

# Collaborating Effectively in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools

Thomas Miller  
Watson School of Education  
UNCW



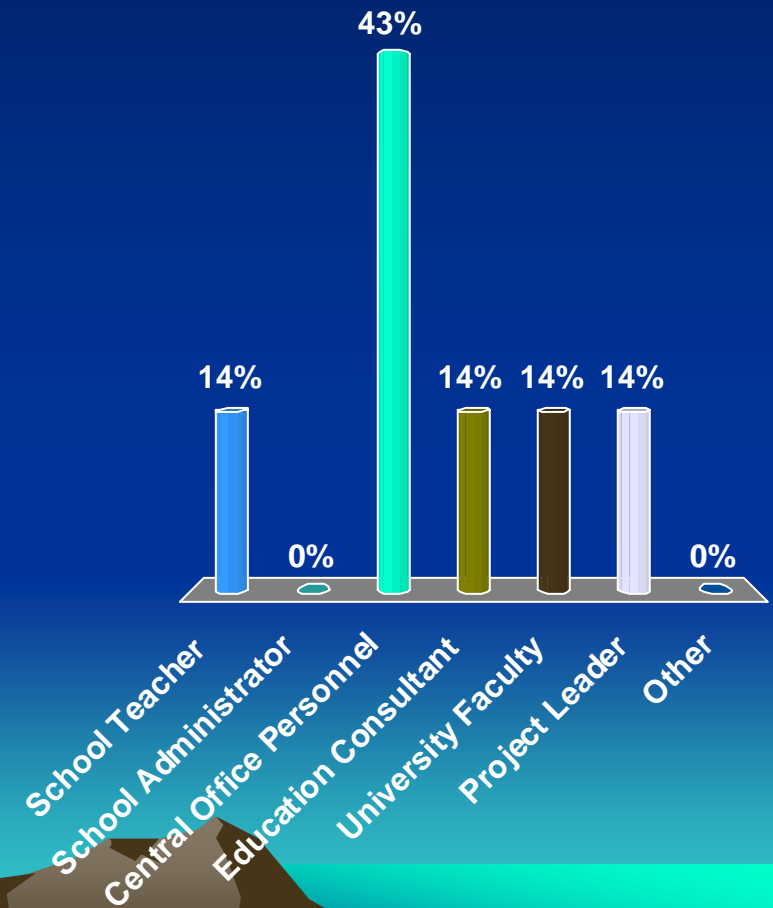
# Objectives

- Discuss collaboration in schools today.
- Examine the effects of a Critical Friends Group (CFG).
- Determine if a CFG is beneficial in your daily practice.



# What is your current role in education?

1. School Teacher
2. School Administrator
3. Central Office Personnel
4. Education Consultant
5. University Faculty
6. Project Leader
7. Other



