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 Amenberg, 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)
For the past few years I’ve been using the Success Analysis Protocol to unpack a text. This involves a group of people who have read a book and decided to unpack the book with a text. Here’s the way it worked in our CFG.

Our group decided we would like to read a book together. We read Respect by Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot and wanted to share our responses to the rich lessons in the book without taking notes to get through them. Using a modified Success Analysis Protocol, we were able to discuss the entire book in one session.

We divided the text into six chapters, each of which corresponded to one person’s experiences. We are a group of twelve so we worked in pairs. Each pair reread their chapter and pulled out the evidence of “respect” that they saw in the person’s daily approach to the people they served. In some instances these people were students, in others they were patients or clients, depending on the field of work being described.

Next, we charted the attributes or evidence of the person’s success at building respect and shared our thoughts with the group. We then took about five minutes for clarifying questions. After all the pairs shared their evidence, the whole group looked for patterns and surprises in the ways these six people “lived” their respect for others. Finally, we talked about the lessons or implications these six lives held for our practice as teachers, as caregivers, as people.

Even though most of the people being described were not classroom teachers and none of them were principals, we found many attributes with which we could connect. We were repeatedly reminded of the power of personal relationships and the value of taking the time to really listen to the people we work for, and those we work with each day.

Here are a few concrete examples of evidence we shared from the text:

- a photographer who never takes anonymous, “candid” photos and always shares prints with his subjects;

(continued on page 17)

Debbie’s CFG Group

Success Analysis with Text

1. Divide the text into chapters or sections of comparable size.
2. Divide your group into small groups of two, three, or four.
3. Have small groups read their assigned section and discuss the evidence of success they see in the story.
4. Small groups chart the attributes of the success they found and present it to the larger group.
5. Large group asks clarifying questions. (Repeat steps 4 & 5 for each small group.)
6. Large group looks for patterns in the success stories that have been shared.
7. Large group discusses implications of these success stories for their practice with students, colleagues, and families.
8. Debrief of the process. If your CFG is using an I-Map or reflective writing to document their work and “Close the Loop”, you might want to specifically pose a prompt that asks what changes in practice individuals are considering after this text-based discussion.

Load be followed as follows: On 1st base is the content of CFG work; 2nd base is knowing how to collaborate; and 3rd base is having cultural competency with critical consciousness.

Collaboration: showing genuine respect for the thoughts, views, and needs of the group; being willing to work together to reach the intended goals; and acting in ways that demonstrate commitment to these tenets. Knowing the rules and making them explicit is crucial. The beginning as well as having open, honest dialogue is crucial. Paying close attention to power dynamics and endeavoring to seek consensus. All of this requires give-and-take on the part of participants as well as facilitators.

Consciousness: herein lies the critical element that will break or make the experience meaningful. By consciousness, I mean having awareness of the history, culture and location of minority and/or disenfranchised groups here in the US and prior to their arrival. Possessing an understanding (or at the very least, the desire to understand) of what it will take to move an historically oppressed group of people forward in their knowledge, to develop fortitude and empower them to act in ways that will foster greater levels of academic achievement. Knowing this will inform the facilitators’ attitudes, preparations (content about CFG, what bodies of literature and experiences will speak to the group) and what is needed in order to build genuine relationships with individuals and the group as a collective. This consciousness requires facilitators to do their own ongoing homework, to be thoughtful and fearless, yet cautious, in their quest to get at the hard issues and intentionally create the space to have the difficult conversations that most facilitators oftentimes avoid. By not focusing on critical consciousness, the facilitators’ behaviors will likely yield cursory conversations; shallow, low introuds (if any) and likely bring transformative moments that can change the beliefs, processes and actions that are modeled to dismantle systems of inequity.

Lastly, but no less important than having bases loaded in the aforementioned areas, is to build authentic relationships with whomever is in the room. Establishing heartfelt relationships will set in motion everything that follows from being transparent about facilitation, making difficult decisions in consultation with participants, working through dilemmas, taking risks and genuinely caring and trusting one another.

We are tired of the sessions that dance around issues which are of fundamental importance to students, families and others. The following formula can maximize your chances of winning: prepare your team to win by doing your own homework so that you know your content; work toward true collaboration; be or become culturally competent with critical consciousness; and build effective, authentic relationships. Having your bases loaded with these essentials in place can result in The Grand Slam and yield a powerful learning experience for everyone.

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(continued from page 4)
enlarge the tools they had available to nurture the growth of their collaborative groups. This was deeply important work. New places to our doors! A full day of sessions. Isolated as those in international schools, but essential for schools as support is important work for all our doors, deprivatize practice, and enhance come to see with increased clarity how mer.

to a CFG Coaches Institute this sum-
tive during the 2004-2005 school year. I was looking forward to CFGs this year!

"Now I think I get it! I tended openly," "Colleague interaction was excellent," "I think I get it! I tend to look at things from another angle."

Since returning from Japan and the following week. Most teachers had just returned from summer travelling and had no new material to share. It was 95 degrees and very humid in Tokyo. School was about to start the next day. Gene Thompson-Grove is one of three Co-Directors of NSRF. She can be contacted at gthompsongrove@earthlink.net

The Practice of Freedom
Camill Greene, Connecticut

As a teacher of English in urban high schools for many years, I found that my ability to relate to and understand the needs of my students was enhanced when I worked as a volunteer teacher. I have come to realize that the practice of freedom is a powerful tool for teaching and learning.

In this article, I will explore the concept of freedom and its significance in the classroom. Freedom is not simply the absence of constraints, but a process of self-discovery and growth. Teachers must create a classroom environment that fosters this process, where students are encouraged to explore their own ideas and beliefs.

I will discuss the importance of creating a safe and inclusive classroom, where students feel valued and respected. This includes creating a supportive community, where students can learn from each other and share their experiences. It also means recognizing the diversity of students and creating a space where they can feel comfortable and included.

Additionally, I will explore how the practice of freedom can be cultivated through various strategies, such as differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and student-centered pedagogies. These strategies can be implemented in a variety of ways, depending on the needs of the students and the context of the classroom.

Finally, I will reflect on my own experiences as a teacher and how the practice of freedom has impacted my teaching practice. I hope that this article will inspire others to consider this approach in their own classrooms, and to actively work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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foster educational and social equity by realizing the mission of the National different? How does a facilitator know Which features are similar? Which are different? Why is this the case? And what does matter? While diversity among ethnic to work in urban Hispanic, and Asian people of African, color.

tive questions ensued: took it beyond suburbia into urban contexts other facilitators ask about goals, and I asked ourselves all of the ques-
tions and perhaps even some answers. In my position as Program Director for the Small Schools Project, I had groups of Black educators to work with to increase the supply of quality educational options for Black children. Without a doubt, these individuals care deeply for the souls of Black children. I had the freedom to construct CFG Institutes that would meet the needs and assist them in the work of planning to open new small high schools in urban communities. My NSF colleague, Camilla Greene, and I designed and facilitated these trainings. (Gina Kaplan co-facilitated with us in Milwaukee, WI.) Camilla and I asked ourselves all of the ques-
tions other facilitators ask about goals, objectives, audience, resources, logistics, etc., but what was significant was also how we could design training for groups who were comprised predominantly of people of color which was different? How does a facilitator know these create dynamic events that will enable us to realize the mission of the National School Reform Faculty which 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? When I started working with The Black Alliance for Educational Options in September 2003, I soon learned that I could create the opportu-
ity to gain some insights into these new schools in urban communities. We used resources of these strangers offered us powerful reminders for our practice in schools. Using the Success Anxiety Protocol we were able to connect their lives with our own. As we debriefed the process, some people talked about wanting to go back to the text to reread particular sec-
tions, while others talked about sharing this book with their staff and school faculties. Everyone agreed that using the protocol to put ourselves in the shoes of the Black Alliance members helped us go more deeply into the lessons of these lives, the lessons of the text. We moved beyond feeling passively inspired to draw a distance from feeling motivated to act to apply the principles learned and bring them to the work of educational leaders and educators with more experience and authority in our departments and schools. Our conversations, our examination of the text, were about how to apply the principles learned. Having used the Success Anxiety Protocol as a lens to read about the lives in Lucent Foundation, NSFRF Facilitators have four districts for three years (from 2000-2003) in the TPI administered Lucent Peer Collaboration process. This year, two of these districts received a year of continuation fund-

