experts?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How easy to use is the self-study process?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do CFG members perceive that the developmental framework is useful?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might the framework and process be even further developed?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the self-study process?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PoE: Panel of Experts Questionnaire; Doc: Document Analysis; Obs: Observations; Int: Interview; Que: Participant Questionnaire

**Observation and Field Notes**

Patton (2002) asserts that in much of his work as a qualitative researcher and evaluator, nothing could have substituted for direct observational and participatory experience in helping him to truly understand a program. He suggests several benefits of naturalistic observation:

- A richer understanding of the context in which people interact;
- Less need to rely on assumptions or prior conceptualizations of the setting;
• Personal knowledge of the setting rather than a complete reliance on the perceptions of others;
• The opportunity to see those things which may escape the awareness of participants because they are such a part of the normal routine; and
• The opportunity to learn things interviewees might be unwilling to talk about.

Observations of the self-study process at each site were critical in this study, allowing me to understand the overall interactions of group members, interpretations of the developmental framework, and experience with the self-study process as no other data collection method would have allowed. One unique feature of protocols is the debrief at the end, during which participants talk about their experience with the protocol structure itself, how it worked for them, and how they might change it for future use. This provided direct verbal response from participants to enhance my own interpretations as the observer.

I felt it would be most appropriate for me to take on the role of onlooker rather than participant observer during each of the self-study meetings for two reasons. First, though I recognize that my very presence as an observer can influence the dynamics or interactions of the group, I wanted to keep that influence to a minimum. Even though two of the groups wondered if it would be preferable for me to facilitate the protocols, I requested that they select one of their own members to facilitate. I wondered how these facilitators would interpret each step of the self-study protocols apart from my perspective or intent and how those interpretations would affect the overall process. Second, without the responsibility of facilitating or participating in the self-study process, I was free to take notes and mentally process the protocol while I was observing.
Although I did videotape or audiotape each protocol session so that I could go back and analyze transcripts in greater detail, these initial observational notes helped me to remember surprises and initial mental connections I wanted to pursue further. These notes also contributed to my ability to piece together an account of one of the protocols for which the recording equipment malfunctioned.

As soon as possible following each initial meeting with the three CFGs and each self-study observation, I typed up personal recollections, impressions, and reflections. These included the date, notes on how the protocol as enacted by the group differed from my intent, new insights I had gained regarding group development, my reactions or feelings, questions I wanted to think about more deeply, and ideas I had for refining the process.

**Documents**

Yin (2003) suggests that documents are likely to be relevant data sources for nearly every case study; and Patton (2002) suggests that documents are not only valuable as a direct source of information, but also as a “stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (p. 294). For this study I saved all email correspondence with the schools and facilitators. I also typed up all charts generated by the groups during the self-study protocols.
Interview

Though direct observation and document analysis can serve as valuable data sources, there are some things that are impossible to find out without directly asking participants. For example, in-depth interviews can provide insight into the experiences of other people and the meaning they make from those experiences (Seidman, 1991). Qualitative interviewing is based on the assumptions that it is possible for individuals to be explicit about their perspectives and that these individual perspectives are of value to the researcher (Patton, 2002). Interviews can vary in length and formality. Yin (2003) recommends a focused interview, a short (perhaps one hour) interview in which the interviewer follows a specific set of open-ended questions in a conversational style.

Although the perspectives of individuals within a single CFG might vary significantly, it would not be realistic to interview each participant. Therefore, I chose to interview the facilitator(s) of the self-study protocols from each CFG. I constructed a fairly detailed interview guide to ensure that the time with each interviewee would be used efficiently, to guarantee that the same topics would be discussed with each interviewee, and to facilitate data analysis with responses that are easy to find and compare (Patton, 2002). However, I also wanted the freedom and flexibility to pursue an unexpected path that would provide greater insights regarding the developmental framework or self-study protocols. Therefore, the interview guide provided in Appendix B should be interpreted as a loose guide instead of a strict structure. Though I had intended to transcribe each audiotaped interview upon its completion so that I might capture the exact words of the interviewees, this was only possible with Case 1. The
interview with the Case 2 facilitators was not recorded, and the poor quality of the recording while interviewing the Case 3 facilitator made it impossible to understand most of her responses. Therefore, for these two cases I used the notes I had taken during the interview and my additional recollections to write up as close an account as possible for future reference.

**Questionnaire**

Though it was not feasible to interview every participant, I did feel it would be beneficial to investigate the perspectives of all the participants in some way. Questionnaires provide a more efficient means of gaining a breadth of participant perspectives. At the conclusion of the self-study process I asked each individual to complete a questionnaire with a mix of closed- and open-ended response items regarding their experience with the framework and the process, pros and cons of participating, and recommendations for improving the process. A copy of this questionnaire is included in Appendix C.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (1998) describes the analysis of qualitative data as a “complex, time-consuming process… the ambitious task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories” (p. 16-17). He later describes data analysis
as a spiraling process involving data management; reading, rereading, and jotting down notes; description, classification, and interpretation; and visualization and representation.

Analysis of Observations, Field Notes, Emails, Documents, and Interviews

Developing a system for organizing the data was an important beginning step. Nearly all the data I collected could be stored in electronic form. Following each observation, I typed up my field notes, any charts generated during the meeting, and my additional reflections. I transferred audio and video files from observations and interviews to my computer and used the video analysis program Studiocode for initial coding and to assist me with transcription. I also created an electronic document for each case in which to paste all pertinent email communication so that it would be in one place. I named each file so that it would be easily identifiable, and I saved the data in folders by case, backing up my data on jumpdrive and CD regularly. I also kept a folder for each case to store copies of electronic documents that I had chosen to print as well as any additional paper documentation.

Stake (1995) writes, “Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). I began analyzing the data as I first collected it and continued analysis for the duration of the study. Immediately following each protocol observation I transcribed the session, typed up a document to outline the protocol as enacted to compare with the protocol that they had been given, read the transcript several times, made notes in the margin, and highlighted connections between their conversation about their CFG’s strengths and weaknesses and the content in the developmental
framework / narratives. I used this initial analysis as the basis for writing a detailed description of the experience for each CFG.

Once this initial analysis was complete, I began a more intense analysis of the data for each case. Patton (2002) suggests that particularly in the case of formative evaluations, the research questions should provide the focus for data analysis. I also found that it was essential to continually return to the research questions in order to maintain my focus. As I read through protocol transcripts, field notes, emails, and other documents again, I created a document for each case into which I could paste any sentence, paragraph, or transcript excerpt that would warrant further reading and analysis. As I pasted portions of the data into this new document, I sorted them by initial broad categories based on the research questions: process, process reactions, issues, and framework. Occasionally, I pasted the same item into multiple categories. An additional category that arose during this process I named “surprises”.

Then, one case at a time, I printed out the compiled text in each category, and cut the document apart into small units of analysis, meticulously labeling each small strip by data source and category. I grouped the strips into smaller and smaller groupings based on their commonalities. I tried to identify the essential meaning from each strip and began looking for patterns within each small grouping. Table 3-2 highlights the primary categories into which I grouped the strips.
One smaller grouping that emerged in the process reactions category was the benefits participants perceived from their self-study experience. Table 3-3 illustrates how I reduced key words and phrases from the data in this grouping into three units of meaning. After completing this process for each case, I began to look for commonalities and differences across cases. For example, I compared the different CFGs’ perceptions of the benefits of participating in the self-study process. Table 3-4 presents the units of meaning that I developed based on words and phrases.
from the Case 2 data. In examining the lists of benefits side by side, I realized that even though I had used different labels, the same basic ideas had emerged from the data in both cases.

Table 3-3: Case 3 Units of Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Benefit</th>
<th>Words and Phrases from which Benefit was Derived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for Reflection</td>
<td>Dug in, rich conversation, stop/think/focus, this process pushes us to highly functioning for the element reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frames group identity</td>
<td>Who we are, where we’ve been, where we’re going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupts current routine/provides new vision of the possible</td>
<td>Uncomfortable, pushed us, refocus, frames where we’re going</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-4: Case 2 Units of Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Benefit</th>
<th>Words and Phrases from which Benefit was Derived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about our work</td>
<td>Dissect, analyze, reflect, look at what we do well and what we need to improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a common understanding of our work</td>
<td>Clarify what we’re doing, unify, some have been involved longer than others, narrow our focus, pinpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing direction for our work</td>
<td>Determine goals, leads us in a direction, keep on track for the year, I know he next step – what we need to do, this is doable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Questionnaire Analysis**

When I received the surveys back from each CFG, I immediately labeled each one by case and numbered each one within the case. For example, there were six surveys returned from Case 3. I labeled each one with a P, the letter I chose for this case. Then I
labeled each one with a number from one to six. I created a spreadsheet for the data from each case, typing in open-ended responses by question and participant number, and entering the numerical data from likert type responses. I then calculated the mean, median, and mode response for each likert type question and grouped together similar open-ended responses to look for what themes or patterns would emerge. Though there were cases in which one participant mentioned the same idea in multiple questions, I thought it more important to look for similar ideas arising from multiple participants.

**Process Analysis**

In addition to analyzing the experiences and perceptions of CFG members during the self-study process, I also wanted to examine the implementation or use of the three protocols. Though investigating the results of the self-study process in terms of its influence on CFG development or future work is beyond the scope of this study, I did feel it would be important to examine whether or not each group achieved the intended outcomes for each specific protocol: group self-assessment, goal setting, developing an action plan, using evidence, monitoring progress, and checking back in. To do this I used the Inspiration software to create a map, or chart, of the portions of each CFG’s discussions that most pertained to the intended outcomes. These visual diagrams, coupled with sections of protocol transcripts and the outlines of how each protocol was enacted as compared to the protocol directions, provided the basis for such an outcomes analysis.
Trustworthiness of the Study

In rationalistic, or “scientific” research, researchers must establish the validity and reliability of the study; that is, the degree to which the researcher has measured what was intended and the degree to which the findings might be duplicated across studies. Guba and Lincoln (2000) assert that researchers and evaluators engaged in naturalistic inquiry are more concerned with the trustworthiness of the study. This means the researcher attends to four major criteria: (1) the truth value or credibility of the study; (2) the applicability or transferability of the study; (3) the consistency or dependability of the study; and (4) the neutrality or confirmability of the study.

Two strategies are appropriate for supporting the credibility of this study. The first is data triangulation. “This means comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means” (Patton, 2002, p. 559). Patton provides several examples, such as comparing observations with interviews or comparing perspectives of people from different points of view. When multiple sources point to the same conclusions, the claims are stronger. Data triangulation in this study involved both comparing different data sources within a single case and comparing findings across cases. For example, three data sources within Case 2 suggested that the second protocol in the self-study process was confusing. First, as participants debriefed the protocol, they discussed strategies that might have lessened the confusion, such as providing a hard copy of the protocol steps for each participant to look at during the meeting. Second, during the interview, the facilitator of this protocol said she felt the different time periods were confusing and that, having never done this type of protocol
before, she was not sure where the steps were leading. Third, two participants mentioned
the confusion of the different times in open-ended questionnaire responses. Not only do
three data sources within this case document confusion in the second protocol, but this
data from Cases 1 and 3 also add to the weight of evidence. Data from these cases,
including questions participants asked, analysis of protocol implementation, participant
comments during the protocol debrief, and interviews, all point to confusion in the
second protocol.

A second strategy for supporting the credibility of this study involves generating
and assessing rival conclusions, seeking alternate ways to organize the data that might
lead to different explanations, and examining the implications of negative cases, or pieces
of the data that do not fit in neatly with the rest (Yin, 2003; Patton, 2002). This eliminates
the suspicions that the researcher has used personal biases to shape the findings. One
example comes from the data in Case 1. The overall questionnaire responses in this case
were much more negative than in the other two cases. Even within the case, questionnaire
responses varied considerably across respondents. It was important to carefully examine
data from all sources in this case to determine possible explanations for these differences.

Two factors enhance the transferability of this study, or the likelihood that the
findings can be useful for other CFGs. First, using multiple cases increases the potential
for transferability (Yin, 2003). Though each case will be unique, patterns observed across
cases are more likely to occur in other contexts. The use of multiple cases also
accentuates the dependability of the study, or the likelihood that the findings would be
consistently repeated with other similar respondents in similar contexts. For example, if
all three CFGs in this study struggled to some extent with the second self-study protocol,
then it is likely that other groups would also struggle with this protocol. It is also likely that refining this protocol to address the confusing areas would benefit other groups engaging in this process. Second, thick descriptions of each case allow the potential for readers to identify similarities between these cases and their own contexts and thus determine to what extent they feel the findings of this study would be applicable in their own setting (Creswell, 1998).

Finally, though naturalistic inquiry puts more emphasis on the data than on the inquirer, it is important for the researcher to conduct honest and ethical research in order to ensure that the findings are solely a function of the conditions of inquiry and not of the researcher’s personal biases, motivations, and preconceived notions. Clarifying my own bias as a researcher from the beginning of the study was important to ensure that my own past experiences and biases would not get in the way of quality data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

**Researcher Position**

I approached this research study with both optimism and skepticism due to my own experiences participating in CFGs. My first introduction to critical friends groups occurred in the spring of 2004 when I had the opportunity to join others from the local Professional Development School (PDS) in NSRF’s coaches training seminar. Although it was really valuable to engage in professional conversations with others from the university and school district, what intrigued me most was how the words of the trainers communicated the value and worth of each person in attendance and the way in which the
norms our group established worked together with the protocols so that sense of value was enacted in each conversation. Because it was my first year in the PDS community as a new graduate student, I was just beginning to form professional relationships. I came to the training sessions with many uncertainties regarding my “status” in the community and whether or not my expertise had value in this different setting. I also brought many uncertainties due to the fact that I was in a new professional role supervising interns. The trainer’s emphasis on making space for everyone to participate helped me to feel comfortable to speak up in group discussions and even to present a piece of intern work for discussion. I left the training with the sense that I was a respected member of the community with something to contribute, but more importantly, with the renewed sense that it was normal and acceptable to have questions about my practice and to share those with other professionals.

As I have continued to participate in critical friends groups, the initial empowering affective response has given way to wonderings about the potential long term professional benefits of participation in a CFG. I wonder if every CFG has the potential to continue growing and developing into a mature group, capable of real impact on teaching and learning. I wonder if there are ways to speed up that process. I wonder if it is possible for a group to maintain a common vision with high group turnover from year to year. I feel it is incredibly important to establish whether or not CFGs are worth the time and commitment, but I also feel a sense of responsibility towards making sure each group has a “fair chance” at reaching its potential, whatever that ultimate potential might be. As I began the study, it was my hope that this process would help groups to monitor and improve their CFG experience, but I wondered if groups would want to take
on such a task or if it was even possible to create developmental framework with universal merit.
Chapter 4
DEVELOPING A TOOL AND PROCESS FOR SELF-STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe how the developmental framework and self-study protocols came into being. I begin by describing the initial development of the framework, continue by describing the refinements that arose through the initial validation process through consultation with a panel of experts, and conclude with a description and rationale for the structure of the self-study process.

Initial Drafting of the Framework

The idea to develop a tool for CFG self-study initially emerged as I contemplated the development of a process for participatory evaluation to help determine the extent to which a critical friends group might serve as a vehicle for significant professional growth and development for its members. I wondered to what extent various groups actually functioned as professional learning communities, to what extent they collected evidence of their individual or collective learning, and to what extent that learning impacted the students in their classrooms. I hoped that in providing a developmental framework for thinking about CFG work, CFG members would have a focus for collecting and discussing evidence of their own learning and their students’ learning so we could collectively address questions about the relative worth of CFGs as a form of professional
development. In beginning to outline this framework, I drew on numerous professional readings as well as my own experiences and vision for CFG work.

In an early research study, Dunne & Honts (1998) concluded that despite a wide degree of variability in local implementation, critical friends groups tended to follow three typical stages of development: (1) a support stage, (2) an improvement stage, and (3) a stage of questioning fundamental practices and purposes. In the first stage, the CFG functioned as a safe space, an oasis from the pressures of the profession, and a support group for discussing general problems related to teaching and learning. The second stage was marked by a focus on classroom practice and improving lessons. Group members asked one another challenging questions that helped them think more deeply about their teaching practice and about how students learn. Then, in stage three, the CFG would begin to examine underlying questions about teaching and the purposes of education, connecting more specific practices to larger issues of the school and community. These three stages formed the basis of the initial skeleton framework.

The work of several other scholars most definitely influenced the fleshing out of the developmental framework. Lieberman & Miller (1999) suggest that the development of true professional learning communities in schools requires cultural transformation rooted in three significant transitions, or shifts in perspective, towards a professional orientation, a community orientation, and a learning orientation. Reflecting on these transitions led me to initially organize the framework around two main ideas: professional community and professional learning. Professional learning should be the primary aim of the group, and the learning outcomes for teachers and students are what ultimately determines the worth or effectiveness of the work in a professional learning
community. However, the ability to engage in collaborative professional learning often hinges upon important community factors, such as commitment and trusting relationships. Descriptions of the stages of development of professional learning communities by Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth (2001) and Dufour & Eaker (1998) particularly informed aspects of the framework related to group member interactions, dealing with conflict, building trust, working toward common goals, and developing a collective sense of responsibility for each others’ growth. Descriptions of factors related to teacher and student learning in studies by Armstrong (2003) and Nave (2000) specifically influenced the section of the framework on professional learning.

After drafting and tweaking and revising and tweaking again, the initial draft of the developmental framework addressed seven different elements: Relationships, Shared Leadership, Commitment, Group Learning Agenda, Meeting Focus, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching Practice and Student Learning (see Appendix D). Additional readings on group development confirmed the importance of many ideas embedded in these elements: the discovery of commonalities, the importance of trust and commitment, the need for goals and monitoring the group’s work, and the power of inquiry and examining student data (Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

By this point my purpose had also shifted from using this framework as one component of an evaluation study determining the ultimate merit of CFGs as a form of professional development to using it as a tool to help groups monitor and improve their work.
Validation of the Framework

It is important to acknowledge that the initial developmental framework represented many of my own values, assumptions, and biases as I struggled to articulate the characteristics that might correspond with three stages of development in each of the seven elements I chose to include. Though my musings were rooted in prior professional readings and conversations related specifically to critical friends groups or more generally to professional learning communities, it is difficult to determine precisely which ideas came directly through my interpretation of the literature and which were entirely my own. I know my own experiences, questions, struggles, and vision largely shaped the initial draft, but my experience is limited. Therefore, in order to determine whether this framework had any potential for use with other CFGs, it was important for me to consult with others more experienced in CFG work, requesting that they serve as my “critical friends.”

A panel of experts consisting of seven members provided feedback on the framework through responding to an email questionnaire (see Appendix A). In addition to participating in CFGs for a number of years, each member of the panel had been involved with NSRF and CFGs in one or more of the following roles: founder of CFGs, NSRF Director, national facilitator for CFG coaches’ training, member of the Accountability Council, NSRF’s National Research Coordinator, and editor of NSRF’s publication, *Connections*. In other words, those included on this panel are truly representative of those with the most expertise about critical friends groups.
The questionnaire included a combination of open and closed response questions. For each element on the framework the questionnaire posed three LIKERT type questions: (1) How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning; (2) How clear are the descriptions in this element; and (3) How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element? Respondents circled one of four choices; for example: Very Important, Somewhat Important, Somewhat Unimportant, or Very Unimportant. I chose to assign numerical values of one to four in order to analyze these responses, one corresponding to Very Unimportant and four corresponding to Very Important. Only four of the experts chose to respond to these questions; however, as Table 4-1 indicates, their responses in this section indicate a very positive overall reaction.
Response means ranging from 3.00 to 4.00 with an overall mean of 3.57 signify that all seven elements included in the framework are perceived to be important to a CFG’s functioning. Response means ranging from 3.25 to 3.75 with an overall mean of 3.49 show that each element is fairly clear in its description. Response means ranging from 3.00 to 3.50 for five of the seven elements indicate that the stage descriptions were

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overall perceived as appropriate. In contrast, the lower response means of 2.50 for Shared Leadership and Group Learning Agenda denoted a definite need to reconsider the stages for these two elements. Two unsolicited comments written in at the end of the survey add weight to the positive overall reaction of the panel of experts to this self-study framework:

“Thank you for your work! You have pushed me to think about these issues and I would really like to get other members of my CFG to respond to your survey. The exercise of completing the survey and discussing our responses would help us as we plan our groups’ next steps.” (Respondent 1)

“Thank you for the opportunity for input. I am thrilled that you are doing this important and much needed research, and I would welcome a conversation with you regarding any of my comments.” (Respondent 5)

The questionnaire also provided space for respondents to make suggestions for improving each element and to offer additional comments, and six respondents chose to write in responses for some or all of these open-ended questions. While mean responses to the LIKERT type questions indicated I needed to specifically focus on the elements Shared Leadership and Group Learning Agenda, I looked for themes across open-ended responses for each of the elements that should inform revisions to the framework. Although one or more respondents offered suggestions for subtle changes in wording or raised questions worthy of consideration for each element, I was only able to identify a clear pattern for change in the responses to the element Shared Leadership.

Since I struggled most to define Shared Leadership in my initial draft, I was not surprised that this element was the subject of the most questions and comments from the panel of experts. Respondent comments indicated that this element neither clearly distinguished between the protocol facilitator and the group coach nor articulated how
formal leadership might be distributed among members. One particularly detailed comment challenged the notion that completely shared leadership was even feasible:

The two CFGs that I coach bring their real work to the table, but they wouldn’t if they didn’t have a coach (me). I know this because they have struggled to “coach” themselves (all consist of trained CFG coaches) in the past, but the group could not maintain its focus. Somehow, it seemed that they needed an outside facilitator to hold and keep them accountable to the group (is this unusual?) Likewise, the long-term CFG (the group that I would call “mature”) of which I am a member struggles mightily with issues of shared leadership. We will bring our real work to the table, but members are reticent to share leadership, or step into the role that one member “informally” holds. Whenever we have tried to distribute the leadership among group members, we haven’t been successful. Last year we experienced success with one member (different from our usual “leader”) took on the responsibility for planning three months of meetings. One leadership issue that we seem to do well is facilitating for one another – engaging in several pre-conferences, honing the framing question or issue, matching protocol to purpose, and facilitating a feedback session for a colleague. …In the three CFGs I describe above, the facilitation role is shared, and in the CFG I belong to, the “coaching” is somewhat shared (we often collaboratively determine what we need), but the group is informally “led” by one person. (Respondent 7)

This respondent reiterated the vital importance of the leadership of a competent coach again when responding to the final element, Impact on Teaching and Learning.

Literature on group processes confirms the complexities of describing small group leadership. Barker, et al. (1979) define leadership as “influential behavior, voluntarily accepted by group members, which moves a group toward its recognized goal and/or maintains the group” (p. 226). As such, there are three important functions of leadership that one or more members of a group may perform: (1) task leadership, (2) socio-emotional or maintenance leadership, and (3) guidance leadership (Brown, 2000; Barker, et al., 1979). Task leadership is important for helping a group move towards its goal and may involve clarifying goals and their importance, stimulating action, monitoring group
progress, identifying problems that might hinder the group, seeking out needed
information, and making sure that the group learns from the expertise of each member.
Socio-emotional or maintenance leadership relates more to relationships and group
functioning and involves monitoring interpersonal relationships, group morale,
encouraging every member to fully participate, and promoting cooperation over
competition. Guidance leadership helps the group to function in an orderly fashion and
includes such activities as setting a group agenda, keeping track of time, or refocusing the
group on the topic. Considering leadership in terms of these three functions provides a
much richer perspective than simply asking who facilitates each meeting. While various
group members may take turns facilitating protocols, thus taking on much of the guidance
leadership, this expert feedback suggests that the coach plays an important role in task
and maintenance leadership throughout the group’s tenure.

Wheelan’s model of group development addresses the evolving role of a formal
group leader over time (Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996; Wheelan & Kaeser, 1997;
Wheelan & Tilin, 1999; Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999). As groups begin their work
together, group members often experience uncertainty related to group purpose and
relationships with others. Therefore, the stage one leader plays an important role in
providing both direction and a sense of safety for group members. The group views the
leader as both benevolent and competent, and its cohesion may be based on strong
identification with the leader. By stage three, the leader has moved away from the center
of the group’s work into more of a consultative role. Ultimately, leadership shifts to
“unleadership” in stage four, where delegation and the sharing of leadership among many
group members is characteristic. This model confirms that though the CFG coach may
facilitate all meetings and provide a strong sense of direction and group cohesion in the beginning, and though that coach may always provide an influential role in helping the group to chart and travel its course, the proportion of leadership shared by other group members should increase over time.

After reflecting on the issues raised by the panel of experts regarding shared leadership in conjunction with the literature on small group development, I chose to change the name of the element to Roles and Responsibilities: How are they distributed? In reconstructing this element I believe the focus has shifted away from the question of who facilitates to two broader and perhaps more important questions: (1) How fully does each group member participate in the group? and (2) To what extent does the group as a whole help determine vision and direction for the group’s work?

After looking for themes within each element, I also examined the comments of each individual respondent across all elements, looking for patterns of response. Several times Respondent 3 raised questions about the assumptions inherent in this framework that CFG members both work with students and share a teaching context. I appreciated the challenge to consider whether this framework could be redrafted to eliminate these assumptions. On the other hand, the majority of CFGs are school-based; and since the purpose of this framework is not to pigeon-hole a group into a particular stage, but rather to launch a group into conversation about setting goals for improvement, I feel this framework could still serve its intended purpose even if the group is “non-traditional.” Though I chose not to address this issue in this revision of the framework, I did make a mental note to keep the issue in mind while continuing the study, particularly as one of the CFGs participating in this study would be a less “traditional” group.
Comments from Respondent 5, such as the following, consistently addressed the need to address the formal mission of NSRF in this self-study framework:

I am concerned about the absence of any mention of the achievement gap, equity, or cultural relevancy. The mission of NSRF is committed to equity and if you are attempting to help CFGs reflect on their development over time without a connection to our mission, a group could be mature and the inequities within the school not be addressed. If each student’s achievement grows proportionately, we would, in the end, still have an unacceptable achievement gap.

I agree that NSRF’s organizational focus on equity is vitally important for our nation’s schools. On the other hand, I am not sure that every CFG shares this focus, nor that a CFG must focus primarily on equity in order to be a powerful impetus for professional growth. The purpose of this particular framework is to help a group evaluate its growth as a CFG or professional learning community in general, not to measure its adherence to a particular reform agenda. So, while I support the idea of creating an additional framework for facilitating a group’s reflection on equity, I chose not to make that the overall focus of this particular framework. Still, as issues of equity have a huge relationship to issues of student learning, I did choose to adjust some of the language in the most highly functioning category to reflect ideas of equity.

Finally, analysis of the four sets of responses to two additional open-ended questions (What is your vision for the ideal, or most mature, CFG? and How would you describe the steps a group typically goes through in order to reach maturity?) served as additional confirmation of the ideas included within the framework. Two respondents reinforced the ideas in the element, Relationships, emphasizing the importance of trusting relationships that allow group members to give one another challenging feedback. Respondent 3 suggested that group development occurs as groups learn to use the
protocols more effectively, learn how to give better feedback, and begin to trust others
enough to bring riskier questions and work samples, while Respondent 5 again highlights
the importance of developing trust so that group members can expose their
vulnerabilities, address inequities, commit to learning and taking action in the school and
community.

Two other respondents reinforced the idea that mature CFGs engage in shared
inquiry, relating to the element, Group Learning Agenda. Respondent 1 commented on
how a group’s time spent reading texts, looking at student or adult work, and engaging in
peer coaching should ideally all relate to that shared inquiry, while Respondent 7
described the potential for the most mature groups to engage in the inquiry cycle together
– defining a question, doing “research” and collecting evidence, examining that evidence,
redefining their questions, etc. These two respondents also emphasized the importance of
accountability, as addressed in the framework elements Commitment and Impact on
Teaching and Learning. Respondent 7 writes:

Members are accountable to the success of each other, and hold each other
accountable to the work by reporting back to the group, checking in on the
progress of work away from the group, and documenting themes and
findings. Group members are able to articulate how their work in the CFG
is positively impacting student achievement, and they can point to data
that illuminates their claim.

Respondent 1 also emphasizes the importance of documenting learning as part of
the accountability process, whether in the form of blogs or the development of a group
portfolio. However, this respondent also adds another layer of accountability beyond
what is present in the framework, suggesting:
public discussion of the documented learning that includes non-professional staff, students and their family members in order to build in accountability and go deeper with lessons learned. (Respondent 7)

In summary, the feedback of the panel experts was both positive and constructive. Responses to the questionnaire both affirmed and expanded upon ideas already contained within the developmental framework and provided questions and alternative perspectives for consideration. Though the Shared Leadership element was the only element to undergo complete transformation, every single element was amended in some way due to the comments and suggestions of the panel members.

In addition to modifications of wording, the framework also underwent a “facelift” in form so that CFG members might find it easier to read and reflect upon. Both the initial framework draft and a final draft highlighting the changes resulting from the validation process are provided in Appendix D. Finally, I developed a set of three narratives that CFGs could select as an alternate tool for group self-assessment. Each narrative described a fictional CFG at a different stage of development and incorporated all seven elements from the developmental framework. The narratives are also included in Appendix D and are color coded to show the connection to each element on the framework.

**Designing the Self-Study Protocols**

In designing the actual self-study process, time and structure were the two primary considerations. The amount of time spent in the process needed to be long enough to allow for deep and meaningful conversation, yet short enough that CFGs might
consider it a realistic endeavor. Though a group could have the option of devoting more
time to the process, I decided that a minimum of three one hour meetings would be
necessary in order to address all the steps I felt would be critical in this process: assessing
the development of the CFG, setting goals for growth, developing an action plan, and
then checking back in after a period of time to monitor growth. My concerns about time
coupled with this ambitious conversational agenda suggested the need for a clearly
outlined process. Since CFGs generally use protocols to structure their meetings because
of the way they help a group to focus their conversation, it made sense to develop a set of
protocols for this process as well. This would enable the group to cover more ground in a
short time.

The ultimate goal I had in mind for the first meeting would be for the CFG to
develop concrete goals for their future work and growth. However, analysis of the current
status of the group’s work and functioning and prioritizing areas for growth would be
important steps prior to goal-setting. I wrestled with a number of questions in the design
of the first protocol. Would it be reasonable to expect individuals to begin reading and
analyzing their group prior to the meeting, or should time be provided during the
protocol? Should the group discuss every element in the framework or should I devise
some sort of system the group could use to identify which elements they felt they most
needed to discuss? How could I develop an evidence-based process?

Finally, I decided upon six steps for the first protocol. The facilitator or the group
would decide ahead of time whether to use the developmental framework as the tool for
group analysis or the set of three narratives I wrote based on the developmental
framework. As the CFG met for the first protocol they would begin by individually
reading the framework or narratives and think about where their group best fit. Second, thinking about the document holistically rather than by element, the group would identify words and phrases from the document that describe their current CFG reality, supporting their selections with evidence. Next, they would identify words and phrases that described an area in which they would like the group to grow. In order to begin honing in on specific goal foci, the group would then look for patterns or themes in the words and phrases identified for future growth. I assumed that areas most important to the group might be addressed by multiple words and phrases on the list. Finally, based on the themes and what the group felt were the highest priority areas, they would craft specific goal statements. The sixth and final step, typical of all CFG meetings, would be to debrief the protocol, analyzing what went well or what they would change about the process or their own interactions during the process.

Once the CFG established concrete goals during the first meeting, the intended outcome for the second meeting was to develop an action plan with concrete steps for accomplishing the goals. Murphy’s (2002) Future Protocol intended for use in the early stages of developing a plan seemed a good place to start in developing the protocol for this session. This protocol allows the group to envision what it would look like to have the plan carried out with the best possible outcomes and to discuss what factors had allowed the plan to be implemented so successfully. What I felt was lacking was the opportunity for the group to decide upon their next steps in concrete terms. I tweaked the protocol to better fit my purposes and ended up with seven steps. First, someone in the group would recap the goals generated in the initial meeting. Then other group members would have the opportunity to ask for clarification on anything that remained unclear and
elaborate on anything they felt was missing. Next the group would project into the future to envision what their group would look like, feel like, and sound like once those goals had been accomplished. This step was followed by a step of looking back from that future time to describe what the group was like when they started working on these goals. Next the group would discuss how they had gotten from the starting place to the best case scenario. Finally, the group would outline the concrete steps they intended to take in order to reach those goals. Once again they would close their meeting by debriefing the protocol.

Establishing goals and an action plan for meeting those goals are important steps, but without some means of monitoring progress, the goals may never be accomplished. I felt it was important to build in some sort of accountability measure. The third protocol provides CFGs with the opportunity to check in and assess their progress towards their goals, both to celebrate successes and determine the next steps to take in working towards the goals. This protocol has five steps. The group would begin by posting and reviewing their goals. Then in pairs or triads they would brainstorm concrete evidence of progress towards their goals, writing each piece of evidence on a sticky note. They would also begin to discuss whether or not they still needed to work on each goal and potential next steps. As the group reconvened they would post each sticky note next to the goal it matched, and one person would read each piece of evidence aloud. Then the group would discuss what the evidence said about their progress towards their goals, highlighting both positive growth and areas in need of continued work. They would again discuss the next steps needed in their work together and conclude by debriefing the protocol. Appendix E
provides copies of the three protocols as initially developed for this study, while figure 4-1 provides a visual overview of the purposes for each protocol.