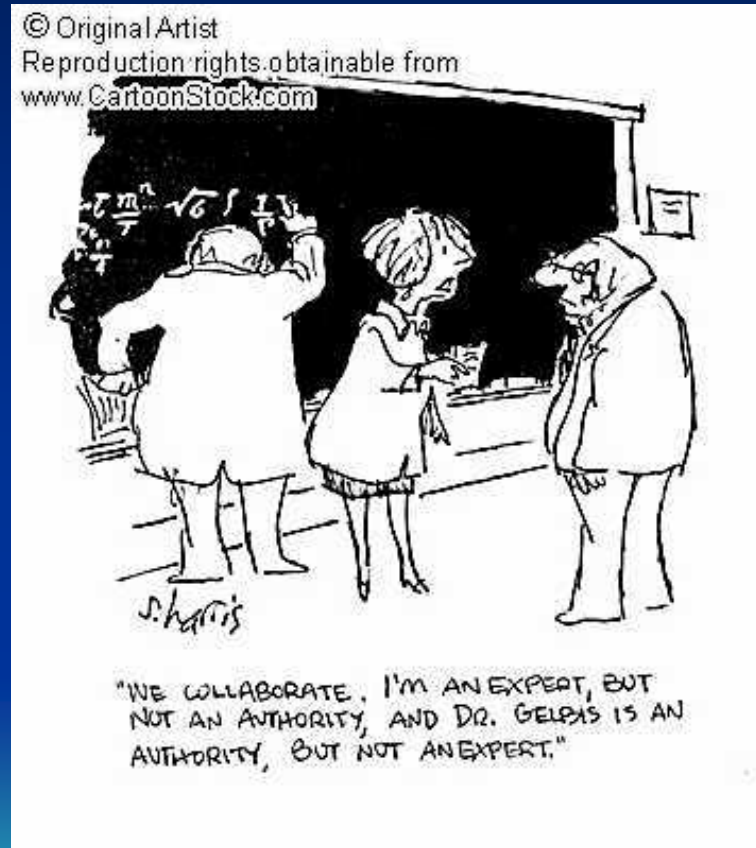
# Devyn's Dad

- Tom Miller
- Project Instructional Leader
- UNCW, Watson School of Education
- Eight years: Special Education Teacher
- Something was missing?



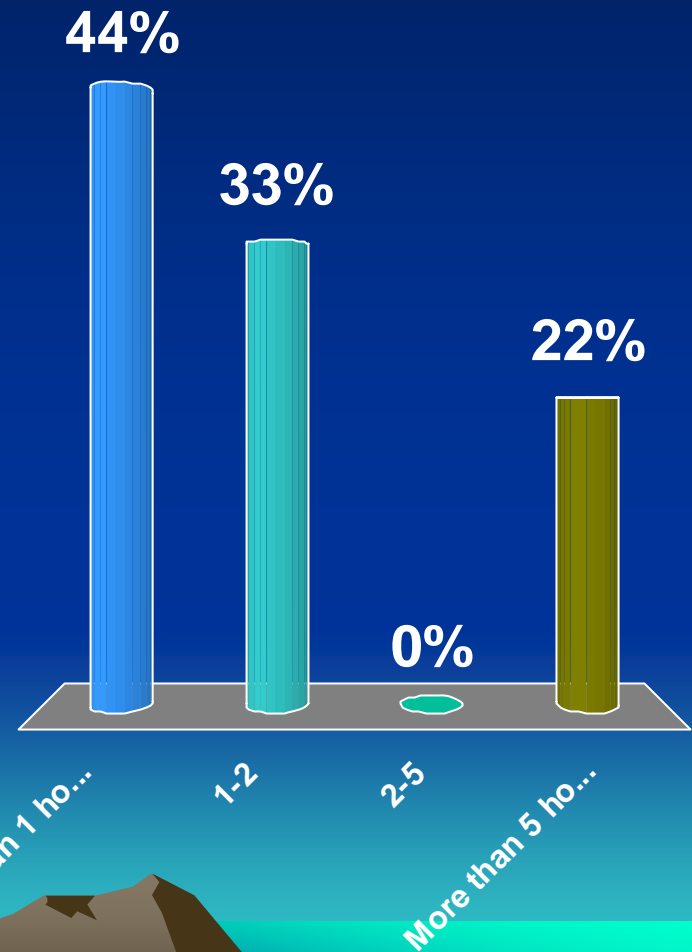
# What does collaboration look like in schools?

- How, When, and Where do we collaborate?