The Black Alliance for Educational Options comprises predominantly of people of color who work in urban settings. What would be different from other groups that we’ve trained? Doubtless, we both knew that it would indeed be different from what we had done in other places. How could we both build on the foundation of CFGs and address the realities of inner city educators, their students and families? We planned and conducted these trainings and, in doing so, they were quite different from oth-

er’s that I was aware of. We included readings authored by people of color who wrote about successful experiences with students who were racially, ethnically and economically diverse. We used resources of these One group. This is not unusual for a person of color in the workplace. When I started working with RoLesia Holman, Maryland (continued from page 12)
Associate Principals (nine), and one for the Directors (seven). Note: the initial CFGs were brought together as a group only four or five in each – as there is probably a critical mass needed of at least six in order for a CFG to work. The Superintendent even went so far as to pay for refreshments to be prepared by our district kitchen staff and delivered to the site of each CFG meeting. She included the meeting times for each of these CFGs in the Superintendent’s Administrators’ calendar for the year, indicating these CFG sessions would substitute the weekly meetings of each of the administrative staff each month. Whether such Central Administrative, specifically Superintendent support, is essential to the creation and sustainability of these CFGs is not clear, but it certainly didn’t hurt. And I believe that our Superintendent’s continually having me use CFG Protocols at Administrative Team meetings at least helped create a new supportive culture of professional learning communities among all our administrators.

These groups met consistently on a monthly basis for the next two years – the Elementary and Secondary Principals groups met at 8:30-9:00 a.m. from 3:30-5:00 p.m. and rotated among the different subjects so that no one or two had to always drive the farthest to get to the meetings (ours is a 155 square mile district in which schools are widely spread). The Directors met in the morning (8:30-10:30) in one of the conference rooms in the Central Administration building. Usually, the two hour ses-
sions are preferable and were more productive, although we did accomplish things in the hour-and-a-half meet-

ings. During these CFG meetings I introduced each group to a number of protocols and then we re-used several as the participants began to identify issues they wished to tackle and a protocol they thought might help. I introduced and used Connections start-
ing with the second session of each group, and used reflections from the very beginning with each group. I also used ice-breakers (or warm-ups) to begin virtually every session as I thought that these people, despite sev-
eral having been in the district for a number of years, really didn’t know each other very well, and needed to build a sense of trust, particularly as they increasingly came to take risks within their groups to share real con-

cerns, issues, and problems. I began each CFG with the Success Analysis Protocol as a way to get them initially to share something positive and to celebrate successes so as not to focus only on problems – these people in particular are sorely in need positive strokes and must be encouraged if they are ever to engage in the many difficult challenges facing us all in public education. We established our Group Norms, and used all variations of protocols for getting help on an issue. Most particularly Consultancies, Sticky Issues, and One Minute Consultants – as this was fre-
quent what they appreciated the most. Also, we used all of the variations of Text-

usted Discussions – including The Final Word, Save the Last Word for Me, and Text Rendering (now a personal favorite). We discussed and worked with the various protocols for look-


For the right mix of profes-
sional development for teachers to be effective: searching for journal articles and books which are timely, finding workshops and graduate level courses which are readily available. Finding the balance between meeting the needs of the individuals and the needs of the school or district can be daunting. Finding time is a constant issue all these tasks and more fall on the shoulders of the “Curriculum Coordinator”. Imagine, however, you are a Curriculum Coordinator and the nearest college or uni-

versity is seven hours away - by plane. Magazines arrive past the month of issue, books need to be ordered sight unseen and take equally long to arrive and for workshop leaders or consultants, they literally need days of travel to reach you and often arrive jet lagged and intimidated by their sur-

roundings. These are the working condi-
tions of Patty Butz the curriculum coor-
dinator at the American School in Japan. So, it’s not surprising that she was not only not able to connect with the work of NSRF but to bring the work of NSRF to her school.

The American School in Japan (ASIJ) is for all intents and purposes a “typical” American school of 1528 students PreK-12. Founded in 1902 to provide a high quality education to expatriate business, embassy and missionary families, it is housed on a campus setting of attractive buildings in the suburbs of western Tokyo. Students arrive daily on school buses as they would in the US, and their days follow a “typical” US curriculum, with the addition of Japanese language, history and culture at all levels. The philo-

sophy of the school is embodied in the statement “A new age in the 1970’s. I have found this to be a real advantage for us. Unlike many other schools, ASIJ has a curriculum that is truly international in scope and balances the faculty’s work with the students in the elementary and secondary schools throughout our district.”

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re, using the Tuning Protocol and some used the Success Analysis. In the spring of 2004, during an evaluation for school accreditation purposes, when asked about the offerings at the school the staff overwhelmingly pointed to their collaborative work as a positive experience and one they wanted to continue.

It was at this point that Patty con-
tacted NSRF and asked for someone willing to travel to Japan to work with the faculty. The final date was set in March 2004. All of the contacts were made primarily in Vermont and work part time for VT NSRF. 20 odd years ago I was an international school educator. For 10 years travelling the world and teaching. I met my husband, Bruce, in Tokyo. In the 1970’s I feel very much at home in an interna-
tional school setting. I ended up being a match for Patty and ASIJ. Consequently, I found myself travel-


Andrea Nussbaum


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Apples and CFGs in Harmony: A "Core" Curriculum
John Pieper, Wisconsin

Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney’s American Teacher Awards to 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 2003 John Pieper was one of 30 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG Coaches training was one of the benefits included with this special recognition.

This is the second of three installments following John’s journey as a CFG Coach.

“Y
ou do realize we will have to have someone in with food?” Brenna chimed in as the three of us began to plan our first CFG meeting. Kathy was busy passing the room. Brenna would bring the treats. I was to provide the soda. A message was sent out to all building staff members and then we anxiously waited to see who would show up. Brenna and Kathy had gone through the CFG training early last summer. They too were eager to put their training to use.

On the day of the organizational meeting, eight souls uneasily stared at each other. There were a few questions pertaining to when the group would meet, how much time would people have to invest, and the truly important question, how would this work help the students? Stacey agreed to bring in a sample of work. November third would be the meeting, eight souls uneasily stared at training to use.

There were limited resources available, and she was uncomfortable with the time
done through the CFG training early last summer. They too were eager to put their training to use.

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There were limited resources available, and she was uncomfortable with the time

frame she had to present the unit to the class. Considering the fact that four of the group’s members did not have any background in such things as probing and clarifying questions, the protocol flowed smoothly and effectively. There was an intensity of thought that you just don’t get when you meet informally.

The true power of the protocol came out when we debriefed the process. Stacey’s words were an affirmation to the value of the work.

“At first I was nervous about presenting.” She said. “But the further into it we got, the more secure I felt. I was so impressed by the depth of thinking all of you were doing for me. This has really been a helpful experience. Thank you for being there for me.”

Lot’s comments were equally gratifying. “As we were discussing Stacey’s dilemma, I found myself thinking of ways her work, and the comments from others, could affect my work. Not only did the process help Stacey, but it helped me as well. This is really neat stuff!”

The group was almost giddy with excitement. I just coyly smiled and let the deep sigh of relief. Brenna, Kathy, and I all agreed this first CFG meeting exceeded our expectations. Even better, a colleague volunteered to take our classes if we wanted to set up some classroom observations. I am blessed to work with such a wonderful staff.