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**Figure 4-1: Self-Study Overview**

- **Protocol 1**: Assess Group’s Development and Set Goals
- **Protocol 2**: Develop Action Plan
- **Protocol 3**: Assess Progress Revise Action Plan

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Chapter 5

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Introduction

Each CFG that participated in this study was unique, both in its characteristics and in its experiences with the self-study process. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed description of how the self-study process was enacted in each case as a frame of reference for the data analysis chapters. The CFG in Case One was the only group to do the self-study process in its entirety. The other two CFGs had only done the first two protocols at the time of this writing.

Case 1

The school campus had the feel of a tropical resort when I arrived on a balmy Friday morning in October. Outdoor hallways between classrooms provided a wonderful view of the large trees and the creek that ran through the middle of the property. All was quiet since students had the day off, and teachers dressed in shorts or other casual attire. I had visited with two of the school’s three CFG coaches the month before, and they seemed quite interested in the possibilities that might come about through participation in this research study. In my field notes following this initial meeting, I wrote:

In this setting most CFG members participate on a voluntary basis, as one of a menu of professional development options, but new hires are required to participate in a CFG… They talk about how the work is truly valued by
teachers and administrators as their professional development and how they have one Wednesday per month devoted to it. Far superior to “workshops” they don’t want to attend. Yet G referred to the work last year as floundering. Apparently even though the staff is enthusiastic, they aren’t attaining the vision that he has for what’s optimal. He talked about how he really felt doing something like this would be important for the staff. Gl looked less enthused until I actually handed out an old draft of the framework. Then the enthusiasm bubbled forth – “This is freaky – It’s like you’ve been following us around. These descriptions tell exactly about what we’ve been struggling with.” Interestingly, she particularly mentioned the section on leadership – a section I had been considering taking out. G also mentioned that he felt this instrument was perfect for where they’re at one year in. (September 28, 2006)

The coaches made special arrangements with the school administration to use a two hour block of time on this teacher work day so that they could do both protocols in one day rather than use two of their monthly meetings. They also decided to have members of all three CFGs discuss the framework together. They scheduled the meeting from 9:30 – 11:30AM, with the realization that they would really need to finish promptly so they could get to lunch and then be ready for the school’s “lock-down” drill that afternoon. Eighteen K-12 teachers slowly began to gather in a science classroom at 9:30AM with some discussion of whether their presence was voluntary or compulsory. Three of those eighteen had not participated in CFGs before this school year. Several worked on laptops or graded papers during the meeting since grades were due the following Wednesday. As the group was about to begin the first protocol, someone came in to show off a new baby. The “grandmas” of the group passed the baby around and “ooh-ed” and “aah-ed” for about ten minutes. Others left and came back during that time. The group finally reconvened and began their focused work together at 9:50AM.

What stood out to me about this group as I observed was the very casual and flexible nature of their work together. G had a very laid back style of facilitation, and
comments between group members frequently involved sarcastic humor. Even in reflecting back on their work together in the last year as compared to when several had tried to get CFGs going in the school at a previous time, several talked about their frustrations with the structure imposed by protocols:

N And there are some of us that did this 7 or 8 years ago and when there was much more of a focus on the protocol…but it was to the point where I didn't like going to meetings because I had a hard time with the protocol. …I preferred last year to the time before. I wasn't, I didn't feel as threatened by the protocol.

J And, and sometimes our best conversations came out of when we kind a stepped away from the protocols and let's, let's talk about these types of issues.

N See, John and I are not the kind of people that want to monopolize a conversation ever. [laughter] And we’re not the ones that want to do that, but I was very frustrated.

Facilitator You're why we had protocols. [laughter]

N I-I did not like the protocols.

Facilitator Ok, but there were protocols running last year, but they were not as restrictive, which is good.

N Yes, not as structured. …That did not make me feel uncomfortable.

The group spent about ten minutes reading and marking where they felt their group best fit on the framework. As the facilitator began to transition the group into the next step of the protocol, L suggested an extra step:

L Are we going to share where we each thought we were?

Facilitator Well, that's a good question. L asked should we, before we get into specific words and phrases, should we just—

L I'm would just be interested if my perceptions are similar to other people's or if I was way off base or—
[The facilitator looked back at me.]

Ellen  Do what you want to do.

Facilitator  Well, how about this, how about we take each one very briefly, like relationships, well, let’s see, relationships beginning raise your hand, developing raise, well, let's see, developing raise your hand, highly functioning raise your hand. …Just to get a pulse of where we all feel like we are. Is that kind of what you mean?

Many  Yeah.

The group took five minutes to share their perceptions of the group for each element with a show of hands. It was difficult to count the hands precisely since they did not hold them up long, but Table 5-1 provides a close estimate of the number of people selecting each stage of development for each of the elements. Overall the group perceived its work to reflect many beginning and developing characteristics across all elements. It would appear that they perceive Roles and Responsibilities, Group Learning Agenda, and Impact on Teaching and Learning as the least developed aspects of their collective work as defined by the developmental framework.

Table 5-1: Case 1 Estimated Number of Responses per Stage by Element

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next they spent ten minutes going around the circle sharing words or phrases from the framework that characterized their current work and interactions. There was some confusion initially as to whether the group was looking only at the first element or at the framework as a whole, but the facilitator clarified for the group. Individuals for the most part limited their contribution to literally just a word or phrase during this portion of the protocol. After just a few had shared, the facilitator spoke up:

*Are you sure we don’t need to chart these things? This feels, this feels good. I want to see. I’m writing them down on my paper.*

So one group member who was new to CFGs and did not feel like she had a lot she could contribute to the current discussion recorded the words and phrases on a chart for all to see. Figure 5-1 replicates the chart created during this step of the protocol. These words and phrases came mostly from the developing stage of the framework, but there were not any words and phrases selected from the elements Roles and Responsibilities or Group Learning Agenda.
As the facilitator transitioned the group to thinking about words and phrases to describe where the group would like to be or a direction in which they would like to grow, one individual insinuated that this step should not be necessary since the framework already defines what a highly functioning group looks like. Interestingly, about ten minutes later K provided a contrasting view:

…When people said we want to be most highly functioning in all this and looked through them, and when I looked through the most highly functional in all the places, my thinking was that you can't, you can't do all this in, in the amount of time or the amount of, of time we have to do the critical friends. So I'm looking at highly functional and saying it's wonderful to think we want to be there, BUT how do we focus our time to really fit what's our most important stuff to hit?

And then a few minutes later, he reiterated these ideas:

…My problem is when I look at this, I don't know if I want to put in the time to be in the most highly functioning piece in all cases, because to be

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendly (interaction)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trying</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to working together</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share passions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe topics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepening trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting but hesitant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinkering with practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some begin to take risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to questioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask fundamental questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5-1: The Group Now
there is not going to get done in one hour every two weeks or month or, you know. You're not going to get there in that type of time frame. You're probably talking about more like three or four hours a week to get to that. And I don't know that I'm willing to put that in, to get to that, to put that in is where I was coming from.

The group spent about twenty minutes on this step of the protocol. For approximately the first ten minutes the group developed a list of words and phrases indicating directions in which they would like to grow. Figure 5-2 replicates the chart created during this time. All the words and phrases selected by the group this time came from the most highly functioning stage, and they reflected each of the seven elements in some way.

- Peer coaching
- Collaborative planning
- Challenging basic assumptions
- ?ing
- Substantial and observable changes
- All members presenting
- Problem solving
- Taking action
- Collective responsibility
- Changes in participants
- Making public deep questions
- To disrupt inequitable practices
- Presenters/ participants know won’t be judged
- Equitable student learning across grades and subjects
- **Focusing time**
- Cont’d inquiry
- **Address conflict** (constructive)

Figure 5-2: Directions for Future Growth
During the remainder of this step in the protocol the group discussed several additional ideas related to the purpose and possibilities of their CFG work, continuing to reveal their questions or discomforts with the most highly functioning stage of the framework. Change was a major thread running through this discussion, as illustrated by the following excerpt from the transcript:

\[ \text{J} \]
I think there's a fundamental question, …like if we're looking for directions for the future, that the value of this, that we can talk in a trusting atmosphere is incredibly important, you know, for me because I can speak for myself, but are we an advisory committee? We don't have all the faculty here; we're not the administrators; and we don't really set policy…

\[ \text{L} \]
…I think it's school wide change through individual classrooms and not this kind of approach, you know what I mean? And that to me is very personal, like it's up to each individual person if they wanna solve problems in their practice and all that stuff, you know what I'm saying? I think this is possible to accomplish in critical friends, because it's all about what the participants want to do in their classrooms. Does that make any sense?

\[ \text{Gl} \]
…But I think L's piece, though, if we raise those issues and we start initiate those conversations, then it is a personal choice to pursue that and come to some kind of resolution yourself with it, you may opt in with some things to follow that up and do it or where other things, it's just like I, I can't do any more with this.

Another theme in this discussion related to equity. This was particularly interesting to me since a critique by one from my panel of experts had centered on the framework’s lack of a focus on equity. \( N \) begins this aspect of the conversation:

I also find that under most highly functioning there is the assumption that we're not being fair or equitable unless we are most highly functioning. Equitable student learning, equitable learning opportunities, equitable practices, getting rid of, disrupting inequitable practices, are all under most highly functioning; and I think there's an assumption that there's
something that's not going well unless we're there. And I don't think we're unfair, I mean, am I misreading inequitable? I mean, it bothered me that that was here and I'm going, I think that certainly it makes you more aware of how to reach all of your kids and hearing things, but I'm not quite sure why they kept that that word. You said to look at words that kept, you know, that kept repeating, and I was a little defensive about that that word. I was a little defensive about it. Like, hey, I'm fair. I know it's more to it than that.

In the discussion that ensued two big ideas dominated the discussion: the need to address the problem of equity and the denial of personal responsibility for the inequity. T persistently tried to describe how inequity might persist even when it is not purposeful:

> If all your kids aren't being successful then there's no equitability. It's not that you're purposely selecting kids that you want to be successful, but they're not all successful.

> It's the instruction that's not giving each kid an opportunity to learn, right, so, you know, not take it so personal, but look at it from the point of, I'm using this lesson plan, but all of my kids aren't being successful with it. How can I make it an equitable lesson plan?

N linked these comments on equity with the threads of the discussion relating to change with this comment: “I don’t see how attending critical friends groups once a month will have that, that much of an impact.”

Although the facilitator felt comfortable to allow the group to step away from the structure of the protocol for a little while to discuss these ideas, he did eventually bring them back to the next step, asking them to identify themes or patterns in what they had charted. The group quickly identified several words that they felt summed up the directions in which the group would like to grow, naming them the 4 Cs: collaborating, challenging, changing, and conflict. The group then spent about fifteen minutes questioning and clarifying what they meant by the word conflict. They discussed the need for productive conflict and the benefits of internal conflict in contrast to the tensions of
interpersonal conflict. During the discussion one group member brought up a specific negative example of conflict from the previous year:

So the comment in our group was, "We notice that there's a difference between the grades in middle school being a little bit higher than grades in, ninth and tenth grade." …And it's like, and that was, on the paper that's what it was. And there was no judgment that was said about that and immediately, immediately, boom, and the person just got completely defensive and started personally attacking people in the group after that, and it just kind of, it was like that wasn't the intent of the conversation …Then that set the tone kind of for the rest of the group conversation, it was just really kind of for the rest of the group for the rest of the year, after that.

The facilitator immediately responded:

Well, let's step back from that example for a second. This is exactly what we should be talking about at this time of year. This is, this is something that went on, and we're talking about different kinds of conflict and some that were, I don't know, um that CFG didn't have the tools or the practice or whatever to be able to fix itself when that happened. And, and it's important that we look at that and what is it that CFGs are going to do differently if that very same thing comes up again. What kind of tools do we need to get back on track?

Interspersed between further explanations of what went wrong and why, several attempted to begin addressing this question. The need to create a safe environment and the assumption that group members will have to address hard questions if their work is really about growing were two fundamental principles the group reiterated. Another individual suggested that if this type of situation should ever reoccur, then they should adjust groups so that the tension will not continue through the rest of the year.

Though as an outside observer I recognized the vital importance of this conversation, I also had my eye on the clock, and so I interjected:

Well, can I jump in and encourage you, just because I want to respect your time, and there's quite a bit left, can I encourage you to get back to the purpose... I know, as much as you hate protocols.
L commented, “We need an outsider like that,” and after quickly reviewing their four C’s, the group agreed to skip the last two steps in this protocol and take a break.

The three coaches crafted a general goal statement based on the four C’s during the break and presented it to the group at the start of the second protocol. Then the group spent about ten minutes again clarifying the word “conflict” and considering replacing it with “criticism”. Of particular concern was how individuals unable to attend this meeting would interpret either version. The group eventually “solved” this dilemma by concluding that they were involved in an unnecessary semantic argument and that each individual should simply substitute the word that felt most comfortable. Figure 5-3 presents the final goal statement as posted during the meeting.

Increase collaboration in order to create an atmosphere of safe constructive conflict (criticism) that challenges individual and group underlying assumptions in order to facilitate positive changes.

Figure 5-3: Case 1 Goal Statement

The group struggled a little bit with the next several steps of the protocol. They seemed a little confused and uncomfortable with projecting into the future and then looking back from the future. The facilitator began to describe the next step – projecting into the future to the end of the school year when these goals have been accomplished – but then turned to me for clarification. Several individuals offered some tentative statements, and that seemed to get the ideas flowing a bit. Even with the apparent confusion, I noted in my reflections following the meeting that this portion of the
protocol felt the calmest and most like my prior experiences with CFGs. However, due to time constraints the group only spent five minutes projecting into the future and five minutes looking back at the past to discuss how they had addressed their starting place to accomplish their goals. Then they spent five minutes brainstorming more concrete steps they could take to address their goals. Much of the conversation centered on how the group could keep their conversation going in between meetings, but there were other suggestions offered as well. They did not create a formal chart, but I jotted down their ideas in my field notes:

Suggestions included:

- J immediately volunteers to bring a sample of his own work to the next meeting
- Keep a blog
- Parking lot conversation (bridge conversation)
- Document our own individual change
- Help new members come on board
- Refer to what we’ve learned at the beginning of each meeting

(Field notes, October 20, 2006)

By 11:30AM most individuals present appeared to be itching to get to lunch. They quickly debriefed the morning’s work, reiterating the confusion in the final protocol, but also thanking me for providing them the opportunity to engage in this process. The debrief quickly disintegrated into the seemingly more urgent questions they had about the afternoon’s plans and procedures, and the group dispersed for lunch.

Seven months later, as school was letting out for the day, I returned to the same room just as the first few teachers were arriving for their CFG meeting. The first
comments I overheard were, “What are we doing today? I didn’t even know we were meeting,” and “Oh, you’re here again.” As I greeted M, the facilitator for this meeting, she said she was just reading through the protocol for the first time. The meeting began with nine in attendance, though three additional group members wandered in late, having been caught up in meetings with parents. Three of those in attendance had not been present at the October meeting.

M passed out a copy of the protocol and a review of the October meeting for everyone’s reference, replicated in Figure 5-4. The figure highlights in bold type the details that must have been added in after the October meeting, particularly the specific reference to differentiated instruction, the plan for the next three meetings, and the list of evidence they could collect to help them determine whether or not they have met their goals.
1st hour: The purpose of our first meeting today was to see where we felt our CFG was on a continuum of Beginning to Most Highly Functional. Based on the shared results, we fall between Beginning and Developing in all categories:
- Relationships=Developing
- Roles and Responsibilities=Beginning
- Commitment=Developing
- Meeting Focus=Developing
- Group Learning Agenda=Beginning
- Level of Reflection=split b/t Beginning and Developing
- Impact on Teaching and Learning=Beginning

From the descriptors provided by Ellen Ballock, we developed a goal for which we will strive for the year: “Increase collaboration in order to create an atmosphere of safe, constructive criticism/conflict that challenges underlying assumptions of individuals and groups in order to facilitate positive changes.”

2nd hour: The purpose of the second meeting today was to determine how we will meet our goal for the year with an outline of concrete steps that we will take.

1. What will we do? **Our first focus will be differentiated instruction**
2. Who will take on specific responsibilities? What resources will you need? How will you get them?

Nov. 15th: *J* has agreed to bring information to the November meeting regarding reading data from 2004-2006. As a CFG, we will try to develop how we as a faculty can utilize this data to differentiate our instruction to address the needs of our students in the different areas of reading comprehension. *J* will provide and explain the data for the group. *M, G,* and *Gl* will find the appropriate protocol to use to answer the question of how we as a faculty can utilize this data to differentiate our instruction to address the needs of our students in the different areas of reading comprehension.

December: (blog meeting) *G, Gl,* and *M* will provide the group with specific articles on differentiated instruction to read. Because there is no meeting in December, we facilitate a blog of the articles.

January 17th: *L* and *H* will provide information from the differentiated instruction conference that they will be attending in December. *G, Gl,* and *M* will find the appropriate protocol to use once they show what they learn from the conference.

3. How will you monitor your progress towards your goals?

First, we will use the blog to have outside meeting discussions of recent CFG meetings. Second, at each CFG meeting we use the first 5-10 minutes to share out how the previous meeting affected our own practice, thinking, etc.

4. What specific evidence will you collect so that you will know whether you have met your goals?
   - Blog usage: is it dynamic or static? Who uses it? How often?
   - Number of outside meeting ongoing conversations
   - Document individual change
   - Growth in attendance
   - End of the year gathering at *G’s* deck to celebrate our accomplishments

---

**Figure 5-4: October Meeting Review**
As $M$ gave directions for the first step of the protocol and read the goal aloud to the group, she said, “Boy, we’re wordy.” Another said, “That’s a mouthful,” and still another added, “Did we make that up?” $M$ split the group into pairs and reminded them:

So what you want to remember to do is to: what concrete evidence shows that we have met or made progress towards these goals? Ok, and actually we have one goal, but our concrete evidence. I guess that's how we're going to go through this. So, under number two, on each of the meetings and then on number four did we collect this evidence. In some places we haven't, but anyhow, ten minutes to talk with your partner.

The group spent ten minutes talking about their work from the year in pairs, and then they reconvened to discuss the evidence. Though sticky notes had been available for writing up evidence, most chose not to use them. They did, however, use a go-round to share and discuss their work for the year. Though this conversation did not directly refer to their goal statement, several participants referred to the stated action plans, and many reflected on the year in general. A few individuals asserted that the group could celebrate their work together on differentiated instruction. $J$ provided evidence of this:

Well, several of us attended the differentiated instruction workshop, and from that, you know, we shared out through critical friends on that. The presentations last time of individual use in classrooms, the multiple intelligence survey that was given through homerooms that eventually became, you know, our teacher inquiry… I think we've done quite a bit as far as that goes.

$K$ also added that their work on differentiated instruction was connecting to what was going on in the school as a whole:

What I did see happening out of here with differentiated instruction and what we talked about was saw, in the SACHS plan there were differentiated ideas, there were differentiated instruction examples, in the secondary plan there were differentiated instruction examples, in the secondary schools initiative, there were differentiated instruction, so I saw talking happening, which is surprising.
Others, however, focused on ways in which the group had been a disappointment for the year. They did not start a blog and realize that blogging is probably not a good option for their group. The turn-out at monthly meetings was less than they had hoped for, and they wondered if their group had been too focused on differentiated instruction and consequently missed out on the power of looking at student and teacher work samples. They spent approximately fifteen minutes in this step of the protocol, and then naturally moved into talking about what they could do next year without even being directed by the facilitator. For the remainder of the meeting the conversation wove back and forth between expressing opinions about the group’s work and talking about how to change for the next year.

They talked about possible next steps for continuing their focus on differentiated instruction, but one participant also asked that there be a clear process communicated for volunteering to bring work samples to share with the group. They also spent quite a bit of time discussing expectations for attendance at CFG meetings. N’s comment expresses the sentiments of many others within the group who want more people to be involved:

I think if we're concerned about attendance, we need to be clearer about whether people need to be here or not. Last year it was pretty clear, ah, this year I think all new teachers were told you don't have to worry about it, which you know, I have no problem with that. I've come to see Gl and M and D, my old friends that I don't get to see, you know I have a social need for coming to this group, so I [overlapping talk] No, but I mean, I think that that needs to be clear. You're either expected to be here or you're expected to be doing something else. And if you want the numbers, I don't think anybody would resent it. It's a Wednesday, we're scheduled for meetings, and you know, I know I missed a couple cause of being down for driver's ed, but in general, I think I wanted to come. And, though we don't want to make people come that don't want to come, it should be clear that they are expected to come or be doing something else in the way of professional development.
Participants used the debrief more to reiterate their dislike of protocols in general rather than to specifically address what worked or did not work in this protocol. A few participants shared how protocols help them to participate, while a few others expressed how protocols keep them from participating. However, there were two comments pertaining directly to this discussion. M said, “I like that we did this today, because at least now I know how people feel, you know, about what we want to do and what went well and what didn’t and why,” while K added, “I didn’t have any problem with this protocol. It led to more discussions than a lot of them do. A lot of them are stricter than this one.”

**Case 2**

I approached the first protocol meeting at this high poverty southern elementary school with uncertainty. I had met with a group of teacher leaders in September to introduce the self-study process and had been immediately impressed with their high level of commitment to students and to equity and the strong vision they communicated related to continuously improving their school, even though they had been designated an “A school” by the state the previous year. They had seemed enthusiastic and agreeable to trying out this process at the time, but an email from the group-appointed facilitator the night before warned me that there was still some confusion:

Hi Ellen,

Sorry I missed you last night. Let's go with the linguistic/creative side of the brain and use the three narratives. Since I'm so late in getting back to you, I'll make the copies for everyone. Also, some of the group members were a little confused concerning our participation in your study. Most
thought you would just be observing us in our groups as we worked. They didn't realize we would be, be using protocols chosen by you. We are prepared to meet and use your protocol tomorrow, but there might be some questions and clarification needed (Email Communication, November 28, 2006).

Ten teacher leaders, the school principal, and a doctoral student from the local university gathered around a long table on this November afternoon. They had helped themselves to a variety of soft drinks from the counter at one end of the room, and Hershey Kisses™ with colorful wrappers were scattered around the table. Though this group does not formally function as a CFG, the teacher leaders had all participated in CFG coaches training, and the faculty are encouraged to use protocols as a tool for looking at student work during team meetings. This group’s primary purpose is to support teacher inquiry within the school, and protocols are a part of the inquiry group meetings these teachers lead. They opened the meeting by reporting back the inquiry topics their teachers had selected to work on as individuals or as a group. Even the principal reported on the inquiry topic she had selected for the school year. Inquiry topics related to vocabulary development, gender, the relationship between teacher visibility in the community and homework completion, and efforts to improve attitudes and achievement in math. Though there was no question that this group viewed its work together as important, it was also clear that they realized their meeting time was short. They were very focused, moving quickly through their pre-protocol agenda.

As the protocol facilitator began to move into the protocol for the day, R burst forth with several cutting comments related to her discomfort with the group’s participation in this study. I could sense that on one hand the overall feeling of the group was that they needed to just get on with it due to time, but I also felt strongly that no one
should feel forced into participation. Though it was difficult not to interpret this as a personal attack, I encouraged her to express her concerns. An excerpt from my reflections following the meeting elaborates further and demonstrates that her concerns lay much deeper than simply the agenda for this meeting:

She wasn’t sure she felt comfortable with this study. Why should I come in and prescribe this process for them to go through? What was the purpose of their group supposed to be anyway? What was T there for (doc student)? Who is leading? Why do the meetings seem so ambiguous or as if they are floating around?... One other teacher expressed that she had thought I was just going to come in and observe what they were already doing as an observer only – a fly on the wall. Another reminded them, “Isn’t that why we said we’d do this? We have big broad goals and ideas, but we don’t really have a day to day action plan.” This discussion seemed so important to have and actually lended itself to “proving” that some kind of process to help them define themselves or to help them focus was actually what was most needed. (Field notes, November 29, 2006)

I was so glad that I had received the email warning. This had allowed me to prepare a written overview of what I thought they had agreed to, which I passed out to the group and provide here in Figure 5-5. The group seemed to appreciate having this written clarification and agreed that since the protocol was on the agenda for the day they should indeed give it a try.
D, the facilitator, then passed out copies of the three narratives. The narratives were stapled in the order beginning, most highly functioning, developing, but they were not labeled in any way that would indicate they represented different levels of development. D asked the group to read through each one, circling words or phrases that they felt represented their current work and underlining words or phrases pointing to an area of difficulty or a direction in which the group would like to grow. As she did I chimed in:

[These narratives were] specifically written about critical friends groups, and I think that, that what you do here involves some of that and more. So, don't feel like your group has to be limited to what's on this page. This is just sort of a discussion starter.
As they continued I could tell this group took the structure of protocols seriously. 

*D* set a timer for the amount of time suggested for each step to help the group stay on track, and they mostly used “go-rounds” to ensure that each person had the opportunity to contribute. *D* confidently stated the directions for each step. A little before the ten minutes allotted for reading were up it appeared everyone had finished, so she began:

You can put “best describe us,” *R*. We only have 10 minutes for this, so we're gonna do a go-round...where each person has an opportunity to contribute or pass. And you're going to use sentences like, "I think," I'll give an example, “I think we are enthusiastic because we all attended the coaches training this summer, and did an excellent job collaborating together." That might be one sentence that you'd use. And *R* is going to chart our words and phrases up there for us. It's ok to repeat a word or phrase more than once. And it's ok to respectfully disagree providing that, provided that supporting evidence is used. "I disagree because our group____." So, if you want to disagree with someone when it comes to you, you can disagree with something that's up there. [Timer beeps as it’s reset.]

The group had time during this protocol step for two full “go-rounds,” and they identified quite a number of positive statements about their work together. The scribe listed eighteen words and phrases describing their current work, as illustrated in Figure 5-6. Of these eighteen, eight originated in the narrative representing a beginning CFG and ten in the narrative representing a CFG that is most highly functioning. In comparing with the framework, seven statements corresponded to Relationships, five to Meeting Focus, three to Commitment, and one to Teaching and Learning. The remaining two statements, though directly from the narrative, did not have a specific correlation to the framework. They came from phrases that had been included simply to help the narrative hang together well, such as “ten teachers from various elementary schools”.
With the beeping of the timer, the facilitator moved the group on to the next stage of the protocol in which they identify words or phrases that point to an area of difficulty or best describe a direction in which they would like to grow. In the middle of this step, W expressed confusion as to whether the focus of this discussion was their work as a group of teacher leaders, as inquiry groups, as teams, or as the whole school. Looking back to my own reflections upon first meeting this group, I had written about a similar idea:

Today they talked about having a good sense of big broad goals, but having a harder time capturing the smaller steps… It seems to me that for this group, they will have to define exactly what it is that they are
evaluating through using this process so that they are all on the same page in self-assessing and goal-setting. (Field notes, September 2006)

R asked for a show of hands as to who had been thinking about this all in terms of just their leadership group and who had been thinking school wide. It turned out to be approximately half and half. They decided it was appropriate to think about their school-wide work and continued.

Though these teacher leaders had identified with many of the characteristics in the narrative referring to the most highly functioning group, their goal statements centered on ideas related to the beginnings of CFG work. They particularly addressed the need to get more of the school faculty to buy into the practice of using protocols to examine student work, to follow CFG-like norms, and to be willing to share artifacts from their own classrooms. Figure 5-7 lists the words and phrases identified by the group during this step of the protocol.

- Discerning between clarifying and probing questions
- Pinpointing – narrowing our focus of what our action plan entails – identifying our specific questions
- Getting ALL persons to share artifacts and questions from their classrooms
- Meeting with teachers across schools – branching out across schools
- Looking at student work samples to drive the work
- Total staff buy-in
- Follow norms
- Being glad we set aside time to meet
- Are we eager to try out protocols? (In Monday meetings) Do we have buy in? Can we improve this eagerness?

Figure 5-7: Directions in Which We Would Like to Grow
Six of the words and phrases identified by members of this group originated in the beginning narrative, two from the developing narrative, and one from the most highly functioning narrative. Connecting with the elements in the framework, three statements related to Group Learning Agenda; and Relationships, Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, and Meeting Focus each corresponded to one statement. The remaining two statements did not directly connect with any of the elements in the framework.

The facilitator moved the group on to the next step of the protocol by asking them to identify themes in what appeared on the chart. Interestingly, this group interpreted that to mean themes relating to both the positive aspects of their work and the areas in which they would like to grow. The dominant theme in this group’s identification of themes related to the two sides of their passion, as illustrated by the following three excerpts from the transcript:

Facilitator: I, my, I think passion and all the desire and everything is there. I think follow through and, is one of our main things…

Mi: Well, I was gonna say, what you see is passion on this side, but over here, look at -- begrudged meetings, improve eagerness. There's two sets of people in this school, and that's what we're dealing with, and that's what we need to make -- that's really where we need to make the improve…

W: What I see is that, that so much like passion and really wanting to look at things and critical thinking stuff, desire but there's also this kind of overwhelmed thing over here, you know. And I don't know if it's a different group of people here, but just, maybe the two sides of how we feel, you know, in the matter of a week or a month or nine months or a school year.

Two positives highlighted by individuals were their strong focus on students and their reflective thinking. Another individual talked about the reluctance of many on staff
to step out of the box and try something new. This statement brought a number of questions and clarifying statements by the rest of the group. Finally, D extended this point with a lengthy monologue on how overwhelming everything could be, particularly for newer teachers, as they were always going off in new directions as a staff, with so many questions and ideas to explore. She emphasized the need for focus.

Next, D asked the group to come up with two to three specific goal statements related to areas of the highest priority. They began with a go-round to identify what each person felt was the highest priority area, and before they got all the way around they felt they had identified the five most important goal areas: (1) running protocols more often during team meetings; (2) connecting the inquiry work more with team meetings; (3) using student work to drive instruction; (4) increasing buy-in from the staff so all are on the same page; and (5) more efficiently streamlining their work so their inquiry meetings connect with all school meetings. D tried to summarize the connections between these goals:

*Facilitator* It's all of those things together. If you pull those all together and you run the protocols during the team meetings, you'll get the increased staff buy-in, and then hopefully you'll get the, you'll be using the student work during the protocol

The group spent the final ten minutes of their meeting debriefing this protocol. Though R returned to some of her initial concerns about the lack of clarity in their purpose as a group and how that had negatively affected her experience with the protocol, other group comments were generally very positive, both in terms of the structure of the protocol and the purpose it served for them in focusing their direction.
Because a number of individuals were not able to attend the next meeting, they did the second protocol twice: once at the end of January with about half of the teacher leaders and once in the beginning of March with the other half. I was not able to attend either meeting. As the videotape for the January meeting was misplaced prior to being mailed for my viewing, I describe here only what went on in the March version of the protocol. \( M \) facilitated this protocol. Though she did not use a timer for each section as the facilitator of the first protocol had, she did keep a close eye on her watch. The group again followed the protocol very systematically and precisely, addressing every bulleted item in each step.

The facilitator opened the protocol by reading the five posted goals. Then she gave each of the other participants the opportunity to ask for clarification or to elaborate upon one of the stated goals. Right away \( X \) asked for clarification:

I need clarification. On the very last thing that we boxed: streamlined, efficient, connect to all. I know you just said a lot of other little things. What were those other things?

Four other participants elaborated on their understanding of this final goal, building on each other’s comments until finally \( X \) said, “That’s a good clarification.” One other group member elaborated on her personal goals related to using student work to drive instruction before the group moved on to the next protocol step.

The facilitator chose to wave her arms and use UFO type sound effects to help the group transition between the next several steps of the protocol: projecting into the future, looking back at the starting point, and addressing how they moved from the starting point to the future state. She read the directions as printed on the page, but then repeated sections to help the group understand what they should do. For example:
... Now what we're going to do, and I'm going to need someone to record our answers, but first let's just think about this, is we're going to project into the future, ok? And basically we're gonna describe what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like having accomplished these goals. So you must use the present tense. So, you're, you're in the future now, everyone ready [sound effect and arm motions], go to the future. [overlapping group talk] You're in the future, and what we're going to do is we're, we are thoroughly describing what our goals, what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like having accomplished these goals. So we're using the present tense. So describe what it looks like in the best case scenario. Do not yet describe how the group has gotten there, so just what it looks like, sounds like, feels like. Focus on the sights, the sounds, behaviors, and feelings surrounding the accomplishments and describe what evidence you have documenting your success. So describe what it, focus on the sights, sounds, behaviors, and feelings of meeting these goals and talk in the present tense.

Projecting into the future, group comments addressed each one of their five goals.

Some comments related directly to the goals as stated, such as the following two examples:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>It feels like everyone's working toward the same goal. Everyone's on the same team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>More staff brought forth student work to look at. Even some of those who were hesitant at first.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other comments indicated broader imaginings beyond the specifics of the precise goal statements to other potential results of working towards these goals, as in the following two examples:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator 2</td>
<td>And I was thinking about, like, behaviors, not just us but student behaviors and hope the students are working a bit more cooperatively together and are a little bit more focused on their activities. They are engaged because of the fact that we are looking day by day and using their work to drive, you know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>We're actually learning and we're showing that to the students too, that we're learning, even sharing with them the kinds of things that we've done together with teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The facilitator also asks the group what specific evidence they will have to document their success in meeting these goals. They list evidence, such as anecdotal notes, test data, teacher interactions, student interactions, and more teachers participating in inquiry.

