

Connections

the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Fall 2005

Director's Report Daniel Baron, Co-Director

Greetings colleagues. I hope that you have had some time this summer to reflect on just how important our work is in the quality of our students' lives, present and future. It is so easy to get distracted by all of the demands of the urgently unimportant issues that confront us daily during the school year. One of the great benefits of reflective practice is that we can take the time to remember what really matters and then to infuse our work with what we know will bring meaning and understanding to the work of our students.

Late summer is a great time to take stock of what is, imagine what is possible, and to make the professional commitment to revise our work for the benefit of our students. I would like to take this opportunity to share some recent developments in NSRF and to reflect back on some lessons learned over the first ten years of our work.

NSRF is currently poised to make an extraordinary contribution to the lives of urban youth and their teachers. Over the last four years, many of us have been engaged in the small school transformation movement. Through the generosity of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, NSRF facilitators and coaches have been working hard in schools and districts across the country to interrupt the gross inequities of far too many inner city school districts.

Much of our work is focused on raising academic achievement through empowering students, families and teachers to strive for intellectually rigorous, culturally and personally relevant curriculum grounded in caring and trusting relationships.

NSRF is actively involved in small schools projects in Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. Critical Friends Groups are an



Celebrating NSRF's tenth anniversary!

"We are contributing to a very powerful undertow pulling us back to our core beliefs of equity and social justice for every child."

integral part of the work everywhere we work. Achieving equity of academic outcomes is at the heart of the small schools movement. It is our commitment to ensure that every student graduate from high school ready for college. It is my belief that every child deserves the choice of going to college and that no child has a choice unless he/she has been accepted into a college or university. The NSRF mission expresses our commitment to eliminate the predictive value of race, class, gender and disability on academic achievement.

After ten years of practice, NSRF has come to understand the need for district transformation in order to support the work of professional learning communities in schools. The intentional transformation of the culture of a school is much more likely to be sustained over time if the district also models the habits of reflective practice. So many of our early CFG coaches and Annenberg

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Protocols in Practice A Passionate Inquiry Into Teacher Practice

Linda Emm, Florida

CFG work has always been about taking an inquiry stance. We ask questions about pieces of text, about the student and adult work we bring to the table, and always about our own practice: “how can I get better at this complicated art of teaching so that my students are eager to learn?”

We so love questions that Juli Quinn has become legend with her “Quinn’s 6”:

- What am I teaching?
- Why am I teaching it?
- How am I teaching it?
- Why am I teaching it that way?
- How will I know my students are getting it?
- How will my students know they are getting it?

Edorah Frasier and the Southern Maine Partnership developed the Probing Questions Exercise and the Pocket Guide to Probing Questions because they believe strongly that a well-asked probing question is the greatest gift a presenter can receive in a Consultancy.

We are all about questions. So is it any wonder that the idea of infusing more formalized inquiry into our work has been something so many of us have strived to do? The challenge has always been to make the

inquiry a seamless part of the work we do in our CFG, rather than something tacked on somehow outside the regular practice. NSRF facilitators in Florida have tried to do this for the past several years, with mixed results. Nothing seemed to really catch fire. Sometimes it even felt like we were giving something up to do the inquiry pieces, and we sensed that this wouldn’t be true if we could just figure it out differently.

Enter our partnership with the Lastinger Center for Learning at the University of Florida. Much to our delight, Professor Nancy Fichtman Dana is actively engaged in teacher research, and is the co-author (with Diane Yendol-Silva) of “The Reflective Teacher’s Guide to Classroom Research.” Pete Bermudez brought her work to the attention of those of us working with the Lastinger Teacher Fellows Program in eight Miami-Dade County, high needs, high poverty schools. Our work in Dade involves three-hour monthly meetings with faculty members committed to becoming reflective educators who adapt their practice to better meet the needs of their students. Sounds like a CFG, right? It does to us, too, which is why NSRF facilitators Tom Fisher, Belkis Cabrera, Simone Waite, Sandy Champion, Vanessa Vega, and I eagerly joined Pete Bermudez in the work.

Nancy’s work is centered on

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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.

Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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Mighty Times: The Children's March

A Teaching Tolerance & HBO Film

Movie Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Most of the material in textbooks used to teach about the Civil Rights struggle in this country focuses on a handful of heroic individuals. Very little attention is paid to the mass character of the movement, and still less notice has been given to the critical role of young people in the fight for equal rights. Our collective failure to teach young people about the strength and courage of other students who have led the way has helped to disempower the youth of today.

In their 2004 Academy Award winning documentary, *Mighty Times: The Children's March*, Hudson & Houston go a long way toward setting the record straight by telling the story of the thousands of students and young children who broke the back of segregation in Birmingham, Alabama, in the spring of 1963.

The film opens shortly after Dr. King was held in solitary confinement in the Birmingham jail, when he called on the adults of the community to join him in a peaceful protest in defiance of the local authorities. The thinking of Dr. King and others in the movement was that if they filled the jails to capacity, they would lay bare segregation and hasten its demise. Rev. Andrew Young put it this way, "We figured we'd let them kill us in the middle of the day (all together) instead of one by one in the night."

The adults of Birmingham, however, did not respond to Dr. King's call. The adults feared for their jobs and their homes, if they were seen on the picket lines. Dr. King then turned to Rev. James Bevel of Mississippi for assistance, and Rev. Bevel responded by appealing to local DJs for their support. One DJ, in particular, "Jelly the Playboy," responded by calling on his young listeners to join "the party in the park on D-Day." "Jelly" Stewart went on to remind the young people to "bring their toothbrushes" because "lunch would be served." This was all code for "come prepared to stay overnight or longer in jail." And students from all over the state responded with their feet, some walking eighteen miles to join the protest, all the while knowing that they would be arrested.

On the first day, 973 students were arrested and

held in cells for parading without a permit. On the second day, 1,922 kids were jailed, after they'd been set upon by fire hoses and vicious attack dogs. On day three, 4,163 young people were arrested and interrogated. The arrests and the demonstrations continued for a week, until the jails, the "hog-pen" and all other facilities were filled with singing students, who maintained their spirits and their demands for equal rights and freedom.

Then, President John F. Kennedy tried to get Dr. King and other leaders to remove the young

people from the struggle, but the involvement of the students was non-negotiable; these kids were thinking for themselves! The kids knew that they could be hurt or killed in the struggle for justice, but they reasoned that by "being born Black in Alabama, they'd get hurt if they didn't do something!"

On May 10, 1963, after some five-thousand arrests and 72 hours of negotiations between local white leaders and Dr. King

and his delegation, segregation was broken. The students had won!

Watching this video taught me about the courage and power of those African-American students of forty-plus years ago, but more importantly, it underscored the value of student empowerment in our current struggles to transform our schools into equitable learning communities. Designing equitable schools isn't something that can be done by well-meaning adults "for" kids. New schools must be co-constructed with all stakeholders at the table, including the young people who will participate directly in the programs.

I urge you to order this free video for your schools. My hope is that as we view it with our students, we can invigorate their leadership potential as co-designers of our journey toward social justice. ■

You can order the free video, complete with standards-based lesson plans, by visiting www.teachingtolerance.org Debbie Bambino may be contacted at dbambino@earthlink.net



Searching for Answers: A Center of Activity Emerges in Milwaukee

Roberta (Bobbi) Aguero and LaRhonda Bearden-Steward, Wisconsin

Schools are social systems. In the work with reform and the redesign of schools we need to recognize that dimensions related to equity exist. Any way we look at it, there are, according to Peggy McIntosh, author of *Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege*, many people who are “privileged” who do not see themselves as racist. They have been taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness, not necessarily in invisible systems. This makes change hard and virtually impossible, at the school reform level, unless we raise consciousness.

