CONNECTIONS

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Report from the Directors

Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director

The past four years have seen tremendous growth in the scope of NSRF's work. What started as a program that focused on the professional development of K-12 teachers and principals has expanded to include post secondary institutions, district-wide initiatives, and long-term partnerships with school reform organizations.

Since its inception, NSRF has aspired to be a democratic learning community, a community that is - in the words of one of NSRF's long-time schools - committed to relationships based on respect, trust, and courage. In 2000-2001, as NSRF moved from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform to the Harmony Education Center, we agreed on a new mission statement:

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

Our commitment to this mission has included diversifying the leadership of NSRF so it more closely resembles the diversity of our constituency - that is, the children in the schools where NSRF has a presence. By leadership, we mean our national project "point people," national task force and planning committee members, national NSRF facilitators, and perhaps most important, the Co-Directors of NSRF.

So on behalf of NSRF's National Center and its Accountability Council - I am delighted to announce that Debbi Laidley has accepted a position as Co-Director of the National School Reform Faculty, effective September 1, 2004.

Debbi has been with the UCLA School Management Program since 1996, where she coordinates the Critical Friends Groups New Coaches Seminars. A graduate of Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles with a master's degree in educational administration, Debbi began her career as a teacher in 1978 and has taught English, English as a second language, student leadership and journalism in grades 7-12. In addition to her ongoing position with the UCLA School Management Program, Debbi is a secondary literacy specialist with the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Debbi has served on NSRF's Accountability Council since its inception in 2003, and is an active NSRF national facilitator, having led and participated in numerous national and local NSRF events. She has coordinated CFG Coaches Seminars for the Southern California area, assisting schools and districts with developing professional learning communities, developing the skills and building the capacity of the CFG coaches there, and supporting efforts to sustain CFG and related school wide reforms. Those who know her all

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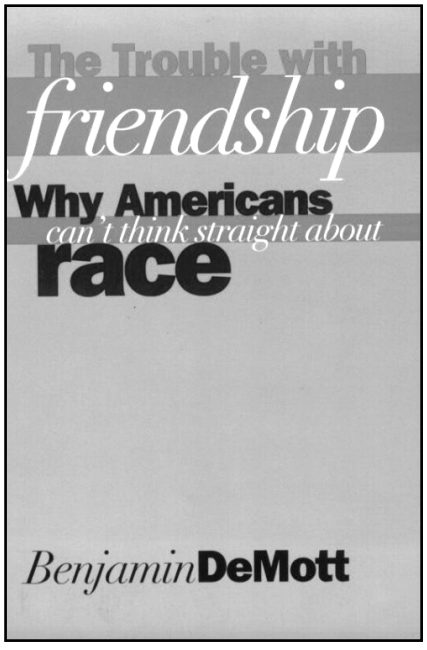
The Trouble With Friendship:
Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Race
A Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

We at NSRF have added social equity to our mission statement. We have read texts and held conversations about the ways to regularly embed a focus on equity into the protocols we use to examine student and adult work. We've held meetings with "equity" as their theme or focus. And this past June, about twenty of us held an electronic book chat to discuss *The Trouble with Friendship, Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Race,* by Benjamin DeMott.



Having participated in these initiatives, I am taking stock and wondering about next steps. More important, I'm thinking about the impact of these actions on my work with other educators and whether shifts in my understanding are making a difference for students.

The need to embed a focus on equity in my/our work is an issue for me because I am white. Last year, a colleague of color from Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools (BAYCES) made it very clear that equity and race are on the table for her by virtue of her presence in any conversation. I cannot lay claim to that same consistency because as Peggy MacIntosh describes in *Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege*, as a white person in our society, I have the option to check in and out of this struggle at will. Given this reality, I am faced with ongoing choices and a need to continually examine both my assumptions and my practice on behalf of students, especially those students of color who make up the majority of our student body in the urban schools where I work.

So I'm asking myself, how willing am I to be disturbed? How much energy am I willing to spend moving beyond what Victor Cary calls "admiring the problem" to actually working to disrupt the status quo of discrimination in our schools and society - and perhaps more important, how will I gauge my progress?

Last week Camilla Greene and I co-facilitated the first half of a CFG seminar with the staff of a soon-to-be opened Afrocentric charter high school. I was the only white person present at our three-day session. The conversation was different from the conversations I've grown accustomed to in the predominantly, or solely white seminars that I usually facilitate.

Camilla and I used many of the same techniques and tools that we usually use, but there was an added layer to last week's conversations. We didn't need to read *Curriculum as Window and Mirror* to drive home the need for students to see themselves in their school's materials and methods. Our framing question for the week was, How can we work as "gap closers" while supporting the development of strong cultural identities for our students? Our question brought together concerns about "closing the gap" but linked them inextricably with the need to counter the biased cultural messages children of color are served on a daily basis by our dominant white culture. There was an implicit recognition that students needed to master the mechanics of the "tests" and master "the game" without getting caught up in the deficit-based rhetoric that is designed to keep them in their place.

In our CFG we have never discussed the relationship between closing the gap and our students' cultural identities, however we've made a commitment to have ongoing, explicit conversations about equity in general and racism in particular. Consequently, at our most recent meeting, we listened to a song from this year's Tony-award-winning-musical, Avenue Q. The song is called A Little Bit Racist, and it drives home the point that we are all guilty of biased assumptions based on our differences. As a theater-goer, I am thrilled that a hit show is tackling issues of race and homophobia, but the equation of biases and the promotion of "sameness" as the basis of our potential harmony is disturbing and potentially dangerous.

During our "Audio Rendering" and in our subsequent conversation, members of our CFG wondered whether being a "little bit racist" was like being a "little bit pregnant," and we went on to unpack the differences between having "colorblindness" and embracing diversity as our goal. Members highlighted the word "relax" and the phrase "everyone makes judgements" among others, and we all agreed to disagree with the song's lyrics.

The sameness promoted by Avenue Q is reminiscient of the analysis in *The Trouble with Friendship*, where DeMott debunks what he calls the "orthodoxy of friendship," describing in detail the ways that a celebration of our supposed commonality necessarily leads to a complacency about, or an outright denial of, the systemic racism that still grips our society and defines the lives and opportunities of our citizens of color. When seen in this light, Avenue Q falls into step with a long list of "buddy films,"

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Interview with Debbi Laidley

Katy Kelly, Indiana

When Debbi Laidley was appointed as NSRF's new Co-Director, Katy Kelly of the National Center took some time to talk with her about her background, early experiences with NSRF work and hopes for the future.

Katy: Debbi, can you tell us a bit about your background and how it has shaped the educator you are today?

Debbi: I don't know if I can talk about my background without talking about my roots. I grew up in the deep South, in Arkansas, in the 60's and 70's when schools in my area were entirely segregated. When I was in 7th grade, we started what was called, "Freedom of Choice." It was supposed to be a voluntary integration program. What it actually meant was, for the first time, children and families who were in black schools could now have the "Freedom of Choice" to attend white schools, that almost invariably, had better facilities. Everything was better and everything was up to date.

It also meant that white students also had the "Freedom of Choice" to attend the schools that had traditionally been all black. As you can imagine, the schools that had been traditionally all black, remained so. A really small handful of black students went to do the voluntary integration at white schools.

K: Were you one of them?

D: I was one of them. My mom taught, up until two years before this, at the same black school that I attended. She had been one of the black teachers that had been forcibly required to go teach at the white school two years earlier, because that had been kind of the easing-in of this whole thing.

You take a few black teachers and sprinkle them into white schools and a few white teachers and sprinkle them into black schools, and get people to start thinking, "OK, this is going to happen, and you can get used to it, see, these people are OK." Mom was one of those, "OK," pioneers. I, and some of my friends were some of these first little seventh-graders who were pioneers.

Because of the difficulty of that whole period of time and the discrimination that I experienced, both subtle and overt, I think I put a tremendous emphasis in my life on issues of equity everywhere. I see, I worry about, and I know that there is not equity, and it is right in front of my face all of the time.

One piece of it that I really am concerned about is the issue of community, or lack of. In black elementary schools there was such a tremendous sense of community; everybody owned everybody. We knew we belonged and that people cared.

Debbi Laidley

When I hit seventh grade, that all changed. I didn't belong and I wasn't wanted. That lack of community is so harmful. I hear people talk about small learning communities and tossing the word, "community," around and doing things with educational decisions that superficially address the window coverings and structures that should lead to small learning communities. However, I don't see an emphasis on what makes a community – how you create that belonging, that ownership of one another, that caring. Those things I really notice in our profession.

K: What did you notice about NSRF when you first heard about it or when you first became involved with it. Did anything surprise you?

