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Report from the Directors

We recently welcomed Hawaii as our 27th NSRF Center of Activity. Just what, you may be asking yourself, is an NSRF Center of Activity, and how does one go about “becoming” a center? Hawaii’s story might be illustrative, as it took one road to becoming a formal center.

First, a little history ... Back in June of 2000, a group of about twenty NSRF National Facilitators met in Providence to hammer out NSRF’s first governance and organizational structure. There was talk of forming traditional regional NSRF Centers – that is, organizations with offices, phones, administrative assistants and 501c3 nonprofit status. There was also talk of a virtual organization – NSRF as a loosely linked network of like-minded organizations and individuals who came together in whatever configurations made sense for that particular part of the country. In the end, the people at the meeting opted for an organizational structure somewhere in between traditional and virtual, with particular attention paid to the local contexts of the people who were doing NSRF work. The people at this meeting wrote:

Centers of Activity can include individuals, schools, and affiliated organizations who are engaged in the work of NSRF. Centers of Activity convene NSRF-related meetings and seminars, provide a conduit for local and national communication, and have associated with them at least one NSRF National Facilitator who offers CFG coaches’ and/or principals’ training. NSRF is not a center-based organization, regional or otherwise. We have quite deliberately chosen the terminology “Centers of Activity” to describe our work nationally. We neither encourage nor discourage “bricks and mortar” centers with full-time employees - that is up to people to determine locally. We envision that there will be many organizations that are Centers of Activity, as well as clusters of people regionally who maintain contact with each other and who both support and hold each other accountable for high-quality work.

Since then, we have decided as an organization that to be an NSRF Center of Activity, someone from the location needs to attend the Centers Council meeting each year, in order to:

1. review organizational vision and processes
2. raise important issues
3. give input on organizational and program issues
4. establish “clusters of interest” and ad hoc task forces for ongoing work together across Centers of Activity

In addition, at least one national facilitator from each Center of Activity must attend the yearly National Facilitators’ meeting.

(continued on page 14)
The Vermont Center of Activity has been piloting a format for doing “fishbowl” protocols that we would like to share. A fishbowl refers to an arrangement where a larger group of participants is broken into an inner and outer circle with the inner circle actively participating in the protocol and the outer providing feedback. The fishbowl can be used with any of the NSRF protocols.

The Partner Fishbowl is a variation of this method that we have found to be helpful in getting all participants to be more active in the protocol, to provide a higher level of safety for the presenter and participants, and to be an excellent way to introduce the use of protocols and to be effective for pushing the conversation deeper during protocols.

The partner fishbowl was very helpful in their learning about how to participate in a protocol effectively and that the collaboration with a partner reduces the stress of doing protocols.

Partner Fishbowl for Groups New to Protocols

With new groups, the aim of the partner fishbowl is to familiarize the group with the protocol and to allow reflection on how to effectively engage in the protocol. During the protocol, the facilitator, who should be an experienced CFG member, stops the protocol at each major conversation stopping point and asks the presenter and participants, in pairs, to help the facilitator understand what was said at that point during the protocol. We have found this practice to be effective and to strengthen the presentation for the presenter and the group.

Partner Fishbowl for Experienced Groups

The partner fishbowl is also an effective way to push experienced groups to deepen the conversation. With an experienced group, the facilitator asks the participants to consult with each other about what questions or comments might be raised during the deep conversation and asks the presenter at each point during the protocol. We have found this practice to be effective and to strengthen the presentation for the presenter and the group.

Another advantage of the partner fishbowl is that the facilitator can get support, preferably from an experienced CFG member. While the facilitator is busy as the presenter and the group focus on the protocol, the facilitator can switch circles during these stopping points if they so desire. We have found the partner fishbowl to work well with both beginning groups who are using the protocols for the first time, and for experienced groups hoping to push the conversation deeper.

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Melissa Kagel can be reached at nissa@vermontel.net

We hope you will try out this way of working with beginning groups that is the presenter can get support, preferably from an experienced CFG member. While the participant partners are discussing responses, the presenter should find out how the presenter is responding to the feedback, which the presenter can clarify with his or her learning from the protocol, and any make any requests of the facilitator at the end of the protocol. This is a very helpful resource for people who may not be accustomed to having their work critiqued by peers.

For beginning groups, this is the ability to be present in intentional action. This is why facilitation is both cognitively and emotionally demanding.

How does it work? As the name implies, everyone participating in the protocol – presenter, facilitator, and participants – is paired with a partner. Each pair has one member sitting in the inner circle and one member sitting in the outer circle at any given time; each participant pair decides which of them will start where (though the presenter and the facilitator will necessarily be in the inner circle). During the protocol, the facilitator stops the conversation at certain points and has the participants consult with each other. Pairs can switch circles during these stopping points if they so desire. We have found the partner fishbowl to work well with both beginning groups who are using the protocols for the first time, and for experienced groups hoping to push the conversation deeper.

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Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Certainly there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of balance and willful election. . . . People middle in the stream of power and wisdom who dominate all whom it floats and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment.” The 2004 NSRF Winter Meeting was a “journey through mad to magic” (to paraphrase my storytelling protocol partner) which placed me back in the middle of the stream of my life, impelling me toward truth and right, if not perfect contentment.

Kim Carter can be reached at kimcarter@mc2school.org

Our World Café (continued from page 12)

I am still thinking about the question, “What does equity look like?” Without open conversation, how will we get there? We won’t. We will continue as an institution to tell ourselves we are reaching all students when in fact the data shows something very different. When every student is empowered to take control of their learning and all students see themselves as a vital connection to the world, then we will begin the road toward real reform. Until then, the best we can do is pretend and congratulate ourselves for thinking we are doing the right thing, instead of actually doing the right thing.

Gregory Foote is a teacher and CCFG Coach at El Sereno Middle School in Los Angeles. He can be reached by email at gregfoote@msn.com

NSRF 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.

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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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impacts student work!" According to Lori, "The protocols help teach-ers evaluate the learning strategies and assessments they ... in a scripted environment. The focus is always on student achievement, but using proven methodology to stir the efforts.

The training has had an impact on their work. Using the Standards of Instruction and Assessment has brought the lessons to a much higher level. The ... 'sharpen the saw' once in awhile, we will undoubtedly create a system that fails on the basis of apathy and ignorance."

As Lori said, “Practicing the specific protocols and examining higher-order thinking skills increased our ability to share them with our respective teams.” Rebecca appreciated how “we’ve gradually been pushed to delve even deeper”. Chad’s observation was that “student work has become one of the most useful and challenging points upon which we consider and reflect."

The principals’ participation in the training is crucial and keeps everybody on the “same page”. Principals help with scheduling and logistics so that groups can meet easily and converge accordingly. As the instructional leader in the building, they need to understand how the discussion of student work impacts instruction. The benefits of peers choosing the CSS coaches was summarized by Lori’s statement: “Using the MCES prescribed process, peers choose coaches, which is a HUGE step in securing staff support and involvement with the process.”

The question of voluntary CSS groups or mandatory CSS groups met with varied responses. From Rebecca’s perspective at Grayling High School: “We initially invited all members of the staff and then placed the interested ones in groups. Our first meeting was done during an in-ser-vice, and we encouraged even the non-committed members to observe one of the groups. This worked out better than we ever could have imagined — the ‘observers’ were so impressed that they all joined the groups they observed!” Jim offers another point of view: “Voluntary participation is always the most desirable option. However, if this doesn’t happen, I think it’s important that CSS takes place during a time when staff are required to be in attendance”. But Chad cautioned that “One must be careful to uncover the contrived col-legiary aspects and use the time as efficiently and effectively as possible.”

