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NSRF Centers of Activity: North East Region

National Center Report

Gene Thompson-Grove, Co-Director

The story goes that when Ted Sizer was first thinking about a national organization based on his research for Horace's Compromise, Ralph Tyler (author of The Eight Year Study) said to him that the success of an organization like CES would not be measured in any brick and mortar building or institution per se, but in the number and quality of people continuing to do the work.

In many ways, the creation of NSRF as an organization has been influenced by Ralph Tyler's words to Ted Sizer. We are unconventional, having virtual Centers of Activity, which are comprised of a network of national facilitators whose charge is to hold each other accountable for high quality work, school systems and sister organizations who partner with NSRF to offer CFG Coaches Seminars and follow-up support, and tens of thousands of CFG Coaches, CFG members and facilitative leaders across the country.

People who know me well know that I wondered aloud about the need to have a formal organization at all when we left Annenberg, thinking that we might be able to create a truly virtual organization – that is, a strong network connected informally through technology and face to face meetings.

Today, when people think of NSRF’s "national" work, they often think of the small National Center in Bloomington, Indiana – the people who keep our web sites and protocols-on-line current, field requests for information, materials and facilitators, produce our quarterly editions of Connections and brochures, organize our annual Winter and National Facilitators' meetings, keep our data bases and financial record-keeping up-to-date, and maintain our various listservs.

However, we also have several national programs. These projects often (continued on page 12)
begin in places where we don’t currently have a Center of Activity or Network of Support. The NSFRF spans several Centers of Activity, or need the resources of several NSFRF Facilitators from across the country. The goal of every project is to leave the place with the capacity to continue the NSFRF work on its own, using local resources and people. And these programs often give NSFRF Facilitators and CFG Coaches from across the country an opportunity to work together, thus cross-pollinating the work nationally, and affording us an opportunity to learn from each other.

What follows is a summary of NSFRF’s current national projects:

**• VISTA – This is the fourth year of an anticipated five year project in Vermont and Indiana. This project is funded by a federal grant through the Corporation for National Service. At any one time, NSFRF has between 15 and 25 VISTA volunteers working in 15 schools throughout Vermont and Indiana.**

**• The Henry Higgins School, where student achievement is high in all subject areas, despite the fact that the school is not considered an urban school.**

**• The Charles Darwin School where student achievement is high in all subject areas, despite the fact that the school is not considered an urban school.**

**• National Council of La Raza – The Small Schools Coaches (SSCC) project is an extension of the SSCC coaches since its inception. NSFRF is also responsible for sharing what we are learning in Washington with the NSFRF national network. Toward that end, NSFRF Facilitators are currently developing a high school conversation coaches seminar design, a community engagement coaching seminar for small school conversion coaches, a principal and small school leadership academy, and an interactive coaches guide in a CD/HTML format.**

**The Collaborative Learning Communities Project, which is administered by The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI) and funded by Lucent Technologies, is in the second year of a four-year project. The purpose of the project is to provide school districts in New Jersey with the resources and support necessary to re-examine their professional development philosophy and practices, and to design a three-year implementation effort that will focus on professional development relationships, focused dialogue among all levels of the districts community, and begin to transform the professional development culture. Last year the NSFRF network of support and technical assistance plans that six NCLR Early College High School or Early College Planning teams. La Raza’s Early College project is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Four NSFRF National Facilitators work with schools in Los Angeles, CA, Tucson, AZ, Houston, TX, Washington, DC, Boston, MA and Puebla, CO.**

**• Cleveland Municipal School District - 2003-2004 was the third year of a three-year project where NSFRF is in its 4th year with the Cleveland Municipal School District. During the past three years, 16 NSFRF National Facilitators have worked with 240 Cleveland educators and eight interns in CFG/Facilitative Leadership practices. This year NSFRF is conducting monthly follow ups.**

**• Knowledge Works Foundation - This is the third year of an anticipated four-year project in several school districts in Ohio. This Knowledge Works project is primarily funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This year, eight NSFRF National Facilitators are included among some 20 Small School Change Coaches who are supporting nearly 20 Ohio urban high schools in the small schools conversion process. All 20 School Change Coaches have attended CFG seminars and are applying the practices in the conversion process. Leadership teams from these 20 schools have also attended NSFRF Seminars and are applying the practices. During the first two years, a NSFRF National Facilitator worked full-time for Knowledge Works and met monthly with the 20 School Change Coaches. In addition, two NSFRF National Facilitators work with one Ohio school developing leaders for each of the school’s emerging six new small schools. An NSFRF National Facilitator is also working with one Ohio school on an Early College project.**