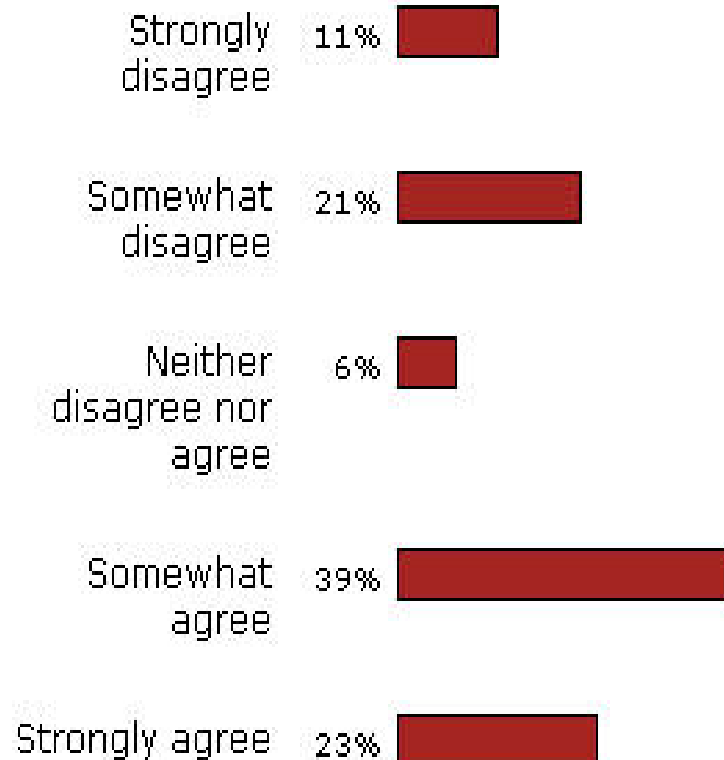
On average, how many hours do you collaborate with peers per week?

1. Less than 1 hour
2. 1-2
3. 2-5
4. More than 5 hours



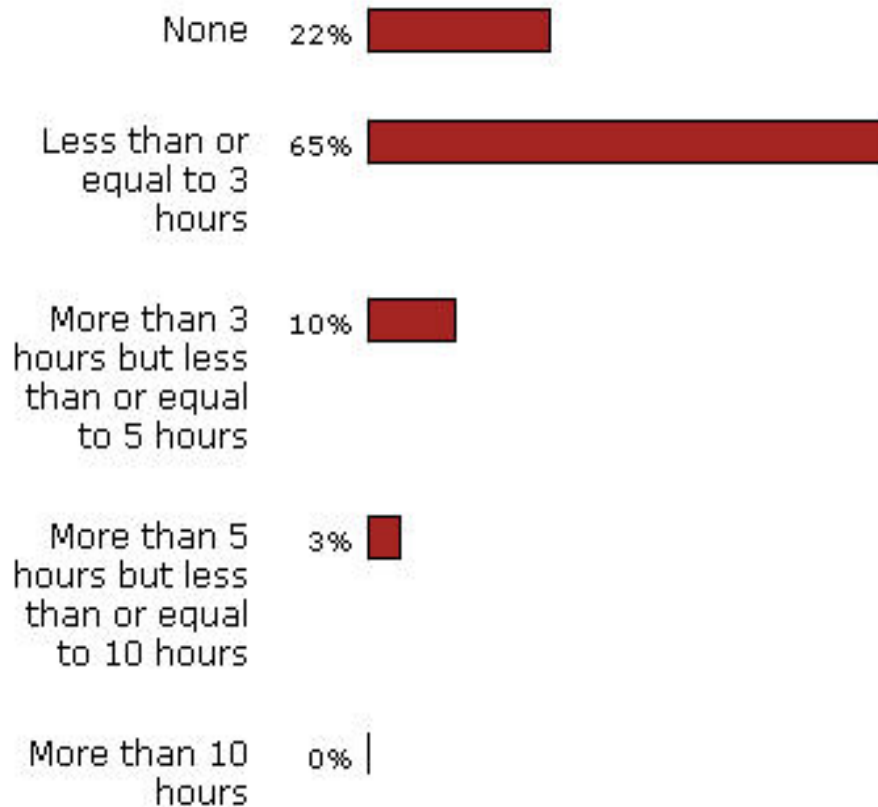
# 2008 NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey

## b. Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues.



# 104,249 NC Teachers reported in 2008:

Q2.3b And how many hours are available for structured collaborative planning?