CSS has an impact on student achievement. Jim said, “It’s com-pletely about instruction and how that impacts student work!” According to Lori, “The protocols help teachers evaluate the learning strategies and assessments they use.” Rebecca believes “CSS has an indirect yet valu-able impact on student achievement. The assignments we have ‘tuned’ are meeting more of the Standards of Instruction. We encourage each other to challenge and extend students to meet these standards, helping them to achieve higher on our state’s assessment tests.” For Chad, the CSS meetings offer opportunities to look at student work in a scripted environment. The focus is on student achievement, but using proven methodology to stir the efforts.

The training has had an impact on their work. Using the Standards of Instruction and Assessment has brought the lessons to a much higher level. The view of student work is more diverse and comprehensive and they have a reference point to discuss a student’s success. The protocols depolarized classroom practice in a nonthreaten-ing manner, trust was established and teachers began to use higher standards. From the MCES staff perspective, our challenge is how to sustain the work back in the schools and to bridge the gap so groups will meet not only to discuss educational issues but to delve deeper into their practice by sharing and analyzing student work. Chad says, “Students are at the center of our minds. If we fail to challenge our minds or ‘sharpen the saw’ once in awhile, we will undoubtedly create a system that fails on the basis of apathy and ignorance.”

The authors can be contacted at the following email addresses: Nancy Fenton - fenton@michigances.org; Shug Brandell - sbrandell@fcomcast.net; Janett Bundy - bundy@michigances.org

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools: Collaborating for Students’ Success
Nancy Fenton, Shug Brandell & Janett Bundy, Michigan

I n honor of the work and leader-ship of our colleague, Nancy Fenton, and to deepen our support of principals in the NSRF network, we are pleased to announce the first NSRF Principals Seminar.

Facilitators
Paula Evans — Former high school teacher, Director of Professional Development and Co-Director of NSRF at the Annenberg Institute of School Reform; former principal of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School in Instruction; MA; current Director of the New Teachers Collaborative in Devens, MA and Lead Founder of the Community Charter School of Cambridge (opening September 09)
Dave Lehman — Principal and Teacher, Alternative Community School (middle-high school) in Inhacu, New York - member school of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and New York State Education Department

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Collaborating for Students’ Success
NSRF Principals’ Seminar
July 14-16, 2004, Cambridge, Massachusetts

New Coaches Institute: 6.21-25
Colorado
New Coaches Institute: 6.21-25
Portland, OR
New Coaches Institute: 6.27-7.2
Fort Kent, ME
New Coaches Institute: 6.28-7.2
Waltham, MA

Experienced Coaches Seminar: 6.28-30
Waltham, MA
Experienced Coaches Institute: 7.6-10
San Antonio, TX
Experienced Coaches Seminar: 7.7-9
Colorado
Experienced Coaches Institute: 7.12-16
Colorado

Experienced Coaches Seminar: 7.13-16
Fairlane, VT
NSRF Principals Seminar: 7.14-16
Cambridge, MA
Experienced Coaches Seminar: 7.14-16
Chattanooga, TN
New Coaches Institute: 7.19-20
New Jersey
New Coaches Institute: 7.19-23
Houston, TX
New Coaches Institute: 7.19-23
Amherst, NH
Experienced Coaches Seminar: 7.19-21
Amherst, NH
NSRF Principals Seminar: 7.26-28
Baltimore, MD
New Coaches Institute: 7.26-29
Provo, UT
Experienced Coaches Seminar: 7.27-29
Portland, OR
New Coaches Institute: 7.28-30
TBA, CA

For more information
If you have any questions about the meeting please feel free to contact Sarah Childers at the NSRF National Center at 812.330.2702 or schilders@harmonyschool.org

Logistics
Register on-line at www.nsrf harmony.org/principals.html
• Registrant Cost – $350
• Location: Hyatt Regency, 575 Memorial Dr., Cambridge, MA
Tel. (617) 492-1234
• Cost- $139/night
• Meeting hours: 8:30am-5pm  Breakfast, snacks and luncheon are included. Dinner is on your own.

NSRF’s theory of action around creat-ing effective, professional learning communities, focused on student achievement and equity in schools, depends on strong, skilled principal leadership - and we are interested in deepening our efforts to support prin-cipals in this work.

In this meeting we will focus both on the community of adults within our schools and the relationships between schools and parent/caregivers in an era of changing family support for young people.

Essential Questions:
• How do schools and families work most effectively to support our students?
• How does our school support teachers and staff in the relationships with an effec-tive learning community?

During this seminar participants will:
• discuss Rob Evans’ new book Family Matters (participants will receive a copy to read in advance)
• examine the critical components that provide the framework for collaborative community
• have the opportunity to present a case study from their own school community
• have time for reflection, tuning of the coming year’s plans – e.g. what might we let go of? how do we “slim down”?

Spring 2004
Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools
Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

The central perspectives advanced in Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools are:

- Teacher beliefs, intentions and perceptions can be a powerful factor in the determination of individual student success or failure, surpassing the role of the curriculum or other structural factors in schools.
- White teachers, because of their unconscious racial and cultural biases, may in fact be unwittingly undermining the success of their students of color.
- Given the disproportionate number of white teachers responsible for the education of poor children and children of color, and the profound impact of their behavior and beliefs on these students, white teachers have a special role to play in the disruption of the achievement gap.

Unfortunately, when we returned this year, we found that this CFG time had been taken away and replaced with mandatory team, grade level, and department meetings. It is equal if all students are given excellent programs and tools to succeed. It is equitable when students have opportunities to find their own success in their schooling through programs that demand a high level of accountability and rigorous, higher-level thinking. Both, the AVID program and the AEMIP program do this. Without the time to carefully look at the work we and students do, these programs and others will go by the wayside. Our school’s AVID program is in doubt for next year, as are many other programs that help students succeed. We may not be able to answer what equity in education looks like, but it is quite clear to most when they don’t see it.

This collaborative inquiry began when Karen approached Jennifer while the two were graduate students at Berkeley. As a previously successful white teacher of mostly white, middle class adolescents, Karen was deeply troubled by her later less-successful efforts to change a predominantly African-American youth. Jennifer knew that, as a West Indian immigrant and teacher, she was well positioned as a successful teacher of inner-city youth and consequently invited Jennifer into her classroom on a regular basis to observe and analyze the disconnect that Karen felt existed between her and her new students.

In the study, the two teachers met biweekly to compare notes and monitors to “break bread” and deepen their broader friendship. Jennifer also administered student questionnaires, held student focus groups and conducted individual student interviews as part of the data collection process. The power in this account lies in the honest exchange of views between the two teachers. Their struggles and their ability to continue working despite their considerable personal pain are a testimony of their mutual commitment “because of the kids.”

The description of the risks involved when people of different racial/cultural backgrounds engage in frank conversation about behaviors and assumptions that cut deep into their own self-concept is powerful. For example, when Karen writes about her frustration at learning that in doing her best she has not only missed the mark, but also hurt her students’ feelings and chances of success, her distress is palpable.

Specifically, Karen designed a simulation about feudal empires for her middle school history class that involved student roles, i.e. barons, slaves, etc. When a student balked at being called a “baron,” Karen was upset with his “attitude” and unaware of her role in their conflict.