Coaches and teachers, well-intentioned people, have to be aware that their assumptions guide their expectations and manifest success or failure for their students. We need to be aware that a privileged status exists in our social system, and it is both visible and invisible. Racism and inequity do not just exist in individual acts of meanness, they are inherent in our underlying thoughts and intentions, both conscious and unconscious. Our organization, the Technical Assistance and Leadership Center (TALC), in Milwaukee, is comprised of high school reformers engaging in systemic change.

Systemic change takes a long time, even for those of us who work as change agents. We constantly chip away at it. In doing so, believing in the Critical Friends process, we asked ourselves how CFGs could be used to promote reflective practice, raise consciousness and address issues of equity. Our internal question became, “Can CFGs related to learning and teaching move teachers toward believing that *all* children can learn and should have access to successful learning experiences?”

Lessons Learned

We couldn't ask our schools to do what we weren't willing to do. First, we used the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) Critical Friends philosophy to move our organization, TALC, toward reflective practice. Using CFG protocols helped us in our organizational work around issues of equity and consciousness-raising. We set operating norms that defined our organizational relationships and practice. We developed principles that guide our work. We used *North, South, East and West: An Exercise in Understanding Preferences in Group Work*. Using some of the text-based protocols with articles about race and ethnicity, teaching, learning, and CFGs, helped us to use a common language and understand each other's perspective.

Since only two of our staff had formal training, we decided to hire Camilla Greene and RoLesia Holman to train our entire staff and other school leadership as CFG coaches. Because we had set the stage using various protocols and feedback techniques, it seemed to take a lot less time to get to the hard questions. With the skilled facilitation of our trainers, we were able to have healthy conversations about race, power, privilege, and equity in relation to student and teacher interactions and success or failure.

After our training, TALC staff used an adaptation of the *Tuning Protocol* with several of our documents, and finally we used the *Success Analysis* protocol.

Engaging in the CFG process helped support an emerging environment and laid a foundation by providing a safe place to have hard conversations about our work. We discussed what we bring to the work, the direction we're going, where we should be going, and why, personally, we engage in the work. This allowed us to surface assumptions, understand where we were each coming from, focus and refocus as an organization and move progressively forward with our work. Our training and experience has taken us on the path to becoming an emerging Center of Activity for CFG development.

We sometimes struggle with our limited capacity to meet unrealistic expectations. This conundrum helps us identify with the small school teams we work with. They, too, have similar challenges with capacity. Teams often ask themselves, “How much can we do when we're caught up in the day-to-day hustle and bustle?” “Now we're expected to start up and sustain a CFG group?!” Since one of our operating principles is that “we must be the change we wish to see,” we make efforts to shape how schools might view practicing CFGs. Getting them to look at CFGs more as a tool than as just another chore is the challenge.

We decided to integrate reflective practice in our bi-monthly staff development institutes. We designed the September Small School Institute to address Culture. To begin with a foundation of awareness by surfacing underlying assumptions, we engaged our small school teams in the Diversity Exercise. When we asked participants to break up into small groups of four or five, we limited the categories to birth order, gender, and race/ethnicity. This became an ordeal, as the

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Intelligences at the Table

Christina Landini, Connecticut

“Why don’t we use a Data Analysis Protocol for the kids to look at the funeral speeches?” he said. I was floored—offended—utterly resistant. The mere suggestion of looking at any part of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* as “data”! Heresy! High treason! A debacle waiting to happen—and in my classroom, no less.

In all seriousness, Peterson Toscano, close colleague and esteemed fellow CFG coach, and I had been doing this kind of thing for years, using Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory to add depth and texture to my teaching of English to ninth graders, albeit on a much less radical scale. This plan of his would be, in fact, the ultimate test of MI theory in practice: employing a protocol designed to analyze data (numbers, charts, timelines and the like) to look closely, rather, at *language*, thereby providing a way for students who are naturally alienated by Shakespeare to understand why Mark Antony’s speech is dramatically more provocative and, in the end, successful, than Brutus’.

During the ensuing class, we actually made good Peterson’s idea: we asked the students to count *words* (how many times each orator mentions Caesar, how many times he mentions Rome, how many times he refers to himself; how many total lines in each speech; how many different verbs each man uses, and how many times each is used; how many pauses, how much interaction with the Plebians, etc.). Then they charted and/or graphed their findings, deriving hypotheses as to why the Plebians respond the way they do in that scene and what the eventual outcomes of these speeches might be, using evidence from the collected data. Without prompting, students who had been almost entirely passive that year—most prominently, the math/logical and naturalist kids—eagerly pulled out calculators and pencils, and hunched over their texts with zeal. They *loved* the counting! They made connections that they genuinely would never have made otherwise and, best of all, they seemed confident, pleased, and *engaged*.

Despite this success, this class was incredibly hard for me. I had to take a gigantic leap of faith and let go not only of control, but also of myriad assumptions about how literature should be taught and, more importantly, how students might learn, if given the chance—about Shakespearean language, about thesis development, about finding and forwarding evidence to support theses. Admittedly, the kids who usually found English class easy and enjoyable were genuinely at sea and displeased. So, in

addition to confirming the power of leveraging multiple intelligences in the classroom, I learned another important thing: enlist other intelligences when possible, but don’t go too far in the opposite direction from the majority’s comfort zone. As in thoughtful CFG coaching, consider the group *and* the individual, be creative, push beyond the routine but maintain circumspection and overall balance.

This winter, I found myself at dinner in the North End of Boston after a grueling day of being Critical Friend to Ross Peterson-Veatch’s coaching at Winter Meeting, discussing with my Watkinson colleagues something that had been nagging at me for months. Why, if I have for years now so deliberately studied and implemented MI theory (to great, lasting effect, I believe) with students in my teaching, have I not been doing the same in my work with adults in my CFG coaching? Although I felt like an idiot, this conversation served as a major “Aha!” moment, and I tripped over my own tongue trying to ask all the questions that arose: What if the coach’s attentiveness to multiple intelligences really could have something to do with engagement in CFG work? Might we invite more people to the table—or people *back* to the table who have “tried” CFGs and determined that it’s not for them—by being more inclusive of all of the intelligences? What if we routinely applied the same concepts and methodologies to working with adults that we do with kids? What if we pushed ourselves to broaden our practice, make it more inclusive, more digestible for *all kinds of learners and thinkers* in our CFGs, as we do in our classrooms?

Let me speak plainly here: NSRF protocols *do* work for the people at the table and, no matter what, the content is the content—examining student work, pushing our thinking and practice as teachers and educators of all kinds. Further, there are many, many coaches and facilitators who already do what I am suggesting, because they’re smart and versatile, and because they intuitively know how to stretch and reach out to those who would otherwise be alienated by the highly cerebral, heavily verbal/linguistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal work that we generally do in CFGs.

But what about the people mentioned above, those who have never come to the CFG table or, worse, those who have *left* the table? When I look around at my school, the vast majority of these people (in both categories) are my colleagues who tend heavily towards the body/kinesthetic, (continued on page 18)



Using a Blog to Intensify Reflections

Donna Reid, Texas

"I want to teach like Tiger Woods plays golf." I heard this declaration at a textbook presentation several years ago and it has really stuck with me. The speaker explained that Tiger Woods is truly a reflective practitioner when it comes to the game of golf. The public just sees him out on the fairways, but Tiger spends a lot of time behind the scenes studying the game, observing others, analyzing film, and reflecting on his own performance. The result is excellence.

