Connections to their work allows for district-wide focus on professionalism with decreasing amounts of time over the period of the relationship toward a true legacy of creating conversation across broad constituencies and contin- uing to believe that the one quality that distinguishes us from all others is that our work is practiced through our core beliefs, with our mission statement in mind, and that we understand that we have questions about competition and collaboration and that our work work in the service of the children they are responsible and accountable to and for. That is, the context of our work is rooted in the specifics of the town, school, classroom, teacher, and child and that a CFG makes this possible.

I look forward to exploring these ideas with you at the regional summits and to learn more about the work you are doing in each of your communities. The greatest strength of NSRF in our national network and the understanding that for works to be conducted in a local context there should be strong local presence in the promotion and facilitation of NSRF work. My continued hope is that we can make a case together for a strong national office working with strong centers of activity across the country and, together, meet the high expectations of the people in the schools we serve.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at this year’s Winter Meeting in Seattle. The Winter Meeting planning team has been working together for months and I am looking forward to another great meeting. This year we are encouraging both CFG coaches and members to attend. Some parts of this year’s meeting will be familiar and some will be new – this year some groups will choose to work on a theme of interest consistent with our service offerings in anticipation of forming new knowledge, informing our collective work, and deepening the learning and commitment of each individual to end the predictive value of the hidden curriculum on student achieve- ment.

My family and I have always loved September. Though we are beach bums in the summer, come Labor Day the mums and cabbages are planted and the Halloween decorations are making their way out of the garage. This particular September, my oldest, Isabella, will be entering the first grade in our neighbor-hood school within the Lynbrook, New York School District – a suburban district on Long Island. We are entering this experience with our eyes wide open, yet full of hope and promise. My sincere wish for each of you is that your September is full of hope and promise and that collectively we are making progress toward peace and equity.

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**Young children:** Young children may be my best teacher when it comes to issues of equity. With their open, inquisitive minds and often brutal honesty, young children are unmatched when it comes to asking hard questions, pointing out differences, and keeping parents and teachers accountable. When someone looks, speaks or acts differently from their accustomed norm, young children are not shy to ask why, often loudly and in public.

The conversation between adult and child (and the unwilling subject of conversa- tion) can be profound, funny or startlingly tragic. How many times have we overheard a child ask their parent something along the lines of “why is that man walking funny?” only for the parent to shush the child and tell them not to stare. How many times have we responded this way ourselves, out of fear of embarrass- ing the person of interest? While thinking we are being “polite,” this response sends the message to the child that differences are not okay to talk about, see, or point out, and are therefore shameful and bad. The child’s voice gets silenced, and an opportunity is lost.

Young children also love to point out differences among themselves, excluding others because of any of a million reasons. Questions arise among preschoolers about why one child doesn’t eat meat, or another child has two moms. Young children notice differences in skin color too, differences we are often reluctant to address. In hindsight I’m wondering who is really protected by the silencing around difference; is it the person who is different or the adult who does the silencing?

We must answer questions when they arise, honestly and openly, so that differences are not kept in the shadows, unspoken and unvalued. We must recognize differences with young children in order to build within them the capacity to feel secure about their own identities and differences as well as value the differences in others.

A visit to my local library’s web site proved very helpful in finding resources for addressing diversity issues with young children. Their diversity booklet provided a wealth of children’s books, of which I picked only a handful to review. I found the following books helpful and often simply profound.

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**Who is the Beast?**

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**Who is the Beast?**

Who is the Beast? by Keith Baker

Suitable for the youngest listeners, Who is the Beast? is a gorgeously illustrated picture book that introduces us to a tiger who wonders why all of the animals in the jungle are scared of him. The snake is scared of his big green eyes, the monkey has his swishing tail. But the tiger is wise, and points out that they all have eyes, and that the monkey too has a swishing tail. By finding common ground, they come to understand one another and see that, in fact, they are all beasts.