In Karen’s words: “I was convinced of the ‘rightness’ of the activity … and had taken time to prepare it with the students best interests in mind … Role-playing … was a way of adhering to advice from the education literature … How could such a strategy go wrong? When students’ responses did not follow my expectations, I shifted the blame. It was the students’ fault (p. 55).”

The same situation from Jennifer’s standpoint: “In the incident we named ‘Why You Call Me a Barbarian’ … initially Karen was actually working against her own good intentions students were exhibiting undesirable (to Karen) behavior, even though their behavior was in direct response to Karen’s actions, which she even though her actions were motivated by her ‘attitude’ and unaware of her role in their conflict.

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Spring 2004

Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools
Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Our World Café
Gregory Foote, California

A number of us had been to the NSRF Winter Meeting in 2003 and had found the World Café experience enlightening and refreshing. We thought that it would be interesting to begin the discussion about what Critical Friends Groups could do for our failing school. One way we tried to make a fundamental difference in the school’s collaborative climate was to have a World Café during Common Planning Time on a Thursday last school year (for this article, the harvest period was hard to find promise for our future. We had asked to have every 4th Thursday of our school’s Thursday Common Planning Time set aside for CFGs. This would give one hour each month to those teachers who were interested in meeting in CFGs. Our World Cafe was our launching pad. All teachers were invited. We had refreshments and flowers. We lowered the lights and read a poem. We put up the paper on the tables for doodling and began our World Café conversa-

connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Spring 2004

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Spring 2004
 Compassion? Yes, that’s what Roger Schwarz’s revised second edition of *The Skilled Facilitator* suggests as one of the four core values of the “skilled facilitator approach.” This four-hundred-page book from Jossey Bass is a text that is not only incredibly dense, but also amazingly useful for “getting at” the complexity of facilitating.

While I will not attempt to give a thorough description of what this text contains, I will highlight several ideas that have been helpful for the work of our own professional development team in Salt Lake and for me personally.

The Skilled Facilitator Approach

Schwarz defines skilled facilitation as an approach “based on a theory of group facilitation that contains a set of core values and principles and a number of techniques and methods derived from the core values and principles. It integrates theory into practice to create a values-based, systemic approach to group facilitation.” Schwarz’s definition articulates the advantage of his book, which is using core values and principles to derive methods and techniques. Unlike many books about facilitation that collect and dispense a kind of “technical expertise,” Schwarz challenges us to make our behavior congruent with a theory of action called the mutual learning model.

Compassion is the first of four core values. The others are 2) valid information, 3) free and informed choice, and 4) internal commitment to the choice. From the skilled facilitator perspective, compassion is the ability to have empathy for others and yourself in a way that holds everyone accountable for their own actions. As three key elements of compas-sion, Schwarz defines a set of behaviors which, when missing from our interactions, often get in the way of doing good work with each other. These intentional actions are: 1) suspending judgment; 2) expressing concern for others’ and one’s own good; and 3) appreciating others’ and one’s own suffering. By suffering Schwarz means the emotional pain that we all feel when our needs are not met or when we confront or experience change.

The core value of valid information describes a set of behaviors that help a group become more effective. First members share with each other all relevant information and are open to making clear their reasoning for considering this particular information relevant to a decision. Members also share information that can be independently validated and intentionally consider new information, as it becomes available. The underlying assumption here is that we need the best possible information to make the best decisions.

The third core value, which is based on the principle of valid information, is free and informed choice. The freedom aspect of choice challenges each of us, especially the facilitator, to examine our own patterns of interactions and emotional reactions, identifying our own tendencies to coercion or manipulation. How do we set the tone with integrity in our work with groups and with each other so that emotional reactivity does not take over the group process? One strategy is that members of the learning community actually defend their own objectives as well as the methods for achieving them. Jane Vella, in her seminal book on adult learning, defines this principle as adults being valued as the subject of their own learning. Vella quotes Freire, writing: “Only the student can name the death of the teacher.” In other words as a facilitator, especially when we are building the capacity of organizations to be learning communities, our primary goal is to ensure that members in the group begin to facilitate their own work.

The fourth core value is internal commitment to the choice. This value is often at the heart of any kind of “reform” initiative. Often people label this experience as “ownership” or “buy-in.” I have always found this way of speaking about motivation to be personally unsatisfying. Schwarz, on the other hand, describes commitment as feeling personally responsible for the choice made and the consequences. We are committed to the decision or action because it is compelling and intrinsically valuable. There is not an external reward or penalty for making the choice. As a result, people actually follow through with what they have chosen without external monitoring.

Other Caveats

Schwarz presents a wide range of knotty issues in a clear and, often, dense way. Schwarz’s underlying belief is that facilitation is valuable in multiple roles: 1) consultant, 2) coach, 3) trainer, and 4) leader. He handles group dynamics in the section about diagnosing behavior in groups. His work, however, stands out because he challenges us to investigate and make a difference. (continued on page 19)
so, do you like your new job?” “Not more than 50 % of the time!”, I blurted weary.

“That’s not good, Kim.”

Arriving at the gate for my flight to the 2004 Winter Meeting, I was greeted by Jim and Peggy, two long-time colleagues from South Penn High School. Jim was asking me about my new endeavor, leading a small “public school of choice” that was in its sec-

ond year. Jim had been my first CPG coach and in true coach manner, he had just asked, intentionally or other-

wise, the probing question that was to define my Winter Meeting experience.

NSRF work has always been deeply meaningful to me. It is intended to encourage dialogue about issues of profound personal and professional significance. Over the years I’ve found it is largely NSRF colleagues with whom I have developed lasting bonds, built on foundations of shared passion for and commitment to the power of education. It had, however, been a few years since I had been able to attend a Winter Meeting and I was uncer-
tain about my place in that particular professional community. I planned to stay in the background, keeping my struggles private, listening carefully to others and spending my evenings reflecting on my ability to sustain the work I’ve been involved in for the last two years.

The opening session on day one sent a powerful message, directly in conflict with my plan to keep my support and private.”

Not only did the introduc-

lion of Victor Cary, Rolsesia Holman stated, “Victor taught me you can’t be effective in this work without doing it AND dealing with it in your mind and in your heart.” The message for me was clear at Winter Meeting: my work was very much about my own per-

sonal struggle.

I especially appreciated his presentation about his work with BayCES, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, reso-

nated within my mind and throughout my being. “Leadership means taking responsibility for what matters to you.” In sharing his work with the 350+ educators present, Victor spoke words that shot straight to the core of my struggle. I listened intently, feeling in that opening presentation I received full value for my time and investment in Winter Meeting. I could have gone home content in the greater clarity about WHY I do the work I do.

But knowing the Why, however helpful, isn’t sufficient. And so, it turned out, every single activity I engaged in over the next three days held its own set of meanings and implications, offering me the What, the How, and above all, the What If of leading for equity. The World Café brought me two young high school men whose words of encouragement and symbolic drawings hang on my office wall. Workshops pro-

vided me with new protocols, insights, and diverse perspectives. Lunchtime conversations offered up essential questions to guide my explorations. The opening day Kiru participated in, Jennifer Nails’ poignant por-

trayal of one-sixth grade girl’s indomi-
table spirit in “Lyric”, and Dave Lehman’s musical testimony to Nancy Mohr, gave witness to the power of the human life.