Isn't this what CFGs can help us achieve as teachers? My hope is that setting aside time for study and reflection about our teaching practice will help us achieve excellence in our classrooms.

[Donna's Reflections, 12-20-2003]

The above excerpt, from my blog *Donna's Reflections* (<http://donna.robreid.com/weblog/>), sums up why regular reflection is so important—careful consideration and analytical deliberation of our experiences can help guide us to excellence whether our profession is teaching, coaching, or even playing golf. Writing reflections leads to powerful, personalized learning that sticks with us.

Another entry puts it this way: *Confucius said it best: "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest."* [Donna's Reflections, 8-16-2004]

So how do we make time and space to engage in this "noblest" method of learning wisdom? I recognized the power of regular reflection when I served as a CFG coach and chair of the school-wide portfolio committee at Johnston Middle School in Houston, Texas. Simply encouraging the habit of regular professional reflection kept the faculty focused on the mission of developing a safe, caring, respectful learning environment where both faculty and students could challenge themselves to be life-long learners.

My own reflections blossomed two years ago when I took on the job of Consultant for CFG Support for the Houston A+ Challenge. At the time, I wondered how I could best encourage myself to continuously reflect, make my work public, and document my own learning. To model these essential habits, I started authoring the blog *Donna's Reflections*.

Blogs, or web logs, are journals that are posted on the World Wide Web. Besides text, the entries may include photographs, document files, and links to other websites. Because they allow readers to add their own comments to an entry, blogs are more interactive than a paper-and-pencil journal. They are also far more public since blogs are accessible anytime, anywhere, from any computer connected to the web.

Of course, anybody can keep a journal with pen and paper, but the blog ramps journaling up a notch by making it public and making the reflections interactive. For example, after every meeting of my current CFG, I post a summary of our activities and every member's written reflections. Each member is encouraged to add comments that express their own thinking and learning, and these comments enliven the blog by turning the reflections into a conversation instead of a monologue:

This is my first time responding in this medium, and I'm amazed by the different modes of sharing technology provides us. I find great value in having a "voice," but more value in being able to share it in this way and get feedback. HURRAH for CFG work! [Marcela, 3-24-2004]

I love the quick posting of everyone's thoughts. It makes my own reflection of the meeting more insightful and deep. [Michaelann, 4-13-2005]

Interestingly, the blog has strengthened our CFG in several ways. First, through regular postings and comments from group members, it provides a way to sustain conversation in between meetings. Second, it produces an ongoing record of our work together, and importantly, that record is public. Most importantly, writing the blog has intensified my own reflections by helping me discover that reflecting is not just something to do during the final ten minutes of a meeting—it is truly at the core of my work. Earlier this year, I admitted:

I've once again been struck by how central the act of reflecting is to my work and how my work unravels when I do not deliberately reflect.

I'm embarrassed that I have posted so few entries over the last few months. I slacked off when a colleague wondered out loud if anybody was really reading the blog. The implication was that the time I spent writing entries wasn't "worth it." As a result, I feel like I've just been moving from deadline to deadline in my work without much inspiration. I've learned that my blog is as much a tool for motivating current planning and action (continued on page 16)

NSRF's Living History: An Interview with Ted Hall

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

NSRF's Living History: a series of interviews with members about our past, our present and our hopes for the future. This month we hear from Ted Hall as he shares his story with Peggy Silva of Connections.

Ted Hall's personal history tells the story of the movement of school reform strategies from the university to high schools from Arizona to New Hampshire. Ted left Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire in June to become the principal of Yarmouth High School in Maine.

What is your history with NSRF?

Well, as a piece of NSRF trivia, I think I have coached more CFGs than anyone else in this organization—ten in total. In addition to coaching, I am a member of my own CFG with administrators from New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and serve on NSRF's Accountability Council. Faith Dunne and Joel Kammer trained me as a CFG coach at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (co-director Daniel Baron trained in the same group) in 1995. At that time I was working with the Math/Science Fellows program at Brown University as part of a Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) initiative. I had recently moved from Tucson, Arizona where I spent three years planning and opening Catalina Foothills High School. Prior to moving to Tucson, I had always been a science teacher. In Tucson, I was the acting principal for one year and a house leader for another. After spending two years at CES/Annenberg Institute, I came to Souhegan High School, where I have been for nine years, two as dean of students and the last seven as principal.

In 1996, I facilitated a national coaches training in San Francisco with Faith Dunne and since that time, I have facilitated either a coaches training or a principals' group every summer, working mostly in New England. I have attended and facilitated at most of the winter meetings and colloquia as well.

So, here is a question I always ask candidates during the New Hampshire Presidential Primaries: What didn't you know and how did you learn it?

I have learned a lot through being a CFG member and working to help others find help in their work through CFGs. The environment created by CFGs constantly pushes me to improve my own work. CFGs create a disposition to work in a certain way. Every time I work with a protocol, explore a dilemma, or learn from a text, I am forced to think of both the application of the work and the implication of the work on student learning. I have learned that

an individual's role in school does not matter; the focus of CFGs is relevant for every practice.

As a school leader, the support my participation gives to CFGs sustains the work. We sponsored a support staff CFG when people demonstrated an interest; we obtained support from our school board to sponsor CFGs one morning a month and to delay school opening by two hours on those days; we meet with our CFG coaches each month to debrief that morning's meeting; and we sponsor three all-day coaches' meetings each year so that we can calibrate the work that each of us does as coach of our own CFG. My work as a CFG coach and administrator helps to translate this work to our board and our superintendent; my participation as principal helps to create a sense of primacy for the work in our district.

In what ways has this work improved student learning in your school?

One strand of the CFG work at Souhegan is our Career Growth Plan. Teachers pose a question of inquiry about improving student learning through teacher practice. They research this question in their practice for three years. They then present this work to their peers. They use their CFG colleagues as mentors to their learning, bringing the ongoing work to the CFG table frequently during each three-year cycle. Their CFG colleagues decide when the work is ready to present to a more public audience, and help to design the presentation. This work exemplifies our community of learners. With CFG at the heart of our work, we are all learners, and our culture forms accountability for that learning. And we know that when adults cast themselves as learners, student learning deepens.

CFGs, and all the learning that comes from CFGs, are at the heart of all we do. Collective work produces better work than individual work. CFG work raises our accountability for each other's work. There is no question that the work we do in CFGs directly benefits student learning, sometimes on the same day as the CFG meeting. On those late start days when we meet in CFGs first thing in the morning, you walk around the building and people are always asking "what did you do in CFG today?" The implication of that question is really "what did you learn in CFG today?"

Michael Fullan's new book stresses sustainability as an imperative. Could you discuss this concept in light of the fact that Souhegan will be changing leadership?

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Coaching for Educational Equity from the Inside Out

Victor Cary, California

Victor Cary, Program Director for Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) in Oakland, CA, has been on a personal and professional journey with equity for many years. Victor, Daniel Baron and others have been collaborating on the first partnership between BayCES and NSRF to design and present a Coaching for Educational Equity Seminar: A Journey of Interruption, Transition and Transformation. A pilot of the seminar will take place in Sonoma, CA the last week in July, 2005.

There is an urgent need to develop school coaches able to support a process of interruption, transition and transformation to small, equitable and high performing schools. Resistance to changing inequity in education, however, is even more widespread than resistance in other areas of school change. There will not be deep and sustainable change if equity is not meaningfully and productively addressed.

