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Here are our own reflections on some of the changes and questions that grew out of our thinking and learning together last January.

Camilla Greene writes about her changed practice at last month’s National Facilitator’s Meeting:

“For the first time in a National NSRF Facilitator’s Meeting, when asked to give feedback on a particular docu- ment on equity, I expressed my concerns about the purpose of the document and the intended audience for the document. It is my contention that we try to play it safe and choose a text that is not too provoca- tive. Too often I have experienced in my CFG training the accommodations that are made by people of color to protect the safety and comfort zones of main- stream folks who feel threatened by equity conversations or are consumed with guilt and are not able to move forward.

“As a National NSRF Facilitator I am sensitive to the ‘Dynamic Zones’ and I wish to accommodate those who are not used to having open, honest conversations about race, class and gender. Therefore, I choose a less threatening, “safe” reading for the text-based discussion on equity. Most recently in CFG trainings, I have been using more provocative texts and I have been experienc- ing a variety of responses. The responses I received from people of color are gratifying. Some people of color cannot believe that we are reading and discussing such a critical and provocative text on race in the context of our CFG training. The sense of urgency is an action aware effort to do what is best for the students.

“In order to achieve more equitable academic outcomes for poor students and students of color, all adults in urban educa- tion must clearly be able to take action and level the academic playing field by making sure there are equitable learning envi- ronments for all students.

“Now I am thinking that we should offer a variety of readings, or a range that are more sensitive to the special needs of students across the curriculum from ‘soft to hard core’ to our participants and ask them to choose which level of intensity they would like to explore in their work. That way we can honor that we are all on a journey with equity. Some may be just beginning the journey. However, I contend that if you are a National NSRF Facilitator, and you choose to work in urban areas, you should not have a choice about starting and moving quickly on the journey with equity towards creating learning environ- ments for students and adults that result in equitable outcomes for all students. As NSRF National Facilitators we must be ready to act on our own issues with equity, and help others act on theirs. To act means to move past “aware- ness” and understanding. We must be able to have the open, honest and emotionally charged conversation with all educators about equitable outcomes for all students. We must be allies in equity, which means that it is not only to pair someone who has had a lot of experience with dealing with equity needs, it is not enough to pair someone who has had a lot of experience with the topic of equity needs experience. It is difficult enough to be in the equity work. We need each other as equity allies able to take appropriate actions when necessary.”

Jennifer Fischer-Mueller, a participant in the Kiva, writes:

“Latenight, at the very last minute of May 17, 2004, my partner Cathy and I will be at the City Hall of Cambridge, Massachusetts to apply for our marriage license. We are going tonight in order to participate in an historic event. For the first time in the history of Massachusetts and the United States gay/lesbian couples are being allowed to marry. We want to be there.

“Our NSRF colleague Debbie Bambino ends all of her emails with the quote “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to pro- duce the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (bell hooks, Teaching to Transform, Education as the Practice of Freedom).

“I have too many scary memories of growing up as a gay kid. I can not imagine how my life would have been differ- ent if someone had ever said to me, ‘When you grow up, you can marry the person you are in love with - the person of your choice.’ If only a teacher had said to me ‘Jennifer, it's going to be OK.’ If a teacher had ever taught me in a manner that respected and cared for my soul, my learning would have been different. Times are changing.

“During the Kiva at the Winter Meeting, I introduced myself and briefly described my work in Brookline, MA. The Public Schools of Brookline are committed to eliminating the achievement gap. We are engaged in the tough and bru- tally honest conversations about the relationship between race and academic achievement. We hold ourselves to high standards of engagement and dialogue. We have very consciously cre- ated a process for pursuing high academic achievement for all students, with a focus on the gap between white and black and Latino/a students. We need to understand that true equity needs experience. It is difficult enough to be in the equity work. We need each other as equity allies able to take appropriate actions when necessary.”

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“While the lessons of the Winter Meeting have been playing out in many ways in both my work and my studies since January, I will turn my focus here on our recent facilita- tor listserv conversation and upcoming book chat.

“What started as an online call for the need for the addi- tion of a facilitator of color at an upcoming seminar quickly became a conversation about many other forms of equity. This ongoing conversation was then refocused on race and the particular difficulties we appear to have in staying the course when questions of race and our potential racism are implied.

“The listserv conversation has died down for now, but some twenty list members have made a commit- ment to read and write/chat about a book on the first weekend in June. The book is called The Trouble with Friendship, Why Americans Can’t Think Straight About Race by Benjamin DeMott. In the book DeMott challenges us to look beyond our good intentions to be nice and become friends. He ... where the achievement gap continues to widen and survival itself is a huge issue for large num- bers of people of color.

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“In my work, while sometimes still scared, I must provide for all students what was absent for me – an adult who shows respect and care by being authentic, to show them that it’s going to be OK.”

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“I hope that this book chat will be the first of many deeper conversations about the inequities that weaken our unity as a force committed to leading for equity in support of all children.

“Next, as the Spring Meeting continues to grow and change, I look forward to the question of how the inequities that weaken our unity as a force committed to leading for equity in support of all children.

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“Contact the authors at the following email addresses:

Camilla Greene-camilla.green@tat.net; Jennifer Fischer-Mueller-Jennifer_Fischer-Mueller@brookline.mec.edu; Debbie Bambino-d.bambino@earthlink.net...