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**DRAFTING A NEW CHAPTER ON CRITICAL FRIENDS GROUPS:  
EXPLORING TEACHER LEARNING FROM A VYGOTSKIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher learning can be examined and understood from a Sociocultural Theory perspective in that learning occurs through social interaction rather than through the acquiring of skills needed to simply transmit knowledge. This epistemology of teacher learning acknowledges that teachers have expertise that can be used to solve dilemmas that arise in their practice. Critical Friends Groups (CFG) are one such model of professional development that involves groups of teachers meeting on a regular basis to identify, present and reflect on questions that are inherent to a particular teacher's classroom and practice. This study is one of the first attempts to look at Critical Friends Groups (CFG) from a Sociocultural Theory perspective. Employing SCT in this study underscores the social origins of individual teachers' performance and helps us to trace the history of their learning as it took place at each stage of the CFG process: prior to, during and after the group session. Both the teachers whose development provided the focus for this study, Catherine and Anna, brought unique histories as teachers and learners to the dilemma that they presented to their group. These prior experiences created their initial orientation and framed how they understood the dilemma prior to their involvement in the CFG process. As much of current literature on teacher professional development is focused on the impact of collaboration and inquiry on teacher practice, this dissertation explores the potential contribution that the study makes to this field.

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction to the Dissertation

#### **1.1 Introduction**

If schools were a stage, then teachers are the storytellers. People use stories as a medium to make sense of their experiences and emotions and teachers are no exception. The faculty lounge could provide sitcom writers with enough material to storyboard numerous episodes with topics ranging from the hilarious to the serious as teachers recount aspects of their school day. Teachers are, however, more than just storytellers. They also write, direct, and act in their stories. They set the stage by creating engaging lessons and directing classroom interactions. Learning the art of teaching involves more than acquiring a set of skills to be applied as needed; learning to teach is an ongoing process of reflection, modification, and self-evaluation. As a result, teachers are continuously seeking avenues to present narratives of their classroom experiences that will enable them to gain a broader perspective to dilemmas that are deeply embedded in their daily practice of teaching.

When asking new or pre-service teachers why they chose the teaching profession as a career, the answer is often that they love children and want to make a difference. Their goals include teaching children to become productive members of society and to instill in them a love for learning that will endure a lifetime. These ideals are difficult to achieve in an age where teachers are viewed with cynicism and discontent, and when teacher identities are constantly being challenged by administrators and policymakers. Teachers' identities are strongly rooted not only in how they see themselves, but also how others view them. Teachers strive to meet heightened curricular expectations set by outside entities while simultaneously facing budget cuts



that reduce their access to the resources they need; they are held accountable to parents when children perform poorly, which often means that their professional decisions are questioned and criticized; and they need to continually refine their practices in order to meet the diverse needs and emotions that exist in the classroom (Hargreaves, 1994).

In spite of the many challenges that teachers have to overcome, they are often able to rise above them. Unfortunately, these successes do not carry with them the forms of recognition that characterize other professions: promotion, salary increase, enhanced prestige, etc. In spite of ongoing educational reforms, teachers are often still marginalized in a profession that is driven from the top by the administration and/or policymakers rather than from those in the classroom who are directly engaged in promoting student learning and achievement. As professional development for teachers is mandated in many states, schools have a need to provide teachers with such opportunities, but the programs that are offered often fall short of the teachers' interests or needs. In other words, incentives for teachers to create and participate in meaningful professional development programs are not currently a part of most school systems, but instead reside within the individual teacher and his/her particular cohort. Researchers have observed that although changes are taking place in many schools, it is often imperceptible (Schön, 1993).

Several researchers (Allen & Blythe, 2004, Lyons and LaBoskey, 2002, Schön, 1993, and Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1998) have argued for teachers to become more engaged in research and leadership experiences that emerge out of their classroom practice. When teachers are involved in program development, they tend to choose topics that relate directly to their classroom experiences when creating their research questions and designs, which is different from staff development programs that are created by well-meaning administrators. Many researchers (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, McDonald, 2003; Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003; Allen & Blythe, 2004; McDonald, 2002; Nolan & Hoover, 2004) have also discovered that when teachers are in charge of their own learning and development schools become more cohesive structures

with a greater impact on student learning. As mentioned above, professional development is the key to building stronger and more efficient schools. This dissertation presents an exploratory study that is focused around one professional development model that involves teacher discourse: Critical Friends Groups.

## **1.2 Statement of Purpose**

American educational policymakers have argued that schools are failing organizations and that teachers and children in the US are not on par with those in other nations around the world. The various solutions to this crisis that are presented to the public often involve introducing standards and mandates and administering tests. Rarely do such discussions turn to initiatives to support ongoing teacher professional development. The effectiveness of schools has been directly linked to the methods of professional development that are employed by individual schools and districts (Wienbaum et. al, 2004). As American schools do not have nationally mandated standards for providing teachers with professional development opportunities, each district adopts its own strategy for meeting these needs, within state guidelines and mandates.

One approach to integrating professional development with daily school activities profits from something that most teachers already do: talk. As mentioned earlier, teachers are engaged in “teacher talk” much of the day around specific areas of concern that are unique to each teacher. Professional development models that allow teachers to “talk” about their concerns have been linked to widespread school change (Sergiovanni and Starratt, 1998; Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003; Allen & Blythe, 2004). It has been argued that professional development programs that are tailored to meet the needs of individual teachers in their unique situations would strengthen failing schools (McDonald et. al., 2003). These programs would focus on the root of

problems (be it low teacher morale, high turnover, low funding, low student motivation, etc.) in a particular school or district rather than the band-aid fixes that administrators suggest. Whole school reform can only occur when teachers are included in the decision making process in the creation and implementation of programs for their own development, and Schlechty (2005) argues that it is such innovations in professional development programs that lead to widespread school reform. Teacher research and collegial discourse and reflection through professional development programs such as study groups, lesson study, peer coaching and critical friends groups have resulted in increased teacher motivation and growth, which in turn has resulted in high-order student learning and engagement (McDonald et. al., 2003, Weinbaum et. al., 2004).

Teacher learning can be examined and understood from a Sociocultural Theory perspective in that learning occurs through social interaction rather than through the acquiring of skills needed to simply transmit knowledge. This epistemology of teacher learning acknowledges that teachers have expertise that can be used to solve dilemmas that arise in their practice. When teachers take charge of their own learning by reflecting upon and questioning their classroom practice, they become *teacher researchers* rather than just imparters of knowledge. Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) define a teacher researcher as “an observer, a questioner, a learner, and a more complete teacher” (p.259). They emphasize that when teacher researchers write about their discoveries that are linked to their experiences, they embed in it their personal voice and style. This work emphasizes the power that the narrative has in understanding a teacher’s way of knowing and acting (Bruner, 1986, Sabin, 1986) and unique experiences, that is not limited to one’s cultural and ethnic heritage. As a result, teachers (Nee-Benham and Cooper, 1998, Grant, 1999) are looking more closely at issues of race-ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, class and position in order to celebrate and articulate the unique experiences that make up a teacher’s identity, which in turn informs his/her interpretations of classroom situations. In other words, teachers look at their dilemmas of practice through lens that are tinted by their individual

histories. While the reflective teaching movement and teachers as researchers have helped to legitimize teachers ways of knowing as legitimate, this is still not the norm nor is it recognized as on par with top-down approaches to professional development.

It could, therefore, be argued that when teachers take an inquiry stance (Wells, 1999) to delve collaboratively into their practice, they are able to gain both professionally and personally from the experience. Collaborative inquiry requires that teachers meet in groups to talk about individual issues of teaching and learning that emerge out of each member's unique experiences (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Weinbaum, et. al., 2004). This approach allows teachers to participate in professional development activities that are tailored to their specific needs and interests and that provide teachers with a way to use their classrooms as a site for their own learning. Professional development opportunities such as these further strengthen the collegial bonds that exist between teachers as they make their work public while seeking answers to tough questions that they are unable to solve on their own. Critical Friends Groups (CFG) are one such model of professional development that involves groups of teachers meeting on a regular basis to identify, present and reflect on questions that are inherent to a particular teacher's classroom and practice.

Research into CFG work has demonstrated that teachers seem to grow both individually and collectively when they are involved in such groups for professional development (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003; Allen & Blythe, 2004; McDonald, 2002). There is therefore a need for more focused research into how and why this model of practitioner led professional development leads to teacher growth. One explanation for this conspicuous lack of development-focused research in the literature on CFGs, is that CFGs themselves are not explicitly tied to a coherent theory of teacher learning. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine teacher development, as it emerges through participation in CFGs, from the perspective of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory.

This chapter's focus is to provide a rationale for the need for such a study and to situate it within a broader educational context. Section three of this chapter provides the reader with an overview of the study, including the study's context and the research questions that guided it. Section four introduces Critical Friends Groups along with the assumptions, the processes and the outcomes of this model of professional development. Section five previews essential elements of Sociocultural Theory that can be used to connect teacher discourse and development. The final section of this chapter lays out the organization for the remaining chapters in the dissertation.

### **1.3 Overview of the study**

This study is one of the first attempts to look at Critical Friends Groups (CFG) from a sociocultural perspective. Data were collected from two CFGs between March 2005 and March 2006. These groups were organized around a course offered through the Professional Development School (PDS) in a large mid Atlantic university. Teachers enrolled in this course could take it for varied (one to three) credits. Teachers taking the course for one credit were only expected to be present and to participate in the sessions, but were not required to write journals or a final paper.

The CFGs formed in this area were named Conversation as Inquiry Groups (CIG) to correlate with other foci of the PDS initiatives. This study therefore uses the term CIG when talking about data collected from the interactions of these groups of teachers. In addition, it is important to mention that as the study spanned two consecutive school years, both the numbers and to some degree the members of the groups changed. The researcher was present at her group's meetings as a participant observer. After initial data analysis, two particular teachers (Anna and Catherine) were recruited from the larger groups to provide additional narratives for an in depth case study. The teachers involved in this study were members of different CIGs, and as

a result had different responses to the process. It is important to note that the information that was gleaned from this study is exploratory in nature as it presents an initial understanding of how Sociocultural Theory could benefit the current work on CFGs. It is hoped that this study will be the basis for larger studies in the future.

### ***1.3.1 Research questions:***

Critical Friends Groups have provided teachers with a safe and enriching avenue for discourse on classroom practice, but the literature on CFGs has failed to provide a theoretical basis that explains the dynamics of teacher learning that occurs. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) has the potential to provide this work with new understandings of teacher learning as they develop their conceptual knowledge of classroom practice with the assistance of either other people or structures. The data that were collected for this dissertation were analyzed with the help of several aspects of this theory and thereby set out to answer the following questions:

- 1) How can a Vygotskian theoretical framework contribute to our understanding of teacher learning within the context of CIGs?
- 2) How do the presenting teachers in CIGs work through their dilemma of practice (prior to the discussion, during it, and after it)? In particular, how does the CIG process lead to shifts in the presenting teachers' thinking about their dilemmas?
- 3) How does the selection and use of a specific protocol (tool) that is used in the CIG process mediate the presenting teachers' learning?

In order to help the reader better understand how CFGs are created and the processes involved in the discourse that takes place between members of the group, the next section presents a description of the assumptions, the process and the outcomes associated with the CFG model.

## **1.4 What are Critical Friends Groups?**

Critical Friends Groups were born out of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 1994. Shortly after the program was designed, The National School Reform Faculty, the professional development wing of the Annenberg Institute, began to train coaches in a program that was both “practitioner-driven and highly collaborative”. The goal of the program was to “identify student learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively at practices intended to achieve these goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work in order to meet that objective” (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000, p.9). Since its conception, the program has grown exponentially from the original 88 coaches in 70 schools, to 1,000 coaches in 700 schools in 2000, and the numerous schools that continue to join the program. This model is unique among professional development initiatives in that the conversations are conducted in highly structured formats. It is important to note that critical friends groups are different from the concept of a Critical Friend that Costa and Kallick (1993) propose. Costa and Kallick note that a critical friend in the teacher research process presents another individual (student, teacher, or administrator) with both “critical and supportive responses to their work” through one on one guidance and collaboration. CFGs, on the other hand, involve group conversations where all members contribute to helping a teacher look at an aspect of their practice in new ways.

### ***1.4.1 Assumptions:***

Nolan and Hoover (2003) classify CFGs as a collegial development group.

“We define a collegial development group as a small (usually 12 or fewer participants) voluntary group of teachers who meet together regularly (at least once a month) on a long term basis to support one another’s personal and professional development through critical analysis of theories and ideas, new and existing practices, and student and teacher work.”

CFGs usually have eight to twelve members in a group and prescribe conversations that are structured around specific protocols (procedural steps and guidelines). These are both time and topic driven and drive the teacher to delve deeper into the dilemma and look at it through a variety of lenses. This results in the teachers making the work public as they gain new insights into aspects of their practice. The CFG conversations are also embedded in current teaching and classroom practices and do not involve outsider “expert” involvement as the CFG’s assume that members of the team brings their own expertise through their own unique experiences and perspectives to the group (Allen & Blythe, 2004). The protocols that structure the discourse are also guided and monitored by a facilitator or a coach who keeps the group focused and on track. The protocols provide every member of the group with equal opportunities to participate in the conversations and assume that every teacher will work hard and contribute to the discussions. The assumption is that teachers are interested in participating in this group to continue to learn new perspectives and ways of looking at teaching and learning.

In spite of the unique nature of CFG, they have similar implications to other professional development models that also involve teacher discourse. CFGs, like lesson study and peer coaching (two other popular collaborative models of professional development) provide teachers with opportunities to collaborate with other teachers in a structured and trusting environment that is supported and encouraged by the administration. This group, like the other models, is not to be used as an evaluative tool, but for self-directed learning and reflection as teachers publicly state their goals for both their students and themselves; and examine curriculum, student work and issues in the school culture that impact student learning (Dunne & Honts, 1998). Participants in a CFG pledge to take the time to work hard for each other during each monthly two-hour session to fully understand the issue being presented without making judgments. In addition, team members are expected to be good listeners who ask clarifying and probing questions that push teachers’



thinking to see issues from varying perspectives. As protocols are the vehicle for teacher learning and collaboration, it is impossible to understand the successes of this model without articulating the purpose, the design and the implementation of a protocol within these settings.

#### ***1.4.2 The Process:***

Allen and Blythe (2004) mention that protocols guide conversations to look beyond the surface of a “problem” to the many layers that lie beneath it. Protocols, therefore, “promote among colleagues both exploration of important areas of teaching and learning as well as sustained collaborative inquiry into particular questions about teaching and learning (p.11)”. These structured conversation guides are designed to draw attention to different aspects of teacher practice by either raising open-ended questions that emerge from work or seeking solutions to specific problems that exist. They go on to mention that protocols currently in use exist along a continuum with “question raising/ problem finding” on one end, “question answering/ problem solving” on the other, and a variety of combinations of the two in the middle. In other words, the protocol continuum accommodates a variety of classroom based dilemmas and provides a structured format for the conversations about a single classroom dilemma.

This dissertation focused on two particular protocols: the Consultancy Protocol and the Describing Student Work Protocol. Each of these protocols will be presented in much greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5, however, a brief discussion of the similarities and the differences between the formats of these protocols is included in this chapter. Since the goal of the CFG is to slow time down and focus on minute aspects of teaching, many of the protocols are written for close exploration and analysis of student work: whether it is a drawing, a picture, an assessment, an activity, etc. These samples of work need not be the most polished versions, but ones that “invite conversations about the work and the teaching associated with it” (McDonald, 2002, p. 121). The protocols also regulate who speaks, and when and how they do so, while

acknowledging that what the group notices or says is spontaneous and therefore hard to predict. Each protocol, therefore, allows time for the following: the presenter to provide the team with the context (background information) for the work; individual and group analyses after closely examining the work; asking both clarifying (fact) and probing (to expand thinking) questions to fully understand the problem; and hearing the presenter's reflections on the process. While these are the basic elements to many of the protocols, there is variability among the protocols for how and when they are used.

The previous paragraph has alluded to the essential aspects that contribute to the success of protocol-guided conversations: the presenter, the facilitator, the group's participants, the work and the question that frames the group's discussion about this work. Each of these factors is dependent on the others for the process to be effective. The presenter offers to present an aspect of her practice for which s/he would like more input from the group. The presenter then meets with the facilitator prior to the meeting to select a protocol, "frame" the question, select a work sample and put the presentation together. The presenter has to make difficult decisions during the pre-conference and utilizes the facilitator's expertise as a sounding board. The presenter must delve into his/her goals for the presentation by identifying a focus question for the group that will result in engaging and useful discussions. The presenter also has to select work samples that will support that discussion. As the teacher looks through all the material about the topic, s/he needs to evaluate the piece that would best highlight the previously determined needs and/or concerns. The facilitator needs to ask appropriate questions that both guide the teacher in his/her thinking and that enables them to fully comprehend the scope of the teacher's concerns so that they can enhance the learning of both the individual teacher and the group. Although this pre-conference is not an essential element of the critical friends process, most discussions are prefaced with a planning meeting that is either informal and short, or more formal where time is dedicated to planning the presentation prior to the group discussion.

During the group meeting, the presenter shares the information as previously planned as and when it fits in with the protocol's format. The facilitator uses the format of the protocol to guide the discussions and to keep it focused. Although these protocols are highly structured, they are not meant to be set in stone, but can be slightly altered to fit the group's needs and learning goals. The participants are expected to be thoughtful as they ask questions to better understand the situation and engage in critical and positive discourse that looks at it from a variety of perspectives. At the end of the presentation, the group discusses the effectiveness of the protocol and the impact that the topic had on both the individual and group learning. Allen and Blythe (2004) encourage facilitators to meet with the presenter after the discussion to further support their new understandings of the topic. They suggest that this post-conference take place after the teacher has had time to digest all the information gleaned from the group discussion and is able to make decisions about its implications for her practice.

The Consultancy Protocol and the Describing Student Work Protocol contain many similar elements mentioned earlier in this chapter. Both these protocols are facilitated by a CIG coach and includes the presentation of some form of background information about the dilemma by the presenting teacher. Both protocols allocate time for the presenting teacher to reflect on the group's discussion and to enumerate the ways in which the discussion impacted their reconceptualization (i.e. the way in which they understood) of the dilemma that had been presented. These were the more obvious similarities that could be drawn between these two protocol formats. The Consultancy Protocol provides a specific section where the group members ask specific kinds of questions to first clarify and then probe the presenting teacher's interpretation of the dilemma. These are two separate questioning sections and are carefully moderated by the facilitator. This protocol also provides a space for the presenting teacher to withdraw from the group conversation and simply listen and take notes while the group tries to analyze the dilemma from their perspective. The Describing Student Work Protocol on the other

hand, utilizes a “rounds” structure where members of the group take turns speaking on a specific pre-determined topic related to the dilemma that is being presented. The conversation progresses around the circle with members either sharing their views or “passing”. These rounds often do not provide a specific time within the protocol for clarifying and probing questions, but there are opportunities to ask “burning” questions in between the rounds at the discretion of the facilitator. As mentioned earlier, this brief discussion was to simply provide an example of the kinds of protocols that could be used in a CIG, but that both these protocol structures are explained in much greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

#### ***1.4.3 The Outcomes:***

As with other collaborative models of teacher professional development, critical friends groups change the look and feel of traditional professional development programs. Participation in “authentic conversations” (Clark, 2001, p.173) as seen in protocol driven discussions, results in the articulation of teachers’ beliefs and goals its impact on classroom instruction. Dunne, Nave and Lewis (2000) discovered that teachers involved in CFGs were more reflective about “the connections among curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy”, which led to “ shift from teacher-centered to student-centered instruction” (p. 10). Teachers were also more likely to change their method of instruction if students were not succeeding, felt more comfortable with the implementation of new methods and strategies, and were able to look at their classroom practice from a variety of perspectives. One of the strengths of this model of teacher development is that it uses protocols to closely analyze and interpret student work. Student work is the core of classroom teaching and student learning, and yet much of this work is done in isolation. CFGs make such work public, as teachers work together to investigate and celebrate the evidence of student learning and teaching practice. CFG’s slow time down and force the participants to delve into the details of an artifact rather than just looking at its surface. This then opens up new

perspectives for looking at teaching, student thinking, and learning. (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003; Allen & Blythe, 2004; McDonald, 2002)

CFG's shift the power away from a hierarchical model to being equally distributed among the members of the group as the group decides the focus and the direction for both individual and group learning. Teachers are therefore included in the decision-making process and share the responsibility for enhancing the school community and culture. As teachers engage in conversations with others, they raise new questions and perspectives that both challenge and validate each other. Teachers are therefore no longer bystanders but active participants in school reform where they share the responsibility for their own development in teaching and learning. These interactions allow for greater collaborative and collegial bonds, where each individual is validated for the expertise that he/she contribute to the whole.

### **1.5 Introduction to Sociocultural Theory**

This chapter has provided a brief review of current literature on CFGs and has shown that this structure promotes collaborative work among teachers. As argued before, it is difficult to ascertain how and why this process helps teachers change in their understanding of a problem without connecting it to a theory of teacher learning. As development is a central tenet to sociocultural theory (as a theory of cognitive development, i.e. learning), the following section will provide a brief discussion on the essential elements of the theory that apply to teacher development through discourse.

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, first wrote about sociocultural theory in the 1920s. His work challenged the current behaviorist theories to look at the mind in a different way. He believed that people do not interact directly with the environment, but that these interactions are always and everywhere mediated. These mediations could take place either

through cultural artifacts (such as physical tools and symbols) or by other human beings through discourse. Several studies have shown that mediation enables people to achieve more than they would be able to do alone. (Gindis, 2003, Miller, 2003, Ohta, 2000, Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) This mediation does not have to be done by an “expert” as every person’s prior experiences results in different perspectives and ways of approaching and solving problems. Mediation in the form of tools allows for a person to change not only the circumstances in which they live but the world itself. These tools have been created by humans and have been passed down from one generation to the other. They can be modified or changed to fit current needs before they are passed on to future generations. (Lantolf, 2000) Just as cultural mediation provides assistance from past generations, social mediation provides assistance from our contemporaries.

Sociocultural theory ascertains that people do not exist in isolation, but are constantly interacting with others and the environment to develop higher orders of thinking and being. Vygotsky argued that development first occurs as a result of social interaction with others (on the interpersonal plane), which then leads to internal development (on the intrapersonal plane). He described this process as internalization. In addition, Vygotsky claims that the knowledge of an individual occurs (i.e., is constructed) through the knowledge of the social group to which the individual belongs. The internalization of mediation structures is most likely to occur within a learner’s zone of proximal development. Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as the following: “It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (1978, p.86) Hence the focus is on the areas of psychological functions that are not yet mature but are in the process of maturing. Vygotsky uses the term “collaboration” in some of his writings on the zone of proximal development. (Chaiklin, 2003) This term does not refer to interactions where the expert is always mediating the partner in inadequate areas, but to instances in which the partner is

provided support that is related to the problem to be solved. Vygotsky presents a hypothetical scenario of two eight-year-old children who are both engaged in solving problems with assistance. It was noted that one child “with respect to maturing functions, went four times further than the other” (Vygotsky, 1989). In other words, one of the children was able to solve problems that were at the level of a twelve-year-old with assistance, while the other child performed at the level of a nine-year-old with the same assistance. In the same manner, when looking at a person’s development in a specific area, it is important to pay attention both to their current developmental level (zone of actual development or ZAD) and their possible future development (zone of proximal development or ZPD). Looking at an individual’s zone of proximal development could be the key to understanding the role that CFGs play in teacher development. The key to development is that teachers receive mediation within their ZPD, which is ahead of where their cognitive level currently lies. As teachers receive assistance in thinking about the problem in different ways, they are eventually able to solve similar dilemmas with less mediation or more independently.

## **1.6 Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The following is brief description of elements included in each chapter.

*Chapter 1* offers an initial grounding into Critical Friends Groups by situating it into the broader educational context. It also presents both the overarching and sub questions that define this research and the potential significance that this study could have on this model of professional development.

*Chapter 2* provides a brief overview of sociocultural theory and then sets out to discuss how this perspective enables researchers to understand the complexities of teacher learning.

*Chapter 3* focuses on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks along with methods of participant selection, data collection and analysis.

*Chapter 4* presents detailed description and analysis of Catherine's dilemma and the Consultancy Protocol that was selected for the CIG session

*Chapter 5* sets out to present and analyze Anna's student work dilemma and the Describing Student Work protocol from a sociocultural theory perspective and argues how this perspective presents a stronger case for teacher development than the traditional understanding of this model.

*Chapter 6* provides a conclusion to this study while seeking to answer the overarching research question that was presented earlier in this chapter. This chapter also explores research questions that are central to future explorations of Critical Friends Groups as an important aspect of school reform and teacher professional development.



## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review of Sociocultural Theory

#### **2.1 Introduction**

American schools are poised at the brink of major school restructuring and change with the inclusion of innovative professional development programs that involve collaborative and democratic discourse. Although this has been an area of much research and discussion within the educational arena for the last decade (Fullan, 1991, Hargreaves, 1994, Murphy & Evertson, 1991), never has teacher development been a more contested subject. Bureaucrats and the public see schools as failing organizations and strict measures are being taken to “hold them accountable” while students are being asked to conform to the norm on standardized tests. Teachers are being mandated to log professional development hours to show that they are properly trained to undertake this task. School administration officials hope that these hours will result in higher test scores that will keep their schools off the list of failing schools, and while every school district has days earmarked for “professional development” this term has been difficult to define. Educators and administrators alike have multiple terms that are often used synonymously to provide an explanation for professional development (e.g., in-service, training, supervision). Many professional development programs currently offered focus on merely exposing teachers to the latest theories and initiatives without providing the conditions (i.e., time, opportunities to practice, feedback, etc.) required for them to be linked to – and to potentially improve – actual classroom practice, which is the very heart of professional development. In fact, Joyce and Showers (2002) argue that teachers are not the only ones who benefit from professional development initiatives: such programs can play a crucial role in fostering student achievement through a transfer of the training to classroom practices. Hence, professional

development is the key to the success of both the individual teacher and the larger school community, which of course includes learners.