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**The Sissy Duckling**

The Sissy Duckling by Harvey Fierstein

Elmer is a duck who has many talents. He loves to bake, put on puppet shows, and build sand castles. But none of the other boy ducks like to do the same things as Elmer. When Elmer’s dad tries to teach him baseball, Elmer is relieved when he strikes out and can go back to the things he enjoys. His father is ashamed, especially when the other boys call him a sissy. His father disowns him, and Elmer leaves home to make his way alone. But when a hunter shoots his father, Elmer’s unique talents and caring save his life, and open the door to renewing their relationship. A great story about being different, strained family relationships, and accepting your own gifts and uniqueness.

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**Bigmama’s**

Bigmama’s by Donald Crews

In this nostalgic story, a black man recalls a summer from his childhood when he and his family took a long journey to Bigmama’s (“Not that she was big, but she was Mama’s mama”) and tells of their delight in discovering that everything is just as they remember it. The children explored around the house, the pond, the chicken coop, and found an adventure at each turn. Better yet, they found strength in family and created...
Monday, March 27, 2006, seemed like any other spring day until Beth Clayton, a world history teacher, came by to get a cup of coffee. Beth beckoned me, “Did you hear there is going to be a walkout today by the Hispanic students?” I replied with a quick, “Had not heard anything and what about?”

As I was moving around the room the next period, a sophomore girl, Di, asked me to sit and talk to her. She informed me of the impending walkout. I asked how they pulled it together. Some of the kids had been talking on myspace.com and text messaging. She said, “You wouldn’t want to miss an opportunity to show them the movie about the children’s march during the civil rights movement.” She was looking for my approval. I felt I could not promote the walking out of school and I was not even sure I understood the reason for the walkout yet. To oversimplify the bill that prompted these reactions from students, HR4437 would make it a felony to be in the United States illegally, and impose new penalties on companies who employ illegal immigrants. Yet, I could not tell her not to do it either; I knew the power of standing up for something in which you believe and the satisfaction and pride in realizing that you had the courage to make a tough decision. The bell rang and masses of kids went to the front of the school and waited. They waited. The administration was there; they waited. The principal spoke briefly, saying that this was not the right time and encouraged them to stay in school and protest on the weekend and after school.

Jesse was on television, in newspapers, and in cyberspace. He took all of this attention in stride. Jesse was still a good academic student. Although he was a little more eager to participate in class discussions, even after all this attention, it still amazed me how the other students looked up to Jesse because I knew how the year began.

The beginning of school can always cause a little apprehension, even for the most well-adjusted of teenagers. But what if you had to worry about fitting your six-foot three-inch, 400-pound body into a desk made for a person about half your size? What if the school dress code policy required you to tuck in your shirt, which is the only thing covering your stomach? What if your new football uniform was taped to your undershirt just to stay down and your socks were taped to your legs to stay up? Jesse had to deal with these physical challenges as well as the psychological trauma of being.

That day of work, because that will show the city of Houston, and everyone in the nation will see how badly this (proposed immigration restrictions) will affect the country.

Jesse led an additional walkout the next day to City Hall; this time students from all over the city walked out with Eagle High School students. Politicians at City Hall spoke to the students giving their support for the students’ activism, but also pointed out that an education is a needed part of success and encouraged them to stay in school and protest on the weekend and after school.

Jesse told me about this activity and I was impressed. He said, “I know I would be loving her for a different land. She cries because the hands that will touch her leave scratches. I cry too, because I don’t know how the earth would treat me now that she knows I have substituted her for the white, red, and blue.”

The end of the month is near and we get the money, which appears not to be ours.

The white men has collected his dinero just as the wind once again in the Tortilla, salt, and lemon will fill the stomach of my family.

The earth would be sad now that she knows there would be no one to keep her.

For a different land she cries because the hands that will touch her.

Leaves scratches I cry too, because I don’t know how the earth would treat me now that she knows I have substituted her for the white, red, and blue.

But before I leave I live my patria I love her you this message that “I would never change for anything.” I love you but the leaders of this time don’t really want me here because I don’t know How to read, write, and even talk.

They say it’s my fault, but they don’t see that they have kept me oppressed for centuries.

Now I know how to see the truth beyond the lines.

I have crossed two worlds to come into this one...