During the past six months NSRF has gone through a period of significant change in leadership. Communication often suffered as the Co-Directors and members of the Accountability Council diligently worked to figure out how best to lead NSRF through this transition. We are committed to improving communication to insure that the acts of governing and leading our organization are well known and transparent. So, as Interim Director and Chair of the Accountability Council, I am writing this column to all of you today to share some of the background of these changes as well as plans for the future leadership of NSRF.

Last spring, in response to Gene Thompson-Grove’s impending resignation as a Co-Director, the Accountability Council announced a search for new NSRF leaders to join Debbi Laidley and Daniel Baron as Co-Directors. We were honored that some of the most talented and well-respected NSRF leaders across the country applied. In the months that followed, the demands of schedules filled with NSRF institutes and day-to-day professional lives led to gaps in communication and confusion around decision making that ultimately interrupted the hiring process. We found ourselves entering the new fiscal and school year with confusion around NSRF leadership, and no decisions were finalized. The Governance and Finance Task Force (Lois Butler, Camilla Greene, Steven Strull, and Frances Hensley), which is charged with overseeing NSRF governance, gathered on the phone in August to examine the issues and develop a recommendation for action. We talked with each of the candidates and the Co-Directors, and we carefully considered how to best honor the individuals, the process, and the organization. In the end, we were forced by a wide range of conflicting input and concerns to stop the process. We crafted a recommendation that, instead of moving forward, the current search be suspended and that I, as Chair of the Accountability Council, serve as Interim Director along with Debbi and Daniel in their roles as Co-Directors. The full Accountability Council met by conference call the following evening and unanimously approved the recommendation. We believed our decision would bring stability to the organization, allow us to enter the new fiscal year with a full leadership team in place, and give us the opportunity to develop a stronger and more transparent hiring process. 

At the December meeting of the Accountability Council, the first face-to-face gathering in the new fiscal year, the Governance and Finance Task Force brought forward the recommendation to reconfigure the NSRF leadership structure. The Task Force recommended and the full Accountability Council unanimously approved a change from three Co-Directors to one full-time Director effective August first, 2006. This is a significant change in our historical leadership structure. When NSRF first moved to Harmony Education Center, leadership was shared among the co-founders and leaders at Harmony: Faith Dunne, Gene Thompson-Grove, Daniel Baron, and Steve “Roc” Bonchek served... (continued on page 13)
Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editorial Board  Debbie Bambino, Camilla Greene and Peggy Silva
Layout & Design  Sarah Childers

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to Connections contact us at 812.330.2702 or dbambino@earthlink.net

You can read many of the research papers that were presented at the NSRF Research Forum at www.nsrfharmony.org/research.html. A helpful list of common and uncommon sources of data that a school or CFG might collect is listed in Kathleen Cushman’s article “Documenting Whole-School Change in Essential Schools” on the Coalition of Essential Schools website at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/ces_res/72
You may contact Donna Reid at donna@robreid.com

“Helpful”, “impressive”, and “empowering” were just some of the reactions buzzing around the Grand Hyatt’s ballroom at the First Annual NSRF Research Forum held on January 11, 2006, in Denver, Colorado. Almost sixty researchers, Coaches, students, and critical friends from all corners of the country gathered to share their research, question assumptions, dig deeper, and encourage each other in our inquiries related to Critical Friends Groups.

My colleague Mary Matthews and I presented work related to the Teacher as Researcher initiative that the Houston As Challenge sponsors in the Houston Center of Activity. As the Consultant for CFG Support, I support the work of the five active inquiry groups to which the Houston As Challenge awarded funds, and Mary is the lead teacher-researcher for one of those five groups. Her paper, “Back on the Road: Reflections on the Power of Critical Friends Groups to Improve School Climate and Student Learning at an Urban Elementary School,” describes how her inquiry team re-established CFG’s at Best Elementary, and examined school-wide data to answer the question “How Do CFG’s impact student achievement in the core curriculums?”

In year one of Mary’s project, four CFGs with volunteer members that represented approximately half of the faculty were established. The data at the end of the first year shows a remarkable change in the school’s climate. The teacher turnover rate at Best Elementary dropped to 5% in a region where the turnover rate hovers around 22%. Ninety percent of the faculty volunteered to be in a CFG. Also, standardized test scores indicate that there may be a positive correlation between teacher membership in a CFG and student achievement. For example, 66% of the K-2 students whose teachers were in a CFG were reading at grade level while only 54% of students whose teachers were not in a CFG were reading at grade level. Scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills show a similar trend in grades three and four. You can read all of Mary’s paper at www.nsrfharmony.org/research.matthews.pdf

My paper, “Learning the Dough: Growing Quality Teaching by Supporting CFGs,” analyzed the findings of all the Teacher as Researcher inquiry groups and developed a new metaphor for understanding how CFGs can transform professional development and improve student learning. In many ways, CFGs are to teacher learning and school improvement what leavening is to bread. First and foremost, CFGs are agents for advancing teacher learning and making it grow. Like yeast or baking powder, CFGs enlarge the “bubbles” of teacher knowledge that are already present in the school reform “dough.” And like biscuits whose baker has left out the baking powder, school reform efforts are destined to fall flat and be hard to swallow unless they include the leavening of collaboration, reflection, and a focus on student learning that can be found in CFGs.

We need to be asking ourselves if membership in a CFG is truly changing our thinking and practice. We need to be demanding evidence from ourselves that educators’ working in a collaborative, reflective group can increase student achievement. Most of all, we need to be continually sharing our findings with each other and with the larger education community.

Because of this realization, I will change my own practice. I will be more diligent about asking questions, collecting data, and sharing my findings about my own work, and all the CFG Coaches that I work with to collect and share evidence that shows how CFGs improve teaching and learning in our schools. My greatest hope is that we will all gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of our work and that we will fill several ballrooms at the second annual Research Forum next year in Seattle.

So What?
Participating in the Research Forum helped me expand my thinking, refine my ideas, and make connections. For example, I started the day by attending Ellen Key’s presentation “Do They Make a Difference? A Review of Research on the Impact of Critical Friends Groups.” This discussion expanded my thinking by giving me a broad overview of the research that has already been done and pointing out weaknesses in the existing studies. Similarly, Angela Breidenstein and Pat Norman’s presentation about sustaining CFGs by offering ongoing support for CFG Coaches helped me rethink and revise the support model that we are using in my Center of Activity. By far the most helpful element of the Research Forum was the conversations that sprang up after each presentation. During these informal talks, we probed, wrestled with, and sometimes polished the ideas that were being shared. I was grateful for each person’s participation and the connections that we made with each other and with our ideas.

Now What?
By attending the Research Forum, I discovered that there is an enormous hunger throughout our national community for stronger evidence that shows the relationship between CFGs and student learning. Teachers, administrators, and stake holders in the trenches need to be collecting and analyzing all kinds of data such as student work, notes from peer observations, and student and teacher reflections. We need to be asking ourselves if membership in a CFG is truly changing our thinking and practice. We need to be demanding evidence from ourselves that educators working in a collaborative, reflective group can increase student achievement. Most of all, we need to be continually sharing our findings with each other and with the larger education community.

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Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
teens fighting to belong, fighting for their way of life, and fighting for their community. Angela wrote, “The hurricane has affected my life in many ways. Far as school goes, it’s hard to focus knowing there is a lot going on around me.” Angela continued to lament about missing her school and the activities in which she had participated. She continued, “Don’t get me wrong, learning did come first, but there were times when we were enjoying being a high school student.”

The teenagers from New Orleans are looking for a place to feel safe and secure. I had my school to help me through the disaster of my childhood, but these kids do not have that place—everything has been taken from them. The curriculum has to take a backseat in the classroom while teachers and administrators work to provide a community for the kids from New Orleans. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs proposes that until we can fulfill the physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem related needs of our students, the students will never reach self-actualization.