Later, as I had time to reflect, my thoughts drifted back to last year’s Winter Meeting. I had talked with many CFG Coaches and they shared a variety of mixed experiences. They aimed concerns regarding time, administrative support, defensive posturing by peers, and a sense of isolation. Yet for all of the obstacles facing these coaches, each and every one projected a sense of commitment and optimism. The demeanor of these people was like that of someone who understands the outcome of the process, but also acknowledges the critical factors that are required to nurture growth. In some ways the situation reminds me of Johnny Appleseed. A man of simple means, he had the vision and determination to dedicate his life to a process. He did not wait to watch the apple trees grow. He spread the seeds near and far knowing that he was enriching the lives of everyone he met.

Like so many John Chapmans, CFG Coaches and facilitators are also planting seeds. We seek out the fertile ground of learning and plant seeds of knowledge. Our ideas are rooted in sound practices. We have a mission to bring meaningful learning and equity to our students. We see the potential good the CFG work can bring to our schools. Yet we understand it will take time for our work to branch out across America. If we try to grow the seed and continue to successfully reach out to more and more educators, then at some point, our patience, persistence and passion will come to fruition. When that epiphany occurs and there is a magnitude paradigm shift in the way schools function, then it will be time for a “Gala” celebration for our students and colleagues. Isn’t life “Delicious?”

John Pieper can be contacted at jpieper@wrec.cc. Websteyr Stanley CFG members: John Pieper, Brenna Garrison-Bruden, Lori Satterstrum, Kathy Riederer, Sarah Poquette, Stacey Reese, Angie Thurn, Marcie Gundlach, and Angela Karz.
laugh the day like Christmas to me — I can’t sleep the night before. Knowing that our community was going to be going with each other the same expectation I to establish relationships. 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 bubble with glee at the prospect of discovering new young talent and helping my students appreciate the aesthetics of art. The only change is that now students to not want to miss class because they felt their presence to be an integral part of the learning environment. Students did not want to be late to class because something that mattered to them 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 for expanding 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 relationships 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: handed down discipline not the co-constructed discipline that helps to instill in each participant in the learning community the will to choose to do the right thing. Instead, there seems to be an assumption operating that “these kids can’t handle democratic participation.” My urban high school students and I figured out how to craft a mutually respectful learning community that respected our differences, did not shy away from disagreements and confronted issues. The journeys and the co- construction of learning and discipline practices was always easy. Sometimes I was confronted with the harsh realities of their lives, or I was confronted with the harsh reality that I had said or done something that was not perceived by a student or students as the right thing. But it was through open, honest dialogue that became a community of learners willing to take on and try to resolve our conflicts and disagreements into the positive energy we used to advance our learning community. Students began to not want to miss class because the community focused on learning. In each learning, I had to help him or her find order for me to engage each student in expanding our learning community. In order for me to establish, maintain and expand our learning community before I could establish a reciprocal learning community, I had to establish, maintain and expand our learning community. In my classroom before I could with other educators, I also needed to establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could engage urban youth most of whom were reluctant readers and reluctant learners. My students and I established reciprocal learning communities when we needed to establish, maintain and expand our learning community. In order for me to engage each student in learning, I had to help him or her find his or her voice in a supportive community for learning. In the learning situation we struggled with how we were going to treat each other and how we were going to be treated. We took time to resolve conflicts and learn from each conflict. My students taught me how to establish early on in the school year. This became the foundation for all of our work.

Crucial to developing a sense of community in my English classroom was the journey that was the power of the circle. We became a community when we sat in a circle breaking the hierarchy of desks and rows; who is sitting in the back or the front of the room is no longer an issue. In our discussions we talked a lot about metacognition. We regularly debriefed and evaluated our learning performance. In our learning together, we learned to ask questions of ourselves, each other and the curriculum. Often those questions were similar to the ones used by Debbie Meier and the Central Park East learning environment. For Whom is this important? Who benefits? And on the metacognitive level we asked: How will I know when I know it? It was also crucial that my students learn how to give me feedback about my performances and interactions with them.

Early on I figured out that professional learning communities were not only valuable communities to establish with other educators, I also needed to establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could engage urban youth most of whom were reluctant readers and reluctant learners. My students and I established reciprocal learning communities when we needed to establish, maintain and expand our learning community. In my classroom before I could establish a reciprocal learning community, I had to help him or her find his or her voice in a supportive community for learning. In the learning situation we struggled with how we were going to treat each other and how we were going to be treated. We took time to resolve conflicts and learn from each conflict. My students taught me how to...
These are a few quotes from some of the “Reflections” of the Principals’ CFGs I have been coaching in the Ithaca City School District in upstate New York. Public School Principals, Associate Principals, and central office Directors typically lead very lonely professional careers. There is only one Elementary Principal in any given elementary school and, although they may meet with their Associate Principals, Secondary Principals find themselves alone in making decisions. And certainly Directors at the middle management level in school districts - e.g. of Special Education, Staff Development, and Pre-K are in lonely positions. As the above quotes indicate, it is my strong belief that school district administrators are almost desperately in need of CFG professional learning communities. Thus, in this article I will briefly summarize how I got these groups started, support for them from the Central Administration, how often, where, and when we met, what worked and what didn’t.

Several years ago when a new Superintendent of Schools was hired, I was in the interim position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, K-12, while continuing to serve as the Principal of the Alternative Community School (6-12). In that capacity in her first summer, the Superintendent consulted with me about activities for a summer workshop with the district’s “Administrative Team” (all Principals, Associate Principals, Directors, and Managers). She knew of my involvement with the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and thus I designed a series of text-based discussions, workshops, and an introduction to some other protocols as well. This culminated in my recommendation at the end of the summer workshop that we form several CFGs to continue this kind of professional collegial sharing. Thus, two Elementary Principals groups (four each), a Secondary Principals CFG (four), and a Secondary Associate Principals group (five) met, with support from the Superintendent, on the last day of school to deliberate on how to continue on with these CFGs, at a meeting and/or two, all but the Secondary Principals’ CFG petered out and did not continue to meet. My guess is that it was too much to expect that they could carry on with the CFG activities without the experience a facilitator/coach such as I provided our Secondary Principals. In the summer of 2001-02, again at my request to the Administrative Team summer workshop, and again with the full support of the Superintendent, I presented a new CFG proposal. This time I offered to facilitate/coach two administrator CFGs, each made up of a mix of Elementary and Secondary Principals, Associate Principals and Directors. Although there was unimposing support for this proposal, it was modified to create three CFGs; one for the Elementary Principals (eight), one for the Secondary Principals and (continued on page 16) and the other half helping others and teaching them. His grade in class was 96.5. He is a member of the top 10% of all my students and his quiet leadership led me to believe he could be an asset to the art program at our school.

