Since 1989, the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney’s American Teacher Awards, saluting outstanding members of the teaching profession. Specifically, the program honors those teachers whose approaches exemplify creativity in teaching and who inspire a joy of learning in their students. In 2001, John Pieper was one of 80 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG Coaches was part of the benefits included with this special recognition. This is the last of three installments following John’s journey as a new CFG Coach.

A few years ago I picked up extra money working for an antique dealer, and I was in the process of combining a number of small estates when a particular group of boxes caught my eye. The word “Kerberger” was neatly printed on the side of each box. To most people, the contents were a worthless assortment of faded papers, out-dated textbooks, black and white photos, and old Valentines. A deeper connection flashed through my mind. I was gazing at a part of my childhood. Like little snippets from a home movie, my memories carried me back to 1964 and Dale School. Miss Kerberger was my fourth-grade teacher. She was kind and caring. Teaching was her life’s passion. I looked through the boxes with reverence and sadly realized how much had been lost when she passed away. Through experience, teachers accumulate a wealth of knowledge. Unfortunately, most of that wisdom is never effective-ly shared with colleagues. Several days later, while sitting in my own class-room, I envisioned the school as one large compartmentalized box where teachers rarely engaged in meaningful interaction. The potential for oppor-tunities missed was unsettling. Time passed and fate revealed a new and wonderful destiny for me. I experienced CFG training. The power of collaboration opened up a whole new world.

A little over a year ago, my prin-cipal, Mrs. Patti Vickman, and I were putting the final touches on an ambitious CFG action plan. First we would introduce the staff to CFG ideas, and then we would gradually develop a core group for our school’s first CFG. We also shared a vision of what this work might look like if it was utilized effectively in our district. We thought it would take a great deal of time and effort to get our colleagues in Oshkosh to buy into the CFG work. Fortunately, we were wrong!

Without the CFG training, the teachers had a hard time relating to the benefits gained from regular collabora-tive practices, but as additional staff members received the CFG train-

ing and, in turn, make us more effec-tive in our work. Professional articles now drive our intellectual development. Protocols are widely used throughout the district to improve the effectiveness of our meetings.

We have recently decided to incor-porate regular classroom observations as part of our CFG strategic design. We are fortunate enough to have the flexi-bility within our building to provide opportunities for classroom observa-tions. The observations are strictly vol-untary. Members of our CFG who have completed observations have gained new insights into their own practice. By shar-ing our enthusiasm, other teachers have expressed interest in what we are doing. The learning takes place within the framework of a caring learning community.

Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine that in only one year, our actual CFG training would start and sustain a CFG in their local settings. Most of our evi-dence is still informal and anecdotal, although we’ve begun to collect this data through written surveys. We’d like to honestly tell you there are many more trained coaches in the state than there are active CFGs, and that there’s a fairly high attrition rate during this transition period from the introduction of new practices (I.U. participating in a five-day New Coaches Seminar to implementation/adaptation at the local level (I.U. starting a CFG). Our sense from talking with other CFG coaches and NSFР facilitators from around the country is that this is a national issue and not just a Wisconsin issue. Could we increase the likelihood that new coaches start CFGs by moving toward a co-coaching model for local CFGs, and by more extensive use of peer observation by pairs of coaches in local settings as a form of ongoing support? Because our own experienc-es with co-coaching and peer obser-vation have been so helpful to us as we learn how to grow this work, we wonder how these supports might be made more widely available to other CFG coaches within our region and around the country.

We also wonder how we can bring our own positive experi-ence with peer observation into our work with other NSFР facilitators who work within our Vermont Center of Activity. How can we be more intentional and thoughtful about our facilitation and protocol-based work within our own group so that we are ourselves a CFG and a learning community? We’re already using an effective co-facilitation model for all five-day New Coaches Seminars throughout Vermont and are currently in the process of incorporating the practice of peer observation more systematically into our facilitation of these seminars. We can teach the peer observation process to Seminar participants for them to incorporate into their work and to share with CFG par-ticipants in their local settings.

We’re certainly aware that there are many more trained coaches in the state than there are active CFGs, and that there’s a fairly high attrition rate during this transition period from the introduc-tion of new practices (I.U. participating in a five-day New Coaches Seminar) to implementation/adaptation at the local level (I.U. starting a CFG).

• How can we as responsible NSFР facilitators support new coaches in their complicated new roles as CFG coaches and change agents/leaders within their schools?

• What role could peer observation play for school coaches in terms of helping them to plant the seed of CFG work in carefully pre-pared local soil and of nurturing its growth through various – and often predictable – stages of development?

• How can we incorporate more planning and goal-setting-CFG- seed conversations into five-day New Coaches Seminars, and what role can a co-facilitating model coupled with peer obser-vation play in that process?

• How can peer observation help us to move collectively, as a movement, beyond thinking of coaching and facilitating primar-ily in terms of technical skill and “technique” to understand coaching and facilitating as important leadership and change agent roles?