With the tragedy of the tornado, my teachers already knew me and knew ways to help me. We must make a conscious effort to get to know our new students so that we can learn how to serve them better. A friend recently informed me that this is difficult at the high school level because we are more concerned or passionate about our content. I think we need to make a call for action to become passionate about the children in front of us and less about covering our content. How can we leave no child behind when we have no idea who the child is? Naima, a bright and cheerful teenager, is able to see the silver lining in this terrible event, but also relates her frustration and yearning for family. She writes, “I like Houston and my school because the teachers teach. I could stay in Houston because I have such a variety of ideas about instructional understanding and focus more on whether or not students were able to complete the task or solve the problems.”

Acknowledgments:
Projects such as this achieve success through the vision and active participation of many individuals as well as organizations committed to research, education, and global conservation. I thank:
• The SIMAB Team in Washington, D.C.
• Dr. Arturo Gómez-Pumpa, Juan Castillo, and Marco Luzcano Barreno for their expertise, support, and belief that secondary school students are capable researchers.
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• Additionally, the Administrative Team of Souhegan High School has given this project their unconditional endorsement, as has our School Board.
• And, finally, a special note of thanks to the hundreds of student researchers, known affectionately as our SHS BioSavT Teams, who have demonstrated global stewardship and other proof positive hope for their future.

You can learn more about HabitatNet at www.sprise.com/shs/habitatnet/default.htm
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Michaelann Kelley is an Art Teacher in Houston, Texas. You may reach her at kelley34@yahoo.com

see the profound effect on a single system in such a short time.”
Perhaps what we need to observe as educators in this new millennium is not how we “teach students,” but instead how we enable students “to learn.” If we want our students to have enduring knowledge and skills in which they are mindful of the natural world, then we need to involve our students in the process of science. Individual choices and decisions regarding the environment are not restricted to those students who pursue a career in the sciences. This must become an imperative for those of us who “teach science.”

I received my administrative certification at a time when principals were expected to be instructional leaders. I thought I knew what that would look like, but, as a first year principal, I found myself easily getting caught up in the “administrative” rather than the “academic” track of leadership. The Effective Principal pulled me back. In this book, Barbara Scott Nelson and Annette Sassi provide concrete examples of instructional leadership by investigating the way in which several principals observe and provide feedback to their teachers’ math instruction.

Educators, just like the students with whom they work, vary in the prior knowledge and experience they bring to the table. When it comes to the study and teaching of mathematics, some elementary teachers shy away from skills that they themselves are not comfortable with. Administrators with similar apprehensions might observe a math lesson with a superficial awareness of conceptual understanding and focus more on whether or not students were able to complete the task or solve the problems.

In mathematics, conceptual understanding must support algorithmic skills. In The Effective Principal, Nelson and Sassi take us into several classrooms where teachers are working on mathematics instruction. Each case study is focused on the principal’s observation, understanding and feedback to the teacher. Nelson and Sassi discuss how the principal’s level of content knowledge impacts the focus of the observation and the feedback provided to the teacher. In each case a deeper understanding of pedagogy and content leads to more focused feedback to the teacher, greater impact to teaching and learning, and improved student success.

I was contemplating my instructional leadership after reading The Effective Principal. As I worked with my third-grade teachers to review their benchmark data, they identified a weakness in the areas of place values and subtraction with regrouping. One teacher insisted that she “teaches” the concept every day (equating additional practice with re-teaching). Another seemed more open to trying an alternative approach. Although both stated they had used manipulatives in the past, they were wary of going back to hands-on with the State test looming in the background.

With Nelson and Sassi in mind, I continued to push the conversation trying to identify where the conceptual understanding of these third graders had broken down. I questioned how continuing to provide algorithmic practice, which had not been successful for the past six months, would help prepare students for the test let alone for future learning in mathematics. The teachers finally came up with a plan for addressing the two areas of weakness and a cooperative way of supporting both classes.

I believe that The Effective Principal is a wonderful tool to help administrators become true instructional leaders and learners. As such, Nelson and Sassi state, “they engage in instructional leadership from a stance of inquiry, that is, a stance of curiosity about how children learn, how teachers teach, why certain instructional strategies work the way they do, or why the teachers in the schools have such a variety of ideas about instructional practice.”

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Aplril 3, 1974, is a date I will always remember. It was the day an F5 tornado demolished my new home of only six months. I was 10 years old with five younger brothers and sisters. Dinner was in the oven, and we were playing in the driveway collecting hail. At that time, we had no idea that hail was sometimes a precursor to violent tornadoes. As my mother was finishing her phone conversation with my grandmother, she called us to the dinner table. Then suddenly the phone went dead. She heard a loud noise, which she later described as a train, and looked out the back door and saw the tornado coming. She yelled into the kitchen for us to run to the basement; we did. As soon as my dad reached the last step, the house was blown away. Walking up the steps and seeing daylight where a house once was will change your perspective on natural disasters forever.

Many of my students will also have a date, August 29, 2005, engraved in their mind. Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and destroyed a region. Unlike a tornado that hits suddenly, the fear and panic of an approaching hurricane starts days earlier. Two of my students, twins named Tyron and Byron, retell the story of their exhausting 15-hour car ride to safety in Houston, while one of my girls, Nenisha, tells of the harrowing five days in the Superdome without food, water and, as she likes to point out, deodorant. The physical pain and mental anguish endured by the students before the hurricane was exacerbated by the hurricane. I do not need to recount the terrible atrocities that were endured and the many mistakes that were made. The fact that so many of the students have survived and are forging a new life for themselves is a testament to their resilience.

For well over six months after the tornado, my three brothers, two sisters, parents and I lived with my grandparents. We slept three to a bed, but we were with family. My grandparents’ home was close enough that I could still go to my same school. After the storm, mom found my school uniform waving like a flag from the top of a tree branch. I was excited about not having school, as if it was a snow day, not realizing the stability and security that school provided me. Nevertheless, mom knew, just as I know because of my experience, that providing a safe and secure school environment would be a key for the students of Hurricane Katrina.

Before Nenisha was even out of the Super Dome in New Orleans, Tyron and Byron were already registering for school. The twins were eager to get into a routine at school and after they saw the football program were ready to play. They had lots of attention thrown on them immediately with newspaper articles and television morning shows. They became an asset to the community and carved a niche for themselves. Others have not been so lucky.

Over the next month, Louisiana students would come and attend our other schools in the Houston area. As they struggled to find a place to live and survive, school was secondary to their basic needs. I worked with my students in trying to create a nurturing environment and a place where they could feel safe, and maybe for 50 minutes, be a teenager. We talked about New Orleans’ schools and how they were different from Eagle High School. I remember Byron telling me about a new student from Dallas at their old school in New Orleans. Everyday he was beaten up by the kids until he went back to Dallas. He laughed and said, “We are tough.”

William, who went to the same school as the twins, said, “My high school experience has changed because of Katrina by being in another location. My education has also changed because we get books in Houston. In New Orleans, we didn’t bring books home. All we had were class copies. And, the students were fighting everyday.”

Many conversations with students from New Orleans about losing their homes, their possessions and their school, revealed how they were frustrated, tired and felt helpless. I did not find it surprising when fights broke out at many of the Houston area schools. So why were others surprised that this was happening on campuses? These were (continued on page 18)
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.

adopted June 2001

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

• School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
• Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
• The key to this effort is the development of a "learning community" based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
• To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

L

ast week in an urban high school, a young, white teacher came into the faculty area of a small urban conversion high school and plodded down. She was disgusted. Her seniors, all of whom were African American were uncooperative, if not outright defiant about learning about the Italian Renaissance. Her response was to leave them to read a two page contract she had written. Her students were to come and get her when they finished reading her contract and had decided how they were going to behave in her English class. In other words she was doing her job. The students were being uncooperative. The students needed to change.

