American School in Japan
(continued from page 5)

Many staff who moving classrooms after summer renovations. Perhaps not an ideal time for professional development days! Despite these inconveniences, the staff took to the work with open minds and were eager to practice the new skills and protocols introduced to them. The enthusiasm was palpable in all three groups of teachers I worked with. During our time together we packed a lot in - Problematic Questions, Feedback Nightmares, Zones, Chalk Talk, Compass Points, Save the Last Word For Me and The Consultancy Protocol. The reflections from participants indicated how thirsty they were for the meaningful and thoughtful work of knowledge they are tapping into: “The discussion was extremely rich...we thought as a group, listened openly.” “Collaborative interaction was excellent.” “Now I think I get it and I am looking forward to CFGs this year!” 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 perfectly the work of NSRF is for an international school setting. To open minds, deprive practice, and enhance our work with students through mutual support is important work for all our schools, but essential for schools as isolates in those international school settings.

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

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Directors Report
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2005 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 11
Marlborough, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute July 12-15
Cape Cod, MA

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

“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, 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 (continued on page 14)

The Practice of Freedom
Camille Greene, Connecticut

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Winter 2005

The 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.

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Winter 2005
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It is like the day before Christmas to me—to I can’t sleep the night before school. I wake up with the same anticipation I did when I was seven and would run down the stairs to see what Santa had left for me under the tree. The same feelings of anticipation exist when I think about meeting my students for the first time. I am excited to bring them the gift of learning about art. I bumble with glee at the prospect of discovering new young talent and helping my students appreciate the aesthetics of art.

Who benefits? And on the metacognitive level we ask: What will I know when I leave? What is it I expected to find an expansion of individual and collective journeys with our urban youth? Whether or not these educators are aware of it, they are putting down the groundwork for the future. Often those questions were similar to the ones used by Debbie Meier and Edgar Thomas in the 1980s. What are students taking home about their philosophy of “teaching with experience.” I have come to understand experience and education, specifically, the practice of freedom and possibilities if we transform large urban high schools to small classrooms where the teachers, parents, communities, and the students themselves bring their issues using nonviolent means.

Coaches training, I knew that one of the students talked about being a good student. I asked him about the group to state who they thought was doing a good job. He then set up a solution, heard him and made the necessary changes. The group was successful. At first, during the debriefing of the activity, there were those who were not satisfied such as “It was too hot” or “This is not appropriate for art class.” I listened and then reflected on what I saw happening during the game and how not all voices were heard or equally valued. I asked the group to state who they thought were the leaders, the innovators and the followers. The conversation took on a whole new dimension and was produced a brilliant suggestion on how to rearrange for the class to achieve a faster speed. I was also at times with a group that did not make connections to their lives and to their learning situation and was struggle with how we would get together each other and how we would be treated. We took time to resolve conflicts and learn from each other.

My students taught me how to challenge the genius within each one of them. They taught me how to channel their energies into the positive energy we used to advance our learning community. Students began to want to take ownership of their identity and felt their presence to be an integral part of the learning environment. Students did not want to be late to class because something to matter them that was going to occur. Students wanted to develop their genius. I taught myself and them how to ask essential questions, probing questions. We grappled with formulating high order thinking questions and used those questions to engage in Socratic Seminars, to do text based discussions, construct projects, and explore the world of possibilities and develop action plans for learning and to expand our horizons.

I expected to find an expansion of horizons in the new schools I visited, but lately I have been disheartened by the practices of discipline used by educators who have all the resources and opportunities to change their relationship with urban youth. Whether or not these educators are aware of it, they are practicing a discipline that grows out of oppression. The discipline is top down discipline; handed down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression. The discipline is top down discipline not oppression.

So where does this leave us as urban youth? Urban high schools into autonomous small high schools? It leaves us with a choice. Either we unconsciously replicate school as we now know it to be, or we consciously take on the challenge and together with our students co-construct “the paradise” of possibilities in a small school in small classrooms where the teachers, parents, communities, and the students themselves bring their issues using nonviolent means.

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