**• The Small Schools Coaches Collaborative (SSCC) provides technical assistance, in the form of school coaches, to schools that receive Reinvention grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Forty-one coaches support the transformation of K-8 schools and the conversion of large comprehensive high schools into small equitable high schools. Over seventy converted small schools opened this fall in Washington. The Collaborative is a partnership of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Schools Northwest, and the National School Reform Faculty. NSFRF Facilitators have been supporting the professional development of the SSCC coaches since its inception. NSFRF is also responsible for sharing what we are learning in Washington with the NSFRF national network. Toward that end, NSFRF Facilitators are currently developing a high school conversion coaches seminar design, a community engagement coaching seminar for small school conversion coaches, a principal and small school leadership academy, and an interactive coaches guide in a CD/HTML format.**

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**Whatever It Takes:**

Everyone working in schools today knows that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) tells us that “all kids will learn – or else.” However, school leaders and educators have us the outcome and the tests that claim to measure our students’ progress, it does little to answer the question addressed in the new book by Richard DuFour and his associates, namely: “What happens in our schools when, despite our best efforts in the classroom, a student doesn’t learn?”

In their new book, Whatever It Takes, the authors assume that we have taken steps to develop the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) they’ve been writing about for years. However, they don’t assume that these PLCs are responding collaboratively and consistently to the needs of students who are walking behind. An early “given” in the text states that most staffs agree, “all kids can learn.” The authors then show that four different sets of assumptions about kids and their learning can be built from this “commonly” held belief. Using four descriptive school models the authors show how a supposedly common belief can be played out in widely divergent approaches. Here are the fictitious schools:

- The Charles Darwin School where the teachers believe “all kids can learn if they take advantage of the opportunity we give to them.”
- The Pontius Pilate School that believes “all kids can learn, if they can participate in the opportunity we give to them.”
- The Charles Darwin School where “all kids can learn, and they can take advantage of the opportunity we give to them.”
- The Henry Higgins School, where they believe “all kids can learn and they will help to all students achieve high standards of learning.”

The authors go on to describe an activity that asks readers to choose the relevant model of schooling currently in place in the U.S. Following this safe national assessment of schools the authors ask people to consider the possibility that all four models are in fact operating in most schools simultaneously. I would go a step further and say that I think some combination of these models co-exist in most classrooms. I know that my best days were those in which I was a “Henry Higgins” doing whatever it took to teach all of my kids. However, I cannot honestly say that I was always at my best, especially when I factor in the size of my classes and the impact of my own unconscious biases as a white teacher working with students of color. Did I maintain the same expectations for all my kids every day throughout the year? Despite my good intentions, I’m afraid I did not.

So how do we align our belief that all students can learn at high levels with our understanding of the models? One idea that the authors promote is a shift from the current paradigm of teaching by the book to that of equity. Instead of saying that we have “X” number of classes or hours to teach “Y” material, they say we need to figure out all of the ways both in and out that we can support all kids learning “Y” and then find the time and supports to make their learning a real possibility.

The authors go on to challenge readers to see a pyramid of collective supports for students that put an end to the “lottery” they say now exists in each child’s school experience. The authors describe the collective lottery like this, get a good teacher and you win an opportunity for real support. Land in a marginal teacher’s class and you lose big time.

When we consider its impact on students’ lives, I think it’s easy to see that reality of student placement is more like Russian Roulette than a lottery.

Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don’t Learn

**A Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania**

**Debbie Bambino can be reached at dbambino@earthlink.net**

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I began my training as a CFG Coach as the only African-American female in the group. This is not unusual for many of us who have been trained in the last few years for work in urban schools and communities. What I have learned is how to bring about the results that matter? While diversity among ethnic backgrounds differs as much as learning styles, much of the latter is addressed in the previous pages. How could we both build on the foundation of CFGs and address the realities of inner-city educators, students, and families who work with to increase the supply of quality educational options for Black children.

We planned and conducted these trainings and asked, ‘how deep would the effects that issue which were important to them as adults and those that impact the lives of students of color were intentionally addressed in depth throughout the training. From the outset to the conclusion of our five day seminars, we remained focused on how the work of CFGs could bring about change and lasting improvements in the lives of the educators, parents, families and children who were serving. We were elated with the reception we received, the daily reflections and evaluations. As we continued to observe and think about why our trainings were so successful, I came away with three critical ideas that I believe enabled our accomplishments and will ensure the success of other CFG trainings. The first is that there is a significant mix of American- and Hispanic parents, and I use the baseball metaphor of ‘The Grand Slam’ to illustrate my thoughts. Your ‘bases’ need to be on first, second, and third to get across the plate. And if you do that, you get a home run! The four districts of color who work in urban settings? And more

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The First Amendment Schools:

The Education Commission of the States and its National Center for Learning and Citizenship is a partnership with NSF that is committed to advancing the civic mission of schools, ensuring that they be prepared to receive one year of continuation funding.

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The Education Commission of the States and its National Center for Learning and Citizenship is a partnership with NSF that is committed to advancing the civic mission of schools, ensuring that they be prepared to implement NSRF Critical Facilitation Protocols in Practice

(continued from page 2)

- a hospice worker who understands the importance of being just there when those patients and families need to talk to someone about their personal issues. A member of the child’s family in their visitation, not just the “custodial adult.”
- the focus on sharing information and power that cut across all the lives being described.