On Tuesday, March 7, 2006, Gordon Parks, a giant of a man, a Renaissance man by all counts, died. Gordon Parks was an acquaintance of mine and a person my daughter, who worked at the Time Photography Lab in NYC, got to know and treasure on a personal level. We are both saddened by his death. My favorite picture is of my daughter with Gordon Parks. In my classroom, we used the internet, Gordon Parks’ vast work, and his movies, his videos and particularly his latest work “Half Past Autumn,” to discover what it means to be a Renaissance man and to explore the notion of a Renaissance.

We used this in-depth study of Gordon Parks to bridge to the Harlem Renaissance and then to study the Italian Renaissance. My students and I now had a lens to use, a reason and a will to look at the Italian Renaissance.

How do I, as an African American school Coach, help a young, white teacher and other teachers both black and white discover how to engage African American students in wanting to learn about the Italian Renaissance? I learned as a teacher how to surround myself and my students with the cultures of our heritage; the African American, Asian and Latino heritages. We used that cloak of personal cultural knowledge to bridge to the dominant European culture. This is the only way I know to engage students who do not look like the dominant American culture in learning about the European culture. Without using a similar approach with high school students who represent cultures other than the dominant culture, you get compliance at best and/or classroom management issues with disruptive, defiant behaviors. I feel privileged to have been able to explore deeply the life and works of Gordon Parks with my students. I will miss Gordon Parks’ presence, but I will always be grateful for having known him, grateful for his works and grateful for the time I spent with my students exploring his genius.

Camilla Greene may be contacted at camillagreene@worldnet.att.net

Gordon Parks
November 30, 1912 - March 7, 2006
African American Renaissance man

• First African American photographer hired by Life magazine
• Author of over 15 books
• Essayist
• Poet
• Director of more than 11 films, including “Shaft”

“I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, racism, against all sorts of social wrongs...From that day on, I began singing a song called Hope. I still sing it loud. And the waves, the fire, darkness and mud.”

- excerpt from “Come Sing With Me”
Dr. Maria Guajardo Lucero, the keynote speaker at NSRF’s 10th Annual Winter Meeting, issued a challenge. She urged us to be unreasonable as we define our sense of self, our sense of voice and our sense of vision. She reminded us that the realities of student failure and extreme poverty should not be accepted as reasonable in our nation and that we should consistently raise our voices about these inequalities.

Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings was in her right. Now 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 that 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 wasn’t hidden from us 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 chose 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 war-riors 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 admires the problem of student fail-ure, 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 perspec-tives 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 focusing question. Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.

5. Pause to reflect on warm and cool feedback — 2-3 minutes
- Participants take a couple of minutes to reflect on what they would like to contribute to the feedback session.
- Presenter is silent; participants do this work silently.

6. Warm and Cool Feedback — 15 minutes
- Participants share feedback with each other while the presenter is silent. The feedback generally begins with a few minutes of warm feedback, moves on to a few minutes of cool feedback (sometimes phrased in the form of reflective questions), and then moves back and forth between warm and cool feedback.
- Warm feedback may include comments about how the work presented seems to meet the desired goals; cool feedback may include possible “disconnects,” gaps, or problems. Often partici-pants offer ideas or suggestions for strengthen-ing the work presented.
- The facilitator may need to remind participants of the presenter’s focusing question, which should be posted for all to see. Presenter is silent and takes notes.

7. Reflection — 5 minutes
- Presenter speaks to those comments/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent.
- This is not time for a defense of self, but instead a time for the presenter to reflect aloud on those ideas or questions that seemed par-ticularly interesting. Facilitator may intervene to focus, clarify, etc.

8. Implications for Equity: Like the Collaborative Assessment Conference, it may be valuable to discuss the implications for teaching and learn-ing of what we’ve heard and discussed using the lens of equity. The reflection questions below would enrich the learning and help us “interrupt” inequities that may be raised by the Tuning. The point is not to shut the presenter down, or put them on the defensive but rather to challenge everyone involved to a higher level of analysis. Questions that the presenter asks at the end of the warm/cool feedback session both address the focus question and takes it beyond the presenter’s work.

Possible Reflection questions following the activity: (from both Nancy Mohr’s draft of LASW for 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 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?
- Debrief — 5 minutes
- How well do we feel we answered the presenter’s question?
- Facilitator-led 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 sum-mer 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 we need to think about stepping up and making a strong case for CGI 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!”
perpetuated within our communities and schools,

- Creating the space for the participants to undertake the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to eliminate their behaviors that support the cycle of inequity (i.e., fostering trust, increasing confidence, decreasing pretense and passivity).

By the end of our Seminar, we challenge you to be ready, willing and able to interrupt inequity and oppression in your school, build the alliances required to create that equitable reality, encourage new leaders to emerge, and to support these new leaders to reflect on the issues of equity that arise in their lives and work. All schools need to create safe opportunities for educators to share and reflect upon stories and experiences about how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression have affected our lives as individuals, parents, educators, and citizens. In CES Small Schools it is our responsibility to do so.

We continue to be guided by these essential questions:

- What do I need to know and be able to do to interrupt inequities in my school?
- What do I need to know and be able to do to create, foster and sustain an equitable Professional Learning Community?
- How does a Professional Learning Community focused on equity and social justice increase student success in school and in life?

In order for us to attend rigorously to these questions, please come prepared to work hard, complete nightly assignments, and engage in a professional discourse that will renew our passion for teaching and learning. Please read and come prepared to discuss the two texts; “Hip Hop In the Classroom,” and “What Do learning.

Please read and come prepared to discuss the two texts; “Hip Hop In the Classroom,” and “What Do learning.

The Collaborative Assessment Conference would be useful here. This might eliminate predisposing the participants to a particular “view” of the class or students in question.

- Assignment or prompt that generated the student work

- Student learning goals or standards that inform the work

Potential clarifying questions might be, “How are all students being served with this assignment?” or “How was it differented for the members of this particular class?”

- Samples of student work — photocopies of work, classroom clips, etc., with student names removed.

More questions to consider: How did the presenter select the work? Was it truly random? Does it represent not only the range of learning, but also the range of diversity in the class?

- Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.

Questions here could focus on how evaluation is handled. Are clear, high expectations stated for all, using student-friendly language that guides the students to equitable outcomes?

- Focusing question for feedback

- Participants are silent; questions are entertained at this time.

3. Clarifying Questions — 5 minutes

- Participants have an opportunity to ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation that they feel would help them to understand the context for the student work. Clarifying questions are matters of “fact.” The facilitator should be sure to limit the questions to those that are “clarifying,” judging which questions more properly belong in the warm/cool feedback section.

4. Examination of Student Work Samples

- 15-minute

- Participants look closely at the work, taking notes on where it seems to be in tune with the stated goals, and where there might be a problem. Participants focus particularly on the presenter’s

(continued next page)

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Tuning for Equity

(continued from page 9)

Coaching for Educational Equity...

(continued from page 8)

NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Lakweisha Tibbs

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Lakweisha, can you tell me about your job and how you use your coaching skills in your work with parents and family members? My official job description is Family Partnership Specialist. Due to rising attention about the parental role in support of student achievement, the Chattanooga non-profit community, in my case the Urban League, joined forces with the Hamilton County School System to design a program that would place point people in nine urban elementary schools to address parental engagement. I’m one of those point people.

In terms of what I do, do you have about 72 hours? Because it may take that long for me to describe my job. No, seriously, I’ll just give you some highlights. One of my responsibilities is the identification and organization of an Action Team of parents/family members and school staff, who will put the school’s Family-Community Partnership Plan into action.