And Home Group. Home group provided the sanctuary for me to share my question “Am I strong enough for this work?”. And the individuals present offered space, patience, wit-

ness, knowledge, experience, insights, and more patience. They allowed me my zone of dissonance, replete with strong emotions and confusion. At the same time, I felt I was able to offer perspectives for others’ questions, not just focusing on myself. For the three days we were together, we were a community, in the BayCES definition: “Community acknowledges discomfort, upset, and fears, as well as the longing and the love that is deep within every human being.”

My notes provide me with a wealth of continuing explorations, from feedback directed specifically to my dilemma (pay attention to the di-

ference between strategy and tactics; identify the allies who can help do the storytelling; pay attention to sharing ownership; work toward a healthy sustainability) to questions and reflec-
tions of others (What am I afraid of? What is my theory of inaction as well? What is the way I get stuck?)

I remember my first graphic design class in college. We (or at least I) thought we were enormously fab-

ulous, creative and artistic. My teacher at the time was doing what we all thought was very basic design work, and I wanted to get into making page layouts for designs and new logos. After months of what felt like years of learning basic design, Mrs. Salchow very much-of-factly told us “Before you can break the rules, you have to know them.”

After she spoke those words, I clicked – I needed the basics: the history, the research and then the skill. When I obtained those needed facets to my education, then I could make an informed choice as a designer, to “break the rules.”

Mrs. Salchow’s words stuck with me even as I trained as a Critical Friends Coach in the summer of 1998. During the training, we learned how to facilitate and build trust, how to work around the prescribed way at first. I could see the deeper value of learning the process beyond just finishing the agenda.

Five years later and I am back in school as a student learning about educational theory, the research and skills. I was thrilled my first semester back when one of my professors passed out a chapter from The Skilled Facilitator, Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups, and announced that each one of us would facilitate a group discussion around a text. I must confess my first thought was – YEAH! I am in with an A; I can do this hands down. She told us to read the chapter for homework and be prepared for the next class.

I showed up excited and ready for the next class, prepared with 5 years as a CFG coach under my belt. Next came the biggest shock of my life: the class was on doing discussions. I was one of those students. This is a good example of not learning the rules before you break them.

Moving from a “could have been better” example to a “better” example, I have been working with the same CFG for over four years, and we meet every sixth month. Do we continue to do the same protocols and connections that I learned in 1998? No, but we did for quite some time. Then why? I believe because we all learned the rules first. In the beginning the group set a trust needed to do some very reflective and small and deep work. Then after the first year, as the group became more comfortable with the protocol processes, we ventured into a whole-

Winter Meeting Reflections
Kim Carter, New Hampshire

I want to give them my strength, not my fears. A quote from James Baldwin: “To act is to be committed. To be com-
mitted is to be in danger.” How do you bring yourself fully to your work and not lose yourself in that work?) Ultimately every minute of Winter Meeting contributed to the epiphany of realizing that...
now, but some2004  (festival of learning). I want to be there.

A

The Winter Meeting in January, Victor Cary, our keynote speaker, challenged us to think differently about the way we approach our work. He spoke to us about the need for a theory of action. He talked about building alliances across our differences in order to deepen and sustain our efforts to lead in the fight for equitable schools and a just society.

Victor spoke, shared some powerful stories and questions, and called on some of our participants to join him in a "Kiva." In this case, a structured, public conversation by a handful of people from diverse backgrounds who play widely different roles in schools, but who come together around the need for equality to support the students whose best interests we hold in common.

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

"For the first time in a National NSFACilitator’s Meeting, when asked to give feedback on a particular document on equity, I expressed 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 provocative. 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 mainstream folks who feel threatened by equity conversations or are consumed with guilt for not being authentic in Philadelphia. 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 experiencing 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 awareness that we need to act, to substantiate our beliefs. The purpose is to talk to the different races of our students as if we are to provide the necessary deep conversations about race, class, and gender. We know how those issues play out in our urban high schools and urban classrooms across the country. In order to achieve more equitable academic outcomes for poor students and students of color, all adults in urban education must clearly be able to take action and level the academic playing field by making sure there are equitable learning environments for all students."

"I am thinking that we still should offer a variety of readings on equity that range across the continuum from ‘soft to hard core’ to our participants and ask them to choose which level of intensity they would like to explore in their journey with equity. 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 NSFACoordinator, and if 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 environments for students and adults that result in equitable outcomes for all students. As NSFACoordinators we must be ready to act on our own issues with equity, and help others act on theirs. To ‘just’ means to move past ‘awareness’ 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 okay to pair someone who has had a lot of experience with dealing with different races of students with someone who has had very little experience and 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:

"Later tonight, at the very first 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 to wait in line for hours to participate in a 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 NSFACoordinator Debbie Bambino ends all of her emails with the quote ‘To teach in a manner that respects and cares for all of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary deep conversations where learning can most deeply and intimately begin’ (bell hooks, Teaching to Tranquility, 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 different 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 brutally honest conversations about the relationship between race and academic achievement. We hold ourselves to high standards of engagement and dialogue. We have very consciously created a process for pursuing high academic achievement for all students, with a focus on the gap between white and black and Latino/a students using the collective needs of an entire building to exert that same level of consciousness and attention to children who sit in those categories that represent inequity – secondary language learners, disabled students, gay/lesbian students, homeless students, students living in poverty – I need not go on.

"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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"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 facilitator-listserver conversation and upcoming book chat.

"What started as an online call for the need for the addition 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 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 commitment 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 questions the political impact of an approach that raises interpersonal friendship as a goal in a society where the achievement gap continues to widen and survival itself is a huge issue for large numbers of people of color.

"I don’t know where the upcoming chat will take us, but I do know that I feel we are approaching the conversation about race, friendship and collegiality in a different way. I know that if we are serious about the strategic alliance-building that Victor Cary spoke about at the Winter Meeting, our alliances need to be principled ones that don’t skirt our differences or the weaknesses in our understanding.

"Reading this book is a bit uncomfortable. I’ve recognized pieces of myself in a few of the unfavorable characterizations that DeMott has provided. My discomfort reminds me of one of the points that Camilla mentioned earlier, and I know that it’s in that less than comfortable zone where I stand to learn the most.

"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.

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Meetings Continue to Change Our Practice
Massachusetts & Debbie Bambino - Pennsylvania

Now What? How Our Experiences at the Winter Meeting Continue to Change Our Practice
Camilla Greene - Connecticut, Jennifer Fischer-Mueller - Massachusetts & Debbie Bambino - Pennsylvania
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t the Winter Meeting in January, Victor Cary, our keynote speaker, challenged us to think differently about the work we do and how we approach our work. He spoke to us about the need for a theory of action. He talked about building alliances across our differences in order to deepen and synthesize our efforts to lead in the fight for equitable schools and a just society.

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“For the first time in a National NSRF Facilitator’s Meeting, when asked to give feedback on a particular document 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 tend to play it safe and choose a text that is not too provocative. Too often in my CFG training the accommodations that are made by people of color to protect the safety and comfort zones of mainstream folks who feel threatened by equity conversations or are consumed with guilt are not able to move us forward.

“As a National NSRF Facilitator I am sensitive to the ‘Dynamic Zones’ and I wish to accommodate those who do not want to have open, honest conversation 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 experiencing 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 added awareness.

“NSRF colleague Debbie Bambino ends all of her emails with the quote ‘To teach in a manner that respects and cares for every member of our organization is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin’ (bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress, Education as the Practice of Freedom).

