

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?

When collective

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

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

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

from one another as we share what we know and what we still wonder.

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

For More Information or to Register

Contact the NSRF National Office at 812.330.2702 or visit our website at www.nsrffharmony.org/winter_meeting.html

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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