Some schools are consequently moving toward initiatives that provide a more *dialogic* and *meaning-making* view of teaching and learning, whereby teachers take a more active role in their own development, collaborating with others in their profession to address various pedagogical problems (Clark, C., 2001). For example, Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) cite research (Haller 1968, Keenan 1974) indicating that teachers are more likely to seek assistance and advice from other teachers than from other sources in developing and enhancing their classroom practices. Teachers in progressive school communities are seeking out avenues for discourse to solve problems surrounding aspects of their practice, be it studying student work, analyzing lesson plans from multiple perspectives, sharing classroom management practices, or researching and implementing curricular initiatives in the classroom. Glatthorn (1987) refers to this process as *collegial supervision*, and suggests that it can include professional dialogue, curriculum development, peer supervision, peer coaching and action research.

This kind of professional development through teacher collaboration and discourse has many elements (Smagorinsky, Cook & Johnson, 2003, Little, 2003) that make sociocultural theory a viable lens through which teacher learning can be viewed. As will be discussed below, this theory highlights the social origins of ‘individual’ performance, and allows the researcher to trace the history of a person’s development, be it a child developing a conceptual understanding of algorithms in mathematics or a teacher developing her professional competencies. This chapter will provide the reader with a brief overview of sociocultural theory while defining some of the key terms that demonstrate a strong connection to a theory of learning. As sociocultural theory is composed of such tightly interconnected constructs, it is difficult to talk about one aspect of the theory without bringing the rest of it into the discussion. For this reason, and also because of the radical differences that distinguish this theory from others, the use of sub-sections

devoted to specific aspects of the theory in this chapter is purely an organizational convenience. To further clarify the interrelated nature of the terms and to concretely illustrate the theory's exploratory potential, the example of a young child learning to add will be presented. The final section of the paper will look at teacher discourse and professional development, and operationalize it within a sociocultural perspective. Data from a study conducted by Rust and Orland (2001) will be presented to highlight the ways in which an SCT analysis can strengthen claims of teacher learning through collaborative discourse.

## **2.2 Definition of Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory (henceforth, SCT), alternatively referred to in the literature as cultural-historical theory or social-historical theory, originated in the writings of Lev Vygotsky in the early 1920's (the years immediately following the Russian revolution). Despite his short research career of roughly ten years, Vygotsky's writings continue to influence many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. However, it has only been within the last twenty years that his work has gained the attention of American researchers and educators. Indeed, educational practices in the United States have historically been influenced by the behaviorist model of learning, and more recently by the work of Piaget. Although a contemporary of these researchers, Vygotsky understood the mind and its development in radically different ways. Wertsch (1990), a contemporary researcher of Vygotsky's work, nicely draws out the principle characteristics of SCT that set it apart from these other theoretical frameworks:

*“[its] ...claim that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in social life; and the claim that an essential key to understanding human social and psychological processes is the tools and signs used to mediate them.” (Wertsch, 1990, p.11)*

Thus the first tenet of SCT is that it emphasizes the social origins of cognition. Unlike other theories that may recognize the social world as a trigger for development, SCT argues that the activities in which an individual engages re-appear as mental activities through a process of internalization (described below). The second tenet of SCT is the concept of mediation. Unlike the behaviorists, who viewed the mind simply as an organ that responded to certain stimuli (as in the case of Pavlov's dogs), Vygotsky believed that people are always and everywhere mediated. They do not interact with and respond to their environment directly. Instead, their interactions are mediated by cultural artifacts (such as physical tools but also symbols) and by other human beings, a point that will be elaborated below. This means that the familiar stimulus-response model of behavior had to be amended to include a third element positioned between the environmental stimulus and the individual's response, an element that mediates this relationship. Vygotsky and his colleagues maintained that individuals learn and develop not by following a pre-specified series of developmental stages (as proposed by Piaget) but through mediated experiences.

### **2.3 Mediation**

As mentioned briefly above, two basic types of mediation can be identified in SCT: social mediation and cultural mediation (hence the name of the theory, socio- and cultural). Social mediation resides on the simple observation that humans are social beings—they do not exist in isolation, but are always in contact with others. Vygotsky maintained that the development of higher order mental functions occurs as a result of this social interaction. When looking at a child's cultural development, Vygotsky states development first occurs as a result of social interaction with others (in the interpersonal plane), which then leads to internal development (in the intrapersonal plane). He described this process as internalization (see

below). In addition, Vygotsky claims that the knowledge of an individual occurs (i.e., is constructed) through the knowledge of the social group to which the individual belongs.

Kozulin (2003) cites a study conducted by Wertsch & Stone (1985) where the interactions between a mother and her 2-1/2 year-old-daughter while working on a puzzle were studied. It was observed that not only was the child able to complete an activity that she would not have been able to do without this adult assistance, but that she was able to self-direct her involvement in the activity because of her mother's presence, encouragement and feedback. Kozulin emphasizes the importance of looking deeper into the kinds of mediation that result in higher order cognitive development. He suggests that one possible method of mediation analysis would be to elucidate the differences between the type and technique of mediation. For example, the organization of an activity, encouragement, adult presence, etc. would be classified in to the type of mediation. On the other hand, questions, hints, directives, modeling, etc. would fall into the technique category. This concept has a direct bearing on teacher training and performance. It is arguably the utilization of specific mediational methods and techniques could generate greater cognitive (or professional) development among teachers, in relation to both individual learning and classroom practice.

Cultural mediation, in contrast to social or human mediation, occurs through the use of artifacts or "tools." These artifacts can be either physical or symbolic and are made available to each generation from the one before (Lantolf, 2000). Vygotsky (1978) portrays tools and nonverbal signs to being similar to words used in interactions as they "provide learners with ways to become more efficient in their adaptive and problem-solving efforts" (p. 127). Thus, in a sense, just as social mediation is mediation by our contemporaries, cultural mediation is mediation by those who have come before us—through the tools that they have handed down. Importantly, tools can be modified to suit specific needs and functions and therefore can change as they pass through generations. As with physical tools (e.g., hammers and saws but also

computers and calculators), symbolic tools can help an individual make meaning of others and the world. Vygotsky mentions counting fingers, tying knots, utilizing pieces of paper, use of mnemonic devices, etc. as external memory retrieval strategies. It can therefore be argued that the protocols that are utilized in Critical Friends Group sessions are an external cultural tool that help teachers mediate their understanding of how they construct a problem that they are encountering. Of course, these symbolic tools can become internal processes in human beings, as when a person learns to remember in ways that do not use any external symbolic tools. Instead, a person may learn to rely on psychological tools. Thus, according to Vygotsky, these psychological tools, or higher mental functions can be traced to “their external form ... [where they] are symbolic artifacts such as signs, symbols, languages, formulae and graphic devices”.

Since Vygotsky’s theory is centered on child development, the use of a similar example to the one that he elaborates on, prior to presenting a more complex explanation of a SCT perspective in teacher learning, can aid in comprehending the intricacies of the theory. The following discussion presents the process that a young child is guided through when “learning” to add. Vygotsky argues that when a child begins formal schooling, he/she is not a blank slate as they have already have an internal “everyday” concept of the information. As in the situation of a child being taught to add, he/she has already seen this being done at home and has an understanding of the word “more”. The teacher needs to build on the child’s prior knowledge when presenting the new information. At the very beginning of the process, the child is given a set of base ten blocks (cubes, rods and squares that represent ones, tens, hundreds, etc.) to create and then manipulate the problem. For example, if the problem was  $7+2$ , the child would be guided to create 7 using seven cubes and then “add” 2 more to that 7 to result in a total of 9. At this stage, the teacher is providing the child with both social (verbal guidance) and physical (manipulatives) artifacts as mediation to help them conceptualize “adding”. As the child begins to understand that adding is the same as “getting more”, the teacher introduces the algorithmic

form along with the symbolic tool (the '+' sign). Thus, the teacher uses both manipulatives and algorithms to help the child develop a basic understanding of the concept. The mediation that the teacher was able to provide this student generated a conceptual knowledge of adding which has the potential to lead to future development.

## **2.4 Internalization**

The importance of mediation in SCT cannot be understood without reference to another core concept briefly mentioned earlier in the paper, internalization. According to Wertsch (1991, p. 7), "the basic goal of a sociocultural approach to mind is to create an account of human mental processes that recognizes the essential relationship between these processes and their cultural, historical, and institutional settings." This 'essential relationship' Wertsch refers to is internalization, the process through which activities in the world are transformed into mental activities. Lantolf defines internalization in the following way:

"Internalization, then, is the process through which a person moves from carrying out concrete actions in conjunction with the assistance of material artifacts and of other individuals to carrying out actions mentally without any apparent external assistance." (Lantolf, 2000, p. 14)

In other words, internalization takes place when an individual is able to move from using physical tools or symbolic tools, including social discourse, to solve problems to solving the problems without these forms of external mediation. This occurs because the actions that the individual performed in conjunction with tools or in discourse with other people are now being performed by the individual him or herself. According to this theory, both types of activity are mental functions, but in the former they are referred to as intermental or interpersonal (the person with other people or with physical and symbolic tools) and in the latter they are intramental or intrapersonal. The term intramental highlights the fact that the individual is still mediated, but the

mediation is no longer external – it has become internal. In this way, the physical and symbolic tools have become psychological tools.

Kozulin (2003) argues that the availability of mediating artifacts does not imply that cognitive development will definitely take place. Without proper mediation and guidance these tools cannot be appropriated to higher order thinking activities, but will be viewed instead as just another content item.

“The symbolic tool fulfils its role only if it is appropriated and internalized as a generalized instrument, that is, a psychological tool capable of organizing individual cognitive and learning functions in different functions and in application to different tasks.” (Kozulin, 2003, p.26)

As mentioned in the above example of the young child learning to add, the child is beginning to internalize the concept when s/he no longer relies on the manipulatives or verbal guidance in solving the problem. This becomes increasingly evident when the child begins to mentally solve the problem through ‘visualizing’ the external physical and social tools internally. However, internalization should not be viewed as a simple reproduction of the external forms of mediation on the internal plane. One of the key characteristics of internalization in this theory is that it is a transformative process. The learner is not a passive recipient of information but an active co-creator of knowledge. Our understandings and abilities, then, are emergent, resulting from our unique personal histories of interactions in the world (social and cultural) and human agency. Vygotsky (1978) himself provides a succinct description of this process. He characterizes internalization in the following way:

- (a) An operation that initially represents an external activity is reconstructed and begins to occur internally.
- (b) An interpersonal process is transformed into an intrapersonal one.
- (c) The transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is the result of a long series of developmental events. (p.56-57, italics added)

The significance of internalization in SCT is that it is the mechanism through which development occurs. According to the theory, an individual is said to have completely



internalized a given process when s/he is able to transfer what s/he has learned to a variety of situations and to problems of varying complexities. In essence, then, the person is different. S/he is no longer dependent upon specific circumstances and conditions but has been freed to think and act in ways that are different from what s/he could have done before, and is able to apply these new ways of being to future situations. Hence the child learning to add would now be able to solve more complex problems (e.g., teasing out intricate word problems where the process is less obvious, addition that involves a greater number of digits, problems involving time and money, etc.). This child should also be able to provide a conceptual explanation of the procedures utilized in reaching the final solution in order to make the argument that s/he has internalized addition.

## **2.5 The Zone of Proximal Development**

The internalization of mediational means is most likely to occur in what is known as the learner's zone of proximal development. Vygotsky (1978) introduces the term zone of proximal development to show how learning and development are interrelated. He provides the reader with an example of a gardener evaluating the maturation of fruits in his orchard. The gardener needs to take both the matured fruits and those in the process of maturation into consideration. In the same manner, when looking at a person's development in a specific area, it is important to pay attention both to their current developmental level (zone of actual development or ZAD) and their possible future development (zone of proximal development or ZPD). Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as the following:

“It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (1978, p.86)

It should be emphasized that the ZPD is not a concept that can be physically observed in time and space, but is instead a metaphor used to understand how mediation is used and internalized.

(Lantolf, 2000) The use of the ZPD has traditionally been utilized in expert – novice interactions as in the scenario of the mother providing assistance to her 2 –1/2 year-old-child while solving a puzzle. However, contemporary researchers (Ohta, 2000, Donato, 2000) have observed that the ZPD can also be constructed in other ways, as people’s mediational activity with others in a group creates a context for knowledge to be co-constructed which then leads to expertise emerging as a result of these interactions. In other words, it is possible for peers at similar zones of proximal development to co-construct new knowledge as they interact with each other.

Returning to our example of the young child learning to add, it can be argued that s/he already has an everyday concept of quantity from prior experiences. This would then be the child’s zone of actual development—her current understandings. By providing various forms of mediation (physical and verbal guidance), the teacher can build on and extend these understandings by constructing a zone of proximal development with the child. As the teacher introduces the “systematic or scientific” concept of “addition” to the child, the instruction occurs in the child’s zone of proximal development. As the child begins to grasp the scientific concept of adding, she internalizes the process, gaining a new conceptual understanding of what she is doing, and is thereby able to solve similar problems with less and less mediation. Over time, it is often observed that this child will be able to attempt problems of various complexities while utilizing the same basic rules. By this example, it can be seen that the instruction takes place ahead of the child’s actual developmental level, which through mediation in the zone of proximal development results in development. This example also exemplifies the cyclical nature of this process, as the child’s current ZPD will be his/her zone of actual development in the future, or,

“what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.”

(Vygotsky, 1978, p.87)

## **2.6 Implications of SCT on Teaching and Learning**

Now that a shared knowledge of the key concepts of SCT has been established, it is important to ascertain how this theory applies to teacher learning and professional development. Numerous studies have looked at teacher-student and student-student interactions from a SCT perspective. Teacher-teacher interactions, on the other hand, have yet to be thoroughly investigated through this lens. SCT focuses on development being the result of mediated social and cultural experiences and as one could argue that teaching is a social experience both within and outside of the classroom, a teacher's individual professional development fits well into this framework. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, teacher collaboration and discourse directly impact classroom practice and have been shown to be more effective than traditional professional development programs that do not take teachers' individual needs into consideration (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The teacher discourse presented below demonstrates how such data can be further illuminated when examined within a SCT framework. This scenario presents a sampling of the type of data and analysis that is typically found in research and the following analysis presents a possible deviation from the norm if one used a sociocultural lens to understand the learning and development that is taking place.

The data that follows is an excerpt from Rust & Orland's (2001) study of the topics and patterns that characterize open-ended teacher discourse, focusing particularly on the stories teachers share in conversation groups. One of the groups consists of undergraduate students in the teacher education program at the New York University and relatively novice teachers (between 1 and 3 years of experience) who have recently graduated from that program who met

once a month for dinner and to share “teaching stories” (p. 83). The data presented in this section are from a conversation that evolved out of several meetings of this group. Mari is a first year teacher who has been struggling with a group of fourth-grade “delinquents” with whom she has been working. She was consistently frustrated about their lack of respect for authority and focused on engaging the students in quiet seatwork rather than looking deeper at the reasons for the students’ misbehavior. In spite of her frequent attendance to and involvement in this conversation group, she interacted differently with others in the group as she was often defiant and voiced that none of the suggestions or teaching stories that were shared related to her practice and would not work in her school. Her solution to the problem was to engage the 12 interested students in activities in the front of the room (mostly girls), and to leave the disrupting 5 students (mostly boys) in the back. She also toyed with the idea of simply retaining the students who were not interested in doing any of the work and who constantly challenged her authority. Mari did not make a connection to any of the other stories being shared until one member of the group suggested that the boys’ attention might be better focused by incorporating certain activities from the science curriculum, and Mari acknowledged that science was an area of collective interest among students in her classroom. Following this suggestion, Mari began to speak more openly to the group about her specific concerns regarding implementation of the science activities – her students’ academic work and her frustration with her inability to control them in the classroom. The others in the group then shared some of the ways that they handled anger among students and this data set is presented below.

Christie (first-year teacher): Children who have been abused are very guarded with adults. You have to talk straight to them. You have to let them know that you are a human being.

Mari: What should I say?

Christie: You’ve really hurt my feelings. I’m not talking to you.

Mari: I don’t know how to do that. All my life, I’ve been taught to ignore stuff like this. When I was a little girl and got teased about the way I looked [she was the only Asian student in the school], my mom would tell me, “Just ignore them.” The teachers all tell me to do the same thing.

Emily (first-year teacher, to Christie): If she does that, isn't she showing she has a weak side, a soft side? [Emily, too, has been told to let such things slide and not to let her emotions show.]

Christie: That's faulty logic.

James (senior): They need to see another side of you.

Christie: This is where the "us against them" mentality comes from.

Susan Haver (co-facilitator): If you don't react, you give one of three messages – that it's okay to talk to you and one another like that; that it's not okay, but you're not going to react; or that it's not okay, but you don't care.

(Rust & Orland, 2001, p. 87-88)

At the next group meeting, Mari announced that she had tried express to the boys how their behavior in class made her feel, and she shared that one of the boys had responded by telling her that he didn't like how she had been treating him either. The group was excited for her as they realized that she and her students were now communicating with one another. They encouraged Mari to continue to look for new ways to interact with these students and to engage them in the classroom. Mari found small successes as the students slowly became less openly defiant and went on to complete the year on a more positive note. Mari began the next year with a new group of kindergarten students and focused early in the year on developing an open communication with her students and looking at individual student needs.

Following Clark's (1999) account of the Zone of Proximal Development and his description of expertise as socially constructed through interaction rather than existing a priori, Rust and Orland (2001) argue that the above is an example of professional development through peer mediation (p. 99). They define peer mediation as a concept where one teacher with a higher level of expertise in one area supports another teacher of lower expertise in that area which in turn raises the developmental bar of both the individual and the group. Unfortunately, the authors do not explain or expand upon this claim, and as mentioned earlier in this chapter the existence of mediation alone does not automatically lead to development. As mentioned earlier, numerous studies have been conducted on peer interactions. These interactions have maintained that mediation can take place between two learners with similar ZPDs. It is important to note,

however, that interactions between peers would be different from those involving a more capable peer or expert. In this regard, some studies on peer mediation suggest that the peers do not adequately tune their mediation to the ZPD and consequently provide excessive or insufficient mediation (Wertsch & Hickmann 1987) while other researchers have concluded that peers can be effective mediators but only when they have been trained to do so (Costa & Garmston 2002; Tzurriel & Shamir 2002). Nevertheless, because Rust and Orland do not carry out a more detailed analysis of Mari's development, it might appear at first glance that these teachers were simply getting together to vent. Indeed, the fact that Rust and Orland do not explain what exactly has developed or how the group's suggestions brought about this development, leaves much room for further analysis. In what follows, I will revisit the scenario from a SCT perspective.

The data presented in Rust and Orland's chapter portrays Mari's development of effective classroom communication through a shift in her construction of both the issue in the classroom and of herself as a teacher. In the beginning, Mari's interaction with others in the conversation group was focused on presenting the students in her classroom as "problems" that needed to be fixed. She saw her role in the classroom as an authoritative disciplinarian who handled problems (i.e. moving disruptive students to the back of the room or retaining those students who did not do the work) through teacher control, rather than trying to understand the reasons for the students' misbehavior and thereby change the behavior. She was, therefore, more reactive than proactive in her classroom management stance.

Susan Haver (co-facilitator): If you don't react, you give one of three messages – that it's okay to talk to you and one another like that; that it's not okay, but you're not going to react; or that it's not okay, but you don't care.

By allowing student voices to be heard and acknowledged, Mari's peers in the conversation group mediated her development in changing her classroom practice from being a teacher who simply 'handled' the problem, to one who listened to student needs.

Christie: You should go back and talk with him when he's not being hostile or misbehaving. Catch him being good and reinforce it.  
James: This will resonate with him  
(Rust & Orland, 2001, p. 88)

She learned to be more proactive and to look at both the context and kinds of student interaction as being essential elements to creating and maintaining an effective classroom environment. She was also led to reflect on how her personal history influenced the way she chose to deal with the disruptive students.

... each of us tried to appeal to Mari's better self and to encourage her to look beyond the student's behavior to what might be motivating it and what she might do to change the situation... I tried it. I told one of the boys that I didn't like the way he was treating me, that he'd hurt my feelings."  
(Rust & Orland, 2001, p.86, 88)

As seen in the above data set, Mari's involvement in this conversation group resulted in the changes in how she oriented to her students and her classroom practice. The following will provide examples from the scenario to substantiate this claim.

In the data presented above, the conversation group is comprised of several individual zones of proximal development, as each teacher within the group is at a different developmental level in their understandings of teaching and learning. Despite the notion that the members of the group were novice teachers, their prior experiences would have resulted in a variety of skills that each of them possessed. As the group worked together, they co-constructed a group expertise that enabled them to mediate each other's learning. Their individual ZPDs are also constantly changing, with the conversations functioning as mediational tools that affect learning and development, which in turn promote action in the classroom (Lantolf, 2000). Conversations allow individuals to socialize and utilize language as a tool to solve problems and share ideas rather than doing it in isolation. However, these conversations need to be structured to include both types and techniques of mediation to be considered effective tools that lead to individual and group development, as the availability of mediation alone does not result in development. In the

scenario presented above, the conversation group provided Mari with a secure environment to voice her frustrations and the group members raised her level of cognitive development by encouraging, challenging and providing feedback to her dilemma. The group prompted Mari to think back to a situation that she had experienced during her childhood that influenced her interactions with the disruptive students. The group utilized effective types of mediation since the encouragement and organization of the group resulted in Mari feeling comfortable to share aspects of her classroom practice with which she was struggling. The group's discourse was focused on helping Mari "solve the problem" that she had presented by sharing examples of how they had acted in similar situations. Prior to mediation, Mari's ZAD (zone of actual development) was centered on her emotions and the negative behavior exhibited by the students. She was unable to sift through these overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and frustration to get at the root of the problem by looking at the variety of perspectives that are present in the classroom.

In addition to the types of mediation provided, the conversation group also utilized specific techniques of mediation such as hints, directives, questions etc. while guiding Mari to create change in her classroom environment, without which Mari would have been unable to view her teaching and classroom practice through a different lens. The other teachers in the group provided information that was initially scaffolded through personal teacher stories that included potential solutions that later led to explicit directions for how she should handle the situation. These stories did not resonate with Mari until she discovered that science really was an area that could impact her relationship with her students. Mari was guided or mediated to the realization that her classroom teaching was directly related to understanding student needs and having those needs met through an open dialogue with students. Mari's ZAD was therefore connected to her ZPD through the mediation of a group discourse, or in other words, she was able look through a different lens with the assistance of her more capable peers (with regards to this specific



situation), than she would be able to do on her own. From the perspective of SCT, an interesting possibility not reported by Rust and Orland but worth pursuing in future research is how participation in the discussion may have also impacted the development of the other teachers.

Christie and James provide one way of approaching the problem by suggesting that Mari express her emotions and communicate her frustrations to her students. Their focus was for Mari to be compassionate, communicative and honest, and to help the students see her humanity.

You have to talk straight to them”, or “You’ve really hurt my feelings. I’m not talking to you”, or “They need to see another side of you” or “This is where the “us against them” mentality comes from.”

They also helped Mari see how her past negative experience as being the only Asian student had resulted in her trying to ignore the problems rather than looking for the reasons for it. Although Mari was now thinking about her classroom practice through a different lens, i.e. communicating with her students, it wasn’t until the co-facilitator presents a directive that Mari realizes the impact of not addressing the issue. (“If you don’t react, you give one of three messages...”) It was this mediational technique that eventually resulted in Mari implementing the suggestions gleaned from the conversation into her classroom practice. This was just the beginning of changes in Mari’s learning and teaching. The interactions enabled Mari to begin to look at her relationships with her students and her classroom practice in a new way.

In spite of Mari’s apparent success at creating a better classroom environment, this alone from a Vygotskian perspective does not necessarily indicate that development has taken place. As many Vygotsky scholars have argued (e.g., Leontiev 1992, Galperin 1977, Feuerstein, Rand & Rynders 1988) development must transcend a given context or problem and must be transferred to more complex or different activities. In Mari’s situation, she used the knowledge that she had gained from her involvement in the conversation group in creating a shift in the construction of both the problem and her role within the classroom. Rust and Orland provide some evidence suggesting that Mari extended her new perspective beyond the specific problem the group had

addressed: the following year she endeavored to establish a communicative classroom environment in her kindergarten classroom. It would seem, then, that she had transferred her orientation to her students and to her instruction from a fourth grade room to one with younger children who needed similar intervention strategies. However, we are not told how successfully she implemented these strategies, and this is surely an important part of development. What strategies would she use to engage the students and involve them in the classroom's activities? Is it possible that Mari was more comfortable working with younger children than older ones? Without taking up these questions Rust and Orland do not provide a full account of any development that may have occurred.

As seen in the data presented, discourse can be an effective mediational tool that results in changes in a teacher's understanding of learning and teaching. It also supports the claim that teachers are more likely to affect change in their classroom practice when they are provided with a safe and nurturing environment to share both dilemmas and positive teaching stories, than when they are mandated to attend workshops in which external authorities address general pedagogical issues. Moreover, analyzing the data from a SCT reveals that the nature of this dialoguing with colleagues can help teachers orient to problems differently and arrive at creative solutions to classroom problems, and this connects well with Vygotsky's central claim that what individuals can do today with mediation they will be able to do tomorrow alone.