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防范性侵害的策略

现在我们面临的挑战是平衡公序良俗与法律之间的关系，以保护儿童免受性侵犯。我们需要尊重儿童的权利，并提供更多保护措施来应对这种局面。

Meeting Continue to Change Our Practice
Massachusetts & Debbie Bambino - Pennsylvania

Now What? How Our Experiences at the Winter Meeting Continue to Change Our Practice
Camilla Greene - Connecticut, Jennifer Fischer-Mueller - Massachusetts & Debbie Bambino - Pennsylvania
So, do you like your new job? "Less than 50% of the time," I blurted wearily. "That's not good, Kim." Arriving at the gate for my flight to the 2004 Winter Meeting, I was greeted by Jim and Peggy, two long-time colleagues from Southside High School. Jim was asking me about my new endeavor, leading a small "public school of choice" that was in its second year. Jim had been my first CFG coach and in true coach manner, he had just asked, intentionally or otherwise, the probing question that was to define my Winter Meeting experience.

NSRF work has always been deeply meaningful for me. It encouraged me to dialogue about issues of profound personal and professional significance. Over the years I've found it is largely NSRF colleagues with whom I have developed lasting bonds, built on foundations of shared passion for and commitment to the power of education. It had, however, been a few years since I had the opportunity to attend a Winter Meeting and I was uncertain about my place in that particular professional community. I planned to stay in the background, keeping my struggles private, listening carefully to others and spending my evenings reflecting on my ability to sustain the work I’ve been involved in for the last two years.

The opening session on day one sent a powerful message, directly in conflict with my plan to keep my participation in private. The introduction of Victor Cary, RoLesia Holman stated, “Victor taught me you can’t be effective in this work without doing it AND dealing with it in your mind and in your heart.” The message for me was clear: this Winter Meeting was very much about my own personal struggle.

Michaelann’s presentation about her work with BayCES, the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools, resonated within my mind and throughout my being. “Leadership means taking responsibility for what matters to you.” In sharing his work with the 350+ educators present, Victor spoke words that shot straight to the core of my struggle. I listened intently, feeling in that opening presentation I received full value for my time and investment in Winter Meeting. I could have gone home content in the greater clarity about WHY I do the work I do.

But knowing the Why, however helpful, isn’t sufficient. And so, it turned out, every single activity I engaged in over the next three days held its own set of meanings and implications, offering me the What, the How, and above all, the What If of leading for equity. The World Café brought me two young high school men whose words of encouragement and symbolic drawings hang on my office wall. Workshops provided new protocols, insights, and diverse perspectives. Lunchtime conversations offered up essential questions to guide my explorations. The opening day Kiru participated, Jennifer Nails’ poignant portrayal of one-sixth grade girl’s indomitable spirit in “Lyris,” and Dave Leahman’s musical testimony to Nancy Mohr, gave witness to the power of the human life.

And Home Group. Home group provided the sanctuary for me to share my question “Am I strong enough for this work?” And the individuals present offered space, patience, witness, knowledge, experience, insights, and more patience. They allowed me my zone of dissonance, replete with strong emotions and confusion. At the same time, I felt I was able to offer perspectives for others’ questions, not just focusing on myself. For the three days we were together, we were a community, in the BayCES definition: “Community acknowledges discomfort, upset, and fears, as well as the longing and the love that is deep within every human being.”

My notes provide me with a wealth of continuing explorations, from feedback directed specifically to my dilemma (pay attention to the difference between strategy and tactics; identify the allies who can help do the storytelling; pay attention to sharing ownership; work toward a muscle of sustainability) to questions and reflections of others (What am I afraid of? What is my theory of inaction as well?).

Breaking the Rules
Michaelann Kelley, Texas

I remember my first graphic design class in college. We (or at least I) thought we were enormously fabulous, creative and artistic. My teacher at the time was doing what we all thought was very basic design work, and I wanted to get into making page layouts for designs and new logos. After months of what felt like years of learning basic design, Mrs. Salchow very matter-of-factly told us “Before you can break the rules, you have to know them.”

After she spoke those words it clicked – I needed the basics: the history, the research and the foundation. When I obtained those needed facets to my education, then I could make an informed choice as a designer, to “break the rules.”

Mrs. Salchow’s words stuck with me even as I trained as a Critical Friends Coach in the summer of 1998. During the training, we learned how to facilitate a professional learning group on our campus. During this intensive workshop, I was on a roller coaster of emotions and learning. One minute I would be ready to run out and start the work right away and other times I was so drained with the demands of new pedagogical learning that I would go home with my head pounding. Already I saw my colleagues cutting corners or skipping debriefs in order to get finished early – already breaking the rules. I had learned the benefits of building a strong foundation, so I stuck with learning the protocols the prescribed way at first. I could see the deeper value of learning the process beyond just finishing the agenda.

Five years later and I am back in school as a student learning about educational theory, the research and skills. I was thrilled my first semester back when one of my professors passed out a chapter from The Skilled Facilitator, Practical Wisdom for Developing Effective Groups, and announced that each one of us would facilitate a group discussion around a text. I must confess my first thought was – YEAH! I am in with an A; I can do this hands down. She told us to read the chapter for homework and be prepared for the next class.

I showed up excited and ready for the next class, prepared with 5 years as a CFG coach under my belt. Next came the biggest shock of my life: the class was run as if we were always in a new project, if I had followed the prescribed way at first. I could see the deeper value of learning the process beyond just finishing the agenda.

Moving from a “could have been better” example to a “better” example, I have been working with the same CFG for over four years, and we meet every month. We do the same protocols and connections that I learned in 1998? No, but we did for quite some time. Then why? I believe because we all learned the rules first. In the beginning the group set the trust needed to do some very reflective and thought-provoking work. Then after the first year, as the group became more comfortable with the protocol processes, we ventured into a whole-group inquiry based on what we believed to be powerful learning. Through this year-long journey, the group came to hand select what each of our members perceive powerful learning to be, using protocols, to navigate the challenges we face in providing these kinds of learning experiences for our students. I am not painting an unrealistic picture and portraying this CFG as the ultimate CFG group; rather I would like to portray a CFG that works and learns the processes together. As the coach that has been with the group the longest (my first co-coach retired and the second is still with the group but in a new position), I have found that in small families, not all times are good times but all times are a time to learn with and from each other. We are now very comfortable with each other and so when we start a meeting without going over norms, it is OK. When the CFG modifies protocols to meet the presentor’s needs or question, it is OK. While each member of the group faces many challenges in life, I believe that in CFG we will all work together, both inside and outside the protocols, to clarify the situation and expand our approach. It is our informed, collective decision making that makes breaking or rewriting the rules work.

Michaelann Kelley is an art teacher at Eisenhower High School in Houston, Texas. She can be contacted at mkelley@aldine.k12.tx.us

Winter Meeting Reflections
Kim Carter, New Hampshire

I want to give them my strength, not my fears. A quote from James Baldwin: “To act is to be committed. To be committed is to be in danger.” How do you bring yourself fully to your work and not lose yourself in that work?

Ultimately every minute of Winter Meeting contributed to the epiphany of realizing that what I grapple with is the really big heat of systemic oppression. It’s OKAY for this work to be hard.