Then the facilitator asked the group to look back from this future time to when they started to describe issues, culture, conversations, teacher work, and student achievement. After the first few comments there was a request for clarification about whether they were looking back to when they first started this self-study process or to when they first started their work together as teacher leaders. The facilitator focused them on when they first began working on the five goals. Various group members commented on the defensiveness of many faculty members regarding the use of protocols perhaps due to a lack of understanding of how they could benefit through the experience and perhaps due to a lack of trust. Another addressed how doing protocols at team meetings felt forced, like the group was just going through the motions. Interestingly, initial perceptions of the self-study process also came up during this protocol step. The following excerpt from the transcript again illustrates the confusion at the start of this process about what they would be doing and why they were doing it:

\[ S \]
I see it all, but there's a lot of cause and effect too. We didn't know where this was leading us. So we were more confused and a little defensive.

\[ Y \]
Well, and it felt like, it felt like, cause one of our goals is this streamline thing. It sounded like this protocol duplicated something we had really worked hard on, and I think that that was kind of, that was personal because we wanted to go back and work on that. I know I did and some other people did, and I just wonder if... It was a top down thing, not something that came from us.
It seemed isolated and foreign, and I didn't see where the, it was leading to with our vision with our kids with everyday -- how we were gonna implement this, but now with the the different meetings and the different protocols and the different areas we have to implement, it makes, it fits much better.

The facilitator moved the group on to the next step, in which they considered how they moved from their starting point to the best case scenario. Out of the nineteen comments made during this protocol step, thirteen related directly to the use of protocols in team meetings. They talked about modifying protocols and changing the language to better fit their setting, about making sure they were really familiar with all the protocols so they would know when and how to use each one, and about only using protocols when there was really a problem or issue so that they would be meaningful. Other comments related to time as a resource since they have meeting times already built into their schedules, using each other as resources more often, starting small, and building trust.

As they “returned to the present” to outline concrete steps for the future, they initially re-emphasized the ideas already mentioned in the previous step, but then really expanded upon those initial ideas and ultimately discussed next steps relating to all five of the goals. They addressed each and every question suggested in this step of the protocol. Figure 5-8 replicates the chart the principal wrote summarizing this portion of the protocol.
WHAT will you DO?
- Will make language of protocols (activities) more user-friendly
- Make it REAL……..Fit NEEDS
- Take “time” to look at student work and arrange schedule for this
- Groups are completing inquiries
- Meetings are sometimes held in other settings

WHO will take on responsibilities?
- SHARED LEADERSHIP
  - Leaders taking turns picking readings and leading protocols (activities)
  - School is growing more leaders/more “buy-in”

WHAT RESOURCES will you need?
- TIME to analyze work, plan
- FOOD for meetings
- PLACES to GO!

How will you MONITOR PROGRESS?
- Set measurable goals and routinely look at data
- Continue book study and share with colleagues
- Inquiry Projects will be presented to staff
- Minutes from team meetings are sent by email to principal
- Lesson Plans are monitored
- Open up to INPUT from ALL staff……

What EVIDENCE will you collect?
- Notes from meetings when analyzing data
- BOOK STUDY handouts shared with staff
- Inquiry Projects compiled into a book to share
- Minutes saved in folder
- Lesson Plans saved
- Anecdotal notes from staff input sessions

Figure 5-8: Concrete Steps Towards Goals
There were two main points emphasized as the group debriefed this second protocol. First, they discussed how the protocol was a little confusing at first and how either reading the protocol before the meeting or having a visual to look at during the meeting would maybe have helped them follow along more easily. Second, they talked about their positive experience with the protocol. In spite of their initial concerns about doing this process, they felt that the process had helped them focus as a group on what they need to do, and that this process has helped them feel like their goals are doable. The final comment seemed to bring together the underlying uncertainty regarding their involvement with the self-study process with their appreciation in retrospect for the usefulness of the process:

\[ Y \]

I really felt like the goals we made over the summer were pretty meaningful, and it would have been helpful to this process with those, and not have to make goal statements just for the sake of it. Like, it just seemed backwards to make goal statements for the sake of a protocol rather than saying, you know what? we actually have some goals that would be good for us to look at and using those.

**Case 3**

On a cold and sunny January morning, I joined a third CFG around a long dining room table in the facilitator’s home in a large northeastern city. Group members began arriving around 8:30am for bagels, fruit, and catching up. As the nine members in attendance introduced themselves to me, the many layers of relationship within this group became apparent. In addition to being in their fourth year together as a CFG, they had worked with and for one another in many configurations over the years as teachers, assistant principals, principals, and superintendents. All had now moved out of classroom
teaching roles to take on various leadership roles within education, and many served as school administrators.

Through email communication with the facilitator in the weeks preceding this meeting, I knew that the facilitator had thoughtfully prepared with her particular group in mind. In an email dated January 15, 2007, she wrote:

I would like to email both the narrative and framework documents to the group to allow them to read the material before the meeting. I’d like them to do their underlining, thinking about evidence etc. in advance so they are prepared for the discussion. (I’ll have them read the narrative for background and we’ll work from the framework at the meeting.) We are a talkative group and I don’t want to cut the discussion part short to allow for reading etc. Is this approach ok with you? I don’t want to alter your methodology.

Here’s the agenda I’d like to send the group:

- Opening Moves 9-9:20
- Taking Stock of Our CFG (Text-based comparison of our CFG with Ellen’s Framework) 9:25-10:25
- BREAK 10:30-10:40
- Modified Futures Protocol 10:40-11:40
- Reflections & Planning for February 11:45-12

This agenda reflects arrangements she made with group members to extend their meeting by a half hour beyond the typical 11:30AM ending time in an effort to ensure adequate time to complete both protocols in one meeting.

The morning of the meeting I realized that additional thought and preparation went into the meeting. The facilitator had placed several sheets of paper at each place around the table: the morning’s agenda, a copy of each protocol, an empty chart she had created for jotting down notes relating to each of the seven elements on the developmental framework, a reflections sheet, and a sheet of round colored sticker dots. Pads of colorful post-it notes lay in the center of the table. Large sheets of white paper
hung on one wall already labeled with the various steps the group chart during the two protocols. An additional large chart hung on the wall containing a row for each of the seven elements from the framework and columns labeled beginning, developing, and most highly functioning.

Shortly after 9:00 AM, the group began their formal meeting agenda with Connections, a common opening for a CFG meeting. This protocol offers:

*a way for people to build a bridge from where they are or have been (mentally, physically, etc.) to where they will be going and what they will be doing. It is a time for individuals to reflect – within the context of a group – upon a thought, a story, an insight, a question, or a feeling that they are carrying with them into the session, and then connect it to the work they are about to do. (Thompson-Grove, no date)*

I have often experienced Connections in my own CFG as ten quiet and contemplative minutes with open spaces in which individuals may choose whether or not to share what is on their minds. The decision to allot twenty minutes of the agenda to this opening protocol suggests the value group members place on connecting with what is going on in each other’s lives. On this morning group members shared deeply reflective stories from their practice, excerpts from books, and struggles, but left very little open or quiet space. By the time each person had an opportunity to share once, the twenty minutes had more than passed.

Then the facilitator transitioned the group into the first protocol with the following directions:

*I made this kind of messy chart… I thought it might help if we used these dots and put them up here, because when I was doing my preparation I was never, I was hardly ever all in one place on any category, but I thought it might be helpful to us if we put the dots up, and then I have sticky notes that I’ll pass around if you wanna make sticky notes about your evidence, you won't have to keep getting up and down ’cause I know*
we're in cramped quarters. But we could just go up and put dots wherever we think we wanna put them in these different categories. Take a moment and think about it, and I have more dots over here on the buffet if you need more. I just thought that that might be a... that might be a good start. And then we would, then we would follow the protocol to go around and say the evidence that we're seein'. Well I put a dot in such and such a spot and this is why. Does that make sense?

At this point several clarifying questions arose as the group attempted to merge the facilitator’s email directions and this modification with the printed protocol they had in front of them. A was concerned that this modification might change the feel or intent of the protocol:

Right, I know, but, knowing that, it's in the protocol where we bring it out and suspend our assumptions. I just, I'm just putting it out there to say would that make it look and feel different, because this already puts it out for us. It's just a different way of doing it. But it's all of it, all at one time, and I think this [the protocol] layers it out and teases it out.

Additionally, there was minor confusion as to whether the group would be referring to the framework or the narratives during this meeting.

Once the group resolved these issues, they spent the next ten minutes putting the colored dots up on the chart, chatting, and pouring tea. No one chose to use the sticky notes the facilitator provided for posting evidence. The placement of dots generally ranged from a high level of developing to the middle of most highly functioning. This visual representation indicated that the elements Meeting Focus, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning were rated as less developed than the other elements. However, there was no discussion of how this collaborative chart might inform their understanding of the group’s development. Figure 5-9 shows an approximation of how this chart looked when completed.
As they were about to move on with the protocol, *D* brought up another point of confusion:

*D* I just have a question. There are 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 of us. Not every category has nine dots. Does that matter? [laughter]

*Facilitator* I didn't get over there.

*D* Oh, alright.

*Facilitator* Because it was too crowded, so my dot's not necessarily—

*D* Alright, that's fine, I was just—

*E* The yellow is very difficult to see from here.

*D* Oh, then that's what it is, I'm sorry.

*Facilitator* There are 8 on the bottom one.

*multiple* Oh, you're right

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**Figure 5-9: Visual Representation of Case 3 Perceptions of Group Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roles and Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting Focus</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Learning Agenda</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Reflection</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Impact on Teaching and Learning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first one is missing one.
The first one from here looks like it's only seven.

**Facilitator**
Ok, so somebody else didn't put all their dots. Alright, thank you for that observation. Thank you for that observation, and some places people put more than one dot.

At 9:52AM the group moved on to step two of the first protocol. The facilitator suggested that rather than look at the entire framework all at once, the group should move systematically through each element. She acknowledged that this adaptation might take longer than the allotted ten minutes, and in actuality the group spent 65 minutes on this step of the protocol.

During this discussion, individuals frequently used the stem “I put our group in _____ because _____.’’ The group did not use “go-rounds” to structure this conversation, but every CFG member contributed multiple times during the hour. The emphasis of the dialogue was on explaining the various members’ placements of the group into one of the three developmental stages rather than on identifying specific words or phrases that described their CFG’s current reality. In a way this discussion of each element combined the intent of steps two and three of the protocol as individuals identified both areas of strength and areas of weakness to justify their rating. They spent an average of nine and a half minutes discussing each element.

By the time this CFG discussed all seven elements, the facilitator was beginning to feel the time pressure, and the group as a whole was ready for a break. She transitioned the group into the next step of the protocol with the following words:

So, I'm gonna just tell us that we're at 67 minutes. [laughter from many]
But I, I think this was valuable, and I think the next pieces will go faster because we really dug in on this one. Um, and we'll take a break after, after, yeah, we'll take a break after we finish this part, if that's ok.
[reluctant oks from many] Ok, so, words and phrases that point to an area
of difficulty, or best describe a direction in which we would like our CFG to grow.

The facilitator got up from her seat to chart the words and phrases put forth by the group. At this point the style of the group’s conversation changed dramatically. They used more of a “go-round” approach in determining who spoke next, and each speaker’s contribution was dramatically shorter. The average number of lines per response in the transcript dropped from 6.15 lines in the prior protocol step to 1.74 lines in this step. Part way through the facilitator asked the group if they had any additional words that were not from the framework that they also wanted to include on the list. They finished this step in the allotted ten minutes. Figure 5-10 replicates the chart created during this step.

- Flow (in the zone)
- Examine student data (analyze)
- Action at district level
- Share work
- Make work public – our deepest questions
- Connected goals
- Clear Group Goal
- Document (Focused/Intentional) Evidence of questions…
- Optimal (balance between safety & risk)
- Disrupt Inequitable Practices
- Distributed Leadership
- Celebrate
- Basic Needs (Glasser – Fun, Power, Freedom, Belonging) –relates to flow Rigor, Relationship, Relevance

- Transparency
- Reflections→Practice→Measurement?

Figure 5-10: Areas of Difficulty or Directions for Growth
At this point in the process the facilitator adapted the protocol on the spot, as illustrated by the following transcript excerpt:

**Facilitator**  
Ok, I'm gonna pull us back together for a minute here. Excuse me. Thanks. Do we notice any themes? We're trying to get to break. I know that we all need a break. Looking for themes or patterns.

**U**  
Just a lot of things that we wanna do.

**Facilitator**  
Ok, I'm gonna suggest that this is going, the way that it's set up is for two separate meetings, but because of distance we're doing it all in one meeting. I'm gonna suggest that we take our 10 minute break and then this is gonna flow right, there's that word again, flow right into our next protocol.

After the break the facilitator launched the group into the second protocol, beginning with step four at 11:22 AM. Having skipped the last three steps of the first protocol, this CFG had not crafted specific goal statements, but they referred back to the list of words and phrases describing areas in which they would like to grow. The facilitator stood by a white sheet of paper labeled, “Projected Present – Sept. ’08” in order to scribe what the group thought their CFG would look like a year and a half into the future. The conversation moved quickly back and forth between participants and focused primarily on actions that would characterize their group in the future, such as looking at data, working towards both individual and group goals, writing articles, and going on a retreat. Consequently, thirteen minutes later when they began to look back from this projected time frame to the past (September, 2006), precisely the same actions were listed: rarely sharing data, not working towards clear goals, few articles written, and no retreat yet. This step of the protocol took only five minutes. Figures 5-11 and 5-12 replicate the charts created in these two steps of the protocol.
Projected Present – Sept. ‘08

- We examine student data (real) reg. + use focused protocols to discuss and follow up for evidence
  - attendance, trend, test – multiple forms
- We create a spreadsheet of our collective data
- Clear stated goal for our large group
- Our individual goals worked on in quads
- Make work public in Connections and other journals
- K.K. – CFGs – everyone has bought in – this is on the agenda
- PA center – conducts trainings
- CFG retreat
- Action at district level
- Empowered to identify & disrupt inequitable practices

Figure 5-11: Projected Present

9/06

- Rarely examine data
- Goals – not a stated group goal
- Work not regularly public – 1 article, 2 summer PDs
- Karen is on/off agenda
- Center isn’t fully developed – not funded
- 2.5 hrs – 1 time per month
- Limited district action
- Some celebration (majitos)
- Recog. Need to ID & disrupt ineq. Practice
- No retreat
- All regions not aware yet

Figure 5-12: Looking Back to When We Started
By this time it was 11:40 AM. The facilitator began to look a bit flustered as she said:

Ok, now very quickly, and I, what I'm gonna say is very quickly for the purposes of our visitor, but not very quickly for us, because this is stuff that we're gonna have and continue to use. January '07, which is where we are right now, what have we done to get from here to here?

Several questioned the directions, confused as to the exact month and year under discussion and whether the purpose of this section was to establish a plan of action for attaining their hopes for September, 2008, or to set goals. G read from the protocol sheet:

We're addressing how we, look, this is number 6: How did you address the starting place? So we're at the starting place. We didn't do everything, and that's the concrete steps. That's the next number.

So the group discussed what steps they had already initiated since September 2006 that would support their progress towards their envisioned future. Figure 5-13 replicates the chart scribed during this five minute segment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are we already doing? 1/07</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• K.K on Reg agenda – CFG focus 2/07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mr. Reyes article in process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Taking stock with Ellen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ID spaces for retreats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Goal-setting is on the 2/07 agenda – and the use of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Colleg. Conver. In Evesham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Some PD in Chelterham</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5-13: What Are We Doing Already to Help Us Meet Our Goals?
At this point the facilitator said, “I’m a little, I have to confess that I’m feeling a little overwhelmed about what we have left to do in 15 minutes.” C reminded the group, “We dedicated time at the end of our meetings for the reflection piece, so I think we need to be mindful of.” The facilitator looked at me apologetically since there would not be sufficient time to finish this second protocol. However, the group did agree to debrief the process prior to completing their reflections sheets and heading out the door. For about ten minutes the group discussed what it was like to go through this process and asked me questions about my intent in creating the process and what my next steps might be as the researcher. The group dispersed seemingly pleased with the time they had spent examining their group’s work during the morning, and planning to continue the conversation during their February meeting.
Chapter 6

ANALYSIS OF THE SELF-STUDY TOOLS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the developmental framework and the narratives through the experiences of the participants who used them to determine their usefulness and how they might be further revised. The chapter begins with an analysis of the content of the framework, continues with analysis of the use of the narratives, and concludes by examining participants’ reactions to the usefulness of these tools for helping them assess their collaborative work.

Developmental Framework Analysis

Two overarching themes and a number of suggestions for revision of individual elements arose from analysis of the data from the two cases selecting to use the developmental framework as a tool for reflection. It is interesting that the two overarching themes connect with issues brought up in the expert feedback. First, both groups discussed equity and its place in the framework, though the conversations played out very differently. The Case 3 CFG is a group that has been consciously trying to address issues of equity in their work together. At one point E refers to “when we exploded into this area of equity issues with our schools and our students,” while F
commented, “I think that, you know, our general focus of equity really does drive, and has been driving, our work for the last four years.”

In addition to such comments on the group’s equity focus, “disrupt inequitable practices” came up as a phrase representing an area in which the group would like to continue to grow. During the second protocol one participant described her vision of the group’s future work as empowering group members “in our own organizations to identify and disrupt inequitable practices.” An excerpt from the transcript of this second protocol shows how this group continued to negotiate the terms to describe exactly where they are on this issue:

A Where are we with ‘empowered to identify and disrupt inequitable practices’?

? Are we thirsty?

H You know what? I think we’re empowered. I don't think that's the right verb…for the future

A Doing it on a regular basis

? So it would be identifying and disrupting inequitable practices?

A I'm not sure how, if we're completely in. When, I made that statement

? Do you feel empowered to do it?

A I feel [sigh] I feel like my knowledge base is there. Do I have the support of my full district and my school board yet? I'm doing it and we're getting a little pushback here, so I am empowered, but that's by my choice. Maybe empowered isn't the word, but when I don't think we're doing it

H …When I, when I said that I wasn't thinking of it in the context of the district, I was thinking of it in the context of having the CFG support me to make greater strides towards
asking the hard questions that disrupt inequitable practice in my school.

_A:_ So where are we now on the current statement?

? Eventually in the district level, but

_Facilitator:_ So we're identifying the need. Right now we're identifying the need to disrupt, to identify and disrupt. We're recognizing the need to identify and disrupt.

_A:_ Recognizing it, right, yeah.

It seems that this group would describe themselves as growing in their awareness of equity issues and that they are learning to identify inequities, but that they believe they still have much to learn about how to ask the hard questions outside their CFG and how to take action in the context of their daily work. For several individuals in this group that has been focusing on equity, the language in the framework did not focus enough on equity issues. The facilitator recommended during the interview that more equity language be included in the framework, and two respondents suggested in open-response questions on the questionnaire that refining the framework to further address equity or group diversity would be beneficial.

In contrast, a number of participants in the Case 1 CFG reacted somewhat defensively to the small amount of equity language that _was_ included in the framework.

This discussion began when _N_ questioned the framework:

I find that under most highly functioning there is the assumption that we’re not being fair or equitable unless we are most highly functioning. Equitable student learning, equitable learning opportunities, equitable practices, getting rid of, disrupting inequitable practices, are all under most highly functioning, and I think there’s an assumption that there’s something that’s not going well unless we’re there, and I don’t think we’re unfair, I mean, am I misreading unequalit? I mean, it bothered me that that was here, and I’m going, I think that certainly it makes you more aware of how to reach all of your kids and hearing things, but I’m not
quite sure why they kept that word, you said to look at words that kept, you know, that kept repeating, and I was a little defensive about that, that word. I was a little defensive about it. Like, hey, I’m fair. I know it’s more to it than that.

Later this same individual commented, “I don’t see how attending critical friends groups once a month will have that, that much of an impact [on equity].” The facilitator also brought up questions about the framework to the group related to this topic:

Well, let’s ask something about this framework. Is what they have listed as most highly functioning what we would consider a highly functioning group as we perceive what a CFG is? Do these things describe what we think? I mean, you talk about equity. We can have problems in our practice that aren’t the result of inequity.

The group then spent some additional time trying to negotiate the significance of this equity language for their group. One suggested that participants in a CFG “could get some insights into practice…that further the success of all students.” Another said, “Well, we can’t meet all students’ needs, but if that’s not out there in front of us as a goal, we’ll lose sight of it. And, I mean, certainly that’s what we hope for.” Still another commented, “It’s not like we’re out to get anybody. It’s more like, what could we do to address the needs of a more diverse…and we do have a problem here, I think.” G/I agreed, “I think we have a problem, but I don’t think it’s fair to say that if a kid isn’t successful it’s because I’m not equitable.” T answered:

It’s the instruction that’s not giving each kid an opportunity to learn, right, so, you know, not to take it so personal, but look at it from the point of, I’m using this lesson plan, but all my kids aren’t being successful with it. How can I make it an equitable lesson plan?

These comments suggest that many members of this CFG are not focused on issues of equity. Perhaps they are not yet aware of the kinds of equity issues that might be present in their school. Perhaps they are not yet ready to take ownership of the issues,
seeing them as other people’s issues, or not ready to examine the role that they might play in perpetuating inequities. Or perhaps they just don’t see this as the purpose of their CFG work. However, for this group the few references to equity that were contained within the framework were enough to provoke discussion in this area.

It is interesting that the group focused on learning more about equity felt that there ought to be more equity language in the framework, while members in the group not specifically focusing on equity felt defensive at the extent to which equity language had been included within the document. In both cases, however, the equity language that had been woven into the framework did provide an impetus for some important discussion in this area. Based on the reactions of Case 1 participants, I would venture that the amount of equity focused language included in the framework as written is enough to encourage reflection and discussion in this area, but that the inclusion of more references to issues of equity might turn them off to using the entire document. However, if a CFG is already beginning to recognize equity issues in their own context and has made a specific commitment to an equity focus, then this tool would not be sufficient for facilitating assessment of their progress in this area and pushing them towards new steps. I would recommend that a separate tool be developed for this purpose, particularly as this connects with the NSRF mission.

The second theme that points back to the expert feedback is the teacher-focused language in the framework. The Case 3 CFG members have all left teaching positions to take on other non-teaching roles within education, and there were a number of times in which they felt what F expressed, “We needed something different than, because we’re administrators…a different kind of terminology, just the words, just the language, would
be different…for different types of groups.” There were three times in which one or more participants expressed difficulty in matching their group to one of the stages described in the framework because of this language difference. Meeting Focus, Commitment, and Impact on Teaching and Learning are the three elements in which this came up. I also see examples of teacher-specific language in Group Learning Agenda. F explained to the group how she handled this situation: “I just didn’t even address anything that was like really teacher-y. I tried to dig out the pieces that were relevant to me as the principal of the school and to our work here as an administrative CFG.”

Apparently the group members in general were able to identify the ideas in each element that were meaningful for their group because they spent an average of nine and a half minutes discussing each element, identified a number of important areas for growth focus, and have begun taking steps to work on those areas. The teacher language did not keep them from a meaningful process related to their own CFG work. On the other hand, this group’s response suggests that it is worthwhile to revisit the framework to look for places where it would be possible to generalize the language. For example, it would be easy to replace “working together collaboratively to discuss classroom practice” with “working together collaboratively to discuss practice.” On the other hand, there are other elements for which it would be difficult to craft a universally appropriate language, such as Impact on Teaching and Learning. It could be useful for a team to identify the different types of groups functioning as CFGs across the country and to work on modifying the framework to match the purpose and experiences of CFGs that are not comprised of teachers.
Though these were the only major themes to arise from the data to inform refinement of the overall framework, listening in on the conversations of the third CFG in particular (since they spent time specifically discussing each element in detail) added to my understanding of several of the elements included within the framework, including Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, and Reflection.

Probably because it had been the major focus of earlier framework revisions based on the expert feedback, Roles and Responsibilities was the element that stood out the most for me in the Case 3 discussion. Though the name of the element no longer includes the word leadership, this group continually used the word leadership as they discussed their two different approaches to assessing their group’s development. G labeled this item “a clear two-parter” as the group discussed leadership from the point of view of the group’s vision and direction versus logistics and mechanics. As the group thought back on their history together and the various approaches they have taken in group leadership, they came to a similar conclusion as that suggested by the panel of experts. F highlights this well when she says:

I think, because we have gone through the process of trying to distribute the leadership of the CFG and came back to having a coach, in my opinion I found that we have decided that, for this group, having a coach makes us highly functioning.

The reflections of the facilitator, who happens to be this group’s coach, add another layer of meaning. She reflects on the evolution of leadership in the group. She spent several years as the group’s coach, the group moved to a more rotating system of planning the content of each meeting and handling the logistics for last year, and then this year she has taken a different sort of coaching role within the group:
I got hung up on that we were doing something wrong by not having the revolving, and was I like usurping it or controlling it or something? I got uptight about that. We went through last year and came to this conclusion, I thought. …Logistically we do need someone to be the point person, but I feel like we evolved so that we are back to having a coach, but at a much higher level of sharing responsibility for the leadership of the real content because we’re doin that quad time and we’re planning at the end of the meeting. So I feel totally different whereas a year and a half ago I was really getting uptight about like, that I was, like, too much the coach.

Two other group members suggested that they felt the group was most highly functioning in this element because everyone is willing to step up and contribute, even though it is useful to have one person take the lead on all the logistics. One of those was A, who said:

I don’t see Facilitator as the leader of the group. I see each of us contributing where our expertise is, if that’s known. And we all do it. And even where it’s not, we step out and try the new stuff. And then we become the leader of that section. And the fact that Facilitator does have the logistics end of it down for us to keep us on track, I think every group needs someone that does that, so that puts her in a certain position. …but I think that it’s really a true, more of a truer model of that type of leadership.

Overall, the comments pertaining to this element confirmed many of the revisions made based on the expert feedback.

As Case 3 CFG participants discussed Commitment, I recognized the many layers of meaning and interpretation embedded within this element. Group members questioned this element. Is it about commitment to improving personal practice or group practice; commitment to the time in which a CFG meets or to supporting each other; commitment to student learning or to using this work in their daily practice? One illustrative quote comes from H:

On this one it was once again, it’s like it’s a two-fer, like what we’re saying. It’s like commitment to actually gettin up on Saturday morning when I really would love to stay in bed one more hour and get myself together and come here anyway… But at the same time, in the highly
functioning I see us committed to the sense of collective responsibility for each other’s professional learning when we’re in here. That’s why I said this is like a two-fer for me. I see, I see it in two places.

E also pointed out a specific area of confusion that might begin to explain the multiple layers of interpretation for this element:

I think the results would have been different if, if commitment was separated from why are we involved. It would have been different. You know, my commitment to the group’s work is, is there. Why are we involved? I’m involved because I want to make things happen at my school. …So I was back and forth, where’s my commitment then.

This is a good point. The label for this element is possibly misleading about the direction in which the descriptors are going to go. Thinking about the degree to which I am committed to a particular group or task is different from thinking about the motivation for why I am involved. Perhaps Motivation would be a more accurate label, or perhaps the question, “Why are we involved?” is sufficient on its own.

Reflection is the third element that stuck out for me in observing these two CFGs using the framework. I was surprised at the extent to which participants interpreted this as a personal question as opposed to a question related to the CFG’s collaborative work. As the Case 1 participants shared their perceptions of group development, L was one of only two to select most highly functioning. She said, “Maybe because I, that was a personal question,” to which Gl added, “It’s a personal perspective. I think that’s the key for that one. It really is.” Similarly, Case 3 participants discussed this element in almost solely personal terms. For example, B said:

I put us at most, well, I guess I put ME, I don’t know, I’m more on the, I’m on the, right there, most highly functioning. I question myself every single day. Look at me. I just am one big question. I question everything I do, every move I make…
The language of this element does suggest that reflection is a personal activity: “I am thinking about some new ideas” and “I’m questioning the basis for my assumptions about my students and my teaching….” And in actuality, I agree that reflection is a personal activity, yet the intent with this element was to consider the extent to which the work of the group facilitates reflection. Replacing the word “I” with the word “we” might begin to address this issue. Yet, much of the group’s discussion relates to their own interpretations of what it means to reflect as opposed to the ideas expressed in the framework. Perhaps this element is not clear in its descriptions, or perhaps there are other aspects of reflection that this group felt were more important to their work. For example, one participant spoke of this self-study process as being a reflective group activity, one that should push their group into the most highly functioning stage. One talked about how their commitment to contact their quad group members (subsets of the larger CFG) between meetings forced her to reflect because she felt like she needed to have something to say when she called them. Several talked about written reflections versus an internal conversation. The facilitator explained why she feels this type of reflection is so important:

You see, I’m really with you there because I feel like we are very reflective individuals, and as a group we are very reflective, but I wrote down focused, intentional, documented as key words, because if you don’t do that, and maybe it’s my science teacher coming out, I used to teach my kids if you don’t write it down, it didn’t happen… So I put myself in the developing stage. If I’m not documenting, if I’m not sharing it and making it public, I’m losing ground. I’m not making stride.

While these snippets of conversation do not provide me with a clear direction for revising this element, they do suggest to me that further revisions could make this element more useful.
Narratives Analysis

The Case 2 group chose to use the narratives instead of the developmental framework. As I observed the protocols and later began analyzing the data, two aspects of this group’s experience with the narratives surprised me. First, I expected that even when using the narratives, a group would identify most strongly with one stage of development and that group goals would stem from the words and phrases indicative of a higher level of development. This group’s experience did not match those expectations.

The following excerpt from my field notes reveals my assumptions about this group prior to their use of the first protocol:

A strong inquiry focus, clear connection to equity issues and to student achievement, and a strong sense of school vision and mission means I would expect this group to assess itself as fairly mature on the framework, even though they are very young in these processes. (September 27, 2006)

To my surprise, this group identified very strongly with the narratives representing both the beginning and most highly functioning CFGs, and then most of the words and phrases they identified for areas of growth came from the narrative representing the beginning stage. Table 6-1 shows the connection between the framework elements and each of the words and phrases identified by this group, while Table 6-2 makes this same connection for areas in which they would like to grow.
There are several potential explanations for this. One possibility is that any experienced group trying a new innovation might identify strongly with descriptors of advanced levels of group development while for a time needing to focus efforts on learning the logistics or processes involved in that innovation. This group that has already worked together, developed trusting relationships, and begun systematically pursuing

Table 6-1: Where We are Now: Connections to the Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-2: Areas for Growth: Connections to the Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
challenging inquiry questions has already developed many of the characteristics of advanced professional learning communities. Yet adopting the protocols and practices of CFG work is new and will take some time to develop. Two examples that support this possibility are learning to discern between clarifying and probing questions and helping others to be eager to do protocols. Another possibility is that this is a function of using the narratives rather than the framework. Since the narratives are not labeled according to particular elements and stages, perhaps a group has more freedom of interpretation. Additionally, the lack of labeling may allow this group to select “beginning” goals that they might not have selected if labeled as “beginning.” A final possibility is that both the narratives and framework are too linear in their descriptions of group development.

The second area of surprise is closely related. Though I expected that the various CFGs would focus on different aspects of the narratives and framework and that their prior experiences and sense of group identity would be very influential on their process of making meaning from the documents, this group interpreted a number of phrases in the narratives very differently than I expected. In one instance this may result from the fact that this group of teacher leaders is not really a CFG. S referred to the section of text that reads, “identify questions within their practice that they might bring to the group for examination” and rephrases it to the group as “Sometimes it’s just, we’re looking at the big picture and I, I think we need a focus. We need more narrowing the focus of what we’re actually, our action plan entails.” Though my intent in writing this phrase was that a group might be working on helping each individual identify questions within their practice and learning how to frame those questions appropriately for protocol use, this
same individual had previously mentioned that the group struggles with focusing their work, and so it would naturally follow that she would return to this thought.

In contrast, in two instances participants selected phrases from the narratives to suggest areas for their own future growth that were transitional phrases aimed at making the narrative flow and not representing content from the developmental framework. The phrase, “other staff members at Deer Woods ask about what’s going on in CFGs,” led the facilitator to bring up the issue of staff buy-in within their school; while the description from the developing narrative, “ten teachers from various elementary schools” caused another participant to address the possibility of meeting with faculty from other schools.

Such broad interpretations of the narratives help explain how it is that two of the four goal areas do not even resemble anything from the framework. The ideas to increase staff buy-in and to streamline their work so that everything connects, though far removed from the ideas I intended when writing the narratives, do represent the perceived needs of this group. Perhaps the narratives provided a useful “launching pad” without confining the discussion to ideas deemed pertinent by this outsider.

**Analysis of Usefulness**

Overall, participants felt that the framework and narratives were useful tools for group self-assessment and goal-setting. Table 6-3 reports the overall mean response across groups for questionnaire items relating to the framework or narratives. For these items, participants circled a number from one to four, corresponding to a range of responses from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Mean 1 was calculated by giving
each respondent an equal weight, adding up each individual response and dividing by the
total number of participants. Mean 2 was calculated by giving each case an equal weight,
since there were a different number of participants in each case. This meant adding up the
three individual case means and dividing by three. Though the means calculated through
this second manner are mostly higher, they communicate a similar pattern. These
response means show that participants generally felt that the framework and narratives
were easy to understand and useful for stimulating discussion, helping them to think in a
new way about their CFG’s work and to identify areas in which they would like to grow.
However, an overall mean below 3.0 suggests that a number of participants did not feel
that the framework or narratives related well to the work of their CFG. Analysis of the
data from each individual case provides greater insight into the meaning of the overall
mean responses.