The hardest part of coaching for equity is staying inside the struggle. This endeavor is a necessary element of both personal/collective consciousness and deep change. It requires skilled coaching and facilitation to "open space" where trust is established and truth is shared. It calls for compassion to "hold space" where pretense is eliminated, emotions released, new meanings constructed, and new relationships are established. We need coaches and leaders who can hold these spaces so others can do the same. And no one can do it alone. Coaches need opportunities for the self-reflective work necessary to create alliances within and across racial, gender and class boundaries to be effective as coaches for equity.

How does one develop the necessary will, skill and emotional intelligence to effectively coach for educational equity?

At the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), we believe that powerful and effective coaching begins from the inside out. To do this, we believe that coaches should "be the change they wish to make in the world." The work of creating equitable and excellent schools is fundamentally about changing ourselves, and thereby our relationships with others.

What this means for me is that anyone who aspires to coach for educational equity must begin by reflecting critically on their own identity and integrity in doing this work¹. Identity lies in the intersection of the many forces that make up a life, while integrity lies in relating to those forces in

ways that make us who we are or want to become. To grow as a coach in this way asks me to be able to reflect upon and talk about my inner life while also focusing on assumptions about oppression, power and hegemony².

Reflecting critically can happen privately or in a communal setting where we can speak our own truth without fear, as well as listen to the truths of others without rushing to judgment. It is also possible to create open and trustworthy communal spaces within a unifying commitment to establish alliances for the purpose of supporting one another. Few such spaces are created do this work in public education. I hold to the basic principles of no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting straight. We can learn instead to listen deeply; ask honest, open, questions; speak for ourselves rather than for another; and trust the "inner teacher" to do its work. Attending to the creation of a safe space for this work is essential--a space in which the noise within us and around us can subside and we can begin to hear our own inner voice.

In his book *Courage to Teach*,³ Parker Palmer suggests every person has access to an inner source of truth, named by diverse cultures as soul, spirit, or heart. This inner source of strength and guidance is the place of truth-telling within us where we know the difference between reality and illusion. Preparing to coach for equity is more a matter of "coach formation" than "coach training." The notion of formation recognizes the inner teacher within each individual, and the vital relationship between inner clarity and lifegiving outer work. Where coach training is often about training in methods and techniques, coach formation involves a concern for personal wholeness. It can also be thought of as permanent process, as being an exercise, a critical understanding of what we do. Through work that is at the same time gentle and firm, rigorous and relevant, we can help shape and reshape, to form coaches without being manipulative.⁴ Coach formation and training are both needed, but the concept of coach formation is given far less attention.

At the heart of formation is the understanding that there is a "hidden wholeness" at work in the natural world, in our lives, in our work--a hidden wholeness that often takes the form of paradox. For instance, Paulo Freire, in a conversation with Myles-Horton, said, "We must be free; we must be free to believe in freedom. Do you see

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Sharing Our Stories: Tales From The First Ten Years

JoAnn Groh, Arizona

For ten years educators around the country have been doing what we have fondly come to call “the work.” And for ten years “the work” has spread, not from some grand design, but because people found value in it. However, the grassroots, organic nature of this movement has made its impact difficult to keep track of. There is a new effort underway to gather hard data on how Critical Friends Groups impact school reform, teacher development and retention and student achievement. But there is another face to this narrative which lies behind the numbers in the stories that we have lived and that we share with each other.

This year in Denver we would like to honor and celebrate those experiences. We are asking people to write their CFG stories. There will be a forum at the Winter Meeting for those who bring stories with them to share or you can send your stories to

Connections in advance and we will try to put together an anthology to be published in January.

What constitutes a story? A lot. Perhaps anything. For example, when I think back to my own Coaches training at Whispering Pines I remember how our group adopted a tradition that anyone could spontaneously call for a standing ovation of a colleague. We did it often and with gusto. I remember we had grown so close as a learning community by the end of the week that one of us danced her closing *Connections*.

A story could be one of those standard tales you tell when facilitating a training. When debriefing *Connections* after the first time I always share how my own CFG couldn't handle the quiet together time and instead came up with their own process which they named “PG-13” or “Powergripe – 13” – ten minutes of griping wiped clean with three minutes of positive sharing. While that might seem like wallowing in the negative, in actuality it allowed me to follow my colleagues through six years of their lives together. I have always thought that teaching is an unforgiving profession. Your life could be in absolute turmoil, yet each day you stand in front of your many children – thinking about their lives and learning. It was a little moment of humanity

to allow us to honor each others' lives beyond our classroom walls. Through our PG-13s, I experienced life's rhythms—births, weddings, bar mitzvahs, graduations, deaths. Who knew that 13 minutes a month could mean so much to us?

You could share frustrations – I remember being the sole on-time participant to one meeting, after just having had a serious conversation the month before about the “be on time” norm. I decided to spend the rest of the meeting time alone and outside in the student-created desert path, wondering if I had it in me to keep coaching my group, all the while keeping my eyes open for sleeping rattlesnakes.

I could write about lots of exciting “aha” moments where it felt like teachers were almost

dogpiling upon each other with their shared ideas and abundant energy. I remember the sadness I felt at hearing about my Navajo teachers' experiences at the white boarding school they had

attended and how honored I was to be invited to hike in the private native lands of Canyon de Chelly. I could write about how much I have learned from working with Carrie Brennan and how in awe I am of Gene Thompson-Grove. I could write about Faith Dunne. I could share the story of how last Saturday I wandered into Brueggers Bagel shop only to see a sign for a weekly Socrates Café meeting. The next thing I know I am sharing chalk talk and the final word protocol with a group of grey-haired retirees. Finally, I could share how in the midst of the overwhelming everyday stress that comes with starting a new school, how grateful I am when I am finally able to turn my attention to what really counts – teachers talking with each other about how to hone their craft so that our children's experiences are deeper, more meaningful and filled with joy.

Having been around a few years, I imagine that our collective stories are filled with joy, frustration, anger, sadness and hope. I suspect they will make us laugh and cry. I know they will make us think. Ten years feels like a good time to mark what has been, before we push onward and upward towards another ten years. ■

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Learn more about the NSRF 10th Annual Winter Meeting on page 13, or visit www.nsrffharmony.org/winter_meeting.html



Student as Learner, Teacher as Coach: Putting Collaboration to Work at S.A. Douglas High School

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

The S.A. Douglas High School is a comprehensive small school located in Philadelphia. Approximately three fourths of the students at Douglas have Individualized Education Plans. The school's principal and two of the teachers are trained CFG coaches and have been introducing collaborative, reflective practices at the school.

Students who didn't read books a year ago are volunteering to read aloud in class. Those same students are writing book reviews for the monthly school journal. According to their teachers, these kids are asking for more and more books in their classroom libraries. According to the kids, they like the books and they feel successful reading now. In a recent conversation some students bragged to me about the numbers of books they've completed this year! Using a *Success Analysis* protocol, they talked about their independence, their small group work and their time with their teacher, but mostly they talked about their increased confidence as readers and learners. They also spoke candidly of their previous practice in school, of a time when they would just give up and wait for their teachers to tell them the answers. Some of the same students talked about putting their heads down or skipping school altogether in the past.

Now, students are winning awards for their original videos in city-wide competitions. Students are participating in school-wide surveys and they are graphing and interpreting their results. These young adults are writing across the content areas, composing mini-paragraphs at the start of many classes. So what happened? Why are all these positive changes taking place?