The tools of developing a theory of action, systematically identifying allies, and intentionally building alliances are among the many invaluable gifts that Winter Meeting bequeathed me. (continued on page 14)
Compassion: A Core Value of Skilled Facilitation - Insights from The Skilled Facilitator
Christelle Estrada, Utah

Compassion? Yes, that’s what Roger Schwarz’s revised second edition of The Skilled Facilitator suggests as one of the four core values of the “skilled facilitator approach.” This four-hundred-page book from Jossey-Bass is a text that is not only incredibly dense, but also amazingly useful for “getting at” the complexity of facilitation.

While I will not attempt to give a thorough description of what this text contains, I will highlight several ideas that have been helpful for the work of our own professional development team in Salt Lake and for me personally.

The Skilled Facilitator Approach
Schwarz defines skilled facilitation as an approach “based on a theory of group facilitation that contains a set of core values and principles and a number of techniques and methods derived from the core values and principles. It integrates theory into practice to create a values-based, systemic approach to group facilitation.” Schwarz’s definition articulates the advantage of his book, which is using core values and principles to derive methods and techniques. Unlike many books about facilitation that collect and dispense a kind of “technical expertise,” Schwarz challenges us to make our behavior congruent with a theory of action called the mutual learning model.

Compassion is the first of four core values. The others are 2) valid information, 3) free and informed choice, and 4) internal commitment to the choice. From the skilled facilitator perspective, compassion is the ability to have empathy for others and yourself in a way that holds everyone accountable for their own actions. As three key elements of compas-sion, Schwarz defines the sub-set of behaviors which, when missing from our interactions, often get in the way of doing good work with each other. These intentional actions are: 1) suspending judgment; 2) expressing concern for others’ and one’s own good; and 3) appreciating others’ and one’s own suffering. By suffering Schwarz means the emotional pain that we all feel when our needs are not met or when we confront or experience change.

The core value of valid information describes a set of behaviors that help a group become more effective. First members share with each other all relevant information and are open to making clear their reasoning for considering this particular information relevant to a decision. Members also share information that can be independently validated and intentionally consider new information, as it becomes available. The underlying assumption here is that we need the best possible information to make the best decisions.

The third core value, which is based on the principle of valid information, is free and informed choice. The freedom aspect of choice challenges each of us, especially the facilitator, to examine our own patterns of interactions and emotional reactions, identifying our own tendencies to coercion or manipulation. How do we set the tone with integrity in our work with groups and with each other so that emotional reactivity does not take over the group process? One strategy is that members of the learning community actually define their own objectives as well as the methods for achieving them. Jane Vella, in her seminal book on adult learning, defines this principle as adults being valued as the subject of their own learning. Vella quotes Freire, writing: “Only the student can name the death of the teacher.” In other words as a facilitator, especially when we are building the capacity of organizations to be learning communities, our primary goal is to ensure that members in the group begin to facilitate their own work.

The fourth core value is internal commitment to the choice. This value is often at the heart of any kind of “reform” initiative. Often people label this experience as “ownership” or “buy-in.” I have always found this way of speaking about motivation to be personally unsatisfying. Schwarz, on the other hand, describes commitment as feeling personally responsible for the choice made and the consequences. We are committed to the decision or action because it is compelling and intrinsically valuable. There is not an external reward or penalty for making the choice. As a result, people actually follow through with what they have chosen without external monitoring.

Other Caveats
Schwarz presents a wide range of knotty issues in a clear and, often, dense way. Schwarz’s underlying belief is that facilitation is valuable in multiple roles: 1) consultant, 2) coach, 3) trainer, and 4) leader. He handles group dynamics in the section about diagnosing behavior in groups. His work, however, stands out because he challenges us to investigate and make (continued on page 15)
Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools
Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

The central perspective advanced in Because of the Kids: Facing Racial and Cultural Differences in Schools are:

- Teacher beliefs, intentions and perceptions of the students they teach are critical in determining individual student success or failure, surpassing the role of the curriculum or other structural factors in schools.
- White teachers, because of their unconscious racial and cultural biases, may in fact be unwittingly undermining the success of their students of color.

Given the disproportionate number of white teachers responsible for the education of poor children and children of color, and the profound impact of their behavior and beliefs on these students, white teachers have a special role to play in the disruption of the achievement gap.

Specifically, Karen designed a simulation study about feudal empires for her history class. Her actions, roles, i.e. barbarians, slaves etc. When a student balked at being “called a barbarian,” Karen was set back with his “attitude” and unaware of her role in their conflict.

In Karen’s words: “I was convinced of the ‘rightness’ of the activity ... and had taken time to prepare it with the students best interests in mind — Role-playing ... was a way of adhering to advice from the educational literature ... How could such a strategy go wrong? When students’ responses did not follow my expectations, I shifted the blame. It was the students’ fault (p. 53).”

The same situation from Jennifer’s standpoint: “In the incident we named ‘Why You Call Me A Barbarian’ ... Initially, Karen was actually working against her own good intentions students were exhibiting free and open discussions, even though their behavior was in direct response to Karen’s actions, which did not take into account her students’ racial and cultural identities (p. 55).”

As a result of the teachers’ collaboration over time, Karen was able to understand and change her behaviors. She continued to use creative lessons and methods, but did not assign roles that could be received as labels that were demeaning to her students. She found a way to mediate student disagreement as “kids getting an attitude” and examined her own practices more closely. She became a reflective practitioner around issues of equity.

In another incident, Jennifer writes about a painful experience and being fed up with Karen and her unwillingness to change her roles, what her reservations are about receiving feedback, etc. Their collaborative relationship grinds to a screeching halt

(continued on page 15)
Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools: Collaborating for Students’ Success

Nancy Fenton, Shug Brandell & Janett Bundy, Michigan

As Lori said, “Practicing the specific protocols and examining higher-order thinking skills increased our ability to share them with our respective teams.” Rebecca appreciated how “we’ve gradually been pushed to delve even deeper.” Chad’s observation was that “student work has become one of the most useful and challenging points upon which we consider and reflect.”

The principals’ participation in the training is crucial and keeps everybody on “the same page.” Principals help with scheduling and logistics so that groups can meet easily and converse efficiently. As the instructional leader in the building, they need to understand how the discussion of student work impacts instruction. The benefits of peers choosing the CSS coaches was summarized by Lori’s statement: “Using the MCES prescribed process, peers choose coaches, which is a HUGE step in securing staff support and involvement with the process.”

The question of voluntary CSS groups or mandatory CSS groups met with varied responses. From Rebecca’s perspective at Grayling High School: “We initially invited all members of the staff and then placed the interested ones in groups. Our first meeting was done during an in-service, and we encouraged even the non-committed members to observe one of the groups. This worked out better than we ever could have imagined — the ‘observers’ were so impressed that they all joined the groups they observed!” Jim offers another point of view: “Voluntary participation is always the most desirable option. However, if this doesn’t happen, I think it’s important that CSS takes place during a time when all staff are required to be in attendance”. But Chad cautioned that “One must be careful to uncover the contrived collegiality aspects and use the time as effectively and efficiently as possible.”

CSS has an impact on student achievement. Jim said, “It’s completely about instruction and how that impacts student work.” According to Lori, “The protocols help teachers evaluate the learning strategies and assessments they use.” Rebecca believes “CSS has an indirect yet valuable impact on student achievement. The assignments we have ‘tuned’ are meeting more of the Standards of Instruction. We encourage each other to challenge our students to meet these standards, helping them to achieve higher on our state’s assessment tests.” For Chad, the CSS meetings offer opportunities to look at student work in a scripted environment. The focus extends to student achievement, but using proven methodology to stir the efforts.