What's the Family-Community Partnership Plan? The Family-Community Partnership Plan brings staff and families together in order to achieve the school improvement plans’ goals. My role in this process is all about facilitating collaboration and communication. My Coaches’ training gave me some skills for my toolbox that help me approach issues with parents and teachers so that we can have real conversations about concerns both groups have.

What are some of the challenges you’ve faced? It’s been rough. One of the first things I had to do was find out how interested the staff really was in parental input. Lots of times parents are invited to meetings where presenters talk at them and then the parents don’t come back. Since my job was about creating a partnership, I wanted to guarantee that a consistent parental base would be present at the table. Using text-based and other protocols has helped me hold a place at the table for everyone’s voice, especially the missing voice of the parents.

What steps have you taken to get a base of parents engaged?

I left a need for (continued on page 16)
Dear Colleagues,

It is hard to believe that it has been almost two months since we began building our equity centered leadership. 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 pre-determined by race, class, or gender. Educational institutions mirror our inequality when we 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 inequality. Through our work together in the CES Small Schools Network we have the power to create equitable 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 for 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? We believe that this wholehearted commitment to the Coaching for Educational Equity training we will continue to develop the will, skill, knowledge, capacity, and emotional intelligence to teach, coach, and lead for educational equity. The seminar develops these traits by:

- Developing educational equity
- Sharing an understanding of the historical and current inequities in the cultural, economic, political, and social communities of our nation and our schools and an understanding of oppression, power, privilege, and hegemony
- Creating the space for intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to break the bonds of these inequities and reflecting privately and/or communally about our own complicity without fear or rushing to judgment
- Empowering educators to ally themselves within and across racial, gender, and class boundaries
- Interrupting and responding to denial, hostility, and other inequities in real time
- Spotlighting how these inequities are

as the first Co-Directors. At time passed, the membership and configuration changed, but the model of part-time Co-Directors remained.

NSRF Co-Directors have dedicated extraordinary amounts of time, expertise, and passion to assure that NSRF remained a vibrant organization. Under their leadership, we have grown to include 35 active Centers of Activity and more than 12,000 CFC Coaches. Our focus on equity has sharpened. We are widely recognized as a high quality professional development organization. Schools and districts throughout the country endorse 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 simple 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 time attention to NSRF will enable us to thrive in the coming years. Leadership by a single Director will allow the organization to respond to the current ebb and flow of changing priorities among traditional NSRF 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 NSRF Director. The process will be announced on the NSRF listservers 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 NSRF 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 transition 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 insure that NSRF continues as a vital legacy 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@uga.edu

“Aggressive Neglect”...

(continued on page 6)

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To read more about the thoughts of Dr. Ladson Billings, Jonathan Kozol and others about Equity after Katrina, read the Annenberg Institute for School Reform’s Winter 2006 issue of Voices in Urban Education.

To share the ways you are taking up the challenge to move beyond “polishing the apple of apartheid,” contact me, dbambino@earthlink.net, and we’ll share your thoughts and experiences in Connections.
As Coaches we all know that protocols are valuable tools that help us create a safe space where teachers feel comfortable bringing their questions and dilemmas to the table for feedback. As an experienced Coach, I continue to value these tools and the need for a safe space, but lately I have had the nagging sense that it might not be going as far as we can in our examination of student and teacher work. My nagging doubts grew out of my awareness that at times the process or protocol being used and my adherence to it might be limiting the conversation, especially in the area of implications for equity in our work. So I began to think about the ways we might continue to create a safe space where we could have the “uncomfortable,” risky conversations about equity that we need to have if we are serious about serving historically marginalized students.

Following our Coaching for Educational Equity (CfEE) Seminar last July in Somotta, a number of the participants held email discussions about the role of equity in using the Looking at Student Work (LASW) protocols. During the discussion, some of us recalled Nancy Mohr’s draft of “Looking at Student Work: Building in the Habit of Equity” protocol. In her writing, Nancy proposes that we “go beyond protocols to the next step which must be specific actions.” I began to think about actively including the equity lens within the protocols as we use them.

Nancy suggested preliminary work around community building and equity prior to using protocols. I include her suggestions here:

Purpose: To focus looking at student work specifically so that it furthers equity for our students, our teachers and our schools.

Facilitation tips: There must be appropriate community building before using any protocol. Suggestions include: (and these are only a few of the many things that can be done – there has to be a lot of facilitator judgment used)

- Reflection on the word equity
- Dong seconds about equity
- Introductions, which include self-identification, historical moments, etc.

And building norms for doing hard and sensitive work together — if this hasn’t already been done. If it has been done months ago, time for a review.

In the process of considering how this should be a preparation for all our efforts, looking at student work, I began to consider how one of the often used protocols might be “expanded” to include the focus on equity that Nancy championed. Here’s a snapshot of my thinking as it applies to the Tuning Protocol (suggestions in italics). This is not a finished product, but I hope it will open up the conversation about the ways we can go deeper with our efforts to serve all students through our collaborative learning from student and teacher work.

Introduction to the Tuning Protocol

Often the presenter begins with a focusing question or area about which she/he would especially welcome feedback, for example, “Are you seeing evidence of persuasive writing in the students’ work?” Participants have time to examine the student work and ask clarifying questions. Then, with the presenter listening but silent, participants offer warm and cool feedback — both supportive and challenging. Presenters often frame their feedback as a question, for example, “How might the project be different if students chose their research topics?”

Some specific examples of equity questions might be useful here, such as “Does this look/feel like a project that all students can access?” or “How can I make this work relevant to the different perspectives/experiences of the student in my class?”

After this feedback is offered, the presenter has the opportunity, again uninterrupted, to reflect on the feedback and address any comments or questions she chooses. Time is reserved for debriefing the experience. Both presenting and participating educators have found the tuning experience to be a powerful stimulus for encouraging reflection on their practice.

Tuning Protocol

Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen

1. Introduction — 5 minutes
   a. Facilitator briefly introduces protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule
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2. Presentation — 15 minutes
   The presenter has an opportunity to share the context for the student work:
   - Information about the students and/or the class, what the students tend to be like, where they are in school, where they are in the year.
   - Descriptions of the students grounded in evidence the way descriptions are shared in (continued on page 14)
Full-Contact Ecology
Dan Bisaccio, Souhegan High School, Amherst, New Hampshire

Several years ago, a student in my class, also a starter on our high school's football team, sprained his ankle while running from a hornet's nest while conducting biodiversity research. When his perplexed coach asked how he had hurt himself, the student's response was that he was taking full-contact ecology. We know that only by urging them to become hunter-gatherers of information, knowledge, and skills will students connect their work to a broader community, and create enduring understanding.

Aldo Leopold writes that “there are two spiritual garments in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.” When I ask my students to sketch an insect, I find that students not only have difficulty locating where they need to place appendages on insects, but also where all that sustains us as humans comes from. It has become an abstraction for all too many of my students. The word “ecology” comes from the Greek word “oikos” – the study of our house. Full-contact ecology provides a way of establishing the context for study of “our house” – our culture, our society, and our children's future.

I teach conservation biology at Souhegan High School (SHS) in Amherst, New Hampshire. I am also an adjunct biodiversity researcher for the Smithsonian Institution’s Monitoring and Assessment of Biodiversity (SiMAB) program. In 1996, I developed a program, HabitatNet for my SHS students as well as other students and teachers around the globe. HabitatNet directly involves students and teachers with conducting authentic biodiversity research while learning science as science is done.

