



*The Support Network for Innovative Principals (SNIP) was formed in 2002 by the Project for School Innovation (PSI). In a series of monthly meetings throughout the school year, SNIP brings together district and charter school leaders to share and reflect on the strengths and challenges of their leadership skills. Each group includes veteran and new school principals, as well as a professional facilitator and peer alumni leader. Recently we spoke with **SNIP facilitator Nancy Brodsky** about her role. Two themes emerged: leaders who accept the role of learners end up being more successful, and the successful practice of reflection looks more like work **in** action than it does work **after** action. As counter intuitive as it sounds, reflection should ultimately take place in the middle of an event rather than at the end.*

### ***How did your career in education begin?***

Before I was a teacher I worked with Peace Corps volunteers in a program that emphasized personal reflection. I started teaching as a junior high math teacher. As a teacher I was always frustrated by the lack of reflection on the practice of learning and teaching. After a frustrating experience in the classroom, I left teaching but I couldn't stay away. I returned to a school a year later and worked to create a peer observation program with administration, teachers and staff. For four years I did a lot of reflection on practice and it was a transformative experience, both for me and the others involved.

### ***You're new to PSI and the SNIP program this year. How has it been?***

Well, let me first say that when I heard about SNIP, it reminded me of why I went into education. The mission of SNIP resonates so deeply with me. This is my first year, and frankly, it has been a year of feeling my way. As the facilitator I have been learning a lot and honoring the wishes of the group. I am very much on the learning curve here.

### ***Your SNIP cohort is actually a group of Alumni. Does that change your role?***

There is not a formal curriculum. The alumni piece is very focused on cases. This group is very internally driven. These SNIP alumni came back for more in order to focus on *their* stories, to delve more deeply into those things they felt they couldn't do the first time around. They are genuinely interested in making themselves vulnerable, sharing their stories, asking deeper questions, and then taking it all back to their schools and using it to create and lead more reflective schools.

### ***Give me an example- what does this facilitation process look like?***

The process is simple. A leader tells a story and then there is common time for questions, which we call "questions for understanding." The group then makes



observations about how the leader told his or her story. I then facilitate a process of reflection, of extracting meaning, and of creating opportunities to learn through appreciative inquiry.

***Reflection seems nice, but isn't this at odds with the culture of accountability that exists in schools today?***

That's a great question. I have thought about that a lot. I think that accountability itself can be an excellent topic for reflection. If reflected upon enough, and reflected upon meaningfully, accountability can often be reframed. I believe the notion of appreciative inquiry is very powerful. It focuses on the root causes of success and what creates that success. To me this is a totally different way of looking at reflection and of looking at leadership. It starts to ask questions about the circumstances of peak performance, of very high productivity; instead of asking what you did wrong, you start to ask questions about what it looks like to do something right. To me that is just so meaningful in today's accountability culture, especially when it comes to the practice of school leadership.

***Is reflection just for school leaders?***

Oh no. Whether it's working with boards, private leaders, nonprofit leaders or school leaders as in the case of SNIP, at the core of it all you realize this is about reflecting on the work of human beings. The best gifts we can give each other are our time and our understanding. Once you take time, once you develop that capacity to understand what reflection is, then you then have to live it. That means operating from a base of integrity. How do you create a process for learning? It involves combining *understanding* with *action*. You must develop the capacity to learn from your failures and your successes.

***What does it look like when you succeed at this practice?***

I think to be successful you have to learn to step back and take on new challenges by regularly and rigorously learning from success as much as you do you from failure. To me, learning is at its best when you learn to reflect on practice in the moment, not after the fact. This is about reflection in action. That, to me, really signals that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing, which is learning in action: that is really what reflection should be about at the end of the day.

--Adam Sapp

To learn more about SNIP click here:

[http://www.psinnovation.org/what we do/support and study groups/snip](http://www.psinnovation.org/what_we_do/support_and_study_groups/snip)