# Research indicates current collaboration issues include:

- Busy schedules
- Overload of classes and students
- Meeting content, structures are often weak and inconsistent
- Unproductive goal setting
- Unprofessional interactions
- Ineffective plans to address shared purposes

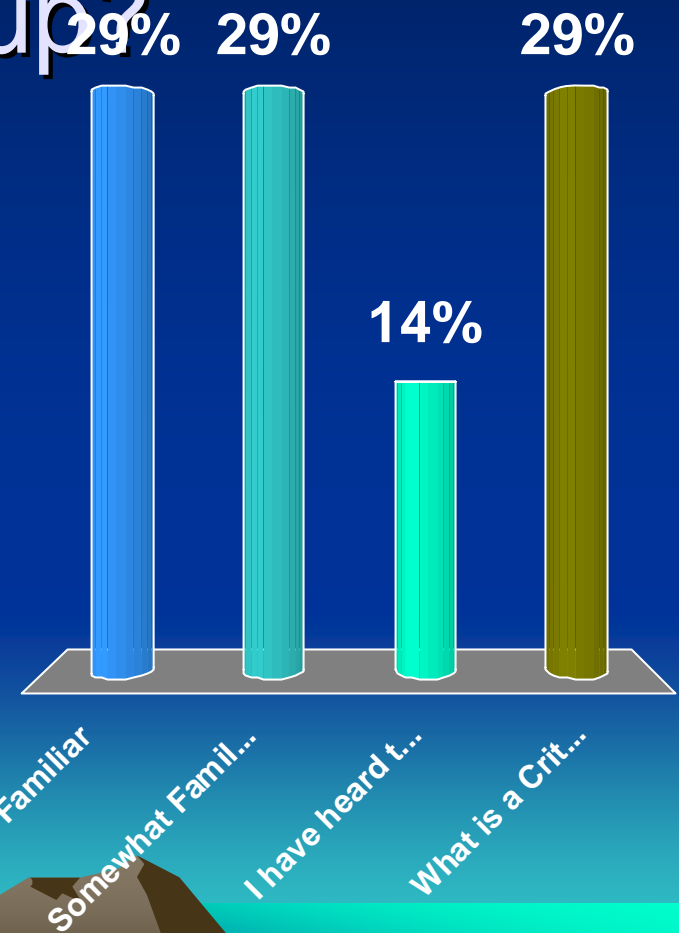


So how do we collaborate  
effectively?



# How familiar are you with a Critical Friends Group?

1. Very Familiar
2. Somewhat Familiar
3. I have heard the term.
4. What is a Critical Friends Group?



# History of Critical Friends Groups

- Annenberg Institute for National School Reform  
(Brown University, 1995)
- Created Professional Learning Communities  
work together to:
  - Engage in reflective discussion
  - Inquire into, analyze and reflect upon student work
  - Develop shared norms and values
  - Focus on Student learning
  - Connect Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction



# Purpose of the Study

“What are the overall effects of teachers participating in a Critical Friends Group within the elementary school environment?”



# Participants

- 9 Elementary School Teachers (K-5)
  - Each grade level had at least one teacher.
  - Including one Guidance Counselor.
- Additional Support
  - Classes Covered
  - Reserved Meeting Rooms



# CFG Needs Assessment

- CFG Coach (School Teacher, School Mentor, County Mentor)
- Clearly Defined Goals (driven by participant/school needs)
- Support from Administration
- Introduction to Staff
- 6-9 Volunteers
- Consistent Scheduling
- Reserved Space to Collaborate



# CFG's provided three occasions for reflection

- Peer Observations
  - During observations
- Small Group Meeting
  - 3 CFG members
  - Post-observations
- Full CFG meeting led by CFG Coach:
  - CFG Participant Driven Topic