• How can peer observation help us deepen the conversation about the local implications of our work and our roles and allow each of us to make a contribution to an emerging national con-versation about the relationship between school reform and CFG-sized communities of practice?

These are some of the larger issues we’re struggling with here in Vermont, and we welcome the opportunity to participate in an ongoing national CFG coaches’ conversation about various ways to approach these important dilemmas of practice.

David Leo-Nyquist is the statewide coordinator for the Vermont Harmony/VISTA Project, and a member of the NSRF Vermont Center of Activity. He can be reached at nyquist@champlain.edu
with colleagues and students changed. Formal leadership looked at how they supported staff, worked with teacher-leaders and helped others develop skills and begin to change habits. The cycle repeated twice.

Throughout the process, par-ticipants were encouraged to pursue NSRF NY Endorsement by ultimately presenting a portfolio of their work demonstrating their facilitation skills in action. Five of the twenty-five par-ticipants received endorsement. ALL participants left more skilled.

We see examples of formal and informal leaders at all levels within the district applying NSRF principles and practices:

• We model and encourage the use of feedback as teaching/learning and community-building tools. Not only does this allow us to take the pulse of the group, it engages everyone in a reflective process in which we experience how feedback can shape future events. This happens when a good leader is able to synthesize input from all of those who lead and is an essential dimension of building a reflective community of learners.

• Our practice of “transparent facili-tation” (characterized by public reflection and sharing your thinking as facilitator) is intentional. It helps team members to see their thinking and understand their own capacity to shape the path forward in a more intentional way. In many ways, this is an essential component of building a reflective community of learners.

• Local Endorsed Facilitators have gone on to form Critical Friends Groups and still others have taken on teacher-leader roles in their schools or stepped up to help plan and facilitate a variety of profes-sional development opportunities.

• A recent series of professional development sessions for Assistant Principals (co-facilitated by Vivian, who was the only participating principal on the team of district facilitators) looked very much like a CFO coaches training, and partici-pants went on to take responsibility for working with their colleagues in ways in which closely resemble Critical Friends Groups.

• I believe nothing happens by chance. Sometimes along the path of life an event causes an individual to pause and seek the greater meaning of his being. It is these moments of reflection that we study the path and contemplate the future. There was a reason why I came across Miss Kerberger’s boxes. Maybe that memo-ry was the spark that is now allowing me to step forward in a leadership role. Maybe it was to help me remem-ber how important teachers are in the lives of children. Where I once only saw memories in boxes, I now see the future unfolding. Reaching the destination at the end of a journey is not the important part. What we learn, and who we share those experiences with along the way, are the things that give meaning to our journeys. Creating a smoother path for those who follow in our footsteps is the precious gift which we can offer.

• NSRF NY Endorsement requires participants to attend approximately 30 hours of training and then present a portfolio of their work demonstrating their ability to apply what they have learned in their work. An alternative route to endorsement is through an apprentice experience, where the “training” takes place by working along with a National Facilitator. See www.nsrfo.org for a complete description of the Endorsement Process and Standards for Facilitators.

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I believe nothing happens by chance. This is not a standard book review; rather, it is a glimpse into my transaction with the nst educating Teachers for Diversity: Seeing with a Cultural Eye by Jacqueline Jordan Irvine.

A few years ago we revised NSRF’s mission statement to include language about working to “foster educational and social equity…” and since that time I realize I have often been responsible for trying to just “add on” a focus about issues of equity. The revision of our mission statement was a call to me as a for-mer Philadelphia Middle School teach-er, as a current Urban Education grad student and as a facilitator of CFGs. In each of these roles I have become increasingly convinced that racism and other forms of bias are the greatest bar-riers we face in our efforts to positively transform the educational experiences of our kids, especially when our kids are poor, inner city, kids of color.

A first step in moving forward around issues of equity for me has been getting in touch with what I don’t know. As a white, female, heterosexual educator, I know I need to consciously incorporate a focus on those differences that I don’t “know” by virtue of my own lived experience. In other words, I have to choose to acknowledge the presence and impact of racism, cultural chauvinism and homophobia in our world.

NSRF’s mission statement to include language about equity is part of the foundation for the work I do as a facilitator and as a researcher. My own lived experience has been shaped by an understanding that as a white, female, heterosexual educator, I need to consciously incorporate a focus on those differences that I don’t “know” by virtue of my own lived experience. In other words, I have to choose to acknowledge the presence and impact of racism, cultural chauvinism and homophobia in our world.

To do this, I have taken the time to understand the history of the United States. I have sought out books and resources that help me understand the impact of race, class, gender and other identities on the experiences of people who are different from me. I have sought out opportunities to engage in dialogue with people who have lived experiences that are different from my own. I have sought out opportunities to engage in dialogue with people who have lived experiences that are different from my own. I have sought out opportunities to engage in dialogue with people who have lived experiences that are different from my own.

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