## CHAPTER 3

### Research Design and Methodology

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The present study breaks new ground by taking a different theoretical perspective on teacher learning from that normally used in the literature. This exploratory study utilizes a small data set and follows a case study approach as it presents a new theoretical grounding to CFGs. It is hoped that this study will be the impetus for larger scale studies that look at teacher learning from a Vygotskian perspective. The Sociocultural Theory of mind (SCT), is a particularly appropriate theoretical lens for studying teacher development through CFG because it emphasizes the importance of mediated learning. In other words, both SCT and CFGs assume that learning is mediated by participation in social practices and therefore a good theoretical match. Teacher learning from an SCT perspective looks very different from other learning theories (cognitive, constructivist, positivist, behavioral, etc.) Proceeding from a Vygotskian perspective, the proposed project sets out to explore the following questions:

- 4) How can a Vygotskian theoretical framework contribute to our understanding of teacher learning within the context of CFGs?
- 5) How do the presenting teachers in CFGs work through their dilemma of practice (prior to the discussion, during it, and after it)? In particular, how does the CFG process lead to shifts in the presenting teacher's thinking about their dilemma?
- 6) How does the selection and use of a specific protocol (tool) that is used in the CFG process mediate the presenting teachers' learning?

The next section in this chapter focuses on presenting the reader with a background for how the teachers were trained in the CFG process. This is an important aspect of the group's collective history and has a direct bearing on the data that were collected as will be discussed later on in the dissertation. Section three recounts how the participants were selected for this study along with a description of how the groups were created and maintained. Section four briefly reviews the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have impacted this study. Section five presents the approach used for data collection along with a rationale for taking a qualitative rather than a quantitative stance. The final section presents aspects of data analysis along with issues of validity, credibility and trustworthiness that accompanies studies that involve the use of narrative data.

### **3.2 Background**

This dissertation looked at data collected from CFG groups in a small university town in the Mid-Atlantic region. The first groups were formed after members received training in February 2004 by two nationally trained educational consultants from National School Reform Faculty (NSRF). This training laid the foundation for the researcher's work and for the data that were collected. It provides the reader with a clearer picture of the context for this study and will be discussed in detail in this section.

The training took place over four consecutive days and was open to any currently employed teachers in this district's eleven elementary and two middle schools. The training was also offered to district administrators, curriculum support personnel and University faculty associated with the area's Professional Development School (PDS). As a result, the group that attended the training sessions was a conglomerate of teachers and University personnel with a variety of interests and experiences. Prior to the training session, the attendees were instructed to

reflect on any aspects of their practice that relates to their work in schools. The three questions that were to guide the training as per the email that was sent from the consultants were:

- What is a professional learning community and how does it contribute to students learning?
- How do I as a facilitator, foster adult dialogue and collaboration that results in high levels of student learning?
- What are the human resources and cultural conditions that insure equity as we learn to adapt our practice to enhance the learning of all students?

The second directive was to have all attendees bring samples of student work that either raised a dilemma or one that needed revision in some way. Thus the practitioners were already thinking about and reflecting on their work with students when they began the training. The training seminar conducted in this town was termed Conversation as Inquiry Group (CIG) training. The group in this area was therefore known as a CIG as the PDS program was currently advocating that inquiry into teacher practice was an essential aspect of teacher development. Hence the term CIG further emphasized that teacher discourse enhance classroom inquiry. It is important to note that CFG and CIG are the same in terms of the assumptions, processes and the outcomes that govern the group's work, and differ in terminology alone.

The first day of training was devoted to presenting the attendees with background information that impacted CIG work. The large group was led in many activities that involved reflecting on current teaching practice and to define what they hoped to gain from the training experience. The two consultants also provided the group members with opportunities to present dilemmas in their practice that they could receive multiple perspectives on. The consultants acted as the facilitators as they used the protocols to incite member discourse. During the second training day, this large group was divided into two smaller, equal groups that kept teachers from a specific school together, but also included a few members of the University faculty. Therefore, while there were several members who were known to each other in both groups, there were

members who were unknown. One of the consultants was assigned to guide each group through their experiences for the remaining training days. The training was focused on providing the groups with opportunities to present their own dilemmas of practice and to facilitate the process while the trainer offered guidance and support. At the end of the intense four-day training, each group reported that they had succeeded in building trust and rapport with each other. The topics that were covered in the four day seminar were structured around research that had been done on professional learning communities. Much of this research focused on studies that had looked at teacher conversation as method of professional development (McDonald et.al., 2003, Blythe and Allen, 2004, Schmoker, 2004).

### **3.3 Participant Selection**

As mentioned above, the CIG group in this area began in February 2004 as a conglomeration of teachers from several elementary and middle schools of a school district in central Pennsylvania. Although this group began with approximately twenty-six members meeting in a large group during the training seminar (as discussed earlier), it has since split into two separate equally numbered groups. These smaller groups were created to allow each member the opportunity to participate as a presenter and/or a facilitator by the end of the school year. A similar method of group selection was carried out in the 2005-2006 school year as mentioned in the preceding section. The groups that were created during the training session continued to meet once a week for the remainder of the school year. No data were collected during this time, but it is important to note that both the individual and collective histories that were created during this period impacted the groups' work in the following years.

Data were collected for portions of the 2004-2005 and the 2005-2006 school years after research clearance was obtained. In an attempt to include all members of the area CIGs, this

study was open to teachers in both groups. The researcher met with both groups and explained the research study and the potential outcome of the study. All group members were presented with the informed consent forms and a chance to review an outline of the study prior to providing consent. Group members were reminded that the participation in the study was voluntary and were not pressured to be involved.

In September 2004, all teachers and faculty associated with the area Professional Development School were invited to participate in the CIG. That year's CIG groups were provided with the option of participating as a variable credit University course. Members could therefore choose to take the course for one to three course credits, which would then ascertain the extent of their involvement in the process. Journals and a final paper were required for three credits while only participation was required for one credit. CIG members could participate to the extent that they were willing and often opted for either the journals or the videotaping. One member of one of the CIG groups for the 2004-2005 school year did not want to participate at all and as a result videotaping that group's sessions were not possible. Data collection from those sessions came from individual member journals and reflective interviews. In addition, data were not collected for the first few months of the group meetings as the course met as a large group to both review protocols and introduce the process to the new members. After three large group sessions, the group split into two smaller groups both of which had a mix of new and returning members. It is interesting to note that although both groups were randomly created, each group had one or more University faculty in attendance. Unlike the initial training group where teachers from the same school were in the same group, these groups were true conglomerations of teachers from all the participating schools. This was done to help new members receive guidance and support from those who had already participated in a CIG. A similar participant and CIG member selection process took place for the 2005-2006 school year. It is important to note that

data collection this year began with the first large group session so that there was representation of that process in the data as well.

Prior to discussing the data collection and analysis procedures utilized, a review of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks is needed to ascertain a shared knowledge base. The next section reviews the frameworks that have guided this dissertation.

### **3.4 Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

The following sections present the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have guided this study. The terms *conceptual* and *theoretical* serve as a way to distinguish the two frameworks as per the literature that is currently available on these topics. These frameworks have already been discussed in detail in previous chapters, so this simply serves as a reminder of the topics that directly impact this study.

#### ***3.4A Conceptual Framework***

The concept of Critical Friends Groups (CFG) was created at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform in 1994. This teacher professional development program is collaborative, time intensive and practitioner-driven. These groups strengthen collegial bonds among teachers through close reflection on individual practice and student thinking and learning. As with other collaborative models of professional development, CFG is not meant to be an evaluative tool, but rather a means for teachers to direct their own learning and reflection. Teachers publicly state their goals for both their students and themselves, and they examine curriculum, student work and various issues in the school culture that impact student learning (Dunne & Honts, 1998, McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, McDonald, 2003, Wienbaum, Allen, Blythe, Simon, Seidel, Rubin, 2004). In other words, teachers are both the directors and the creators of their own learning as



they bring issues that are present in their practice to be discussed collaboratively. Teachers are therefore provided with opportunities to reflect beyond surface classroom issues to deep dilemmas that are at the root of their practice. Participants in a CFG pledge to take the time to work hard for each other during each monthly two-hour session, with the goal of understanding the issue being presented while suspending judgments. In addition, team members are expected to be good listeners who ask clarifying and probing questions that push teachers' thinking to see issues from different perspectives.

All conversations within CFGs are structured around specific protocols (procedural steps and guidelines) that are both time- and topic-driven. These protocols were designed to enable teachers to closely analyze and reflect on a piece of student work, their own teaching practices, or external resources, e.g. texts, videos, etc. a. Although protocols may differ in their format and the way in which they are used, most share common elements: sharing the question or dilemma, inviting questions from the participants, giving and receiving feedback, and promoting self-reflection. Allen and Blythe (2004) mention that protocols guide conversations to look beyond the surface of a "problem" to the many layers that lie beneath it. They argue that protocols should "promote among colleagues both exploration of important areas of teaching and learning as well as sustained collaborative inquiry into particular questions about teaching and learning" (p.11). In addition, protocols invite teachers to participate in the discussion while taking the time to delve into multiple aspects of the problem being presented. The conversation is structured into timed segments that invite specific kinds of talk: describing the problem, asking clarifying or probing questions, providing warm (strengths) or cold (weaknesses) feedback (Little, Gearhart, Curry, Kafta, 2003, McDonald et.al., 2003). Protocols are therefore designed to look at different aspects of teacher practice by either raising open-ended questions that emerge from work or seeking solutions to specific problems that exist.

The CFG process begins with a presenting teacher and the session facilitator or coach collaboratively planning the CFG meeting. Although this pre-conference is not an essential element of the critical friends process, most discussions are prefaced with a planning meeting that is either informal and short, or more formal where time is dedicated to planning the presentation prior to the group discussion. During the group meeting, the presenter shares the information as previously planned. The facilitator uses the format of the protocol to guide the discussions and to keep it focused. Although these protocols are highly structured, they are not completely rigid, but can be slightly altered to fit the group's needs and learning goals. The participants are expected to be thoughtful as they ask questions and engage in critical and positive discourse in order to understand the situation from a variety of perspectives. At the end of the presentation, the group discusses the effectiveness of the protocol and the impact that the topic had on both the individual and group learning.

As should be clear from the above discussion, CFGs provide a structured environment where teachers can “talk through” a dilemma, collaboratively coming to understand the problem and propose solutions. Research has shown that CFG members are more likely to take risks in their teaching by trying new things; to look for connections between the curriculum and assessment; to collaborate with other teachers; to take on leadership roles within the school community; and to shift their view of classroom instruction from being teacher-centered to student-centered (Dune, Nave, Lewis, 2000, Franzak, 2002, Allen & Blythe, 2004, Schmoker, 2004).

While this group promotes collaborative work among teachers, it is difficult to ascertain how the CFG sessions actually lead to changes in how teachers think about and approach both current and future dilemmas of practice. This is the crux of the argument that CFGs are an effective model of teacher professional development. Learning through mediated activity is also a central tenet of SCT and therefore strengthens the connection between these two frameworks.

Owing to the dual emphasis on both speaking and changes in conceptualizations in this theory, it is an appropriate framework for exploring if and how this form of teacher collaboration impacts teacher development. Hence, the following sections will provide a brief discussion on the essential elements of SCT that apply to teacher development through discourse.

### ***3.4B Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical construct that is utilized in this dissertation has been presented in detail in the literature review in Chapter 2. To recap, the central notion to this theory is that Vygotsky believed that people do not interact directly with the environment, but that these interactions are always and everywhere mediated. Mediation could take place either through cultural artifacts (such as physical tools and symbols) or by other human beings through discourse. Several studies have supported Vygotsky's claim that mediation enables people to achieve more than they would be able to do alone (Gindis, 2003, Miller, 2003, Ohta, 2000, Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). Language is in fact the most important mediational tool. Just as cultural mediation provides assistance from past generations, social mediation provides assistance from our contemporaries. This mediation does not have to be done by an "expert" as every person's prior experiences results in different perspectives and ways of approaching and solving problems. In other words, as this study is exploring learning through teacher collaborative discourse, looking at how language mediates learning will be central to the study.

As this study looks at the ways in which teacher discourse leads to potential future development, a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was selected. The following section presents the rationale for this approach along with a discussion of the specific methods used in data collection.

### **3.5 Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

Researchers have emphasized the benefits of a qualitative rather than a quantitative research design in evaluating program effectiveness. Patton (1998) writes that qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to gather detailed and descriptive information of the various facets of a program as they immerse themselves in the complexity of the real world through both physical proximity and developing bonds of trust, confidentiality and shared experiences. In addition to capturing multiple perspectives through direct documentation, qualitative research also enables the researcher to pay attention to the situational constraints that impact the study both in positive and negative ways (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). This study, therefore, utilizes qualitative inquiry to analyze and describe how teachers create meaning and their role as agents of change within an educational setting. The study is carried out within a Vygotskian theoretical framework and guided by a set of questions (discussed earlier) to explore claims that participation in Critical Friends Groups results in teacher professional development. In the following sections, the various methods of data collection and analysis to be used will be discussed in detail.

As this study takes its focus from qualitative inquiry, substantiating the validity of the data can be difficult. The researcher has attempted to provide various perspectives in this study with the use of multiple data sources. Researchers have coined the term, triangulation, for the use of multiple methods or perspectives in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, Patton, 1998). The focus of this study is on providing detailed accounts of the interactions that take place during the CFG sessions as well as taking the participants' reflections on the sessions and their own development into consideration. Therefore, qualitative procedures of data collection and analysis are appropriate. In addition, this study is structured around a Vygotskian theoretical framework, which is aimed at understanding development in the terms of both actual performance as well as how it is talked about. Hence, the sources of data that will be used are complimentary in creating a detailed picture, which is akin to the notion of data triangulation as discussed in research

literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002, Patton, 1998). It is important to note that while the data collected and the study itself is interpretive in nature, the subsequent analysis will be utilized to trace teacher learning from an SCT perspective.

In the section to follow, the various methods of data collection along with a description of the types of data will be presented. These data were narrative in nature and portray various sides of the presenting teacher's experience as they grapple with a variety of classroom dilemmas. Data from many members of the CIG (not just the presenter and the facilitator) help both to create a comprehensive picture of the dilemma and the teachers' orientation to it after the CIG process. While this study does not employ a narrative inquiry into the CIG process, the narrative data that are utilized in this dissertation help provide a basis for the work that teachers do in their classrooms. This narrative data helps to situate the story of the everyday realities that teachers face within the continuum of their experiences both within the classroom and as a part of the greater school culture (Polkinghorne, 1988, Bruner, 1990). The focus is thereby not on discovering the intricacies what is going on in these teachers' classrooms, but on *how* these teachers are interpreting and explaining their experiences through their orientation to the dilemma that they are presented to the group. The pieces of narrative data that were collected as described below provide a rich conglomeration of both individual and collective experiences that are strongly mediated by systematic social interaction through the CIG process.

### ***3.5A Data Collection***

Participants in the study were teachers and University faculty taking part in a local CFG or CIG during portions of the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. It is important to note that the researcher was a member of one of these CIGs and was present during the group data collection sessions as a participant observer. Teachers in all groups were invited to participate in

this study. All participation was strictly voluntary, and all relevant Office of Research Protection (ORP) guidelines were adhered to.

This study involved three different forms of data collection, including: 1) direct observation and videotaping of parts of the CFG process 2) in-depth and open-ended interviews with presenters and 3) written documents that include reflections and student work. Data from the direct observations yielded detailed descriptions of the activities, behaviors, actions and emotions that emerged as a result of the interactions and organizational processes of the CIG. The interviews and written documents provided specific information about an individual member's knowledge, perceptions, opinions and emotions related to their experiences as presenters in this CIG. Each of these data collection methods will be elaborated on below.

### *3.5A.1 Direct Observation*

Data collection began with videotaping the various parts of a CIG session. CIG members interested participating in this study emailed the dates and times of their pre-conference sessions so that the researcher could be present. These planning sessions were video recorded to observe the interactions that took place between the presenter and the facilitator as they talked about the dilemma and planned the approach for the group session. This planning session also involved choosing the protocol to be used and framing the question that will be later presented to the group. Following the pre-conference, the presenter and the facilitator were the focus of the video recorded group session. Particular attention was paid to the way that they presented, talked about the problem and used the guidelines of the protocol that was selected. Although the other group members' comments were audible on the tape, their identity was not clear. Seven pre-conference and group sessions were video recorded although not all were transcribed in their entirety. Ten different CIG group members participated as either and/or presenters and facilitators. Although each session involved a different presenter and facilitator, a few members participated in this

manner a few times. For example, both Anna and Catherine were taped both as a presenter and as a facilitator and although the sessions in which they facilitated were not fully transcribed, parts of those sessions will be used in subsequent chapters to validate claims about teacher learning through collaborative discourse.

### *3.5A.2 Interviews*

Following the group session, the presenter and the facilitator were asked to provide a commentary about the decisions, emotions and thoughts that they experienced while watching the videotaped CIG sessions in the form of a stimulated recall (Shavelson & Stern, 1981, Johnson, 1995). These members were asked to be specific about what they recalled thinking through the session, the comments that they felt impacted the changes (or lack thereof) in their understanding of the dilemma, and to describe why they said what they did, etc. This is especially important, as both the presenter and the facilitator do not engage in the group's interaction other than at specified times and may not be allowed the opportunity to interact or share their thoughts and feelings during the course of the session. The stimulated recall prompted reflection on the part of the teachers and provided insights into their potential development. Allen and Blythe (2004) caution against having discussions about the problem right after the group session as the teacher needs to have some space for individual reflection. Hence, the stimulated recall sessions were conducted a while after the group sessions had taken place. It is important to note that although all the members were initially willing to participate in all avenues of this study, two members were later unable to participate in the stimulated recall sessions due to time constraints. Therefore, five different stimulated recall sessions were conducted altogether: two from the 2004-2005 school year and three from the 2005-2006 school year.

Following the stimulated recall sessions, two presenters were selected for further interviews. These particular presenters were selected for the follow up sessions based in the

apparent impact of their dilemmas in the self-reported growth of group members as a whole. These two teachers had presented interesting dilemmas that were mentioned several times in the journals of other members present in at the group sessions. These dilemmas were vital to the group members' collective and individual growth and could present the study with interesting background information for the ways that the teachers generally approach and solve classroom-based dilemmas. The teachers were invited to participate in a short interview to gain a narrative perspective on their approach to their classroom practice. The interview questions were first sent via email to the teachers so that they had a chance to prepare for the interview. The questions that were presented to the two teachers are documented below:

- *Talk about your teaching background. Think about a specific experience or memory that impacted the way you approach your work with students.*
- *How is your classroom teaching philosophy unique?*
- *What is one aspect of your work that is vital to you?*
- *What steps did you take to solve the dilemma that you brought before the group both prior and subsequent to the CIG session?*

### *3.5A.3 Written Documents*

In addition to collecting data through observations and interviews, written documents or classroom artifacts were collected from participating members. For example, as mentioned earlier, the CIG session could be focused on student work. The presenting teacher brought samples of student work that were closely analyzed during the group sessions. In these instances, copies of these documents were collected and utilized when analyzing the effectiveness of the protocol itself as a mediating artifact. The presenter often also kept notes during the process. As they are not provided with space to share their reflections during the course of the process, the



choices that the presenter made while taking the notes were also analyzed. Three different sessions on student work were closely analyzed for this study.

Several teachers in these CIGs kept reflective journals that have detailed their experiences in each group session as part of their course involvement. Ten members from the various groups who had chosen to participate in this aspect of data collection sent copies of their journals either by email or postal mail. Each participating member sent at least five journals that were looked at for the choice of language structures that were utilized when talking about and understanding the problem that was presented at the group session.

Another source of written data came from emails that the presenter and the facilitator sent at various points during the CIG process. The emails often addressed logistical issues with place and times for meetings, but often also expressed initial feelings about the dilemma that they were thinking about presenting to the group. These email correspondences were collected and analyzed for the language that the teachers used while talking about their dilemmas prior to and after the CIG session.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Teachers bring a variety of individual and collective experiences to the table. They often link moments in the present to similar situations they encountered in the past. Therefore research that attempts to understand such multifaceted experiences must go beyond traditional quantitative methodologies that seek to measure the presence or intensity of variables and to establish correlations among sets of factors (Ratner 1997). As Bruner (1986) argues, narrative inquiry allows the researcher to be entrenched in the work as s/he looks for the hidden meanings or patterns present in these experiences. Each of the teachers who presented at these CIG meetings were inquiring into their practice through the vehicle of structured conversations. While this

dissertation does not deal directly with narrative inquiry, the data that were collected were narrative in nature and seeks to provide glimpses into the thoughts and actions as teachers investigate ways to solve classroom dilemmas. Bruner, as cited by Lyons and LaBoskey (2002), contends that narrative research takes place simultaneously through action and consciousness where the focus is on “what those acting know, think, or feel” (p. 15). Narratives are more than just telling stories of events that occur in the classroom or in the past. It forces the teacher to look past the surface for the meaning that is hidden in these experiences. Thus, narratives involve interpreting and constructing meaning from a set of experiences. Lyons and LaBoskey define narrative in the following manner:

Narrative practices are intentional, reflective human actions, socially and contextually situated, in which teachers with their students, other colleagues, or researchers interrogate their teaching practices to construct the meaning and interpretation of some compelling or puzzling aspect of teaching and learning through the production of narratives that lead to understanding, changed practices and new hypothesis. (2002, p.21)

Dewey (1938) also argues that teachers’ classroom practices are in large part shaped by their personal life experiences. According to Dewey, life experiences do not occur in a vacuum, but are a result of contact and communication with others in social situations. He asserts that these experiences take place both internally and externally as people connect with others in the world. Internal experiences are the emotions, beliefs, and attitudes that determine how a person will act in a given situation. For example a teacher needs to know what is going on in the heads of the students that s/he is teaching. The teacher needs to be sympathetic to the understanding and attitudes that their students are developing by looking at both their own as well as other’s experiences. Although experiences do become internalized, they are conditions in the environment that define how they will be used in future situations. This is similar to Vygotsky’s notion that people are always and everywhere mediated (Vygotsky, 1978).

As argued earlier in this chapter, SCT is a strong theoretical lens through which to understand teacher learning. Therefore all of the data collected were utilized in answering the first research question, “How can a Vygotskian theoretical framework contribute to our understanding of teacher learning within the context of CFGs?” Members of the area CIG who participated in the study presented data that indicated learning beyond simply the level of participating in teacher directed conversations. The following chapters documents the specific areas of growth that two teachers, Anna and Catherine portray as they participate in the CIG sessions. It is important to explain the reasons for these teachers to be focused on in such detail. These two sessions seemed to contain all the data necessary to answer the four research questions presented earlier in this chapter. It could be further argued that delving into Anna and Catherine’s experiences would provide a depth to the process and aspects of learning as set forth by SCT that is not currently seen in literature on CFGs. A SCT perspective also documents the kinds and amount of mediation that was needed to attain the learning that took place. The narrative of their prior experiences historically traces their growth from how they initially understood and talked about teaching and learning to how these understandings changed as a result of their interactions within the CIG. The remainder of this section will provide the reader with a discussion of the different data sets that were utilized in answering the remaining research questions presented earlier in this chapter.

As the initial data collected in the form of videotaped CIG sessions and member journals were reviewed, it was discovered that two specific sessions were referenced numerous times in the journals. While coding the journal data, it was found that members used language such as “exciting”, “forced me to think outside the box”, “challenged my understanding of behavior modification procedures”, “made me think more about what I do in my own classroom” when talking about these two sessions. As the participating members sent journals after each CIG session, it is also important to note that these two sessions were talked about at other times as

well. The two sessions that were referenced time and time again were presented by Anna and Catherine and were therefore utilized in understanding teacher learning through the CIG. In addition, these two sessions seemed to greatly impact group members' learning and were essential in answering the final research question "How does participation in a CFG (as discussants only and not presenters) result in changes in thinking?"

Anna and Catherine's interviews and transcripts of the CIG sessions were analyzed using grounded content analysis. Each of these narratives was carefully read to determine the connections between the texts and the experiences and/or the knowledge that these teachers brought to the situation. Each of these connections became the themes that were utilized in analyzing the ways in which the teachers understood the dilemma that they brought to the CIG group. The information gleaned from the interviews of Anna and Catherine, the stimulated recalls of their CIG sessions and the written documents that they shared during the session were utilized in answering the second research question, "How do the presenting teachers in CFGs work through their dilemma of practice (prior to the discussion, during it, and after it)? In particular, how does the CFG process lead to shifts in the presenting teacher's thinking about their dilemma?" In addition to these data sets, the two CIG sessions in which Anna and Catherine shared their dilemma of practice were transcribed and coded. These data were closely analyzed for themes that emerged with respect to how the teachers and the group members talked about the dilemma. Each case will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

Question three, "How do the specific protocols (tools) selected mediate the presenting teachers' learning?" requires that the two protocols that were used in both Anna and Catherine's sessions be closely analyzed. In addition the transcribed sessions will also play a role in answering this question as the decisions that the facilitator makes while following the protocol is paramount to both the individual and the group learning that takes place during the sessions. It is important to note that while Anna and Catherine's presented sessions were central to study, the

sessions where they were involved as facilitators were also used to support the claims made in the next two chapters. Therefore, the videotaped sessions, protocols written documents from those additional sessions will also be referred to and presented in the case studies.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

Dewey (1938) maintains that experiences are akin to building blocks: present experiences are built on ones of the past and serve as the base for ones to come in the future. Thus, experiences occur in continuity with one another and are constantly being changed and negotiated. As a person understands the meaning of the experiences that s/he has encountered and makes changes in the present situation based on the outcome of those in the past, this leads to “growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally” (1938, p. 36). In his argument about growth, Dewey distinguishes two types of experiences: “educative and mis-educative”. He defines the latter as an experience “that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p.25). Educative experiences, on the other hand, propel a person forward by “...arousing curiosity, strengthening initiative, and setting up desires and purposes...” that can be used later in the future.