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NSRF Mission Statement

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National School Reform Faculty
is to foster educational and
social equity by empowering
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CONNECTIONS is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702, kkelly@harmonyschool.org, dbambino@earthlink.net

School Three -
The Cambridge Rindge and Latin School
Beth Graham, Massachusetts

The Cambridge Rindge and Latin School

Four years ago, when I became principal of a small school in a large, urban, conversion high school, I had the rare opportunity to grow a new community. I resolved to create a school that sharply contrasted from the non-intellectual institutions of which I had been a product. In order to begin this task, I featured and promoted myself as head learner. For students, teachers, and parents, I modeled "not knowing": I was curious, asked a lot of questions, and resisted easy solutions. As a result, I helped us begin to manage the ambiguity that comes from doing school differently. We began to understand, for example, that teaching and learning are complex issues, and must remain at a complex level if we are to do deep, meaningful work in schools. Because I made my own learning public, teachers started to buy in, and a few began to share in the decisions that affected our school.

But growing a professional learning community among *all* adults in our school meant emerging from a deeply embedded context of privatized teacher practice. What would it take to shift the culture of adults in order to best serve the needs of all students? We had to learn to work differently.

First, we had to create new structures to support our new learning. A schedule was created, therefore, that provided common planning time for teachers. Having time available was not enough, however; teachers required my support as facilitator of those meetings in order to transfer their experience with traditional curriculum into unexplored realms of essential questions and integrated, interdisciplinary, and thematic units of study. To make connections among disciplines explicit to our students, we learned that we needed first to uncover and make explicit those connections to ourselves. Planning meetings were characterized by simultaneous frustration and excitement; as we learned and practiced thoughtful, reflective, and civil discourse, however, our curriculum began to emerge.

While structures such as common planning time were critical to support our new learning, how we used the structures was pivotal in our becoming a professional learning community. For example, in addition to our core curriculum meetings, a weekly meeting was convened for all advisors. While developing close, personal relationships with *some* kids was not new for us, formalizing this kind of experience for *every* kid was new to all of us. We needed each other to learn how to be advisors, and so, we became an advisory group of sorts: we learned to share our successes and challenges with one another. Unlike meetings characterized by blaming and shaming students and families, in these meetings, we used the Consultancy Protocol to ask for and receive the kind of feedback we needed from each other in order to improve our practice. As a full participant in these meetings, I often presented the dilemmas I faced from working with my own group of twelve adolescents. I brought authentic work to the table, modeled vulnerability for my staff (thereby making it safe for them to go public with their work), and received invaluable support from colleagues.

Using protocols to do our work and engaging in reflective practice became hallmarks of our emerging community. Staff meetings opened with Connections, a time of transition from our work with children to our work with adults that allowed us to breathe and to gain perspective on our work. Because I kept "administrivia" out of the way of what I considered to be the "real" work of teaching and learning (morning memos and email were the vehicles for communicating the urgent, but not important issues in our school), we also had time in meetings to write together. Most of us kept journals, and we learned that we needed that space and time to reflect together as a community of adult learners, and as individuals. Using the Collaborative Assessment Conference, we examined student work from multiple perspectives, and surfaced our (often contradictory) assumptions about teaching and learning. Finally, the Tuning Protocol allowed us to ask for help in improving our assignments, and to design authentic assessments that provoked students to demonstrate deep understanding.

These structured conversations were so much more than nimble exercises and clever activities – this became the way we worked in our school. It was our culture.

As a result, the adults in our school became collaborators, and, ultimately, modeled thinking and learning for our kids. It was not unusual to observe teachers being transparent in their practice in front of kids: "Where do you think we should go next?" "What do you think we need to do to support your learning?" As teachers became more comfortable in their new roles as coaches, or facilitators of learning, most were able to slip the bonds of having to be the expert in the room.

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Houston Center of Activity Report

Catherine Araiza, Texas

The work of CFGs, and the principles that underlie it, have been integral to Houston A+ Challenge (formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge) since it was founded in 1997. We have offered CFG new coach training since 1998 – to date providing CFG new coach training to almost 600 educators – and CFG work is embedded in all Houston A+ initiatives and professional development services. (see side bar)

Houston A+ also uses Critical Friends tools and strategies as the operating foundation for the organization. Continual learning, examination of practice and cycle of inquiry are integral pieces of all meetings. Houston A+ staff members examine each other's work, ask probing questions and read and discuss the latest research to determine its application to the work around supporting student learning.

Grants from the Annenberg Foundation, Bank of America, the Brown Foundation, the Joe B. Foster Family Foundation, the Clayton Fund, Ocean Energy, and the Simmons Foundation support the work of CFG in the Houston area.

Some Highlights of Houston A+ Initiatives

Houston Schools for a New Society
Houston Schools for a New Society (HSNS), a partnership between Houston ISD and Houston A+ Challenge, is redesigning high schools to ensure that all Houston ISD graduates have the knowledge and skills they need for college or the workforce. Participating high schools are moving away from the traditional, large comprehensive high school model into small, theme-based academies designed around quality teaching and learning and maximum personalization of the learning environment for all students. Many of these schools' staff members have received CFG new coach training. In addition, a recent informal survey indicates that many of the schools also are using CFG tools in their regular academy meetings as they develop a professional learning community on campus. As adults begin to collaborate in new ways in these smaller structures, CFG coaches have been able to help structure meetings in such a way that they focus on improved student learning and professional dialogue.

Partnership for Quality Education
In 2000, Houston A+ Challenge joined a team of universities, school districts and a community college that was forming Partnership for Quality Education to redesign teacher preparation programs at their respective institutions. PQE formed six design teams to reshape teacher education courses along with core and majors courses. The PQE teams attended CFG trainings and then used the protocols to facilitate their design work. In addition, "Making the Case for Quality Teacher Education," a new report by Adolfo and Betin Santos of the Consortium for Assessment, Research and Evaluation (CARE), quotes several PQE design team members as saying CFG changed the way they teach. For example, participants said they have implemented more discovery learning in their classes and become more of a coach than a lecturer.

Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute
More than 250 Houston area educators, parents, and community members convened in July for the eighth annual Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute (FRSSI) to explore the theme "Keeping Kids Connected." Institute highlights included keynote addresses by Jim Burke and Grace

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Houston A+ Initiatives and Professional Development Services

- K-5 Mathematics Initiative
- K-5 Fine Arts Initiative
- Fondren Reforming Schools Summer Institute (cross-district institute focused on school reform)
- Houston Schools for a New Society (partnership with Houston ISD 24 comprehensive high schools)
- Partnership for Quality Education (higher education initiative)
- Regional High School Network (high school reform initiative in three metropolitan area school districts)
- New Visions in Leadership Academy (cross-district leadership initiative)
- Regional Senior Fellows (cross-district learning network)
- Focused Impact Award - supports the original Houston Annenberg Challenge network schools in the areas of math, literacy, and fine arts.
- Teacher as Researcher Grant – supports CFG-trained teachers and administrators in their inquiries about teaching and learning.
- Challenge Early College High School – a new small high school

Into the Light -
Reflections from a New Coach
John Pieper, Wisconsin

Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney's American Teacher Awards, saluting outstanding members of the teaching profession. Specifically, the program honors those teachers whose approaches exemplify creativity in teaching and who inspire a joy of learning in their students. In 2003 John Pieper was one of 30 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG coaches training was one of the benefits included with this special recognition.

In our next three issues we are going to follow John's journey as a new CFG coach.

In the midst of a magical Disney experience, I found myself facing an element of darkness. It wasn't a literal darkness, but rather that unsettling feeling you get when you are about to face a totally new situation that you know absolutely nothing about. Fortunately, I would not be facing this adventure alone. A collection of equally bewildered teachers, all relative strangers, assembled in a large hall. There was an air of mystery and anticipation. We were to receive special training in something called Critical Friends Groups. Little did I know that this training would start me on an incredible journey.

Stephen Spring and Steven Strull were the Zen-like guides who would lead us through this personal and professional transformation. They were totally in control. I remember being very impressed with how effortlessly they moved us from one concept or activity to another. They instilled a sense of confidence in us as we took the time to practice these things called protocols. Not only was I given the opportunity to look inward, but more importantly, the participants were able to exchange ideas with each other. This group of relative strangers connected in an amazing way. We entered into a bond that reminded me of the unique camaraderie men in combat experience. We found strength and solace in each other. We stood united in our belief that one individual can make a difference in the life of a child. We gained a new appreciation in knowing that the love or pain of a child had made an incredible difference in our lives.

John Pieper

The training first moved me from the sense of darkness into shades of gray, and then it created a glimmer of hope. Perhaps this work would be something I could actually use at school. Midway through the training that hope burst into a bright and shining beacon. It was a vision based on the realization that this work did have the potential to create a learning environment where collaboration was the rule rather than the exception. My mind raced with the possible benefits this work could bring to my classroom, school, and district.