My experiences with Edgar led me to recommend him for the National Art Honor Society. He joined us and has been an active member for the past three years. In his second year at Eagle High School, he was invited to join the Science National Honor Society and has been an active member in that organization for the past two years. He made a critical decision that semester to focus on learning, a choice he continues to make. I believe I had a small role to play in spices Edgar’s decision. I also made a mindful choice that semester to focus on understanding the students in front of me and build relationships with them. I was especially determined to meet the challenge of the pair of brown eyes in the back of the room. The interaction I had with Edgar has made me look at my practice differently. Sergiovanni (2001) states, “Teachers analyze different situations and monitor how situations change as practice unfolds. They craft strategies that combine action with thinking.” I still keep a journal and reflect on my teaching practice. I can’t say I have found the holy grail for all teachers, but what I have discovered in really looking at the needs of my students, working on building relationships with my students and continually reflecting on my and their thoughts and actions helps me always be a better teacher tuned to my students’ needs. I do get complaints all the time from past and current students, “Why didn’t you get to do that?” or “Why aren’t we doing what my sister did?” My answer is always, “I don’t have the same students as last year or when your sister took my class why would I teach the same way or the same thing?” Over the past 12 years, teaching strategies, classroom management strategies and various standardized tests have come and gone during all of this change, I have maintained the students at the center of my teaching. Striving to become an effective teacher who cared for them, laughed with them, and taught them something about themselves that they didn’t even know has always been my passion. Edgar is now a senior and has enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Recently, Edgar and I spent some time after school talking about those first days in art class and how I came to know him in the first place. Edgar talks about the façade he felt he was compelled to wear as a Mexican-American teenage male. I believe I had a small role to play in how I came to know him. In the first days in art class Edgar commented that he doesn’t understand some of the work and that I don’t understand the art world. I believe I had a small role to play in how I came to know him. I believe I had a small role to play in how I came to know him in the first place. Edgar also talks about the state curriculum specifies in a beginning art class the students will have studio experiences in both 2-D and 3-D art production. The sculpture project has proved to be very challenging to most of my students, even students who had previously done well in the class. Edgar immediately understood the 2-D and 3-D concepts and was quickly producing structurally sound projects. At the same time, the other half was made to feel their work was a failure. They rang and as all the students left the class, I told him, “You make a big mistake today – I now know how smart you are and what a good leader you can be.” I winked and smiled and left.

As an art teacher I have worked hard to build in opportunities to learn more about my students. I move about the room critiquing artwork and giving technique suggestions. I constantly struggle though to provide each student with individual instruction and personal time in classes of 35 students. I try during these one-on-one times to learn more about each student and allow space for them to learn about themselves and their strengths and others and their strengths. Edgar, during his 18-week course, became a leader. Sometimes young Hispanic males fall prey to the stereotype that doing well in school is not “cool.” Edgar became a positive example that doing well in class, both academically and artistically, does not diminish your “coolness.” During class we talked and learned more about each other. We found out we had in common than either of us would have thought. We shared our family experiences, our experiences in school and even our similar religious beliefs and values. He began to exceed expectations rather than just meet them in my art class and in all aspects of his life. For example the state curriculum specifies in a beginning art class the students will have studio experiences in both 2-D and 3-D art production. The sculpture project has proved to be very challenging to most of my students, even students who had previously done well in the class. Edgar immediately understood the 2-D and 3-D concepts and was quickly producing structurally sound projects. At the same time, he noticed he was one of the few. He therefore would spend half the class working on his project...
begin in places where we don’t currently have a Center of Activity or NSF Research Institute. However, spanning several Centers of Activity, or need the resources of several NSF Research Facilitators from across the country. The goal of every project is to leave the place with the capacity to continue the NSF work on its own, using local resources and people. In this way, these projects often provide NSF 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 NSF’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. Over three years NSF has between 15 and 25 VISTA volunteers working in 15 schools throughout Vermont and approximately 70 volunteers under the direction of two NSF VISTA state directors. All VISTA volunteers attend a CFG Seminar and then apply their facilitative leadership skills in their schools. In Indianapolis the VISTAs focus on the Gates Foundation Small School conversion process, taking place in all five Indianapolis public high schools, serving as liaisons and foundational resources for the school districts. In the Cleveland Municipal School District, two NSF VISTA volunteers are working in 20 Cleveland schools and eight interns in CFG/Facilitative Leadership practicums. This year NSF 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 NSF National Facilitators are included among some 20 Small School Change Coaches who are partnering with nearly 130 urban high schools in the 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 NSF Seminars and are applying the practices. During the first two years, a NSF National Facilitator worked full-time for Knowledge Works and met monthly with the 20 School Change coaches.

In addition, two NSF National Facilitators work with one Ohio high school that is developing leaders for each of the school’s emerging six new small schools. An NSF National Facilitator is also working with one Ohio high school on an Early College project.

- **The Small Schools Cooperative (SSCC)** provides technical assistance, in the form of school coaches, to schools that receive reimbursement 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 schools open this fall in Washington. The Collaborative is a partnership of the Small Schools Project, the Coalition of Essential Small Schools (COESS), the National School Reform Faculty, and the National School Reform Faculty.

NSF National Facilitators have been supporting the professional development of the SSCC coaches since its inception. NSF is also responsible for sharing what we are learning in Washington with the national NSF network. Toward that end, NSF National 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 seminar guide in a CD/HTML format.

- **The Collaborative Learning Communities Project** is funded by The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI) and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and 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 relationships, focused collaborative dialogue among all levels of the district community, and begin to transform the professional development culture. Last year, they worked to help all students achieve high standards of learning. NSF volunteers work with students of color.

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

#### Debbie Bambino

- **President, Professional Development Institute**
- **Director, Center for Professional Development**
- **Director, New Jersey Network of Sites**

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Winter 2005
Snapshot of a CFG

Gathered in a cozy living room, enjoying the warmth of a fire, sat the eight members of the “Boundary Spanners” CFG. We are all educators: a school principal, school psychologist, learning specialist, college instructors (teacher prep), science museum educator, and me. Several of us are also CFG Coaches. (Two of us, Jay Davis and I, are also NSRF Facilitators.) At this meeting, what we call this Critical Friends Group got started. Three of the members were participants together in a coaches’ training last year, and determined to create a Critical Friends Group that would really push the thinking of the members.

At that recent fire-side meeting, I was co-presenting a brochure, using the Tuning Protocol. We had also included a text-based discussion as part of the agenda. That led to rich discussion and, of course, we found ourselves pressed for time. I was eager to go ahead with the Tuning, despite the time crunch, (only 30 minutes), anxious to get feedback on the brochure so it could be used immediately. Sticking to the protocol is something I very strongly about, and often “preach” about not changing the process. “The protocols are created very consciously, and have been tested over time... they work the way they are written...” I BELIEVE THIS to be true. I would never allow this to happen in a coaches’ training. Yet, faced with the dilemma of squeezing a Tuning into limited minutes, I heard myself saying, “We can skip the warm up, but go right into the cool... I really need to know what doesn’t work.” Does that sound like the sentiments of a NORTH, or what??? “Just give me the information so I can get to work on it.”

The designated facilitator strongly supported otherwise, but acquiesced. We went through the protocol, and dedicated several quick rounds to cool feedback. The comments were actionable, credible and audible - all the characteristics...
If you come to Massachusetts or southern New Hampshire to visit the NSRF “Center of Activity,” you won’t find a building, or an administrative assistant, or even a phone number in the telephone directory. However, you will find a great deal of CFG work being done by hundreds of CFG Coaches, led by nearly a dozen NSRF National Facilitators and interns, in schools and school districts across the region.

In 1999, when NSRF moved to Harmony in southern New Hampshire, NSRF was the first school in NSRF’s network to move to whole school CFGs. In fact, Souhegan’s use of CFGs to realize its mission – Souhegan High School aspires to be a community of learners born of respect, trust, and courage – was featured in an early NSRF video: A Community of Learners.

There has been a steady growth in activity in the region since 2000, and NSF-funded initiatives have supported the first of many national CFG New Coaches Seminars in the Northeast region. Last summer alone, participants in Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire sponsored approximately 150 educators in Maine who are NSRF-trained coaches. In addition, CMS’s NSRF-related activities at the Southern Maine Partnership (SMP) have been ongoing since 1996. These have taken place for principals, as groups in leadership development programs through the Vermont Principals Association, and in varied formats and have included annual meetings and 5-day summer sessions for new coaches. Since 2002 they have hosted annual meetings and statewide listservs open to all trained coaches in Maine.

Despite these consistent efforts, the single largest component of SMP’s NSRF-related work has been helping educators in Maine become NSRF-trained CFG/PLC Coaches, and providing support for them after initial training. At this time, there are approximately 150 educators in Maine who are NSRF-trained CFG/PLC coaches.