Dewey’s stance is very similar to that of Feuerstein’s (1988) idea of direct and mediated learning. In this theory, only mediated learning, i.e., experiences where someone is there to help another engage and make sense of the situation makes them ready for future learning situations. That is to say that the mediator helps a person develop. Thus, engaging in mediated learning makes a person better positioned for future learning. An educator needs to look at both their own past and their students’ current experiences to evaluate how to render various learning experiences educative rather than mis-educative. Dewey’s ideas are not dissimilar from those of Vygotsky (1978) or Feuerstein (1988) who both theorized that educative experiences or

meditative learning experiences are basically about development, which means understanding the world in new ways. The significance of this for classroom practice is that it means that all learners are not the same, but instead have histories which determine the kinds and amounts of mediation they will need in order for classroom activities to be educative rather than mis-educative. Pretending that all learners should be treated the same ignores history and therefore means that any given pedagogical task will likely be mis-educative for many learners. It is important for educators to delve into their own backgrounds to search for attitudes, biases and emotions that inform their knowledge of their students and their teaching practice.

The following data analysis chapters present a narrative account of two different teachers' search for solutions to unique classroom dilemmas. Their experiential stories have led to transformations in not only in how they view their classrooms and students but teaching as a whole.

## CHAPTER 4

### CATHERINE: Reframing Student Behavior Through Mediation

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will illustrate the CIG process, and the various forms of mediation that are a part of it, by following one teacher's experience from her initial identification of her classroom dilemma, to her planning with the facilitator, the CIG session itself, and finally a follow-up interview with the teacher focusing on any changes to her practice that resulted from this process. The teacher, Catherine (a pseudonym), was struggling with a dilemma that is all too familiar to classroom teachers – “that one child, and there's always one, who you just can't get to behave” (Catherine's journal, February 2005). While at first Catherine was unable to articulate the precise nature of her dilemma, through interaction with her facilitator she realized that her frustration came not only from the child's behavior but from her own inability to identify a way of addressing it that was both effective and in line with her overall teaching philosophy. Specifically, Catherine's expressed view of how she wanted her classroom to be emphasized a learning community characterized by mutual respect where students had the freedom to express themselves. Through the CIG process, she came to believe that the way she had approached one student's behavior was not the most conducive to establishing her ideal learning environment. I explain below that Catherine shifted first in her understanding of the dilemma and then in her approach to resolving it, and both of these changes occurred through her participation in the CIG process. I am not claiming that these changes would have been impossible had Catherine not taken part in CIG, only that this process offered multiple types of mediation that facilitated Catherine's reconceptualization as she thought differently about the dilemma; recontextualization as she tried new ways of engaging with the dilemma; and her transformative behavior when dealing with similar future situations. In particular, her planning meetings with her facilitator,

Stephen (a pseudonym), the protocol they selected, and the dialogue that occurred among the group during the CIG session all represent forms of mediation that I will argue were beneficial to Catherine's transformation.

I would like to note at the outset that an unforeseen difficulty made data collection with this particular CIG very complex. Three members of this CIG expressed that they felt the content of their discussions was confidential and that video or audio recording the sessions might inhibit individuals from speaking freely and would therefore make the experience less effective and helpful to the teachers. In retrospect, these sentiments should not have been entirely unpredicted. It is true that CIG requires a great deal of trust among group members, and the presence of a researcher intending to analyze and likely share some of the group's discussions with outsiders, albeit anonymously, is something with which not all teachers will be comfortable and an issue that future research on CIGs may also encounter. In addition, when each CIG sets its own norms at the beginning of the process, confidentiality is almost always one of the norms that group members agree on. Each group typically pays a great deal of attention to this issue, to the extent that any materials that are handed out by the presenter during a CIG session are always returned at the close of the session. In the end, a good deal of information about the session discussed here was obtained through the extensive notes of the group's facilitator, and this was triangulated with Catherine's retrospective comments and the journals of several group members.

This chapter is organized as follows. I first provide background information about Catherine and the dilemma she wanted to bring to her CIG. I then follow Catherine through her planning meeting with Stephen, the CIG session, and a debriefing interview in order to track changes in her thinking and to understand how these were brought about through the CIG process. As I will attempt to show, the dilemma itself changed for Catherine and this in turn impacted the specific actions she chose to take in her classroom. These changes affected not only the student whose behaviors brought about the dilemma in the first place but actually led to new



ideas through the implementation of a student driven home-school journal and a Rock Buddy program used with Catherine's entire class.

#### ***4.1A Catherine's Teaching Philosophy***

Catherine is a tenured teacher with eight years teaching experience in a suburban school district in central Pennsylvania. Her teaching experience began with her year-long internship in a second grade classroom in the same district in which she currently teaches. This internship was the culminating experience of her undergraduate teacher education program and was possible through a university-school district cooperation designed to help teacher trainees bridge their theoretical knowledge of instruction and learning with the realities of the classroom. As a result, Catherine explains that she has always tried to implement a philosophy of teaching that she describes as "student-driven" and "inquiry-based" (Catherine, Teaching philosophy interview, June 2005). She elaborates that she sees herself as "a teacher who strives to help students grow both as individuals and within the group each year" and this requires ongoing "reflection" and "inquiry into [her own] teaching practice". She continues that she views her responsibility to be largely concerned with helping her students form a community that will be optimal for each child's learning:

Students are more likely to take risks as learners if they feel accepted and comfortable to be themselves. I believe that each child should feel included as a contributing member of our classroom community and should be given a space to share both successes and frustrations....So, my classroom provides students with opportunities to interact with others in the room and with materials through collaborative and hands on projects and activities (ibid.). (Catherine, Teaching philosophy interview, June 2005)

These remarks are intended to give a brief introduction to what Catherine valued as a teacher, as this proves relevant to her dilemma and the solution she ultimately pursues, as I

explain later in this chapter. For now, what is important to note is the strong emphasis Catherine places on helping learners create a sense of community within the classroom. Her comment that students should feel accepted and comfortable and willing to take risks underscores her commitment to involving all learners in the creation of this environment. As I argue below, Catherine's values of mutual respect among students and helping students to take responsibility for the classroom community (and consequently their own learning) becomes the key to her eventual resolution of the dilemma. I will now provide background on the dilemma itself as Catherine initially understood it and communicated it to the CIG facilitator during their planning meeting.

#### **4.2 The Dilemma**

Catherine's dilemma began early in the 2005 school year with the arrival of her new class of students. Her class contained more boys than girls and was racially homogeneous with the exception of one African American boy, Jason (a pseudonym). Jason was at the heart of Catherine's dilemma because he simply "didn't mix well with the other children, at least not the way you want, not positive ways" (Catherine's journal, February 2005). She describes Jason as a "very aggressive" child who antagonized his classmates, something she speculated might be intended to get a reaction from her. She mentioned that although Jason's aggression was visible in the classroom, it was especially prevalent on the playground, where he seemed to want to prove that he was the stronger and the more athletic sportsman. However, in spite of his bravado with the other students, he was easily hurt both physically and emotionally by the situations that he would put himself in with other students. Catherine noted that these behaviors seemed to be isolating him from the other students, and she further worried that her interactions with him only reinforced their negative perceptions of him: "It's like they see me all the time correcting him,

‘Don’t do this, stop that’ and I don’t like how I sound so I can imagine what they think but I have to do something” (Catherine’s journal, February 2005).

Catherine’s comment above is interesting because it reveals that she perceived her style of interacting with Jason to be authoritarian. She does not say that she attempted to redirect his attention or to engage him in a more constructive activity. Rather, she uses the term correction to describe how she speaks to him, and the examples she gives (don’t do this, stop that) would support her impression. Catherine seems to feel that in her exchanges with Jason she is positioning herself in way that makes her uncomfortable and is not best for him or the other students. However, at this point she feels that the urgency of the situation demands that she “do something,” even if it is does not match her ideals.

Catherine reports that early during the year she met with Jason’s mother and learned additional details about his home life. According to Catherine (From Catherine and Stephen’s planning meeting, January 2005), Jason came from a home where his biological parents had gone through a divorce a short while earlier and his mother had recently gotten remarried. Although his biological mother and father lived in separate towns and his mother had primary custody, he visited often with his father. Catherine also learned that Jason’s mother had recently decided to make a career change to become a school guidance counselor. Catherine subsequently asked the school’s counselor talk to Jason’s mother, but this reached a dead end as the mother felt that the counselor had already made her mind up about Jason as he was a “minority student” and “a person of color” (in the counselor’s words, reported by Catherine, planning meeting, January 2005). Catherine explained that,

Mom doesn’t believe in the counseling thing even though she’s going back to school to be a counselor (laughs) and doesn’t want him to be seen by a counselor at all, she will agree to (sic) a peer group (sic) to learn how to communicate with a group of

(sic) three other boys but won't approve any kind of counseling... (From Catherine and Stephen's planning meeting, January 2005).

This was extremely frustrating to Catherine as she had expected that Jason's mother would have been open to and might even have suggested this herself since counseling was her interest and area of expertise. Jason's mother, however, felt that there wasn't a pressing concern but that his behavior just needed to be monitored better.

Catherine also consulted with other teachers in the school, but it is not clear how helpful these discussions were. Perhaps the major benefit to Catherine from these interactions was gaining a sense that this sort of issue was commonly experienced by teachers, as evidenced by the statement from her (Catherine's journal, February 2005) earlier in this chapter that there is always one behavior problem in every class. In fact, commiserating with other teachers only seems to have prompted Catherine to monitor Jason more closely. Although she does not explain precisely how she accomplished this while teaching the class, she does state that this monitoring "only made things worse" (Catherine's journal, February 2005). She then tried to improve the situation by moving his seat near other students who would be less likely to be engaged in an argument with him and who might serve as good role models. Instead of seeing an improvement in his behavior, Catherine found that he began to act more isolated from the other students in the class. Moreover, he began responding to any correction in a more aggressive manner. Stephen reports Catherine's description of the situation to him in his journal as follows:

If she were to ask the class to quiet down, he'd [Jason] react as though it were a personal attack, and whine (loudly) how he wasn't the one making all the noise. If she specifically saw him antagonize a child out at recess by deliberately pushing, she would confront him and he would behave as though he were shocked and insulted for being wrongfully accused. For everything he had an excuse or an answer. Even if she was talking to someone else – for instance about missing homework, etc – he would react as

though he were being unfairly singled out...and yet it had nothing to do with him (Stephen's journal, February 2005).

As the weeks passed, Catherine found that dealing with Jason was increasingly becoming the primary focus of her day and that it was negatively impacting her class as a whole.

#### ***4.2A An Attempted Intervention***

Catherine's next move was to implement an intervention that came out of her discussion with Jason's mother and that she thought might respond to the mother's feeling that closer monitoring was needed. Catherine began a home-school dialogue journal that included a specific behavior management plan that Catherine describes as

...a journal with a behavior plan that mom came up with, so that she was on top of his behaviors at school and she knows what's going on everyday. But which is that he would get a smiley, straight face or a frowny face in the morning or in the afternoon everyday and if he gets five he'll get some sort of a special reward at school and at home, so that's what's in place right now (From Catherine's pre- CIG session interview, January 2005).

According to Catherine, this dialogue journal had some initial success. For two weeks after the plan was implemented, Jason was doing much better with both the other students and Catherine. As she explains, "He was getting a lot of smiley faces with very few straight faces and then as time went on it's become this kind of like this mixture of smiley and frowney faces... mom wants to see those smileys again... I think it was like the honeymoon period" (From Catherine and Stephen's planning meeting, January 2005). Catherine felt that although the situation had improved since the beginning of the year, she still had not seen a sustained improvement in his behavior. In fact, Catherine discovered that Jason had managed to override the dialogue by changing the frowning faces to smiling ones, and in this way he was able to

misbehave in school without facing negative consequences at home. It was obvious to Catherine that a new approach was needed and she was interested in getting help from her colleagues through CIG.

I would like to note that at this point Catherine expressed frustration both with Jason's behavior and with her interactions with him, especially since these were not helpful in improving the situation. As I will attempt to show in the next section, Catherine's perception of the dilemma changes as she begins working through the CIG process. During the initial stage in which she planned for the CIG session with Stephen, her discussions with him helped her to clarify that the dilemma hinged not just on 'doing something,' as she had said, but on finding a way to change the interactions in her classroom (her interactions with Jason but also the relations between Jason and his classmates) that would be better aligned with her overall teaching philosophy. As she later explained retrospectively, "I think what I really needed was a whole new perspective on the situation and how it could make things better for the whole class" (Catherine's stimulated recall, February 2005). Catherine turned to her CIG to try to get this new perspective. Before discussing the mediation offered to Catherine during the CIG process, I would like to offer some commentary on Catherine's situation informed by a Vygotskian perspective. My purpose is to further storyboard the main characters in this dilemma and to shed some light on the intervention and its failure as this will help the reader to appreciate the changes that come out of Catherine's CIG experience.

#### ***4.2 B Mediating Household and Classroom Cultures***

Household cultures have a deep connection to how students interact in and with classroom situations. Moll (2000) conducted research on the impact of household ethnography on teacher's classroom practice and argues that researchers need to move away from the more normative understandings of culture where people are simply grouped into displaying certain

characteristics due to the group to which they belong. Looking at this dilemma through what Moll refers to as a normative cultural lens, that is, an understanding of culture “as well integrated, cohesive entities whose values are shared by all members of a particular group” (p.257), one might argue that Jason is having trouble fitting in because he’s the only African American in the class. However, that analysis simply skims the surface as the dilemma goes deeper than that. Catherine’s inquiry into Jason’s household situation looked at the complexity of his daily, lived experiences. Jason’s family was in the midst of not only changing the structure of the family unit, but his mother (with whom he was living) had just begun a new career as a student. “The most important cultural mediating creation in the child’s development is the child- not the child’s personality created in the abstract, but rather one that is inseparable from the social and cultural context of its development and the social relations that constitute these contexts” (Moll, 2000, p.263).

When Catherine first found herself faced with a child displaying inappropriate behavior she tried to “fix” the surface behaviors without looking deeper into the deeper contexts that were at the heart of the behavior. It was when she began to investigate the home situation that she discovered the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2000) that resided within that household. Moll defines funds of knowledge as the “bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities. Their documentation makes obvious the wealth of resources available within any single household of its social network, resources that may not be obvious to teachers or students” (p. 258). Of course, Moll is concerned with these funds as they exist in the daily, lived experiences of individuals and the social worlds they inhabit. He does not restrict this world to the household, but the home is certainly a fundamental social space and it plays an especially important formative role during childhood.

At first glance, Jason’s mother’s training in counseling should have been an asset in attempting to understand Jason’s needs, but these efforts were hampered by the cultural

statements that were both verbalized and assumed by members of the school community when the counselor gave the impression that Jason's image as a "minority student" and "a person of color" (in the counselor's words, reported by Catherine, planning meeting, January 2005) contributed to his difficulty in fitting in. The mother chose to therefore distance herself from cultivating a relationship with the school counselor and chose instead to focus her attention on the behaviors themselves and collaborated with Catherine to create a behavior modification plan. This plan should have been an external mediating tool that provided Jason with a concrete visual representation of his behavior. Catherine states that this behavior plan (figure 4.1 presents a recreated page of Catherine's behavior chart and journal) worked for a while and Jason wanted to see the smiley faces. This supports Vygotsky's argument that social and cultural aspects cannot be separated from each other and that people think and are mediated by artifacts (in this case the behavior chart). It is apparent, however, that the mediating tool was not sufficient as Jason was not able to internalize the behaviors that were necessary to maintain the smileys on the chart.



### Behavior Chart

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

	Using appropriate language	Completing assignments in a timely manner	Working with others appropriately	Using free time appropriately
AM				
PM				

Teacher/ Parent comments:

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**Figure 4.1: Catherine's sample behavior chart**

Gal'perin, (1989) makes a similar observation in his model of human action and its relation to internalization and development which is central to understanding how Jason orients to the smiley face system that Catherine is using. As mentioned in Chapter 2, internalization takes place when an individual is able to move from using physical tools or symbolic tools, including social discourse, to solve problems without these forms of external mediation. According to Gal'perin (1989), internalization is most successful when it occurs through a series of steps, the most important of which is an initial stage during which the conceptual knowledge to be learned is presented using material artifacts (see discussion of symbolic tools in Chapter 2). These are intended to serve as an orienting basis for learners, which Gal'perin argues is crucial for subsequent learning. Indeed, in the context of school learning he explains that without properly orienting to the subject matter, learners are left with only partial understandings, and

consequently even at advanced levels of studies misapprehensions of basic concepts and principles re-emerge and create confusions for learners (Arievitch & Stetsenko, 2000). As a component of Gal'perin's general model of human action, the importance of orientation, which includes assessing the problem to be solved or task to be completed, devising a plan, and taking inventory of all necessary and available resources, clearly extends beyond the domain of content mastery. I return to this point below when discussing the mediation Catherine required before bringing this situation to the other teachers in her CIG. For now, however, Gal'perin's framework is helpful in understanding why the goal of Jason reaching a point where he would be able to monitor and regulate his own behavior was only temporarily improved by the smiley face system. It would seem that this system in fact oriented him toward the goal of gaining additional smileys but not the goal of improved relations with his classmates and teacher. To the extent that the behaviors needed to reach these two goals overlapped, the situation improved, but when Jason realized that his goal could be attained through alternative means (simply changing frowns to smiles on the chart before presenting them to his mother), problems in class reappeared. This was when Catherine felt that the home-school journal with the concomitant behavior plan was not the answer. In her words,

this was set up as a communication thing with a behavior plan kind of built into it and it just wasn't working ... and I think it is hard to do and implement something in your room that you don't really totally believe in (Catherine and Stephen's planning meeting, January 2005).

Catherine's remarks here are revealing. They indicate that her thinking is beginning to shift away from simply acting because she felt she needed to do something and the home-school journal seemed to meet Jason's mother's expectations. Now Catherine is beginning to realize that she herself needs to be invested in the solution to this dilemma, and she was not invested in this version of the home-school journal and behavior plan. Catherine has not yet explicitly identified

a mismatch between her approach to working through this dilemma and her vision of how she wants her class to be. She only becomes conscious of this while working through the CIG process. However, she has reached a point in her thinking where she is ready to begin a re-analysis of the situation.

### **4.3 Mediation and the CIG Process**

The following section outlines the stages of the CIG process and the forms of mediation associated with each of these stages. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the CIG process begins with the planning meeting between the presenter and the facilitator as they determine the manner in which the dilemma would be presented to the group. The group discourse is mediated both by the facilitator as well as by the structure of the protocol, which determines the type and the length of time that is spent on each of the sections of the protocol. In this case, the mediating artifacts that helped Catherine take a different perspective on the dilemma were: (1) consultation with Stephen, the CIG facilitator; (2) the CIG training manual; (3) the protocol itself, in this case the Consultancy Protocol; and (4) the group interaction during the CIG session. Stephen in his role as the mediator and the training manual came in to play as mediators primarily during the planning session, while the protocol and the group interaction structured the discourse during the actual CIG session. These elements will be discussed in greater detail below.

#### ***4.3A The Planning Meeting***

Catherine's eagerness to receive help with her dilemma prompted her to volunteer when her CIG group asked for a volunteer to present a dilemma during the third CIG meeting for the year. This group's CIG sessions met once a month and due to the district's winter break, it was actually several weeks after Catherine volunteered that she was able to present her dilemma. This

meant that she had a long time to prepare for the session. She met with Stephen (who had volunteered to be her facilitator) to plan for the group session during her lunch break at school. They met four times prior to the group session to ensure that both of them felt comfortable with the way in which they would present this dilemma to the group. She and Stephen had very different levels of prior experience with CIGs. Catherine had been trained as a CIG facilitator and had already participated as both a presenter and a facilitator and was accustomed to the process and looked forward to presenting her group with a challenging dilemma. Stephen on the other hand was new to the group and enthusiastic about being accepted but also anxious about being able to fulfill his role of facilitator. Stephen journaled,

I thought it [being a facilitator] would be a good opportunity for me to step up and take a definite role, especially since I had some earlier feelings of frustration at meetings where I felt I was not genuinely given a voice. I've mentioned before that I tend to have some paranoid feelings about being the "new guy" who needs to build credibility; well here was an opportunity to change that (Stephen's journal, February 2005).

To help ease Stephen's concerns, Catherine suggested that they exchange emails prior to their planning meeting as a way of getting the ball rolling informally. She also reports that she thought this might give her a chance to bounce possible questions off Stephen as she was at this point feeling overwhelmed by the dilemma and unable to focus a question that she could present to the group that would get at the heart of the situation (Catherine's journal, February 2005). Stephen writes,

... she wasn't entirely sure what her question was so we brainstormed some basic ideas and I agreed to type them up and email them to her... she picked and polished the one she felt was her real dilemma (Stephen's journal, February 2005).

A few of the questions that were drafted during those early emails are as follows:

- *How does one successfully transition from an extrinsic motivator, which is working at some level, toward something more intrinsic?*
- *Given the extenuating circumstances of this scenario, what might be a reasonable and appropriate goal for a teacher to have to know that this student will be successful in the following school years?*
- *What does a teacher's role become (and what are their options) with regard to counseling-oriented issues (beyond what the teacher sees as her specialty) when a student's family wishes to NOT involve the school's guidance counselor or counseling services?*

(From email correspondence between Catherine and Stephen, December 2004)

Catherine pondered these questions for a few days before she states in her journal, “I think this is the one. [*How does one successfully transition from an extrinsic motivator, which is working at some level, toward something more intrinsic?*] I like all of the questions, but the real heart of it is the journal that I am using now. How is it helping intrinsically? What is the logical move from the extrinsic to the intrinsic?” (Catherine’s journal, February 2005) This particular question appears to reconnect Catherine to her stated platform of beliefs regarding the development of a student-centered philosophy.

During the planning meeting with Stephen, they decided that a consultancy protocol would be the best way to present and obtain possible next steps for Catherine’s dilemma. One of the other protocols that they looked at as a potential format for the group discussion was the Tuning Protocol, but they dismissed that as “it was just about one child instead of the whole class and would not involve work samples. It also did not involve “fine tuning” or comparing something to something else as with a rubric” (From Stephen’s journal, February 2005). Their rationale for choosing this protocol came from the CIG manual that the members had been given during the training sessions.

*C: I kinda had it in my mind that it was a consultancy... it's something that's pressing, it's you know something that's a dilemma to me... the hardest thing was to narrow down the question ... that was the most important part I think...*

*S: ... I'll just read what the consultancy ones were because for some reason they were true. Okay?*

*READS: (The focus is) On a dilemma is based by an individual or a group.*

*Some of the other choices were on an assignment, on student work, on student work, on student via his or her work, a project... none of those seemed to apply, so the focus alone seemed to steer it that way.*

*Helps the presenter think more expansively about a dilemma s/he is facing. Can be used for educator work or student work. In either case, the focus is on the dilemma. The dilemma is important; the presenter thinks a solution is possible but doesn't know what it is; the presenter is willing to change his or her own practice to resolve the dilemma; the effectiveness of the "probing questions".*

*Presents the issue, responds to questions, sits out, and then comes back to the conversation. The presenter brings copies of student work, the assignment, and/or the assessment – all of which serve as artifacts, illustrating the dilemma"*

(From Catherine and Stephen's planning meeting transcript, January 2004)

\*The underlined sections represent the description of the Consultancy Protocol as stated in the CIG Manual, 2004.)

The Consultancy Protocol acts as a mediating artifact. Both the pre-conversation thinking by Catherine as well as the group interaction that it stimulates provide Catherine the opportunity to look at the dilemma from another point of view. The structure of the protocol allows time to present the dilemma, listen to other perspectives and to reflect on how this discussion reshaped her understanding of the dilemma. In addition, the framework of the protocol (which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter) sets aside time to clarify and to delve deeper into issues surrounding the dilemma within a structured and timed format. The protocol was therefore both a concrete and a symbolic tool that structured the group discourse in a manner that helped Catherine orient the dilemma. It is a concrete tool because it is written down and can be held in your hand and read from, but it also functions as a symbolic tool in that it structures what and how things are talked about.

#### **4.3 B Orienting the Dilemma**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Catherine was struggling with this dilemma on multiple levels. She was initially frustrated with Jason's behavior, which resulted in strained interactions between both the teacher and the students in the classroom. The implementation of a journal with a behavior modification component did not seem to improve the situation for long.

Gal'perin's model of human action helps to explicate Jason's misappropriation of the journal and behavior plan. It is a useful lens for examining Catherine's orientation to this situation. During the orientation stage, individuals need to devise a plan that could help them successfully analyze and complete a task while looking at and utilizing available resources (Talyzina, 1981).

Catherine's initial analysis of her difficult classroom situation was that she had a student who portrayed negative behaviors that she believed could be changed by close monitoring and structure. Through her discussions with Stephen during the planning meeting, she realized that her uneasiness with the home-school journal and behavior plan was that she felt it was not open and flexible, that it did not allow for student choice. As she explains, "I really don't like the fact that I have to think about only certain behaviors that we put on the chart. There are many times that the things I see don't fit the categories that are in there and I end up not putting it on because it takes more time to write it out. I feel like all I do is police bad behavior" (Catherine and Stephen's planning meeting, January 2005). Allowing Jason to have choice and to have some voice in the resolution of the dilemma emerges during the CIG process as central to Catherine's goal. Stephen helped her reorient to her "real" dilemma by offering a series of ten questions (that could take the dilemma in different directions). Stephen's questions acted as the springboard for the question that she would ultimately choose and utilize.