My enthusiasm burned even brighter when I attended this incredible function called a Winter Meeting. I likened it to something that was halfway between a family reunion and a cheerleader camp. I don't think I had ever seen so many people so excited and so committed to something pertaining to education. I felt blessed because my principal and district supported my efforts to learn more about this new and fantastic work.

The action plan I developed toward the end of my training took on two distinct parts. As a new CFG coach it would be my responsibility to generate a basic understanding of the CFG work with the staff at my school. I was chomping at the bit to gather a team of recruits and lead them into meaningful CFG work. There was student work to be tuned, articles to be shared, norms to be implemented and reflections to be written. But alas, by the time I became a "certified" CFG coach, it was too late in the year to organize a real CFG. I had to be content to scheme and dream. My enthusiasm continued throughout the summer. The other portion of my action plan was also a reflection of my idealistic thinking. My vision was to carry this work beyond my school to as far as I could take it.

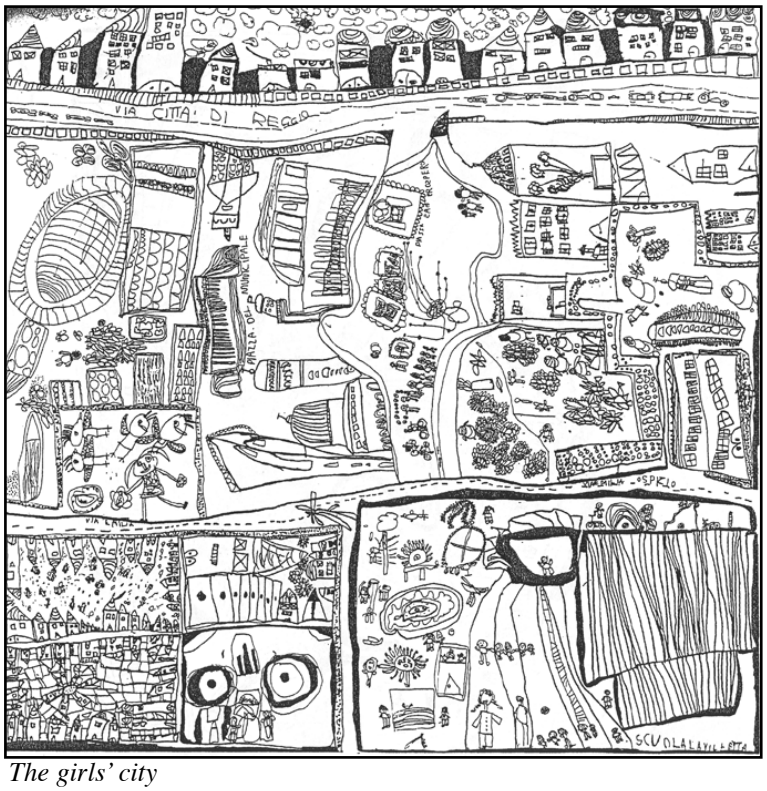
The new school year has started and I will begin the implementation of my plan within the next week. We have often used the lighthouse as a symbol for learning at our school. As I reflect on my CFG training, that symbolism takes on new meaning. Education can be a storm tossed sea. We have many at risk students who need to be beckoned into the safety and calm of our welcoming harbor. We offer the light of knowledge. How smooth the sailing will be if my light is passed on to those around me. It is my time to shine. ■

John Pieper is a fifth grade teacher at Webster Stanley Elementary School in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. John's background includes regular and special education teaching experiences. He has been teaching for twenty two-years. You can contact him by email at jpieper@new.rr.com

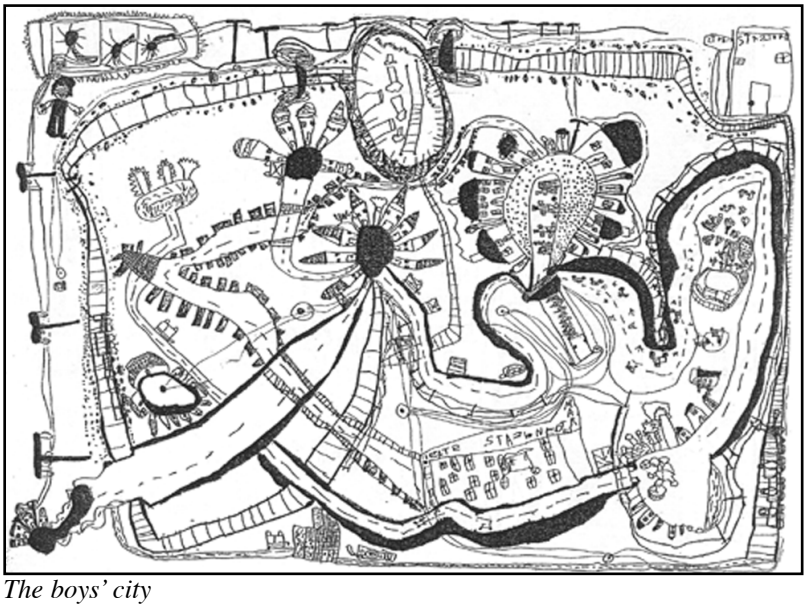
Making Learning Visible - Project Zero
Learning from the Students of Reggio Emilia
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

How do we document teaching and learning in our classrooms and schools? How do we know they know? How do teachers arrive at authentic, inquiry questions and how can I support that process? This is just a sampling of the questions I brought with me as I made my way to the Making Learning Visible (MLV) Institute at Project Zero in July.

As a member of the Lucent Collaborative Learning Community Project Team, I have been actively exploring the notions of inquiry and documentation, and the ways both interact to inform teacher practice in schools. At the MLV Institute, I took a step back from my starting point of teaching implications to look long and hard at the role of documentation for students' understanding of their own learning. This new point of entry, while it now seems obvious to me, added layers to my thinking and questioning.



The girls' city


The boys' city

At the institute we were treated to the visual essays of students at the Reggio Emilia schools in Italy. In one unit, the Reggio kids worked together in small groups to commit their impressions of their "city" to paper. While the students documented their understanding in pictures, their teachers recorded notes about their process as well as their running dialogue. When taken together, the students' thoughts and their collaborative drawings offered a rich window into their thinking. This window was an invaluable resource for the teachers as they planned their next steps, but it was also a resource for the students as they reflected on their own thoughts, collaborated with peers and refined their thinking as a result of their heightened awareness of both their process and their abilities, individually and as a group.

I was struck by many aspects of the students' learning, not the least of which was the very power of their collective thinking. This process was way beyond the cooperative learning models that I had seen and used. This wasn't cooperative work to make large classes manageable, it was true collaboration. The students weren't following someone else's script. Instead, these kids were building on each other's thinking, asking and answering their own questions. At one point the students decided to make sure their city "worked." They decided, among themselves, that an important test for determining whether a city worked or not was your ability to travel from one place to any other place through the streets. Once they agreed to this criterion, they designed a test and used their fingers to trace the streets from one side of their city to the other. When their test worked, all three times, they expressed satisfaction with their model. This was real student empowerment!

Project Zero has learned many lessons from its collaboration with the Reggio schools. Here are the four fun-

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Inquiry Circles
An Appreciative Approach to Professional Inquiry
Betty Bisplinghoff, Georgia

"In the long run, a people is known, not by its statements or its statistics, but by the stories it tells."
- Flannery O'Connor

"Inquiry can poke air holes in your life!" These were the words of a group member at a recent NSRF Inquiry Institute. The group consisted of experienced CFG coaches who worked together to explore the viability of inquiry in our work using the Inquiry Circles Protocol. By shaping inquiry questions as laid out in the protocol, the group succeeded in moving beyond their current work world- one characterized by recent, huge budget cuts, school closures and job losses- to a place that required better understandings of what was good and strong in their work.

The Inquiry Circles Protocol is intended as a way to refresh our professional lives through an asset-based approach to inquiry. In constructing this protocol, I was inspired by the Appreciative Inquiry model for organizational change generated by Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2003). They proposed that "organizations move toward what they study" (p. 29). This protocol recognizes the power of our questions to influence our actions. In essence, how we inquire influences the culture of our schools.

It is my hope that the Inquiry Circles Protocol will help us remember to be curious, to share and develop our stories of professional strength, and to rebuild a narrative culture around us that contributes to a healthy and enriched professional life.

The protocol intentionally asks us to focus on what is healthy about our life's work, but also helps us unwrap such gifts through specific acts of critical friendship. It is clear that "goodness" is fraught with contradictions and complications but by choosing to grab hold of and build on the positive - what is good and working for us - we can make a difference in the quality of our work experiences and in the public conversation about education. This information should be at least as prominent in our discourse on schooling as the problems that are more often highlighted.