Table 6-3: Overall Perceptions of Framework Usefulness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework / Narratives</th>
<th>Mean 1</th>
<th>Mean 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related well to the work of our group</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for stimulating discussion</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me think in a new way about our work</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped our group identify areas in which we would like to grow</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 1

The members of the Case 1 CFG had the most negative response to the
framework. Table 6-4 shows the mean, median, and mode responses to questionnaire
items by this group’s participants. It also includes the range of participant responses to show the wide degree of variability in responses. Twelve individuals completed part, or all, of the questionnaire. However, the responses of only nine individuals are used in this analysis since the other three noted that they had not been present at the first meeting when the group used the framework.

Table 6-4: Case 1 Perceptions of Framework Usefulness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related well to the work of our group</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for stimulating discussion</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1 to 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me think in a new way about our work</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2 to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped our group identify areas in which we would like to grow</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are several factors influencing this data. First, since the questionnaire was given at the end of the entire self-study process, seven months after the participants had used the framework to assess their group, the participants may have had difficulty remembering what they had thought of it at the time. Second, I am not sure how respondents interpreted the word “framework” on the questionnaire. Responses to open-ended questions by one participant led me to believe that the individual was responding generally to the work of the CFG and not to the self-study process. Additionally, two participants, who noted at the top of the questionnaire that they had not even been at the initial meeting when the group used the framework, responded to these questionnaire items. Their general comments of surprise and confusion during the final self-study
meeting suggest that they probably never saw the document, so it is a curious thing what exactly these two participants thought they were rating in these items. This brings up a question as to how many others misinterpreted the word “framework” when filling out the questionnaire. The only direct reference to the framework in open-ended responses was a positive one. K5 wrote, “I liked the beginning, developing LIKERT choices.”

Analysis of observation and interview data provides some additional possible explanation for participant responses. There is definitely evidence that participants saw themselves to some extent in the framework descriptors. The two CFG coaches I first met with when I invited this group to participate in this study responded positively to the framework. According to my field notes, one of these coaches did not look very enthusiastic about trying out this process until I showed her a framework draft, but “then the enthusiasm bubbled forth – This is freaky – it’s like you’ve been following us around. These descriptions tell exactly about what we’ve been struggling with” (September 28, 2006). The other coach “mentioned that he felt this instrument was perfect for where they’re at one year in. There is no area in which he thinks they are at the most ‘mature’ stage” (Field Notes, September 28, 2006). During the first self-study meeting, this same coach referred to the seeming applicability of the framework to their group’s work by saying, “When Gl and I, when we first looked at this continuum, we read, like two, and we were like Holy Cow, that’s amazing. I mean boom, right, you know. I think it’s well thought out” (Facilitator, Protocol 1). Though there were no specific comments about the relevance of framework from the rest of the participants, they tended to agree that their group fell somewhere within beginning or developing for each element, suggesting that they were able to identify with the descriptors to at least some extent.
In spite of identifying with many of the descriptors in the framework, participants in this CFG may not have felt the framework offered as many realistic possibilities for their future work. In an interview at the conclusion of the self-study process, the two CFG coaches said:

\[ M \quad I \text{ remember that we weren’t very good at anything.} \]

\[ Gl \quad Yeah, that we were beginning everything. And I mean, I think it was important to see that. \]

Rather than mentioning the opportunity to envision new possibilities for their future work, they commented on the beginning nature of their current work.

Though participants did discuss aspects of the framework that suggested directions for their future growth during the self-study process, they also spent time questioning what would actually be possible for their CFG to be or become. One example comes from repeated comments by one participant that it is not reasonable to expect their group to reach most highly functioning in many of the elements because of a lack of time. \( K \)'s words in this excerpt from the first meeting illustrate this concern:

\[ My \text{ problem is when I look at this, I don’t know if I want to put in the time to be in the most highly functioning piece in all cases, because to be there is not going to get done in one hour every two weeks or month or, you know. You’re not going to get there in that type of time frame. You’re probably talking about more like three or four hours a week to get to that. And I don’t know that I’m willing to put that in, to get to that.} \]

Another example comes from this group’s discussion about the kinds of changes that might be possible through CFG work. During the first meeting, \( J \) spoke about the constraints placed on the group because of small participation and a lack of power within the school to make things happen:
I think there’s a fundamental question, you know, because it comes up again, you know, like if we’re looking for directions for the future, that the value of this, that we can talk in a trusting atmosphere is incredibly important, you know…but are we an advisory committee? We don’t have all the faculty here; we’re not the administrators; and we don’t really set policy. So, so, I mean, I’m just, maybe just asking the fundamental question. I, you know, I think it’s important that we come together, but we’re not settin’ policy. We don’t have the whole faculty here.

Perhaps this framework is not best used with groups that fall in the more beginning stages since the characteristics of most highly functioning seem like such a far reach. Or perhaps there are other issues of readiness. The conversation during the final meeting indicated that the elements in this framework may not have connected with the group’s most immediate concerns. Participants voiced concerns about falling participation rates, their discomfort with using protocols, the many school initiatives vying for their time with a corresponding lack of follow-through, and questions about the continued support of the administration for CFG work. Perhaps this group would have benefited more from a process aimed at helping them address the concerns they already had about their work rather than reflecting more broadly on their work.

One final issue of readiness also comes to mind. If the need for a leader to provide vision and purpose is common to groups in beginning stages of development as described in this framework and by others (e.g., Wheelan & Hochberger, 1996), then it is likely that a group is not ready to analyze its own functioning until it has reached at least the developing stage of roles and responsibilities. In the beginning stage the framework might be more useful as a reflective tool for the coach(es) than for the group as a whole.
Case 2

The Case 2 participants responded to the same questions as those in Cases 1 and 3, but relating to the narratives instead of the framework. Table 6-5 presents the mean, median, and mode response for each item. These averages are based on eleven questionnaire respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narratives</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related well to the work of our group</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for stimulating discussion</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me think in a new way about our work</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped our group identify areas in which we would like to grow</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents from this case generally agree or strongly agree that the narratives were useful for stimulating discussion, helping them to think about their work in a new way, and helping them to identify areas for growth. They also agree that the narratives related well to the work of their group; however, this item had the lowest response mean and mode. Two factors help explain why responses were slightly less favorable for this item. First, there was confusion in this group as to whether they were analyzing their work at the small group level or the whole school level. Second, this group had helped established broad goals for their school during the summer, and the narratives did not specifically relate to all of these broad goals.

There were no comments specific to the narratives written for open-response items on the questionnaire, but two individuals commented specifically while debriefing
the first meeting that it was nice to read examples of other groups’ work in the narratives. They could bring their own perspectives to the text as they read, but having these other examples provided a sense of safety in identifying areas for growth. As W said, “It kind of makes it safe, too, in some ways, because it’s there on paper and it’s issues somebody else has.” It may be easier to bring up issues in a group’s work when participants see that another group has had a similar struggle. Since the narratives are not labeled with the beginning, developing, and most highly functioning stage names, it is quite possible that they would feel safer to a group than the developmental framework. A group can examine their work more in light with what they feel is important than by a standard set by an outside source.

**Case 3**

The Case 3 participants responded the most positively on the questionnaire, with response means for all five items at 3.5 or higher and all modes at 4.0. Table 6-6 presents all means, medians, and modes for the responses from this case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related well to the work of our group</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful for stimulating discussion</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped me think in a new way about our work</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped our group identify areas in which we would like to grow</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Though protocol debriefs and open-response items on the questionnaire provide very little additional explanation as to the reactions of the participants to the framework, several sources suggest that the facilitator’s reflections on this framework months before the group actually began this self-study process brought about changes in the group’s work. The facilitator of this group was one from the panel of experts who initially provided feedback on the framework. As they debriefed their meeting, the facilitator shared, “So actually, we have been in correspondence a while now, so when I started pushing back in the summer about needing something different, it was thanks to the [framework]. You planted the seed.” In several other conversations, the facilitator shared more specifics. First, looking at the framework caused her to reflect more on group leadership. She had acted as coach for the group for a while, but then they moved to a rotating chair leadership structure. However, something was missing in the consistency of logistics and format. Her reflections on leadership brought her back to functioning as the group’s coach as a logistical point person to help with consistency. Second, the facilitator’s reflections on the framework content led to the creation of “quads” among their members, smaller groups that provide additional accountability. These small groups meet together for a half hour at the beginning of meetings to address individual needs and goals and they have committed to checking in with each other in between meetings. This case shows that the framework can be useful even without a formal process, and even if only the coach reflects on its content.
Analysis by Element

Though participants’ reactions to the framework and narratives provide one perspective on usefulness, analyzing the conversations of each group around the framework or narratives also provides insight into the usefulness or relevance of each framework element. First, it is useful to look at the sources of the words and phrases participants identified as areas for growth. Table 6-7 provides a case by case breakdown of the number of words and phrases identified as areas for growth in each element along with the total across cases. Bold font is used when one or more of the final goals developed by the group also relates to that element.

Table 6-7: Connections Between Framework Elements and Areas Identified for Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Case 1</th>
<th>Case 2</th>
<th>Case 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (not from the framework)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data shows that two groups identified goals related to the elements Impact on Teaching and Learning and Group Learning Agenda, while every group identified a goal related to the element Meeting Focus. These three elements apparently weigh in as very significant for these CFGs in their current stages of development. Overall, groups identified one or more areas for growth within each and every one of the elements, and goals identified across groups related to every element except for Roles and
Responsibilities and Level of Reflection (though Roles and Responsibilities prompted action in Case 3 prior to their involvement in the self-study process). The infrequent reference to Level of Reflection and the fact that this element was not addressed in any group’s goals adds to the questions raised previously in this chapter about the appropriateness of the descriptions. As written, it does not seem to play a significant role in the group self-assessment and directions for the future.

In spite of their negative responses towards the framework, the conversations of the Case 1 participants during their final meeting and during the facilitators’ interview demonstrated the relevance of many of these elements to this CFG’s functioning. Though they had a list of how they had rated themselves in each element, they did not have the framework available to them in this meeting, nor did they formally address where they were at on each element. However, the themes in these conversations relate directly to ideas included in five of the seven elements. Relationships is one of the elements addressed in the final discussion. One new teacher talked about her struggle with protocols because she feels they hinder her from developing relationships with others. She says, “It’s really hard to form relationships when you can’t really have a conversation.” Another individual talked about how he preferred their work the year before in smaller CFG groups, saying, “Personally I liked it with the smaller groups last year… cause then we could, you know, somebody had an idea, and we could actually talk about it.” N said, “I’ve come to see Gl and M and D, my old friends that I don’t get to see. You know, I have a social need for coming to this group.” Not only do they talk about their desire to have relationships with others, but in both the group discussion and the interview, the idea of safety came up. For example, Gl said:
That’s the one thing that last year that really surprised me how teachers felt like that whole sense of relationship like I have a group of people that I can just lay it out there, you know, and I can be honest about, well I never thought about that…or I never did that. Or hear how you do something different to get a different perspective. And they weren’t at all threatened by it. …But that whole relationship among people to me that are coming back because they feel that responsibility to the group.

In contrast to this sense of safety, several mentioned that, while recognizing that involving administrators adds an important layer of accountability for attending CFG meetings, they did not feel like they could really be open and honest with administrative participation.

A second discussion theme matches up well with Roles and Responsibilities. During the interview, Gl, one of the coaches, spoke several times about the desire to have more people step up and to really give voice into the direction for the group. She says:

I don’t know that everyone really sees themselves as facilitator. And it’s like everybody…just kind of looks to us for the leadership and it’s like, no, this needs to be about what WE wanna do and stuff. Not M and I, but we as the group.

Interestingly, during the group discussion, Z asked how it was that J had been able to get on an agenda to present his ideas to the group:

J, question. When you decided to, you brought your idea of inquiry to, how did you approach getting that on the agenda? Because I think part of what we lack is just ho it works to bring, you know what I mean? Because I always felt the agendas were kind of set, and how do you, I mean, if it really is a place to run off and bounce off ideas and stuff.

Later, Z brought up this idea again, suggesting that they develop “an easier process or an actual process for having input in what comes in the next time.” Participants brought up ideas, such as emailing the coaches if they had an idea they’d like to use or deciding at the end of one meeting what the agenda for the next meeting might be.
Commitment to attending the group was another major theme during this conversation. This was aimed mostly at their frustrations over falling attendance throughout the year and a lack of accountability for attending. L explained why several in her department stopped coming, “There’s an expectation that they didn’t really have to come, they tried it once and like maybe they came on a meeting that didn’t really, you know what I mean.” N suggested that “if we’re concerned about attendance, we need to be clearer about whether people need to be here or not.” They struggled as a group with wanting to really make a difference in what is going on in the school but feeling like the “last remaining survivors shouting down a well if the rest of the people in the school aren’t here to hear the things that are going on” (U).

Group Learning Agenda was also a major topic of discussion. They had focused primarily on differentiated instruction for the year, but they did not do as much looking at student work or teacher work. N and J recollected the power of looking at their exams together the previous year, and they brought up another time when they had compared student grades with reading levels in classes aside from English. Gl suggested the need to continue looking at differentiated instruction. After more comments on both sides, M said, “So I almost hear two things. In a way we wanna continue with differentiated instruction, and in a way we wanna get away from and just do—,” when someone interrupted her and said, “We want to differentiate,” or meet the needs of the CFG members as they come up. Though the two coaches commented again on the two sides of this issue during the interview, they also talked about how in previous years they had not really had a plan:
Gl ‘Cause every month we would kind of like try and figure out what do we wanna look at this month. So that forced us to, and I thought, like, it gave us a very, based on teacher input, a focus of what the teachers wanted to do.

M …I think we were fumbling. Because truly, every critical friend last year was, what do you think we should do this month? You know, oh, let’s look at grade distributions and see if there’s correlation, blah, blah, blah, and I, that was something that maybe a lot of teachers were interested in but never thought about themselves, so we brought it to the forefront. But after a while, you’re like, now what are we gonna do? I mean, I felt that way. I was like, now what? You know, our little brains are struggling just to maintain teaching every day.

The coaches were wrestling to merge together the idea that they wanted the group to be intentional and focused, and yet they also wanted to best serve the group even if that meant addressing an urgent need that arose.

Finally, the group spoke about wanting to have an Impact on Teaching and Learning both for their own classrooms and on behalf of the school as a whole. J felt there was much they could celebrate this year in the area of differentiated instruction:

I think the place that we can really celebrate the most in my opinion is impact on teaching and learning. we had given ourselves a beginning, but if you fold differentiated instruction under that heading, we've really done a lot in regard to that over the course of the year, and I can elaborate on documented evidence… Several of us attended the differentiated instruction workshop, and from that, you know, we shared out through critical friends on that. Um, the presentations last time, um, of individual use in classrooms, the multiple intelligence survey that was given through homerooms that eventually became, you know, our teacher inquiry. …So, I think we've worked towards, I think we've done quite a bit as far as that goes.

K added further examples:

What I did see happening out of here with differentiated instruction and what we talked about was saw, in the SACHS plan there were differentiated ideas, there were differentiated instruction examples, in the secondary plan there were differentiated instruction examples, in the
secondary schools initiative, there were differentiated instruction, so I saw talking happening, which is surprising…and just some of the examples that people gave in here were good for me to go, gotcha, I might be able to take that back and use that in my room.

Even their conversation on commitment centered around wanting to be able to make a bigger difference at the school level. On the other hand, several felt that sharing more student work would facilitate more of an impact on their classroom work. N says:

We shared more student work in the past, which was kind of interesting. When I think back to the critical friends ten years ago, and we did follow the protocol, but it was interesting you could bring in information about a student that you had some concerns about and get group comments. We also brought in things that we were very proud of, but it was also the other side of it, what can I do to help this child, or what do I do in this situation that we shared that I found worthwhile.

The extent to which this CFG’s conversations addressed the framework without even making reference to the framework descriptors suggests to me that the elements in the framework are very relevant and a natural part of a CFG’s work and development. In fact, this group’s experience raises the question of whether as detailed a reflective tool is necessary for a group’s self-assessment and goal setting process. Perhaps a list of the elements alone, or a list of the elements with a few reflective questions under each would foster an equally or more beneficial reflection on the group’s work.

**Summary**

Taken as a whole, the analysis of three CFGs’ use of and reactions to the developmental framework and the narratives suggests that these are useful and relevant tools for CFG work. However, different groups may find it more beneficial to use one form versus the other. Perhaps there are also times in a group’s work when the
framework in particular would be more beneficial for promoting the coach’s reflection on the group rather than the reflection of the group as a whole. Though the framework has many strengths as a document, this analysis has also provided input for further revisions and has called into question the usefulness of the element Level of Reflection. It also could be worthwhile to generate versions of this document that use less teacher language.
Chapter 7

SELF-STUDY PROCESS ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the self-study process as it was enacted in the three cases. This chapter first analyzes the process implementation and the extent to which each CFG met the intended objectives in each protocol. It also examines the procedural questions raised in each case. The chapter concludes with an analysis of each protocol in a more step-by-step manner, laying out suggestions for modifications where appropriate.

Implementation and Outcomes Analysis

A useful place to begin the analysis of the self-study process is to examine the extent to which each group met the objectives of the self-study protocols. The intent of the first protocol was to facilitate a group self-assessment including strengths and weaknesses and to set group goals based on that assessment. The purpose of the second protocol was to develop an action plan for meeting the group goals, including concrete next steps, a discussion of needed resources, and a discussion of how to monitor progress towards goals. Then the aim of the final protocol was to check in on progress, assessing the group, refining goals, and setting an action plan. Since only one CFG has completed the final protocol, this discussion will at first focus solely on the extent to which each
CFG met the objectives of the first two protocols before looking at the Case 1 experience with the third protocol.

Developing a flow chart for each case provided a visual means for determining the extent to which each objective was met as well as for establishing the relationship between each protocol step. The top row of each chart represents the words and phrases identified by the group as areas for growth. Other green bubbles chart the flow of conversation after that time, while the yellow diamonds represent goal statements and action steps, and the purple rectangles document plans for monitoring group progress. Cloud shapes represent obstacles or resources the group discusses. Unfortunately, the chart for Case 1 is less detailed than the others since the recording equipment malfunctioned during the second protocol.

Case 1

Outcomes Analysis

Figure 7-1 provides an overview of the discussions for the Case 1 CFG. The members of this CFG successfully assessed the group in two ways. First, they shared the stages into which they perceived their work to fall. Then they identified areas of strength and areas in which they would like to grow. Though the three CFG coaches crafted the four part goal statement while the rest of the group took a break, this statement ties together the four themes that the group had identified across areas for growth.
Figure 7-1: Case 1 Protocol Map
By the end of the second protocol this CFG had identified five concrete action steps. Two of these were not specifically tied to the content of the goal statement, while the remaining three connected with just two of the four parts of the goal statement. There was not ample time for this group to discuss what resources they would need or how to monitor their progress towards all of these goals. Yet they did suggest that documenting their own individual learning would help them to determine the kinds of changes that came about through participation in a CFG.

Questions Analysis

Analysis of the procedural questions asked during this protocol provides insight into how easy it was for this CFG to implement the protocols, particularly since the facilitator had not done any preparation in advance. Participants asked eleven procedural questions during the first protocol. The facilitator answered five of these questions quickly and easily. One example was when Gl asks, “Are we just doing the interaction ones?” as they begin to identify words and phrases that describe their current group. On the other hand, six questions brought a little more discussion from the group. Examples included whether or not they would chart words and phrases that describe them now, whether or not they would share with each other how they rated themselves on the framework, and whether they should “whip around” or use a “popcorn style” of discussion. Though the group discussed each of these questions, they still came to a decision relatively quickly and easily.
In contrast, I only noted one procedural question in my field notes for the second protocol, and yet this one presented a bigger issue. As the facilitator tried to describe to the group that they were going to project into the future to describe what it would look like, sound like, and feel like having accomplished their goals, he met blank stares. He even appeared confused himself as he looked to me for clarification and help in explaining the step. I stepped in saying, “You’re imagining that you’re at the end of the year. Everything you want to accomplish according to these goals has been accomplished. And so you’re talking about now, now what is life like for you?” Even with my help explaining the directions, initial comments were quite tentative, with N even asking, “Is that what I’m supposed to do?” after giving it a try.

Protocol Revisions

After observing and reflecting upon the protocols as used with this first CFG, I made a number of revisions before passing them on to the second and third groups. Each revision was made for one of three reasons: (1) to help the facilitator with logistics, (2) to clarify directions, or (3) to facilitate the achievement of the protocol objectives. Logistical revisions included having participants highlight words and phrases as they read at the beginning to prepare them for sharing in the next two steps, suggesting that the group use “go-rounds” to share words and phrases to ensure that everyone has a turn, and clarifying that it’s acceptable for someone to repeat a word or phrase used by someone else or to disagree with something that someone else has said. In an attempt to alleviate some of the confusion experienced in the fourth step of the second protocol, I added the
questions, “In what ways has your group or the individuals in your group changed since you first set your goals?”

However, the most important revisions in my mind were intended to encourage the use of evidence and to facilitate the development of the concrete action plan. Since the first group had not used any evidence during the process despite the inclusion of the phrase “and what evidence can you provide?”, I added the direction “Use sentences like ‘I think ____ describes our group because we ____’” to the second protocol step to promote some type of justification. I also included a statement that supporting evidence must be used when disagreeing with something someone else has said.

During the debrief of the second protocol one participant expressed disappointment in not having enough time to fully discuss the concrete steps the group would take to work towards their goals, as this was the most important part of this protocol (Field notes, October 20, 2006). This individual also specifically mentioned the importance of discussing what evidence they could collect to help them determine whether or not their goals had been met. Though this CFG would have had more time for this step if they had been able to start the process on time, I still felt that the suggested timing of the protocol deserved a second look. Since each of the steps suggested a time range, I chose to suggest only the lower of the two times provided so that there would be the maximum possible time available for this final step. Appendix E provides a copy of the protocols as revised and given to the CFGs in Cases 2 and 3.
Cases 2 and 3

Outcomes Analysis

The second group implemented the process in a very structured and exact manner with little question or deviation from the printed protocol. As a result of following the protocols so closely, this group also achieved the highest number of process objectives. Figure 7-2 charts the progression of the discussion over the two protocols used. This figure shows that they completed a group self-assessment that included identifying areas in which they would like to grow. They developed five goals that related to the themes they had identified, though two of the goals were similar enough that I joined them together in this chart. The conversation during the second protocol addressed each of the goal areas, so that by the end they had suggested at least one concrete step they could take to begin working towards each goal. This was the only group that identified any obstacles that might hinder their work or resources that might support them in reaching their goals.
Figure 7-2: Case 2 Protocol Map
With the provision of a sentence starter containing the word “because” in this version of the protocol and enough time to complete the second protocol as written, evidence had a small, but visible, role in the process for this group. Though the first protocol encouraged participants to back up their selection of words and phrases that describe their CFG with evidence, in actuality evidence was used to support only five of the eighteen statements during this protocol step. In four instances the evidence was given in the form of a concrete example, such as the following:

_Mi_ I think our group is good at asking questions about the relationship between the students’ learning and the community and the culture. We saw that when we talked about all the different inquiry projects that we were working on this year, and what they were focused on.

In the fifth instance, _S_ used weekly meetings as an example of times when group members speak candidly with each other, but she did not provide a concrete example of this candid speech. During the next protocol step, one person used an example as evidence for an area in which they need to grow, referring to “the first year when we had all these great ideas and we weren’t able to implement them because we took too much out” (_S_). This was the only example of a justification statement during this protocol step.

During the second protocol, as the group was projecting into the future, the facilitator instructed the group to describe the kinds of evidence that they had documenting their success. Participants offered five different types of evidence, four of which connected directly to one or more of the specific goals, before moving back to discussion without evidence. In contrast, when discussing what kind of evidence or documentation to collect as they monitored progress towards their goals, all six suggestions were concrete and specifically connected to one of the four goals. Though the
use of evidence in the first protocol would not be sufficient to label this an evidence-based process, the second protocol led participants to discuss the use of evidence in documenting their future growth. In fact, this was also the only group to discuss how they might monitor progress towards goals and what types of evidence they might collect along the way.

In Case 3, the CFG used the protocol structures fairly loosely; and since their protocol modifications added to the length of time this process would take, the group did not achieve all the objectives intended in this process. Figure 7-3 charts the progression of the discussion over the two protocols for this group. This figure shows that they completed a group self-assessment that included identifying areas in which they would like to grow. In fact, the depth at which this group reflected on their growth and development in each element surpasses that of either of the other two groups. However, this depth came as a result of spending over an hour sharing their perceptions of group development for each element prior to even listing areas for growth. Table 7-1 shows the amount of time the group spent discussing each element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7-1: Time Spent Discussing Each Element</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Element</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles and Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7-3: Case 3 Protocol Map
Due to time constraints, this group did not prioritize areas for growth or develop specific concrete goal statements. Their conversation during the second protocol then addressed five of the areas identified for growth, and as they projected to the future there were many potential future actions brainstormed. The group did not have time during this meeting to outline their next steps or talk about how to monitor their progress. However, discussing how they might make use of data and what learning goals should frame their work were the two items they selected to include on the agenda for their next meeting, the most concrete action suggested from any of the three groups.

There was a stronger emphasis on the use of evidence as this CFG assessed their group than with any of the others, possibly because participants were trying to justify their rating of the group instead of merely identifying words and phrases to describe their group’s work. Individuals referred to evidence or used some type of justification statement 49 times as they discussed the seven elements. About half the evidence used in individuals’ explanations referred to fairly concrete examples, such as the following example F provided related to the element Meeting Focus:

And I agree…because I think that, you know, our general focus of equity really does drive, and has been driving, our work for the last four years. And we have work samples. I mean, remember when we did the whole [indistinguishable] on observation and shared, you know, we brought observations, we did observations. We brought them, we shared them, we talked about them, we received feedback from one another. We were questioned about the observations. You know, well why did you say this. Or you didn't support your, you made a statement, but you didn't support it, you didn't give evidence. I took that back and worked on that, and, and realized that, you know, what was happened here and the feedback you gave me was important. And I've changed my whole way of doing observations…
The other half was given in broad general terms, such as this statement \( A \) made related to Roles and Responsibilities:

\[ \text{...I don't see Facilitator as the leader of the group. I see each of us contributing where our expertise is, if that's known. And we all do it. And even where it's not, we step out and try the new stuff. And then we become the leader of that section. And the fact that Facilitator does have the logistics end of it down for us to keep us on track, I think every group needs someone that does that, so that puts her in a certain position...} \]

Though there was a fairly large amount of evidence and justification provided during the group analysis in the first protocol, evidence was not at all a part of this group’s conversation during the second protocol. Though it is uncertain whether evidence would have had a larger role given more time for completing the process, it is likely that time was at least one factor involved. The facilitator felt pressured to finish the protocol and consequently had difficulty keeping straight what was to happen next.

**Questions Analysis**

Analysis of the procedural questions asked by these two groups provides insight into how clear and easy to use this process was with the revised protocols. Participants in Case 2 asked twelve process related questions across the two protocols they completed. In ten of these instances, individuals were checking in regarding their understanding of the directions. Four of these questions came from a single individual. One example from the first protocol is when \( X \) said, “She just said that she pulled something out from the article, and we can do that as well?” The facilitator immediately and briefly answered each question of this type. Similarly, out of the nine procedural questions asked by the participants in Case 3, the facilitator quickly and easily answered six of them. An
example would be in the second protocol when $G$ asks, “Is it ‘what did we do,’ or is it first ‘what does it look like today’?” The ease with which the facilitators answered these procedural questions suggests that these questions do not need to be considered in refining the protocols further.

The remaining questions in each case were not as easily addressed. There were two such questions for the participants in Case 2. First, there was a bit of argument over whether the words and phrases used to describe the group had to come from the narratives themselves, an argument which was ended when another group member connected the word in question with a phrase actually used in one of the narratives. Interestingly, while the facilitator in Case 2 did not want to allow the use of words that were not connected to the narratives, the facilitator in Case 3 asked her group if there were any areas not addressed in the framework that they felt were important in considering their future growth. While the framework includes many different ideas, it is unlikely that it addresses every important aspect of every CFG’s work. Providing participants an opportunity to bring up words and phrases not included within the document is one way to provide flexibility in this process in order that it might best fit the needs of the group. On the other hand, it would not make sense to decide to use the documents provided in this process and then spend the bulk of the time discussing ideas from other sources.

Second, at the conclusion of the first protocol, the Case 2 facilitator demonstrated that she was not really sure where this process was going when she said, “Ok, we need to debrief the protocol, so I guess we need to discuss, also as far as goals go, I guess our next step as a leadership team,” indicating that she was not clear what would be the
purpose of the second protocol. This suggests it might be useful to add a note at the bottom of each protocol pointing the group to where they will be heading in the next meeting. Alternately, this might suggest the need for a more detailed facilitator’s guide.

During an interview with this facilitator, she mentioned how providing everyone with a half sheet overview of the entire process had been really useful. It gave everyone in the group something concrete to look at so that they would know where they were headed.

The other facilitator from Case 2 added that the most difficult part about facilitating the self-study process was her feeling of uncertainty because she had not used these protocols before. My field notes from that interview paraphrase her comments: “Can we answer other people’s questions about the protocol? We didn’t have someone else to consult with who knew the protocols better than we could to just run through our own questions and understanding of the process” (May 15, 2007). The comments of these facilitators suggest that providing facilitators with more than just the three protocols as written could be very useful.

There were three additional areas of question for the participants in Case 3. Two of these occurred at the beginning of the first protocol and arose because the modifications that the facilitator chose to make (placing dots up on a chart to give the group a sense of where everyone perceived their CFG’s development) did not match the directions that the participants had read in the protocols the night before. First, A was concerned that the modifications might change the feel or intent of the protocol:

A Right, I know, but, knowing that, it's in the protocol where we bring it out and suspend our assumptions. I just, I'm just putting it out there to say would that make it look and feel different, because this already puts it out for us. It's just a different way of doing it. But it's all of it, all at one time,
and I think this [the protocol] layers it out and teases it out. That was just my

Facilitator I thought in the sharing we would still be teasing it out and explaining our evidence, so I didn't think it would, be changing it dramatically.

A I think it's just giving it a different feel.

Facilitator It's, it's up to you. It's up to the group. What do you think?

Second, since the members of this CFG had read both the narratives and the framework prior to this meeting, there was confusion about where they should have underlined words and phrases and how these colored dots fit in with the directions. Though this confusion took a bit of time to clear up, this situation does not signify a need to refine the protocol, as it involved additional outside directions.

The third area of confusion for this group, however, has greater significance for this study. The sixth step of the second protocol asks the participants to discuss how they moved from their starting place to the “projected present,” or that future time by which they would have successfully accomplished their goals. This step is meant to prepare the group for determining concrete next steps. The facilitator began this step by labeling a sheet “January ’07” (the time of the meeting) and asking, “What have we done to get from here to here?” (from the place where they started to Jan. ’07). Several asked questions to clarify these directions, and G even suggested that the chart should really be labeled “September ’08.” A then tried to suggest that this step should really be moving the group towards what steps they would take next with various interrupted comments including, “But this is driving what we do the very next thing.” G made several comments in the meantime about how this step was meant to address the starting place, or
“what we’re doing now.” In the end those protesting gave up, and the protocol continued with the group identifying steps they had already taken or planned to take rather than what new next steps they would need to take. In addition to being short on time, this misinterpretation of the protocol is one reason why this group did not identify much of a concrete action plan during the meeting. Since this is a very experienced CFG, and since many of these individuals had done the original Futures protocol in the past, this confusion further suggests the need to consider revision of this protocol.

**Protocol 1 and 2 Implementation Summary**

Table 7-2 provides a comparison of the protocol outcomes achieved by each group. The CFGs in Cases 2 and 3 attained more of the intended objectives than the CFGs in Case 1, and the Case 2 group came the closest to fully meeting these objectives. One possible explanation for this is that the second two groups benefited from the revisions to the initial protocol drafts, particularly in adding the stem “I think ___ because ____.” On the other hand, time was a considerable obstacle for the CFGs in Cases 1 and 3 while a strict adherence to the protocol, including the suggested times and questions, meant that the group in Case 2 addressed every detail in the time allotted. A question to consider is whether this is completely a function of this group’s structured style, or if using the narratives as the basis for group assessment lends itself to a quicker process. An equally important question would be whether using the narratives is as meaningful of a group experience as using the framework. Finally, it is important to
further consider how to encourage the use of concrete evidence within this process if this
is to be a truly evidence-based process.

### Protocol 3

The Case 1 CFG followed the times and structures of the third protocol much
more closely than the first two protocols. The objectives for this protocol were to assess
progress towards goals using evidence, to refine goals as necessary, and to develop a plan
for action. The group met all three of these objectives during this meeting. Though this
group’s conversation focused more on their progress towards their action steps than
towards their four part goal statement, they did assess their work. They felt they had
really not addressed any of their action steps except for looking at differentiated
instruction. Therefore, there was no evidence cited outside of this one area. Two
individuals provided specific examples of how they felt the focus on differentiated
instruction had impacted teaching in individual classrooms or had influenced school-wide
initiatives, using these examples as evidence of why the group should celebrate. The
group spent time discussing the aspects of the goal statement or action steps that would
be important for their continued growth, and they refined their direction for the next year. They determined that they would like to continue a content focus on differentiated instruction, but also have meetings for examining teacher and student work samples as they had in the past. They discussed concerns about commitment and the numbers of participants attending meetings. They then identified concrete actions for the future, including defining the process for how a teacher might get his or her work on the monthly agenda, exploring further specific opportunities for learning about differentiated instruction, and establishing expectations for attendance at meetings. Participants did not ask any procedural questions during any of the steps of this protocol. The implementation of this protocol can be viewed as a success.