The staff at S.A. Douglas High School was the recipient of a three-year Comprehensive School Reform grant. The Douglas staff chose the Coalition of Essential Schools as their reform model, and for the past three years they have been engaged in a purposeful conversation about what works and what does not work for their students.

Armed with additional funds, the staff, some students and their families have attended retreats and planning sessions where they've explored the Common Principles of the Coalition, talking about a "tone of decency" and the need for "teachers to act as coaches while students act as workers."

In partnership with their School Council the staff has shared their vision for Douglas graduates and they have worked to make their common vision a reality.

While there have been many examples of the staff's and the community's commitment to their students' success, there are a few that really stand out. Last September the school principal, Patricia Parson, heard an inspirational speaker just days before school opened. She was both energized and worried. Energized because she knew she could buy a new reading program with the grant money, worried because wholesale changes in teacher assignment and classrooms at the start of the school year would be understandably unpopular with her staff.

After talking with her Assistant Principal, Michael Picardi, Pat decided to present her proposed changes on the first day of school. "Because of the kids" and led by their union representative, Ken Richardson, the staff decided to support Pat's proposed changes. With kids at the center, teachers



"The writing program has exploded at Douglas. Students write in shop class and math class, social studies and technology. Students are writing everywhere at Douglas and they are writing more effectively."

opted to shift classrooms and teaching assignments and three READ 180 labs were established. The results have been stunning.

Students and teachers now speak openly about the benefits of small-group instruction. The kids like the individualized feedback and the teachers like the ability to offer the intensive support. Students also talk about being forced to master the content by the computer, a teacher who never gives them the answer, but always lets them try and try again. Students shared that they were more "confident in all of their classes now." Students really appreciated the ability to self correct, using help buttons on the computer, or to listen to books on tape. I heard over and over again that they enjoyed knowing, "You can do it for yourself!"

The seniors told me they were much more willing to write paragraphs now. The students' writing from READ 180 is connected to the second example I'd like to share. This spring, the staff at Douglas joined the staff at Jules E. Mastbaum, another CES school, to hear a Philadelphia teacher's presentation of his "Highly Effective Writing" program. Dr. Charles Payslay made his pitch and shared his student work with the combined staff of the two schools. Dr. Payslay isn't a publishing house representative, he's a Philadelphia high school teacher on a mission, and his dedication to his students' success is evident. With Dr. Payslay's blue booklets in hand, the Douglas staff hit the ground running. The writing program has exploded at Douglas. Students write in shop class and math class, social studies and technology. Students are writing everywhere at Douglas



and they are writing more effectively.

The final example I'd like to share is the initiation of a lunch group where teachers share their student work. Twice a month a group of teachers from different disciplines gathers in the conference room to reflect on their work. Using protocols that help to keep the conversation focused, these teachers act as critical friends, sharing their concerns and dilemmas about the lessons they hope to improve and the kids they want to reach.

Looking at Student Work (LASW) collaboratively signals a break from the isolated privacy experienced by most teachers. Gone are the gripe sessions as well. These teachers give and receive feedback with each other, and their students benefit from their collective expertise.

As an external coach at Douglas I have had the privilege of observing their three-year journey. They would never have written this article, they may even be a little embarrassed by my singing their praises. However, anyone who visits Douglas and talks to the students will see that this staff does "whatever it takes" to help their kids succeed. The grant monies may be dwindling, but the Douglas family is not slowing down. At a recent professional development session, the LASW group modeled a protocol for the entire staff in an effort to expand their collaborative practices to the staff as a whole. As the grant ends, the Douglas family is focused on sustaining their momentum with each other and, perhaps even more importantly, they are dedicated to sharing ownership of the process with their students and their parents. ■

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The Role of the Inquiry Cycle in Changing Practice

Aimee Gibbons, New Hampshire

Six years ago my CFG made the decision to ground our work in inquiry. The significant consequence of this decision was that every action in our CFG became purposeful. Our actions were based on real questions about our practice—questions that nagged us about a unit, about instruction, about a student, about assessment. Once we had established questions, we looked at student work for a reason; we observed each other for a reason; we explored texts, we participated in protocols—all to explore each other's very real questions. This focus has energized us and sustains our work, year after year.

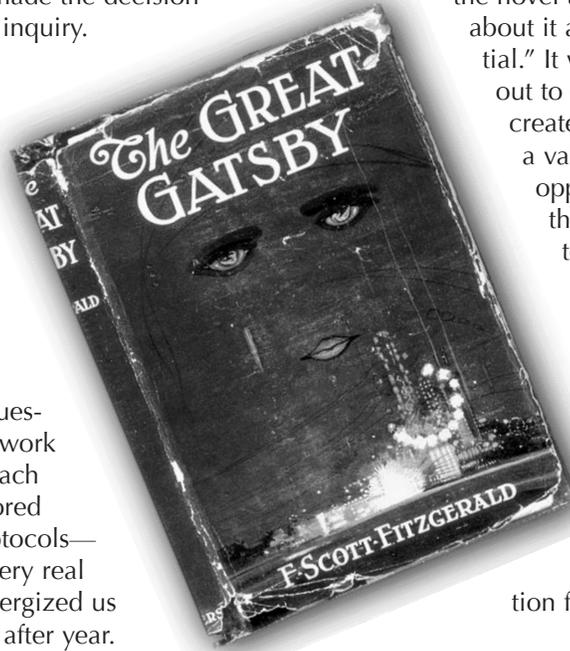
For my first cycle of inquiry, I chose to examine my practice around my unit on *The Great Gatsby*. My tenth-grade social studies colleague and I usually team-teach most units. However, when I began the study of *The Great Gatsby*, my partner was teaching an integrated economics unit with our math teacher.

Left to my own devices, I reverted to a traditional approach to the novel. I lectured, assigned study questions, and quizzed students daily. I paid absolutely no attention to the need to differentiate instruction for the wide levels of ability in front of me each day in our heterogeneous classroom.

My first homework check demonstrated that 30% of students had not attempted the assignment and another 30% had incomplete work. Classroom discussion was abysmal, and students were disengaged and disruptive. I countered with assigning the second chapter, eight comprehension questions, and a quiz the next day.

Well, they showed me! 40% of students got a zero on the quiz and 5% earned less than 50%. The other 55% received higher than ninety; clearly, there was no middle ground. Students who had the reading skills would do well, and those students with different areas of intelligence would not.

We continued in that vein for the entire novel. The final exhibition for that unit was to write an analytical paper addressing *The Great Gatsby* as the quintessential novel of the 1920s. Egads! What was I thinking—half of my students were unable to read



the novel and I am asking them to write about it and I used the word “quintessential.” It was almost as though I had set out to see just what a failure I could create. I eventually saw that I had lost a valuable teaching and learning opportunity. We all felt beat up by this experience. I could not afford to repeat this series of mistakes with future students.

I wondered how I could improve student engagement, creativity, and academic achievement while studying *The Great Gatsby* through the development of authentic curriculum. The following are the steps I took to establish a question for inquiry:

Step 1. *Create a vision for change.*

I examined my data:

- 30% no homework and 30% incomplete work
- Poor class discussion
- Daily quiz - 40% of students scored a 0
- Essay – How is *The Great Gatsby* the quintessential novel of the 1920s?
- 40% of students did not do the essay
- 90% of students indicated the *The Great Gatsby* was their least favorite unit

Step 2. *Formulate a research question.*

I needed to keep in mind that good inquiry questions are those that:

- cannot be answered yes or no
- do not begin with “why”
- could not be easily misinterpreted
- are not too narrow or too broad
- do not already have an answer

Step 3. *Turn the vision into a question.*

What would I like students to do differently; what outcomes do I want? I knew that I wanted this unit to be interdisciplinary in nature. I wanted students to have a clear understanding of the historical perspective this novel offered for a specific time period. In a conversation with a colleague, we noticed a parallel between art styles and writing styles in Fitzgerald's novels.