It is interesting to note that Catherine's final form of the question that she presented to the CIG used the exact language that Stephen had used in the draft of the question that he had emailed her. Stephen helped Catherine think about the situation from multiple angles and in doing so helped her hone in on the issue that was at the heart of her dilemma. The mediation that Stephen provided Catherine as she thought about her dilemma is different from the mediation provided by the manual, the protocol, and the group interaction. Stephen's conversations with Catherine helped her recontextualize the dilemma as she attempted to find new ways to engage with the dilemma. Stephen's interactions provided Catherine with a meditational other who

utilized a variety of meditational types and techniques that closed the gap between her cognition and how she engages with the dilemma. The analysis of how the protocol mediated Catherine's understanding of the situation will be provided in the section after the description of the Consultancy Protocol format.

### ***4.3C The Protocol***

As I explained in the preceding section, the CIG manual helped Stephen and Catherine to decide to use the Consultancy Protocol to structure their CIG session. The Consultancy Protocol is reproduced in Figure 4.2.

<p><b>Consultancy Protocol – developed by Gene Thompson-Grove</b></p> <p><b>Purpose:</b> A consultancy is a structured process for helping an individual or a team think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma  <b>Time:</b> approximately 50 minutes</p> <p><b>Process:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma with which s/he is struggling, and frames a question for the Consultancy group to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter's reflection on the dilemma being discussed are key features of this protocol. The focus of the group's conversation is on the dilemma. (5-10 minutes)</li> <li>2. The Consultancy group asks clarifying questions of the presenter – that is, questions that have brief factual answers. (5 minutes)</li> <li>3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his/her thinking about the dilemma presented to the Consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question he/she framed or to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the Consultancy group of the presenter's responses. At the end of the ten minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to restate his/her question for the group. (10 minutes)</li> <li>4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma presented. (15 minutes)  Possible questions to frame the discussion:  *What did we hear?  *What didn't we hear that they think might be relevant?  *What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?</li> <li>Members of the group sometimes suggest solutions to the dilemma. Most often, however, they work to define issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn't speak during the discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.</li> <li>5. The presenter reflects on what s/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Consultancy (5 minutes)</li> <li>6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group's observation of the Consultancy process.</li> </ol>
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**Figure 4.2: The Consultancy Protocol (CIG manual, 2004)**



As alluded to in the section on the planning meeting, the Consultancy Protocol itself served as a mediating artifact as it provided Catherine with a specific format that allowed her to present and think about her dilemma from another angle. This protocol began with Catherine's description of the dilemma that enabled the group to focus their attention on the question that was presented. It was therefore vital that the question represent the true nature of the part of the dilemma that needed to be analyzed or solved. While this was an essential part of Catherine's presentation, the questions that the group asked both to clarify and to probe deeper into the dilemma were central to the group's discussion.

Catherine and Stephen used the rest of their planning time talking about potential questions or comments that could hinder the process and planning for how Catherine would present the dilemma. They decided to provide the group with copies of the question so that the members could refer to the question through the course of the discussion. Stephen planned to provide the group with the opportunity to review the differences between probing and clarifying questions so that Catherine could really be challenged in how she thought about the dilemma. Clarifying questions are to benefit the group members as they provide brief and factual information about the presenter's dilemma. These questions ask the presenter the "who, what, when, where and how." Probing questions, on the other hand, are intended to challenge the presenting teacher in thinking about the dilemma through multiple lenses without suggestions for how it could/ should be solved (Thompson-Grove, Fraser, Dunne, 2002). These questions are open-ended and often require deep thought and take longer to answer. In addition to the questioning sections, Catherine and Stephen decided that they would enforce the time limits set by the consultancy protocol for each section. Stephen pointed out that other protocols that had been presented were more flexible with the time intervals for each section which had resulted in giving the presenter less time to debrief and share their impressions at the end. They both agreed that this would be the most important part of the process as it not only gave Catherine a chance to

process all the information that she had received through the course of the conversation but also gave the CIG members a chance to see how their comments had impacted her view of the dilemma.

#### ***4.3C The Tool for the Result***

In Vygotskian terms, the Consultancy Protocol is a cultural artifact that emerged from the history of CIG and functions to focus and structure the group interactions during the session. Scollon (2001) captures the importance of tool mediation from a Vygotskian perspective when he notes that just as physical tools such as hammers extend the reach of a human's ability to change the material world, symbolic tools "amplify memory and increase the capacity to organize and communicate information and knowledge" (Scollon, 2001, p. 116). Scollon's remarks are a good description of the intended functioning of CIG protocols. The protocols were developed to provide teachers within the CIG a structured format that can be followed while presenting and thinking through a dilemma (Allen and Blythe, 2004). This format allows the presenting teacher to frame the dilemma for the rest of the group by with the help of a question that the group will utilize to provide a new lens through which to understand the dilemma. The main sections of the protocols allow the group to ask very specific questions of the presenting teacher and to engage the members in a discussion that seeks to "amplify" the teacher's perception of the problem.

An important feature of tool mediation is that, as Newman and Holzman (1993) explain, the tool itself may be modified through the process of using it, and this was the case with the Consultancy Protocol used by Catherine and Stephen. An example of this principle that is often discussed in the research literature comes from Marx and Engles (1977) and concerns an architect designing a blueprint. The blueprint functions as a plan or guide for the eventual construction of a building, bridge, or other structure. The blueprint is an important symbolic tool that mediates the building process. However, blueprints are rarely static documents but must be

revised and refined during construction as problems arise and the architect becomes aware of new possibilities, limitations, and concerns. As Marx and Engels explain, this is a qualitatively different process from a bee constructing a hive because the bee has no plan but relies on instinct alone. Humans, in contrast use artifacts and modify them over time to fit their needs. The blueprint is necessary for the realization of a material structure that was present in the architect's mind from the very beginning, but the blueprint is a flexible, dynamic artifact that is modified to fit the less ideal facets of the building.

The example of the architect is similar to how protocols provide the CIG with a blueprint of how the presenting teacher could achieve her goal of looking at her dilemma with a fresh perspective. The Consultancy Protocol used here begins with Catherine presenting a detailed dilemma that helps the members of the CIG recreate the situation in their own minds. Catherine planned to write her dilemma down and then to read from it for the group session so that she would not forget important aspects of the intervention timeline and the results of each of her interventions. This was not an inherent part of the protocol, but it was a change that Catherine and Stephen agreed upon to present a clearer picture of the dilemma to the team. The Consultancy Protocol was created by members of the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), and the advice in the manual is to closely follow the format as changes could deter the result that is achieved at the end of the session. Catherine and Stephen made a conscious decision to maintain the integrity of the protocol as seen in the data presented earlier in this chapter. The beginning presentation, however, included a slight deviation from the written format as Catherine read her dilemma timeline. Lantolf and Thorne (2006, p. 65) cite Scollon (2001, p.120) while advocating the modification of mediational tools, especially when symbolic artifacts are involved. They state, "Mediational means are historical in nature, which not only means that they predate their users and that the individual's control over them develops through repeated instances of use, but that they also 'embed the power and authority structures of society.'" Scollon goes on to say

that although others were involved in the creation of the artifact, there is no reason why it cannot be used in a different manner from which it was intended. It is interesting to note that while the writing of the dilemma was a seemingly insignificant change, it helped Catherine think through and clearly articulate the various stages that her dilemma took her through. In other words, writing functioned for Catherine as a form of self-regulation. She created a symbolic but nonetheless more material representation of the dilemma. This was not simply recording Catherine's thoughts but it helped her to give shape to them.

The planning meeting was an opportunity for Catherine to gain peer guidance and mediation from Stephen. It is important to note that Stephen brought a certain level of expertise through his prior experiences and his relationship to the situation as a true outsider. There was however also an element of shared expertise as Catherine had participated in several CIG sessions as both a presenter and a facilitator and was aware of the various issues that could arise during the session. In particular, Stephen's speech and a written bank of questions functioned as mediating artifacts that helped Catherine frame her question and through that the part of the dilemma that was most pressing to her. Catherine on the other hand encouraged Stephen by pointing out his positive attributes and focusing on the relationship that they had built as they planned for the session. The high degree of trust and collegiality that characterized their relationship is clear in the following exchange:

*C: it's a pretty tiring experience*

*S: Yeah... have you done this role before where you've brought a dilemma*

*C: Yes*

*S: Okay. How was it for you the last time in case there's anything that I should watch for?*

*C: It was fine. I've done it a time or two... I'm pretty easy going about stuff.*

*S: I've never been in those shoes... I'm a little nervous about it, I think I would be fine*

*C: You're really organized and seem to be able to read me well... That's the most important thing, to know the person you are working with and having a good relationship. It'll be fine.*

There are precedents in the Vygotsky research literature to peer interactions in which there is no clear 'expert' (Donato, 1994, Ohta, 1995). Donato (1994) mentions that in the case of

shared expertise, the speaker is both a novice and an expert as s/he 'orients' the situation in a new way through the collaborative dialogic interaction. Wertsch (1981) argues that according to Vygotsky the discourse that takes place in learning situations as the one portrayed here is not simply a "vehicle for learning" but is in fact learning itself (p.146).

After Catherine made a decision about the question that she was going to present to the group, they spent time taking a closer look at the protocol format and making decisions regarding the time and potential changes that they would make to it. One of the biggest foci of their discussion was about the time that was allotted for each section in the protocol. This had been a concern in previous CIG sessions as the members were available only for a certain amount of time and if the session went over, the group simply disbanded instead of extending the time. Catherine and Stephen decided to keep the time segments as recommended in the format and decided to make it clear with the use of a timer. They also decided to be very clear about the differences between the clarifying and the prompting questions, which they felt were the most important sections of the protocol format.

#### **4.4 The CIG Session**

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, this CIG session was not video recorded as all members of the group did not consent to participating in this study. However, three members of this group wrote specifically about this session in their journal and some of the comments they made about the process.

One member said, *"a highly respected mentor teacher shared raw emotion as she talked about her struggle with a student and how her focus had now changed so many times in the past few weeks. I felt for her. And I wanted to fix it for her. We all did... Suggestions were made*

*about whether or not she could/ should simply back out and say “Enough! I tried and I’m completely sapped.”* (Member journal, February 2005)

While this chapter focuses on Catherine’s dilemma and the mediation that she received from various parts of the CIG process, it would be incomplete without including the voices of the other members of the group who did not have specific roles of a facilitator or a presenter but who contributed to Catherine’s learning. The excerpt from one of the group members that is presented above mentions her shared understanding and empathy for Catherine’s dilemma. She was able to connect her prior experiences in a similar situation to the frustration that Catherine felt in trying to implement a journal that didn’t seem to be bringing about the desired change. This member recalls that suggestions were made during the session for Catherine to simply say, *“Enough! I tried and I’m completely sapped.”* Catherine mentions that the validation that she received from the group members made her realize that she wasn’t locked into having to use the journal when she wasn’t happy with the results. This was one of the powerful comments that made her pause and think that she could just do away with the journal (from Catherine’s stimulated recall, February 2005). This seemed to be an easy “fix” which seemed to be a common theme among the CIG member journals as exemplified in the excerpts below.

*“This was an intense session and full of energy. I even found myself cutting people off so that I could be heard. I think that it’s good to feel so connected to the process and the dilemma, but I also know that many of us felt pressure to try to fix the situation for her.* (Member journal, February 2005)

This member talks of much of the same emotions- feelings of empathy and the desire to find a solution that would help “fix” the problem. She emphasizes that her connection to the dilemma provided her with the impetus to get involved with the process, even to the point of overriding others comments. It is obvious that this dilemma was one that resonated with many of the members of the group, which in turn led to a passionate discussion of how they had handled

similar situations in the past. The emotional connection, however, also added to the frustrations of some of the members as seen in the excerpt below. This group member felt that the situation had already gotten to a point where the other factors outside Catherine's control (i.e. the mom and the school counselor) who could negatively impact the changes the group was suggesting. This member felt that the true weight of the discussion lay in their ability to encourage Catherine's attempts to find a solution.

*"It seemed to me that the dilemma that we were presented with had already gone far beyond something we as a group could help with...the mom and the school counselor situation was tricky... It felt difficult to even suggest changes that the presenter could make... We were able to encourage and commiserate. Maybe that's all that was needed."*  
(Member journal, February 2005)

Each of these teachers brought unique prior experiences, motives and expectations to the discourse which contributed to the kinds of interactions that took place during the session. This concept is explored in more detail in the following section.

#### ***4.4 A The Motive of Group Discourse***

The hallmark of Vygotskian theory is that humans gain higher order thinking skills through goal oriented, culturally situated and tool mediated social interactions (Cole, 1996, Wertsch, 1991). CIG interactions are goal oriented (looking to provide the presenting teacher with a new perspective on their dilemma), culturally situated (around classroom teaching practice), and tool mediated (with the help of a facilitator and the protocol). These interactions also have to take into consideration the varied prior experiences that members of the group bring to the process. Each member brings his/her own set of motives and expectations to the activity that influences the way in which the eventual goal is reached. Wertsch (1985) argues that every activity has a set of assumptions deeply ingrained in it that determines the selection of actions and their operational composition. The guiding and integrating force of these assumptions is what

Leont'ev called the motive of an activity... Among other things, the motive that is involved in a particular activity setting specifies what is to be maximized in that setting (p. 212).

In the case of this CIG session, the members of the group were focused on trying to find a solution for this teacher as is evident in the journal excerpts presented above. Fixing the problem was a common goal that existed between members of the CIG and seemed to be an emphasis for this dilemma. These teachers were empathetic to Catherine's dilemma and were focused on trying to give her solutions that would help her fix the problem. A good deal of research indicates that a common trait among teachers is the ability to look at a difficult situation and look for a way to solve the problem (for example, Allen and Blythe, 2004, Zeichner, 1996, Clark, 2001). In this case, the emotional aspect of empathizing with another teacher's plight helped the group members develop through their dialogue a shared understanding of the dilemma. This shared understanding helped them to support Catherine through comments and questions that deepened her understanding of the dilemma, and this was the desired outcome of the CIG session. One of the members journaled, *"I've worked with students who don't seem to fit in with the rest of the class and it seems as though if I take the time to help them form friendships, the rest of it seems to go smoother...finding the right niche for kids who struggle can be so frustrating"* (Member journal, February 2005).

As Donato (1994) explains, collectives are very difficult to make happen because individuals typically pursue their own goals rather than group goals. In the case of CIG, however, it seems that there is real potential for teachers to act collectively as they empathize with the presenting teacher's dilemma and then focus their energies on attempting to help him/her even though there is no direct benefit to themselves. As one group member in this CIG commented, "We all just came together because I think we could all see ourselves in her [Catherine] and what she was dealing with" (Member journal, February 2005).



I met with both Stephen and Catherine the day after the group session in order to get their impressions of how the meeting had gone and whether or not it had met Catherine's expectations. Stephen asked Catherine pre-formulated questions to help her think about specific situations that arose during the session. These were the same questions that had been asked to all participating presenters during the stimulated recall sessions that took place after the CIG meeting. The following is an excerpt from that session.

*S: What were you thinking about while the group was reflecting on your dilemma?*

*C: The biggest thing that stood out for me ... first of all I felt such a sense of community and I didn't feel threatened at all. It was just nice to be able to remove yourself from the situation and have people just talk about it and when someone mentioned about the journal and the home connection and how there was such a conflict between [sic] what my part was at school and what was going on at home and they said [sic] why doesn't she just get rid of the home part. Obviously that's not working out and to hear someone else say that... was a powerful moment for me... I can do that... and when someone else says it... it makes it so much easier.  
(Stimulated recall, February 2005)*

As I explain below, the approach to overcoming the dilemma that Catherine followed did not exactly involve 'getting rid of the home part.' In other words, Catherine did not simply eliminate the home-school journal altogether as one of the CIG members suggested during the session. Instead, what Catherine began to see was that Jason's mother's proposal of the journal and behavior plan amounted to closer monitoring on Catherine's part of Jason's behavior but did not involve Jason in the process of overcoming those behaviors. Just as Catherine had reported that early on Jason felt he was being singled out and picked on, the journal only reinforced this. As she explains, "It was like I was always there standing over him, waiting for him to act out so I could say, got you now mom's gonna be mad..." (Catherine's stimulated recall, February 2005). The home-school journal and behavior plan, in Catherine's view, made the dilemma worse by setting up an adversarial relationship between Jason and her. Although she was uncomfortable with this approach, it took the support from the CIG group before she felt she could take a stand and move beyond that approach to find something that better fit her own ideals.

This is an important point because it shows that a teacher is not always presented with a fix to his/her dilemma during CIG but may instead be prompted to begin thinking about the problem in new ways, and this may lead him/her to solutions that were not even suggested during the group session. In this case, remarks from the group that the home-school journal and behavior plan could be done away with did not provide the answer Catherine wanted but did help her to feel validated in moving from that approach to a new one in which her own “expertise” in Catherine’s words (Catherine’s stimulated recall, February, 2005) would play a greater role. As I explain in the next section, Catherine’s solution was to reconceptualize the journal in a way that would help Jason to take more responsibility for monitoring his own behaviors. It is important to point out that Catherine had not thought about reformulating the home-school journal prior to the CIG session:

*S: How was this different from your initial thoughts about the dilemma? Had you thought about this before?*

*C: Umm... No I hadn't had that thought before - that's really funny. I was just...really dedicated to...we need to communicate and we need to be in constant contact...*

Putney et. al (2000) refer to the term *opportunities for learning* when talking about how learning is constructed during group interactions (p.89). They emphasize that the situational context provides opportunities for both the learner and the individuals in the group to gain new insights into the situation being discussed. Letting go of the original journal format was a new realization that Catherine was brought to by the group, but the way in which she will make that a reality occurs at a later time independent of the group. In other words, learners appropriate the knowledge gleaned from group interactions into their own ways of interpreting and following up on the situation.

#### 4.5 Next Steps

Catherine reports that following the CIG session she decided to schedule a meeting with Jason's mom to suggest that they rethink the home-school journal and behavior plan in a way that recruited Jason as a participant. A month later, an update on the situation was obtained through email correspondence with both Stephen and Catherine. According to Catherine's email (March 2005),

The meeting went really well! Mom and I came up with a weekly folder idea with parent/teacher/student comments along with a checklist of activities that had been completed that week. We agreed that he (Jason) would be the one to write comments explaining how things had gone. This would make my job less stressful! I would add details as needed or follow up with a phone call home.

This new "journal" approach showed Jason's mom what he had accomplished during the week and also provided a space for additional dialogue if needed. The new journal approach is illustrated with a sample page reproduced in Figure 4.3.

#### Home-School Journal

Week of \_\_\_\_\_ Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

√ when Completed	Date	Project/ Activity Title	Description of the Activity with Comments (student)	Parent Comments/ Signature
Teacher				
Comments:				

**Figure 4.3: Sample weekly home-school journal sheet**

This new journal differed from the original journal approach in several important ways. The initial journal that Catherine designed with Jason's mother, was teacher focused and driven as it involved Catherine assigning a "grade" (in the form of smileys) for specific observable behaviors. Catherine did not like the "policing" aspect of this journal and was also frustrated that Jason seemed to be mediated by the chart for only a short period of time. As Jason was not involved in either the creation or the evaluation of this journal, he did not seem to be able to internalize the behaviors that were expected of him. The new journal on the other hand utilized an open-ended format and was student generated and maintained. Figure 4.3 shows that the student listed the projects that had been the week's focus along with a description and an analysis of the activity and provided a space for parent comments. In addition, the teacher had a space to add or respond to comments made by either the parent or the student. Hence the new journal provided the student, teacher and the parent a more dialogic and open-ended form of communication.

In her email, Catherine stated that although they had only been following this new journal approach for a few weeks, she had noted an improvement in Jason's behavior. According to Catherine, Jason's mother was very appreciative of Catherine's efforts and she agreed that the original journal had not led to the kinds of improvements she had hoped for. In fact, while Catherine had not included in her plans any attempt to get Jason's mother to reconsider her resistance to bring the school counselor into the situation, she reports that the mother stated during the meeting that she would rely on Catherine's judgment as to if and when the counselor should be consulted. Stephen's email (March, 2005) reinforces the overall positive feeling about the new journal:

*The good news is that it seems like things went really well; better in fact than she [Catherine] anticipated. Not only did she get permission to send the child to the counselor when needed... the mother actually commented that she trusted [Catherine's] professional opinion – a huge success in and of itself!*

Catherine also mentioned that if this new journal approach continued to work well with Jason and his mother, she might implement it as a whole class parent communication device the following school year.

Catherine also implemented a counseling component into her classroom meeting time. Catherine met with the school counselor and decided to participate in initiating a school wide “Rock Buddy” program in her classroom. This idea emerged out of a comment that a CIG member made during the group discussion about the difficulty that students have in forming relationships with others in the class. The member journaled, “*if I take the time to help them form friendships, the rest of it seems to go smoother*” (Member journal, February 2005). The Rock Buddy program was an idea that the school counselor had observed being successful at other area schools and involved randomly pairing students within the classroom for a week. Students are taught to get to know their “buddy” through large and small group team building games and activities facilitated both by the classroom teacher and the school counselor. This program allowed all students the opportunity to not only get a chance to know their classmates at a deeper level, but also introduced them to another adult in the building to whom they could turn if they had difficulties in the classroom.

As argued earlier, learning within the ZPD is socially constructed and situated so that expertise is created together and arises within the collaborative engagement in specific contexts. The learning that takes place through this social mediated activity is only a part of the process, as it needs to transform and extend into how similar situations are handled in the future. In the case of Catherine’s dilemma, the new perspectives that she gleaned from her interactions with both her facilitator and the CIG to rethink how she could better structure the journal and her interactions with Jason so that she could return to her view of a democratic and collaborative classroom environment. She did not simply do away with the journal but appropriated it while utilizing her other funds of knowledge (Jason’s mother) as well as her deeply held beliefs about teaching and

learning to help her create an artifact that could be used not only with Jason but also with other students in the class. As mentioned in the above narrative, this artifact served as a method to communicate classroom achievements with all parents and was transformative to Catherine's classroom teaching practice. She discovered that not all students are able to participate in open ended activities in the same manner and that some students require certain structures to enable them to fully participate in these activities. This modified journal provided all students with the opportunity to self monitor and evaluate their involvement in classroom activities and projects.

Another aspect that Catherine integrated into her classroom practice was the inclusion of a counselor mediated activity where the students were provided opportunities to not only get to know other students at a deeper level, but also to know other members of school community who could provide assistance as needed. The Rock Buddy program gave both her and the other students the opportunity to get to know areas of strength and need that each student brought to the classroom setting. As argued earlier in this chapter, each member of a collaborative community brings with him/her a unique set of social and cultural experiences that impact the group dynamics and the learning that takes place within it. This argument holds true not only in Catherine's classroom, but with how she understood and transformed her classroom practice.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented Catherine's classroom dilemma of trying to understand and reframe one student's behavior. It traced her initial intervention strategies and her conversations with many different members of the school community including but not limited to the mother, the school counselor and other teachers in the building as she searched for ways to engage Jason in appropriate behaviors. Her inability to find a solution with which she was content led her to present her dilemma at a CIG session. Stephen, a new member to the CIG volunteered to

facilitate the process and was the key to how she shifted in her understanding of Jason's behavior. As argued throughout the chapter, Catherine's learning (development) was mediated by several tools as she participated in this process. Stephen's facilitation, the CIG manual, the Consultancy Protocol and the group's discourse were all mediating artifacts that led Catherine to thinking about implementing a journal that was more student maintained and open-ended rather than her initial journal that was more teacher driven and authoritarian in nature. While Catherine used this journal for the first year with just Jason, she continued to use this new "journal" format in subsequent years as a home-school communication method, which is an evidence of how her classroom practice was transformed. Another essential aspect that had its conception in the CIG session was the Rock Buddy program where students were provided with opportunities to get to know other members in the classroom at a deeper level through the course of the year. This program emerged out of the discussion where one of the members stated that greater student involvement through finding "their niche" led to less behavior issues. As mentioned early in this chapter, it is not to say that Catherine's learning would not have occurred without her involvement in the CIG process, but that her participation provided her with a deeper understanding of the dilemma as she shifted her focus of how to frame the errant behavior.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANNA: Striving to Innovate**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Dewey (1938) proposes the notion of “intelligent experiences” in his discussion of how we learn from the past and draw upon these lessons as we attempt to construct a future for ourselves. He describes experiences as building blocks: present experiences are built on ones of the past and serve as the basis for ones to come in the future. He continues that experiences occur in continuity with one another and that we are constantly reinterpreting them as we reflect and remember in the present. For Dewey, “growth, or growing as developing, not only physically but intellectually and morally” involves a process of drawing on past experiences to make changes accordingly in present situations for the purpose of constructing a future (Dewey, 1938, p. 36). This chapter describes the case of Anna (a pseudonym), a teacher who approached CIG not only as a way to address a specific issue in her classroom but who also understood CIG principles to have relevance to how she organized activities in her classroom. It is not clear whether Anna began to view CIG protocols as a model for her classroom during her initial CIG training (which occurred prior to data collection for this dissertation) or at some later point. However, it is certain that by the time data collection began and Anna was in her second year as a CIG participant, she saw this potential. I will explore this point throughout the present chapter. In fact, Anna’s case is interesting because the CIG process helps to mediate her thinking about a particular dilemma in her teaching practice but it also serves another purpose as it provides a model for creating



community and sharing expertise in the spirit of inquiry, ideals that she takes back to her classroom.

