Daniel Baron and I co-facilitated a CFG Coaches training for the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) network schools in the CES Gates Small Schools Project along with Frank Hortis and Greg Peters. The Co-Directors of the CES Gates Small School Project wanted clear that they wanted equity and the 10th Common Principle of CES to be the center of the CFG training. Daniel, Greg and myself were part of the Sonoma Coaching for Educational Equity Group last July. In crafting this CES CFG training, which was structured to be 2 ½ days followed by another 2 ½ days, we intentionally incorporated a lot of the strategies, readings and processes in the first block of the training.

In keeping with Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) tradition, we, initially as facilitators and later with the participants, made a commitment to using Discourse II and using an equity lens to look at student work and in our practice of the protocols. We also committed to opening a space and a place for the participants in the CFG training to do both the emotional and intellectual work required when you make a commitment to take up issues of equity.

This participant letter follows on the heels of the equity work we did during the first 2 ½ days. It is also the result of a close collaboration with the Co-Directors of the CES Gates Small Schools Project and Daniel, Frank, Greg and myself. We offer this letter to you as one example of what it might look like and sound like in a professionally placed equity at the center of our work in new coaches trainings. We welcome your feedback.

Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe it has been almost two months since we began building our equity centered learning community. As we prepare for our time together in Minnesota we hope that you have found many opportunities to reflect on and put into practice some of the learning that we did together in San Francisco. As you know, creating equitable schools is the heart and soul of our work. In an equitable society test scores, graduation rates, average incomes, and fair elections would not be predetermined by race, class, or gender. Educational institutions mirror our society’s inequities. Schools are used to reproduce a culture of inequity where many of the assumptions, values, and practices of the dominant culture serve to disadvantage the students of non-dominant cultures. If we do not intentionally and meaningfully interrupt the inequitable sorting practices that exist in our schools and replace them with equitable practices, relationships and learning conditions we will continue to deny children of color and poor children a quality education.

The 10th Common Principle of CES declares that “schools should model democratic practices, honor diversity, and deliberately and explicitly challenge all forms of inequity.” Through our work together in the CES Small Schools Network we have the power to create equitable new small schools (start-ups and conversions) and to deliberately improve our existing small schools to reflect democratic and equitable practices.

In our CES Small Schools we have accepted the challenge to be the change we want to see. As Gandhi once said, “We must become the change we wish to see in the world.” Consequently, we, as teachers, administrators, and other educators must end the inequitable practices in our classrooms, schools, and districts and re-invent these institutions with equity of outcomes for all students. To do this work wholeheartedly we must ask ourselves: What are the moral issues and the sense of urgency that drives this work? Are we, as teachers, administrators, and other educators committed to opening a space and a place for the participants in the CFG training to do both the emotional and intellectual work required when you make a commitment to take up issues of equity.

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As the first Co-Directors. At time passed, the membership and configuration changed, but the model of part-time Co-Directors remained. NSF- CFR Co-Directors have dedicated extraordinary amounts of time, expertise, and passion to assure that NSF continued to be vibrant organization. Under their leadership, we have grown to include 35 active Centers of Activity and more than 12,000 CFG Coaches. Our focus on equity has sharpened. We are widely recognized as a high quality professional development organization. Schools and districts throughout the country have adopted and our National Facilitators to lead school improvement efforts.

To lead us into the next decade of work, the Accountability Council members believe that the organization now needs a single full-time, paid leader; someone who is not encumbered by the demands of another full- or even part-time job at the same time. A person devoting full attention to NSF will enable us to thrive in the coming years. Leadership by a single Director will allow the organization to respond to the current needs and flow of changing priorities among traditional NSF funding sources and help us to develop new sources of financial support. It will improve communication and coordination of efforts.

At the May 2006 Accountability Council meeting, the Council will create a process to select a new NSF Director. The process will be announced on the NSF listservs immediately following that meeting.

We are acutely aware that inherent in this decision is the loss of multiple perspectives and representation in decision making. The Accountability Council, the Centers of Activity Council, and the membership at large will be called upon to assure that NSF continues to reflect the richness and complexity of its membership. To that end, the Accountability Council will also develop an explicit selection process and a tenure policy for its members. This process will also be shared with the community through the listserv.

