

The Reflective Educator's Guide to Professional Development: Coaching Inquiry-Oriented Learning Communities

Book Review by Chris Kingsbery, Pennsylvania

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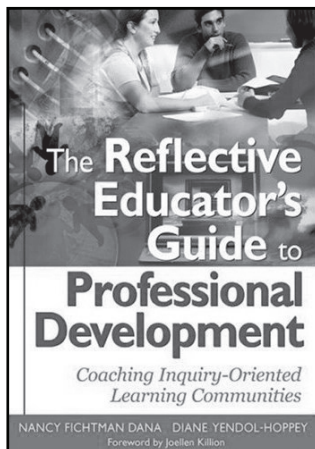
By Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey

This text strives to “demonstrate how coaching promotes learning at each step of the (action research) process.” (Killion, p.x) The authors suggest several types of collaborative meeting structures that allow researchers studying teacher action to propose, act upon and reflect on research taking place in their classrooms. Dana and Yendol-Hoppey utilize NSRF protocols to facilitate these learning conversations and share the protocols in detail with their readers.

The authors advocate for two site-based professional learning opportunities: action research and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). They combine these ideas by using protocols to guide their work. They call their learning teams inquiry-oriented PLCs and define these “as a group of six to twelve professionals who meet on a regular basis to learn from practice through structured dialogue and engage in continuous cycles through a process of action research (articulating a wondering, collecting data to gain insights into the wondering, analyzing data, making improvements in practice based on what was learned and sharing learning with others.)” (Dana and Yendol-Hoppey, p. xiii) As I was reading this description, I thought it sounded suspiciously like a CFG! And as I proceeded through the text, I continued to have difficulty differentiating between an inquiry-oriented PLC and a Critical Friends Group.

The authors present 10 essential elements of healthy inquiry-oriented PLCs:

1. Establish a vision that creates a momentum for their work. (p. 23)
2. Build trust among group members. (p. 27)
3. Pay attention to the ways power can influence group dynamics. (p. 30)
4. Understand and embrace collaboration. (p. 33)
5. Encourage, recognize and appreciate diversity within the group. (p. 36)
6. Promote the development of critical friends. (p. 37)
7. Hold the group accountable for learning and its documentation. (p. 39)



8. Understand change and the discomfort it may bring to some PLC members. (p. 43)
9. Have a comprehensive view of what constitutes data, and be willing to consider all forms and types of data throughout the PLC work. (p. 45)
10. Work with building administrators. (p. 47)

These principles or elements are evident in all the stories and cases shared by the authors. Each chapter contains a story that illustrates a part of the action research process, protocols, data gathering tools and templates, research methods utilized and conclusions drawn as a result of the inquiry. Peppered throughout the chapters are the authors' reflections on the processes and practices embedded in the cases they present.

The authors take the reader through a very methodical process of action research, which allows for easy transfer to practice. The examples provided are clear and concise, and readers can see themselves in the cases articulated as examples.

Protocols are presented as on the NSRF website, NSRF Resource Book and in *The Power of Protocols*, 1st and 2nd editions. The authors have not adapted or compromised any of the protocols they present. Rather, they have implemented them appropriately, matching protocol to purpose with the finesse of experienced Critical Friends Group coaches. This fidelity, along with the demonstrated success articulated in *The Reflective Educator's Guide to Professional Development*, will reignite veteran practitioners and engage novices in the praxis of using structured conversation to focus inquiry and reflection.

This text serves as a reminder of the powerful sustainability and “best practice” nature of our work. While at first glance, it might seem as if the authors are renaming that work, their continual reference to NSRF and the authors of the protocols leave the reader wanting to know more about the National School Reform Faculty and its work. For the veterans among us, this text provides a quick reference and some good scenarios to share and compare. Finally, this text would also serve as a good book study for new or novice CFG coaches. Reading its stories and seeing examples of embedded protocol in practice will spark reflective conversations. ■

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