On a more concrete level, Anna's dilemma concerned a student's performance during a Language Arts activity she referred to as Writer's Workshop. However, throughout the CIG process Anna was motivated not simply by her desire to help this student but to deepen her own understanding of and experience with the CIG process itself. Thus, Anna's orientation to the CIG differed somewhat from what one would expect to find; after all, as explained in the CIG manual it is primarily about helping teachers work through dilemmas in their practice. Anna's motivations, however, not only lead her to rethink (reconceptualize) her dilemma following the CIG session but she also recontextualizes and restructures the Writer's Workshop activity itself in order to model it more closely on the CIG ideals. I will begin the discussion of Anna's case by presenting some background information to give a clearer picture of Anna's views on teaching and learning and her instructional context.

## **5.2 Background**

Anna had been teaching in a second grade classroom for four years when she was given the opportunity to be trained as a CIG coach. She was quick to volunteer for this opportunity, and she regularly offered to either facilitate or present at group meetings. At the time when data were collected for this dissertation, Anna had already completed one year as a participant in a CIG and she enthusiastically returned for another year. Although I have no data that follows her participation in CIG during her first year, her remarks at the outset of her second year (see below) reveal that she had begun to see CIG sessions as an opportunity to work through dilemmas and that she also drew inspiration from the idea of group inquiry in her thinking about organizing activities in her classroom.

A dynamic and innovative teacher, Anna's CIG dilemmas were often focused on her students' work in one way or another. Typically, Anna was concerned either with gaining a deeper understanding of student learning or with how she could enhance her practice by strengthening classroom communication. These themes came out strongly in her philosophy of teaching interview as she described herself as "striving to innovate," and "enthusiastic about trying new things" that will engage her students and support their learning (From Anna's teaching philosophy interview, April 2005). To reference again Dewey's statements regarding reflection and experience that were mentioned above, it seems that Anna was determined not to stagnate but to continue to draw upon professional development experiences as sources of new ideas that she could incorporate into her own teaching. As she explained, "I will say that my approach [to teaching] is a result of all my experiences over the years...My experiences have led me to believe in student inquiry, conceptual learning, student centered and thematic units..." (ibid.).

It is also clear from Anna's interview that CIGs represented much more to her than a professional development experience. The basic idea behind CIGs – inquiry into teaching practice that depends upon collegial interaction and the sharing of expertise – was something that Anna was trying more and more to enact in her own classroom. For example, she explained that she set-up many of her instructional activities as a form of "inquiry" in which

*students are given the opportunity to investigate the world around and come up with conclusions that are based on their observations. I often tend to do this with math and science, but have a much harder time with literature... I think that it might be the reason for why my students are not as engaged in language arts as they are in math and science and a lot of my own inquiries are about that [language arts] ... (Anna's interview, April 2005).*

She went on to say that her first year of experience participating in CIGs was a major source of her conviction that inquiry was a powerful way to learn: "that's [inquiry] something I really believe and it isn't just about being a part of CIGs but you can actually apply the knowledge with all kinds of things" (ibid.). Wells (2000) cautions against utilizing the term

*inquiry* loosely – he maintains that inquiry is not a stance that can be turned on and off but instead a mind set that is deeply ingrained within a classroom’s structure and functions. He asserts that inquiry allows for democratic classroom interaction where “understanding is constructed in the process of people working together to solve the problems that arise in the course of shared activity” (p. 66).

Anna’s way of organizing her classroom seems to share many features of Wells’ description of inquiry. She talks about providing students opportunities to observe and helping them make inferences and draw conclusions; she mentions giving her students a chance to come up with logical consequences for inappropriate behavior that the class agrees upon in a weekly “morning meeting” format; she describes her classroom as an environment in which the students feel that they are all equal partners in the running of the classroom and that they as individuals are valued and listened to by the teacher (Anna’s interview, April 2005). Wells (2000) continues that most classrooms do not allow for this sort of democratic activity because people often forget that there is a collaborative relationship between “knowing and acting” (p.66). Knowledge, he explains, is co-constructed between individuals as each person engaged in inquiry brings unique prior experiences to help them solve the problem at hand. This basic epistemological view also comes out in Anna’s comments about wanting her students to be “actively part of the whole teaching and learning experience,” and her remark that

*I always ask my students their opinions about what we’ve done and what they’d like to do. As a result, I think my students feel like they belong in our class and feel comfortable voicing concerns and ideas. I also approach discipline [this way]. I even have my students come up with their own consequence* (Anna’s interview, April 2005).

I am not claiming that Anna’s classroom practices or views about teaching and learning are a direct result of her experience with CIG. In fact, as she said, her teaching philosophy has been shaped by “*all my experiences over the years*” (Anna’s teaching philosophy interview, April 2005, italics added). My point is that from the outset of her second year in CIGs, Anna identifies

her own teaching philosophy very strongly with the ideals that she believes are the basis of CIG, and she even articulates parallels between CIG practices and the practices she has started using in her classroom. This should be kept in mind later in the chapter as we examine Anna's planning of the CIG session where she presents her dilemma and also her actions after the session.

I would also like to note that later in Anna's teaching philosophy interview she revealed her frustration that her commitment to continually developing new approaches and trying out innovations to help her students was constrained by the district in which she taught and the curricular goals and expectations that she felt were imposed. For Anna, there was a dissonance between her own creativity and ability to be flexible to meet the needs of her students on the one hand and her responsibility to cover specified material and to prepare students to do well on achievement tests on the other. As she said, "Honestly, as a teacher, I think it's hard to approach your practice in a way that matches your philosophies... We have so much added to our plates each year, mixed with a diverse population of students" (From Anna's teaching philosophy interview, April 2005). She asserted that the CIG provided her with the opportunity to look at her teaching in a new way and to try innovative ideas that help her get closer to what she believes to be effective teaching practice. In her words, Anna's involvement in the CIG

*was always a way that helped me in my efforts to NOT get stuck... In order to complete all that I need to, I really don't have time to "do things my way". The beginning of the school year and after the winter break or after a CIG session are always times when I feel like I'm coming in fresh and I will try something new or give it a twist (ibid.).*

There is evidence in the research on CIGs that indicates that teachers who participate in CIG are more likely to take risks in their classroom and to assume leadership roles within the school community than those who are not involved in CIGs (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafta, 2003; Allen & Blythe, 2004; McDonald, 2002). The degree to which this is a characteristic of teachers that leads them to participate in CIGs in the first place or whether it is a quality teachers develop through their involvement in CIGs is an important and intriguing issue that future studies

might be designed to investigate. It was not, however, part of the design of this dissertation, and I do not have data to explore this issue but it is certainly a topic for future research. For the present discussion, what must be noted is that Anna viewed CIGs as central to her ongoing efforts to further her own professional development and improve her teaching practice. As she said in her teaching philosophy interview, “Each time I take a class, or meet with colleagues in the CIG, or read a book, I get so inspired and motivated to try new things or approach something in a different way” (From Anna’s teaching philosophy interview, April 2005).

Anna’s comments during her teaching philosophy interview also suggest that her enthusiasm for professional development programs, including CIG, may be partially explained as a desire to establish a professional identity. She explained that her “expertise as a teacher” did not seem to be fully recognized by the growing list of district mandates that she felt determined what was to be taught as well as how: “...they’re leaving us with less and less of a choice about what we do in our own classrooms,” and Anna believes that this places teachers in the situation where they must “...just find a way to get it done” (ibid.). More than just competing goals (helping her students and meeting district expectations), it appears that Anna in fact feels her professional expertise is being devalued by her teaching context, and that CIG offers her a possibility to both continue developing as a professional and to transform elements of her own practice through interactions with colleagues. Thus, Anna has a dual motivation (concrete specific dimension- i.e. solving this particular situation as well as an overarching dimension about professional growth in general as a way of helping to maintain/ extend her identity as she sees it) for taking part in CIGs. I will argue later in this chapter that this dual motivation illuminates how she approached the CIG session during which she presented her dilemma as well as the transformations to her teaching practice following the session.

### ***5.2 A The Dilemma***

Anna's dilemma concerned the performance of one of her students, Kayla (a pseudonym), during a component of Language Arts instruction known as Writer's Workshop. In Anna's class, Writer's Workshop began with what she referred to as "a small moment activity." These activities were writing prompts that asked students to recount events from their lives or to describe people or things that were important to them. The children did not prepare for small moment activities in advance and were asked to work independently on their writing. This was followed by time for one-to-one meetings during which Anna met with each student individually for a writing conference while the rest of the class completed other assignments. During the writing conferences, Anna read the student's small moment writing and offered him/her corrections and feedback. In an email, Anna explained that she had not learned this as a formal approach to Writer's Workshop but that she developed it on her own based on the kinds of activities other teachers used in their classes (Anna's interview, April 2005). She also explained that she found this approach to Writer's Workshop to be "efficient," noting that "we just don't always have a lot of time" as Language Arts is only one component of her activities with her class.

According to Anna, Kayla was a creative and articulate student who did well when asked to write a story, but who experienced problems with the small moment activities. Her responses were much shorter than the other students' (usually only about six sentences long) and her ideas were not well developed and any descriptions she gave lacked details. This was not characteristic of Kayla's usual writing ability during other assignments, but it seemed to occur every time she was asked to complete a "small moment" writing. Anna summarizes the situation as follows:

*Kayla is one of my strongest writers and yet when I gave them the "small moment" prompt, she hardly wrote anything... I'm concerned about my Writer's Workshop and whether...the student is getting what I am trying to get across (Anna's email, January 2005).*

Anna went on to say that she was not overly concerned about Kayla because she knew that she was able to write successfully at times and so she believed her writing abilities were developing. What troubled Anna was why Kayla was not able to show those abilities during Writer's Workshop and what could account for the inconsistencies in her performance. In other words, the dilemma for Anna was spurred by cognitive dissonance in attempting to reconcile two different and seemingly competing profiles of Kayla's writing. From an SCT perspective this dissonance positioned Anna to be able to benefit from inquiry into the dilemma. As I explained earlier in this dissertation, the Vygotskian notion of orientation, as outlined by Gal'perin, is a key feature of human action. Anna's awareness of the two profiles of Kayla's writing and her inability to reconcile them pushes her development by priming her to be able to benefit from the group's mediation, as we will see later in this chapter. As Vygotsky might have said, Anna's thinking about this dilemma was "ripe" for development.

At the time of the CIG session, Anna reported that she had not yet attempted an intervention because she simply was not sure how to proceed. She added that another reason she had not taken any action was that although she found the issue perplexing, it did not represent a "burning dilemma" for her because she knew that Kayla could write well in other contexts (Anna's email, January 2005), a point I discuss further in the next section.

### **5.3 Choosing the CIG Protocol: Anna's Dual Orientation**

As explained, Anna looked at CIGs as an opportunity to elicit help from colleagues for a dilemma in her classroom but she was also interested in developing her own level of expertise with CIGs because she found that the protocols themselves gave her ideas for how she could structure interactions in her classroom. Anna's dual orientation to CIG influenced the kind of protocol she was interested in following during her session. As I will explain, Anna wanted not

only to find a protocol that would be appropriate to resolving her dilemma, she also wanted one that she had not previously used, as this would increase her own base of knowledge about CIGs. Anna has what we might term a metacognitive goal as she indeed wants to learn about her dilemma and attempt to resolve the puzzle of Kayla's writing profiles, but at the same time she wants to learn more about the use of protocols to work through dilemmas as she believes this can, in turn, be brought into her classroom. Before going into detail about the process of selecting which protocol to use, I will first contextualize the CIG group itself, including Anna's level of experience with CIG and also her facilitator's experience because this is important for appreciating what follows.

### ***5.3A Experienced and Inexperienced CIG Members***

Anna's dilemma was presented during the second year of data collection when a new CIG had formed that combined teachers who had participated in CIG the year before and also teachers new to CIG. As mentioned in chapter 3, the CIG was formed as a professional development group for which teachers could obtain graduate credits. When teachers in the district heard that there was a professional development opportunity that would also give them graduate credit, many were interested in being a part of it. There was a lot of discussion early on to determine whether to keep the experienced CIG members as their own unit and to have the new teachers form a separate group, or to create random groups with a mix of both old and new members. It was decided during one of the early sessions that each group would be comprised of both experienced and novice CIG participants, and so this way teachers with experience in the CIG model would train new members as they engaged in the group activity. Interestingly, this process resonates well with the apprenticeship model, as outlined by Rogoff (1994). From this perspective, newcomers are apprenticed into ways of talking and acting while participating in activities with others and gradually moving metaphorically inward from the periphery. None of



the CIG participants referenced this work, but their reasoning for mixing the groups in terms of experience level fits with Rogoff's arguments.

Anna's group included three new members and six returning members. Anna's dilemma was presented during the third CIG session after the new groups had been created, although the group was still in the process of building a cohesive unit where all members were comfortable sharing their thoughts and trusted one another to provide frank, helpful critiques, questions, and suggestions. As one group member wrote in her journal, they were at this point still attempting

*...to figure out what was important to our group and what words would help the group to function effectively. There was also some trust required. A number of the people in the group have taken the [CIG] class before. Trust us to know what works was their message. A number of people know each other well, or work closely together. They already communicate on a more comfortable level than the newcomers (CIG member journal, October 2004).*

Anna explained, however, that even those experienced with CIGs were not truly "experts" in her view because they had tended to "use the same protocols over and over again" but had never used many of the other protocols (Anna's interview, April 2005). For Anna, exploring previously unused protocols represented an opportunity for the group – newcomers and experienced members alike – to learn more about CIGs. I will return to this in the next section.

Before moving on, I would like to add that while Anna had been a part of the group that had been initially trained in the CIG process the previous year, the teacher who volunteered to be her facilitator, Mona (a pseudonym), was a new CIG member. Both Anna and Mona stated their interest at the end of an earlier CIG session and were asked by the group if they could try to provide an opportunity to tackle a dilemma that involved student work. As mentioned, this was an area Anna was greatly interested in. She wrote that she was confident she would be able to find a piece of work that would "...give me a new frame of reference to the parts of the curriculum that I've got to complete by the end of the year and how I can do that in way that will

be really interesting for my students” (Anna’s email, January 2005). It is interesting that Anna’s first thought seems not to have been about Kayla and the Writer’s Workshop but had to do with the general issue of innovation in her classroom. As already noted, Anna did not consider the situation with Kayla to be a “burning dilemma” and this may explain why the dilemma was not foremost in her mind when she began to think about presenting to the CIG group. Her focus appears to be gaining familiarity with the CIG process and working through new protocols. However, this should not be interpreted as a sign that the Kayla dilemma was unimportant to Anna. In fact, she clarifies that “As a teacher I want all of my students to be successful all of the time, not just some of the students some of the time. I know Kayla can be successful but she isn’t performing in Writer’s Workshop the way I know that she can and that’s definitely a problem” (Anna’s email, January, 2005).

### ***5.3B A Protocol for the Dilemma That Was Not “Burning”***

Anna explained that she volunteered to present a dilemma on student work even though she was not facing a “burning dilemma like the ones we usually see brought to the group...I have a really good group of students this year and have not had too many struggles that I’ve been unable to find a solution to” (From Anna’s email, January 2005). However, she added that Math and Language Arts were two areas where the curriculum had become very demanding, “with so much to cover” that she felt she was often unable to take the time she would like (ibid.). This echoes her earlier comments about her approach to Writer’s Workshop, which she described as “efficient,” indicating that it allowed her to get the job done in a timely manner. However, it is clear that in her search for efficient methods she felt she was making compromises that might not be in her students’ best interest, something Kayla’s writing performance during the workshop seems to have called Anna’s attention to. To reference again her concern about the Writer’s Workshop, Anna worried about whether the students were “getting what I am trying to get

across” (Anna’s email, January, 2005). She further stated that “When I see a student like Kayla who I know can write well but she’s struggling I have to step back as a teacher and consider the question: is the problem coming from how I have set things up for the students?” (ibid.). For Anna, the dilemma involving Kayla appears to be connected to the tension between meeting curricular demands and implementing best practices with her students. Specifically, she worries that while her approach to Writer’s Workshop has what she sees as the advantage of relative efficiency, it may not be creating an optimal space for her students to show what they are able to do.

However, as I have already mentioned, working through the Writer’s Workshop dilemma was not Anna’s only motivation for volunteering to present in a CIG session. She was also interested in helping the group to continue to develop their own expertise in CIG, and to do this she decided to find a protocol that none of the group members had used before. Instead of simply looking for a protocol that matched the dilemma, Anna actually had two criteria for choosing a protocol. In her words,

*I was thinking of bringing a piece of [student] writing... that we could use to practice a different protocol- other than a Consultancy or Tuning Protocol... We seem to use the same ones every time...It would be good to try to build on our current repertoire of protocols (From Anna’s email, January 2005).*

At first, Mona was uncertain that it would be good to choose a new protocols since, as explained earlier, newcomers were looking to the experienced CIG members to provide guidance. In her email to Anna, she initially expresses some reluctance, and suggests instead a protocol that was more familiar to the group, the Collaborative Assessment Conference (CAC). Citing the CIG training manual (underlined) in her email, she writes

[CAC] has the potential to reveal not only the student’s mastery of the curriculum’s goals, but also a wealth of information about the student him/herself: his/her intellectual interests, his/her strengths, and his/her struggles. The Collaborative Assessment Conference was designed to give teachers a systematic way to mine the richness...(From CIG Manual, 2004) I guess it depends on what you want to get out of

the discussion...Why did you choose that particular piece of student work... is there anything you would want me to turn the group's attention to... (From Mona's email response, January 2005).

For Mona, selecting a CIG protocol is about finding one that best matches the presenting teacher's dilemma, and this is in fact how protocols are usually chosen. Anna, however, remained committed to trying out a new protocol. What appears to be happening here is that Mona is searching for a tool that will help Anna to work through the Writer's Workshop dilemma and this is clearly in line with the way protocols are usually selected. Anna, however, maintains a dual focus. She views the situation with Kayla as important but not "burning," suggesting perhaps that it is comparatively less urgent than other dilemmas that have been brought before the group. For Anna, this reduced level of urgency gives her a sense of freedom to simultaneously pursue her other goal of exploring new protocols. In other words, she wants to address the dilemma but is willing to choose a protocol that may not be the best for this particular situation but does have relevance and is new for the group. In terms of a dual focus, we may say that the goal of exploring new protocols was in the foreground for Anna; the dilemma with Kayla, albeit still important to Anna (as her own remarks indicate) was in the background.

Anna's dual focus led to some frustration on Mona's part, as she maintained that "the whole point of CIG is to work through a real dilemma and not just practice using protocols" (Mona's email, January 2005). Typically, the presenting teacher and facilitator collaboratively determine the protocol that they believe will optimally engage the group in whatever dilemma needs to be addressed. One way of thinking about this is that the CIG manual is a form of mediation in the sense of a toolkit: the manual contains a range of protocols, or tools, along with directions on how each is to be used. The presenter and facilitator must then select the appropriate tool for the job. This calls to mind a distinction made by Newman and Holzman (1993, pp. 38-39) in their discussion of tool-based mediation (see discussion in Chapter 2). To

review that discussion, Newman and Holzman explain that some tools are made available to us through our culture in a ready-made form and are intended to be used not for any single problem but for a generalized set of problems. For example, hammers are a ready-made tool that are not specific to a single activity such as only putting these nails into this door; instead hammers have the function of striking many different kinds of nails into all sorts of surfaces, and so hammers are used everyday by people doing all kinds of work. Newman and Holzman describe this as a tool-for-result approach to mediation. They contrast this with a tool-and-result approach, which they explain is when the tool is created in the process of the activity itself and has no meaning or purpose outside this activity. They make this point by describing the work of a tool-and-die maker. This craftsman, they explain, actually produces the tools s/he needs for a given job while doing that job. This means that the tool is a result of the activity but it is also a pre-condition for the completion of that activity.

A third way of thinking about mediation that is not discussed by Newman and Holzman but that I think is relevant to CIG protocols comes from the work of Wertsch. Wertsch (2002) describes a real life scenario that is probably very familiar to everyone involved in academic work. A student comes to see him in his office and during their conversation wants to recommend an important book but cannot remember exactly the right one. However, he is able to recall certain details, and so with the help of the website Amazon.com, he finds the book in question. According to Wertsch, the psychological act of remembering was mediated by his use of an internet website. More important, Wertsch explains that his use of the website was creative: Amazon is intended as a place to purchase books, it is not designed as a tool for remembering and yet this is how it functioned for Wertsch. From this perspective, tool-based mediation does not necessarily mean following it in a precisely specified way (as in the case of a hammer) but it also does not mean that we must invent new tools (as in the case of the tool-and-die maker). Instead, we can adapt existing tools for our own purposes even when these purposes differ from how the

tools were originally intended to be used. For Mona, the CIG manual and protocols were similar to the tool and toolbox, and she oriented to the activity of selecting a protocol in the way that one must choose between, for example, a hammer, screwdriver, or wrench. Anna, on the other hand, recognized the manual as offering valuable information about CIGs but felt that this was only a “starting point for what we want to do,” going on to say that

*I really got a lot out of the [CIG] training and all that, it was really good, but personally I think it's really got to be about teachers solving problems and maybe that means changing things up and combining the best parts of protocols because you're going to find that some parts of some of them just work better for you than others (Anna's journal, February 2005).*

For Anna, the CIG manual and protocols were important forms of mediation but she felt confident in her ability to not only select a ready-made protocol but to revise and implement them in her own way and, as she says, “changing things up and combining the best parts of protocols” to make something new that fits the demands of a particular situation. Importantly, during the CIG session when the protocol was actually used, it was Mona and not Anna who made changes to the protocols, something I discuss below in greater detail.

In the end, after emailing each other extensively about the protocols, Anna and Mona reached a compromise that both were relatively comfortable with. They agreed to use the Describing Student Work (henceforth, DSW) Protocol, a protocol that fit the dilemma and was new to everyone although it was similar to ones the group had used the preceding year and that Anna described as “really powerful” (Anna's email, January 2005). Nevertheless, Mona confessed that she remained somewhat apprehensive about how successful the session would be as there were now two unknown elements: she was a first-time facilitator and the protocol was new to all the group members. She explains,

New things scare me a bit – not enough to keep me from trying it but enough to help me plan and prepare. That was another hard part – trying to prepare to facilitate something I had never witnessed or experienced- and all of it over email! ... So I planned and I read what I needed to read and then had several email correspondences with the

appropriate people who were presenting and it all turned out fine in the end (Mona's journal, February 2005).

It is worth noting that Mona seems to find the process even more daunting because so much of the planning took place over email rather than face-to-face. I will comment further on this in the next section.

### ***5.3C Working Through Constraints on CIG Planning***

Because this was a busy time of year for both Anna and Mona (parent conferences and professional meetings), they were unable to find a common time during which they could meet face-to-face to plan for the group session. This is a very real constraint many teachers face when trying to do something like CIG. It is not always possible to allow a good deal of time for planning the CIG session in the way that one would ideally prefer. Teachers may be forced to seek out alternatives that will work within the constraints – and possibilities – of their own school context. For Anna and Mona, they decided to conduct the bulk of their planning over email and they just met briefly prior to the group meeting to ensure that they were on the same page. During the month of January they exchanged a series of emails and while this did allow them to select a protocol, the process was not without problems. Most of the CIG and planning sessions take place in person and as a result a teacher's thoughts while choosing a protocol can be further explained and/ or clarified. This process wasn't as smoothly achieved over email. As Mona put it, sometimes "some of the details got lost in the language and rapid pace of sending emails" (Mona's Journal, February 2005). For example, Anna noted in her journal that at one point when they were using the CIG manual to discuss various protocols they could use, they agreed upon one but later they discovered that they were actually talking about two different protocols:

...I later found out that I was confusing protocol names in my head...We might have caught it if we had looked at the two protocols together rather than over email. I guess it worked out in the end after all (Anna's journal, February 2005).

Despite the challenges Anna and Mona experienced planning for their session and selecting the protocol, both later stated in their journals that the DSW Protocol was a good choice. Of course the CIG manual offered Anna and Mona a number of options they could choose from, and as explained they identified protocols that could have been used with the Writer's Workshop dilemma. Each of these may have led to different insights during the CIG session. However, the DSW Protocol had the advantage of fitting Anna's two criteria of being a new protocol for the group and having relevance to her dilemma. In fact, in her journal, Anna explained that one feature of this protocol that she preferred over others they considered was that there was not a focus on assessing the student's work in the traditional sense of discussing ratings or describing the work in relation to a set rubric. Instead, the group members were asked to help with a description of the student's work that was much more diagnostic. In Anna's words:

*I think the Describing Student Work Protocol might be the best one to help me see if others can see the kinds of things we've been working on in the classroom... This is one I think is similar to what we did at the initial training and that was really powerful.*  
(Anna's email, January 2005).

In the next section, I discuss the protocol in more detail and particularly how it was used during Anna's CIG session. As should be clear at this point, Anna viewed this session as both a chance to work through the dilemma and also to gain experience with a new protocol and thereby increase her CIG expertise, which she could then bring into her classroom. Given this dual orientation to CIG, my analysis first focuses on the process through which the group became familiar with how to use this new protocol (i.e. how their interaction and participation needed to be structured to follow the protocol) and then I will examine the use of the protocol to address the Writer's Workshop dilemma.



#### 5.4 A New Tool

The DSW Protocol requires the presenting teacher to share a piece of student work with the group, either by displaying it so all members can view (e.g., via a chart or enlarged student work) or producing copies to distribute to the group. The facilitator then leads the group through a series of rounds during which individual group members take turns making comments or asking questions about the piece of work. Each round has a particular focus (e.g., general impressions of the work, relation of work to development of specific skills or content knowledge, etc.) that is introduced by the facilitator, and the facilitator also may interject comments to follow-up on group members' questions and remarks during the round. The facilitator may choose to summarize the group's statements at the end of each round. The final round in the protocol is to debrief the protocol and its effectiveness in answering the dilemma that was presented to the group. The DSW Protocol, as it was annotated by Mona and distributed to group members, is reproduced in Figure 5.1.