It is interesting to consider, as a professional community, what our stories will tell us about the actions we should support in order to make a positive difference for professional educators as learners and for students as learners. The protocol supports time for participants to think for themselves and to think in collaboration with others. It is a reflexive and expansive process. This is the dance of professional inquiry – space to reflect alone – space to reconsider in the company of respected others – space to act and grow.

The title of the protocol, Inquiry Circles, was chosen for several reasons:

1. to highlight the cyclical nature of inquiry – questions lead to more questions
2. to denote the continuous connections of understanding that inquiry can support
3. to present a method for supporting inquiry that asks people to circle-up and share their stories of hope and promise

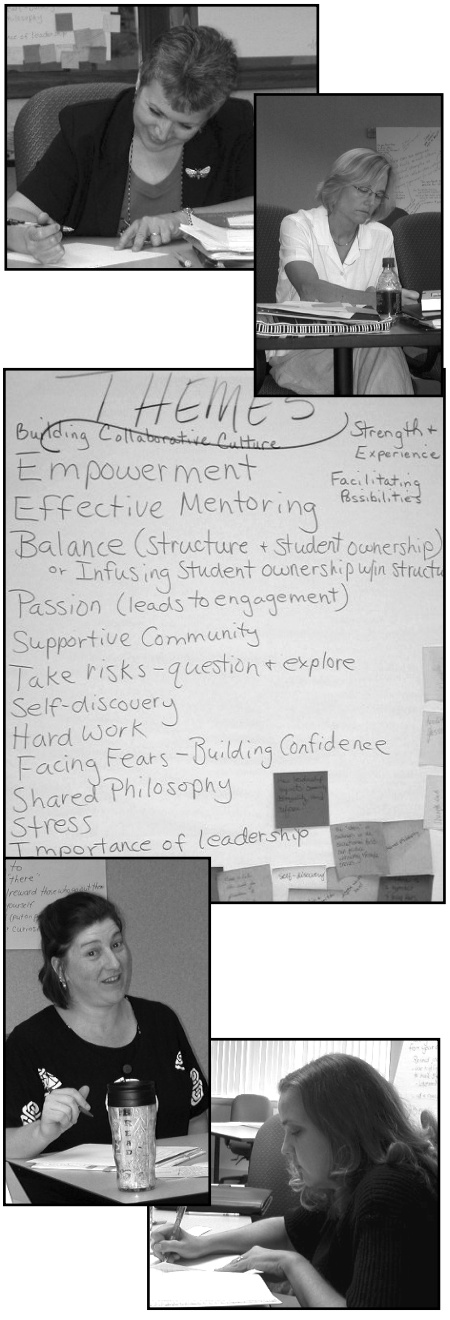
Overall Purpose:
To generate robust inquiry questions that can lead our work in support of teachers and students as power-based learners.

Supporting Goals:

- to place inquiry at the heart of our work
- to support reflective practice
- to encourage the development of an evidence-based, positive narrative culture
- to build on the good
- to develop a vision-based professional voice

This protocol may be used as an agenda for a day in the design of a CFG Institute. ■

A summary of the protocol is reprinted on the opposite page, and the full version is available on our website, at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html
You can reach Betty Bisplinghoff at bettysb@arcges.uga.edu



Inquiry Circles: A Protocol For Professional Inquiry (summary)

Phase 1 – Storytelling (approximately 1 hour)

1. Written Rememberings - *Individually* (15 minutes)
   Participants have time to write in their journals – Think about times in your work life when you felt strong, when you felt your work was honored and you were living your true promise as an educator. List some of your most successful moments in your work. Select one of those moments to write or draw about. Where is the story for you in this successful experience?
2. Storytelling - *Whole Group* (Inside – Outside Circles) (30 minutes – 15 minutes each person)
   Participants initiate the collaborative inquiry process by sitting knee-to-knee within a circle facing out and a circle facing in. Each pairing shares stories of best practice based on their written reflections. Partners will take turns telling and documenting stories.
   - The teller tells for 15 minutes.
   - The listener records notes capturing important features of the story being shared.
   - The partner pairs switch roles for the next 15 minutes.
3. Reviewing your partner's story - *Individually* (10 minutes)
   There is time now for each participant to review notes based on the story told to him or her. This is time to prepare for the responsibility of retelling the partner's story in Phase 2 of the protocol.

Phase 2 – Retelling - *Small Groups* (approximately 1 hour)

Partner pairs regroup in small circle groupings of 4 (2 partner groups join together). THE FOLLOWING 3 STEPS ARE REPEATED FOR EACH PERSON IN THE GROUP. 10 minutes for each person = 40 minutes total time for this section

1. The partner (the one who listened to the story) introduces the storyteller to the group and retells the story that s/he heard. (4 minutes)
   This process is often considered an especially meaningful aspect of the protocol experience. Participants feel supported and affirmed when they hear their stories told through someone else's voice. There is a quick sense of linking story to story that begins to demonstrate giving life to quality work.
2. The owner of the original story has time to add to and/or clarify what their partner has shared. (2 minutes)
   The original storyteller uses this time to confirm the highlights shared and/or add any other necessary details.
3. The group members now have time to ask clarifying questions. (4 minutes)
   It is helpful to keep these questions focused on eliciting more information about what was "good." This is not a time to make suggestions.

Phase 3 - Crafting and Claiming a Positive Inquiry Question - *Individual Reflection and Whole Group Dialogue*
(flexible timing – group agrees on the amount of time needed)

1. Partners complete "Storytelling Summary Sheets" for one another based on the storytelling process and the questions that emerged from the group. Once the summary sheet is completed, it is given to the partner. Each person reviews her/his notes from the storytelling experience and records responses on the summary sheet. The summary sheet is helpful in creating a shared data set based on the storytelling process and provides written documentation for the storyteller to use as a resource in crafting positive inquiry questions.

2a. *Individually* - This is space/time to reconsider how your personal story can serve as a beginning point for crafting an inquiry question that builds on some aspect of your work that is good and strong. What really matters? What do you want to remember to hold dear in your work? What do you want to be more involved with? When you have crafted a question for yourself, write it in the center of a sheet of chart paper. Each chart paper will now be treated as an individual "chalk talk" (see protocol for Chalk Talk process). Participants move from chart to chart and silently participate in a written conversation around each proposed question. The chalk talk provides an opportunity to "talk" around the proposed questions – exploring and expanding the possibilities of the inquiry. The intent is not to answer or propose ways to resolve questions but rather explore related assumptions and ideas.

At the conclusion of the "chalk talk," each person has time to revise their question and the protocol closes with a go-round in which each person simply states their question for beginning an inquiry. It is understood that this question may go through several revisions once the inquiry is in process.

2b. *For a group inquiry* - The facilitator reconvenes everyone in one whole group Inquiry Circle.
Each person adds the themes/core values that were identified in their story and recorded on their summary sheet to a sheet of chart paper that is posted for the group to see. The facilitator encourages the group to review the posted themes/core values and dialogue is encouraged for the purpose of identifying a shared inquiry.

Debrief

The full version of this protocol is available on our website, www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html

A Sad Reality

Jonett Miniel, Texas

"Where is your work Jonathan?" He shrugs, refusing to make eye contact. "What does that mean? We've been working on this piece of writing for more than a week, and we've been discussing the Civil Rights Movement for months! At least let me see your rough draft." Silence. "You don't even have a rough draft?" I asked, incredulously. More silence. "We will talk about this later." I was definitely too frustrated to discuss this now.

It's nearing the end of the first semester of fifth grade, and Jonathan is still an enigma. Given a choice, he'll always work alone rather than with a partner. When assigned to a group, he will sit with the group, but rarely participate. He has two loves, reading and origami, and he works on one or the other incessantly. All day every day the class hears, "Jonathan, put the book away." "Jonathan, what are you doing?" "Jonathan, put that paper away." "Jonathan pay attention." His previous grades are average and he's always passed the state tests. However, none of his other teachers ever understood what was going on with Jonathan. I heard, "Jonathan is smart, just lazy." "He's a loner; he doesn't have any social skills." "I don't know what's wrong with that child, but something is definitely wrong. There's no way he's really gifted and talented." "Jonathan will do just enough to get passing grades, but he always passes the state tests, so don't worry about him." "I couldn't get him to do any work, and I got tired of trying, so I just left him alone."

I have tried every strategy I know to get Jonathan to produce and stay on-task, to no avail. Even his parents don't know what to do with him. They regularly visit with me regarding his progress, and try all my suggestions. I'm now at my wits' end. I've talked, begged, coddled, and bribed. I know he's very intelligent from the conversations I've had with him (not the work I've seen him produce). Virtually all of Jonathan's grades are from alternative assessments, because he rarely completes the class assignment. I know that I can continue working with him in this way, but I also know that few (if any) teachers in middle and high school will be willing to regularly modify for him. It is also a problem when other students know that Jonathan didn't turn in an assignment but continues to get passing grades. So, I feel that I have to find a way to get through to Jonathan so he can at least fit into the mainstream most of the time.