We wondered whether *(continued on page 17)*

10th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting Denver, Colorado • January 12 - 14, 2006

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We will work in the ways our CFGs do, and for two and one 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

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Meeting Elements

- Keynote Address from Maria Guajardo Lucero of the Denver Mayor's Commission on Education
- Seminar Groups
- Coaches Clinics
- Performance by Rattlebrain Theatre
- Tenth Anniversary Celebration

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See you in Denver! ■

The 2006 NSRF Winter Meeting Planning Team

NSRF's Living History...

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practice is embedded—when it is a part of how you operate on a daily basis—then sustainability is a given. The language of CFGs is a part of our culture. This initiative is also a valuable tool in identifying and supporting emerging leaders. We create leaders by giving them a place to practice new skills. Thinking again of our Career Growth Plan, I am aware that teachers could not have made their practice public unless we had created a democratic culture that supported collective learning. I am not at all worried about Souhegan. We have well-established practices in place such as the ninth and tenth grade teams, school-wide CFGs, senior project and Division I Exhibition. My leadership supported these practices through advocacy with the superintendent and school board, as well as my own participation as a CFG coach and a senior project mentor. There is very strong support across all of the constituencies for these collaborative practices and they certainly won't go away when I leave.

What is your response to NSRF's increasing focus on equity?

I think the NSRF focus on equity is absolutely essential. We can have lots of discussion about the best ways to teach and learn and NSRF can be inclusive in including teachers and principals from many philosophically different schools, but we cannot sit

by and pretend that we don't have a serious issue of inequitable opportunities. We have made progress in providing equity of opportunity, but only because of our sustained focus in raising our awareness of inequities. We now need to focus our work to get to the point where we have equitable outcomes for students.

How will you continue your work as a member of NSRF in Maine?

I have a great deal of respect for the schools in Maine. I know that I will have much to learn. Yarmouth has a collaborative relationship with the University of Southern Maine through the Southern Maine Partnership. I am looking forward to an active relationship with a university. I know that I will continue to train CFG coaches, and that I will embed this work in my practice as the Yarmouth High School principal.

I know that I will be able to count on the relationships I enjoy as a member of NSRF to help me learn and grow in this new setting. ■

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this paradox? Without freedom it's difficult to understand freedom. On the other hand, we fight for freedom to the extent that we don't have freedom, but in fighting for freedom we discover how freedom is beautiful and difficult to be created, but we have to believe it is possible.⁵ Working with paradox helps us to see how things that seem to be opposites, when more deeply understood, actually complement and co-create each other.⁶ You cannot know light without darkness, silence without speech, and solitude without community.

Understanding and exploring paradox is useful to the pedagogy underlying this idea of coaching for equity from the inside out. For example, the skill and art of facilitation is a key competency expected of school coaches. As a coach you may be called upon to "open space" for dialogue and practices that 1) interrupt inequity and oppression; 2) hold a powerful "proxy" vision for what could be true instead; 3) create alliances across difference and 4) "open space" for new visions to become reality and for new leaders (formal and informal) to emerge. Therefore, it is important for a coach to consider the various forms of nonphysical space that will help a group do its work.

I have found Palmer's six paradoxical tensions of pedagogical space very helpful in this regard and use it as a guide. The six paradoxes of space include:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and "charged."
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honor the "little" stories of the participants and the "big" stories of teaching, learning, identity, and integrity.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of the community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

Reflecting on these paradoxes as I prepare to facilitate a group offers clues for creating the kind of intellectual, emotional and spiritual space that invites and encourages the building of diverse and equitable learning communities.⁷

When working with coaches, administrators, teachers, and parents, I often use the process of Constructivist Listening.⁸ This is a particular form of listening that is primarily for the benefit of the talker and not the listener. This is one way to invite

people to reflect on and work with questions regarding issues of equity that arise in their work and in their lives. Creating opportunities to reflect upon our stories and experiences about how racism, sexism, classism and other forms of oppression have affected our lives as educators, parents and members of the community is vital. This creates a plumb line for dialogue and exploration that is owned by all, providing an opportunity to explore both "personal" stories as well as universal and timeless stories of human life and experience. The practices of critical reflection and journaling, silence and solitude, dialogue and community are part of the fabric of coaching from the inside out.

This approach invites people into participation rather than demanding it from them. Opportunities for sharing and engagement are offered, but each individual is trusted to determine her or his level of sharing and participation. This work affirms that we can join in a respectful, evocative, and yet challenging communal inquiry about the inner dimensions of our work that will not only encourage us, but also stretch us.

In working with people we want to both support space for solitude and surround it with the resources of community. As one example, Constructivist Listening Support Groups, a structure used in BayCES Leading for Equity Institutes, embody this paradox of solitude and community. This practice is grounded in the belief that there are no external authorities on life's deepest issues. There is only the authority that lies within each of us waiting to be heard. A commitment to deep confidentiality and trust is essential to many aspects of our work as coaches. Making space for diverse voices, and clarifying boundaries and guidelines for our work together, helps make the space safe for the human soul.

At BayCES, coaching from the inside out helps to build our alliances across difference, harnesses the power of our diversity and informs a "movement model" of social change. I think that lasting change occurs when individuals choose to live in what Parker Palmer calls "divided no more." Living divided no more essentially means being congruent inside and out, experiencing no disconnect between inner motivations and outward actions. This in turn leads to greater personal wholeness and a changed relationship to each other, to role and to institution. Beginning with the individual, this chain of integrity has the potential to weave

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participants resisted our structure. The resistance was directed mainly toward the limitations of our categories. It seemed difficult for the participants to talk about what it meant to be male, female, black, white, etc. We found that this protocol pushed participants completely outside their comfort zones.

The discomfort was not limited to race. A faction of men broke off from the white group and became a men's group. Some black men joined the men's group and defined themselves as males. There was a black women's and a white women's group. There were no mixed-race women's groups and only one birth order group (which was mixed race). Once the participants had moved beyond their discomfort, however, which usually was moved by someone being honest and coming from their heart, they became immersed in the dialogue. They were so involved in their discussions, in fact, that they resisted again when we began to reconvene the groups to report back.

This experience forced the participants to deal with their good, bad, and ugly assumptions and stereotypes. Their learning was revealed as we debriefed the protocol. A connection had been made. The realization that what we had just put them through was what many educators put our students through every day in our classrooms. We harbor assumptions, and we form relationships and create expectations based on those assumptions. Furthermore, our students rise to those expectations both negative and positive. This is how we manifest success or failure with students. It was an eye opener for just about everyone who participated.

We learned that using CFG practices can help facilitate transformation. In developing safe spaces that allow for discussing difficult issues, if we are grounded, we can make an honest and productive approach to relationship building resulting in reflective practice. Who we are, and what we bring to our work-matters. Sometimes in the process, we experience discomfort, sometimes resistance. The process of improving learning experiences for children and adults requires that we look at our motivation, the assumptions that shape our expectations, and finally at our practice. ■

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together soul, role, institution, and social transformation.

