



*Editors Note: This is the first installment of what we hope will be a regular feature in our journal. A place where coaches like you can spread the word about our work for and with kids!*

Why do other teachers keep coming in to visit us? What's all that food for on Monday afternoons? As my students began to notice the outward signs of my involvement in a Critical Friends Group, peer visits, refreshments for meetings etc., I began to wonder about using the internal processes and protocols we valued in our CFGs in my class-

rooms as well.

Meanwhile, in sunny Florida, Linda Emm, a coach and middle school drama teacher, talked about students using the protocol to facilitate ongoing feedback from their peers as they refine their original material and their performances. Linda also told us about a situation when the performance of her class was postponed time and time again because of hurricane warnings and building renovations. Instead of suffering in silence, Linda brought her dilemma to her stu-

answers to the question, "If you had the opportunity to speak to people who could affect change in your school system, what changes would you suggest to improve teaching and learning?" On short notice, the fourteen students "Came From the Truth" and presented their ideas to an auditorium filled with educators. Here are some quotes from the kids:

*"I would like it if teachers got together to plan our lessons from grade to grade. I have had social studies lessons about the Pilgrims and*

**"It is important to me that my teachers hear my ideas when what I say is not really the answer they were looking for."**

*Pennsylvania Student*

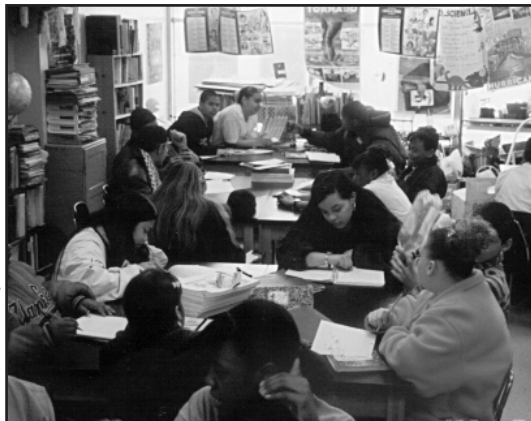
room community. As it turns out, I wasn't alone. Other teacher coaches across the country were taking the same journey...

In a fifth grade class in Lancaster County, PA, Keeley Potter, a new coach, has introduced the use of *Connections* in her fifth grade classroom. Students take responsibility for circling their chairs and are settled and ready to share within minutes each morning. Keeley has noticed that the tone in her class has become more purposeful and supportive since her use of this practice. All student voices are heard and respected, and there no longer seems to be a need for the kinds of off task attention getting that kids so often crave when they feel left out of the conversation. Students are also using *Text-Based* protocols in their Literature Circles.

Another coach, Sandra Richardson, shared her fifth grade students' excitement and interest when they heard that she was still a student, and that they could get in on the "it" that she was learning. Sandra's students learned how and when to use protocols and activities from *Connections* to *Chalk Talk*. When the word spread that these fifth graders had embraced the processes and strategies of full, thoughtful participation, other teachers throughout the school were moved to incorporate the same practices in their

rooms, and using the *Consultancy* protocol, they decided to move forward with their work on film, since a live performance wasn't possible.

In Rhode Island, another coach, Jan Grant, shared experiences where students have been trained in a process called *Coming From Our Own Truth*, a risk taking process where students state their opinions freely, without fear of judgment. Students have been



trained in the use of I-messages and have become skilled in forming opinions based on their own experiences. Others are free to disagree with the opinions that are voiced, but it all proceeds with the help of a facilitator, who upholds the group's norms that guard against judgmental words or behaviors. At the start of the year, the superintendent invited a group of students from grades 3-12 to share their

*Native Americans for four years in a row!"*

*"It is important to me that my teachers hear my ideas when what I say is not really the answer they were looking for."*

*"I want to be safe in my classrooms and in the halls from negative judgment and put-downs so I can be who I am."*

As students become empowered in their classrooms, they carry their skills beyond the four walls of their school. High school students have told Jan that their classroom norms are often practiced at their lunch table, and a parent of a fourth grader recently overheard her son facilitating a group of his peers in the car when some name calling was about to erupt into an argument. □

You can contact Deborah Bambino at <[dbambino@earthlink.net](mailto:dbambino@earthlink.net)>

*Editor's note: Whether you're using Chalk Talk to kick off a unit of study or protocols to help students engage in self and peer assessment, let us hear about your experiences. We're reserving this spot in our journal for coaches, their students and/or their families to share the ways in which habits of reflection, collaboration and communication are changing the face of teaching and learning in their lives.*