In Maine, NSRF-trained CFGs are now working intensively with schools through their New England Small Schools Network Program (NESSN), especially in Boston, Malden and Worcester, MA, and in Utica, NY. NSRF Facilitators also have a small cadre of trained coaches in individual schools.

NSRF-related activities at the Southern Maine Partnership (SMP) have been ongoing since 1996. While some work of the Southern Maine Partnership is explicitly NSRF, the spillover influence into many aspects of SMP work has been large. The single largest component of SMP’s NSRF-related work has been helping educators in Maine become NSRF-trained CFG/PLC Coaches, and providing support for them after initial training. At this time, there are approximately 150 educators in Maine who are NSRF-trained CFG/PLC coaches. A second aspect of their work is support for trained coaches and the hosting of coaches’ support meet-

### Vermont NSRF

Vermont NSRF (VT NSRF) activities have been ongoing since 1999. In this time period much has changed. In 1999, they were a small group of three individual coaches working independently in different geographic areas of the state. In 2004 they are a collaborative group of 7 national level facilitators whom:

- meet regularly in center retreats and meetings
- have agreed upon standards of practice
- use the tools of our practice to conduct center meetings
- have used the future protocol to begin the development of a strategic plan
- have developed a relationship with the Snelling Center for Government for fiscal services and administrative support

As of July 15th they have hired a part-time director, Margaret MacLean. Originally, introductory one-day sessions have taken place to initially introduce participants to CFG practices. These have taken place for principals, as groups in leadership development programs through the Vermont Principals Association, and for the statewide group of Special Education Directors and Administrators through the Vermont Principals Association.

The core of their work since 1999 has been scheduling and conducting coaches’ training. They have seeped into many aspects of SMP work, and have graduated coaches who support each other’s growth as facilitators.

### Watkinson School, Connecticut

At Watkinson School, Hartford’s only independent day school, the impact of CFGs has been immeasurable (although we’re trying to change that through better documentation methods!). Although about 60% of faculty and administrators participate in voluntary CFGs, the language and methods of critical friends have seeped into almost every aspect of our school culture. In classes students challenge each other’s assumptions; give each other warm and cool feedback, and tune each other’s work. At our annual upper school retreat, students participate in the Future Protocol, where they imagine who they want to be in the future and speak about it as if it has already happened. They devise a plan for how their high school career can help them get there. At our faculty meetings we often use protocols like Microlabs or a Consultancy to get at people’s issues and concerns around a new proposal.

At a recent board meeting, the entire board of directors participated in a continuum exercise designed to help members of the school reach agreement about which school initiatives should be the focus of a major new capital campaign. Our CFGs are facilitated by pairs of committed coaches who support each other’s growth as facilitators.
implement small school development, support and technical assistance plans for 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 NSRF 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 NSRF is in its 4th year with the Cleveland Municipal School District. During the past three years, 16 NSRF National Facilitators have worked with 24 Cleveland educators and eight interns in CFG/Facilitative Leadership practices. This year NSRF 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 NSRF National Facilitators are included among some 20 Small School Change Coaches who are supporting nearly 20 Ohio urban high schools in the 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 NSRF Seminars and are applying the practices. During the first two years, a NSRF National Facilitator worked full-time for Knowledge Works and met monthly with the 20 School Change coaches.

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Toward that end, NSRF 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.

- **The Collaborative Learning Communities Project**, which is administered by The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI) and funded by Lucent Technologies, is currently developing a comprehensive high school model across the country an opportunity to support nearly 20 Ohio urban high schools. An NSRF National Facilitator works with a group of 20 School Change coaches. They maintain, “All kids can learn. An early "givens" 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 fictional schools:

- The Charles Darwin School where the teachers would learn based on their ability.”
- The Pontius Pilate School that believes “all kids can learn, if they take advantage of the opportunity we give to them.”
- The Combined Education for All School where “all kids can learn something, and they help all students experience academic and social relationships, freedom, and safe, nurturing environment.”
- The Henry Higgins School, where they believe “all kids can learn and they work to help all students achieve high standards of learning.”

The authors go on to describe an activity that asks readers to choose the prevailent 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 reach 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.

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

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So how do we align our belief that all students can learn at high levels with the tools, models, and paradigms 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 reach 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.

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

Dave Lehman, New York

Doing Principals’ CFGs

It is very rare that all of the Elementary Principals got together to share... if we could always work this way it would be incredible.

- an Elementary Principal

I enjoyed this more than I ever thought I would. Strategies [pro- tactic] are very helpful, and realizing that we have similar issues is reassuring. I look forward to having the consultation piece next time.

- a Secondary Associate Principal

I was very pleased with the way the meeting/training occurred today. I must admit, I was hesitant to become part of a CFG – time issues. However, after this session, I can clearly see the benefits of a CFG and how becoming part of a group can actually save me some time and help me complete my job responsibilities more effectively.

- a Director

Looking at student work is directly applicable to work with department heads and staff at staff meetings. Help with my issue expanded my thinking on it; and helped me to plan an action. I like this a lot.

- a Secondary Principal

These are a few quotes from some of the “Reflections” of the Principals’ CFGs I have been coaching in the Ithaca City School District in upstate New York. Public School Principals, Associate Principals, and central office Directors typically lead very lonely professional careers. There is only one Elementary Principal in any given elementary school and, although they may meet with their Associate Principals, Secondary Principals find themselves alone in making decisions. And certainly Directors at the middle management level in school districts - e.g. of Special Education, Staff Development, and Pre-K are in lonely positions. As the above quotes indicate, it is my strong belief that school district administrators are almost desperately in need of CFG professional learning communities. Thus, in this article I will briefly summarize how I got these groups started, support for them from the Central Administration, how often, where, and when we met, what worked and what didn’t.

Several years ago when a new Superintendent of Schools was hired, I was in the interim position of Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, K-12, while continuing to serve as the Principal of the Alternative Community School (6-12). That capacity, in her first summer, the Superintendent consulted with me about activities for a summer workshop with the district’s “Administrative Team” (all Principals, Associate Principals, Directors, and Managers). She knew of my involvement with the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and thus I designed a series of text-based discussions, walkabouts, and an introduction to some other protocols as well. This culminated in my recommendation at the end of the summer workshop that we form several CFGs to continue this kind of professional collegial sharing.

Thus, two Elementary Principals groups (four each), a Secondary Principals CFG (four), and a Secondary Associate Principals group (five) met, with support from the Superintendent, on the last morning of the workshop to engage in “consultancies” and decide on times to meet. Our Secondary Principals CFG, of which I was a member, met regularly for the next two years, either once or twice per month in the office of one of the Principals, on a rotating basis, after school from 3:30-5:00. Although the Superintendent continued to call on me to use CFG protocols (particularly text-based discussions) during our monthly Administrative Team meetings, and despite the other groups very much wanting to do their CFGs after a meeting or two, all but the Secondary Principals CFG petered out and did not continue to meet. My guess is that it was too much to expect that they could carry on the CFG activities without the experience a facilitator/coach such as I provided our Secondary Principals.

In the summer of 2001-02, again at my request, the Administrative Team summer workshop, and again with the full support of the Superintendent, I presented a new CFG proposal. This time I offered to facilitate/coach two administrator CFGs, each made up of a mix of Elementary and Secondary Principals, Associate Principals and Directors. Although there was unanimity support for this proposal, it was modified to create three CFGs; one for the Elementary Principals (eight), one for the Secondary Principals and (continued on page 16)

would have failed.

The bell rang and as all the students left the class, I told him, “You made a big mistake today – I now know how smart you are and what a good leader you can be.” I winked and he smiled and left.