Step-by-Step Protocol Analysis

Having analyzed the protocol implementation of each group and the extent to which the intended outcomes were met, I now turn to a more step by step analysis of each protocol and what additional information the experiences of these three CFGs might offer for protocol evaluation and revision.

Protocol 1

As you read individually, use one color to mark words and phrases that best describe your CFG now, and use a second color to mark words or phrases that either point to an area of difficulty or describe a direction in which you would like your CFG to grow.
Though this protocol does not instruct CFG members to share with each other their perceptions of which stage they feel their group best matches for each element, both of the CFGs that used the framework added a time of sharing to this step. In Case 1, \( L \) asked, “Are we going to share where we each thought we were?” and followed up with, “I would just be interested if my perceptions are similar to other people’s or if I was way off base.” Then the facilitator asked group members to raise their hands to indicate whether they felt the group was in Beginning, Developing, or Most Highly Functioning for each element. In Case 3, the facilitator made the decision to modify the protocol so that the group members would visually communicate their perceptions about the group’s development with others. During the debrief the facilitator asked others if using the visual was helpful for others. There were several who simultaneously said, “Yeah.” During the interview, the facilitator again commented on how helpful she felt the chart was and recommended that others consider using a similar visual. This group not only used a visual to share their ratings with the group, but they also spent an hour discussing why they placed their dots where they did, not only considering placement within a specific stage, but also where they felt the group fell in the continuum of a particular stage. In contrast, since the group using the narratives did not know that each narrative was meant to represent a CFG at a different level of development, they did not seek to share group ratings. Though every group would not necessarily choose to discuss the placement of the group into specific stages to the extent that the Case 3 CFG did, it is clear that when there is some type of “rating” involved, the group members want to know the perceptions of others. It would be valuable to include this as a formal part of the process when using the developmental framework as the tool for analysis.
An interesting side-note is the extent to which participants mention how the stages are really not clear-cut. The facilitator of the Case 1 group said at one point, “So are you thinking, what I’m hearing is maybe there should be more than three slots?” and later reiterated, “That’s an interesting point that we have a lot of sort of two-and-a-halves and one-and-a-halves.” Gl added:

You know there is some overlap, I think. I think that it’s sometimes difficult, you know, there’s a piece here and a piece there that fit and we’re kind of, we’re doing a little of this and we’re doing a little of that so we’re not clearly defined in one area.

As the Case 3 CFG members discussed the stages into which they would place their group’s work, there were twenty instances in which their language indicated that they fell on the line between two elements or that their group was at the beginning of a one stage or at the high end of another stage. I agree with the participants that the stages are not clear-cut, and I do not believe that they could be since every group is so different. This suggests that a group’s focus should rest more on the meaning of the words, phrases, and ideas contained in the framework and how those ideas connect to their own group’s work than on determining precise stage labels for their group.

One of the Case 2 facilitators provided a recommendation to consider even prior to this step. One thing she had found interesting about going through this protocol was how it became obvious that the various members of her group did not all share the same sense of what the group’s purpose was to begin with. She thought it would be interesting for individuals to spend five to ten minutes writing down their own descriptions of their CFGs prior to looking at the narratives. Then they would be able to name their own understanding of the group’s work and compare that to the other groups presented in the
narratives. Though adding a step to this process would add to the length of the protocol, this might be a task participants do prior to coming to the meeting. This might particularly provide a useful point of comparison that could help groups to feel they have the freedom to shape their work along the lines of what is most important to them rather than simply on the basis of what an outside document suggests they should be.

Which words and phrases in this document best describe our CFG at this time, and what evidence can we provide?

While the wording of this direction does not specifically mention identifying words and phrases to describe the positive or strong aspects of a group’s work, the participants in Cases 1 and 2 interpreted the directions this way. One possible explanation is that participants assumed that the contrast in the directions between this step and the next one meant that they should save any critical statements of their group’s work for the discussion of how the group should grow. Comments made by members of each of the three groups in this study confirm that the opportunity to identify strengths is important. Groups value the opportunity to affirm and celebrate their collaborative work. Halfway through this step, the facilitator in Case 1 remarked, “Are you sure we don’t need to chart these things? This feels, this feels good. I want to see. I’m writing them down on my paper.” In debriefing protocol one, the principal in the Case 2 group said, “I think this process is good at really pointing out examples…things that we do well and things where we need to improve. …I like the structure of what’s working well and what do we need to improve.” Finally, in Case 3 two participants mentioned the idea of celebrating. C said:
It goes along with what B said about co-, constant reflecting and saying ‘Oh my gosh, it’s not good enough…how do I take it to the next level?’ I find myself doing that with our school. People come in and they say, ‘You know what, you should pat yourself on the back and celebrate,’ and yet it never feels like that.

Shortly after that, A provided examples of success in making an impact on teaching and learning and followed them up with the statement, “So I kinda think we are there. I wanna celebrate something that we’re there and we’re good at. But we can get better.” These examples highlight the importance of acknowledging strengths in addition to setting goals for the future.

*Which words and phrases in this document point to an area of difficulty or best describe a direction in which we would like our CFG to grow?*

*What themes do we notice in the words and phrases we have written up on the chart? Which of these are most important for our future growth and development as a group?*

*What two or three specific / concrete goal statements can we make in these areas we see of highest priority?*

All three groups listed numerous words and phrases from the documents to describe directions for future growth. Yet those words and phrases did not always correspond with the elements for which participants had rated their group as least developed. Table 7-3 shows the connection between the framework elements and the words and phrases identified by the participants in Case 1. This group identified more words and phrases for growth among the three elements in which they rated themselves the most developed than among the three elements in which they rated themselves the least developed.
By the time these words and phrases had been condensed into themes, and finally a goal statement, the gap between the initial rating of the elements and the goals chosen had grown even further. Only one of the four parts of the goal statement (facilitate positive changes) corresponds with one of the three elements rated as least developed (Impact on Teaching and Learning). The other three parts (collaboration, safe constructive conflict, and challenging assumptions) connect three of the elements in which the group rated themselves as most developed (Relationships, Commitment, and Meeting Focus).

Case 3 provides a similar but contrasting example. Table 7-4 connects the areas identified for growth by this group with the framework elements. Since there were so many elements in which these CFG members viewed themselves as highly functioning, this table is ordered by the number of instances of words and phrases rather than by perceived level of development for the framework elements. Again, there is a disconnect between the number of times words and phrases from each element are identified and the elements in which the group perceived themselves to be least developed.

Table 7-3: Connections Between Case 1 Areas for Growth and Framework Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements Ordered By Level of Perceived Development (Least to Greatest)</th>
<th>Number of phrases identified for growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants in this group perceived themselves as least developed in the areas of Meeting Focus, Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning during their conversation in step one. Though words and phrases from Impact on Teaching and Learning are identified the most frequently, words and phrase from Relationships, Group Learning Agenda, and “Other” significantly outnumber those from Meeting Focus and Reflection. Yet in this case, this disconnect reverses itself as the CFG moves on into protocol two. Though they do not identify concrete goal statements, the bulk of their conversation in the second protocol focuses on ideas related to four elements: Meeting Focus, Reflection, Impact on Teaching and Learning, and Group Learning Agenda.

There are several potential explanations for this phenomenon that have implications for this process. First, it is possible that the initial shared perceptions of the group’s level of functioning were inaccurate and that the format of this process allowed the true areas of need to arise. This could explain why the Case 1 group identified so many words and phrases corresponding with Relationships even though they initially identified this element as one of the more developed aspects of their work. Another

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Elements</th>
<th>Number of phrases identified for growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impact on Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Learning Agenda</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Reflection</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
possibility that could provide explanation for Case 1 is that some elements are more important than others or are perceived as more important than others either generally or at particular points in a group’s development. Though the group perceived themselves as more developed in Relationships than in Roles and Responsibilities, they still did not perceive themselves as Most Highly Functioning. Perhaps participants perceived further growth in the area of Relationships as more important than beginning to work on the ideas in Roles and Responsibilities.

Second, it is possible that the number of words and phrases identified for a particular element is less relevant than the relative urgency or importance of each particular word and phrase. A group could identify more with a lower stage of development for a given element because of the weight of importance of one aspect of that element rather than because of the element’s description in its entirety. This could explain why the Case 3 CFG naturally returned their focus to the ideas from the elements in which they had rated themselves as least developed when they got to the second protocol. However, if this is the case, then looking for themes across all of the words and phrases identified as growth areas may not be as effective as honing in on those ideas which are the most important for a CFG’s work.

Given this discussion it seems potentially prudent to provide CFG members with the opportunity to consciously consider whether the elements in which they perceive their group to be least developed should form the basis for their goals, or if there are other elements in which growth is more immediately needed. It might be useful to ask participants to rate the importance of each element in addition to where they feel their group falls along the continuum during step one. Then the facilitator might encourage
them to share words and phrases representing areas in which they would like to grow from those elements they perceive to be most important.

Protocol 2

The presenter or another group member will “present,” or recap, the goals your group hopes to work towards this year. Go around the circle to give each group member a chance to say one or two sentences to clarify or confirm the goals as stated by the “presenter.”

This step provided an important opportunity for group members to check in on their understanding of some aspect of the stated goals for the CFGs in Cases 1 and 2. In Case 1, the coaches had actually written the goal statement during the break, so this step provided the rest of the group with the opportunity to provide additional input or to ask questions. The group spent quite a bit of time discussing the words conflict and criticism, what those words meant in the context of the goals, and which word could better communicate the intended meaning. Though the facilitator eventually cut off this discussion, saying, “It’s becoming a semantic argument,” it seemed that the opportunity to develop a shared meaning was important. Similarly, in Case 2, X immediately asked for clarification on one of their goals, saying, “On the very last thing that we boxed – streamlined, efficient, connect to all – I know you just said a lot of other little things. What were those other things?” Several others in the group contributed their understanding of the meaning of this goal, and later X said, “So that’s a good clarification.”

On the other hand, it was during this time that Y asserted that one of her personal goals is “to use student work in my instruction instead of my pacing guide, or, you know,
I like that goal.” Here she was referring to the group’s goal to use student work to drive instruction. Back in the first protocol, V had suggested this as an area for growth and clarified her meaning with the statement:

I wasn’t necessarily talking about the sense of looking at work, but we’re constantly looking at student work, making changes, adjustments, you know, ourselves, you know, alone…I’m talking about looking at student work more in the protocol sense – that it really, um, is a different way to look at the work.

However, by the time this group was discussing the potential resources needed to facilitate the success in each of their goal areas, Y suggested:

I think we um need time. We need time, not just time for planning and for having meetings with each other, but I really feel like we need time that we can sit and look at our student work… I feel like an hour after school by the time you’ve done your morning routines and your color chart and your this and that, how much time do you really have to analyze and reflect and to plan the next day’s instruction based on what your students are doing. It just takes, it really does take a lot more time.

Clearly this represents a complete change from the goal’s initial intent. The proposed solution for finding this time was not to take time as a group to look at student work, but to take time off from meetings once a month in order examine student work oneself. While I don’t disagree that teachers need time alone to think, analyze, and reflect, the transformation of this goal over the course of the two protocols could end up doing more to undermine group development than to push it forward.

While I would suggest that it is more likely that providing an opportunity to clarify and elaborate on goals at this time will help a CFG come to a deeper common understanding of the goals, it is also possible that this step of the protocol could move a group away from the initial intended meaning or that they could become bogged down in
fruitless “semantic arguments.” Despite these risks, I would suggest that the potential for good outweighs these negative possibilities.

Project into the future and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like having accomplished these goals. In what ways has your group or the individuals in your group changed since you first set your goals?

Look “back” from your projected present and describe how things were for your group when you set your goals.

Continue looking back from the projected present and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present.

Though these steps come directly from a previously published protocol, and though the ideas generated during these steps related to the intended purpose of this protocol, this may not be the best manner in which to approach the development of an action plan. First, all three groups experienced some degree of confusion relating to what one questionnaire respondent termed the “time warp thing” (W9). In the open-response items on the final questionnaire, one respondent from Case 1 and four respondents from Case 2 suggest that the second protocol was confusing. One interview question asked the facilitators what recommendations they would give to other groups considering using this self-study process, and M from Case 1 said, “Don’t use the Futures Protocol.” The facilitators in Case 2 also spoke of the confusion in these steps, particularly because they had not used this type of protocol before and were unsure of the purpose of the steps and where it was all leading them in the end.

Second, there is the potential for repetition rather than expansion of thoughts during these steps. Case 3 provides an unfortunate example of this. Though projecting to
the future allowed the participants to brainstorm new ideas and elaborate on ideas already
shared relating to moving their work forward, looking back did not provide any fresh
insight, but rather reiterated that the group hadn’t yet accomplished any of the
possibilities they had brainstormed. Table 7-5 provides a few illustrative examples.

Though this same repetition was not apparent across all three cases, the fact that this was
not the first time that members of this CFG had used a Futures Protocol adds weight to
the evidence.

Table 7-5: Repetition When Looking Forward and Looking Back

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projected Present</th>
<th>Looking Back from Projected Present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We examine student data regularly</td>
<td>Rarely examine data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear goal stated for our large group</td>
<td>Goals – not a stated group goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFG retreat</td>
<td>No retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action at district level</td>
<td>Limited district action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The holistic manner in which CFG members discuss goals during these steps and
throughout the entire protocol is a third issue for consideration. A look back at the
protocol map for Case 2 (Figure 7-2) provides one example of this issue. In spite of a
very structured facilitation style and a recorder who occasionally asked the group
members if they had addressed a specific goal or point, participants offered significantly
more ideas in regards to running protocols during team meetings than for any of the other
three goals throughout most of this protocol. Perhaps it was easier for the group to
discuss this very concrete goal than for a more abstract goal like streamlining what they
do at the school so that it all connects or a very complex goal like using student work to
drive instruction. However, it is also possible that focusing on one goal at a time is a
more reasonable expectation than four goals at once. Figure 7-1 shows that the CFG in Case 1 also developed action steps for only two of their goals. While developing the actual next steps does not occur until the next step of the protocol, this example suggests the same issue. It is unlikely that a group would be able to take the amount of time necessary to complete these steps from the Futures Protocol for each one of their goals individually and still have time and energy remaining for determining the concrete action plan. A different process that would allow a group to discuss the action steps for each goal one by one could be more efficient and productive.

*Return to the “present” and outline (in writing) the concrete steps your group will take to work towards your goals.*

It is worth repeating here that, during the Case 1 debrief, one participant expressed the opinion that this is the most important step in this protocol and that it was unfortunate that the group had not had time to adequately discuss concrete next steps. As this is the step that fulfills the purpose of the protocol, I would have to agree with this comment. However, with closer examination, I have realized that there are actually multiple steps embedded within this step. One part of this step involves action planning (next steps, needed resources, who will take responsibility), while the other part of this step involves planning a way to monitor progress and how to collect evidence. The only group to fully address both aspects of this step essentially treated it as two separate steps. Though the facilitator tried to direct the participants to address each of the five subquestions one by one, the conversation actually ended up dividing into two parts. The group spent nine minutes talking about what they could do and what resources would
help, having agreed that they would all share the actual responsibility for accomplishing their next steps. Then they spent six minutes talking about the evidence they could collect to help them monitor their progress. It is possible that formally breaking this step into two steps might ensure that the monitoring progress conversation does not slip through the cracks.

One additional observation informs the revision of this protocol step. Although the “Future” steps allowed the Case 2 group to discuss a couple of obstacles that might have kept them from attaining these goals in the past (defensiveness, lack of trust, lack of vision), this protocol does not formally instruct participants to consider how they might overcome potential obstacles. Having such a conversation could enhance the likelihood of a CFG being able to overcome obstacles and attain their goals.

Protocol 3

*Post and review the goals your group set during the first protocol.*

The facilitator of this protocol actually provided a hand-out for each individual reviewing all that the group had discussed during the first protocol. While I am not sure that all of this information was necessary, and I wonder if having so much on the page actually took the focus off of the goal statement, the print reminder of the action steps the group had planned really directed the discussion. This suggests that posting or handing out a copy of both the goals and the planned action steps could be more useful than the goals alone.
Break up into pairs or triads for brainstorming.

This step was a very appropriate beginning for this protocol. The facilitator of this protocol said during the interview, “And I like that we split up and talked in pairs. I hate it when we talk in groups of four or whatever. It’s too many if we’re gonna really talk about it. So I like the pair thing really well.” Breaking up into pairs seemed to provide individuals time to read, process, and initially react to the overview of what had been discussed during the first two protocols.

Post sticky note evidence next to the posted goals as the group reconvenes together. Have one person read each of the sticky notes out loud. Then use go-rounds to discuss the group’s work, what can we celebrate, and which goals are still important for the group’s growth and development.

The participants in this CFG chose not to post sticky notes. Instead they simply went around the circle and shared their thoughts and the evidence they had demonstrating their progress or lack thereof. This seemed to work effectively. On the other hand, this group did not have a lot of evidence to share because they had not made any progress towards most of their goals. It would be important to observe this process by several additional CFGs in order to determine the relative usefulness of visually posting the evidence.

What steps do we need to take next?

As with the final step of the second protocol, this step also seems to imply two steps. This CFG addressed what they would do, who would take on responsibilities, and what resources they would need during this step; but they did not discuss how they might
continue to monitor their progress in the future. In light of the fact that many participants had completely forgotten the goals and action steps from the first two protocols in the seven months in between meetings, it seems crucial that a group develop a plan for monitoring their work, whether that be some type of small monthly check-in, scheduling a date for a bigger check-in, such as this protocol, or some other type of accountability measure. In order to emphasize this important component of the process, it should be its own separate protocol step.

Summary

Though each of these protocols facilitated a degree of success in meeting the intended protocol outcomes, each could benefit from further revision. The steps in the first and third protocols appear to just need a little tweaking. Formally providing groups using the framework with the opportunity to share the stages they marked for each element and to determine whether group goals need to pertain to areas in which they rate themselves the least developed would strengthen the first protocol, while posting planned action steps alongside the goals and breaking the last step into two separate steps would strengthen the third protocol. In contrast, it appears that replacing the second protocol with an entirely different process might yield a less confusing and more productive conversation. Developing a process by which participants can look at each goal one by one, along with the obstacles that might hinder their progress towards each and the resources that would facilitate their progress, could support a CFG in developing a more concrete action plan and determining ways to monitor their progress towards their goals.
Chapter 8

PARTICIPANTS’ PROCESS PERCEPTIONS

Introduction

In addition to comparing the actual implementation and outcomes of each protocol with the original intent in order to refine the self-study process, it is also important to learn from the perspectives of those who experienced the process. This chapter provides an analysis of participant reactions based on data from the self-study meetings, questionnaires, and interviews for each case.

Overall, participants responded favorably to the self-study process. Table 8-1 reports the combined mean responses across cases for questionnaire items relating specifically to the self-study protocols and to the whole self-study process in general. For these items, participants circled a number from one to four, corresponding to a range of responses from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” I calculated Mean 1 by giving each respondent an equal weight, adding up each individual response and dividing by the total number of participants. I then calculated Mean 2 by giving each case an equal weight, since the number of participants in each case varied. This meant adding up the three individual case means and dividing by three. Response means of 3.0 or higher for each of the items show that participants agree with each item overall. Though this overview of questionnaire data is useful, examining the responses on a case by case basis and adding data from protocol debriefs, interviews, and open-ended questionnaire items
provides even greater insight into the extent to which participants perceived that participating in the self-study process was valuable, the suggestions they make for change, or the disadvantages they see in this process.

Table 8-1: Overall Perceptions of the Self-Study Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean 1</th>
<th>Mean 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protocols</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused our discussion on what was important for our group</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure helped us make good use of our time</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would use these protocols again.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our group benefited.</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process helped us reflect while giving us the freedom to shape our work according to our own needs and interests.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified important goals.</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified concrete steps that have helped us begin working towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have taken action towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have concrete evidence of progress towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend that others use this process.</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 1

Participants in Case 1 provided very mixed feedback about the protocols and self-study process. Table 8-2 reports the mean, mode, and median response for each LIKERT type item for this case. There were twelve total respondents. While the mode for each item and the median for all but one of the items show that participants generally agree that the protocols and the overall self-study process were useful, most means fall below 3.0. Comments from open-ended questions are also quite mixed in their content.
On a positive note, the means show participants agree that their group benefited from the process and that they identified concrete steps to help them take action towards their goals. In open-ended responses, half of the participants report feeling that this self-study process was a good way to start off the year and to give the group a focus. The two coaches I interviewed also expressed the usefulness of the initial meeting in helping them to develop a plan and focus for the year:

\[ M \] The goal-setting was helpful in that it made us make a plan. That was real important I think. I don't think we would have had a plan.

\[ G1 \] No, we wouldn't. Cause every month we would kind of like try and figure out what do we wanna look at this month. So that forced us to, and I thought, like, it gave us a very, based on teacher input, a focus of what the teachers wanted to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8-2: Case 1 Questionnaire Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused our discussion on what was important for our group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure helped us make good use of our time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would use these protocols again.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Process</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our group benefited.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process helped us reflect while giving us the freedom to shape our work according to our own needs and interests.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified important goals.</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified concrete steps that have helped us begin working towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have taken action towards our goals.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have concrete evidence of progress towards our goals.</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend that others use this process.</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
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</table>
My field notes also indicate that during the debrief following this group’s first meeting, one participant said, “Yes, this is what we need in order to get us excited about this again – to jumpstart what we’re doing for this year so we’re not in a rut” (October 20, 2006).

There were also a number of positive reactions to the third protocol. Only two survey respondents specifically mentioned the third protocol in open-ended questionnaire items, but they felt the third protocol was useful for reflecting on the year and gaining a sense of where they need to go as a group next year. This protocol came up several times during the final interview as well. The two coaches were a little surprised at some of the feedback on the year’s work that came from participants during this protocol, but M felt this protocol “was really effective, probably one of the most effective as far as giving us input on where we’re going,” and Gl said, “I liked the reflecting back on where we, you know, what we did this year.” Since the coaches have been primarily responsible for planning the agendas for each CFG meeting, they appreciated the opportunity to hear from others in the group. Gl adds:

And the way you get people to come and really be a part of it is by seeing what their interests are. I mean, you know, pulling the faculty and seeing what do you want us to talk about? What's important to you? What are the conversations you want to be a part of? That's really important to people, because, to have a voice (we have it in our own classroom and control that) but to hear what other people are saying and how they respond to things and how they're doing things, that's really important, cause we're very isolated in the classroom. So, this is, this is a good thing. I like the looking back at the end of the year, because it was, you know, we did some, you know, I wasn't always sure, I kinda knew where we were going, but I really wasn't sure, were we doing, you know, and to hear their feedback about things they like and don't like. It was like, oh that's good.

They also particularly liked the more flexible structure of this protocol. M said:

This particular protocol today, I liked. I like it that everyone has to go around the room and say one thing before anyone else can add in, but I
also liked after we had done that, that number four didn’t say that we had to do that, so we could just bounce ideas off of each other.

K expressed a similar idea during the protocol debrief, saying, “I didn’t have any problem with this protocol. It led to more discussions than a lot of them do. A lot of them are stricter than this one.”

In addition to these positive reactions, several comments begin to explain the lower response means for many of the items. Five out of the twelve questionnaire respondents indicated that they felt the process was too long. One respondent described the process as “intense and time consuming” adding, “I feel like we spent too much time on reflecting if the group works and not enough time reflecting on our teaching. We only meet a handful of times and 2 full meetings in my opinion were a waste” (K3). Another wrote, “Too much @ the October meeting → we tried to do too much” (K1).

The overall discomfort that many participants in the Case 1 CFG feel when they use protocols is likely to also have influenced their responses, particularly to the three items referring to the self-study protocols. Four individuals mentioned the protocols in their open-ended responses. One described the process as “over-reliant on protocols” (K9); one felt the protocols were “constraining” (K5); one described them as “too formulaic” (K7); while another felt that the first protocols were confusing (K10).

Participants also brought up their general dislike for protocols during both self-study meetings. Whereas only one participant brought up her dislike for protocols during the first meeting, this was a major theme in the discussion during the final meeting. A few participants shared with the group that they would likely not speak during a group meeting if not for a protocol or that they knew the protocol was good for them because
they would otherwise speak too much, but a number of others expressed their frustrations with protocols. This transcript excerpt from the third protocol highlights a few of these frustrations:

\[ P \] I do, however, feel, that when I do come in, it's hard to communicate with people with this format we have, which makes it a little stressful.

\[ J \] Nobody likes them. Everybody's like that.

\[ N \] We're rebellious

\[ P \] It just makes it really hard to communicate, and it makes it really hard working on that top relationship issue. I feel like I

\[ Z \] You have an idea and you can't share it. You have to sit and then... [like our students in class] you call on them and they're like, I forgot.

\[ P \] It's really hard to form relationships when you can't really have a conversation. It's not meant to be a conversation. It's meant to be sharing among the group. I understand that, but it's really stressful.

It is likely that an additional factor influencing participant responses for the overall self-study process is the fact that the participants in general had not referred back to their goals or in any way monitored their progress towards these goals in the seven months between meetings. One participant wrote, “Honestly, I'm a bit embarrassed. It was good at the time, but I've not thought about it since” (K11). Participants unable to attend the October meeting did not even know the goals and action plan existed. It sounds like this may be a function of school culture to some extent. Numerous times I heard the comment “flavor of the month” used to describe school initiatives, both within the formal protocols and in casual conversation. Gl described this phenomenon during the interview:

We were so, like, many different things where we’ve thrown it up, you know, like I call it flavor of the month, you know, we’re looking at Essential Six and then we’re looking at differentiated instruction, and then
we’re looking at the secondary reform initiative and we’re looking at blah, blah, blah…

K also alludes to this in a third protocol comment:

The whole issue of critical friends or anything else that we add on top of everything we’ve already got here is gonna be a problem…There’s only so much time. And how many of the things that we get involved in and how many things we’re trying to cover. And if there’s one to drop without harm, then you’ll drop it.

Whatever the reason, when participants looked at the action steps they had planned for the year, the only area in which they felt they could celebrate success was in the area of differentiated instruction. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are lower response means for taking action towards goals and having concrete evidence of progress towards goals.

Additionally, the group goal was in many ways reinterpreted during the third protocol as a focus on differentiated instruction for the year, and a number of participants questioned whether this was even the direction in which they still wanted their group to be going. This could perhaps explain the lower response mean for the item “We have identified important goals.” Several referred back to the previous year when they had looked at exams teachers had written or forms of student data as being more powerful. S said:

I was wondering about, I know that we got a lot done with differentiated instruction, but does, were we too focused this year on one certain, I don't know. Cause part of the end of last year I was excited about, you know, some different, I know last year we looked at more than one issue and… so that was my one thing. I don't know if we were too focused this year on one thing to really be able to be a critical friends group.

Participants offered comments on both sides of the issue during the discussion, but the following quotes highlight the group’s conclusion on the issue:
L I think [differentiated instruction] could be woven throughout the year, but to do it every single month is a little too—

U Focused.

L Yeah.

V It may not always be the right month for that particular need. Maybe another need is more appropriate in a given month. We should not put ourselves in a box.

Finally, participants’ lack of ownership of this process may be another reason for the mixed reactions. The three coaches decided that the group would use this self-study process without much consultation with the other CFG members. In fact, participants did not even know that I would be coming or what they would be doing at the meeting in which they did the third protocol. During the interview, M said of the other CFG members, “They weren’t really in on the whole thing that this is supposed to be a self-study process.” While the coaches expressed generally positive reactions to the process because it gave them the opportunity to actually get input from the rest of the participants about directions for the group’s work, many of the other group members may not have felt the same sense of purpose or need to go through this process. This may suggest that the decision to examine the group’s functioning ought to be a collaborative one, not one decided for the group by its leaders.

One unintended positive outcome of the self-study process that participants do not mention seemed to be the opportunity for setting norms around the ideas of conflict and judgment. Four main themes ran through the discussion during the first two protocols: defining conflict and judgment, reasons for participant defensiveness, the need for establishing a safe environment, and the need to monitor group conflicts in the future.
Participants spoke about both positive and negative aspects of conflict and judgment during this conversation. Several recalled a situation in the previous year when one participant felt blamed or defensive and, as $U$ phrased it, “started personally attacking people in the group after that.” $P$ added, “To me, if it’s getting to the point that it’s personal conflict, then you’re not following the mission of the group.” Others framed conflict and judgment as essential for learning, mentioning internal conflict with new ideas, recognizing the conflict between belief and practice, and professional disagreements that help uncover different points of view. $Gl$ shares:

There can be a conflict within, though, like when I’m thinking about how, like, how I’m teaching or what I’m teaching. I can, I can have a conflict from within that’s like I’ve done this and I’ve done this and I’ve been successful, but I want to try this, and there’s a conflict within me that says, ‘Go with the tried and true. You know you get results.’ But then there’s something else going, ‘But wait, maybe there’d be two more kids over here that you’re not quite getting’ that, so there’s a conflict, and it’s not necessarily a bad thing.

$N$ also addresses the positive side:

I felt that some of our meetings last year involved judgment…and we were all defensive, we were being judged, um, we were also, I thought it was a wonderful opportunity when we looked at each other’s exams, we were all being a little judgmental, I think, looking at other people’s, and I loved the fact that it hit us by surprise, that we were not preparing our exams for examination by the group…So, you know, I think judgment is part of who we are and we can learn from other people’s disagreements with us, and that judgment’s not necessarily bad.

The group also spoke about why feelings of defensiveness might arise during the learning process. The facilitator said, “Well, we’re all insecure,” while $M$ added, “It’s your first reaction to kind of defend. Well, here’s why I did that.” Several mentioned that the involvement of administrators might have accentuated feelings of being judged. With these ideas in mind, participants also discussed the need for a group norm of
nonjudgmental critique within a safe environment, realizing that negative conflict early in
the year could set the tone for the rest of the year. *U* said:

> I feel like, too, it comes back to the assumption that if we all come to the
table with the assumption that we’re here to grow that that’s gonna, you
know…Like if we all start off at the table with that assumption that we’re
going to look at stuff critically, it would be, you know what I mean?

*J* suggested that maybe the greatest purpose of protocols is protecting people from feeling
judged, saying, “Because given those protocols, if you follow ‘em… they’re not gonna
throw insults out there…you only have certain things that you can comment on.” Based
on this discussion, a number of participants suggested the need to be proactive and to
keep a watch on the groups to make sure they could deal with any future negative conflict
appropriately. *K* ultimately suggested, “If we run into that in the future, we’ve got to
adjust groups. You can’t keep it where one group they stays together…[with] this fight
going on for the rest of the year.” Hopefully, this discussion in and of itself served as a
preventative measure so that this group will not again experience the kind of conflict that
brought what *L* termed such a “palpable tension” during the previous year.

Though this conversation as a whole did not directly relate to the protocol steps
and objectives as outlined, it seemed critically important to have. I agree with the
facilitator who said:

> Well, let’s step back from that example for a second. This is exactly what
we should be talking about at this time of year. This is, this is something
that went on, and we’re talking about different kinds of conflict and some
that were, I don’t know, um, that CFG didn’t have the tools or the practice
or whatever to be able to fix itself when that happened. And, and it’s
important that we look at that and what is it that CFGs are going to do
differently if that very same thing comes up again. What kind of tools do
we need to get back on track?
The opportunity for this group to address an issue that came up in the past, to develop a common understanding of the purpose and nature of examining student and teacher work, and to verbalize the assumption that real learning is often uncomfortable seems invaluable for their continued work together.

**Case 2**

Though participants in Case 2 generally responded more positively to the self-study process than those in Case 1, the positives were mixed with a few strong negative messages. Questionnaire data is one source of this information. All eleven participants from this group returned questionnaires. Although two individuals provided consistently negative responses, the responses of four other individuals were overwhelmingly positive. Seven of the eleven respondents used positive words, such as “productive,” “effective,” and “beneficial,” to describe the process in open-ended questions. Responses to the LIKERT type items also suggest a fairly positive response. Table 8-3 reports the mean, median, and mode for each item. Response means for all but two items range from 3.0 to 3.4 with all medians and all but one of the modes at 3.0, indicating participants agree with most items. They most strongly agree that this process helped their group to identify important goals. However, response means are slightly below 3.0 for two similar items: “The protocols focused our discussion on what was important for our group” and “The process helped us to reflect while giving us the freedom to shape our work according to our own needs and interests.”
The lower means for these two items may relate to three factors. First, this group followed the protocols very precisely compared to the other two CFGs. Perhaps tweaking the process is an important aspect of meeting the perceived needs and interests of the group. Second, the fact that this group does not specifically function as a CFG means that they may have felt that the content of the narratives did not lead them to discuss what was most important for their group. Third, this group had already developed meaningful school-improvement goals over the summer. Though this process was intended to produce improvement goals at the small group level, this group realized that they were assessing their work at many different levels partway through the first protocol. \textit{W} said, “I thought we were looking at this group of people...because that’s what we’ve been talking about, doing this research with just the leadership,” while \textit{Mi} commented, “But

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocols</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused our discussion on what was important for our group</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure helped us make good use of our time</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would use these protocols again.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Process</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our group benefited.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The process helped us reflect while giving us the freedom to shape our work according to our own needs and interests.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified important goals.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We identified concrete steps that have helped us begin working towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have taken action towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have concrete evidence of progress towards our goals.</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend that others use this process.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
our true critical friends groups are our teams. That’s where we’re doing most of our protocols at.” Others were thinking about their work with teacher inquiry, while still others were reflecting at the school level. Because they chose at this point to consider their school-wide work, the first protocol felt like it “duplicated something we had really worked hard on,” according to S. Later on in the protocol, Y added, “I really felt like the goals we made over the summer were pretty meaningful, and it would have been helpful to do this process with those, and not have to make goal statements just for the sake of it.” Three of the eleven questionnaire respondents also wrote comments suggesting that this process would have been more helpful if it had connected to the school goals they had set over the summer. One written response was particularly forceful:

We developed goals for our group over the summer… They were powerful, related directly to our school. Incredible! I may have benefited from parts of the experiment if it had used our goals. Creating new goals for the sake of a protocol was not authentic. (W9)

Questionnaire data indicate that a more general sense of confusion influenced this group’s experience as well. Seven of the eleven respondents wrote one or more comments for open-ended questions referring to either their own or to others’ initial confusion regarding the group’s participation in this self-study process. The communication gap began during the summer as I attempted to make it clear that I was not doing a study about teacher inquiry, but about a self-study process that I was inviting them to try. In the meeting in which I introduced my study to the staff to request their participation, I once more tried to eliminate this confusion, describing the three step process I was giving them the opportunity to try out. However, the communication was still not clear. My field notes indicate that at least one participant was confused because
she thought I was just coming to observe what they were already doing in their school, while at least one felt defensive because I was prescribing protocols for their group to do. During the second protocol, \( Y \) said it felt like “a top down thing.”