Endnotes

¹ See Parker Palmer, Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, Chapter 1, 1998. In this chapter, Palmer addresses the issue of identity and integrity when it comes to teaching in the classroom. The ideas he puts forward are just as relevant and challenging when thinking about coaching for educational equity.

² See Julian Weissglass, Ripples of Hope, Building Relationships for Educational Change, 1998. My thinking and understanding of the many forms that oppression takes and what can be done to interrupt and heal from it has been deeply influenced by this book and my association with the author.

See also Stephen D. Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, 1995. This book gave me new insight into the connection of critical reflection and the recognition of hegemonic assumptions. Brookfield writes, "The subtle tenacity of hegemony lies in the fact that, over time, it becomes completely imbedded, part of the cultural air we breathe. We cannot peel back the layers of oppression and identify any particular group or groups of people actively conspiring to keep others silent and disenfranchised. Instead, the ideas and practices of hegemony are part and parcel of everyday life—the stock opinions, conventional wisdom, and commonsense ways of seeing and ordering the world that many of us take for granted. If there is a conspiracy here, it is the conspiracy of the normal."

³ Parker Palmer, Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life, 1998.

⁴ Myles Horton and Paulo Freire, We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change, 1990, p. 222.

⁵ Myles Horton and Paulo Friere, We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change, 1990, p. 220.

⁶ See Palmer, Courage to Teach, Chapter III, "The Hidden Wholeness, Paradox in Teaching and Learning," for an excellent discussion of this idea. Also see Palmer's new book, A Hidden Wholeness, The Journey Toward an Undivided Life, 2004.

In this book Palmer addresses four compelling themes: the shape of an integral life, the meaning of community, teaching and learning for transformation, and nonviolent social change.

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principals are now engaged in central office work that it was inevitable that our work would eventually flourish at the district level. These administrators have experienced the power of making their authentic work public to their peers for the purpose of receiving feedback to improve the effectiveness of their work. We now know that whole districts can be transformed when the practice of professional learning communities becomes embedded into the culture of teachers, principals, and central office administrators.

Much has been written recently about the essential role of professional learning communities in improving student achievement. It seems as though every educational journal I read has a reference to learning communities. However, not enough has been written about NSRF practice and effectiveness in improving the quality of the educational experience for students and teachers. Until now. This fall, the educational honor society Phi Lambda Theta's journal "Educational Horizons" will be entirely devoted to NSRF practice in schools and universities across the country. Each Center of Activity will receive ten copies to share with their colleagues.

In celebration of NSRF's tenth anniversary, the Lastinger Center, an NSRF Center of Activity in Southern Florida, has received funding from the Wachovia Foundation to document our learning over the last ten years. This publication will be an invaluable resource to coaches and facilitators across the country working at any level of schooling.

NSRF is committed to generating the resources to support and document research that will provide the evidence necessary to deepen and sustain our work through our second decade of Critical Friends Groups and facilitative leadership.

At this year's Winter Meeting, my colleague Gene Thompson-Grove boldly stated that our work "goes against the tide of current educational reform." I take great pride in that statement. I am also aware that we are contributing to a very powerful undertow pulling us back to our core beliefs of equity and social justice for every child. Although the tide is easier to see, it is the undertow that disrupts the status quo that can cause the sands to shift. NSRF is committed to continuing our tradition to build on the talents and strengths of all our members and to interrupt those practices that do not serve our students well.

I wish you all a school year guided by inquiry and curiosity, supported by colleagues and community, and focused on the success of each child. ■

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as it is a tool for encouraging reflection on the recent past. [Donna's Reflections, 1-11-2005]

Maintaining the blog actually helps me reflect on my reflections. Studying the entries over

Blog Links

Here are some links to get you started on your own blogging adventure:

<http://awd.cl.uh.edu/blog/> provides resources for getting started to use blogs for yourself or with your students.

<http://bloggingineducation.blogspot.com/> highlights articles related to using blogs in a variety of education-specific ways.

<http://donna.robreid.com/weblog/> my own web log shares the activities and reflections of a CFG Coach.

<http://blogs.setonhill.edu/MikeArnzen/> Pedablogue, a "personal inquiry into the scholarship of teaching," is authored by Michael Arnzen of Seton Hill University. His personal reflections are updated regularly, often humorous, and always thoughtful. This blog is a great model for a professional reflective journal.

time helps me see connections and reinforce the good work that we do for students, teachers, and schools. Now if I could just find time to work on that golf swing... ■

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The Role of the Inquiry Cycle...

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students could explore new knowledge through art. We changed our essential question so that students would study the decade of the 1920s in conjunction with *The Great Gatsby* as a period of both light and dark images. For this exhibition, students would create an artistic work that captured the light or the dark aspects of an event from the 1920s or *The Great Gatsby*. We would encourage them to work through the process of creating a work of art, similar to the process used in writing a paper. Their final art piece would be the focus of a student art exhibition, open to school and community members. Students would write an abstract to accompany their artwork, describing the main idea they wanted to convey to the audience and explaining why they made the various choices of color, form, content, and style.

This work took months. I finally arrived at my question for inquiry: *How does the development and implementation of authentic arts-integrated curriculum affect student learning?* I next needed to establish what kinds of data would help me to explore this question.

Step 4. *Establish indicators to demonstrate what will signify improved student learning.* I would monitor student work, student feedback, homework completion and test scores. I would also ask members of my CFG to observe my work and offer feedback.

Step 5. *Design instruction based on an essential question.* The essential question for this new curriculum unit was, "How is *The Great Gatsby* a novel of 'light' and 'dark' images?" We watched film clips of the time period, we learned the Charleston, we studied different schools of art, and we studied the techniques artists used to create a message. We used various text-based protocols to explore the theme and characters.

Step 6. *Analyze the data.* After I had made the changes to this unit, 68% of my students reported that this was their favorite unit of study. 95% of them completed all homework assignments, and 100% of students completed their final exhibition. Students had remained engaged throughout.

Step 7. *Reflect on implications for changing practice.* While my focus for this unit was to create a visual art-integrated unit, I also wanted to appeal to as many of the multiple intelligences as possible, so my lessons and assignments were varied. As a result of changes I made to my practice, I learned that authentic curriculum promotes student engagement and investment in their learning; that students

develop critical thinking skills; and that students achieve at a higher level.

Throughout my period of inquiry, my CFG played a significant role in my learning. They helped me to formulate my inquiry question, tuned my curriculum, and conducted a descriptive review of student work. They observed my teaching, they pushed my thinking, and they motivated me with their questions and their comments. They then helped me to formulate my next question. My next cycle of inquiry was to examine how authentic curriculum and instruction improved student learning. My questions build on my learning from my first question.

There is nothing easy about this work. I spent two years digging at the question and searching for answers in my students' performance and achievement. I remember, however, the feeling of isolation I experienced when I lectured, piled on more and more punishing assignments, and watched my students fail. When I lean on my colleagues for help, I know that we are all in this together—all focused on improving student learning. When I know that my colleagues care about my work, it makes a difference. ■

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Coaching for Educational Equity...

(continued from page 15)

⁷ See Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, pp. 73–77, for elaboration on the six paradoxes of space.