As an art teacher I have worked hard to build in opportunities to learn more about my students. I move about the room critiquing artwork and giving technique suggestions. I am constantly struggling though to provide each student with individual instruction and personal time in classes of over 35 students. I try during these times or once-on-one times to learn more about each student and allow space for them to learn about themselves and their strengths and others and their strengths. Edgar, during the 18-week course, became a leader. Sometimes young Hispanic males fall prey to the stereotype that doing well in school is not “cool.” Edgar became a positive example that doing well in class, both academically and artistically, does not diminish your “coolness.” During class we talked and learned more about each other. We found out we had more in common than either of us would have thought. We shared our family experiences, our experiences in school and even our similar religious beliefs and values. He began to exceed expectations rather than just meet them in my art class and in all aspects of his life. For example the state curriculum specifies in a beginning art class the students will have studio experiences in both 2-D and 3-D art production. The sculpture project has proved to be very challenging to most of my students, even students who had previously done well in the class. Edgar immediately understood the 2-D and 3-D concepts and was quickly producing structurally sound art pieces. At the same time, he noticed he was one of the few. He therefore would spend the other half helping others and teaching them. His grade in class was an A. He was the top 10% of all my students and his quiet leadership led me to believe he could be an asset to the art program at our school.

My experiences with Edgar led me to recommend him for the National Art Honor Society. He joined and has been an active member for the past three years. In his second year at Eagle High School, he was invited to join the Science National Honor Society and has been an active member in that organization for the past two years. He made a critical choice that semester to focus on learning, a choice he continues to make.

I believe I had a small role to play in sparking Edgar’s decision. I also made a mindful choice that semester to focus on understanding the students in front of me and build relationships with them. I was especially determined to meet the challenge of the pair of brown eyes in the back of the room. The interaction I had with Edgar has made me look at my practice differently. Sergiovanni (2001) states, “Teachers analyze different situations and monitor how situations change as practice unfolds. They craft strategies that combine action with thinking” (p. 253). I still keep a journal and reflect on my teaching practice. I can’t say I have found the holy grail for all teachers, but what I have discovered in really looking at my and their thoughts and actions helps me to be a better teacher tuned to my students’ needs.


Edgar is now a senior and has enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. Recently, Edgar and I spent some time after school talking about those first days in art class when I had to throw away his sculpture – “I almost did.”

He continued with how all his friends felt they had to maintain a facade he felt he was compelled to wear as a Mexican-American teenage male. As he put it, “there is no Mexican-American teenage male.” He continued with how all his friends have since dropped out of school or are barely passing, remarking how that could have been him. He laughed and said that comments he doesn’t understand how they can throw away their lives – he pauses, then reflects and remembers – “I almost did.”

References:


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I can’t say I have found the holy grail for all teachers, but what I have discovered in really looking at the needs of my students, working on building relationships with my students and continually reflecting on my and their thoughts and actions helps me to be a better teacher tuned to my students’ needs.
established early on in the school year. This became the foundation for all of our conversations.

Crucial to developing a sense of community in my English classroom is the idea that every student was the power of the circle. We became a community when we sat in a circle breaking the hierarchy of desks and rows; who is sitting in the back or the front of the room is no longer an issue. In our circle we are all equal. We began to view the circle as a necessary format and platform for the establishment of an emotionally safe and nurturing learning environment. In our discussions we talked a lot about metacognition. We regularly debriefed and evaluated our learning performances and our learning together. We learned to ask questions of ourselves, each other and the curriculum. Often those questions were similar to the ones used by Debbie Meier and the Central Park East learning environment. For whom is this important? Who benefits? And on the metacognitive level we asked: How will I know when I know? It was also crucial that my students learn how to give me feedback about my performances and interactions with them.

Early on I figured out that professional learning communities were not only valuable communities to establish with other educators, I also needed to establish a reciprocal learning community in my classroom before I could engage urban youth most of whom were reluctant readers and reluctant learners. My students and I established routines and expectations. Over time when we needed to establish, maintain and expand our learning community. In order for me to engage each student in learning, I had to help him or her find his or her voice in a supportive community of learners. In the learning situation we struggled with how we were going to treat each other and how we were going to be treated. We took time to resolve conflicts and learn from each conflict.

My students taught me how to challenge the genius within each one of them. They taught me how to channel their oftentimes negative energy and turn it into the positive energy we used to advance our learning community. Students began to resist my class because they felt their presence be an integral part of the learning environment. Students did not want to be late to class because something that mattered to them was going to occur. Students wanted to develop their genius. I taught myself and them how to ask key 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 for expanding 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 relationships 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 the co-constructed discipline that helps to instill in each participant in the learning community the will to choose to do the right thing. Instead, there seems to be an assumption operating that “these kids can’t handle democratic participation.” I have been troubled by the practice of discipline used by educators who would set fires in the bathrooms to teens who would use education as a means, a tool to confront, address and resolve their issues using nonviolent means.

So where does this leave us as we transform our urban high schools into small urban high schools? It leaves us with a choice. Either we unconsciously repulse 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 freely thrive. The academy, the small school and the classrooms can be the places of paradise where learning is the practice of freedom and possibilities if we as adults are willing to take the individual and collective journeys with our students to forge a different reality of teaching and learning. I refer to the discipline as an individual or collective practice. These practices are not always easy. Often I was confronted with the harsh realities of their lives, or I was confronted with the harsh reality that what I had said or done something that was not perceived by a student or students as the right thing. But it was through open, honest dialogue that we became a community of learners willing to take on and try to resolve our conflict and disagreements. 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 bubble with glee at the prospect of discovering new talent and assisting them in finding their voice inside them, and for expanding our horizons.

My mind was racing a mile-a-minute and, faster than I can type the following paragraph, I went through my mind. I thought about John Dewey (1938) and his philosophy of experience and education, specifically, “the purpose of education comes about through experience.” I had also recently received a book as a gift with this philosophy in mind. I had conversations about her philosophy of “teaching as caring” (Valenzuela, 1999). As a Critical Friends Group (CFG) Coach and National Facilitator of new CFG Coaches training, I knew that one of the keys to building a successful learning community was establishing relationships. How do we do that in CFG training? One way is to start by using team builders to learn about each other. I had the knowledge. I had the toys.

I took the students outside to the hallway by the gym and we made a large circle. We did the group juggle.

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It is like the day before Christmas to me – I can’t sleep the night before our community 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 art. I bubble with glee at the prospect of discovering new talent and helping my students appreciate the aesthetics of art. I knew that the day before 2002 that anticipation was quickly squashed. I walked into first period and was met by 35 pairs of eyes – staring at me with anticipation not with but with skepticism and doubt. In the back of the room one pair of brown eyes came piercing through, almost challenging me to reach him. He sat with a group of young men that looked just like him at the table in the far back corner of the room. He smiled and tried to put on an unfettered expression, but I knew this was going to be a tough crowd. I called roll and quickly realized the eyes in the back of the room belonged to Edgar, a sophomore. I knew the activities I had planned for the day were useless. If I didn’t make a connection with Edgar and the others quickly, I would never make that connection. It would be a long year.

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That night I wrote in my journal about that class and those brown eyes in the back of the room that challenged me to find a new first day agenda and get to know him.

The next morning we started the boring business of putting together the class syllabus, safety in the classroom, and the vocabulary of art. The students who love school, the ones for whom the current public school was being passively attentive, those eyes still looking and waiting. I needed to continue what I had started the day before. Again, we all tracked out to the hallway by the gym and I had just one ball this time to keep us all at warp speed in the day. As I started, everyone, even Edgar, looked skeptical. I had pushed the group to get a faster time. I was relentless and would not let them settle for quitting. Just as I was about to give up on the group, Edgar stepped up with a brilliant suggestion on how to rearrange for the class to achieve a faster speed. Everyone listened, but no one else did. The traditional high school leaders were in control. Edgar was right but then after two more rounds of disappointing times, He again offered his suggestion. This time he was more forceful and physically moved to the center of the group. This time the group, desperate for a solution, heard him and made the necessary changes. The group was successful. At first, during the debriefing of the activity, I thought 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 all high five to, the leaders, the innovators and the followers. The conversation took on a whole new dimension and was more effective. The class talked about Edgar and his suggestion and how if he had not tried again to be heard, the whole group

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Apples and CFGs in Harmony: A “Core” Curriculum
John Pieper, Wisconsin

Since 1989 the Walt Disney Company has presented Disney’s American Teacher Awards to 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 2003 John Pieper was one of 30 teachers nationwide who received this award. CFG Coaches training was one of the benefits included with this special recognition.