The training has had an impact on their work. Using the Standards of Instruction and Assessment has brought the lessons to a much higher level. The training has met with varied responses. From Rebecca’s perspective at Grayling High School: “We initially invited all members of the staff and then placed the interested ones in groups. Our first meeting was done during an in-service, and we encouraged even the non-committed members to observe one of the groups. This worked out better than we ever could have imagined — the ‘observers’ were so impressed that they all joined the groups they observed!” Jim offers another point of view: “Voluntary participation is always the most desirable option. However, if this doesn’t happen, I think it’s important that CSS takes place during a time when all staff are required to be in attendance”. But Chad cautioned that “One must be careful to uncover the contrived collegiality aspects and use the time as effectively and efficiently as possible.”

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The authors can be contacted at the following email address: Nancy Fenton - fenton@michigances.org; Shug Brandell - smbrandell@icomcast.net; Janett Bundy - bunday@michigances.org

Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) and the Critical Friends training model offer training for principals and teachers. Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) is the partner in Comprehensive School Reform (CSRs). The Critical Friends training model offers training for Critical Friends that enable collaborative groups back at the school site, where looking at lesson design and student work is the desired outcome of the meetings.

Sixteen schools have teams being trained. One group is in its second year of training and the others have just begun. Almost all of the schools are affiliated with the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools (MCES) as their partner in Comprehensive School Reform (CSRs). The training is one of the key strategies of the MCES Theory of Change to improve student achievement. We asked participants to comment on its various aspects. Lori Gibson, from Union City Middle School, said “The Critical Friends model is wonderful and we have seen great results.”

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NSRF Principals’ Seminar
July 14-16, 2004, Cambridge, Massachusetts

In honor of the work and leadership of our colleague, Nancy Mohr, and to deepen our support of principals in the NSRF network, we are pleased to announce the first NSRF Principals Seminar.

Facilitators
Paula Evans – Former high school teacher, Director of Professional Development and Co-Director of NSRF at the Annenberg Institute of School Reform; former principal of Cambridge Riddle and Latin School in Cambridge, MA; current Director of the Teachers Collaborative in Devens, MA and Lead Founder of the Community Charter School of Cambridge (opening September 05)

Dave Lehman – Principal and Teacher, Alternative Community School (middle-high school) in Inhaca, New York - member school of the Coalition of Essential Schools, and New York City Education Department, Compact Partnership School - CFG Coaching Facilitator with NSRF, member of the original Amsterdam Institute for School Reform “Principals Seminar,” Advisor to Cleveland Heights/University Heights High School as part of the Gates Foundation funded “small schools conversion project,” Facilitator for Inbaca School District’s Professional Development Coaches

Special Guest
Rob Evans – Clinical and organizational psychologist and the executive director of The Human Relations Service in Wellesley, MA. A former high school and pre-school teacher and child and family therapist, he has consulted to hundreds of public and private schools throughout the U.S. For more information on Rob Evans, please visit the new book Family Matters (participants will receive a copy to read in advance)

For more information
If you have any questions about the meeting please feel free to contact Sarah Childers at the NSRF National Center at 812.330.2702 or schilders@harmonyschool.org

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NSRF’s theory of action around creating professional learning communities, focused on student achievement and equity in schools, depends on strong, skilled principal leadership - and we are interested in deepening our efforts to support principals.

In this meeting we will focus both on the community of adults within our schools and the relationships between schools and parent/caregivers in an era of changing family support for young people.

Essential Questions:
• How do schools and families work most effectively to support our students?
• How does our school support teachers and staff in the relationships for an effective learning community?

During this seminar participants will:
• discuss Rob Evans’ new book Family Matters (participants will receive a copy to read in advance)
• examine the critical components that provide the frame for collaborative community
• have the opportunity to present a case study from their own school community
• have time for reflection, tuning of the coming year’s plans – e.g. what might we let go of? how do we “slim down”?

Logistics
• Register on-line at www.nsrc.org/principals.html
• Registration Cost – $350
• Location: Hyatt Regency, 575 Memorial Dr., Cambridge, MA
• Comfortable shoes are included. Dinner is on your own.

For more information
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Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “Certainly there is a possible right for you that precludes the need of bal- ance and willful election. . . . Place yourself in the middle of the stream of power and wisdom which animates all whom it floats and you are without effort impelled to truth, to right, and a perfect contentment.” The 2004 NSRF Winter Meeting was “a journey through mud to magic” (to paraphrase my storytelling protocol partner) which placed me back in the middle of the stream of my life, impelling me toward truth and right, if not perfect contentment.

Kim Carter can be reached at kimcarter@mc2school.org

Our World Café (continued from page 12)

I am still thinking about the question, “What does equity look like?” Without open conversation, how will we get there? We won’t. We will continue as an institution to tell ourselves we are reaching all students when in fact the data shows something very different. When every student is empowered to take control of their learning and all students see themselves as a vital connection to the world, then we will begin the road toward real reform. Until then, the best we can do is pretend and congratulate ourselves for thinking we are doing the right thing, instead of actually doing the right thing. It is not easy, but it is critical to have that conversation. CFGs give voice to progress and provide a check on what does and does not work. They bring voice to the table where conversations about where to begin.

Gregory Foote is a teacher and CFG Coach at El Sereno Middle School in Los Angeles. He can be reached by email at gregfoote@mcn.com

This year, the National Facilitators’ Meeting took place in Chicago in May. Conversations among the National Facilitators at this meeting, as well as among Center of Activity contacts at the annual Winter Meeting in January, are just two ways that leaders in the organization learn with and from each other, thus support- ing the growth and development of NSRF work nationally. Hawaii was one of those parts of the country that . . . up until this spring – did not have a formal way to participate in the decision making of NSRF, or to learn with people in NSRF from other parts of the country. There were people inter- ested in pursuing CFG work, but since Hawaii didn’t have any NSRF National Facilitators, there was not a Center of Activity to support the work or to facilitate CFG Coaches Seminars. Educators in Hawaii had to either go to the mainland for their CFG Coaches’ seminars, or had to fly NSFRC National Facilitators to Hawaii. So, in February, two NSFRC National Facilitators from the mainland and three CFG Coaches from Hawaii co-planned and co-facilitated a twoday Introduction to CFGs for 24 participants from Hawaiian schools. Following the two-day intro- duction, these CFG coaches from Hawaii were sponsored by an NSFRC National Facilitator in Los Angeles, and went to California to co-facilitate a full five-day CFG coaches seminar with her. Hawaii now has two NSFRC National Facilitators, hopes to offer CFG coaches seminars with follow-up, and is our newest NSFRC Center of Activity. One of the interesting things about Hawaii’s Center of Activity is that it has involved public and charter schools, as well as independent schools, from its inception. Intentionally bringing together these diverse strands of educators is consistent with Hawaii’s cultural value of interdependence, and other Centers of Activity will hopefully be able to learn from their experience and work together.

NSRF’s National Center provides some direct support to individual CFG coaches, but the bulk of the National Center’s work is focused on supporting local Centers of Activity and their National Facilitators. The NSFRC National Facilitators in the Hawaii Center of Activity are not bringing national projects to their local community, but are instead using ideas, insights and tools gleaned from their work with the work of others in NSFRC’s national network to inform their local work and context. That is what building capacity is all about.