Meanwhile, Daniel and Debbi will continue to serve as Co-Directors, and I will continue as Interim Director with the aid and guidance of the Accountability Council and support of the National Office staff. We are dedicated to doing the hard work necessary to assure that NSF continues as a vital entity that fosters educational and social equity. We are working with the National Office staff and CES Northwest, the Seattle Center of Activity, to plan the 2007 Winter Meeting. Efforts are underway in the National Office to offer new support to Centers of Activity. Grant writing and other fund raising efforts are receiving dedicated attention from the Co-Directors and the Accountability Council. New collaborations and partnerships are under development with the Co-Directors working with Centers of Activity around the country. As we continue these efforts and embark on others, we look forward to the next ten years working with all of you to create a national organization that fulfills its promise.

Frances Hensley may be contacted at fhensley@iit.edu

“Aggressive Neglect”... (continued from page 6)
“Aggressive Neglect” in Urban Districts Calls for Unreasonable Action by Warriors of Justice!
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, in her talk: New They’re Wet: Hurricane Katrina as Metaphor for Social and Educational Neglect, challenges us too. Dr. Ladson-Billings was in London when Katrina hit and after three days of horrific news coverage, she noted that the inequities being broadcast twenty-four seven were nothing new, it was just our nation’s “aggressive neglect” was now on television for all the world to see. When asked about the disaster she said, “Actually, the only difference between the people you are seeing on television today and their status two weeks ago is now they’re wet!” Along the same lines, Jonathan Kozol, when asked why the gaps between the haves and have-nots weren’t hidden from so many before Katrina hit, said that the hurricane shelters were basically colonies of segregation that reflected the state of apartheid in our nation; colonies that the media choose to ignore for the most part. And when asked why he doesn’t settle down now that he’s 69 and establish a network of slightly more innovative schools, he responded with an implicit challenge for the rest of us, saying, “...I don’t want to go to my grave helping to polish the apple of apartheid. I want to stir teachers and educators and decent academics to be more than technicians of innovative proficiencies—I want to stir them to be warriors of justice.”

So how will I be unreasonable? How will I respond to the aggressive neglect that is alive and well in my own city’s schools? How will I do my work as a Coach and a graduate student so that I am moving beyond polishing the apple of apartheid?

These questions serve as a reminder for me that my work as a Coach isn’t going far enough if it’s about developing better lessons here, or a personalized advisory program there, without engaging in the deeper collaborative discussions about the ways our schools reproduce the ongoing inequities of our society.

In the same vein, my work as a graduate student needs to shed new light on the issues of power and inequity at play in the ways schools are failing kids, especially poor kids of color. In other words, my research needs to be participatory and action oriented, or it’s going to be just another dissertation that admits the problem of student failure, even though it might be looking at the crisis from a different angle.

The best way I know to push my thinking and my work beyond the safe, band-aid measures that I used to be content with, is to approach my work collaboratively across differences of race, class and position in the structures of our schools. If I continue to do my work mostly alone, or with other white teachers and grad students who look, and often think like me, chances are pretty good that I’ll stay locked-in to the status quo of my own thinking and practice. However, if I build bridges across differences and include teachers of color, students and members of their families in the mix, I can increase the likelihood for multiple perspectives and theories of action to emerge.

Dr. Ladson-Billings suggests that “aggressive attention” is needed before we forget the lessons of Katrina. Jonathan Kozol calls for an end to high stakes testing and full funding for universal, high quality education. And Dr. Lucero’s young son urged us, through her, “to pay attention.” My challenge is to keep these lenses in place as (continued on page 13)

Equity and additions by Debbie Bambino
- What have each of us learned about building the habit of equity through doing this protocol?
- What are our own next steps?
- Who’s at the table? Who’s missing?
- Why aren’t those voices included?
- How can we include those whose perspectives have been silenced historically?
- How does the work we’ve just done serve all of our students?
- How does it serve those students who have been marginalized in the past?
- Who’s at the table? Who’s missing?
- How well do we feel we answered the presenter’s question?
- Facilitator-lead discussion of this tuning experience.

In conclusion, examining specific protocols through the lens of equity begs the question of doing the equity work ahead of the protocols. It seems that trying to do the work through the protocols could be risky and half-baked if the baseline work of some of the equity tools we used this summer at the CFEE seminar (Constructivist Listening, Examining Equity Perspectives, relevant readings), or other thoughtful equity work, hasn’t been done previously with the group. On the other hand, if we wait for that preparation to be done, we may never get to examining the student/teacher work. So once we’ve examined these protocols for equity work, we need to think about stepping up and making a strong case for CFG training and existing CFGs to do purposeful equity work. This might include more CFEE seminars around the country and an equity “curriculum” involving all our protocols. I like to think Nancy is cheering us on! - Mary Hastings may be contacted at mhasting@usm.maine.edu

A printer friendly version of this protocol is available at www.nurtharmony.org/connections.html

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
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