This is the second of three installments following John’s journey as a new CFG Coach.

“Y
ou do realize we will have to bring in food?” Brenna chimed in as the three of us began to plan our first CFG meeting. Kathy looked at me. I was to provide the soda. A message was sent out to all building staff members and then we anxiously waited to see who would show up. Brenna and Kathy had gone through the CFG training early last summer. They too were eager to put their training to use. The two days of the organizational meeting, eight souls uneasily shared at each other. There were a few questions pertaining to when the group would meet, how much time would people have to invest, and the truly important question, how would this work help the students? Stacey’s words were an affirmation to the value of the work.

“At first I was nervous about presenting.” She said. “But the further into it we got, the more secure I felt. I was so impressed by the depth of thinking of all of you were doing for me. This has really been a helpful experience. Thank you for being there for me.”

Lot’s comments were equally gratifying. “As we were discussing Stacey’s dilemma, I found myself thinking of ways her work, and the comments from others, could affect my work. Not only did the process help Stacey, but it helped me as well. This is really neat stuff!”

The group was almost giddy with optimism. The demeanor of these people was that of someone who understands the outcome of the process, but also acknowledges the critical factors that are required to nurture growth. In some ways the situation reminded me of Johnny Appleseed. A man of simple means, he had the vision and determination to dedicate his life to a process. He did not wait to watch the apple trees grow. He spread the seeds near and far knowing that he was enriching the lives of everyone he met.

So many John Chapmans, CFG Coaches and facilitators are also planting seeds. We seek out the fertile ground of learning and plant seeds of knowledge. Our ideas are rooted in sound practices. We have a mission to bring meaningful learning and equity to our students. We see the potential good the CFG work can bring to our schools. Yet we understand it will take time for our work to branch out across America. If we try to stay the course and continue to successfully reach out to more and more educators, then at some point, our patience, persistence and passion will come to fruition. When that epiphany occurs and there is a magnitude paradigm shift in the way schools function, then it will be time for a “Gala” celebration for our students and colleagues. Isn’t life “Delicious?”

John Pieper can be contacted at jppieper@wisc.edu. Webster Stanley CFG members: John Pieper, Brenna Garrison-Brauden, Lori Satterstrom, Kathy Riederer, Sarah Paquette, Stacey Reese, Angie Thurn, Marcie Gundlach, and Angela Karcz.

long-standing relationship with several school reform organizations locally, including: ATLAS Communities, Educators for Social Responsibility, The Education Alliance and Northeast Regional Lab at Brown, Project Zen at Harvard, SmART Schools at EDC, and the CT Center for School Change, and have begun work with the Tripod Project at Harvard, as well as with EDCO (Educational Collective of Greater Boston). They also have an on-going relationship with some of the local colleges and universities and districts connected with the Institute on Disabilities at the University of New Hampshire.

Finally, the Massachusetts/ southern New Hampshire NSRF Center has as both a policy and a practice “cross-pollinating” with other CFG Centers of Activity from across the country. Last summer alone, we invited NSRF Facilitators from CT, ME, Salt Lake City, UT, and VT to work with us. One of the best examples of “learning from each other” has been our long-standing relationship with the Northeast Independent School District (NEISD) of San Antonio. NSRF Facilitators from Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire have worked with schools and district personnel in San Antonio since the summer of 2000, when twelve educators from the NEISD and Trinity University attended a CFG Coaches seminar facilitated by NH and MA NSRF Facilitators. San Antonio now has three NSRF Facilitators as well as three interns in the process of becoming NSRF Facilitators. This reciprocal relationship has formed the basis for important learning by CFG Coaches and NSRF Facilitators alike in both locales.

Gene Thompson-Grove is one of the Co-Directors of NSRF, and can be contacted at gthompson-grove@earthlink.net

In our own Coaches CFG. All current coaches attend the Winter Meeting every year and use time away on the trip to infuse our work with new energy and ideas. We bring dilemmas from our Coaches CFG to share with coaches and NSRF Facilitators from all over the country so we can bring back our collective wisdom to help us here at Watkinson. Increasingly, lately, we find ourselves moving towards becoming a NSRF National Faculty and trying to bring the work to other schools in Connecticut through LASSW and New Coaches’ Institutes. In that way, we hope to make an impact beyond the walls of Watkinson.

Joslín Aubin is the Head of Professional Development at Watkinson School. She can be contacted at joslin_aubin@watkinson.org

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Associates Principals (nine), and one for the Directors (seven). Note: the initial CFG meetings were held to see if four or five in each – as there is probably a critical mass needed of at least six or seven. The Superintendent and a group of each very well, as build a sense of trust, particularly as they increasingly came to take risks within their groups to share real concerns, issues, and problems. I began each CFG with the Success Analysis Protocol as a way to get them initially to share something positive and to celebrate successes so as not to focus only problems – these people in particular are sorely in need positive strokes, and must be encouraged if they are ever to engage in the more difficult challenges facing us all in public education. We established our Group Norms, and used all varieties of protocols for getting help on an issue. Most particularly Consultancies, Sticky Issues, and One Minute Consultants – as this was frequently what they appreciated the most. Also, we used all of the variations of Text-based Discussions – including The Final Word, Save the Last Word for Me, and Text Rendering (now a personal favorite). We did several meetings with the various protocols for looking at student work, sometimes using these actually to look at administrators work. Although experience with one of these administrator CFGs taught me, that when using the Tuning Protocol for a particular piece of administrator work, that regardless of what person says they really want to hear the cool feedback first and it doesn’t matter if it is available. I will always insist on beginning with the warm feedback before going to the cool. Particularly with the Secondary Principals and Associate Principals, we frequently did a check-in at the beginning of our sessions, going around the group, asking each person simply to share where they were, what they were feeling, experiencing, dealing with, excited about, need help for perplexed by – then sometimes using something from that process as the focus of a Consultancy even if only to use the short Sticky Issues Protocol.

Lastly, at the end of the second year of coaching these three CFGs I indicated to the Superintendent and subsequently to each of the groups that I would not continue facilitating their sessions and encouraged them to get coaches training for themselves. This led to a CFG in each of the three schools. I offering a one-week “Beginning CFG Coaches Training” last summer, which was paid for by the district through the Staff Professional Development office. As a result, all three administrator CFGs are at stage of functioning on their own with trained coaches from their ranks now in each group. An additional positive spin-off from all of this work has been the ever-expanding use of some of the protocols by our district administrators while working with their various staffs, tackling real issues, looking at student work, and beginning CFGs among the teachers in their buildings. It has taken five years to get this far, but it seems to be working well the effort and I’d like to believe that it has at least some compassion with the students in the elementary and secondary schools throughout our district.

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A Grand Slam
Rolaes Haliman, Maryland

I began my training as a CFG Coach as the only person of color in my group. This is not unusual for many of us who have been training for CFGs who are currently working in school reform and facilitate CFG Coaches Seminars.

When NSRF decided to place equity in its mission statement, it was a turning point for those of us who felt that the organization didn’t do enough to address the issues that face many educators, students and facilitators of color.