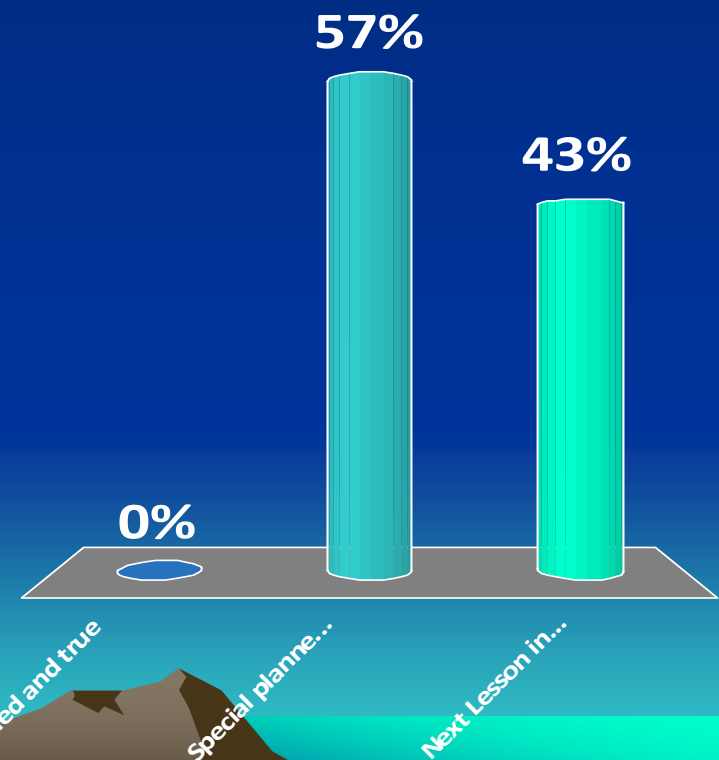
# Themes

- Support and Trust
- Diverse Range of Foci
- Shared Relevant Strategies for Student Success
- CFG's as a Professional Development



How would you describe the focus of the lesson you would choose when formally observed by Administration?

1. Tried and true
2. Special planned lesson
3. Next Lesson in the textbook.



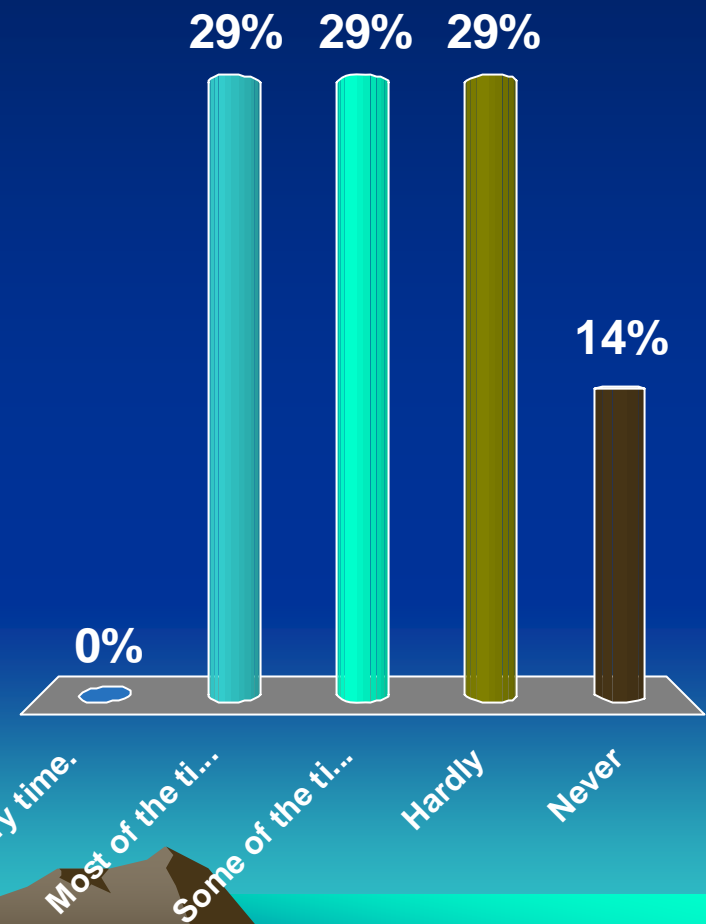
# Teacher Selected Focus for Peer Observation