From Hawaii to Maine, to Washington and Florida, NSFRC Centers of Activity are providing the necessary support to help educators move away from their previ- ously isolated practice toward the development of collaborative learning com- munities. The ultimate goal? To support every child in developing his or her full capacity as a person, as a learner, and as a responsible citizen.

Steve Bonchek, Gene Thompson-Grove and Daniel Baron are the three CoDirectors of NSFRC. They may be contacted at the following email addresses: Steve Bonchek - harmony@indiana.edu Gene Thompson-Grove - gthompsongrove@earthlink.net Daniel Baron - dbaron@bloomington.in.us

Dr. Marjorie Larner is a former teacher and administrator. She is currently a staff developer at the Denver-based Education and Business Coalition (PERC). Marjorie is a member of NSFRC and Colorado Critical Friends Group. You can contact her at larnerm@earthlink.net, and order Pathways at www.heinemann.com

I t’s the first Saturday of the month and here in Philadelphia that means our leadership CFG is meet- ing. We had just finished our “opening moves” and one of the principals was puzzling over how to offer space and time for the diverse profes- sional learning needs of her staff. After hearing her con- cerns, I slipped out of the meeting and ran upstairs, to get Marjorie Larner’s new book, Pathways: Charting a Course for Professional Learning. I had had an “aha” earlier in the week when I was reading the book and thought our CFG would benefit from it. I know we all talk about customizing agendas and pro- cesses to fit the needs of our groups and schools, but there’s something about Marjorie’s book that makes this customization tangible. She shares a “Continuum of Participation” template and a “Ways to Participate in Professional Development” menu that empower teachers and groups to chart their courses in very specific ways. It was this notion of differentiation that struck a chord for me. Have we been guilty of too narrow a focus on the ways and times adults learn?

As a coach, I am continually doing the dance between mandated and voluntary professional learning, worrying about buy-in and whether mandated teacher “learning” has any impact or value for our kids. We know “one size fits all” doesn’t work for our students, but we often still try to use this model for adults. I have a really strong hunch that using the tools in Pathways will help us develop differentiated learning plans that empower teachers and administrators to move forward using many paths toward their shared destination of greater student success.

Members of my CFG are ordering copies of Pathways as they begin work on their plans for summer trainings and school improvement. I look forward to hearing about the ways they use this new resource at their schools and I urge oth- ers to use this tool too!}

Marjorie Larner

Pathways: Charting a Course for Professional Learning

Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Steve Bonchek - harmony@indiana.edu

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Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Spring 2004

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ONNECTIONS

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.

Editors — Debbie Bambino & Katy Kelly
Production Coordinator — Sarah Childers
Layout & Design — Sarah Childers

Our special thanks goes to the Foundation for Educational Renewal for its support of this journal.

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to Connections contact us at 812/330.2702, kkelly@harmonyschool.org, dbambino@earthlink.net
Partner Fishbowl: A Structure to Start and Deepen the Conversation
Melissa Kagel, Vermont

The Vermont Center of Activity has been piloting a format for doing “fishbowl” protocols that we would like to share. A fishbowl refers to an arrangement where a larger group of participants is broken into an inner and outer circle with the inner circle actively participating in the protocol and the outer providing feedback. The fishbowl can be used with any of the NSRF protocols.

The Partner Fishbowl is a variation of this method that we have found to get all participants to be more active in the protocol, to provide a higher level of safety for the presenter and participants, to be an excellent way to introduce the use of protocols and to be effective for pushing the conversation deeper during protocols.

How does it work? As the name implies, everyone participating in the protocol – presenter, facilitator, and participants – is paired with a partner. Each pair has one member sitting in the inner and one member sitting in the outer circle at any given time; each participant pair decides which of them will start where (though the presenter and the facilitator will necessarily be in the inner circle). During the protocol, the facilitator stops the conversation at certain points and has the partners consult with each other. Pairs can switch circles during these stopping points if they so desire. We have found the partner fishbowl to work well with both beginning groups who are using the protocols for the first time, and for experienced groups hoping to push the conversation deeper.

Partner Fishbowl for Groups New to Protocols
With new groups, the aim of the partner fishbowl is to familiarize the group with the protocol and to allow reflection on how to effectively engage in the protocol. During the protocol, the facilitator, who should be an experienced CFG member, stops the protocol at each major transition and asks the presenter and participants to together prepare things such as probing questions, responses to describing student work rounds, or points to be made in a conversation.

Only the person sitting in the inner circle is part of the conversation when the protocol recommences, but the time with the partner helps beginners to figure out what is appropriate and effective to say during a protocol.

Another advantage of the partner fishbowl is that the facilitator can get support, preferably from an experienced CFG member. This is a very helpful resource for people who may not be accustomed to having their work critically examined by peers.

Partner Fishbowl for Experienced Groups
The partner fishbowl is also an effective way to push experienced groups to deepen the conversation.

With an experienced group, the facilitator asks the partners to consult with each other about what questions or comments might push the conversation deeper at different points during the protocol. We have found this practice to add significant depth to the ensuing conversation because everyone involved in the protocol is focused and proactive about this goal.

The facilitator’s partner should help the facilitator make decisions about how to lead the protocol with an emphasis on getting to the harder questions. The role of the presenter’s partner is critical in experienced groups because pushing the conversation deeper involves a greater risk for the presenter. The presenter gives the partner, through frequent check-ins about comfort level and learnings, the necessary support so that participants can push harder. Another advantage of a partner for the presenter is that it allows the facilitator to concentrate his/her efforts on deepening the conversation as the presenter’s needs are met by someone else. In my experience as a facilitator, being relieved of the duty of assuring the comfort of the presenter has helped me to lead protocols more effectively.

We hope you will try out this way to structure protocols and we would love to hear about other uses groups find for it.

When Jennifer decides to publish her work in the study, her dissertation, as part of her plans to enter academia and Karen tries to block Jennifer’s plans. Karen begins the exchange by demanding a co-authoring credit and the kid gloves get dropped. Jennifer’s feelings of risk and pain as she’s being threatened by Karen are devastating.

I was being encouraged by my professors to publish my dissertation as a natural aspect of making myself marketable for the profession … Karen felt disillusioned by my actions and her hurt led to her being a threat to the publica-

When I read this part of the book, I found myself wondering about the risks that colleagues of color take each time they form professional and personal relationships with white colleagues like me.

However, just when it looks like a legal battle is about to heat up between the two women, Karen apologizes and publicly our inferences as members of groups. In another section he addresses interwining in groups and articulates clearly the ways in which group mem-

ber can express emotions so that it increases the effectiveness of the group’s work. This section had great appeal to me personally because emo-

tional energy is so powerful and has so much potential for doing great work with a group. The sticker is that power, as defined by Ken McLeod in Wake-Up to Your Life, is the ability to be present in intentional action. This is why facilitation is both cognitively and emotionally demanding.

So What? Now What?
The biggest challenge for each of us as coaches, facilitators, and human beings is to act congruently with our espoused core values.

Here are two other sets of core values that Schwarz describes as a contrast to the Mutual Learning Model that he espouses.

Set One:
1. Achieve your goals.
2. Maximize winning and minimize loss.
3. Minimize generating or expressing negative feelings.
4. Act according to your value rational.

Underlying assumptions: I understand the situation. I have pure motives. My negative feelings are jus-
tified.

Set Two:
1. Everyone participates in defining the purpose.
2. Everyone wins and no one loses.

Because of the Kids...
(continued from page 5)

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