These two areas of confusion suggest three important considerations. First, it is probably not the best time for self-study if a group is poised to begin work on new learning goals, as the process might disrupt the momentum and enthusiasm already present among group members. Second, it might be preferable for CFG members to decide together that they are ready and interested in engaging in a self-study process. Third, the facilitative guide should emphasize that this process is really designed to look at small group development, particularly for CFGs. This group of teacher leaders left out the voices of many faculty members as they developed whole school goals. One participant even brought this up during a protocol debrief, saying, “It’s safe in here, but when you put it out in the staff meeting, I mean, we’re the team that decides where our school was. I guess it would be nice if…the other opinions of people who are not in this team.”

In spite of numerous references to these areas of confusion, the participants used more positive than negative statements to describe the overall process when debriefing both protocols. Words, such as “dissect”, “analyze”, and “reflect”, suggest that the process helped participants to think about their work together. Words, such as “clarify”, “unify”, “narrow focus”, and “pinpoint”, suggest that this process helped participants to develop more of a common understanding of the nature and purpose of their work together. Comments, such as “It leads us in a direction”, “Keep on track for the year”, “I know the next step”, and “This is doable”, suggest that this process helped the group to
establish a clearer direction for their work. Responses to open-ended questions on the questionnaire also address reflection, purpose, and direction. During the interview, the two facilitators from this group also agreed that this process had been beneficial for their group. My field notes summarizing the main points from this interview paraphrase the recommendations that one of the facilitator would give to a group considering this self-study process:

This process is helpful and beneficial – good if you’ve lost your way, if you need a focus, if you aren’t sure where to go next, and as an assessment of where you are as a group. Perhaps consider doing this process or something similar on a yearly basis. (May 15, 2007)

Case 3

Overall, Case 3 participants reacted very positively to their self-study experience. Responses to LIKERT questions in the final questionnaire provide a beginning snapshot of this positive response. These are presented in Table 8-4. Though only six out of nine participants returned completed questionnaires, response means ranging from 3.2 to 4.0 and medians and modes for most questions also at 4.0 indicate that respondents agree or strongly agree with each of the questionnaire items.
Though this questionnaire data provides a positive overall impression, analysis of responses to open-ended questionnaire questions, the process debrief, and the interview with the facilitator provides greater insight into this group’s own perceptions of the experience. First, during the debrief, four different participants voiced the opinion that engaging in this process was worth the time they spent on it. C said, “I enjoyed the process. I struggle with the process because I feel like I’m so action oriented, I want to get right to the work, and yet this is a great reflection piece. You know, it’s worthwhile;” while B countered, “I have to say that I don’t, I don’t see this as not being part of our work as a CFG, so that’s what made it for me meaningful… So I don’t think it was an aside.” F said, “Dedicating this time was very valuable, very valuable.” The facilitator
expanded this idea saying, “I think we could have spent all of today just on the first protocol and would have been worthwhile.” Others echoed the idea that they had enjoyed spending time on the process.

A number of additional comments from the interview provide additional insight into the value of the process for this group. The facilitator described this process as “pivotal” to her group’s work, adding that it was “just what we needed.” She mentioned that one particular group member had almost not even come to that meeting in January as he was feeling a bit disconnected from the work of the group. She shared that this process helped him feel like there is still a reason to be involved. She also added that this process had really helped turn their work in a new direction. As an example, she mentioned that everyone was going to be bringing data to the next meeting so they could continue to consider how they could incorporate more of a data focus into their collaborative work.

Second, several themes arise from participants’ descriptions of the process that suggest the functions served by this process. During the interview, the facilitator described the process as “concentrated, intentional reflection,” a theme reiterated during the protocol. Phrases used during the protocol, like “stop, think, and focus”, “dug in”, and “rich conversation”, also suggest a very reflective experience. In fact, during the first protocol, G said about the element reflection, “I put us in Developing, but now I’m thinking that what we’re doing today actually just pushes us over into the Highly Functioning.” In addition to facilitating reflection, participants describe this process as disrupting their current routine and providing a new vision for their group’s work. F said, “It was uncomfortable, but that was good,” while B said, “It disrupts what you’re used to
doing and makes you look elsewhere.” Other comments during the debrief, such as “pushed us” and “frames where we’re going,” fit with one questionnaire response:

We became more aware of where we, as a group, may be off track, the direction we want to go and how we need to reset our group’s path in order to reach our goals and deepen the effectiveness of the work we do and the support we provide to one another.

In a third theme, a comment during the debrief and a questionnaire response both highlight how this process, in a sense, frames their group identity in time. One refers to this as “where we really are…what we’re doing, where we’ve been, where we’re going,” while the other refers to the opportunity to reflect on the past, present, and future of the group.

Finally, participants in this group shared a few suggestions for change. None of the questionnaire respondents believed there were any disadvantages to their participation in this process, and the facilitator could think of no disadvantages to share during the interview. However, the facilitator suggested that other groups consider using a similar visual representation of the stages each member felt the group fell in to help them focus their discussion. She also suggested that this process requires more time than what is suggested by the protocols and that she would have scheduled two or three full meetings if she could do the process again. On the questionnaire, four responded that the length of time they spent on the process was just right, while two felt it was too short. P2 wrote in, “I would do the process at a retreat so it was all in one day;” and P3 wrote, “Stretching it out over more than one month has necessarily lessened the impact a bit,” likely referring to the fact that since they did not finish outlining their next steps at the first meeting, they carried the “so what” part of the conversation on into the next meeting or two. In addition
to watching the facilitator struggle during the protocol with feeling that there was a lack of time, several commented on time during the debrief. For example, B said:

I think that the, realistically…looking at the framework…giving it an hour is not realistic at all…even prepping, and I think most of the people seemed prepared. It was in no way enough time. And because I think that we got so much learning from it that it, it really is much, much longer than an hour. So the expectation to finish something like this in an hour is totally unrealistic.

Comparing the responses about time between Cases 1 and 3 suggests that different groups might benefit from spending different amounts of time on a self-study process. Perhaps a beginning CFG benefits most from just a short process while a more highly developed group with more history of working and reflecting together needs more time to really dig in deeply. The facilitator’s guide might suggest several modifications to the process that would allow a group to spend more or less time depending on the time available and the level of group development.

**Summary**

Comments from individuals within all three cases suggested that participants felt their CFG was not meeting its full potential. My field notes refer to an example of this for Case 1. “G referred to the work last year as floundering. Apparently even though the staff is enthusiastic, they aren’t attaining to the vision that he has for what’s optimal” (September 28, 2006). In Case 2, one participant said before they started the process, “Isn’t that why we said we’d do this? We have big broad goals and ideas, but we don’t really have a day to day action plan” (Field Notes, November 29, 2006). In Case 3, two individuals made this kind of comment. During the protocol debrief, the facilitator said,
“It came at just the right time for me, because I was feeling something wasn’t right,” while C said, “It was interesting that I keep thinking about where we’ve been as a CFG, and, and we’re struggling to identify who we are and where we’re going. It seems like, it just keeps surfacing for us.”

The reactions of participants suggest that this self-study process is useful for helping a group to find their way. Potential benefits include the opportunity to reflect on the group’s functioning, to develop a common understanding of the group’s work or identity, to envision new possibilities for their work together, and to establish a clear plan or focus for the group’s work. A potential drawback could be the amount of time this process takes. The data suggests that timing, group ownership of the process, and follow-through are several important considerations for groups thinking about engaging in this process and that different groups might benefit from spending different amounts of time on the process.
Chapter 9

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Developing effective work teams has long been understood as essential for organizational success in private industry (Wheelan & Tilin, 1999), and the education profession is also beginning to recognize the importance of developing professional learning communities to support collaborative work, learning, and problem solving (e.g. Dufour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993, 2006). However, group development is a process. Some studies suggest that 80-90% of work groups have difficulties with performance (Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999), and in the case of schools, learning to work collaboratively requires a number of significant cultural transitions (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Wheelan and Tilin (1999) posit that “because a connection between faculty group effectiveness and student achievement has been established, studies of interventions designed to improve team effectiveness would be a logical next step” (p. 79). The intent of this study was to do just that.

This study considers the development of one specific type of professional learning community or work team, the critical friends group (CFG). The purpose of this study was to explore the development of a framework to describe group development in the language of CFGs and a self-study process to facilitate CFG members’ intentional reflection, goal-setting, and action to improve their collaborative work so they ultimately
improve teaching and learning for all students. The self-study process involved three hour long meetings. In the first meeting, participants used either the developmental framework or a set of narratives to identify areas of strength, areas for growth, and specific goals. The purpose of the second meeting was to develop concrete steps for working towards the goals and a plan for monitoring progress. The final meeting provided participants with the opportunity to check back in on their goals, to assess progress, and to again develop plans for next steps and for monitoring growth.

Five main research questions framed a formative qualitative evaluation of the developmental framework and self-study process:

1. How can the developmental framework be further refined through the input of a panel of experts?
2. How easy to use is the self-study process?
3. To what extent do participants perceive that the developmental framework and process are useful for CFGs:
4. How might the framework and process be further developed based on the experiences of groups that use the tool?
5. What are the advantages or disadvantages of using this framework and process?

Chapters 4 through 8 address each of these questions in detail. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss this study’s findings related both to the developmental framework and to the self-study process and to suggest the implications of this study for future research.
Discussion of Findings

Developmental Framework and Narratives

*How can the developmental framework be further refined through the input of a panel of experts and the experiences of the groups that use the tool? To what extent do participants perceive that the developmental framework is useful for CFGs? What are the advantages or disadvantages of using this framework?*

**Defining a CFG**

Drafting and revising the developmental framework and the corresponding narratives was in one sense an attempt to articulate the most important attributes of CFGs, those characteristics essential for optimal CFG functioning and outcomes. Yet, throughout this study it became very clear that the question “What is a CFG?” is not as easily answered as one might expect. Simply comparing my own CFG and the three cases in this study demonstrates this. I have found in my own context that many individuals do not make a distinction between being a CFG and using protocols. Whether those protocols are used in our formal CFG meeting or in another setting, that’s what a CFG is in their minds. The emphasis is on the structure and process more than on the learning community. In contrast, the group in Case 2 emphasizes learning in community more than a specific process. A colleague who has been through coach’s training and has attended NSRF’s annual Winter Meeting recommended this group as a good fit for this study. She identifies this as a site where CFG work exists, but there are actually no groups that have been formally labeled as CFGs within the school. The process of using protocols is new to them, and some are hesitant to jump on board; but the individuals in
this school work together as a learning community, meeting together often as they collaboratively inquire into their practice, use data to make decisions and solve problems, and keep the needs of their students at the forefront of their thinking.

While the groups mentioned above appear to emphasize either the process or the community aspects of CFGs, the group in Case 1 appears to emphasize the professional development aspect of CFGs. They struggle with the idea of using protocols to structure their conversation, but participants seem to value the time they spend in CFGs looking at student work or discussing texts as a worthwhile professional development activity that may help them to think in a new way and make changes in their teaching practice. In contrast, the group in Case 3 exhibits strength in both the process and community aspects of CFGs. Their long history together has given them a shared language and vision, while their structured process allows them to both reflect together and begin to hold one another accountable to act on their learning.

These examples begin to show the diversity of CFGs as they are actually conceptualized and enacted in various settings. However, taking a look at NSRF publications shows that conceptions of CFG work are not even static within the organization. An early pamphlet distributed by the National School Reform Faculty (no date a), provides the following description:

A CFG typically consists of eight to twelve teachers and administrators who agree to work regularly together to define and produce improved student achievement. As a group, the members establish and publicly state student learning goals, help each other think about better teaching practices, look closely at curriculum and student work, and identify school culture issues that affect student achievement. (p. 2)
This brochure goes on to suggest that members of a critical friends group should be involved in both monthly meetings and in observing each other teaching in order to meet their goals.

In contrast, a more recent pamphlet distributed by NSRF (no date b), frames CFGs a little more broadly:

CFGs generally consist of 6 to 10 teachers and administrators who commit themselves to learning together. They hold each other accountable for continuously adapting their practice to meet the needs of all learners, share resources and ideas, and support each other in implementing new practices. Whether they call themselves critical friends, facilitative leaders, or simply members of a professional learning community, the commitments they make are the same: to be reflective; to make their practice public to one another; to frame meaningful questions and ask for substantive feedback from their colleagues; to hold each other accountable for meeting the needs of students who struggle most; to ask the kinds of questions that provoke and challenge their assumptions and habits; to believe that together they are more capable of knowing what they need to know, and learning what they need to learn, than they are alone. (p. 3)

Though the changes in meaning are subtle, they are there. The language has been adjusted to include those professional learning communities that may not have the label CFG and to emphasize meeting the needs of struggling students. This more recent description also does not mention the specific activities mentioned in the first, such as monthly meetings, looking at student work, and peer observations.

The changes over time even in the way the parent organization communicates the essence of CFGs suggest that attempting to nail down a list of essential CFG characteristics and how those develop over time may be an exercise in futility. However, the data from this study suggest that tools such as the developmental framework and narratives can facilitate worthwhile discussion and clearer group analysis for CFGs interested in assessing their work and setting goals for growth.
Developmental Framework

The data from this study show that the efforts to identify essential elements of CFGs were successful to a large extent. First, the seven members of the panel of experts agreed that each of the seven elements included in the framework (Relationships, Commitment, Roles and Responsibilities, Meeting Focus, Group Learning Agenda, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning) was either important or very important to a CFG’s functioning. Second, the very process of completing the expert questionnaire facilitated reflection substantive enough that one individual (the coach in Case 3) and her CFG made changes in their group’s structure in the areas of leadership and follow-up in between meetings. Third, as the Case 1 participants openly reflected on the struggles they were experiencing in their work without reference to the developmental framework in their final self-study meeting, their conversation addressed aspects of five of the seven elements included in the document. Finally, participants across the three CFG cases identified goals for their work related to five of the seven framework elements.

Though the importance of each of the seven elements included in the developmental framework has been affirmed through this study, the usefulness of the specific descriptions at each stage of development is less certain. Some evidence is favorable. The two CFGs that used the developmental framework did identify with many of the descriptors in the various stages. Case 1 participants placed themselves primarily within the beginning and developing stages, and Case 3 participants perceived their group’s work to fall in line primarily with descriptors in the most highly functioning
stage. In fact, one of the Case 1 coaches remarked, “This is freaky – it’s like you’ve been following us around. These descriptions tell exactly about what we’ve been struggling with” (Field notes, September 28, 2006). Additionally, responses to the final participant questionnaire suggest that, overall, participants in these two cases agreed that the content of the framework was useful for stimulating discussion, for helping them to think in a new way about their work, and for helping their group to identify areas in which they would like to grow. Participants felt that their discussions around the framework and narratives helped to establish a new direction or clearer focus for their work. For example, B from Case 3 said, “It disrupts what you’re used to doing and makes you look elsewhere.” Whether or not this document is able to fully capture the nuances of group development, it does serve the purpose of facilitating group reflection.

However, there is also evidence pointing to negative aspects of the developmental framework. Some evidence suggests that the descriptors are not accurate, which is not surprising given the elusive and changing nature of CFGs. For example, in Case 3, A said during the first protocol, “I think we might be holding ourselves to a higher standard than what the indicators are here,” suggesting that the highest stage is not really representative of most highly functioning. Further discussion by the Case 3 group during the first protocol points to a possible need to clarify the language and ideas included within descriptions of the elements Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, and Level of Reflection.

Other evidence calls into question the universal usefulness of the developmental framework as a tool for a CFG’s reflective group assessment. First, the lowest mean response of all the questionnaire items inquiring about the developmental framework was
for the item “related well to the work of our group.” Comments made in Case 3 that the language of the framework was particularly teacher-focused explain why participants in this group might not have thought the framework was relevant, yet the mean response of participants in this CFG still showed that participants agreed with the statement. A low response mean of 2.44 on this item for Case 1 respondents shows that they did not feel the framework related well to their group’s work. One reason may be that, whether or not the descriptors of each element in the most highly functioning category were accurate, participants did not feel it was feasible for their group to attain the most highly functioning level in many cases given the amount of time they had to meet together or their perceptions of the purpose of their group. Another possible reason is that the descriptors in this framework did not specifically address this group’s more immediate concerns, such as participation rates, too many school initiatives vying for their time, a lack of follow-through typical of their work, and whether or not the school administration would continue to support CFGs. Though it is clear that the members of this CFG did not feel the framework was particularly relevant to their work, it is not completely clear whether this indicates a problem with the developmental framework or the group’s lack of readiness to use the framework.

The seven elements included in the framework do indeed seem important to a CFG’s functioning at this time. Since these elements are rooted in the broader literature on professional learning communities in addition to studies specific to CFGs, it is also likely that they will remain important over time. However, the specific descriptions of the stages of development for each element may not remain relevant over time. The developmental framework may define CFGs too rigidly or prescriptively to be relevant to
all groups and to be useful over time. This would be something for groups to keep in mind when they consider whether or not to use this reflective tool.

Alternate Tools For Reflection

Considering the differences in the experiences of the group using the narratives, as compared to the groups using the developmental framework, suggests a number of advantages and disadvantages for each tool. The most notable difference between the tools is that the narratives do not explicitly label the elements or stages of development. The CFG in Case 2 was the only group that chose to use the set of narratives as a tool for reflection. When debriefing their first protocol, participants alluded to two possible advantages of using the narratives as tools for reflection. First, the principal mentioned that it was useful to have specific examples in text to which this group could bring their perspective to talk about their work. In fact, more so than the other two CFGs in this study, this group freely brought their own sense of meaning and interpretation to the process of assessing their group’s collaborative work. Whether this was due to the group’s style, the narrative text structure, or to the lack of identifying labels within the text is unclear. However, such freedom seems to be a benefit of using this particular reflective tool. Second, W mentioned that using the narratives felt safe, “because it’s there on paper and it’s issues somebody else has.” This individual and her sense of safety seems to stand in sharp contrast to the Case 1 participants who felt threatened by some of the equity-focused language contained within the descriptions of most highly functioning and overwhelmed at the thought of trying to attain a level of most highly functioning
given their specific context. Finally, the narratives do not put group development in a linear box in the same way that the developmental framework does. This seemed to be advantageous for Case 2. Though the participants in Case 2 identified with many descriptors in the narratives representing both the beginning and most highly functioning stages, most words and phrases they cited as relating to areas for their own future growth came from the beginning narrative. It is possible that presenting the narratives without stage labels allowed this group to identify goals in areas of true perceived need instead of in the areas that would bring them to what was labeled as a higher level of development.

Overall, the narratives may have a number of advantages over the developmental framework as a tool for group assessment and goal-setting. Given the diversity among CFGs and similar learning communities and the likelihood of change over time, the possibilities for broader interpretations, the less prescriptive nature of the text, and the fact that they do not force a linear sense of group development may be advantageous. The narratives may also provide a “safer” means of analyzing the group. On the other hand, the set of narratives may not be the perfect reflective tool either. The narratives may not support the same depth of group analysis that participants in Case 3 attained through systematic discussion of each framework element since they each provide a more holistic snapshot of a CFG. While the narratives provide a sense of safety, they may not provide as much of a challenge to groups to move their work forward as the framework does.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to suggest a third tool for group analysis: a list of questions aimed at promoting group reflection for each element. Using the list of questions might have a number of benefits. The list would not be prescriptive as some might interpret the developmental framework, but rather would leave room for
open interpretation and meaning-making while simultaneously ensuring that a group addresses ideas from each element systematically. The list would not label some ideas as more developed than others, but would allow the group members to make those decisions for themselves. On the other hand, one disadvantage of this tool could be that it does not provide text with specific details about the possibilities for CFGs. Group members would have to do all their own thinking to identify struggles or a vision for the future. This new tool is included in the Facilitator’s Guide in Appendix F. Though the list of questions is presented in three groupings, the questions do address the important ideas from all seven elements from the developmental framework.

Need for a Forward Looking Tool

In the process of creating the developmental framework, I did a lot of looking back. First, I reflected back on my own experiences and why I had felt dissatisfied with my CFG experience. I had found the protocols to be powerful new tools, and I was excited about developing a deeper professional network or learning community. However, I was frustrated with the repeated question, “Who has work they would like to bring to the next meeting?” I wondered if our group really had a sense of purpose. I wondered what it would be like to really pursue a common inquiry or goal over time. I appreciated the opportunity to bring my own questions to the group, but I wondered if we were asking the right questions. I wondered how my CFG differed from a menu type professional development day since we looked at a completely different topic at each meeting.
Second, I looked back at the research related to CFGs that others before me had completed. These studies not only addressed the promise of CFG work, but the struggles that had kept groups from seeing that promise fulfilled. For example, Dunne and Honts (1998) found that group dynamics and difficulties establishing trust, school culture, and a lack of access to appropriate resources or rigorous content could inhibit the work of CFGs. Armstrong (2003) found that participants in the CFGs she studied also struggled to keep their work meaningful and rigorous, whether because they spent too much of their time in community building activities, had difficulty asking meaningful questions, or did not feel comfortable enough to honestly challenge each other during discussions. Murphy (2001) found that trying to create too many CFGs at once and coach burn-out were among the factors that led to the ending of CFG work in one high school. She also found that CFG activities were disconnected and that participants focused more on the process than on developing a focused goal or content for their work.

Looking back at the broader literature on group dynamics and professional learning communities helped me to fill in more details. The work of Wheelan and Hochberger (1996) provided an outline of stages of group development that highlighted the importance of member interactions, the development of roles within a group, the development of goals, working effectively towards goals, and monitoring work. More specific to professional learning communities, Mclaughlin and Talbert (2006) emphasize the importance of developing a sense of community, developing shared leadership, focused effort, and the use of inquiry and data.

Across all three of these areas are ideas related to the development of relationships and roles within community, of processes and tools needed for effective
work, and of goals and content that will lead to the desired outcomes. The framework elements address all three of these areas. Relationships, Commitment, and Roles and Responsibilities refer mostly to the development of community. Meeting Focus and Group Learning Agenda include aspects of learning to use specific processes and of developing goals and content for meetings. Level of Reflection and Impact on Teaching and Learning bridge the content with the desired outcomes.

While looking back at what has come before me was an important step, resulting in reflective tools with some merit, this study has also reminded me that it is important to look forward to the future. I have been reminded that it is not only the history of the organization and the struggles that groups have faced in the past that are relevant, but also the challenges that lie ahead while working towards new visions of possibility. NSRF’s adoption of a mission statement in 2001 has begun to focus CFG work on a more specific purpose. This mission states:

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone. (NSRF, no date a)

Feedback from one individual on my panel of experts and from several participants in Case 3 reminded me that assessment of a CFG’s functioning is not complete without connection to this mission statement.

If identifying the core elements of a CFG’s work and how those develop over time is a challenge, then unpacking broad notions of educational and social equity into specific measurable steps or outcomes is an even more complex endeavor. Striving for
educational and social equity requires the ability to not only look at schools and at society, but also at self (Gorsky & Covert, 2000).

Examining educational equity might mean identifying and addressing institutional practices that lead to inequities, such as tracking, the distribution of funds for education, or the over-placement of English language learners and students from minority groups into special education. Alternately, this might mean identifying patterns of student achievement within a particular school, grade level, or classroom that might be a function of such factors as race, ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status, etc., and then learning how to be culturally responsive in instructional decisions (Gay, 2000).

Promoting social equity might mean changes in the curriculum to help students gain awareness and understanding of culture and to value cultural differences. It might mean addressing biases, name-calling, stereotypes, and conflict resolution. On the other hand, it might also mean helping students to identify larger patterns of inequity and the inequitable distribution of power in our country and world, to equip them with skills in analysis and critique, decision-making, and problem-solving so they can take on the role of active citizens willing to work for social justice.

The process of analyzing schools, curriculum, and society also requires inward reflection and the willingness to admit the need for personal growth and development. CFG participants need to look inward and recognize areas in which stereotypes and biases inhibit their own ability to help all students succeed. They themselves need to continue to learn about different cultures, intercultural communication, and conflict resolution.
While these short paragraphs perhaps present an oversimplification of the many different issues and challenges involved in promoting educational and social equity, they begin to illustrate the complexity and multiple facets of this mission and why it is difficult to encapsulate this all into one reflective tool. However, this being the mission of the organization, it is important to begin developing reflective tools to help the members of CFGs to identify an appropriate starting point, to reflect on their growth, and to make plans for next steps. Resources, such as Nieto’s (2004) four levels of multicultural education and Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell’s (1999) cultural proficiency continuum would likely serve as useful resources in the development of such a reflective tool.

In the meantime, there are several ways in which ideas related to the NSRF mission statement might be further articulated in these reflective tools. The element Relationships can address the inclusive nature of a CFG in which individuals from diverse perspectives including factors such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, feel they are welcome, can speak honestly, and can work effectively through conflicts that arise. The element Commitment can ask the group to reflect on whether they are willing to commit collectively to the NSRF mission, to address the achievement gap, to learn how culture affects the learning and placement of their students, to try new culturally responsive practices, and to work for social equity within school and society. The element Group Learning Agenda can highlight the use of student data to identify patterns of achievement and placement and the pursuit of inquiry questions and goals related to the performance of students in various subgroups or the social interactions of various groups of students. Finally, the element Level of Reflection can address whether or not individuals are identifying biases, stereotypes, or practices
within their teaching and taking action. The new list of reflective questions included in
the Facilitator’s Guide in Appendix F represents a beginning effort to include these ideas
within a reflective tool.

Self-Study Process

*How easy to use is the self-study process? How might the process be further developed
based on the experiences of the groups that use the tool? To what extent do
participants perceive the process is useful for CFGs? What are the advantages or
disadvantages of using this process?*

Can Intentional Reflection Lead to Growth?

While the question “What is a CFG?” lies at the heart of the creation of the
developmental framework and other reflective tools, the questions “Can a group fix
itself?” or “Can a group intentionally plan its own growth and development?” seem
fundamental to an examination of this self-study process. A number of scholars in the
field of group dynamics have asserted that conscious and intentional processes can
facilitate group change and development (e.g., Akrivou, Boyatzis & McLeod, 2006;
Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999; Schultz, 1999). Dufour and Eaker (1998) suggest that
professional learning communities seeking continuous improvement must address four
questions: (1) What is our purpose? (2) What do we hope to achieve? (3) What are our
strategies for becoming better? and (4) What criteria will we use to assess our
improvement efforts? These questions point in a similar direction to a number of other
interventions that researchers have deemed effective in facilitating group development in
the past: assessing current group functioning in terms of relationship and task achievement, identifying important areas for change, considering the factors that might help or hinder change, establishing a plan for monitoring progress, and seeking collective ownership of goals and plans (Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999; Schultz, 1999; Hussstedde & core, 1995). The three protocols developed for this particular self-study process aimed at similar objectives: analyzing a CFG’s strengths and areas for growth, developing specific goals, devising a plan for attaining those goals, and checking back in on progress.

The data from this study show that this self-study process is beneficial for CFGs in several ways. First, data from all three cases suggest that this process helped participants to develop more of a common understanding of their work together and their purpose as a CFG. In fact, the Case 1 coaches felt this process was really valuable for their group members because it allowed everyone to share their perceptions of their group’s development and to have a voice in the direction of the group’s work. This connects back to the element Roles and Responsibilities. A process like this provides a formal opportunity for many group members to participate in setting the vision and direction for the group’s work and, as such, could promote the group’s development in this area. Buzaglo and Wheelan (1999) also found that giving members of a group the opportunity to take ownership of decisions about what and how to change was an important factor in raising the level of perceived group effectiveness in the work groups they studied.

Second, participants from all three cases said that the self-study process helped them to narrow their focus or clarify their direction, and participants in Cases 2 and 3 claimed that this process helped disrupt their group’s routine, providing them with a new
vision for the possible or a clearer direction for their work. In addition to providing vision or direction, sticking to the structured protocols can facilitate concise and focused conversations leading to action steps that participants in Case 2 described as “doable” when compared to the big broad ideas they often come up with in meetings. A clear focus and “doable” plan are two factors that are likely to lead a group to more effective collaborative work.

While participants in this study found the process to be valuable for reflecting on their group’s work and setting important goals, the data also point to issues that may significantly affect whether or not a group is able to truly grow and develop over time as a result of this process. The first issue is one of follow-through. A number of scholars have emphasized the importance of checking back in on progress for accountability purposes (e.g., Buzaglo & Wheelan, 1999; Schultz, 1999; Dufour & Eaker, 1998), and this self-study process is specifically designed to support follow-through. Both the second and third protocols ask participants to discuss how they can monitor progress towards goals, and the third protocol asks group members to actually look back and evaluate progress towards goals. Yet it will take more intentional follow-through on the part of a CFG than simply scheduling a time for the third protocol to bring about change. The Case 1 CFG demonstrates that it is possible for a group to get so caught up in the busyness of their individual and collaborative work that they forget the goals and action steps outlined during the first two protocols. Immediately taking action towards goals and regularly referring back to goals can help ensure that progress is made. It could be valuable for one or two individuals to take on the specific responsibility of helping the group members to
keep the goals and intended actions in mind. Whatever the form that follow-through and monitoring take, it is unlikely that a group will make significant strides without them.

A second issue is readiness. It is important to consider whether groups must attain a minimum level of experience or development before attempting self-study. My selection of CFGs for this study was partially based on the assumption that groups just beginning their work together would not be ready for self-study. This fits with the literature on group development. Wheelan and Hochberger (1996) assert that the members of groups in beginning stages expect the leader to provide the vision and direction. In fact, even though the goals of the group may not be clear to group members, they are unlikely to actively seek clarification. In this time of tentative and guarded participation it is unlikely that analysis of group development and collaborative goal-setting would be appropriate. Therefore, one of the criteria for case selection was that a group had worked together for a minimum of one year.

Comparison of the reactions of participants in Case 1, a beginning CFG, and Case 3, a fairly experienced CFG, seem to push the idea of readiness a bit further. While the coaches in Case 1 appreciated the opportunity to hear the perspectives of their group members so that they could plan meetings more effectively, another member of this CFG wrote on the participant questionnaire, “I feel like we spent too much time reflecting if the group works and not enough time reflecting on our teaching” (K3). While almost half of the participants in Case 1 felt that this process was too long, a third of the participants in Case 3 communicated that they had not had enough time to adequately reflect and plan. Several even felt that it would be appropriate to plan an all day retreat for this type of process. There are several potential explanations for these differences. One possibility
is that a group falling mostly within the beginning stages of development on the framework is not ready for a self-study process. The developmental framework might serve as a useful tool for the coach’s reflection and leadership of the group, but the group’s time could better be spent in continuing to build a sense of shared history and purpose through looking at student work and discussing texts and problems of practice. Another related possibility is that the longer a group has been working together collaboratively, the more time they can comfortably spend in analysis of their group. Three self-study sessions may not seem like such a lengthy time commitment for a group that has been working together for four years than for a group that has been meeting together for one year. It is not so large of a percentage of the group’s time if they meet together twice a month as compared to once a month. It seems important for CFG members to begin voicing their perspectives and helping to set the vision and purpose for the group as early as possible, but it seems likely that beginning with a shorter and less intense process could be beneficial.

Considering what else is going on within a CFG or its context could also provide information as to whether a group is in a position of readiness for self-study. For example, CFG members may already have an awareness of specific issues or concerns that they need to address. For example, the Case 1 group discussed concerns about participation rates, the many school initiatives vying for their time, the lack of follow-through typical in their work, and questions of whether the administration would continue to support CFGs. It is possible that this CFG could have benefited more from a process aimed at helping them address the concerns they already had about their work rather than assessing their work in a new way. On the other hand, a group might already have a clear
sense of direction in which they would like their group to move. For example, the Case 2 group had recently developed a set of goals for their school. Several participants suggested that they would have benefited more from a process that helped them focus on developing an action plan for the goals they already had. These two cases suggest that readiness for the full self-study process may involve a sense of uncertainty as to the group’s direction or an ambiguous feeling about the need for change.