- Intimidating Students
- Distributing Materials
- Promoting Open Student Dialogue
- Effectiveness of Lesson
- Curriculum Content
- Modeling Content
- Students who Finish Early



# How often do you use the strategies you learned in a professional development?

1. Every time.
2. Most of the time
3. Some of the time
4. Hardly
5. Never



# Effective Shared Strategies

(6 weeks – 3 cycles)

- 29 Implemented Strategies Through CFG
- 9 Through Staff Development
- 8 Through Grade Level Meetings
- 3 Through Informal Collaboration



# Professional Development

- CFG Created:
  - Direct Focused Observations/Modeling
  - Shared Strategies
  - Educational Culture
  - New Ideas to Improve Practice
  - Cross grade level collaboration



# Documented Benefits to Teachers

- Support and Trust
- School Based Professional Development
- Diverse Range of Foci
- Shared Relevant Strategies for Student Success
- Cross grade level collaboration
- Journal reflecting about their connections, generalizations, applications increased personal learning



# Critical Friends Group

(New Hanover County Data)

- Demonstrated:
  - Teachers were more likely to be observed during difficult/engaging lessons
  - More personal feedback, discussions about education
  - Not sit and get: Teacher receives modeled lessons
  - Trained Coach to: Set an agenda, keep meeting positive, focused on goals.
  - Participant centered professional development
  - Greater impact on the learning community, ripple effect
  - Teachers develop “true” professional relationships



# Impact on Student Learning

- Stronger Classroom Management
- Open Dialogue Amongst Students
- Linking Lessons to Prior Knowledge
- Effective Strategies for Success
- Fresh New Ideas that Gain Student Attention/Motivation
- Focus on Students Needs



# Barriers

- Time
- Past Collaboration Experiences
- Other School Responsibilities
- Personal Lives
- Adequate Supervision



# Future Research

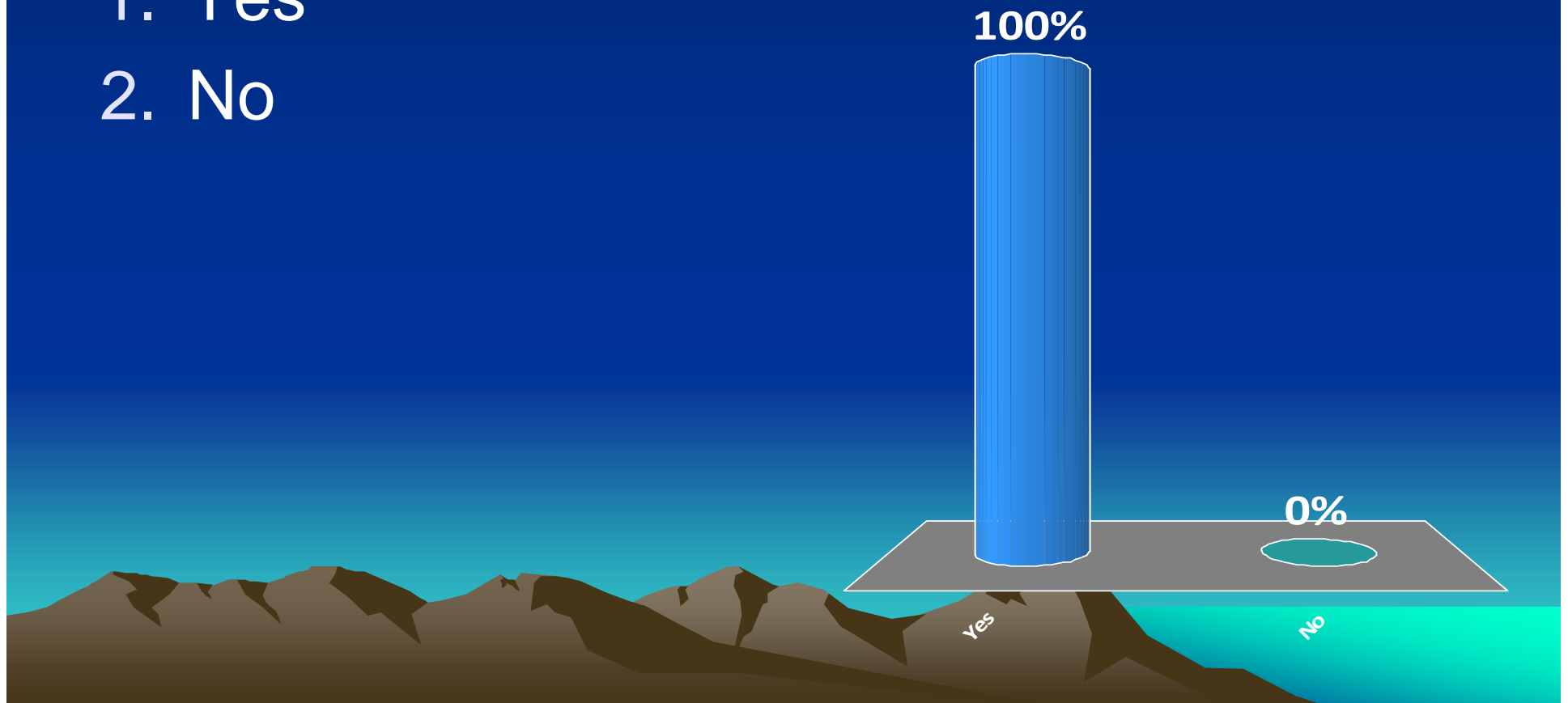
- Impact on Teacher Growth and Development
- Student Scores
- Teacher Retention
- School Morale