After lunch, I found a volunteer to cover my class and I took several students, including Jonathan, to an empty classroom to work on their writing pieces. I got the other students started recopying their paper after their final peer review. I sat down with Jonathan and said, "What did I ask the class to do?"

"We're supposed to look at that picture you showed us, the one of the cops and the little kid dressed up like a KKK member. And we're supposed to think about all the stuff we've been reading and watching and talking about that deals with the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., racism, prejudice, and freedom. Then we're supposed to write an essay describing what we see in the picture, how it makes

us feel, how we think the police officers feel, and what we think the little kid is thinking about."

"That's exactly right," I said. "So, I'm confused. If you know the assignment, why haven't you completed it? Or at least started working on it?"

Shrugging, "I don't know."

"Do you have any thoughts about the picture? Any ideas about what's going on and what the characters might be feeling and thinking?" I asked.

"Yeh, sure," Jonathan replied.

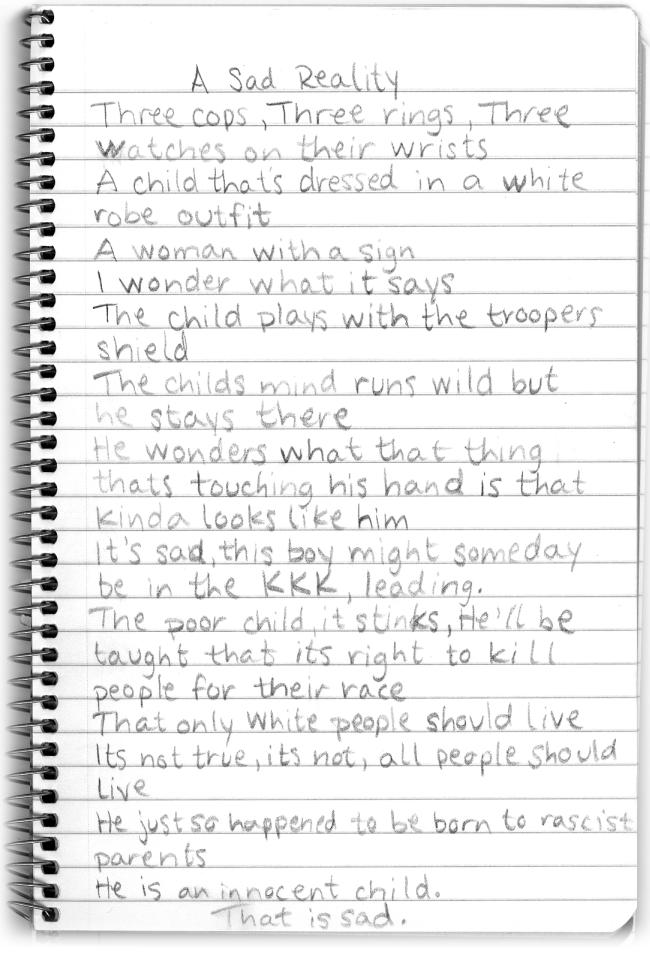
"Okay then. Here's a copy of the photograph, a piece

of paper, and a pencil. Don't move from that chair until you have something on that paper for me to see. I don't care how you choose to present the information, just get some words on that paper in the next half hour. Is that clear?"

"Okay."

I spent the next forty minutes answering questions, providing feedback, and proofreading work. Suddenly remembering Jonathan, I looked over to find him slouched down in the chair daydreaming. That was the final straw. "Jonathan, bring me your paper now!"

Jonathan ambles over, bringing the paper with him and drops into the chair next to me. Here's what I read:



A Sad Reality
Three cops, Three rings, Three
watches on their wrists
A child that's dressed in a white
robe outfit
A woman with a sign
I wonder what it says
The child plays with the troopers
shield
The childs mind runs wild but
he stays there
He wonders what that thing
thats touching his hand is that
kinda looks like him
It's sad, this boy might someday
be in the KKK, leading.
The poor child, it stinks, He'll be
taught that its right to kill
people for their race
That only White people should live
Its not true, its not, all people should
Live
He just so happened to be born to rascist
parents
He is an innocent child.
That is sad.

I read it and reread it. Then I read it again. I knew it was his work, because all he had was a pencil and paper. I was blown away. I didn't even know what to say to this child. I had no idea he had this in him. What an amazing talent and I didn't even know it. How could I have taught this child for half a year and not known what he was made of, what he was capable of? What kind of teacher am I not to have even glimpsed this talent? This child has a unique gift of insight and words and I didn't have a clue. How could I have missed this? Where was my focus, my energy? Then I realized that Jonathan was watching me intently and seeming very anxious. It occurred to me that he was waiting for me to say something. I knew I couldn't do justice with words to how I was feeling, but I knew I had to try. "Jonathan, I'm shocked! I had no idea you were so talented. This is a wonderful gift, but you've been hiding it from everyone. I've never seen you produce any work that is comparable to this, and you wrote this in less than thirty minutes. What's up with that?"

"I don't know. I've just been thinking," he said.

"All week long, when everyone else was writing and you were reading and practicing origami, you were thinking about this assignment?" I asked.

"Uh, huh," replied Jonathan.

"Why didn't you let me know what was going on?" I replied. "If you'd talked to me I wouldn't have been so upset and angry at you."

"I didn't think you'd believe me."

Pausing thoughtfully, I said, "You're right, I probably wouldn't have believed you. But do you know why I wouldn't have believed you? Because you have never ever turned in anything to me that was remotely similar to this. Right?"

Smiling shyly, "I know," Jonathan replied.

I worked much more closely with Jonathan for the rest of the year, and continue to keep in touch with him. I worry about him every day. How will he survive the traditional classes? Will he start letting others see his extraordinary abilities and talents? I'm so afraid he's going to become so frustrated with the cookie-cutter approach to instruction and assessment, he'll just give up and drop out.

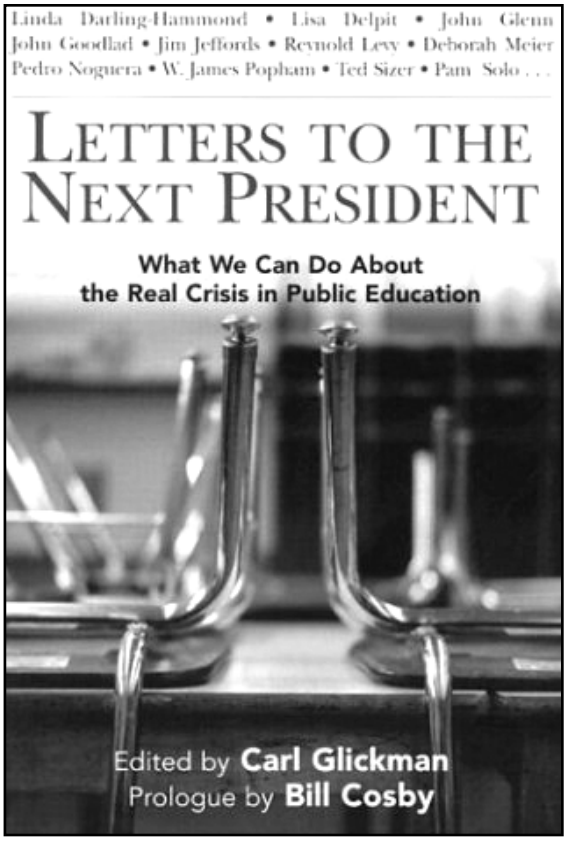
This child touched me in a special way. He has been the single biggest factor in causing me to think differently about how I relate to kids, and how I reach kids. I'm a much better teacher because of Jonathan. ■

Jonathan Estrada now attends seventh grade at Holland Middle School, Houston, Texas. Jonett Edwards Miniel currently teaches fifth grade at Durham Elementary in Houston, Texas. She works closely with the Houston A+ Challenge, facilitating new coaches' seminars and reform-related workshops, and facilitates a CFG at her school.

Letters to the Next President - What We Can Do About

A Book Review by Katy Kelly, Indiana

Often when commuting or showering, those times when I have few mental distractions, I find myself composing mental letters to the editor of my local paper, to the school board, or, particularly in election years, to the president. This exercise helps me to focus my thinking around a particular subject. So when a copy of "Letters to the Next President" arrived on my desk early last summer it immediately caught my attention. In the words of its editor, Carl Glickman, this book is "…straight talk from experienced, caring, and intelligent citizens about what can be done to improve public education in America."