A third issue arises at the intersection between efficiency and meaning. My desire to enhance the productivity of CFG work in terms of learning outcomes for participants and their students has been the real impetus for this study. In reflecting on this research study, I am reminded that neither a foundation of strong community nor tools facilitating effective processes are sufficient for impacting teaching and learning. Productive work within a professional learning community depends on several factors, including the extent to which a group is able to function as a community with trusting collaborative relationships, the extent to which a group is able to function efficiently with effective processes, and the extent to which a group is able to take on important and substantive questions or pursuits. As a mentor of mine recently quipped, we can be doing things right, but if we are not doing the right things, what does it matter? Developing goals to help improve interactions and processes can facilitate group development, but if a group is not asking important questions, questions that are rigorous or challenging, questions that they pursue over time, then will improvements in other areas yield productivity of any consequence?

This issue of content arose with two CFGs during the self-study process. The group in Case 1 spent time during their final meeting discussing whether or not their
group ought to have a specific focus (differentiated instruction) or whether various teachers should bring to the group whatever seemed most urgent at the moment. The group is Case 3 realized that although a general equity focus had been driving their work, they did not have a specific goal towards which they were working and felt they ought to determine one. The Case 2 group did not address content during their discussion. This is likely due to the fact that members of this group are engaged in challenging year-long teacher inquiry projects that provide much of the content of their collaborative work.

Content is an issue that extends beyond this self-study process. It is an issue that NSRF must continue to seek to address as an organization. New coach’s training sessions have emphasized ideas related to building trust and creating professional community, and they have provided new facilitators with numerous protocols to provide structure for pursuing learning as a community. However, CFGs are a professional development strategy that has no link to a specific content focus, and the literature suggests that one of the most pervasive struggles that CFG members have faced is learning to identify and pursue content that is relevant and rigorous. It is just as possible for a CFG to embody characteristics of a “menu-driven” inservice day as it is for it to function as a community engaged in powerful sustained learning. While several elements in the framework might push a CFG to consider the content of their work together during the self-study process (Meeting Focus, Group Learning Agenda, and Impact on Teaching and Learning), this process alone would likely not be sufficient to lead a group to meaningful content goals. It would be useful for NSRF to provide some form of support to CFGs in helping its members learn to ask the questions that are most important for their own learning and for the learning of their students, to pursue those questions over time, and to access resources
and perspectives outside of the group to ensure that they do not remain isolated or insulated in their own experiences and perspectives.

**Refining the Self-Study Process**

Though there were a number of benefits to using the self-study process, and though the overall process was fairly easy to use, the experiences of the three CFGs in this research study highlight the need for two major areas of refinement: (1) changing the structure of the second protocol and (2) developing a Facilitator’s Guide.

There were a number of issues that arose as groups used the second protocol – the protocol intended to facilitate the development of a concrete plan of action for working towards the goals set during the first protocol. The groups in Cases 1 and 3 struggled with this protocol in part because they did not really have enough time left in their meetings to fully engage in each step; and members of all three CFGs found it difficult to keep track of whether the group was using present tense or past tense and whether or not they were situating themselves in the future, present, or past.

The Future Protocol (Murphy, 2002) on which this protocol was based requires a sort of abstract and playful type of discussion. Participants envision what a best case scenario might be, pretend they have attained that best case scenario, and imagine the steps they might have taken along the way and the issues they would have addressed in getting to this best case scenario. Those in Cases 1 and 2 who had never done a Future Protocol before felt uncomfortable and confused because they did not understand the purpose of the protocol steps asking them to project forward and backward in time. Even
the facilitators of these groups felt confused as to how exactly these steps would be useful. Though the purpose of the Future Protocol matches the purpose of this stage of the self-study process, it is possible that this type of playful thinking is easier when considering someone else’s plan, as when one CFG member brings a plan in progress to the whole group for consideration. It is also possible that these steps require too much of an abstract leap for a self-study process that is otherwise very concrete and linear, particularly since the intended objective is developing concrete action steps. It is clear that the revised process should focus more on a concrete discussion of the action steps that will help the CFG members to move towards their goals than on the abstract envisioning of the future.

The holistic manner in which CFG members discussed their goals during this protocol is an additional issue for consideration. The data suggests that discussing all the goals simultaneously may result in addressing only the surface of each goal or in addressing one goal fully at the expense of any conversation around the other goals. Unless the goals are very closely related, a more concrete sequential approach to devising an action plan may yield a more detailed and concrete plan of action for each goal. This is important, because without a concrete plan for action, it is likely that goals will fade away into mere intentions.

With these two issues in mind, the Facilitator’s Guide includes a revised second protocol, renamed Planning for Action and Accountability. The steps suggested in this protocol ask participants to discuss ideas similar to what they would have discussed in the Future Protocol, but in a more direct way, one goal at a time. These steps include the opportunity to envision how the group and its work would be different when the goal has
been attained, what forces are at work within or outside the group that could hinder or help goal attainment, the concrete steps group members can take to work towards the goal, and what evidence they can collect to help them assess how they are doing in the goal area. In keeping with the discussion in the previous section about the importance of keeping goals in mind and monitoring progress towards these goals, the revised version of this protocol now includes a separate step for this purpose. It is hoped that the restructuring of this protocol will facilitate the development of a more concrete plan that will be easier for CFG members to enact and monitor.

The experiences of the three CFGs in this study also suggest that developing a Facilitator’s Guide would be beneficial. Although several individuals in this study facilitated the protocols with a large degree of success without much advance preparation, it was clear that the facilitators were not always sure exactly where a protocol was leading the group or how to appropriately adapt a protocol to fit within the group’s available meeting time. For example, the Case 2 facilitators emphasized how helpful it had been for their group to have an overview of the purpose for each protocol written out on a piece of paper, but they still named uncertainty as one of the biggest challenges in their facilitation. My field notes paraphrase the comments of one of the two facilitators during the interview, “We didn’t have someone else to consult with who knew the protocols better than we did to just run through our own questions and understanding of the process” (May 15, 2007). Although the Facilitator’s Guide cannot serve as a sounding board for thoughts or questions, it can provide more of a foundation for the purpose of each of the self-study steps and tips on how to make decisions in the best interest of the individual CFG.
The Facilitator’s Guide, included in Appendix F, addresses when and why a group might consider using a self-study process, how to select the most appropriate tool for self-study, and how much time is needed for effective use of the process. It clearly outlines the objectives for each of the self-study protocols, provides the final revised version of each of the three protocols, and offers tips for effective facilitation of each protocol based on the experiences of the CFGs in this study.

**Adapting this Self-Study Process for Use in Other Contexts**

The design and refinement of the three protocols in this self-study process represents a contribution to the literature beyond its applicability to CFGs. This process can easily be adapted to other situations in which a group seeks to analyze its work, set goals for the future, develop a plan for accomplishing those goals, and monitor its progress. Any group or organization that has already established meaningful goals could easily use the second and third protocols as written since these protocols do not exclusively relate to the characteristics of CFGs. These protocols could provide a helpful structure and focus for powerful and productive discussion and decision-making.

In contrast to the immediate applicability of the second and third protocols to other contexts, the first protocol is really not useful unless accompanied by some type of pertinent tool for reflection. However, this does not leave the first protocol irrelevant in other contexts. There are many documents already published and easily accessible with similarities to the tools developed in this study for CFGs. Examples might be professional standards or accreditation criteria. For instance, leaders in a professional development
school might assess their work using the standards developed by NCATE. When relevant specialized documents are not readily available, groups might choose to go back to more general models of group development as a basis for group analysis. Descriptions provided by Wheelan (2005), McLaughlin & Talbert (2006), or Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) would be particularly easy to read, understand, and use for this purpose.

Still other groups might attempt to craft their own reflective tool. Though each professional learning community has its own unique characteristics, there are several areas likely to be universally relevant. Considering the goals or purposes of the community is essential. Examining the extent to which meetings or processes facilitate movement in the direction of the community’s goals or purpose is a next logical step. Other useful areas of analysis would include relationships, or the sense of community, steps for action or follow through, and the use of data as evidence of success. The easiest type of tool for a community to develop on their own might be a list of questions. Many of the reflective questions provided in the document, “Questions for Reflection and Analysis of CFG Development,” and included as part of the Facilitator’s Guide might be relevant in other contexts and might provide the basis for a list of questions specific to the particular community. Even the process of developing such a tool could be an incredibly valuable reflective task.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this research study show that both the developmental framework and the self-study process have merit as tools for intentional reflection about
CFG work that can push groups forward in their collaborative learning. These tools can likely be useful in other contexts in which groups, teams, or organizations seek to assess their work and set goals for growth and development. However, the findings from this research study also suggest a number of directions for future research.

First, this study has shown a need for restructuring the second self-study protocol. The experiences of the CFGs in this study have informed the revision process, but future research should test out the usefulness of the revised protocol. Furthermore, since this entire self-study process is new, additional studies would be useful for further evaluation, particularly in examining longer term outcomes. It is important to examine whether this process really does facilitate group development, whether groups do make progress towards their goals, and whether participation in this process impacts a group’s ability to monitor its work and growth over time.

Second, this study suggests the possibility that groups at different stages of development might benefit from different reflective processes. Further research could lead to a greater understanding of the factors that lead to a group’s readiness for self-study and the best timing for self-study. It could also provide insight into the selection of the tool for group self-assessment and into determining the best process to use at various stages of group development. This information could be included in the Facilitator’s Guide so that coaches and whole CFGs would be able to make more informed decisions about whether or not to engage in this type of process.

Third, future studies of group development in CFGs could be useful for refining the developmental framework, particularly in the descriptors of groups that are most highly functioning, so that this tool is even more relevant for the groups that choose to
use it. Though I would not recommend that the framework be used as a rubric for an outsider to evaluate a particular CFG, it does appear to be a tool that could help a researcher to distinguish between groups. Therefore, this tool could be useful in studies aiming to broadly evaluate the effects critical friends group participation has on teaching and learning, as it could help the researchers select groups for participation in the study.

Finally, future research could look at how this process might transfer to support other types of groups in assessing their work, developing goals and an action plan, and monitoring their progress. Though other types of groups might need to use different reflective tools during the first protocol, it is likely that they could use the second and third protocols with little revision.

**Concluding Remarks**

The process of conducting this research study has led me to new knowledge and to new questions directly related to my research questions, but it has also helped me to grow personally. I have developed a deeper appreciation for the complexity of qualitative research, including the challenges of introducing a study in a relevant and compelling manner to potential participants, communicating and scheduling long distance, and flexibly responding to the unexpected. Yet I have also gained an appreciation for the rich learning possible in collaboration with other professionals through observations and interviews. I have gained confidence in myself as a scholar as I have hesitantly stepped out to share my thoughts and questions with others and found that in the professional dialogue we all have expertise to share and new perspectives to consider. Although I feel
no more confident that I have adequately described the development of CFGs or best articulated the important elements to CFG work than when I started, I am no longer driven to find the “perfect” list. Instead, I have developed a greater sense of the importance of helping groups to collaboratively reflect on their work in order to set meaningful goals and have been reaffirmed in my conviction that the content or purpose of our collaborative work is of the utmost importance. I look forward to continuing to learn and grow through dialogue with those who read this work, through further participation in CFGs, and through ongoing pursuit of related questions.
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National School Reform Faculty (no date a). *Critical friends groups as a vehicle for improving student learning*. Bloomington, IN: Harmony Education Center.

National School Reform Faculty (no date b). *A network of educators pursuing significant change in their schools and practice*. Bloomington, IN: Harmony Education Center.


Appendix A

Expert Questionnaire
My purpose in developing and refining this framework is to provide a tool a CFG could use to assess its own growth and development as a professional community supporting teacher and student learning. Through engaging in a self-study process centered on this framework, a group would have the opportunity to celebrate its accomplishments, establish goals for the future, and take action towards meeting those goals. Thus far this framework is based on the work of Dunne and Honts (1998), which identified three stages typical of the development of a “mature” CFG, the literature on professional learning communities, and my own limited experiences participating in a CFG. As an “expert” in the work, your feedback will be so useful in further developing and refining this framework. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!

What is your role in the work of critical friends groups?

What is your vision for the ideal, or most mature, CFG?

How would you describe the steps a group typically goes through in order to reach maturity?
The purpose of the first section of the self-study framework is to assess the degree to which a CFG is growing as a professional community.

Element 1: Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Friendly, but superficial</th>
<th>Trusting, but hesitant</th>
<th>Trusting, open, and honest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growing relationships provide a safe space for friendly interaction. Participants agree with one another on the surface, avoiding conflict. Developing norms helps the group learn how to respect and support each person’s participation. Participants discover that others in the group face similar problems, share passions, and have insights to share.</td>
<td>Deepening trust allows some participants to begin taking risks in openly sharing and questioning their practice, but stick to “safe” topics. The group begins to acknowledge and work through conflict. Group norms have been internalized</td>
<td>A balance of safety and risk allows participants to speak openly and honestly to one another, to press one another for clarification, to ask hard questions, and to examine underlying assumptions. Participants feel they can bring even sensitive issues to the group for discussion, and they openly address conflict. Relationships among group members support teacher and student learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?

Very Important  Somewhat Important  Somewhat Unimportant  Not Important

How clear are the descriptions in this element?

Very Clear  Somewhat Clear  Somewhat Unclear  Very Unclear

How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?

Very Appropriate  Somewhat Appropriate  Somewhat Inappropriate  Very Inappropriate
What suggestions do you have for improving this element?

Other comments:

Element 2: Shared Leadership

| Shared Leadership | Participants look to the coach as the formal group leader. The coach plans/facilitates most meetings. | Multiple group members facilitate meetings with support from the coach. | Leadership is completely shared among participants. |

How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?

Very Important  Somewhat Important  Somewhat Unimportant  Not Important

How clear are the descriptions in this element?

Very Clear  Somewhat Clear  Somewhat Unclear  Very Unclear

How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?

Very Appropriate  Somewhat Appropriate  Somewhat Inappropriate  Very Inappropriate

What suggestions do you have for improving this element?
Other comments:

What important elements are missing from this section on professional community that might help a CFG assess and improve its group practice?

What kinds of evidence would you suggest a group collect and discuss in relation to professional community?
The second section of the self-study framework looks at the degree to which a CFG is growing in its sense of *vision or purpose*.

**Element 3: Commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Commitment to trying a process</th>
<th>Commitment to improvement</th>
<th>Commitment to ongoing learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants are committed to a time slot and trying a new process.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to working together collaboratively to discuss classroom practice and to make improvements. They begin to consult with one another outside of formal group meetings.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to their sense of collective responsibility for student learning across grades and subjects. They hold one another responsible to ongoing learning, and their support for one another extends beyond their formal meeting time. Peer coaching relationships and collaborative planning and problem solving are common.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?**

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Somewhat Unimportant
- Not Important

**How clear are the descriptions in this element?**

- Very Clear
- Somewhat Clear
- Somewhat Unclear
- Very Unclear

**How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?**

- Very Appropriate
- Somewhat Appropriate
- Somewhat Inappropriate
- Very Inappropriate
What suggestions do you have for improving this element?

Other comments:

Element 4: Group Learning Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Learning Agenda</th>
<th>Learning to be a CFG</th>
<th>Work Samples and Solving Problems</th>
<th>Ongoing Questions of Teaching and Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group’s work is focused on learning to use protocols and to craft good probing questions. Participants want to try many different protocols to see how each one works.</td>
<td>The questions individual participants have about their classroom practice or students’ work drive the work of the group.</td>
<td>Questions connected with ongoing individual or collaborative inquiry drive the work. Students become the center of the group’s discussion rather than teaching. There is a clear learning agenda aimed at filling in gaps in collective knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?

Very Important  Somewhat Important  Somewhat Unimportant  Not Important

How clear are the descriptions in this element?

Very Clear  Somewhat Clear  Somewhat Unclear  Very Unclear

How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?

Very Appropriate  Somewhat Appropriate  Somewhat Inappropriate  Very Inappropriate
What suggestions do you have for improving this element?

Other comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Focus</th>
<th>Community Building</th>
<th>Student or Teacher Work</th>
<th>Meeting the Needs of ALL students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are a variety of community building activities and discussion topics focus on student problems, external influences on the profession, or texts. The coach commonly asks, “Does anyone have work they could bring for next time?”</td>
<td>Participants frequently bring samples of student work or teacher work (rubrics, lesson plans, assignments) for discussion and tuning.</td>
<td>Participants analyze student data, student work, standards, curriculum, school policies, and their underlying assumptions or philosophies. They ask fundamental questions about the school mission, teaching approaches, and their connections to students, culture, and community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Somewhat Unimportant
- Not Important

How clear are the descriptions in this element?

- Very Clear
- Somewhat Clear
- Somewhat Unclear
- Very Unclear

How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?

- Very Appropriate
- Somewhat Appropriate
- Somewhat Inappropriate
- Very Inappropriate
What suggestions do you have for improving this element?

Other comments:

What important elements are missing from this section on vision and purpose that might help a CFG assess and improve its group practice?

What kinds of evidence would you suggest a group collect and discuss in relation to vision and purpose?
The purpose of the second section of the self-study framework is to assess the degree to which a CFG is supporting *professional learning*.

Element 6: Personal Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Reflection</th>
<th>Surface reflection</th>
<th>Reflection to improve</th>
<th>Critical reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants say, “We have interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.”</td>
<td>Participants say, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective.”</td>
<td>Participants say, “I’m grappling with my fundamental beliefs about my students and my teaching with the help of this group. I’m questioning the way I’ve always done things”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?**

- Very Important
- Somewhat Important
- Somewhat Unimportant
- Not Important

**How clear are the descriptions in this element?**

- Very Clear
- Somewhat Clear
- Somewhat Unclear
- Very Unclear

**How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?**

- Very Appropriate
- Somewhat Appropriate
- Somewhat Inappropriate
- Very Inappropriate

**What suggestions do you have for improving this element?**
Other comments:

Element 7: Impact on teaching and learning

| Impact on Teaching Practice and Student Learning | Little impact: Participants consider new thoughts or perspectives, but there is little effect on classroom practice. | Some impact: Participants can point to revisions they have made in lesson plans, rubrics, and student assignments. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it even better. They have experimented with a few new ideas. | Significant impact: There are substantial and observable changes in participants’ approaches to teaching, and they have documentation of how those changes have affected the student learning in support of meeting the needs of all students. |

How important is this element to a CFG’s functioning?

Very Important  Somewhat Important  Somewhat Unimportant  Not Important

How clear are the descriptions in this element?

Very Clear  Somewhat Clear  Somewhat Unclear  Very Unclear

How appropriate are the three different stages described in this element?

Very Appropriate  Somewhat Appropriate  Somewhat Inappropriate  Very Inappropriate

What suggestions do you have for improving this element?
Other comments:

What important elements are missing from this section on professional learning that might help a CFG assess and improve its group practice?

What kinds of evidence would you suggest a group collect and discuss in relation to professional learning?

OVERALL COMMENTS OR SUGGESTIONS:

What additional suggestions do you have for improving the overall self-study framework?
Facilitator Interview Guide

A bit of time has passed since you and your group started the self-study process. Looking back, what are your overall reactions? (positive and/or negative)

- What, if anything, was different or unique about the discussion you had?
- How important do you feel the conversation was for the work of your group?
- How important do you feel the goals you set are in the work of your group?
- In what ways has what was discussed during the self-study process affected your work or your thinking since that time?

Let’s focus more specifically on the actual developmental framework (narratives). (we’ll talk about the process more later) Thinking about this framework in relation to your CFG:

- What strengths and weaknesses does it have as a document?
  - …For promoting discussion
  - …For promoting reflection or providing a new perspective
  - …For helping you identify goal areas
  - …In leading to action steps for improvement
- Which areas of the framework were the most useful for your group? Why?
- Which areas of the framework were the least useful for your group? Why?
- What, if anything, would you change about the framework in order to make it easier to use or more useful for your group?

Focusing more on the self-study protocols:

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the protocols used in the process?
  - What was easy?
  - What was challenging?
- What would you say about the amount of time needed for this process?

How would you describe your experience as facilitator of this process?

- What was your experience like?
- What was easy / difficult about your role?
- If you could go back and begin this process again, what would you change?
- What do you know now that would help you if you facilitated a process like this in the future?

If someone in another CFG considering the self-study process asked you for a recommendation, what would you say?

- What are the overall advantages or disadvantages?
- What knowledge or skills would you say are required for this process?
- What would determine whether or not a group is “ready” for this process – what recommendations would you give in terms of timing?

Is there anything additional you’d like to add that I might not have specifically asked about?
Appendix C

Participant Questionnaire
Final Participant Survey

Thank you for taking the time to reflectively fill out this survey. It should take no more than 15-20 minutes for you to complete. Your honest responses will help me to refine the self-study process so that it can better serve other CFGs.

1. How would you describe the self-study (goal-setting) process your group has used this year?

2. What are your overall impressions and reactions regarding this self-study process?

3. What would you change about the self-study process in order to make it more useful for groups in the future?
The following statements relate to the developmental framework you used in the first protocol. Mark the number that best matches your perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2-Agree</th>
<th>3-Disagree</th>
<th>4-Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A – not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. The elements in the framework were easy to understand.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The elements in the framework related well to the work of our group.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The elements in the framework were useful for stimulating discussion among our group members.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The elements in the framework helped me to think in a new way about our group’s work.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The elements in the framework helped our group identify areas in which we would like to grow.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Please add additional comments you have specific to the developmental framework:

The following statements relate specifically to the protocols used in this process. Mark the number that best matches your perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1-Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2-Agree</th>
<th>3-Disagree</th>
<th>4-Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A – not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. The protocols helped us focus our discussion on what was most important for our group.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The protocols provided a structure that helped us make good use of our time.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Given the opportunity I would use these protocols again.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. Please add any additional comments related to one of the three protocols (Setting Goals, Futures Protocol, Checking In Protocol)
The following statements relate to the overall self-study process. Mark the number that best matches your perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1-Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2-Agree</th>
<th>3-Disagree</th>
<th>4-Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>N/A – not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14. Our group benefited from using this self-study process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The self-study process helped us to reflect on our work while still giving us the freedom to shape our work according to our own needs and interests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. We identified goals important to our work as a group.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Our group identified concrete steps that have helped us begin to work towards our goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Our group has taken action towards our goals as a result of this self-study process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Our group has concrete evidence that we have made progress towards our goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Our group has taken action towards new goals as a result of this self-study process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I would recommend that other groups interested in improving their work use this self-study process.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. Think about the total amount of time you spent in the self-study process. Was the time:

- [ ] Too long
- [ ] Too short
- [ ] Just right

23. Did you experience any problems with the self-study process?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If yes, please explain:
24. Would you change anything about the self-study process in order to make it easier for future groups to use?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, please explain:

25. Do you feel there are any disadvantages to engaging in this self-study process?

☐ Yes
☐ No

If yes, please explain:

26. What other comments do you have about the self-study process?

Thank you for your time in completing this survey!
Appendix D

Developmental Framework and Narratives
## Initial Framework Draft

### Professional Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Friendly, but superficial</th>
<th>Trusting, but hesitant</th>
<th>Trusting, open, and honest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Growing relationships provide a safe space for friendly interaction. Participants agree</td>
<td>Deepening trust allows some participants to begin taking risks in openly sharing and</td>
<td>A balance of safety and risk allows participants to speak openly and honestly to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with one another on the surface, avoiding conflict. Developing norms helps the group</td>
<td>questioning their practice, but stick to “safe” topics. The group begins to acknowledge</td>
<td>press one another for clarification, to ask hard questions, and to examine underlying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learn how to respect and support each person’s participation. Participants discover</td>
<td>and work through conflict. Group norms have been internalized.</td>
<td>assumptions. Participants feel they can bring even sensitive issues to the group for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that others in the group face similar problems, share passions, and have insights to</td>
<td></td>
<td>discussion, and they openly address conflict. Relationships among group members support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>share.</td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher and student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Leadership</td>
<td>Participants look to the coach as the formal group leader. The coach plans/facilitates</td>
<td>Multiple group members facilitate meetings with support from the coach.</td>
<td>Leadership is completely shared among participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>most meetings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Vision or Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Commitment to trying a process</th>
<th>Commitment to improvement</th>
<th>Commitment to ongoing learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants are committed to</td>
<td>Participants are committed</td>
<td>Participants are committed to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a time slot and trying a new</td>
<td>to working together</td>
<td>their sense of collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>process.</td>
<td>collaboratively to discuss</td>
<td>responsibility for student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>classroom practice and to</td>
<td>learning across grades and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>make improvements.</td>
<td>subjects. They hold one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>They begin to consult</td>
<td>another responsible to ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with one another outside</td>
<td>learning, and their support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of formal group meetings.</td>
<td>for one another extends beyond</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>their formal meeting time. Peer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>coaching relationships and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>collaborative planning and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>problem solving are common.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Learning Agenda</th>
<th>Learning to be a CFG</th>
<th>Work Samples and Solving Problems</th>
<th>Ongoing Questions of Teaching and Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The group’s work is</td>
<td>The questions individual</td>
<td>Questions connected with ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>focused on learning</td>
<td>participants have about their</td>
<td>individual or collaborative inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to use protocols and</td>
<td>classroom practice or students’</td>
<td>drive the work. Students become the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to craft good probing</td>
<td>work drive the work of the group.</td>
<td>center of the group’s discussion rather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>questions. Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>than teaching. There is a clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>want to try many</td>
<td></td>
<td>learning agenda aimed at filling in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>different protocols</td>
<td></td>
<td>gaps in collective knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Focus</td>
<td>Community Building</td>
<td>Student or Teacher Work</td>
<td>Meeting the Needs of ALL students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>There are a variety of community building activities and discussion topics focus on student problems, external influences on the profession, or texts. The coach commonly asks, “Does anyone have work they could bring for next time?”</td>
<td>Participants frequently bring samples of student work or teacher work (rubrics, lesson plans, assignments) for discussion and tuning.</td>
<td>Participants analyze student data, student work, standards, curriculum, school policies, and their underlying assumptions or philosophies. They ask fundamental questions about the school mission, teaching approaches, and their connections to students, culture, and community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Reflection</th>
<th>Surface reflection</th>
<th>Reflection to improve</th>
<th>Critical reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants say, “We have interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.”</td>
<td>Participants say, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective.”</td>
<td>Participants say, “I’m grappling with my fundamental beliefs about my students and my teaching with the help of this group. I’m questioning the way I’ve always done things.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Teaching Practice and Student Learning</th>
<th>Little impact</th>
<th>Some impact</th>
<th>Significant impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants consider new thoughts or perspectives, but there is little effect on classroom practice.</td>
<td>Participants can point to revisions they have made in lesson plans, rubrics, and student assignments. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it even better. They have experimented with a few new ideas.</td>
<td>There are substantial and observable changes in participants’ approaches to teaching, and they have documentation of how those changes have affected the student learning in support of meeting the needs of all students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Relationships: How do we interact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Developing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Most Highly Functioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friendly, but superficial</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trusting, but hesitant</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trusting, open, and honest</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing relationships provide a safe space for friendly interaction. Participants discover that others in the group face similar problems, share passions, and have insights to share. Developing a set of norms helps the group learn how to respect and support each person’s participation. Participants agree with one another on the surface, avoiding conflict.</td>
<td>Deepening trust allows some participants to begin taking risks in openly sharing and questioning their practice, but they stick to “safe” topics. The group begins to acknowledge and work through conflict. Group norms have been internalized.</td>
<td>A balance of safety and risk allows all participants to speak openly and honestly to one another, to press one another for clarification, to ask challenging questions, to examine underlying assumptions, and to address conflict. Presenters feel they make public even their deepest questions about practice because they know they won’t be judged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Roles and Responsibilities: How are they distributed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Developing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Most Highly Functioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants look to the coach for vision and purpose. The coach plans and facilitates most meetings. The question “Does anyone have work they would like to present next time?” marks the end of many meetings.</td>
<td>The coach takes the lead in helping a group find vision and purpose. Multiple group members plan and facilitate meetings with support from the coach, and many group members have interest in presenting their work to the group. All group members participate in protocol discussions and yet also make space for the contributions of others.</td>
<td>Members of the group collaboratively develop a sense of vision and purpose for the group, while the coach asks challenging questions to help them expand this vision and maintain and document their progress. All group members take turns presenting their work to the group and facilitating protocols for one another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Commitment: Why are we involved?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commitment to Trying a Process</strong></td>
<td>Participants are committed to a time slot and trying a new process. They are really focused on the logistics of what it means to be a CFG.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to working together collaboratively to discuss classroom practice and to make improvements. They sometimes consult with one another outside of formal group meetings.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to their sense of collective responsibility for one another’s professional learning and for equitable student learning across grades and subjects. Peer coaching relationships and collaborative planning and problem solving are common.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Meeting Focus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Building</strong></td>
<td>The group develops trusting relationships through joint reflection and collaboration while using protocols to focus on problems with students, external influences on the profession, or texts. The group may engage in a number of community building activities as well.</td>
<td>Participants learn collaboratively as they closely examine samples of student work or teacher work (rubrics, lesson plans, assignments) they have brought for discussion and tuning.</td>
<td>Participants analyze student data, student work, standards, curriculum, school policies, and the underlying philosophies and assumptions embedded in practice. They ask fundamental questions about the school mission, teaching approaches, and their connections to students, culture, and community in order to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Group Learning Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Developing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Most Highly Functioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learning to be a CFG</strong>&lt;br&gt;The group’s work is focused on learning to use protocols and to craft good probing questions. Participants want to try many different protocols to see how each one works.</td>
<td><strong>Work Samples and Solving Problems</strong>&lt;br&gt;The questions individual participants have about their classroom practice or students’ work drive the work of the group as they read texts together and look at teacher and student work samples. Presenters and facilitators have worked on matching protocol to the question and are beginning to really get it right.</td>
<td><strong>Ongoing Inquiry Focus</strong>&lt;br&gt;Questions connected with ongoing individual or collaborative inquiry drive the work. Student learning becomes the center of the group’s discussion. There is a clear learning agenda aimed at learning from student data, filling in gaps in collective knowledge through reading relevant educational research, working towards more equitable practices, and documenting growth in students and group members. The group uses peer coaching to support ongoing growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Level of Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Developing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Most Highly Functioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface reflection</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participants say, “We have interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.”</td>
<td><strong>Reflection to improve</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participants say, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective and give me new ideas to try. As a result of our work together I have many new questions to explore.”</td>
<td><strong>Critical reflection</strong>&lt;br&gt;Participants say, “I’m questioning the basis for my assumptions about my students and my teaching and looking for evidence from a variety of perspectives to answer my questions about teaching and learning. I’m questioning whose interests are being served through my practice, and looking for ways to disrupt inequitable practices.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Impact on Teaching and Learning

### Beginning

**Considering Practice**
Participants begin to consider new thoughts or perspectives. They have a growing awareness of questions or problems in their own practice and the benefits of making these public.

### Developing

**Tinkering with Practice**
Participants can point to revisions they have made in lesson plans, rubrics, and student assignments. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it even better. They have experimented with a few new ideas.

### Most Highly Functioning

**Transformed Practice**
There are substantial and observable changes in participants’ approaches to teaching and/or student learning outcomes, and the group has documentation of these changes in the forms of lesson plans, student work samples, achievement data, etc. Presenters often report back to the group about their ongoing learning resulting from the work of the group. CFG members are committed to continued inquiry into their practice, and to taking action based on what they have learned in the classroom, school, district, community, etc.
Beginning Narrative

Two critical friends groups started at Deer Woods Middle School this year, and after a few months of meeting together, the teachers involved are enthusiastic about their decision to participate. They are glad they have made the commitment to set time aside to meet together regularly, and the new experience of taking a long focused look at one topic in each meeting feels so restful compared to the frenetic pace of the average teaching day. Intrigued by the difference they see in their conversation when it’s structured by a protocol, teachers in these CFGs are eager to try out many other types of protocols to see how they would work.

CFG participants are developing a new appreciation for their colleagues as they discover that others in the group share similar passions about teaching and about children and that each other group member has unique insights and expertise to share. Teachers have also felt relieved to learn they are not the only ones with questions or struggles in their practice. Establishing a set of norms right from the beginning has also helped individuals to think about the needs and participation styles of others in the group so that they can make sure each member is included and respected during meetings.

Other staff members at Deer Woods ask about what’s going on in CFGs, and participants say, “We have really interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.” They describe their typical meeting activities as collaborating together to focus on problems that arise with students, to analyze successes in their teaching, or to discuss texts through the use of protocols (but they leave out the part that they still feel a little wary about putting their own work on the table for others to look at and that the groups’ coaches frequently end meetings by asking, “Would anyone be willing to bring work for the group to look at next time?”).

The CFG coaches are trying to balance what they feel are two important roles they have in the group. First, they are working on logistics: helping the groups
follow their established norms and to stick to the protocols and supporting individuals in discerning between clarifying and probing questions, between observations and judgments. Second, they are working to help the group develop a vision for the possibilities of working together. They try to find texts that will raise many questions about teaching and learning to help the group find direction for shared work, and they work to help their CFG members identify questions within their practice that they might bring to the group for examination.

Even though it has only been a short time that these two CFGs have met together, the participants are already learning. They are beginning to consider new thoughts and perspectives, and even more, they have a growing awareness of questions or problems in their own teaching practice. They are beginning to see the value in making these questions public so that their CFG can help them to grow.