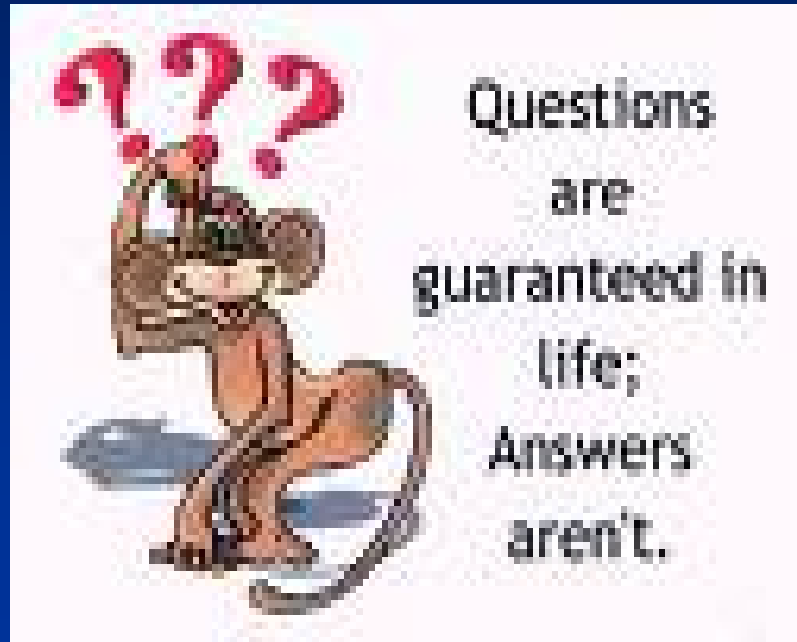
# Final Question, Would a CFG be beneficial to your daily practice?

1. Yes

2. No



# Questions?



# For more information



- Call or Email
  - [millert@uncw.edu](mailto:millert@uncw.edu)
  - (910) 962-3881
- Web Site
- <http://people.uncw.edu/millert/>

# Critical Friends Group Resources

- National School Reform Faculty

- <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/default.html>

- Anneberg Media and Professional Development

- <http://www.learner.org/index.html>

- Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest

- <http://www.cesnorthwest.org/cfg.php>