⁸ For a detailed introduction to one underlying set of theories and assumptions about how our current behaviors, beliefs and assumptions are often linked to past memories and experiences that have been hurtful (e.g., racism, sexism, and classism), see Julian Weissglass, "Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change," *The Education Forum*, Vol. 54, No. 4, Summer 1990. ■

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Intelligences at the Table

(continued from page 5)



math/logical, visual/spatial, naturalist, and musical/rhythmic intelligences. (Those with Gardner's ninth intelligence, the existentialists, can go either way, I've noticed, this no doubt depending on the Voice of the Universe and other unfathomable intangibles.) These folks, I suggest, may choose not to engage in CFG work because they either erroneously deduce from what they hear that it's strictly about reading (articles, for example), writing (reflections), and talking (as guided by whatever protocol is being employed at the time); or because they've been to a few meetings and feel that because many protocols do require a heavy dose of those things, it's not for them. They may feel anxious and alienated, just as I did when I gave my colleague Peterson the reins of my class on the funeral scene in *Julius Caesar*, and he and the students turned passionate Shakespearean verse rhetoric into data. They may feel, as I did (as our students so often do in classes whose focus does not lie within their area of cognitive strength), unequal to the task, and a little stupid and ashamed. It's not a hard leap, then, to figure that this may be a reason they leave or never even approach the table.

Case in point: In a recent CFG coaches meeting at Watkinson, our faculty did a Success Analysis protocol to look at the year—five of us, all humanities teachers, cited articles we had read (and the ensuing discussions) as the most effective, lasting work we had done this year, while the one science teacher in the room cited an exercise called the “River of Time,” in which we had charted important moments over the course of our three years together as a group. As she talked about this, I noted, she apologized more than once for choosing an exercise that most of the rest of us had not, in fact, enjoyed much at all. A highly experienced teacher and CFG coach, and a top-level administrator at our school, she felt the need to *apologize* for benefiting most from the experience in our time together that most suited her way of thinking.

So what's a coach to do? *Keep* the protocols, *keep* the content—keep articles and deep discussions and reflective practice—and use those other intelligences to open the channels of the brain to do this work. Find other ways in, embellish, give options, regard the content from various points of view, not simply or primarily the verbal/linguistic and inter-/intrapersonal ones. Examples are myriad, and there's no telling what can be accomplished once we start *deliberately* (rather than fortuitously) working in this vein. With any text-based protocol, a coach might offer up a painting, a video, a

student's art as the text to engage our visual/spatial colleagues, or have them reflect by drawing, rather than by writing. A coach could strive to get body/kinesthetic people on their feet as much as possible: when doing the Probing Questions exercise, she could demark a bull's-eye on the floor with masking tape and ask the presenter to move towards and away from the center depending on the usefulness of the question, *then* discuss why he/she moved that way; or offer up a ball to individuals working in dyads or triads and suggest that they throw it around as they talk. In another session, the coach might play music while people are writing and thinking, or give them the option of writing rhymed verse in order to answer a question or as their method of participating in the discussion (musical/rhythmic). Naturalists love to organize and categorize. As standard practice, a coach could have these colleagues do the recording for the group (giving them several different colored markers to connect, also, to their visual/spatial propensities), ask them to take the lead in chunking items in a group-generated list, suggest that they lay out their thinking, during reflection time, in a chart. Later, after a discussion, the coach might ask the group to look at the results as data and challenge them to use the data to push their thinking further. Provided with these avenues, odds are that math/logical colleagues will come to the fore, as they might also if the coach offered up statistics as text or encouraged them to think about issues in terms of timelines or graphs. And, of course, a coach can draw mindfully on protocols and exercises that already tap various intelligences: Chalk Talk, Continuum Dialogue, Wagon Wheels, El Paseo—to name only a few.

Though it may seem so, I am not advocating that CFGs should be turned into carnivals of tricks, nor am I suggesting that we turn our focus from the bona fide learning experiences with underlying seriousness of purpose that the bedrock without which CFG work would be uninteresting and of little use. Attending to multiple intelligences and planning with a practiced and balanced eye towards them, however, is another way to be attentive to group dynamics, another way to attend to the individual, another way to acknowledge and leverage all the ways people—children and adults alike—teach and learn; another way, indeed, to keep the *learner* at the center of our practice. ■

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Protocols in Practice...

(continued from page 2)

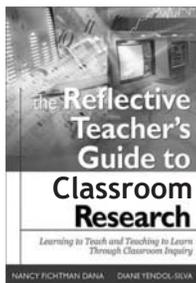
defining teacher inquiry as the “systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own classroom practice.” This is different from the usual way we wonder informally about our students’ work in that it is less happenstance, more visible, and more organized. She talks about how complex teachers’ work is, and the felt difficulties that affect our work. The place where these two areas intersect is the wonderings teachers have all the time. She believes that if teachers focus on these wonderings they will connect to an area they are really curious to know more about – and the idea for their inquiry project will be born.

To further help teachers find their wonderings, Nancy talks about there being eight passions that teachers have about their work. Sometimes these are what drove them to the profession in the first place. Often people enter with one passion and then become passionate about another area of their work. These are useful tools for opening the conversation with teachers about the inquiry process. However, it wasn’t until Belkis Cabrera asked people in her group at Chapman Elementary to group themselves by their passions that an idea was born to adapt Nancy’s passion into an activity similar to the *Profile of a Student*.

Profile of a Student is a beloved activity for talking about how it felt to be the kind of student you were in high school. How was your experience shaped by the kind of student you were? Were teachers able to engage you in high quality work? How? If not, what would it have taken to inspire you? The resulting conversations are profound and shed light on the kind of work we need to be doing with our students in the present. Might we adapt this format to get teachers talking about why they entered the profession? Most people get here through a strong passion, even a sense of mission. We wondered if this new process could help teachers both reconnect to their original sense of purpose and identify some questions they care deeply about?

Using Nancy Dana’s eight passions as a model, we thought about what they would look like if they described certain teachers. What would they be most interested in? How would their “interests” affect the content and context of their classrooms? What is the hook or passion that keeps them coming back day after day?

The Reflective Teacher’s Guide to Classroom Research: Learning to Teach and Teaching to Learn Through Classroom Inquiry, by Nancy Fichtman Dana and Diane Yendol-Silva



After crafting eight teacher profiles, we adapted the directions for the conversation to pretty much mirror those of the *Student Profiles Protocol*, and took the whole thing for a test run with our Lastinger Teacher Fellows.

The resulting conversations were intense and thoughtful. After identifying others with similar passions, these passion alike groups charted the kinds of questions they most wonder about. These questions have helped us get at the idea that teacher inquiry is grounded in passion. When that passion is combined with a sense that “if I just knew more about this one area, my students would be so much more successful,” it becomes easier to develop a question to guide the inquiry.

Pete and I brought the Passions Profiles to the National Facilitators’ Meeting last April, and had our colleagues look at them with a critical eye and actually try out the process. We received helpful feedback on some of the profiles, and are still fine tuning them. Since then, we have used this process in a variety of settings.

Several Lastinger Teacher Fellows have fine tuned questions which came out of this process and are crafting Inquiry Action Plans, which will drive their collaborative work as well as their Individual Professional Development Plans next year.

What we are most excited about is the natural flow of this work as part of the work a CFG does. We have been quite explicit here in Florida that a CFG or a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is NOT defined by who is in it, but by the work the group is engaged in. A critical aspect of this work is to be curious about one’s practice and be willing to engage in the ongoing work of adapting that practice to the needs of the students we serve. We know from experience and enormous amounts of research that the most effective professional development is work that is job-embedded, ongoing, and driven by the needs of teachers and students at the school site. Discovering ways to embed the practice of inquiry in our CFG work is a way to keep authentic learning at the heart of what we do. And that’s exciting. ■

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The Passion Profiles Activity and Passion Profiles are available online at
www.nsrffharmony.org/connections.html

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