Using the SiMAB permanent biodiversity research protocols, my high school students have been collecting biological research data at field sites in New Hampshire, Central America, the Caribbean Islands, and Mexico for the past eight years. The overall goals of HabitatNet are (1) to develop conservation biological literacy in high school students by giving them an opportunity to learn field methods and applications while collecting and interpreting biological diversity data, and (2) to establish baseline biological diversity data at our HabitatNet field sites. Thus far, over five hundred high school students have been involved with this project. They write annual field reports for the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., various conservation agencies throughout the Caribbean, and El Edén Ecological Reserve located in Quintana Roo, Mexico. Field reports include 20 m x 20 m forest quadrant tree maps; vegetation analysis (tree species frequency, dominance values, and density statistics); and invertebrate and vertebrate species lists. Additionally, concurrent student research projects complement the basic biodiversity data that is collected using the SiMAB protocols. These research projects are designed by students and conducted by them in the field. Their focus of research is on an aspect of anthropogenic or "natural" disturbance regimes as they pertain to biological diversity.

The fact that our students and I had ten years of data recently earned us the opportunity to travel to El Eden to share our work with university and Ph.D. candidates as we began our assessment of hurricane Wilma’s damage to our biodiversity plot. Traditionally, principal investigators for the National Science Foundation are college professors and their graduate students.

Our ongoing relationship with the Conservation Biology Center at the University of California – Riverside (UCR) included an earlier collaboration on a joint publication of a text (The Lowland Maya Area; Three Millennia At The Human-Wildland Interface, Hayworth Press, 2004). UCR’s research has centered on how recently disturbed forests of the Yucatan recover from anthropogenic disturbances while our SHS HabitatNet research has focused on the long view of forest successional patterns. Our 10 year research has indicated that even “mature forests” show past disturbance regimes and selective forestry practices by early through mid-20th Century Mayan people.

Souhegan Seniors Nate Langille and Julia Day accompanied me on this trip. They had first traveled to El Eden as part of a Global Use Symposium of 80 students from Saba, India, Germany, Mexico, Italy, Spain, and several states. Souhegan’s students served as teachers for the field work, as they had been trained in field protocols. Students developed the Youth Accord on Biodiversity for the United Nations.

In December 2005, Nate and Julia served as graduate students, along with Ph.D. candidates from the University of California, Riverside. Our task was to record the destruction of hurricane Wilma, the strongest hurricane ever recorded. Its 140 mph winds had swirled over the Yucatan for 36 hours in October. Trudging through waist-high water, wielding machetes to clear a path, we studied the changes we observed. We measured the height of the snapped trees, the number of trees felled, the size of the trees, and the species that had withstood the violent winds.

Julia noticed the effects of changes in the density of the canopy. “With all the leaves stripped from the trees, we observed vast changes in light that would definitely affect species’ growth. We wondered what plant species would adapt and/or recover from the change in canopy density.”

Nate observed a significant change in wildlife behavior following the storm. “When we were first in the Yucatan, we saw very little wildlife. The canopy hid their presence. With the land exposed to the elements, the animals were willing to gather for food. Their behavior changed; they seemed to seek us out. I was fascinated by their rapid adaptability to changed circumstances.”

What impressed me watching my students work with college professors and graduate students is that we were all teachers with distinct skill sets to share. My students were functioning as scientists at a field research site—their tests were designed by their environment. We all shared expert status. I became Nate and Julia’s students on our last days in the field. They knew that a friend with dwarfism would accompany the next student group to El Eden Reserve; as we cleared trails and cleared paths, they urged me to do a better job so that the student would be able to participate fully in the field experience.

Julia and Nate serve as exemplary witnesses to the value of authentic learning. Julia realizes fully that “the most minute event affects individuals on a global scale.” Nate vehemently states that “you can’t not want to make a difference when you...” (continued on page 18)
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Often the presenter begins with a focusing question or area about which she/he would especially welcome feedback, for example, “Are you seeing evidence of persuasive writing in the students’ work?” Participants have time to examine the student work and ask clarifying questions. Then, with the presenter listening but silent, participants offer warm and cool feedback — both supportive and challenging. Presenters often frame their feedback as a question, for example, “How might the project be different if students chose their research topics?”

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Developed by Joseph McDonald and David Allen

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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 Horis and Greg Peters. The Co-Directors of the CES Gates Small School Project were 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 1/2 days followed by another 2 1/2 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 1/2 days. It also is 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 if intentionally placed equity at the center of our work in new coaches training. 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 pre-determined 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 small schools (start-ups and conversions) and to deliberately improve our existing small schools to reflect democratic and equitable practices.

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Director’s Report (continued from page 1)

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“ForAggressive Neglect” … (continued from page 6)

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To share the ways you are taking up the challenge to move beyond “polishing the apple of apartheid,” contact me, dbambino@earthlink.net, and we’ll share your thoughts and experiences in Connections.

Accountability Council Members:
Daniel Baron
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Steve Borchuck
Lois Butler
Alan Dichter
Camilla Greene
Ted Hall
Frances Hensley
Debbi Laidley
Josephine Rice
Amy Schuff
Steven Strull
Gene Thompson-Grove

“Aggressive Neglect” …

(continued from page 6)
Coaching for Educational Equity...  (continued from page 8)

perpetuated within our communities and schools,
- Creating the space for the participants to undertake the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth to eliminate their behaviors that support the cycle of inequity (i.e., fostering trust, increasing confidence, decreasing pretense and passivity).

By the end of our Seminar, we challenge you to be ready, willing and able to interrupt inequity and oppression in your school, build the alliances required to create that equitable reality, encourage new leaders to emerge, and to support these new leaders to reflect on the issues of equity that arise in their lives and work. All schools need to create safe opportunities for educators to share and reflect upon stories and experiences about how racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression have affected our lives as individuals, parents, educators, and citizens. In CES Small Schools it is our responsibility to do so.

We will continue to be guided by these essential questions:
- What do I need to know and be able to do to interrupt inequities in my school?
- What do I need to know and be able to do to create, foster and sustain an equitable Professional Learning Community?
- How does a Professional Learning Community focused on equity and social justice increase student success in school and in life?

In order for us to attend rigorously to these questions, please come prepared to work hard, complete nightly assignments, and engage in a professional discussion that will renew our passion for teaching and learning. Please read and come prepared to discuss the two texts: “High-Five In the Classroom,” and “What Do We Mean by Rigor.”

Because the work of this Seminar is tied so closely to our work as educators in our individual settings, we ask you to bring samples of student or adult work. If you are not currently teaching, then please bring a piece of your work for the purpose of receiving feedback back or a dilemma you face as a leader for educational equity. We will make the time to honor all the work that you bring.

We hope you know how excited we are to continue our crucially important work together.

Daniel Baron may be contacted at dbaron@bloomington.in.us and Camilla Greene may be contacted at camillagreene@att.net

Tuning for Equity  (continued from page 9)

the Collaborative Assessment Conference would be useful here. This might eliminate precluding the participants to a particular “view” of the class or students in question.
- Assignment or prompt that generated the student work
- Student learning goals or standards that inform the work
- Potential clarifying questions might be, “How are all students being served with this assignment?” or “How was it differentiated for the members of this particular class?”
- Samples of student work — photographs of work, classroom, clips, etc. with student names removed.

More questions to consider: How did the presenter select the work? Was it truly random? Does it represent not only the range of learning, but also the range of diversity in the class?
- Evaluation format — scoring rubric and/or assessment criteria, etc.
- Questions here could focus on how evaluation is handled. Are clear, high expectations stated for all, using student-friendly language that guides the students to equitable outcomes?
- Focusing question for feedback
- Participants are silent; questions are entertained at this time.

3. Clarifying Questions — 5 minutes
- Participants have an opportunity to ask “clarifying” questions in order to get information that may have been omitted in the presentation that they feel would help them understand the context for the student work. Clarifying questions are matters of “fact.” The facilitator should be sure to limit the questions to those that are “clarifying,” judging which questions more properly belong in the warm/cool feedback section.