<p><b><i>Describing Student Work Protocol</i></b>  <i>(adapted by Marylyn Wentworth from many sources)</i></p>
<p><b>Purpose:</b> The goal of this protocol is to focus on the work of one student as a way to better understand that students' way of thinking</p>
<p><b>Time:</b> 1 hour (can be as much as 2 hours)</p>
<p><b>Roles:</b> Presenter of student work; Facilitator/ Chairperson; Review group (all but Presenter and Facilitator)</p>
<p><b>Process:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Review descriptive process: (5 minutes)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Description NOT judgment or evaluation</li> <li>b. All work bears the imprint and the signature of the author and so offers an important access to the interest, ways of creating order and point of view</li> <li>c. Formal process of go-arounds. You are free to pass</li> <li>d. NO cross dialogue</li> <li>e. Be brief (not a lot of "ands")</li> <li>f. Use action words, descriptive words and phrases</li> <li>g. Focus for each round (Facilitator takes notes for common ground)</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. <i>Practice descriptions (5-10 minutes): Since true description is difficult, start with a reflection/ description exercise. The skill of the group in being descriptive rather than evaluative dictates how much practice is needed.</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Free association for "TEACHER", "PDS" or "CIG PROCESS"</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

- b. Free association with an art piece (with writing?)
- c. Practice go-arounds
- 3. *Work presentation and description (5-10 minutes)*
  - a. Share the work – the teacher may choose to read some of the work or have someone else do so
  - b. Describe the work??? *The description tends to be less evaluative if the teacher does not give too much information, as too much pre-knowledge may prejudice the view of the ream... Often NO information is given other than the work itself*
  - c. Describe the child (age, siblings, pertinent information?)
- 4. *Rounds (30 minutes): Each round is summarized by the facilitator and the focus for the next round set. Facilitator might vary the beginning person for rounds and change the order from clockwise to counter clockwise. Facilitator might choose to insert a clarifying question round where the group members can ask the presenting teacher clarifying questions*
  - a. Literal description (*always done with this protocol*): General impressions, physical description as in what do you see
  - b. What is this student working on: skills or purpose for writing
  - c. Assessment options
- 5. *Final Round... Debrief/ Feedback on Process Round (5 minutes)*
  - a. How did this work... or not
  - b. What did you learn?
  - c. Suggestions for facilitation
  - d. Time for the presenter to say what was learned from this student

**Figure 5.1: Describing Student Work Protocol** (CIG session protocol, January 2005)

As noted above, Mona, despite her initial concerns about being new as a facilitator, made certain changes to the DSW protocol. In her journal, she describes that she “worked on” the protocol before giving it to the group because

*I knew that the group would share my worry to be working with a brand new protocol so I tried to make it as simple to read as I could. I tried to have the protocol retyped and accessible for each person...with italics to make it more concise and easier to read (Mona’s journal, February 2005).*

This was not the only way that Mona attempted to mediate the group members’ efforts to understand the structure of this new protocol. During the *practice description* phase of the protocol Mona brought a piece of artwork and asked the group members to complete rounds describing it in order to get a better idea of what they would need to do when working on Anna’s dilemma. She also encouraged group members to ask questions about the process during this practice time and she herself asked several questions to the group to be sure that they understood the protocol (e.g., “Do you see why that’s a good description for this phase because what we’re doing is the literal description and this is about what it actually looks like?”). Members were

given the option to “pass” if they did not want to share and no time limits were enforced because Mona wanted each group member to “share all the ideas that they are able to come up with” and she reiterated that what was important was that the group “really understand the protocol” (Mona’s journal, February 2005). It is worth pointing out that Mona’s innovations may have impacted how the group understood and used the protocol. In other words, while the protocol itself exists in a physical form as a symbolic tool, it is implemented by the group as a conceptual tool, and the implementation may have been effected in important ways by Mona’s changes. Of course, because this protocol had never been used by the group before, we cannot draw comparisons between different implementations of the protocol (with Mona’s changes and without), and so any discussion of the impact of the innovations would remain speculative.

Even though Anna as the presenting teacher had worked with Mona to select the DSW Protocol and thus was more familiar with it at the outset than the rest of the group, she also benefitted greatly from Mona’s presentation protocol and the way she conducted the practice time. She reflected,

*For me it was really powerful to see how everything played out with all of us there actually using the protocol. It’s one thing to imagine it in your head and be like oh yeah so then they’re going to have to do this round or whatever. But when you’re there you see things...everybody has to wait their turn which is hard if you’ve got something you really want to get out (From Anna’s interview, April 2005).*

Anna was also struck by the group’s efforts to distinguish between remarks that are purely descriptive and those that are evaluative or judgmental. Several teachers found during the practice time that the descriptions they offered were actually judgments, and this was something that the group came to understand as Mona provided follow-up to their remarks. The group’s success in meeting Anna’s needs is largely due to Mona’s interventions and guidance during the various rounds as will be discussed later in this chapter. Anna noted that, “*It’s a lot harder than you think...[and] something really important for my students to understand*” (ibid.). Here again,

Anna is simultaneously engaged in the CIG process but also thinking about how this process may be woven into her classroom. The DSW Protocol in fact becomes an important part of how Anna eventually reconceptualizes her approach to Writer's Workshop. However, more needs to be said about the interactions during the CIG session, and especially the teachers' use of the DSW Protocol to address Anna's dilemma.

### 5.5 Describing Kayla's Work

The DSW Protocol differs from many other CIG protocols because the presenting teacher does not come with a question to pose to the group but rather presents a piece of student work for the rest of the group to comment on. The purpose of the protocol, as explained in the CIG manual and as indicated in Figure 5.1, is to better understand a student's thinking by focusing on an example of his/her work. Through understanding, the classroom teacher will be better positioned to receive additional support, restructure an assignment, develop an intervention, or follow some other course of action depending upon the nature of the issue. Given that there was not a question to be posed to the group but a piece of work to be presented, Anna (A) and Mona (M) kept their introductory comments to a minimum, providing only minimal details before proceeding to the sample of Kayla's writing:

*A: Alright, so I said earlier that I brought writing and I brought the actual sample to share with you but you can see it's pasted and cut and written in red and black. It's a writing piece from a second grader in my class and I don't want to tell you what we were specifically working on. I'd like to see if you could kind of from looking at it figure that out and then she'll tell you what kind of rounds we'd talked about... I thought I would just go through and read it with you because some of the parts that were in red were a little bit lighter. Just so that everyone knows the words.*

*M: Do you want to talk about in general the background or anything?*

*A: It's a little girl a second grader. Umm I don't think I'm going to go into the background. It's called How I Got Molly. And I will tell you that this is a small moment [from] the story that she was working on.*

(From CIG session transcript, February 2005)

Following this, Anna read the piece aloud to the group. The writing sample is reproduced in Figure 5.2. The parts of the text that were written in red ink during Anna's conference with Kayla are indicated by italicized font with the red writing representing the changes that Anna had made to the initial writing.

It was *a cold and merry Christmas* at my cousin's house. I was holding one of my many presents. *"I wonder what it is?" I asked.* I opened it. It was the Molly doll I wanted a lot. I gasped. *"It's Molly!" I shouted.* *"What do you say?" my mom asked.* *"Thank you Grandma Carole and Grandpa John."* I answered. *She looked just like in the catalogue. Her nice straight brown braids. She had the round glasses that made her look cute. She had the sweater to match the skirt.* I hugged her tight. For the rest of the day I played with Molly. *It had been a wonderful day.*

**Figure 5.2: Excerpt from Student Work**

The excerpt was simultaneously displayed on the table so that it was visible to all the group members and they could read along silently with Anna and see which parts of the text were in red. Anna did not explain exactly how the text in red had been revised, although some of this came out later in the session when she responded to the group members' questions and comments. Following Anna's description of Kayla's writing, Mona told the group that they were going to be participating in a description round very similar to the one that they had done while practicing with the piece of art. Mona began by asking the group if there was a volunteer who would like to begin the round and then she explained that the conversation would go clockwise (as the group members were seated in a circle) with members passing on commenting if they had nothing to share. The description round provided the CIG with the opportunity to 'state the obvious' while looking at the student writing. Some of the comments that emerged from that round are presented in Figure 5.3 (taken from CIG transcript, February 2005).

*“there was writing in both red and black pencil”*

*“there were periods and capital letters”*

*“there were spaces between the words”*

*“I notice she didn’t use said. She used asked, guessed and shouted”*

*“I see that she has an interesting beginning sentence and a conclusion”*

*“I noticed that the story seems sequenced in a logical way”*

**Figure 5.3: Examples of Descriptive Comments**

One of the interesting aspects of this round was that at the beginning the teachers focused on simple comments such as the spacing, the capitals and the periods. However, as the round progressed and the group had run through some of the more obvious features of the piece, they began to look harder at the document. Some of the group members seemed visibly agitated that they were unable to find more descriptions to share and Mona encouraged them to broaden their comments to include traits that they might expect to see with primary students. *“Perhaps you could think about your experience/ knowledge of what primary students writing may or may not look like when describing this piece of writing... think about what you would expect to see...”* As a result of this prompt, the descriptions became less superficial and segued into the second round where the teachers’ remarks concerned skills or abilities that the student already seems to have developed and those that she has not. For example, members were impressed by the amount of description included in a second-grader’s text, and others commented on Kayla’s apparent control over conventions for reporting speech in storytelling. In her journal, Anna admitted that she had been skeptical as to whether this section of the protocol would be very helpful because she worried that the group would not move beyond the kinds of superficial remarks they began with. She explains,

*I was surprised by the first round of literal descriptions. I didn’t think that I would be able to take much away from a round where people simply describe what they see. I was*

*wrong. It was helpful for me to take notes and I divided them into positives and negatives. Then when I was reflecting, things that I could work on with this student really stood out to me. I had missed that she [Kayla] used an interesting beginning sentence. We had been working on that a lot and it was gratifying to see her use it in this context (Anna's journal, February 2005).*

Mona also mentioned having a similar concern and as a result had come prepared with prompts and suggestions that she could offer to help move the discussion along.

Anna also felt compelled in some cases to explain more about the revisions that were written in red ink. She shared that some of the descriptions in Kayla's writing were done after the small moment portion of Writer's Workshop and during her conference time with Kayla. However, she explained that it was Kayla herself who had come up with descriptions and not Anna. At this point, Anna began to think about the kind of support she offered Kayla during their conference time:

*She really didn't need much help. During the conference she was the same strong writer that she normally was during other writing [sic]. She was really able to do the revising without much help from me (Anna's journal, February 2005).*

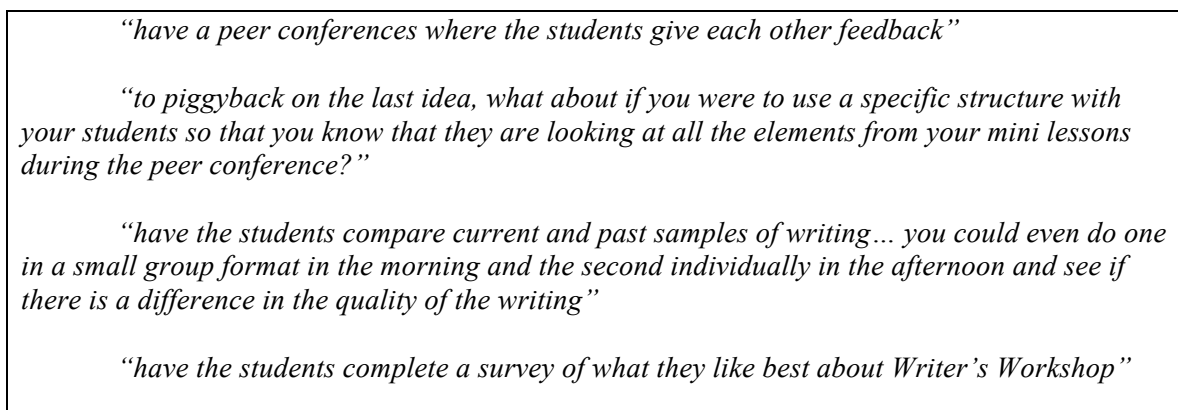
During the debriefing round, Anna stated that the discussion of how she and Kayla revised the small moment writing to improve it now compelled her to wonder whether it was really the writing itself that presented a challenge to Kayla or the time constraint. She observed that compared to the other kinds of writing she asks her students to do, only the small moment writing follows a strict time limit. Because Kayla's performance declined during small moment writing but then improved again once she had more time to work on the text during her conferences with Anna, it seemed, to Anna, that this might be the key:

*I know from my own experience that when I'm under a time crunch I just don't do as well. Some people are good under pressure like they say but not everybody. Some of us need that time to really think through what we're doing and then we can do something really good. That's how I operate (From Anna's interview, April 2005).*

Several group members indicated their agreement that it was very possible that Kayla simply needed additional time to complete the small moment writing tasks. One suggestion that

was made was that Anna might consider modeling more explicitly how to make the best use of time during that kind of activity. For example, she could suggest that students take no more than a couple of minutes to brainstorm their ideas, followed by another three or four minutes to write a brief outline that can be then used as a blueprint for the writing itself.

Another matter that was raised during the debriefing phase was that if other students were like Kayla, and ready to assume responsibility for their learning, then perhaps peer conferencing rather than teacher-student conferencing would be something to explore. Anna acknowledged to the group that she had not considered peer conferencing before but that involving the students in their learning this way was an attractive idea. This led to animated discussion and a good number of suggestions. Some of the specific suggestions produced during this phase of the protocol are reproduced in Figure 5.4.



**Figure 5.4: Examples of Suggestions During Debriefing**  
(From CIG session transcript, February 2005)

Anna was receptive to these ideas and stated in her journal that she left the session feeling that she benefitted from it even more than she had expected to. Prior to the CIG meeting, Anna had been perturbed about Kayla’s writing progress, but did not make the connection that it could be a result of the way in which she conducted her Writer’s Workshop. The group discussion led her to reconceptualize the nature of her problem as she began to think about how she could



change the way she handled this segment of the day that could improve the process not just for Kayla, but for other students in her class as well.

## **5.6 Transforming Practice**

From a Vygotskian perspective, Anna reconceptualized what she thought of her “problem” through her experience presenting in CIG in two important ways, both of which led to immediate consequences in her classroom practice. The first way that Anna did this concerns her understanding of the dilemma itself. Initially, Anna approached Kayla’s performance during Writer’s Workshop as fundamentally a question of her writing abilities. For Anna, there was an inconsistency in Kayla’s writing as she usually did well but not during Writer’s Workshop. In fact, she limited her view of Kayla’s performance to the small moment portion of the Workshop, overlooking Kayla’s contributions during their one-to-one conferences. It was through interaction during the CIG session that Anna was able to step back and question whether the inconsistency was really with Kayla’s writing abilities or with the context in which she was being asked to write. As Anna states during the stimulated recall (March 2005), “It really strikes me that I was so focused on Kayla’s work early in the session, but in this part (during the assessment options round) I began to think about my frustrations being more about my program and how I have it structured then about Kayla in particular... I was writing that that rubric idea might give my students a chance to be more creative rather than stifled with my guidelines.” Reframing the dilemma to be about writing contexts rather than Kayla’s abilities positioned Anna to begin thinking about the features of the different contexts for writing that she placed her students in, and the ways that this might affect them.

The consequence this insight had for Anna’s teaching practice was that she made two immediate changes to Writer’s Workshop. The first was that she allowed students to

continue working on their small moment pieces while she met with them individually. In the past, she had assigned other work for them to do during these conferences, and in that way she ensured that all students received the same amount of time to do their writing prior to conferencing with her. However, given her comments above that some students require more time than others, she gave students a choice to continue working on their writing if they wished or to do other work. As Anna mentioned in a paper that was presented at a local conference where she documented her students' learning as a result of the changes that she had made to her Writer's Workshop program, Kayla said, "I learned not to be afraid to share my work" (Anna, field notes, 11/05).

The second change to the workshop was that she did a lesson explicitly modeling for students how to keep track of time while writing and strategies they could use to budget their time more effectively, such as allowing themselves to set time limits for brainstorming, outlining, and other stages of the writing process. "I learned I need to look at the spelling words and check it over." "I need to use more details to tell what happened in the game." "I should use capital letters for my sentences" (Anna, field notes, 11/05).

During a stimulated recall session while watching Kayla write, Anna noted that she did find the work Kayla produced during Writer's Workshop to resemble more closely her other writing assignments, although in fairness it cannot be known for sure whether this change was due to Anna's modeling and the provision of additional time. As Anna herself stated, the reason it is hard to know for sure what made a difference in Kayla's case is that she made so many changes simultaneously to her Writer's Workshop time. As she said about her initial approach to relying on teacher-student conferencing only: Anna talked about the structure of her Writer's Workshop time during the stimulated recall session and mentioned that

When they would finish I would try to meet with them and ask questions or give advice but...there just isn't a lot of time...it's always such a rush to get to all the students

who need me- this really hasn't been the most effective conferencing strategy (Stimulated recall, March 2005)

Thus it can be said that the changes that Anna made to her Writer's Workshop benefitted both her students and herself as it enabled her to be more efficient with her time and her interactions with her students. The second way that we can see Anna changing through CIG concerns her restructuring of Writer's Workshop which began immediately after the CIG session and that she continued during the following school year. Given the group's suggestions about peer editing, Anna began to rethink her approach to Writer's Workshop in order to incorporate more student-student interaction into her program. She started by thinking about providing the students with a format called "*Praise, Question and Polish*" where

“a student has to listen to his/her partner's story as s/he reads it aloud. Then the student fills out a sheet that I created that gives praise for something that was well written or a good idea; a question that puzzled him/ her about the story; and a suggestion for how it could be improved... I modeled this with another teacher in the building and had a discussion where the students could ask questions and share concerns before I had them work in their randomly assigned pairs.”

(Stimulated recall, March 2005)

This format provided a structure that the students could draw on as they gave one another feedback on their writing. Anna modeled this process with another teacher so that the students could see firsthand what this type of interaction looked like. I believe that the group's mediation gave Anna the impetus needed to look at her Writer's Workshop program through a different lens and thereby reframe her epistemology of teaching writing.

She reported that the students seemed more enthusiastic about Writer's Workshop and that they greatly enjoyed the opportunity to work in pairs (Stimulated recall, March 2005). It is also interesting that she commented that she found the student interactions themselves to be “still focused on the writing...[but] not as much about giving corrections, more just about the ideas and considering possibilities” (ibid.).

Anna further developed her ideas for the Writer's Workshop during the following school year. This was not initially a part of the current study and so data were not collected directly on the use of her new approach. However, I was contacted by Anna when she was preparing a written paper about her experience (mentioned earlier in this chapter), and after meeting she agreed to allow me to read the final version of her paper and to reference it in this dissertation. I describe Anna's innovation to Writer's Workshop below.

### **5.7 Recontextualization**

As the next school year began, Anna began to think about the aspects of her Writer's Workshop time that worked for her and that she wanted to make changes to. One of her favorite parts of the process from the previous school year was the interaction that she observed among students in her classroom. She reported, "the students were much more excited about writing time and were always asking me if I had the new partner assignments ready" (Anna's journal, October 2005). The new school year brought new challenges as Anna had decided to participate in an inquiry project where she had to determine an area of her practice that needed to be investigated, collect data, analyze and then present at a local inquiry conference at the end of the year. While Anna was excited about the changes that she had observed in her students' enthusiasm for the Writer's Workshop time, she felt that this was just the beginning and wondered if there would be a way to further enhance their zeal for writing. She thus decided to make the Writer's Workshop her primary inquiry topic and decided to utilize the Critical Friends Groups' protocol format for the students to follow when talking about their classmates' writing. In her inquiry paper (mentioned earlier), Anna outlines her interest in using protocols as a method to foster student interaction as she felt that that during the CIG process,

*Time is given to one person to focus on something from his or her practice that is meaningful to that person. I've often wondered if students could gain similar benefits from using protocols to look at their work themselves (Anna's inquiry paper, April 2006).*

Anna began to think about ways in which Writer's Workshop could be reframed as a type of CIG protocol where students could be given time to present and collaboratively work through a problem in her writing. As she explained, this would involve "self assessment" on the students' part as they would have to first identify the problem in their writing that needed to be improved and it would also engage the students in peer review and teaching as they tried to help one another. Anna realized early on, however, that it would be very difficult for second graders to be able to facilitate and participate in the complexity of the protocol structure, so she took time to research protocols that she could modify. After a careful review of several student work analysis protocols, Anna decided to create a modified Tuning Protocol to include in her Writer's Workshop process. Anna described some of the modifications in her inquiry paper as follows:

*"Facilitating protocols requires many decisions to be made prior to and throughout the meeting (McDonald et al., 2003, p. 18). The facilitator role is one that I believe to be too sophisticated for the skills of primary students. So, one adaptation was that I decided to take on the role of the facilitator for the purpose of our classroom meetings. The other major adaptation I made was the length of time expended for implementing the protocol. Typically, a Critical Friends Group meeting can take anywhere from 45 minutes to one hour to complete. I knew that length of time would be in excess of what primary children could manage productively. So, I decreased the time frame to about one half hour."* (Anna's inquiry paper, April 2006)

To recall our discussion earlier of tool use, modification, and creation, Anna's implementation of a CIG protocol with her own students represents an especially powerful form of her development. Anna has adapted an existing tool (the Tuning Protocol) and implemented it in an altogether different context than the one it was created for. Rather than helping teachers work through dilemmas of practice Anna has assigned new meaning to the protocol so that it may now also help second-grade children work through difficulties in their writing. It should also be

noted that this use of the protocol, in turn, may also offer many benefits to the children in Anna's class. This modified tool, along with Anna as a facilitator, provides the students with a chance to take on the role of a teacher or expert, and to paraphrase Vygotsky's description of children engaged in play, they are able to become something they are not. In other words, asking students to diagnose their own writing needs and also to help 'teach' one another requires them to take on greater responsibility for their own learning, and in this way it supports the "development of imagination, self-reflection, emotions and awareness of the child's own thinking" (Egan and Gajdamaschko, 2003, p. 87). This highlights the potential link between teacher learning through the process of a CIG and student learning. As teachers change how they think about their learning and change the modes of the engagement that they expect students to function in, it has the potential to shape what and how students learn.

Again, following Anna back into the classroom the next year was not a part of this dissertation's research design, and so I do not have actual data on the effects of using a CIG protocol during Writer's Workshop. However, Anna explains in her inquiry paper that she found the protocol structure augmented the students' interactions and helped them to make greater connections in their own learning. As she says,

*"I decided that writing would offer them the most opportunity to have meaningful conversations and offer feedback to each other. I came to this conclusion based on the fact that they had previously completed partner critiques in the area of writing. They had been coached in what to look for when trying to help a peer edit his or her writing... I feel strongly that children need to be involved in conversations about their own learning."* (Anna's inquiry paper, April 2006)

## **5.8 Conclusion**

Anna's involvement with the CIG session brought about some surprising new avenues for her approach to Writer's Workshop. Prior to her presentation to the group, Anna had taught Writer's Workshop in a teacher-directed manner as she often taught a mini-lesson; had

the students follow a prompt that she provided that targeted the mini-lesson; and then met individually with each student to conference with them. She was surprised, however, to note that some of the students in her class were not comfortable expressing their small moments in this time intensive and teacher-driven format. The CIG enabled Anna to not only think about other ways to assess and provide feedback but also helped her see all the written structures that Kayla was including in her writing. Kayla's writing, while it was not a "burning dilemma", became the impetus for Anna to transform how she understood, planned for and implemented a Writer's Workshop curriculum in her classroom. Anna was able to take the suggestions made by the CIG to look at how she formatted and assessed her writing time through a different lens and to then think about whether the protocol that mediated her thinking could be used to mediate her students' writing. Her current Writer's Workshop process includes peer analysis and interaction aspect through the structure of the Tuning Protocol. This creative and innovative variation to peer coaching provided the students to think outside the box while they learned to self-reflect and self-regulate how they approached this part of the curriculum.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION: Recontextualizing Teachers' Professional Development

#### 6.1 Introduction

Educators and politicians alike seem to be searching for ways to improve both student and teacher performance, and as a result, teacher professional development programs have become the hot ticket item. The Critical Friends Group (CFG) is one model of professional development being used by many school districts in the hope of promoting school change. As discussed in Chapter 3, this model is very different from the more traditional transmission models where teachers are provided with information that they are then expected to transmit to their students. Transmission models position teachers as objects to be researched or, at best, consumers of professional knowledge rather than professionals who themselves have expertise that makes them “agents of change” (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, Joyce & Showers, 1980). Of course, the CFG model recognizes that teachers need external assistance to support their reflection on their teaching practice. Hence, transmission models take a top-down approach rather than providing teachers with the ability to be creators and directors of their own learning (Johnson & Golombek, 2002). On the other hand, CFGs as with other collaborative learning models, make different assumptions about how teachers learn and the experiences that are needed to support their growth. Collaborative models assert that teachers’ knowledge of teaching and learning is socially constructed from their prior experiences in classrooms and other educational situations. This would mean that teachers reorient how they understand and approach classroom situations when they are provided with opportunities to participate in socially mediated activity. Teachers are therefore not seen as entities who simply utilize knowledge but ones who can also create and thereby grow in their knowledge of teaching and learning. Since Sociocultural Theory is a theory of cognitive development, it aligns well to



collaborative models of professional development such as CFGs as they share the same assumptions about learning and cognitive development.

The study presented in this dissertation used the following questions to explore and track teacher learning through their involvement in a Critical Friends Group (or Conversation as Inquiry Group (CIG) as this central Pennsylvania group called themselves):

- 7) How can a Vygotskian theoretical framework contribute to our understanding of teacher learning within the context of CIGs?
- 8) How do the presenting teachers in CIGs work through their dilemma of practice (prior to the discussion, during it, and after it)? In particular, how does the CIG process lead to shifts in the presenting teacher's thinking about their dilemma?
- 9) How does the selection and use of a specific protocol (tool) that is used in the CIG process mediate the presenting teachers' learning?