As we continued to do the work of creating and deepening the work of CFGs, opportunities were presented to take it beyond suburban and urban communities (the “inner city”) where there is more diversity. Many provocative questions emerged: Would these processes work with groups who were primarily people of African, Hispanic, and Asian descent? What if they were women? How would they receive it? What facilitators have the knowledge and skills to work in urban settings? And more importantly does race/ethnicity or class matter? While diversity among ethnic groups differs as much as learning styles, much of the latter is addressed far more frequently than the former. Why is this the case? And what does this have to do with education reform and the CFGs we are engaged in?

The question that looms large in the minds of some NSRF Facilitators is how to bring about the changes that have been seen in suburban and rural environments in urban communities? How do we make them different? How does a facilitator know what they are doing? How do groups without the knowledge of their facilitators to work with to increase the supply of quality educational options for Black children.

Without a doubt, these individuals care deeply for the souls of Black children. I had the freedom to construct CFG Institutes that would meet their needs and assist them in the work of planning to open new small high schools in urban communities. My NSRF colleague, Camilla Greene, and I designed and facilitated these trainings. (Gina Kaplan co-facilitated with us in Milwaukee, WI.) Camilla and I asked ourselves all of the questions other facilitators ask about goals, objectives, audience, resources, logistics, etc., but what was significant was also how we could design training for groups who were comprised predominantly of people of color. With whom you work in urban settings. What would be different from other groups that we’d trained? Doubtless, we both knew that it would indeed be different from what we had done in other places. How could we both build on the foundation of CFGs and address the realities of inner city educators, their students and families?

We planned and conducted these trainings and, to the best of my knowledge, they were quite different from others that I was aware of. We included readings authored by people of color who wrote about successful experiences with students who were racially, ethnically and economically diverse. We used resources of these authors and also from Asa Hilliard’s chapter in Young, Gifted, and Black, “No Mystery: Closing the Achievement Gap Between Africans and Excellence” We also began the “equity” dialogue on day one as opposed to the usual point of entry on the afternoon of days two or three. On one hand, the groups were surprised to see two African-Americans facilitating and leading work in education reform. On the other hand, participants commented on how surprised they were that issues 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 onset 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 we 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 beliefs that I believe enabled our accomplishments and will ensure the success of other CFG Seminars where there is a significant mix of African-Americans (or more broadly educators of color who work in urban settings).

1. A hospice worker understands the importance of just being there when those of us who are dying need it to be better;
2. A pedestrian who knows that a sick child is a member of a family and includes questions of the child’s family in their visit/attention, not just the “custodial adult”;
3. the focus on sharing information and power that cut across all the lives being described.

All of the people described in the book were busy. None of the people had an abundance of time, yet they all held on to the ways they could connect deeply and be responsive to the lives of these strangers offered us powerful reminders for our practice in schools. Using the Success Analysis Protocol we were able to connect their lives with our own. 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 schools. Everyone agreed that using the protocol to put ourselves in the shoes of the authors 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 systematically respect in our departments and schools. Our conversation, our examination of the text necessarily followed.

Having used the Success Analysis 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 reminds me that I am an active participant in the world; books I used to devour as a child and I hope this new use of an old tool will be powerful for others too.

Debbie Bambino can be reached at dbambino@earthlink.net

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Directors Report
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The National Looking at Student Work (LASW) Collaborative has been supported by NSRF for the past two years. The LASW Collaborative is an association of individuals and educational organizations that focus on looking at student work to strengthen connections between instruction, curriculum, and other aspects of school life to student learning.

This association grew from a meeting on “Examining Student Work and School Change” held in Chicago in October 1998, hosted by the Chicago Learning Collaborative and the American Institutes for Research. NSRF maintains a web site (www.lasw.org), which is a resource for teachers, teacher-developers, and others who work with teachers, schools, and students. The site provides ideas and resources about a set of prac- (continued on page 18)

Support to the districts throughout the grant period. This year, four districts sent school personnel to the equivalent of a CFG Coaches Institute, and NSRF Facilitators are continuing to act as external coaches to the four districts as they deepen and scale up their work.

This is the second round of school districts to receive support from the Lucent Foundation. NSRF Facilitators have worked with four districts for three years (from 2000-2003) in the TPI administered Lucent Peer Collaboration Project. Last year, two of these districts received a one-time year of continuation funding.

• The Education Commission of the States and its National Center for Learning and Citizenship is a partner- ship with NSRF that is committed to advancing the civic mission of schools, increase support of state policy makers and educators and education leaders for more engaged and democratic school pro- cesses, and to employ NSRF Critical Friends Group processes in national school reform initiatives.

• The First Amendment Schools, Educating for Freedom and Respon- sibility (FASEFR) project is co-sponsored by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the First Amendment Schools Project; last year, two of these districts

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Directors Report (continued from page 17)

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.

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A Grand Slam
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Debbie’s CFG Group

Success Analysis with Text

1. Divide the text into chapters or sections of comparable size.

2. Divide your group into small groups of two, three or four.

3. Have small groups read their assigned section and discuss the evidence of success they see in the story.

4. Small groups chart the attributes of the success they found and present it to the larger group.

5. Large group asks clarifying questions. (Repeat steps 4 & 5 for each small group.)

6. Large group looks for patterns in the success stories that have been shared.

7. Large group discusses implications of these success stories for their practice with students, colleagues, and families.

8. Debrief of the process. If your CFG is using an I-Map or reflective writing to document their work and “Close the Loop”, you might want to specifically pose a prompt that asks what changes in practice individuals are considering after this text-based discussion.

be loaded as follows: On 1st base is the content of CFG work; 2nd base is knowing how to collaborate; and 3rd base is having cultural competency with critical consciousness.

Then I know that the work (origins, objectives, tools, structures,) of Critical Friends Groups Collaboration: showing genuine respect for the thoughts, views, and needs of the group; being willing to work together to reach the intended goals; and acting in ways that demonstrate commitment to these tenets. Knowing the rules and making them explicit helps students see the beginning as well as having open, honest dialogue is crucial. Paying close attention to power dynamics and empowering

to seek consensus. All of this requires give-and-take on the part of participants as well as facilitators.

Consciousness: herein lies the critical element that will break or make the experience meaningful. By consciousness, I mean having awareness of the history, culture and location of minority and/or disenfranchised groups here in the US and prior to their arrival. Possessing an understanding (or at the very least, the desire to understand) of what it will take to move an historically oppressed group of people forward in their knowledge, to develop fortitude and empower them to act in ways that will foster greater levels of academic achievement. Knowing this will inform the facilitators’ attitudes, preparations (content about CFGs given to all bodies of literature and experiences will speak to the group) and what is needed in order to build genuine relationships with individuals and the group as a collective. This consciousness requires facilitators to do their own ongoing homework, to be thoughtful and fearless, yet cautious, in their quest to get at the hard issues and intentionally create the space to have the difficult conversations that most facilitators oftentimes avoid. By not focusing on critical consciousness, the facilitators’ behaviors will likely yield cursory conversations; shallow, low inroads (if any) and unlikely bring transformative moments that can change the beliefs, processes and actions that are modeled to dismantle systems of inequity.

Lastly, but by no less important, we always need to discuss the hard issues and intentionally create the space to have the difficult conversations that most facilitators oftentimes avoid. By not focusing on critical consciousness, the facilitators’ behaviors will likely yield cursory conversations; shallow, low inroads (if any) and unlikely bring transformative moments that can change the beliefs, processes and actions that are modeled to dismantle systems of inequity.

How do we estimate authentic relationships with those whose backgrounds differ from one’s own? How do these relationships impact CFG trainings and our ongoing personal and professional development? How can our work “close the achievement/preparation gap?”

We are tired of the sessions that were primarily of people of color. The following formula can maximize your chances of winning: prepare your team to win by doing your own homework so that you know your content; work toward true collaboration; be or become culturally competent with critical consciousness; and build effective, authentic relationships. Having your group loaded with these essentials in place can result in The Grand Slam and yield a powerful learning experience for everyone.

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