More specifically, it is a collection of letters, written by a diverse group of people, at the invitation of Mr. Glickman, to the next president of the United States. The letters, written with passion and clarity, provide the reader (including the president, one hopes) with a deeper understanding of the complexity of significant issues facing educators in America today.

Some of the letters are familiar, comfortable, reaffirming: Ted Sizer gently guiding the president, suggesting that "you ponder fully what you want and hope for your own children and grandchildren." Others opened my eyes to situations I was unaware of, like the one from Iris, writing from a Correctional Institution near the Canadian border: "on behalf of the 2,000,000 women and men behind bars, I urge you to have the courage to restore the once common college-in-prison programs." Jacqueline Jordan Irvine's account of the young boy Darius still haunts me. When prompted by Ms. Irvine to "tell me about your dreams," Darius replied, "Lady, I don't see nothing and I don't have no dreams."

In his opening prologue, Bill Cosby uses a junky room as a metaphor for schools. In closing his letter to the next president he invites him "to look into this room. You have these letters to point the way, to keep you going as you sweep and mop and dust and even do some of the heavier work. You can say to our nation, 'We must begin, we cannot wait for someone else to clear out the mess.' My hope is that 30 years from now this book will no longer matter because kids will have the public schools that they deserve."

I invite you to look into this book. It may inspire you, inform you and trouble you. You may even want to write a letter of your own. Here are a few letters from people who chose to do just that.

Dear Mr. President,

To educate is to develop attitudes and values needed to actively participate in the civic life of one's local community, nation, and the world. One of the goals of education is to produce an effective citizen.

An effective citizen is one who can conceptualize, interpret, analyze, generalize, apply knowledge and evaluate knowledge. These are all critical thinking skills that in part are developed through education. Education provides opportunities for learners to participate in projects and activities that will develop their thinking skills. Through education, an individual can make reflective decisions and participate effectively in his or her society.

A school community's teaching philosophy is one that promotes learning and meets the needs of ALL students. This is why it is important that colleges and universities train future teachers to teach the students of today and of the future and not those of 10 years ago. The students of today are more challenging and demanding due to the impact of globalization. Schools need to be a community of life-long learners with a common vision.

Our community of learners depends on our ability to develop relationships, especially our relationship with parents; this relationship needs to be fostered through the same strategies that we are implementing with students and staff. We need a re-alignment between the school and the family.

I feel that to educate students without the deep partnership of a school community and parents is hopeless. It is not enough to have a handful of parents present in a monthly school council meeting. That is not where change occurs. It occurs in different forms throughout the school and community. Involvement needs to be deliberately fostered, developed and supported. Programs are needed to expand and increase the capacity of parents and community, in the same ways that we

establish programs and supports for teachers and students.

I urge you to prioritize partnerships between our schools and families. Please earmark funds to support our outreach efforts so that each child can benefit from a true community of support before, during and after school is in session.

Nelson Reyes

Nelson Reyes is the Principal of Feltonville-Horn Schools, Grades K-4, in Philadelphia, PA, and a member of the Leadership CFG in the Philadelphia Center of Activity.

Dear President,

A fifth grader observed, "I learned some disabilities don't revolve around legs and arms." Michele's comment reminded us that every individual is unique, each having different strengths and needs. We believe that our public education system can meet the needs of every child; however, NCLB mandates are having a crippling effect on this goal.

Students need time. To improve student reading and writing, students need time to practice reading great books and writing while studying mentor authors.

Students need to have voice, a valuable commodity that's becoming more endangered as we institute 'cookie cutter' curricula. Learning is social. Our students need to have time to talk, listen, and share with each other.

Students need to practice reading the world critically, discussing issues of injustice, gender and power from multiple perspectives. They need opportunities to reflect about possible action plans for positive change.

Finally, voluminous standardized testing does not improve student learning. Students might become better test takers but not critical thinkers who know how to negotiate and improve their worlds. Standardized tests provide only a small window of information about a student on one particular day. We work with them every day and gather much more pertinent useful information all the time.

Teachers are not averse to being held 'accountable' (as some critics

claim) – we are accountable to our students, parents, administrators, and most of all ourselves. Excellent teachers are being forced to sacrifice what they know best about teaching and learning in exchange for test prep curriculum that emphasizes memorization and isolated skills. Please listen to teachers and help us do what's best for children and ultimately for the world.

Sincerely,
Kevin Gallagher and Rise Reinier

Kevin Gallagher and Rise Reinier teach a K-6 class at Templeton Elementary in Bloomington, IN. They can be reached through e-mail at kgallagh@mccsc.edu and rreinier@mccsc.edu

Dear Mr. President:

I am the parent of two children in the Texas public school system. I have a sixteen-year-old daughter in the traditional public school and a thirteen-year-old son in a charter school. My daughter is an exceptional student with a positive sense of direction. My son has a passion for the mechanics of how things work; he has been diagnosed as dyslexic.

I am writing this letter to ask for the reduction of classroom sizes in our schools. The average size of the traditional classroom in this country is about 22- 40 students per class. Statistics show that 3 out of 5 students who attend college are not equipped to successfully complete college. In the classroom the teacher should have the opportunity to know the student that he or she is teaching. There should be a personal relationship established between student and teacher.

Reducing the number of students in a classroom allows the teacher to meet the student where they are and have a curriculum that's beneficial to each student. The teacher would better understand the learning styles of the students. Every child is teachable if given adequate attention, and smaller classes support better study skills.

The following are recommended classroom sizes:

- K-4 level: up to 15 students per class
- 5th - 8th: up to 17 students per class
- high schools: up to 22-25 students per class

The idea is that no child is left behind.

Mr. President, the reduction in student-teacher ratio will be paramount in improving the education process of our children. Please ensure that every student and teacher has a real opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,
Jerrye Stephenson
1811 Grand Cayman Way
Mesquite, Texas 75149 ■

Letters to the Next President - What We Can Do About the Real Crisis in Public Education
Edited by Carl Glickman, Prologue by Bill Cosby
Published by Teachers College Press, available on www.tcpress.com

9th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting

...a space for courageous work to take root...

Cambridge, Massachusetts
January 13th - 15th, 2005

Winter Meeting - Then & Now

In December 1995, the National School Reform Faculty convened its first Winter Meeting in Chicago, and what began as a small gathering for those early cohorts of newly trained CFG Coaches has become an annual source of renewal for hundreds, providing time to think and inquire, and space for courageous work to take root.

We know that sustained, focused conversations with one another are among the most essential elements of the work we do. So join us in Cambridge, Massachusetts to do the work you most need to do, with the people whose wisdom, perspective, and skill you most need. Reconnect with colleagues from your CFG Coaches Institute, from your Facilitative Leaders Seminar, or from past Winter Meetings. Meet the colleagues from around the country you don't yet know you have.

We will work in the ways our CFGs do, and for two and a half days, we'll use the tools and processes of our CFGs to deepen our skills, to press for insights, and to find courage in community. We'll spend time in small groups, looking at student work, asking tough questions, and taking the time we need to do the work we need to do most. Coaches Clinics will provide opportunities to learn from one another as we share what we know and what we still wonder.

Critical Friends Groups - Then & Now

In September 1995, members of the first 90 Critical Friends Groups brought their chairs around a table and began work that changed their professional lives.

Today, more than 10.000 educators in schools across the country come together in CFGs with a shared commitment to improve student achievement. We hold each other accountable for continuously adapting our practice to meet the needs of all learners, we share resources and ideas, and we support each other in implementing new practices. Whether we call ourselves Critical Friends, Facilitative Leaders, or members of a Professional Learning Community, the commitments we hold are the same:

- to be reflective
- to make our practice public to one another
- to frame meaningful questions and ask for substantive feedback from our colleagues
- to hold each other accountable for meeting the needs of students who struggle most
- to ask the kinds of questions that provoke and challenge both our assumptions and our habits
- to believe that together we are even more capable of knowing what we need to know and learning what we need to do than we are alone

Logistics

When
: January 13th-15th, 2005
Begins 8am Thursday, ends 12:30pm Saturday

Where
: All sessions will be held at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge
575 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, Massachuetts

Cost
: Standard- $350
Coaches Clinic Presenters:
One session- $325
Two sessions- $300

Meals
: Breakfast will be provided. Lunch and dinner are on your own. A reception with light hors d'oeuvres will be held Thursday night at the Hyatt.

Lodging
: Hyatt Regency Cambridge
575 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, Massachusetts
Phone - 617.492.1234
www.cambridge.hyatt.com
Group rate - $99/night single/double. Rate expires on December 11th, 2004

Registration Deadline
: Please register by December 11th, 2004

Register online at
: www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html

Questions?
: Call Sarah Childers at 812.330.2702, or email nsrf@harmonyschool.org

Register online at www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html

Report from the Directors
(continued from page 1)

agree that she brings distinct qualities of leadership to NSRF that will complement our existing governance structure and will serve our national community well.