This concluding chapter highlights the claims that the preceding data analysis chapters have made that both Catherine and Anna were able to transform their classroom practices after sustained mediation and engagement that occurred during the CIG process. The chapter will discuss the two protocols used (Consultancy and Describing Student Work Protocol) from an SCT perspective, viewing them as artifacts that helped to mediate teacher participation in CIGs, guiding their discussion and thinking about the dilemmas. I argue that an SCT framework provides us with a deeper understanding of how CIGs mediate teacher learning. In addition, because much of current literature on teacher professional development is focused on the impact of collaboration and inquiry on teacher practice, this chapter explores the potential contribution that the study makes to this field. The conclusion also considers some of the shortcomings of the study and suggests avenues of future research.

## 6.2 CFGs through a Vygotskian lens

This dissertation used a case study approach to understanding teacher learning as it emerged in a collaborative model of teacher professional development, namely CFGs. Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory was utilized as a theoretical lens that provided a different view of teacher learning from what is usually found in the literature on teacher education (Putman & Borko, 2000). To be precise, employing SCT in this study underscores the social origins of individual teachers' performance and helps us to trace the history of their learning as it took place at each stage of the CIG process: prior to, during and after the group session. Both the teachers whose development provided the focus for this study, Catherine and Anna, brought unique histories as teachers and learners to the dilemma that they presented to their group. These prior experiences created their initial orientation and framed how they understood the dilemma prior to their involvement in the CIG process. Their experiences served as the building blocks that primed them for the interactions that they were engaged in, first with their facilitators and later with other members of the CIG.

In brief, Catherine's dilemma focused on ways of addressing the behavior of one of her students while Anna's dilemma was concerned with a student's writing performance. Catherine struggled to find an approach to handling disruptive behavior in a manner that matched her philosophy of teaching. She initially tried to address this dilemma by talking to the parents and the school counselor and trying to implement a behavior modification plan in an attempt to provide Jason (the student) with a way to monitor and self regulate his behavior. While this plan seemed to slightly improve the classroom situation, Jason's behavior was inconsistent. It was clear to Catherine that her attempts were not helpful in changing the situation and so she decided that she could benefit from a group discussion about this dilemma.

Anna, on the other hand, was a tenured second grade teacher who was constantly "striving to innovate" and was "enthusiastic about trying new things" that might engage her

students and support their learning (From Anna's teaching philosophy interview, April 2005). Her dilemma was based on the performance of one of her students, Kayla, during the Writer's Workshop component of her Language Arts block. One of the activities that Anna conducted during Writer's Workshop was for the students to participate in writing about a "small moment". While Kayla was a creative and articulate writer when it came to writing stories, her small moment descriptions were not well developed or detailed. Anna's dilemma was spurred by her own cognitive dissonance that characterized Kayla's inconsistent writing profiles. Anna's awareness of the discrepancies in Kayla's writing and her inability to reconcile them motivated her to seek out the support of her CIG and positioned her to be receptive to their mediation. The cognitive dissonance that both teachers experienced represent the sort of inner contradiction that Vygotskian sociocultural theory argues creates the potential to push cognitive development. By implication, some sort of cognitive dissonance may be an essential element in teachers' professional development, an element that is neither recognized nor incorporated in transmission models of teacher professional development but foundational to collaborative models of teacher professional development, such as CFG.

The protocols that were selected acted as tools in a Vygotskian sense. For Vygotsky, the significance of tools is that they "provide learners with ways to become more efficient in their adaptive and problem-solving efforts" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 127). Of course, individuals learn to use tools in specific ways, and may adapt them to new situations. In this case, Catherine and Anna's facilitators (Stephen and Mona, respectively) were instrumental in first selecting a tool (protocol) appropriate to the dilemma and then making modifications so that the tool could be tailored to the specific dilemma they were working to solve. The two sessions presented in this dissertation showcase the protocols as one of the external cultural tools that engaged group members in helping the teachers reconceptualize their understanding of the dilemma and reorient the course of action they pursued. The CIG process provided both these teachers with an

opportunity for dialoguing, or intermental functioning, as the group worked together to view the dilemma from various perspectives. The totality of mediation – which included the group, the facilitator, and the protocol – guided Catherine and Anna to new ways of understanding their dilemmas and this in turn enabled them to make distinct changes in their classroom practice, both in terms of concrete steps they took to address their dilemmas as well as broader changes they implemented.

### **6.2A Protocols as mediating artifacts**

Protocols function as what Vygotskian theorists term symbolic tools in that they “amplify memory and increase the capacity to organize and communicate information and knowledge” (Scollon, 2001, p. 116). Taking a protocol-as-tool perspective helps us to understand the various mediating functions they performed by structuring the CIG sessions. These include the following: guiding the presenting teacher as she frames the question/dilemma; leading the group through a process of asking questions to the presenting teacher; and helping the group to discuss aspects of the dilemma from various angles. An important feature of the protocols is that they also structure when and how certain types of questioning and discussion can take place during the process. The structure of each protocol is different and this can be seen in the two examples that were presented in this dissertation.

The two protocols that were closely analyzed were the Consultancy Protocol (see Appendix A) employed by Catherine and Stephen and the Describing Student Work (DSW) Protocol (Appendix B) that Anna and Mona discovered and implemented in their CIG session. While both protocols provided the presenting teacher with a lens through which to view their dilemmas, they were structurally very different. In both cases, however, the presenting teacher and the facilitator worked closely to determine that the protocol was appropriate for the dilemma that was to be presented to the group. Catherine and Stephen had several planning sessions where

they worked to initially frame the question that would be presented to the group and the protocol that would guide the conversation in a way that would be meaningful to her. Anna and Mona's planning in contrast occurred over email, but eventually led to choosing a protocol that matched Anna's interests. Both Stephen and Mona prepared visual aids to help the group stay focused and planned for questions and/or issues they thought might arise during the group discussion.

Both protocols and the group sessions provided "*opportunities for learning*" (Putney et. al., 2000, p. 89) by creating spaces for both the presenting teacher and the other group members to gain new insights into the dilemma being discussed. The Consultancy and DSW protocols began with a presentation of the dilemma after which the group was given time to fully engage with the dilemma through asking questions (as in the case of the Consultancy Protocol), or participating in rounds that have a particular focus (general impressions of the work, relation of work to development of specific skills or content knowledge, etc.). Thus, while the protocols exist in a physical form, their functioning as mediating tools was at more of a conceptual level as their application to the dilemmas helped the group draw their attention to particular features of the issues. Of course, the protocols themselves were also mediated by Stephen and Mona, who each introduced modifications to emphasize certain elements they believed were essential to successful group discussion. Through this process of facilitator driven mediation and engagement with the protocols, the presenting teachers moved from an initial level of frustration and uncertainty (at the outset of the session) to new conceptualizations of their dilemmas and new plans of action. These conceptual shifts and the transformed practices that accompanied them call to mind Vygotsky's description of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) and its complement, the *zone of actual development* (ZAD). The ZPD has been given great attention the educational research because Vygotsky explained that it enables us to understand today in the present moment the level of functioning an individual will reach tomorrow. This is because development, in Vygotsky's view, proceeds from intermental functioning, as when individuals

work collaboratively to solve problems, to intramental functioning, when the dialogue and forms of reasoning that occurred have now been internalized and the individual can now approach these problems more independently. In the case of CIGs, the group collaborations, in which they drew on each individual's knowledge and expertise to talk through the dilemmas, led to new ways of thinking on the part of Catherine and Anna. Another way of framing this is to say that the forms of mediation in the CIG process that were external to Catherine and Anna, at the conclusion of the CFG process had been internalized. The new forms of classroom practice that they both pursued (described in the next section) make a strong case that their functioning following the CIG sessions is different from what it was previously as they are now seeking to bring these new conceptualizations into play as they create new ways of engaging in teaching and learning in their classrooms.

In fact, as Catherine herself reflected, the validation and the suggestions that the group provided helped her reconceptualize her dilemma, and as a result she reformulated the activity of journal writing so that Jason had more opportunities to take responsibility for his behaviors. Like Catherine, the mediation that Anna received through her involvement with Mona and the CIG process helped her reorient her understanding of her dilemma. Her experience with this process provided her with the opportunity to understand the dilemma not only as an issue with one student's writing but as a broader feature of her practice – how she structures Writers Workshop time. The power of the protocols as mediating tools was that they guided Catherine and Anna to the realization that their dilemmas were directly related to how they conceptualized their teaching practice. Vygotsky's theory helps us to move beyond a simple 'feeling' that the CIG process was helpful by allowing us to 'see' the changes in their thinking that took place as Catherine and Anna moved from initial frustration to alternative understandings (as these were formed during the group's dialogue) to their eventual transformed practice. In other words, understanding the processes of CIGs through the theoretical lens of SCT means that professional

development through CIG no longer has to be simply assumed because it can be traced from its social origins in the group's interactions (mediated by the protocols) to changes in classroom practice.

## **6.2 B Teachers transforming classroom practice**

Both teachers were engaged in more than just reconceptualizing their dilemma – they also made significant changes to their practice after their involvement in the CIG process. The mediation through participating in CIG helped position Catherine and Anna to transform aspects of their classroom practice to reflect the new knowledge they co-constructed during CIG. Their reorientation not only to their perceived dilemmas but to broader components of their teaching supports Lantolf's (2000, p. 14) interpretation of Vygotsky's concept of internalization:

*“Internalization, then, is the process through which a person moves from carrying out concrete actions in conjunction with the assistance of material artifacts and of other individuals to carrying out actions mentally without any apparent external assistance.”*

The data that were presented in Chapters 4 and 5 make a strong case that Catherine and Anna gained much more than suggestions on how to 'solve a problem' – they built upon their own histories as well as the professional expertise of their CIG members to chart a new path that included not only a new orientation to the original dilemma but also ideas for how to engage other learners in their classrooms, and potentially new ways of thinking about problems they have not yet encountered.

For example, Catherine's reconceptualization led to her engaging with the dilemma in a new way (recontextualization). The mediation that Catherine received both from Stephen and the CIG led her to reframe and reformat the behavior plan in a manner that included Jason in the process as an agent rather than as purely an object. She also implemented a counseling component into her classroom meeting time to provide all students the opportunity to interact and

collaborate with other students in a structured format. Catherine's recontextualization of the dilemma led to a transformation of practice that extended beyond her dilemma with an individual student. The home-school journal that was created for use with Jason was used with all students in an attempt to create a space for open-ended, student-centered communication with their parents. Catherine also continued to implement the "Rock Buddy" program to help students feel secure, encouraged and motivated through the course of the school year. It is clear that the mediation Catherine received prompted understanding and action that would likely have been different had she simply tried to work through the dilemma on her own.

While Anna also reconceptualized her dilemma, her method of recontextualizing it was different from Catherine's. Her new orientation to the dilemma resulted in changes to the portion of her schedule for Writer's Workshop as she gave individual students the time they needed to complete their "small moments" writing while she met with those who had already finished. In the past, she had provided all students with the same amount of time to complete their pieces. Anna also explicitly taught students how to manage their time while working on their small moments through modeling and sharing strategies. It is clear therefore that the CIG process helped Anna reframe her approach to teaching writing in her classroom. It is interesting to note, that in both cases, the teacher's transformation was in the direction of increasing student agency and helping students develop metacognitive strategies to become more self-directed.

The other way in which Anna's CIG experience led to transformative practice was that she began to think of her Writer's Workshop as a modified CIG session where students were given time to present and collaboratively work through an area in their writing with which they were struggling. She thought that this would be an opportunity for students to both self-assess and participate in peer review and teaching as they listened to and searched for solutions to issues with their writing and their peers' writing. The protocol that she modified and used with her second graders was the Tuning Protocol. Anna's modification of an existing tool for use in an



altogether different context than the one for which it was created is revealing of the powerful learning that Anna experienced. Anna's commitment to the process of teaching and learning proved to be at the heart of the solution for the initial dilemma that she presented and it also enabled her to find a way to incorporate what she felt were innovative and democratic practices in her classroom.

Catherine and Anna's examples illustrate the mediation that they received from their facilitators, the CIG manual, the protocol that they selected and the group session enabled them to make changes in how they thought about the dilemma. These reconceptualizations led to changes in how they interacted with the dilemma and later to how they transformed their classroom teaching practice. As many leading Vygotsky scholars (e.g., Leontiev 1992, Galperin 1977) have argued, development is more than just thinking or talking about a dilemma in a new way – it must transcend a given situation or context as it concerns the ability to address new or more complex problems. The examples stated above exemplify that these teachers have transformed their current teaching situations and have the potential to handle future dilemmas differently as a result of their involvement in this process. Since professional educators and policy makers want to see evidence of real change in teachers' practice (i.e. changes that lead to greater gains or at least has the potential for greater gains in student learning), SCT, presents a unique lens for understanding how teachers transform their classroom practice through their involvement in collaborative models of professional development like CFGs.

### **6.3 Juxtaposing this study alongside current research on teacher professional development**

This study comes at a time when American schools are being closely scrutinized for student success on grade level tests. Several studies (Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000, Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002, Glickman, 2003, McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) have made

the connection between teachers' professional development and student motivation and achievement. In fact, a recent report published by the National Staff Development Council (2009) identified several findings based on research that teachers' professional learning and student learning are interrelated. Some of the key findings that were a part of this report and have a direct bearing on this dissertation are as follows:

- Sustained and intensive professional development for teachers is related to student achievement gains.
- Collaborative approaches to professional learning can promote school change that extends beyond individual classrooms.
- Effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers.
- U.S. teachers report little professional collaboration in designing curriculum and sharing practices, and the collaboration that occurs tends to be weak.
- Teachers say that their top priorities for further professional development are learning more about the content that they teach (23%), classroom management (18%), teaching students with special needs (15%) and using technology in the classroom (4%)
- U.S. teachers participate in workshops and short-term professional development events at similar levels as teachers in other nations. But the United States is far behind in providing public school teachers with opportunities to participate in extended learning opportunities and productive collaborative communities.
- Other nations that outperform the United States on international assessments invest heavily in professional learning and build time for ongoing, sustained teacher development and collaboration into teacher' work hours.
- U.S. teachers have limited influence in crucial areas of school decision making.

This NSDC report highlights the claim that professional development needs to be strongly anchored in classroom practice. They state that professional development should be job embedded, ongoing and should be linked to issues impacting schools. This is a key argument for including collaborative and inquiry driven models of teacher professional development, such as CFGs, in the professional development opportunities offered by school districts. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, one of the goals of CFGs is to “identify student learning goals that make sense in their schools, look reflectively at practices intended to achieve these goals, and collaboratively examine teacher and student work in order to meet that objective” (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000, p.9). CFGs provide time for teachers to work collaboratively to delve into

classroom based dilemmas, whether they be about curriculum, student work, or issues in the school culture that impact student learning (Dunne & Honts, 1998).

CFGs also provide a systematic process – protocols – that guide teachers through the process of investigating areas of their teaching that can be enhanced by a group conversation. To review, this process begins with the presenting teacher creating a succinct and evidence based question that is critical to their work with students. This question becomes the basis for sustained conversation around evidence-based artifacts of student work, behavior and/ or curriculum. One of the most compelling features of this method of collaborative discourse is that teachers *volunteer* to participate in a process where they are both the developers and the directors of their “*learning in and from practice*” (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p.10). As these authors explain,

*Crucial questions about teaching and learning would be one part of the frame of such work, and evidence of professional work—teaching and learning—would be another part. Investigating such questions and bringing salient evidence to bear would be central activities in the acquisition and improvement of professional knowledge. Thus the pedagogy of professional education would in considerable part be a pedagogy of investigation.* (Ball & Cohen, 1999, p. 13)

While CFGs do provide a space for teachers to learn in and from their practice as they present and participate in conversations about classroom dilemmas, they have not up to this point documented *how* this learning occurs. There are educators (Applebee, 1993, Wilhelm, 1997) who feel that there is a disconnect between theory and practice and that teacher education programs (and by extension professional development models) are too theoretical and not adequately connected to classroom practice (Gallagher, 1996, Voutira, 1996). Smagorinsky, Cook & Johnson (2003, p. 1406) argue that the “theory-practice dichotomy” dilutes the understanding that practice, in the Vygotskian tradition, is deeply embedded in culture and the history of social interactions occurring in teaching communities. They argue that when teachers are involved in specific goal oriented activity that is socially situated, they are co-constructing new knowledge that positively impacts the community that they are a part of. Practice and learning are thus

linked as teachers develop new conceptual frameworks to aspects of their teaching. Smagorinsky et. al. (2003) also refer to the path of learning as a “twisted” one as teachers often return back to the original dilemma and make many deviations in how they understand the dilemma before they find a solution that not only fits the current situation but also transforms their teaching. If teachers’ development requires necessitates multidirectional investigations into their practice, it then amplifies the claims made in this NSDC report that states that “effective professional development is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers”.

The report also determined that all U.S. teachers are involved in short-term workshops, but that these workshops do not provide opportunities for teachers to make the connections between the theory presented and the implications that it has for classroom teaching. These connections cannot be made without teachers taking a direct role in structuring and investigating their practice and school administrators providing a time a space for these collaborative processes to take place. The participating teachers involved in the study presented in this dissertation did not receive any release from the district for the time spent in the CIG process. This was an intense time commitment for teachers who are already stretched thin with after-hour job requirements.

The NSDC report supports many arguments that CFGs are a valuable professional development model as teachers are given opportunities to take the time to inquire into areas of their teaching that they believe needs attention. It is a model that validates teachers’ experiences and expertise. While the report clearly supports such collaboration and leadership in school communities as enhancing student achievement, it does not mention if or how models such as the CFGs are successful. Transmission models (such as seminars, speakers, brief workshops, etc) may still be able to provide teachers with certain types of knowledge (for example, to enhance

teacher awareness of concepts or models of practice), but does not support the type of conceptual change that CFGs are able to. Transformative practice requires the elements discussed in this dissertation. From an SCT perspective, mediation is the means through which real change in activity will take place, which emphasizes a need for collaborative models of professional development to become the norm and not the exception. To return to Smagorinky's argument that development is a "twisted" process, we also need to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with others for a sustained and intense period time. In other words, if we want to see real changes in teachers' professional development, it should be linked to a robust theory of learning. SCT is one theoretical lens that can begin to fill in the holes of what this learning looks like, what supports it, and how it follows a twisted developmental path along which all teachers must travel. Paying attention to these considerations could offer professional development designers powerful vehicles for enabling teachers to transform their practices while utilizing SCT as one of the design elements.

#### **6.4 Shortcomings of the study**

This dissertation was intended to explore how teachers understand a classroom dilemma through their involvement in a CFG. As argued earlier, while research (McDonald et.al., 2003, Blythe and Allen, 2004) has shown that this is a viable approach to teacher professional development as the conversations that take place impact student learning, there has not been a focus on *how* these groups affect individual teacher learning. As with many exploratory studies, it is difficult to project all the kinds of data that would provide the best evidence to strengthen the case being made until later. This was the situation with this particular study.

Foremost among the shortcomings of this dissertation was that I was unable to videotape all CIG sessions due to some members feeling uncomfortable with their comments being used in the study. This resulted in several interesting dilemmas being left out of the analysis and nearly

meant that Catherine's case would not have been able to be presented. It was only due to the tremendous support that both Stephen and Catherine provided through additional one-on-one interviews that I was able to glean enough information that could fill in the holes of the actual session. In spite of these modifications, it was a shame to not have a transcription of the actual CIG session. It would have been helpful to see the specific comments and questions that were asked throughout the session that might have contributed to Catherine's changing perception of the dilemma.

A second issue that arose during the data analysis was that the study did not include collecting data in the form of classroom observations prior to and following the presenting teachers' CIG sessions. This would have been very helpful in understanding in greater depth how Catherine and Anna implemented changes to their classroom practice. Teacher transformative practice is the crux of development as it exemplifies how they use the mediation that they receive and internalize it to change their teaching behaviors. I believe that classroom data would create a clearer picture of the process that a teacher goes through as she tries to implement new ways of thinking about teaching and learning in her classroom. This would have been particularly helpful when talking about Anna's reconceptualized version of Writer's Workshop. Much of the discussion about Anna's new program came from the data included in a paper that she presented at a local conference. This analysis would have been strengthened by actual classroom observation data that could have documented the ways she went about incorporating these changes in her classroom as well as the implications for the students' involvement in the process.

## **6.5 Implications for future research**

As I conclude this dissertation, I am struck by the realization that Critical Friends Groups have been a large part of my life for the last five years. Being a member of this group has made

me a more innovative teacher who utilizes the expertise that other teachers possess to help me solve tough dilemmas in my practice. It is also my belief that providing teachers with a collaborative space to be both the co-constructors and the co-directors of their learning can greatly enhance their reflections on their practice which in turn has the potential to impact student learning. I am currently investigating ways to create a CIG for novice teachers in order to explore the role that group discourse plays on the formation of their teacher identity at the very start of their career. As I envision in now, this group will likely contain a mix of both pre-service and newly hired first year teachers who would meet once a month to identify and collaboratively investigate classroom dilemmas. These teachers will be involved in keeping a journal/ blog of their experiences as a participant in the group. This research could provide valuable insights into how teachers create and develop identities and how it can impact their work with students. The use of SCT as a theoretical lens could also be applied to other collaborative and sustained models of professional development that such as peer coaching, lesson study, study groups, action research, etc. As mentioned early in this dissertation, this study is just the starting point to understanding how teachers explore, understand and tackle dilemmas that are deeply embedded in their work with students. It is my hope that it has also presented a new way of looking at teaching practice – one that is grounded on personal stories, collaboration and social discourse.

## Appendix A

**The Consultancy Protocol (CIG manual, 2004)****Consultancy Protocol – developed by Gene Thompson-Grove**

**Purpose:** A consultancy is a structured process for helping an individual or a team think more expansively about a particular, concrete dilemma

**Time:** approximately 50 minutes

**Process:**

1. The presenter gives an overview of the dilemma with which s/he is struggling, and frames a question for the Consultancy group to consider. The framing of this question, as well as the quality of the presenter's reflection on the dilemma being discussed are key features of this protocol. The focus of the group's conversation is on the dilemma.

(5-10 minutes)

2. The Consultancy group asks clarifying questions of the presenter – that is, questions that have brief factual answers. (5 minutes)

3. The group asks probing questions of the presenter. These questions should be worded so that they help the presenter clarify and expand his/her thinking about the dilemma presented to the Consultancy group. The goal here is for the presenter to learn more about the question he/she framed or to do some analysis of the dilemma presented. The presenter may respond to the group's questions, but there is no discussion by the Consultancy group of the presenter's responses. At the end of the ten minutes, the facilitator asks the presenter to restate his/her question for the group. (10 minutes)

4. The group talks with each other about the dilemma presented. (15 minutes)

Possible questions to frame the discussion:

\*What did we hear?

\*What didn't we hear that they think might be relevant?

\*What might we do or try if faced with a similar dilemma? What have we done in similar situations?

Members of the group sometimes suggest solutions to the dilemma. Most often, however, they work to define issues more thoroughly and objectively. The presenter doesn't speak during the discussion, but instead listens and takes notes.

6. The presenter reflects on what s/he is now thinking, sharing with the group anything that particularly resonated for him or her during any part of the Consultancy (5 minutes)

6. The facilitator leads a brief conversation about the group's observation of the Consultancy process.



## Appendix B

**Describing Student Work Protocol** (CIG session protocol, January 2005)

***Describing Student Work Protocol***  
*(adapted by Marylyn Wentworth from many sources)*

**Purpose:** The goal of this protocol is to focus on the work of one student as a way to better understand that students' way of thinking

**Time:** 1 hour (can be as much as 2 hours)

**Roles:** Presenter of student work; Facilitator/ Chairperson; Review group (all but Presenter and Facilitator)

**Process:**

6. *Review descriptive process: (5 minutes)*
  - a. Description NOT judgment or evaluation
  - b. All work bears the imprint and the signature of the author and so offers an important access to the interest, ways of creating order and point of view
  - c. Formal process of go-arounds. You are free to pass
  - d. NO cross dialogue
  - e. Be brief (not a lot of "ands")
  - f. Use action words, descriptive words and phrases
  - g. Focus for each round (Facilitator takes notes for common ground)
7. *Practice descriptions (5-10 minutes): Since true description is difficult, start with a reflection/ description exercise. The skill of the group in being descriptive rather than evaluative dictates how much practice is needed.*
  - a. Free association for "TEACHER", "PDS" or "CIG PROCESS"
  - b. Free association with an art piece (with writing?)
  - c. Practice go-arounds
8. *Work presentation and description (5-10 minutes)*
  - a. Share the work – the teacher may choose to read some of the work or have someone else do so
  - b. Describe the work??? *The description tends to be less evaluative if the teacher does not give too much information, as too much pre-knowledge may prejudice the view of the team... Often NO information is given other than the work itself*
  - c. Describe the child (age, siblings, pertinent information?)
9. *Rounds (30 minutes): Each round is summarized by the facilitator and the focus for the next round set. Facilitator might vary the beginning person for rounds and change the order from clockwise to counter clockwise. Facilitator might choose to insert a clarifying question round where the group members can ask the presenting teacher clarifying questions*
  - a. Literal description *(always done with this protocol)*: General impressions, physical description as in what do you see
  - b. What is this student working on: skills or purpose for writing
  - c. Assessment options
10. *Final Round... Debrief/ Feedback on Process Round (5 minutes)*
  - a. How did this work... or not
  - b. What did you learn?
  - c. Suggestions for facilitation
  - d. Time for the presenter to say what was learned from this student

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