Developing Narrative

Ten teachers from various elementary schools in the Middleburg School District have been meeting together for quite a while now as a critical friends group. Though they have had their ups and downs in their work together, they are glad they worked through conflict and continued their relationship as critical friends. And over time they really have become critical friends. Deeply internalized norms of respect for one another and much experience in working together has helped them to develop that optimal balance between safety and risk needed for learning. They speak very candidly with one another, asking challenging questions, pressing one another for clarification, and looking for each other’s underlying assumptions. They are not afraid to disagree with one another. On the other hand, they encourage and support one another in such a way that each member feels he or she can expose even their deepest questions and concerns about their practice without fear of judgment. And they enjoy one another! They view their work together as challenging, yet refreshing.

Colleagues at their various school buildings ask them about what this CFG thing is all about, and they describe their work together as a commitment to ongoing professional learning. Some years they have supported each other in their own individual year-long inquiries into teaching practice, while at other times a question they all shared drove their collaborative work. To support these inquiries, they read research together, examine student data, consider appropriate standards for student work, and analyze lesson plans, assessments, and units. To maintain their mutual accountability to ongoing learning, this CFG’s coach continually challenges the ten group members to analyze their practice and report back to the group the ways they are learning and changing and in what ways this learning is impacting their students. Because the group members have such clearly defined learning goals, they have not found it difficult to document their own learning and that of their students.
through lesson plans, student work samples, student achievement data, and other artifacts.

Though they have always felt their CFG has supported them in asking questions about their practice and making improvements, these ten teachers recognize that their questions have deepened over time. Where they once were very focused on their own teaching, they are now focused on their students and whether all students’ needs are being served in their classrooms. Where they once limited their questions to what was going on within the four walls of their classrooms, they have now begun to ask questions about the relationship between their students’ learning and the district’s mission or community and cultural factors. One participant recently said, “I’m questioning the basis for the assumptions I’ve always had about my students and about teaching. I’m looking for evidence from a variety of sources and points of view to answer the questions I have about teaching and learning. I’m examining inequitable practices in our setting and looking for ways to disrupt them.”

Though they have grown significantly as a group, this CFG strives never to become complacent or stagnant in their work together. Their coach continually encourages them in monitoring their collaborative work, and as a group they are considering how they might seek further perspective from parents, students, and community members. Since they have learned so much, they are also talking as a group about how they can take action at the district level in order to effect change.

---

**Most Highly Functioning Narrative**

Janice has really enjoyed coaching a CFG at the high school in which she teaches. She has noticed that her colleagues feel safe with one another now that they have really internalized their group norms, and they are beginning to report that their conversation style has changed even outside of the formal protocols used in their regular meetings. They are better at listening and asking questions of others. The sense of safety among group members has prompted all group members to share artifacts and questions from their practice with one another, and they’re asking each other to facilitate for them. They’ve really mastered the art of matching the choice of protocol to the question being asked. She knows that her group members have developed a commitment not only to being a part of the group, but also to working together collaboratively to improve their practice. In fact, she overheard a teacher in the staff room last week saying, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective, and they give me new ideas to try. As a result of our work together I’m thinking about new questions I might explore.”

The questions of individual group members about practice or about student work samples have begun to drive the work of the group as they read texts together,
analyze student work samples, or tune teacher work, such as lesson plans, rubrics, or assignments. Participants have been tinkering around with what they have been learning in the CFG. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it better, and they have experimented with a few new ideas.

Janice feels that her role has really shifted from helping her group learn the logistics of what it means to be a CFG and use protocols to really pushing her group to develop a deeper sense of vision or purpose for their work together. She is thrilled that their collaborative efforts appear to be supporting learning and experimentation among group members. However, she would also like to challenge her group to take bigger risks in making their work public, to seek deeper accountability, and to move from isolated topics that differ each meeting to questions connected to ongoing learning goals.
Appendix E

Self-Study Protocols
Protocols Used in Case 1

Protocol 1: A Look at the Framework

Time: Approximately 1 hour

1. Individually read through each item and mark where you feel your CFG best fits. (15 minutes)
2. Which words and phrases in this document best describe our CFG at this time, and what evidence can you provide? (10 minutes)
3. Which words and phrases in this document best describe a direction in which we would like our CFG to grow? (Have a scribe write these up on chart paper) (10 minutes)
4. What themes do we notice in the words and phrases we have written up on the chart? How can we group items together? (10 minutes)
5. What goal statements can we make for our own growth considering these themes or groupings? Which two or three goals are of highest priority? (10 minutes)
6. Debrief the protocol. (5 minutes)

Protocol 2: Modified Future Protocol

Time: Approximately 1 hour

1. (5 minutes) One person will “present,” or recap, the goals your group hopes to work towards this year.
2. (5 minutes) Go around the circle to give each group member a chance to say one or two sentences to clarify or confirm the goals as stated by the “presenter.”
3. Post the group’s goals so that all can see. Consider charting all the following steps as well.
4. (10-15 minutes) Project into the future (according to whatever timeline seems appropriate… perhaps the end of the current school year) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished these goals.
   • Must use present tense
   • Describe what is in this best case scenario. Do not yet describe how the group has gotten there.
   • Focus on sights, sounds, behaviors, and feelings surrounding the accomplishment.
   • Describe what evidence you have documenting your success.
5. (5-10 minutes) Look “back” from your projected present and describe how things were for your group when you started.
   • Must use past tense
• Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher work, student achievement, etc.
• Try to remain as tangible as possible

6. (10-15 minutes) Continue looking back from the projected present and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present.
   • Must use past tense
   • Consider discussing how, when, with what resources, and by whom
   • Directly relate previous discussions of how it looked when it started and what the best case scenario is.

7. (10-15 minutes) Return to the “present” and outline (in writing) the concrete steps your group will take to work towards your goals.
   • What will you do?
   • Who will take on specific responsibilities?
   • What resources will you need? How will you get them?
   • How will you monitor your progress towards your goals?
   • What specific evidence will you collect so that you will know whether you have met your goals?

8. (10 minutes) Debrief the process (this protocol and the entire process thus far)

Protocol 3: Checking In

Time: Approximately 45 minutes

1. Post and review the goals your group set during the first protocol.
2. Break up into pairs or triads for brainstorming (10 minutes)
   • What concrete evidence shows us we have met or made progress towards each goal? (write each piece of evidence on a separate sticky note)
   • Which goals are still important for us to work on?
   • What steps do we still need to take (and why) in order to reach each goal?
3. Post sticky note evidence next to the posted goals as the group reconvenes together. Have one person read each of the sticky notes out loud. Then use go-rounds to address the following questions: (15 minutes)
   • What does this evidence tell you about our group’s work together?
   • How have we grown or developed over time?
   • What can we celebrate?
   • Which goals are still important for the group’s growth and development?
4. What steps do we need to take next? (15 minutes)
   • What will we do?
   • Who will take on specific responsibilities?
   • What resources will we need? How will we get them?
   • How will we continue to monitor our growth?
5. Debrief the protocol. (5 minutes)
Protocols Used in Cases 2 and 3

Protocol 1: A Look at the Framework or Narratives

(The group and / or facilitator should decide whether to use the framework or the narratives prior to the meeting time.)

Time: Approximately 1 hour

1. As you read individually, use one color to mark words and phrases that best describe your CFG now, and use a second color to mark words or phrases that either point to an area of difficulty or describe a direction in which you would like your CFG to grow. (15 minutes)

2. Which words and phrases in this document best describe our CFG at this time, and what evidence can we provide? (10 minutes)
   - Begin with a “go-round” where each person has an opportunity to contribute or pass.
   - Use sentences like “I think ___ describes our group because we _____”
   - Consider charting so all can see.
   - It’s ok to repeat a word or phrase more than once.
   - It’s ok to respectfully disagree, provided that supporting evidence is used. “I disagree because our group___”

3. Which words and phrases in this document point to an area of difficulty or best describe a direction in which we would like our CFG to grow? (10 minutes)
   - Begin with a “go-round” where each person has an opportunity to contribute or pass
   - Use sentences like “I’d like our group to be _____ because _____”
   - Consider charting so all can see.
   - It’s ok to repeat a word or phrase more than once.
   - It’s ok to respectfully disagree, provided that supporting evidence is used. “I disagree because our group___”

4. What themes do we notice in the words and phrases we have written up on the chart? Which of these areas are most important for our future growth and development as a group? (10 minutes)

5. What two or three specific / concrete goal statements can we make in these areas we see of highest priority? (10 minutes)

6. Debrief the protocol. (5 minutes)
Session 2: Modified Future Protocol
Time: Approximately 1 hour

1. (5 minutes) The facilitator or another group member will “present,” or recap, the goals your group hopes to work towards this year.
2. (5 minutes) Go around the circle to give each group member a chance to say one or two sentences to clarify or confirm the goals as stated by the “presenter.”
3. Post the group’s goals so that all can see. Consider charting all the following steps as well.
4. (10 minutes) Project into the future (according to whatever timeline seems appropriate… perhaps the end of the current school year) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished these goals. In what ways has your group or the individuals in your group changed since you first set your goals?
   - Must use present tense
   - Describe what is in this best case scenario. Do not yet describe how the group has gotten there.
   - Focus on sights, sounds, behaviors, and feelings surrounding the accomplishment.
   - Describe what evidence you have documenting your success.
5. (5 minutes) Look “back” from your projected present and describe how things were for your group when you set your goals.
   - Must use past tense
   - Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher work, student achievement, etc.
   - Try to remain as tangible as possible
6. (10 minutes) Continue looking back from the projected present and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present.
   - Must use past tense
   - Consider discussing how, when, with what resources, and by whom
   - Directly relate previous discussions of how it looked when it started and what the best case scenario is.
7. (15 minutes) Return to the “present” and outline (in writing) the concrete steps your group will take to work towards your goals.
   - What will you do?
   - Who will take on specific responsibilities?
   - What resources will you need? How will you get them?
   - How will you monitor your progress towards your goals?
   - What specific evidence will you collect so that you will know whether you have met your goals?
(10 minutes) Debrief the process (this protocol and the entire goal setting process)
Appendix F

A Facilitator’s Guide to Self-Study

Why self-study?

If the purpose of a CFG is to address questions of classroom practice in order to improve teaching and support student learning, then many might question why any group would choose to engage in a seemingly unconnected self-study process. The answer is simple. Collaborative work is challenging, and many groups have difficulty along the journey that keep them from attaining their optimal vision for CFG work. Sometimes there are external factors that hinder a CFG’s work, such as staff turnover or a lack of administrative support. There are other times, however, when a reflective analysis of the group’s functioning could move the work of the group forward or lift a group out of a rut. Those who have chosen to engage in self-study with their CFG in the past have noted several benefits for their groups. The self-study process helped them to develop more of a common understanding of their collaborative work and purpose, analyze their group’s functioning, consider new possibilities for their work together, and set a course of action to direct their next steps. Ultimately, the self-study process can assist a group in developing the relationships, skills, or focus that will help them to have an even greater impact in their educational settings.
When should we consider using the self-study process?

This self-study process is not intended for CFGs that are just beginning their collaborative work because they do not yet have enough experience together to warrant a deep analysis of group functioning. It is also not intended for CFGs that have a clear sense of direction or set of goals towards which they are working. These groups should continue working productively in their current direction. However, for groups feeling disillusioned with their current CFG work, uncertain with where to go next, sensing that something is not quite right, or needing a jumpstart towards a new direction, this could be a helpful process.

A group could begin this process at any time during the year. This might be a useful component of a CFG retreat, or groups might choose to use their regular meeting time for this process. However, it is useful to do the second protocol soon after the first in order to help the group maintain a sense of momentum and enthusiasm.

Tools for self-study

Three tools have been developed to facilitate reflection on a CFG’s functioning. All three are included at the end of this document. One tool, the developmental framework, provides descriptions of seven different elements of a CFG at three different stages of development: Beginning, Developing, and Highly Functioning. These elements include Relationships, Roles and Responsibilities, Commitment, Meeting Focus, Group Learning Agenda, Level of Reflection, and Impact on Teaching and Learning. This tool might be useful for helping the CFG coach reflect on next steps in leading the group, or it
might be useful as a reflective tool for the entire CFG during self-study. If a group falling in the more “Beginning” stages of development chooses to use this tool, it could be helpful to set goals that will move the group towards “Developing” at first so that the goals seem more doable.

The second tool is a set of three narratives, each describing a CFG at a different level of development. These narratives describe the same seven elements as are included in the framework, but they provide a more open-ended approach to analyzing a group’s work. The narratives might be particularly helpful for a group that is still fairly young as a CFG. Although the narratives might not support the same depth of analysis, they provide a safer means to identify group issues. They might also allow a group to reflect on its functioning in a shorter length of time.

The third tool provides a list of reflective questions for considering CFG work. Though organized in only three groupings, these questions also relate to the ideas from all seven elements from the developmental framework. These questions allow for a much more open-ended type of group analysis. However, they might not as obviously suggest the next steps in the group’s development as the other tools. These questions are suitable both for a coach’s individual reflection on leadership and for consideration as a whole group.

**What are the goals of the self-study protocols?**

A series of three protocols provides the structure for the self-study process. Figure F-1 provides a visual overview of the purposes for each protocol. The first protocol
is designed to help group members to take stock of their current work and group functioning. CFG members reflect on both strengths and areas for growth. The ultimate purpose of this protocol is to write one or more concrete goal statements representing directions that are important for helping the group to move forward.

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**Self-Study Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol 1</th>
<th>Protocol 2</th>
<th>Protocol 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess Group’s Development and Set Goals</td>
<td>Develop Action Plan</td>
<td>Assess Progress Revise Action Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure F-1: Self-Study Overview

The intent of the second protocol is to assist the CFG in making a plan for how to accomplish its goals. Not only is it important for the group members to discuss the next steps they will take in order to meet the goals, but it is also important they discuss ways to monitor progress towards goals. Good intentions are not enough. It is important that the group commit to a plan for accountability as well.

The third protocol is designed to facilitate a check-in on progress towards goals. The group might use this protocol six months to a year after setting goals. A CFG might choose to use this protocol once every year as a way to monitor their work over a long period of time. This protocol could be useful for checking in on any goals, even if they were not developed during a formal self-study. Regardless of when or how this protocol is used, the purpose is to review the group’s goals to celebrate progress, to evaluate the
continued importance of the goals, to outline next steps, and to plan ways to monitor continued progress.

How long will it take?

Each self-study protocol is approximately an hour in length. With a structured facilitation style it should be possible to accomplish the objectives of each protocol within the suggested time allotments. It is possible, however, to adjust the times in the protocols to meet the needs of the group. For example, a group using the protocols at a CFG retreat may have the luxury of spending more time analyzing their group’s work during the first protocol and brainstorming action steps during the second protocol. It would be difficult, however, to cut back the time for each protocol to less than 45 minutes and still accomplish the intended objectives. Facilitators should keep the objectives for each protocol in mind if making any adjustments to ensure that the group’s time is spent as productively as possible.
Protocol 1

Purpose: Group Analysis and Goal-Setting

Time: Approximately one hour

Facilitation Considerations:

• CFG members could benefit from one of two potential “homework” assignments prior to attending this first meeting. Groups using the framework may choose to complete step one prior to meeting in order to provide more time for discussing individual’s perceptions of the group’s development. Groups using the narratives may choose to have each group member write a short description of their own CFG prior to the meeting to use as a point of comparison.

• If your group uses the developmental framework as the tool for reflection, consider two additions to the first step. First, have group members mark the elements they feel are most important for your group’s growth. Second, consider providing the opportunity for group members to share the stages they think the group most closely matches for each element, keeping in mind that many CFGs identify with descriptors in multiple stages simultaneously. This might be done visually by hanging a larger version of the framework on the wall or by a simple show of hands. Allow a few extra minutes for this step.

• If your group uses the list of questions as the tool for reflection, begin by having each group member read through the list of questions, making notes about the strengths of the group and areas in which the group can grow. It might also be useful for group members to mark the questions they feel are most important for your group’s work to help focus the ensuing discussion on what they find most significant.

• Help your group members remember to back up the words and phrases they select with concrete evidence and examples during steps two and three. Feel free to press them for evidence if none is provided.

• Looking for themes across the words and phrases suggested as areas for growth may help your group determine the most important areas for future growth. The important thing is to make sure that your group identifies the areas that will truly help your group to push ahead in your work as a CFG.
Protocol 1: Analysis and Goal-Setting

7. As you read individually, use one color to mark words and phrases that best describe your CFG now, and use a second color to mark words or phrases that either point to an area of difficulty or describe a direction in which you would like your CFG to grow. (15 minutes)

8. Which words and phrases in this document best describe our CFG at this time, and what evidence can we provide? (10 minutes)
   - Begin with a “go-round” where each person has an opportunity to contribute or pass.
   - Use sentences like “I think ____ describes our group because we _____”
   - Consider charting so all can see.
   - It’s ok to repeat a word or phrase more than once.
   - It’s ok to respectfully disagree, provided that supporting evidence is used.
     “I disagree because our group ___”

9. Which words and phrases in this document point to an area of difficulty or best describe a direction in which we would like our CFG to grow? (10 minutes)
   - Begin with a “go-round” where each person has an opportunity to contribute or pass
   - Use sentences like “I’d like our group to be ____ because ____”
   - Consider charting so all can see.
   - It’s ok to repeat a word or phrase more than once.
   - It’s ok to respectfully disagree, provided that supporting evidence is used.
     “I disagree because our group ___”

10. Which of these areas are most important for our future growth and development as a group? (10 minutes)

11. What two or three specific / concrete goal statements can we make in these areas we see of highest priority? (10 minutes)

12. Debrief the protocol. (5 minutes)
Protocol 2

Purpose: Developing plans for action and accountability

Time: Approximately one hour

Facilitation Considerations:

- The length of time estimated for this protocol is based on a discussion of two goals. If the group has more than two goals, it might be beneficial to divide into several smaller groups and to assign each group one goal to think about. Then small groups might report back to the larger group for a time of revision and expansion on what has already been done. The entire group should plan ways to monitor progress towards goals together (Step 8).

- It would be helpful to create a graphic organizer on a piece of chart paper for each goal in advance of the meeting. Including a space for forces that could hinder or help, concrete action steps, and the kinds of evidence that would document success in this area could serve as a reminder that each of these areas needs to be addressed.

- As the group discusses the forces at work that could either help or hinder goal attainment, challenge group members to consider how negative forces can be diminished and positive forces accentuated. If the group determines that the bulk of the forces are working against them, it could perhaps be a sign that a different goal would be more appropriate and achievable.

- Again, ensure that your group does not overlook the importance of evidence. This time the group is discussing the kinds of evidence they can collect over time to document their progress towards goals.
Protocol 2: Planning for Action and Accountability

9. (5 minutes) Post the group’s goals so that all can see. The facilitator or another group member will “present,” or recap, the goals your group hopes to work towards this year.

10. (5 minutes) Go around the circle to give each group member a chance to ask for clarification on one or more of the goals or to expand upon the goals as stated by the “presenter.”

11. Go through steps 4 through 7 for each of the group’s goals. Plan on 15-20 minutes per goal.

12. What will your group’s work look like, feel like, sound like, be like when this goal has been attained? How will your group be different than it is today?

13. What forces are at work (either within or outside the group) that could hinder you or help you as you strive for this goal?

14. What concrete steps will you take to work towards this goal? (Who needs to take on particular responsibilities?)

15. How will you know when you have reached your goal? What evidence can you collect so that you will know how you are doing?

16. (10 minutes) Discuss how you will keep your group on track as you work towards these goals. How will you monitor your group’s progress? What will ensure accountability?

17. (5 minutes) Debrief the protocol.
Protocol 3

Purpose: Monitoring Progress and Determining Next Steps

Time: Approximately 50 minutes

Facilitator Considerations:

- Evidence is a crucial component of this protocol. Your group members may want to begin thinking about evidence prior to this meeting. Collecting concrete pieces of student work, teacher work, or other data could really strengthen this discussion. Regardless of the type of preparation done by your CFG members, it is important that they fully address the evidence (or lack of evidence) demonstrating progress towards each goal.

Protocol 3: Checking In

6. Post and review the goals and action steps your group set during the first two protocols.

7. Break up into pairs or triads for brainstorming (10 minutes)
   - What concrete evidence shows us we have met or made progress towards each goal? (write each piece of evidence on a separate sticky note)
   - Which goals are still important for us to work on?
   - What steps do we still need to take (and why) in order to reach each goal?

8. Post sticky note evidence next to the posted goals as the group reconvenes together. Have one person read each of the sticky notes out loud. Then use go-rounds to address the following questions: (15 minutes)
   - What does this evidence tell you about our group’s work together?
   - How have we grown or developed over time?
   - What can we celebrate?
   - Which goals are still important for the group’s growth and development?

9. What steps do we need to take next? (15 minutes)
   - What will we do?
   - Who will take on specific responsibilities?
   - What forces will help or hinder us in our progress?

10. How will we continue to monitor our growth? What evidence can we collect?

11. Debrief the protocol. (5 minutes)
Option 1: A Developmental Framework for CFG Reflection and Analysis

Relationships: How do we interact?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendly, but superficial</td>
<td>Trusting, but hesitant</td>
<td>Trusting, open, and honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing relationships provide a safe space for friendly interaction. Participants discover that others in the group face similar problems, share passions, and have insights to share. Developing a set of norms helps the group learn how to respect and support each person’s participation. Participants agree with one another on the surface, avoiding conflict.</td>
<td>Deepening trust allows some participants to begin taking risks in openly sharing and questioning their practice, but they stick to “safe” topics. The group begins to acknowledge and work through conflict. Group norms have been internalized.</td>
<td>A balance of safety and risk allows all participants to speak openly and honestly to one another, to press one another for clarification, to ask challenging questions, to examine underlying assumptions, and to address conflict. Presenters feel they make public even their deepest questions about practice because they know they won’t be judged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roles and Responsibilities: How are they distributed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Most Highly Functioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants look to the coach for vision and purpose. The coach plans and facilitates most meetings. The question “Does anyone have work they would like to present next time?” marks the end of many meetings.</td>
<td>The coach takes the lead in helping a group find vision and purpose. Multiple group members plan and facilitate meetings with support from the coach, and many group members have interest in presenting their work to the group. All group members participate in protocol discussions and yet also make space for the contributions of others.</td>
<td>Members of the group collaboratively develop a sense of vision and purpose for the group, while the coach asks challenging questions to help them expand this vision and maintain and document their progress. All group members take turns presenting their work to the group and facilitating protocols for one another.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Commitment: Why are we involved?

**Beginning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment to Trying a Process</th>
<th>Commitment to Improvement</th>
<th>Commitment to Ongoing Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants are committed to a time slot and trying a new process. They are really focused on the logistics of what it means to be a CFG.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to working together collaboratively to discuss classroom practice and to make improvements. They sometimes consult with one another outside of formal group meetings.</td>
<td>Participants are committed to their sense of collective responsibility for one another’s professional learning and for equitable student learning across grades and subjects. Peer coaching relationships and collaborative planning and problem solving are common.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Meeting Focus**

**Beginning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Building</th>
<th>Student or Teacher Work</th>
<th>Meeting the Needs of ALL students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The group develops trusting relationships through joint reflection and collaboration while using protocols to focus on problems with students, external influences on the profession, or texts. The group may engage in a number of community building activities as well.</td>
<td>Participants learn collaboratively as they closely examine samples of student work or teacher work (rubrics, lesson plans, assignments) they have brought for discussion and tuning.</td>
<td>Participants analyze student data, student work, standards, curriculum, school policies, and the underlying philosophies and assumptions embedded in practice. They ask fundamental questions about the school mission, teaching approaches, and their connections to students, culture, and community in order to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Group Learning Agenda

**Beginning**

**Learning to be a CFG**
The group’s work is focused on learning to use protocols and to craft good probing questions. Participants want to try many different protocols to see how each one works.

**Developing**

**Work Samples and Solving Problems**
The questions individual participants have about their classroom practice or students’ work drive the work of the group as they read texts together and look at teacher and student work samples. Presenters and facilitators have worked on matching protocol to the question and are beginning to really get it right.

**Most Highly Functioning**

**Ongoing Inquiry Focus**
Questions connected with ongoing individual or collaborative inquiry drive the work. Student learning becomes the center of the group’s discussion. There is a clear learning agenda aimed at learning from student data, filling in gaps in collective knowledge through reading relevant educational research, working towards more equitable practices, and documenting growth in students and group members. The group uses peer coaching to support ongoing growth.

### Level of Reflection

**Beginning**

**Surface reflection**
Participants say, “We have interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.”

**Developing**

**Reflection to improve**
Participants say, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective and give me new ideas to try. As a result of our work together I have many new questions to explore.”

**Most Highly Functioning**

**Critical reflection**
Participants say, “I’m questioning the basis for my assumptions about my students and my teaching and looking for evidence from a variety of perspectives to answer my questions about teaching and learning. I’m questioning whose interests are being served through my practice, and looking for ways to disrupt inequitable practices.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Impact on Teaching and Learning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Beginning</strong></th>
<th><strong>Developing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Most Highly Functioning</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Considering Practice</strong></td>
<td>Participants begin to consider new thoughts or perspectives. They have a growing awareness of questions or problems in their own practice and the benefits of making these public.</td>
<td>Participants can point to revisions they have made in lesson plans, rubrics, and student assignments. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it even better. They have experimented with a few new ideas.</td>
<td>There are substantial and observable changes in participants’ approaches to teaching and/or student learning outcomes, and the group has documentation of these changes in the forms of lesson plans, student work samples, achievement data, etc. Presenters often report back to the group about their ongoing learning resulting from the work of the group. CFG members are committed to continued inquiry into their practice, and to taking action based on what they have learned in the classroom, school, district, community, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Option 2: Three Narratives for Reflection and Analysis

1. Two critical friends groups started at Deer Woods Middle School this year, and after a few months of meeting together, the teachers involved are enthusiastic about their decision to participate. They are glad they have made the commitment to set time aside to meet together regularly, and the new experience of taking a long focused look at one topic in each meeting feels so restful compared to the frenetic pace of the average teaching day. Intrigued by the difference they see in their conversation when it’s structured by a protocol, teachers in these CFGs are eager to try out many other types of protocols to see how they would work.

   CFG participants are developing a new appreciation for their colleagues as they discover that others in the group share similar passions about teaching and about children and that each other group member has unique insights and expertise to share. Teachers have also felt relieved to learn they are not the only ones with questions or struggles in their practice. Establishing a set of norms right from the beginning has also helped individuals to think about the needs and participation styles of others in the group so that they can make sure each member is included and respected during meetings.

   Other staff members at Deer Woods ask about what’s going on in CFGs, and participants say, “We have really interesting conversations about teaching and learning. I am thinking about some new ideas.” They describe their typical meeting activities as collaborating together to focus on problems that arise with students, to analyze successes in their teaching, or to discuss texts through the use of protocols (but they leave out the part that they still feel a little wary about putting their own work on the table for others to look at and that the groups’ coaches frequently end meetings by asking, “Would anyone be willing to bring work for the group to look at next time?”).

   The CFG coaches are trying to balance what they feel are two important roles they have in the group. First, they are working on logistics: helping the groups follow their established norms and to stick to the protocols and supporting individuals in discerning between clarifying and probing questions, between observations and judgments. Second, they are working to help the group develop a vision for the possibilities of working together. They try to find texts that will raise many questions about teaching and learning to help the group find direction for shared work, and they work to help their CFG members identify questions within their practice that they might bring to the group for examination.

   Even though it has only been a short time that these two CFGs have met together, the participants are already learning. They are beginning to consider new thoughts and perspectives, and even more, they have a growing awareness of questions or problems in their own teaching practice. They are beginning to see the value in making these questions public so that their CFG can help them to grow.
2. Ten teachers from various elementary schools in the Middleburg School District have been meeting together for quite a while now as a critical friends group. Though they have had their ups and downs in their work together, they are glad they worked through conflict and continued their relationship as critical friends. And over time they really have become critical friends. Deeply internalized norms of respect for one another and much experience in working together has helped them to develop that optimal balance between safety and risk needed for learning. They speak very candidly with one another, asking challenging questions, pressing one another for clarification, and looking for each other’s underlying assumptions. They are not afraid to disagree with one another. On the other hand, they encourage and support one another in such a way that each member feels he or she can expose even their deepest questions and concerns about their practice without fear of judgment. And they enjoy one another! They view their work together as challenging, yet refreshing.

Colleagues at their various school buildings ask them about what this CFG thing is all about, and they describe their work together as a commitment to ongoing professional learning. Some years they have supported each other in their own individual year-long inquiries into teaching practice, while at other times a question they all shared drove their collaborative work. To support these inquiries, they read research together, examine student data, consider appropriate standards for student work, and analyze lesson plans, assessments, and units. To maintain their mutual accountability to ongoing learning, this CFG’s coach continually challenges the ten group members to analyze their practice and report back to the group the ways they are learning and changing and in what ways this learning is impacting their students. Because the group members have such clearly defined learning goals, they have not found it difficult to document their own learning and that of their students through lesson plans, student work samples, student achievement data, and other artifacts.

Though they have always felt their CFG has supported them in asking questions about their practice and making improvements, these ten teachers recognize that their questions have deepened over time. Where they once were very focused on their own teaching, they are now focused on their students and whether all students’ needs are being served in their classrooms. Where they once limited their questions to what was going on within the four walls of their classrooms, they have now begun to ask questions about the relationship between their students’ learning and the district’s mission or community and cultural factors. One participant recently said, “I’m questioning the basis for the assumptions I’ve always had about my students and about teaching. I’m looking for evidence from a variety of sources and points of view to answer the questions I have about teaching and learning. I’m examining inequitable practices in our setting and looking for ways to disrupt them.”

Though they have grown significantly as a group, this CFG strives never to become complacent or stagnant in their work together. Their coach continually encourages them in monitoring their collaborative work, and as a group they are considering how they might seek further perspective from parents, students, and community members. Since they have learned so much, they are also talking as a group about how they can take action at the district level in order to effect change.
3. Janice has really enjoyed coaching a CFG at the high school in which she teaches. She has noticed that her colleagues feel safe with one another now that they have really internalized their group norms, and they are beginning to report that their conversation style has changed even outside of the formal protocols used in their regular meetings. They are better at listening and asking questions of others. The sense of safety among group members has prompted all group members to share artifacts and questions from their practice with one another, and they’re asking each other to facilitate for them. They’ve really mastered the art of matching the choice of protocol to the question being asked. She knows that her group members have developed a commitment not only to being a part of the group, but also to working together collaboratively to improve their practice. In fact, she overheard a teacher in the staff room last week saying, “That group really makes me think. They ask good questions that help me to see from a different perspective, and they give me new ideas to try. As a result of our work together I’m thinking about new questions I might explore.”

The questions of individual group members about practice or about student work samples have begun to drive the work of the group as they read texts together, analyze student work samples, or tune teacher work, such as lesson plans, rubrics, or assignments. Participants have been tinkering around with what they have been learning in the CFG. They have refined what they were already doing with their students to make it better, and they have experimented with a few new ideas.

Janice feels that her role has really shifted from helping her group learn the logistics of what it means to be a CFG and use protocols to really pushing her group to develop a deeper sense of vision or purpose for their work together. She is thrilled that their collaborative efforts appear to be supporting learning and experimentation among group members. However, she would also like to challenge her group to take bigger risks in making their work public, to seek deeper accountability, and to move from isolated topics that differ each meeting to questions connected to ongoing learning goals.
Option 3: Questions for Reflection and Analysis of CFG Development

Professional Community
- To what extent do I, as a group member, fully participate in the work of the group by sharing my expertise, by bringing my own questions to the group, and by helping to shape the vision for where our group is headed?
- To what extent do I, as a group member, feel I can speak honestly about my perspective?
- To what extent do our norms support safe yet challenging interactions during our meetings?
- How do we address conflict when it arises?
- Are we aware of the specific types of expertise that each group member can offer, and do we take advantage of that expertise?
- To what extent does our group welcome members from a diversity of backgrounds?
- What barriers exist between group members? How can we work to overcome those barriers?

Professional Learning
- Why am I a part of this group and to what level of commitment?
- What is our purpose as a group? What concrete goals or inquiries are we working towards individually and/or as a group? Why are these pursuits important?
- To what extent do our meetings help us to progress towards our goals?
- To what extent does our work depend on actual data, whether student achievement data, work samples, or reading research from the field?
- Do we seek perspectives and expertise regularly from those outside our group?
- To what extent have we committed ourselves to NSRF’s mission of pursuing educational and social equity?
  - What kinds of inequities have we identified within our own context? How are we responding?
  - What biases and stereotypes have we identified within our practice or within ourselves? How are we responding?
  - What are we learning about the relationship between culture and student learning? How are we working towards more culturally responsive practices?

Action and Accountability
- How do we challenge ourselves to meet our goals and purpose?
- How do we hold one another accountable to taking action based on what we learn and discuss as a group, whether within our own individual practice or within our organization as a whole?
- How do we know whether we are making progress as a group? How do we measure success? What evidence or documentation do we have of our own learning and impact? What differences can we identify in student achievement across all subgroups?
VITA

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Education
B.S. Elementary Education, Florida State University, 1999

Professional Experience
Professional Development Associate, Pennsylvania State University Professional Development School, 2003-2007
Elementary Teacher / Lower School Faculty Liaison, North Jakarta International School, 2000-2003
Elementary Teacher, Deerwood Elementary School, 1999-2000

Selected Conference Presentations

Fellowships and Awards
Eva Diefenderfer Graduate Fellowship
First Year Doctoral Student Fellowship