Debbi will take over the Co-Director position held by Steve Bonchek (Roc) for the last four years. As a result of the growth of Harmony Education Center (HEC) and NSRF, Roc will work full-time as Executive Director of HEC, and thus have more time available to invest in guiding the upcoming multi-million dollar Capital Campaign for HEC (which includes NSRF), which will ensure a permanent national presence for our school reform work. We expect that Roc will play a vital role in NSRF, continuing many of the networking responsibilities he had as an NSRF Co-Director. In addition, he will serve as a member of the NSRF Accountability Council.

I will continue to serve as NSRF's founding Co-Director, working closely with Daniel Baron and Debbi Laidley, as well as with the Chair of the Accountability Council, Frances Hensley. While our working relationship will continue to be collaborative and democratic, the Accountability Council has requested that I assume the title "Facilitating Co-Director," in acknowledgement of the organization's need for one co-director who is ultimately accountable. All three co-directors will serve part-time.

We look forward to Debbi's tenure in her new position and to Roc's service in his expanded role with HEC. ■

Gene Thompson-Grove can be contacted at gthompsongrove@earthlink.net, Debbi Laidley can be contacted at debra.laidley@lausd.net, Daniel Baron can be contacted at dbaron@bloomington.in.us, and Steve "Roc" Bonchek can be reached at harmony@indiana.edu

Some Highlights of NSRF's History

March 1995
NSRF was established at Brown University by the Annenberg Institute established for School Reform (AISR), with Paula Evans, Faith Dunne, and Gene Thompson-Grove as its Founding Co-Directors. Paula was also the Director of Professional Development at AISR; Gene and Faith were Principal Associates.

January 1999
NSRF's Founding Co-Directors Faith Dunne and Gene Thompson-Grove announced that NSRF would be leaving AISR, and that the Harmony Education Center in Bloomington, Indiana would assume responsibility for being the National Center for NSRF.

June 2000
The first NSRF council met and formed the foundation for the organization, including:
- A draft mission statement
- Agreed-upon goals of CFGs
- A governance structure for the organization that included:
  - National Center
  - Centers of Activity
  - Council
  - Clusters of Interest

June 2001
A mission statement was agreed upon: *The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.*

Gene Thompson-Grove, Faith Dunne, Daniel Baron and Steve Bonchek assumed the responsibility for being NSRF's Co-Directors.

August 2001
Faith Dunne passed away; her position as Co-Director was not filled.

December 2002
At the recommendation of the NSRF Council, the Co-Directors invited a group of NSRF facilitators to revisit the NSRF governance structure. This retreat created the new governance structure that was approved at the January 2003 Council Meeting. It included
- Three co-directors as responsible for decisions
- The formation of an NSRF National Accountability Council that would hold the directors accountable for decisions made
- A NSRF Centers of Activity Council

May 2004
Acting on the charge to actively seek out leaders who reflect the diversity of the NSRF constituency, the Accountability Council recommended the nomination of Debbi Laidley as Co-Director of NSRF.

The Accountability Council endorsed Roc Bonchek's move from Co-Director of NSRF to Executive Director of Harmony Education Center.

D: I think the thing that surprised me was how connected it was to things I had already been doing at my previous school, that I didn't know had been connected to NSRF.

I was a teacher at Foshay Learning Center, and at that school, we were using lots and lots of protocols, examining student work. We had a State of California Grant called SB 1274. That grant used, "the California Protocol" as a tool to examine our work. It was the way that our school, as a whole school and in small groups, looked at the impact of the changes we were making. I had been doing that for years, working with hundreds of teachers, on our government structure, leadership and at every decision that we made. I was just so shocked to see where this came from.

K: I have never heard of the California Protocol.

D: It's the Tuning Protocol! I was amazed. I was blown away. I thought, "You know, I had no idea that this is what we were doing." I didn't know the genesis of what we were doing.

K: When did you first hear about NSRF?

D: I was a faculty member with the UCLA School Management Program. It was working on improving LA Unified and the surrounding metropolitan area that were just finishing up their fifth year with Annenberg and the LA-Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), and both had been doing CFG work. These projects were going to be closing and LAAMP began looking around for organizations that they felt confident would carry-forth the work of CFGs.

K: I see, and they approached the UCLA School Management Program?

D: Yes, and asked if we would take that on. Patricia Averette took about eight of us at the School Management Program under her wing and put us through a week-long seminar. She gave us an intense version of a facilitator's training over period of weeks. With that and with her ongoing support, we began to roll out our first CFG coaches institutes. She supported us through that, coached us, gave us feedback, and we began to make adjustments and began to work with the NSRF. It struck me as a way to really create true community. I was selected as the person to spearhead the effort for UCLA SMP on this.

K: Last year you moved from working full-time at the UCLA SMP into the LA School District. What are you doing with the school district, now?

D: This year, I am acting coordinator for secondary literacy. Our local district has about 65,000 students. In the secondary we currently serve seven comprehensive middle and high schools and we have five more that are either starting up right now, this year, or will be in the next three years.

K: What do you do?

D: We're a professional development arm around literacy. We support teachers and literacy in a few ways. The central district has what is called, a secondary literacy plan. It is a very clear and focused plan that looks at content literacy. It takes the fact that so many students at the secondary level are really struggling readers and focuses on those specific strategies that we can use, and coach one another to use effectively, to help readers do what they need to do in order to become strong readers. We have a group of coaches and we have literacy cadres. Our work is to coach those coaches and to work directly with those cadres and directly with the school-site teachers.

K: You use the word, "coaches." How does the coaching you are talking about relate to CFG coaching?

D: It relates really well for me. I think it's just lucky that it does, because CFG coaching is not the design of the LAUSD. The coaches in our area have, prior to my joining the team, received training in cognitive coaching, there is of course a link there, and have received training in specific literacy strategies. The place where they are now, the CFG-type coaching is really beneficial to them because it provides them with a really systematic way to coach one another. Many of them have just been together now long enough, this is starting their third year of working together, that they're really ready to start looking really directly at one another's work, so we have some protocols ready for them on how to do that well.

The other portion of how CFG work connects is that our local district is really focusing district-wide on the use of protocols when looking at student work. We've been training and supporting that.

K: Have any of those coaches had a chance to go through coaches seminars?

D: A number of them have, and it's really fortunate that when I returned to the district that I had so many already existing relationships in so many schools, because the people had gone through coaches training, and there were people out there already either using protocols in small groups as it kind of came up as a need in their schools or who are officially seriously coaching a CFG.

K: I want to ask you about your personal CFG experiences. Do you have any memories of coaching your first CFG?

D: I do. It's about the CFG that I have been a member of the longest, the

one that is entering its third year. The thing I remember most is how excited we were about the fact that there were really smart people in the room. And together, we were going to have the luxury of time to sit and learn together. At the same time there was that feeling of tentativeness. "Am I really going to be safe? What do we have to do to make sure that we're safe?" We all worked in the same building, at that time, and we knew that each of us had alliances with people in the building who were not a member of our group. There were concerns about confidentiality. There were concerns about, just how honest we can be, really. There were concerns about making sure that we were clear about what we wanted to get out of this, that the time was not a waste of time.

K: Had you been part of a CFG before you coached that one?

D: No. I had learned from my experience of having used protocols extensively at my school and having gone through transition work later on from Annenberg to the UCLA SMP.

K: What did you learn from this experience?

D: The thing I learned the most is the importance of being honest with new coaches in coach's institute and about how much we're learning that we don't know. Even now, with as many institutes as we do at UCLA, and even with having been a CFG member for going on three years with a really stable CFG, coaching two others, and being a member of a second one, there are still so many things I don't know, that I am finding out, and I am amazed at all of this work. I feel that I am just as green as I was when I coached my first CFG!

K: Can you talk a little more about learning how much you don't know?

D: I think it really has put us in good stead that we've really had to be humble, because we truly couldn't even possibly think that we knew anything, going in. We just continue to feel that same way, that we have had lots more experiences, and still know that there is a lot that we don't know, and that same sense of humility and wonder and questioning, but then hopefulness that we could think of that first institute. I think we still have that and I think that is what makes our institutes good at UCLA.

K: You talk about a sense of hopefulness. What hope do you have for schools now?

D: The hope that I see comes from a heightened sense of awareness of subtle discriminations and not just a willingness, but a sense of responsibility, to not let that be OK. The example that comes to my mind is watching students on TV from schools in east Los Angeles, which are the schools I serve. They were protesting in front of the school about the number of army and other military recruiters that more or less stay at our schools. They wanted to know why these people are practically camped-out on our school site, when they're not visible at the schools in the San Fernando Valley and the affluent areas. I think a few years ago, students I was working with may have not been willing to say that or to take action around it or may not have even noticed that.