4. Examination of Student Work Samples
- 15 minutes
- Participants look closely at the work, taking notes on where it seems to be in tune with the stated goals, and where there might be a problem. Participants focus particularly on the presenter’s

NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Lakweisha Tibbs
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

NSRF’s Living History is a series of interviews with members about our past, present and hopes for the future. In this issue we’re hearing from Lakweisha Tibbs, a Family Partnership Specialist from Greater Chattanooga, Tennessee, who shares the story of her collaborative work with parents and teachers in her conversation with Debbie Bambino.

Lakweisha, can you tell me about your job and how you use your coaching skills in your work with parents and family members?

My official job description is Family Partnership Specialist. Due to rising attention about the parental role in support of student achievement, the Chattanooga non-profit community, in my case the Urban League, joined forces with the Hamilton County School System to design a program that would place point people in nine urban elementary schools to address parental engagement. I’m one of those point people.

In terms of what I do, do you have about 72 hours? Because it may take that long for me to describe my job. No, seriously, I’ll just give you some highlights. One of my responsibilities is the identification and organization of an Action Team of parents/family members and school staff, who will put the school’s Family-Community Partnership Plan into action.

What’s the Family-Community Partnership Plan?

The Family-Community Partnership Plan brings staff and families together in order to achieve the school improvement plan’s goals. My role in this process is all about facilitating collaboration and communication. My Coaches’ training gave me some skills for my toolbox that help me approach issues with parents and teachers so that we can have real conversations about concerns both groups have.

What are some of the challenges you’ve faced?

It’s been rough. One of the first things I had to do was find out how interested the staff really was in parental input. Lots of times parents are invited to meetings where presenters talk at them and then the parents don’t come back. Since my job was about creating a partnership, I wanted to guarantee that a consistent parental base would be present at the table.

Using text-based and other protocols has helped me hold a place at the table for everyone’s voice, especially the missing voice of the parents.

What steps have you taken to get a base of parents engaged?

I felt I needed a dominant parent voice in the group, not just one or two folks who are totally outnumbered by teachers and administrators. I knew that parents would find safety in numbers and would be more willing to speak up if they came as a group.

I also wanted to make sure that our meetings went beyond the traditional one-way transmission model where schools tell parents how to help with homework at home but parents don’t get to tell schools what they need.

But back to your question, I make home visits. I meet with groups of parents at our school. I coordinate an after school/ before school/weekend literacy tutorial program that works with community organizations and resources along with teacher consultants to yield measurable academic improvements for students.

Basically, I communicate with families. I use student and school data to ask parents number one question, if you don’t defend your kids, who will? I don’t stop there though, I also work to give parents the skills and opportunities they need to speak up and be heard.

I remember when we met last summer, you told me about parents lobbying and holding a press conference. Can you refresh my memory about these actions?

Sure, the first thing was the press conference. Here in Chattanooga, we’ve been working really hard to improve the student scores. We’ve been under the gun at schools like mine and we’ve made a tremendous gain of ten points in just one year, the highest gain in the state. Well, after

(continued on page 16)
D r. Maria Guajardo Lucero, the keynote speaker at NSRF’s 10th Annual Winter Meeting, issued a challenge. She urged us to be unreasonable as we define our sense of self, our sense of voice and our sense of vision. She reminded us that the realities of student failure and extreme poverty should not be accepted as reasonable in our nation and that we should consistently raise our voices about these inequities.

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-fourseven were nothing new, it was just that 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 were 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 set down now that he’s 69 and establish a network of slightly more innovative schools, he responded with an implicit challenge and established a network of slightly more innovative schools.

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

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.

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 CTEE 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 CTEE training and existing CTEs to do the equity work. This might include more CTEE seminars around the country, and an equity “curriculum” involving all our protocols.

I like to think Nancy is cheering us on!

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A printer friendly version of this protocol is available at www.nurtharmONY.org/connections.html
we found out our results a county commissioner said the praise of our progress wasn’t earned. He said, at the end of the day, we were still failing. It was a gut punch to all of us, staff, parents and the community. Here we were holding Early Bird sessions from 6:30-7:30 every morning, organizing Saturday school etc., and he said we were failures. Everybody was upset, but the parents were up in arms and wanted to respond. We had a meeting to prepare and the parents went on to advocate for themselves. The parents got listed on the docket at the next school board meeting and they called a press conference before the meeting. Parents demanded an apology from the County Commissioner, and they got it!

How about the family members who went to lobby? I remember you telling me about them too. The parents who went to lobby were upset with possible plans to cut back funding for a Pre-K initiative called Stand for Children Chattanooga. I think these parents were empowered to make their voices heard because of their participation on the Action Team.

It sounds like you’ve work has fostered some truly meaningful collaboration. What’s next on your agenda?

The Associate Superintendent of Elementary Education has noticed the way parents are stepping up at my school and has asked me to organize a conference across the nine targeted schools. The conference will be a chance for a broader group of concerned parents to pool their questions and their skills in support of their kids. I’m really excited about this opportunity, and the respect for parental engagement that it represents.

All of your work sounds exciting to me! It’s refreshing to hear from a young professional who hasn’t been infected with the “these parents don’t care” bias that is so widespread among teachers and school staff. How have you avoided the common, deficit view of parents, especially poor parents of color?

I don’t know. I just never felt, never believed, that most parents did not want to be involved in their children’s education. I started my job with lots of observations. I observed teachers and students, parents and students, and teachers and parents. I always figured that the kids were the center, the focus of all we do and I set out to build bridges so we could work together.

In addition to your work with parents and teachers I know that you are also a spoken word poet. Do these two sides of your talents ever come together?

As a matter of fact, I once shared my poem, “Your Babies Are Crying”, at a Parents’ meeting, I wrote it when I started this job.

Read Lakewisha’s poem on the following page. For more information about her work, you may contact her at libbi@hotmail.com

On Tuesday, March 7, 2006, Gordon Parks, a giant of a man, a Renaissance man by all counts, died. Gordon Parks was an acquaintance of mine and a person my daughter, who worked at the Time Photography Lab in NYC, got to know and treasure on a personal level. We are both saddened by his death. My favorite picture is of my daughter with Gordon Parks. In my classroom, we used the internet, Gordon Parks’ vast work, and his movies, his videos and particularly his latest work “Half a Past Autumn,” to discover what it means to be a Renaissance man and to explore the notion of a Renaissance.

We used this in-depth study of Gordon Parks to bridge to the Harlem Renaissance and then to study the Italian Renaissance. My students and I now had a lens to use, a reason and a will to look at the Italian Renaissance.

How do I, as an African American school Counselor, help a young, white teacher and other teachers both black and white discover how to engage African American students in wanting to learn about the Italian Renaissance? I learned as a teacher how to surround myself and my students with the cultures of our heritages; the African American, Asian and Latino heritages. We used that cloak of personal cultural knowledge to bridge to the dominant European culture. This is the only way I know to engage students who do not look like the dominant American culture in learning about the European culture. Without using a similar approach with high school students who represent cultures other than the dominant culture, you get compliance at best and/or classroom management issues with disruptive, defiant behaviors.

I feel privileged to have been able to explore deeply the life and works of Gordon Parks with my students. I will miss Gordon Parks’ presence, but I will always be grateful for having known him, grateful for his works and grateful for the time I spent with my students exploring his genius.

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

- School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
- Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
- The key to this effort is the development of a “learning community” based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
- To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

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.

adopted June 2001

The National School Reform Faculty is engaged in African American, Latino and Mainstream High School Students in the Italian Renaissance and a Tribute to Gordon Parks

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

NSRF’s Living History...