One of the people described in the book was busy. None of the people had an abundance of time, yet they all held on to the ways they could connect deeply and meaningfully to the lives of these strangers. How would they meet their students and families?

As we debriefed the process, some people talked about wanting to go back to the text to reread particular sections, while others talked about sharing this book with their staff and achieving the goals. Everyone agreed that using the process to put ourselves in the shoes of the five-year-old helped us go more deeply into the lessons of these lives, the lessons of the text. We moved beyond feeling passively inspired to act in ways that embody respect in our schools. In particular, we discussed the need to make our personal decisions to respect others consistently explicit. Our conversation of the text ended with a conversation about the ways we could systematize respect in our departments and schools. Our conversation, our examination of our roles, our questions.

Having used the Success Analysis Protocol as a lens to read about the lives in Respect has given me a new way to read other people’s stories, a way that draws me in as more than a spectator. It is my challenge to continue to be in those shoes. I use the baseball metaphor of a child and I hope you might view this as my own tool to be powerful for others too.

Debbie BMW

(continued on page 19)

A Grand Slam RoLesia Holman, Maryland

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The Practice of Freedom
Camilla Greene, Connecticut

D o we all share a common theory of action or a common philosophy about teaching and learning? I wonder. Do we all believe that we need to educate our urban youth to view education as—to use bell hook’s phrase “the practice of freedom”? What does and what would that practice look like and sound like in our newly formed small urban high schools? For the last three years I have been an external coach in schools and school districts engaged in a variety of transformational initiatives mostly in urban areas and mostly in high schools. The Gates High School Transformation initiative in urban areas stresses personalization and establishment of relationships in small schools and small classrooms. Given the opportunity to create a new paradigm of teaching and learning, I have been disheartened when I have visited newly established small urban high schools. More often than not I have observed not the practice of freedom but the practice of continued domination and control of the students by the adults. The discipline that I have observed is a discipline that grows out of oppression—external control of those with power (adults) over those who ostensibly have no power (the high school students). Something is amiss here. This oppressive discipline is metered out to students by mainstream and non-mainstream educators alike.

Very few adult educators in urban educational settings seem to know how to transform the behavior and will of those students least served by the education system without resorting to external control and discipline. This knowing how to teach to transform does not occur overnight rather it is a journey you take over time as a teacher. It is a journey informed and shaped by our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom

NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

NSRF Events

California
New Coaches Institute
February 14-18
New Coaches Institute
February 28-March 4

Connecticut
New Coaches Institute
April 4-8
Hartford, CT

Massachusetts
New Coaches Institute
January; Newton, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute
Jan 26-28, March 30-31, April 13, 2005
Marlborough, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute
July 12-15

National Center Facilitators’ Meeting
April 29-30
Chicago, IL

New Hampshire
New Coaches Institute
July 25-29
Keene, NH

Oregon
New Coaches Institute
February 17-19, April 15-16
Portland, OR

Tennessee
New Coaches Institute
June 20-24
Chattanooga, TN

Wisconsin
New Gates Institute
June 20-24
Oshkosh, WI
New Coaches Institute
June 27 - July 1
Oshkosh, WI
Open Space Technology
August 4
Oshkosh, WI

2005 Events

“the academy is not a paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The Classroom, with all of its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, even to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”

“...bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom”

Margaret MacLean can be contacted at margaretmaclean@netscape.net

2005 Events

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As a teacher of English in urban high schools for many years, I found that my ability to work with urban teenagers disengaged from the educational process depended on developing relationships with them. Getting to know my students as unique individuals was one of the many joys of teaching. Using what I gained from getting to know each one of my students well helped me to develop a lot of strategies that helped me in my journey to empower them to become more authentic learners. In order to get to know each one of my students well it was essential that I co-construct with the student a sense of community. In our learning community the notion that we could learn from each other and the notion that all we brought our strengths and weaknesses to our community was

 Directors Report (continued from page 17)

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Director’s Report (continued from page 5)

American School in Japan
(continued from page 5)

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It was 95 degrees and very humid in Tokyo. School was about to start the following day. Most teachers had just returned from summer travelling and were dealing with the resulting jet lag. Many staff where moving classrooms after summer renovations. Perhaps not an ideal time for professional development days! Despite these inconve-
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Hopefully they now have enough new tools to keep their groups productive during the 2004-2005 school year. They are working on sending teachers to a CFG Coaches Institute this summer.

Since returning from Japan and reflecting on the experience, I have come to see with increased clarity how perfect the work of NSRF is for an international school setting. To open doors, deprivatize practice, and enhance our work with students through mutual support is important work for all our schools, but essential for schools as isolated in those international school settings.

Putty are glad we found the work of NSF and hope you will bring new places to our doors!

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