The other thing that gives me hope is seeing teachers and certain administrators feel the impact that a true CFG or truly using CFG processes can have on their school. The story that comes to mind is about high school kids who noticed something going on with their teachers who had been to Critical Friends Institutes. The teachers had started coming into one another's rooms and watching each other. The kids noticed that the teachers were starting to use similar practices. One of these teachers told me a kid came up to her and said, " Miss…, are you guys learning something?" (laughing) and that gave me hope.

K: (laughing) That's wonderful. Debbi, looking back over your growing involvement in NSRF – which began with the "California Protocol" at the Foshay Learning Center and grew rapidly as your positions within LA Unified and UCLA SMP evolved, and even included co-hosting the NSRF Winter Meeting in 2003, your recent acceptance of the role of co-directorship in NSRF isn't that surprising! What are you going to do as a director of NSRF?

D: (laughing) I don't know, yet.

K: (laughing) What do you hope you might do?

D: You know, this is probably going to sound funny because it's not going to sound very…specific. Again, it goes back to that thing about community for me. As I listen to our group on the listserv, in groups of three, in groups of twelve, any group that I'm a part of in NSRF, the thing that I notice is a need to really pay attention to communication. So that's where my focus lies right now, in really listening and watching to see what are the dynamics of communication. I think it's not a coincidence that, "communicating" and, "community" are practically the same word. That's my focus. I don't know how that will play out, but that's my interest. ■

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Trouble with Friendship...

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sitcoms and TV commercials that Madison Avenue dishes up regularly to reassure well-meaning whites, like me, that racism was laid to rest by the Civil Rights legislation of the sixties.

DeMott goes on to say that this denial of racism's existence as a foundation of our society leads to a shying away from the labeling of our society as a caste society. Relegating problems to the realm of individual differences between "prejudiced" individuals shifts the responsibility for dealing with those problems to those particular individuals and allows the majority of whites to see ourselves as blameless and powerless.

Coupled with these images of friendship and sameness are stories of philanthropy, from the donations of super-wealthy whites, to the business partnerships that place white mentors in classrooms of color. What we don't see in these media messages is any recognition of the efforts of leaders of color. We don't see Geoffrey Canada's efforts in Harlem, or Robert Moses's work in the Algebra Project. Instead, the loudly unspoken question, the question of fault or blame for the ongoing achievement gap, looms large. If these white philanthropists offer a guarantee of a free ride to college to "these" kids and "they" don't graduate, whose fault is it? If all of us white teachers, with our good intentions and hard work, aren't closing the gap, who's to blame? Is it the kids, their parents, their culture? How much of this message gets internalized by students of color? And how much of this message do we internalize, despite our good intentions?

These questions of blame used to make me uncomfortable and for the most part I have challenged them silently, contenting myself with what I've called a "proactive" approach with students and their families. But now I'm thinking that in order to be truly proactive, I need to be much more explicit. With all students, I think I need to openly acknowledge the existence of a current caste system based on race and its relationship to the achievement gap. With colleagues, I need to ask the questions that DeMott's analysis points to, asking whether I/we really believe that equal opportunities exist and that we've dealt with racism as a systematic form of oppression. Along the same lines, I need to recognize the ways that I've promoted a shallow form of racial unity, one based on the kinds of "friendship" or tolerance that DeMott outlines.

Concretely, I'll be introducing norms with the "Willing to be Disturbed" section of Margaret Wheatley's book *Turning to One Another*. Using this text and The Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger has helped groups I've worked with recently move beyond the level of polite discourse into safe but principled, probing conversations.

I'll also be using an article called *Educating African American Children: Credibility at a Crossroads* by Brenda Campbell Jones and Franklin Campbell Jones, Ed.D. The authors raise questions about our system's loss of legitimacy, a loss that continues to grow each day that our leaders make speeches about equity and our institutions, including schools, continue to discriminate against poor children and children of color.

At the beginning of this piece I wondered how I would know if I was making progress as a white ally in the struggle for equity. Now I think that one way I'll know is by my shift in framing questions. I think all of my work should be based on the intersection of "gap closing" and healthy cultural identities for kids, regardless of the racial make-up of the adult or student populations where I'm working. ■

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Making Learning Visible...

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damental features of group learning that they shared at the MLV Institute:

1. The members of learning groups include adults as well as children.
2. Documenting children's learning processes helps to make learning visible and shapes the learning that takes place.
3. Members of learning groups are engaged in the emotional and aesthetic as well as the intellectual dimensions of learning.
4. The focus of learning in groups extends beyond the learning of individuals to create a collective body of knowledge.

In his opening remarks at the Institute, Steve Seidel said he hoped we would leave with more questions than those we had when we arrived and I, for one, was very successful when measured by this standard! As I look over my notes, the pages are filled with quotes, wonderings and a trove of questions. I'll close here with just one, and I hope you'll share your thoughts, questions and experiences in response to it: What happens at the intersection of group learning and documentation? ■

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For more information about these principles, and the MLV project, visit Project Zero at pzweb.harvard.edu
For more information about Reggio Emilia Schools, visit zerosei.comune.re.it

School Three...

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The most striking effect of our new community was among students who, in the past, had been told – implicitly, or explicitly – that they could not learn. The success they began to experience as teachers learned to vary instruction, to give up the hold they had on "knowledge," and to discover the passion that is waiting to be unleashed in every student, was infectious. Kids who had been previously denied access to quality instruction discovered multiple entry points to learning. They were invited to ask questions, and practiced crafting better ones. Teachers held higher expectations for all students. There was a feeling of "we can do this!" in our school. As we developed portfolios and presentations, too, students became more accountable for their learning. Parents who attended and participated in these student-led presentations often left in tears of joy, for they had never before seen their child as learner.

We had tangible evidence (significant increases in state and national test scores and college attendance, decreases in dropout rate, acts of violence, and discipline issues, and, most importantly, the narrowing of gaps in achievement among racial and socio-economic groups) to support the claim that ours was a learning community. But statistics cannot bring to life the "feel" of our school. In three short years, we transformed a place where thinking and learning were habits reserved for a select few, where the intellectual needs of most kids were undernourished, and where teachers worked in isolation and liked it that way, into a respectful community where all could learn to use their minds well. An intellectual community grew and was nourished there; a culture whose seeds were planted and watered among the adults, and whose fruits were borne through the successes of the children under our stewardship. ■

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Houston Center Report

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Sammon; dozens of workshops organized around the strands of fine arts, literacy, mathematics, personalization, and professional learning communities; and home group discussions. A hallmark of the FRSSI is the home groups, composed of about 20 participants each. Facilitated by teams of new and experienced Critical Friends Group coaches, the home groups give each participant a taste of the power and effectiveness of being part of a professional learning community.

Supporting Coaches

Six clinics for new and experienced CFG coaches were held during the 2003-2004 academic year at no cost to participants. These 2 or 3 hour clinics were facilitated by experienced facilitators from the Houston area and delved into these topics: beginning a group and keeping it going, using and designing protocols, action research, dealing with difficult people, equity, and leadership. One hundred and nineteen coaches and facilitators participated in these clinics. Six clinics are planned for the 2004-2005 academic year.

Supporting Facilitators

The Houston A+ Challenge supported the development of a regional CFG composed of experienced facilitators. Called the K-16 CFG because its 17 members hail from elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, universities, foundations, and administrative posts, the CFG met monthly and developed the inquiry focus "How can our CFG training and experience be used to its maximum potential in our work?" This group serves as the main pool of facilitators for CFG seminars and clinics in the Houston area.

Supporting Inquiry

The Houston A+ Challenge awarded seven Teacher as Researcher grants to CFG coaches in May 2004. The grant supports each of the seven CFGs' inquiry work with $10,000 during two years. The Teacher as Researcher grant has the potential to effect change in a broad cross-section of Houston area schools. Fifty-eight CFG members will be directly involved in the action research projects supported by the grant. These CFG members represent four school districts (Houston, Aldine, Alief, and Spring Branch). Furthermore, faculty and staff from five local colleges and universities (Rice University, University of Houston, Houston Community College, Prairie View A&M, and University of Saint Thomas) have committed to support these inquiry projects. Several of the inquiry groups also have engaged other members of the community by including business partners and parents as participants in the research.

The seven inquiry projects, which include elementary, middle, and high schools, will tackle questions dealing with literacy, math, and fine arts. Within those content areas, several projects also will work to find strategies for how to best teach some of the Houston area's neediest students: impoverished readers, English Language Learners, and Special Education students struggling with mandated standardized tests. ■

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