(continued from page 7)

Engaging African American, Latino and Mainstream High School Students in the Italian Renaissance and a Tribute to Gordon Parks

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

The Renaissance Across Difference:

Last week in an urban high school, a young, white teacher came into the faculty area of a small urban conversion high school and plodded down. She was disgusted. Her seniors, all of whom were African American were uncooperative, if not outright defiant about learning about the Italian Renaissance. Her response was to leave them to read a two page contract she had written. Her students were to come and get her when they finished reading her contract and had decided how they were going to behave in her English class. In other words she was doing her job. The students were being uncooperative. The students needed to change.

On Tuesday, March 7, 2006, Gordon Parks, a giant of a man, a Renaissance man by all counts, died. Gordon Parks was an acquaintance of mine and a person my daughter, who worked at the Time Photography Lab in NYC, got to know and treasure on a personal level. We are both saddened by his death. My favorite picture is of my daughter with Gordon Parks. In my classroom, we used the internet, Gordon Parks’ vast work, and his movies, his videos and particularly his latest work “Half a Past Autumn,” to discover what it means to be a Renaissance man and to explore the notion of a Renaissance.

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Camilla Greene may be contacted at camillagreene@worldnet.att.net

Gordon Parks

November 30, 1912 - March 7, 2006

African American Renaissance man

- First African American photographer hired by Life magazine
- Author of over 15 books
- Essayist
- Poet
- Director of more than 11 films, including “Shaft”

“I saw that the camera could be a weapon against poverty, racism, against all sorts of social wrongs...From that day on, I began singing a song called Hope. I still sing it loud. And the be the waves, fire, darkness and mud.”

- excerpt from “Come Sing With Me!”

Italian Renaissance and a Tribute to Gordon Parks

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

The Renaissance Across Difference:

Engaging African American, Latino and Mainstream High School Students in the Italian Renaissance and a Tribute to Gordon Parks

Camilla Greene, Connecticut
April 3, 1974, is a date I will always remember. It was the day an F5 tornado demolished my new home of only six months. I was 10 years old with five younger brothers and sisters. Dinner was in the oven, and we were playing in the driveway collecting hail. At that time, we had no idea that hail was sometimes a precursor to violent tornadoes. As my mother was finishing her phone conversation with my grandmother, she called us to the dinner table. Then suddenly the phone went dead. She heard a loud noise, which she later described as a train, and looked out the back door and saw the tornado coming. She yelled into the kitchen for us to run to the basement; we did. As soon as my dad reached the last step, the house was blown away. Walking up the steps and seeing daylight where a house once was will change your perspective on natural disasters forever.

Many of my students will also have a date, August 29, 2005, engraved in their mind. Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast and destroyed a region. Unlike a tornado that hits suddenly, the fear and panic of an approaching hurricane starts days earlier. Two of my students, twins named Tyron and Byron, retell the story of their exhausting 15 hour car ride to safety in Houston, while one of my girls, Nenisha, tells of the harrowing five days in the Superdome without food, water and, as she likes to point out, deodorant. The physical pain and mental anguish endured by the students before the hurricane was exacerbated after the hurricane. I do not need to recount the terrible atrocities that were endured and the many mistakes that were made.

The fact that so many of the students have survived and are forging a new life for themselves is a testament to their resilience.

For well over six months after the tornado, my three brothers, two sisters, parents and I lived with my grandparents. We slept three to a bed, but we were with family. My grandparents’ home was close enough that I could still go to my same school. After the storm, mom found my school uniform waving like a flag from the top of a tree branch. I was excited about not having school, as if it was a snow day, not realizing the stability and security that school provided me. Nevertheless, mom knew, just as I know because of my experience, that providing a safe and secure school environment would be a key for the students of Hurricane Katrina.

Before Nenisha was even out of the Super Dome in New Orleans, Tyron and Byron were already registering for school. The twins were eager to get into a routine at school and after they saw the football program, were ready to play. They had lots of attention thrown on them immediately with newspaper articles and television morning shows. They became an asset to the community and carved a niche for themselves. Others have not been so lucky.

Over the next month, Louisiana students would come and attend our and other schools in the Houston area. As they struggled to find a place to live and survive, school was secondary to their basic needs. I worked with my students in trying to create a nurturing environment and a place where they could feel safe, and maybe for 50 minutes, be a teenager. We talked about New Orleans’ basic needs. I worked with my students in trying to create a nurturing environment and a place where they could feel safe, and maybe for 50 minutes, be a teenager. We talked about New Orleans’ basic needs.

As my street fame grew higher with my pants hung low I learned solely on the streets cause this is all I know. Yeah, there may be something else for me, but I never got the chance. And folks on the block showed me how to turn my pain into wealth. Everyone on the block knew name and all of a sudden I was receiving love from all over the place. It could never replace yours, but it was least something to fill the empty space. And as my street fame grew higher with my pants hung low I learned solely on the streets cause this is all I know. Yeah, there may be something else for me, but I never got the chance. To be exposed to something greater, I’ve been hooked in a Ghetto Romance.

So yeah, my possibilities were great but my opportunities were slim. I took pride in the things I knew and found comfort in them.

But as time progressed I learned to take care of myself. And folks on the block showed me how to turn my pain into wealth. How to become an electrical engineer when it came to cars to jack I learned how to dice and cook and my meals always provided the best smoke, and I received many props from the neighborhood folk. Everyone on the block knew name and all of a sudden I was receiving love from all over the place. It could never replace yours, but it was least something to fill the empty space. And as my street fame grew higher with my pants hung low I learned solely on the streets cause this is all I know. Yeah, there may be something else for me, but I never got the chance. To be exposed to something greater, I’ve been hooked in a Ghetto Romance.

So yeah, my possibilities were great but my opportunities were slim. I took pride in the things I knew and found comfort in them.

And now my smile shines bright with gold plated beans And my soul gets clothes with brand named schemes. And no my heart didn’t grow cold from the guidance that I lacked. I just filled it with unplanned pregnancies and failed rap dreams. You know just trying to give something back. And though my struggle continues, I always remember your advice. So I obeyed and because of your absence I climbed through a window and made the streets my home.

A Wake Up Call To Parents: Your Babies Are Crying
Lakreshia Tibbs
Rhyme-N-Chat, interactive poetry organization, Chattanooga, Tennessee

I can’t do this on my own, I never traveled this road before
And locking me in this community is like sending me off to war
I know that you instructed me to “never open a door when you’re alone.”

But, I wanted to get out of this situation and I didn’t know when you were coming home.

Dirty clothes, no food, no this house is not a home
Somebody got robbed next door and I was scared. I tried calling you but you wouldn’t answer your cell phone.

But as time progressed I learned to take care of myself.

And folks on the block showed me how to turn my pain into wealth.

I try to educate myself on the street but just how far do you think I’ll get

On a Cornerstone Community College Doctorate
You’ve been gone so long that I had to find my own ways to survive
And the streets became my lifeline to try and stay alive.

They taught me how to borrow with no intention of putting it back,

How to become an electrical engineer when it came to cars to jack
I learned how to dice and cook and my meals always provided the best smoke,

And I received many props from the neighborhood folk.

Everyone on the block knew name and all of a sudden I was receiving love from all over the place. It could never replace yours, but it was least something to fill the empty space.

And as my street fame grew higher with my pants hung low I learned solely on the streets cause this is all I know.

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I took pride in the things I knew and found comfort in them.

And now my smile shines bright with gold plated beans.

And my soul gets clothes with brand named schemes.

And no my heart didn’t grow cold from the guidance that I lacked.

I just filled it with unplanned pregnancies and failed rap dreams.

You know just trying to give something back.

And though my struggle continues, I always remember your advice.

“Never open a door when you’re alone.”

So I obeyed and because of your absence I climbed through a window and made the streets my home.
teens fighting to belong, fighting for their way of life, and fighting for their community. Angela wrote, “The hurricane has affected my life in many ways. Far as school goes, it’s hard to focus knowing there is a lot going on around me.” Angela continued to lament about missing her school and the activities in which she had participated. She continued, “Don’t get me wrong, learning did come first, but there were times when we enjoyed being a high school student.”

The teenagers from New Orleans are looking for a place to feel safe and secure. I had my school to help me through the disaster of my childhood, but these kids do not have that place—everything has been taken from them. The curriculum has to take a backseat in the classroom while teachers and administrators work to provide a community for the kids from New Orleans. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs proposes that until we can fulfill the physiological, safety, love/belonging, and esteem related needs of our students, the students will never reach self-actualization.

With the tragedy of the tornado, my teachers already knew me and knew ways to help me. We must make a conscious effort to get to know our new students so that we can learn how to serve them better. A friend recently informed me that this is difficult at the high school level because we are more concerned or passionate about our content. I think we need to make a call for action to become passionate about the children in front of us and less about covering our content. How can we leave no child behind when we have no idea who the child is? Naima, a bright and cheerful teenager, is able to see the silver lining in this terrible event, but also relates her frustration and yearning for family. She writes, “I like Houston and my school because the teachers teach. I could stay in Houston because there are many opportunities here...but everything is far away. My friends are so far away, and my family is all over the world.” Teachers, remember you are part of their family now. Show them with love and care. Teaching and learning will naturally follow.


Michaelann Kelley is an Art Teacher in Houston, Texas. You may reach her at kelley.34@yahoo.com

see the profound effect on a single system in such a short time.”

Perhaps what we need to observe as educators in this new millennium is not how we “teach students,” but instead how we enable students to “learn.” If we want our students to have enduring knowledge and skills in which they are mindful of the natural world, then we need to involve our students in the process of science. Individual choices and decisions regarding the environment are not restricted to those students who pursue a career in the sciences. This must become an imperative for those of us who teach science.

Acknowledgments:
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- And, finally, a special note of thanks to the hundreds of student researchers, known affectionately as our SHS BioSwat Teams, who have demonstrated global stewardship and offer proof positive hope for their future.

You can learn more about HabitatNet at
www.vispse.com/sbs/habitanet/default.htm
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I received my administrative certification at a time when principals were expected to be instructional leaders. I thought I knew what that would look like, but, as a first year principal, I found myself easily getting caught up in the “administrative” rather than the “academic” track of leadership. The Effective Principal pulled me back. In this book, Barbara Scott Nelson and Annette Sassi provide concrete examples of instructional leadership by investigating the way in which several principals observe and provide feedback to their teachers’ math instruction.

Educators, just like the students with whom they work, vary in the prior knowledge and experience they bring to the table. When it comes to the study and teaching of mathematics, some elementary teachers shy away from skills that they themselves are not comfortable with. Administrators with similar apprehensions might observe a math lesson with a superficial awareness of conceptual understanding and focus more on whether or not students were able to complete the task or solve the problem.

In mathematics, conceptual understanding must support algorithmic skills. In The Effective Principal, Nelson and Sassi take us into several classrooms where teachers are working on mathematics instruction. Each case study is focused on the principal’s observation, understanding and feedback to the teacher. Nelson and Sassi discuss how the principal’s level of content knowledge impacts the focus of the observation and the feedback provided to the teacher. In each case a deeper understanding of pedagogy and content leads to more focused feedback to the teacher, greater impact to teaching and learning, and improved student success.

I was contemplating my instructional leadership after reading The Effective Principal. As I worked with my third-grade teachers to review their benchmark data, they identified a weakness in the areas of place values and subtraction with regrouping. One teacher insisted that she “teaches” the concept every day (equating additional practice with re-teaching). Another seemed more open to trying an alternative approach. Although both stated they had used manipulatives in the past, they were wary of going back to hands-on with the State test looming in the background.

With Nelson and Sassi in mind, I continued to push the conversation trying to identify where the conceptual understanding of these third graders had broken down. I questioned how continuing to provide algorithmic practice, which had not been successful for the past six months, would help prepare students for the test let alone for future learning in mathematics. The teachers finally came up with a plan for addressing the two areas of weakness and a cooperative way of supporting both classes.

I believe that The Effective Principal is a wonderful tool to help administrators become true instructional leaders and learners. As such, Nelson and Sassi state, “they engage in instructional leadership from a stance of inquiry, that is, a stance of curiosity about how children learn, how teachers teach, why certain instructional strategies work the way they do, or why the teachers in the schools have such a variety of ideas about instructional practice.”

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Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Lakweshia Tibbs
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Coaching for Educational Equity; Placing Equity at the Center of New Coaches Trainings
Camilla Greene, Connecticut

Tuning for Equity
Mary Hastings, Maine

Students at the Center: Full Contact Ecology
Dan Bisacca, New Hampshire

Photos from the NSRF 10th Anniversary Celebration,
Denver, Colorado

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Learning. In many ways, CFGs are to teacher learning and school improvement what leavening is to bread. First and foremost, CFGs are agents for advancing teacher learning and making it grow. Like yeast or baking powder, CFGs enlarge the “bubbles” of teacher knowledge that are already present in the school reform "dough." And like biscuits whose baker has left out the baking powder, school reform efforts are destined to fall flat and be hard to swallow unless they include the leavening of collaboration, reflection, and a focus on student learning that can be found in CFGs.

We need to be asking ourselves if membership in a CFG is truly changing our thinking and practice. We need to be demanding evidence from ourselves that educators’ working in a collaborative, reflective group can increase student achievement. Most of all, we need to be continually sharing our findings with each other and with the larger education community.

So What?
Participating in the Research Forum helped me expand my thinking, refine my ideas, and make connections. For example, I started the day by attending Ellen Key’s presentation “Do They Make a Difference? A Review of Research on the Impact of Critical Friends Groups.” This discussion expanded my thinking by giving me a broad overview of the research that has already been done and pointing out weaknesses in the existing studies. Similarly, Angela Breidentstein and Pat Norman’s presentation about sustaining CFGs by offering ongoing support for CFG Coaches helped me rethink and revise the support model that we are using in my Center of Activity. By far the most helpful element of the Research Forum was the conversations that sprang up after each presentation. During these informal talks, we probed, wrestled with, and sometimes polished the ideas that were being shared. I was grateful for each person’s participation and the connections that we made with each other and with our ideas.

Now What?
By attending the Research Forum, I discovered that there is an enormous hunger throughout our national community for stronger evidence that shows the relationship between CFGs and student learning. Teachers, administrators, and stake holders in the trenches need to be collecting and analyzing all kinds of data such as student work, notes from peer observations, and student and teacher reflections. We need to be asking ourselves if membership in a CFG is truly changing our thinking and practice. We need to be demanding evidence from ourselves that educators working in a collaborative, reflective group can increase student achievement. Most of all, we need to be continually sharing our findings with each other and with the larger education community.

Because of this realization, I will change my own practice. I will be more diligent about asking questions, collecting data, and sharing my findings about my own work, and all the CFG Coaches that I work with to collect and share evidence that shows how CFGs improve teaching and learning in our schools. My greatest hope is that we will all gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of our work and that we will fill several ballrooms at the second annual Research Forum next year in Seattle.

You can read many of the research papers that were presented at the NSRF Research Forum at www.nsrfharmony.org/research.html. A helpful list of common and uncommon sources of data that a school or CFG might collect are listed in Kathleen Cushman’s article “Documenting Whole-School Change in Essential Schools” on the Coalition of Essential Schools website at www.essentialschools.org/cs/resources/view/crs_res/7281. You may contact Donna Reid at donna@robreid.com.