ing their dilemma in a way that ensures that the focusing question is focused around what’s going to make the greatest difference for students with the greatest needs. It helps to surface some of the assumptions we bring into the work.

This vice principal left with great ideas for getting better attendance records, but I would argue that it didn’t create more powerful learning experiences for students. Our mission states that our end goal is to “create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.” As practitioners and as an organization, I think we have barely dipped our toes into unpacking what our mission statement means in practice and what it looks like in action.

CFG work has changed the lives and practice of many educators, including myself, but the elephant in this room is that most of us doing the work are white. If this work, as we’re currently doing it, really empowered all voices, wouldn’t we see more faces color our national meetings? Wouldn’t we see stronger data around equitable outcomes for all students connected to our work?

What do we need to do to think differently about our work in the future as we shift our thinking and our structures to better engage the “every” one in our mission statement? I’m left with the conviction that we still need protocols to support our collaborative work across difference. However, my conviction is now tempered by an awareness that protocols are guidelines that must be revised, interrupted and sometimes scrapped, in the moment, if the process is not serving the needs of our most underserved students. I’m talking about stepping into the “zone” of dissonance and staying there because we know we can’t really grow until we are disturbed and uncomfortable enough to change our practice.

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Visit our website at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html to download Kim Feicke’s Framing Dilemmas tool as cited in this article.

PLANTING OAK TREES, HARVESTING ACorns AND BUILDING TOWARDS “REFORESTATION”

Indiana Center of Activity Report by Ross Peterson-Veatch, Indiana

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two hundred years ago, as much as eighty-five percent of our great state of Indiana was covered with trees. With logging in the 19th century came forest management practices based on replanting trees to replace and replicate the forests so that the basic organic resources around us could sustain our well-being and survival. But just planting more trees ignored the crucial roles that the other layers of the forest played in the system and gave us what we might call “all the woods” — trees with out dense undergrowth, and dirt covered only by leaves. What we know now about reforestation tells us to attend to the soil, and nurture the shrubs, even as we plant seedlings and saplings that continue to grow into healthy trees that can sustain the forest. This attention to the layers in between might be one of the keys to the future. I can’t think of a better example of what we’ve been doing in the two years since our last Center of Activity report in Connections.

When the NSRF National Office asked us to write a report from the field, none of us really knew where to start. So many things have happened in the interim that it was hard to get a handle on all of our activities statewide. We have branches from Bloomington, but from Columbus, Indianapolis, and Bloomington. This growth prompted a brief conversation over e-mail about what we should do for the report and who should do it. Tom Gregory came up with the idea of using a modified online metaphors activity, and I agreed to write that up in the form of this report. Tom began the metaphors conversation with me on the phone, at which point I used the metaphor of a center of activity’s work being like a board of directors. Tom’s metaphor began to evolve as he wrote this to me the next day.

Your goal (in creating your metaphor) was probably to keep things manageable so that good deliberations could be made. My goal was to have an army so that when one of us faltered another could take her place. We cast a broad net when we wrote this to me the next day.

In the interim we have met monthly for some time, sitting around a big table looking at each other and asking “what next?” on our minds. Since there were twelve of us there, we had been able to form and maintain small CFG-sized groups of ten participants and two facilitators practically throughout the entire year. We all found it remarkable that there were enough facilitators in Bloomington to support not just one but two National Facilitators.

At that point we had enough of a critical mass of people who were obsessively passionate about CFGs and the growth of forming a Center of Activity that was larger than just a few individuals, but we had no concrete plans. So, in February of 2006, after the Winter Meeting in Denver, we began meeting as a group of facilitators and interns, intent on making something happen.

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nate. We gained five new Bloomington interns, and this year we are gathering interns from both Columbus and Indianapolis. We spent a good deal of time – perhaps four or five months – working out our theory of action and building an inductive ‘architecture’ to use in supporting others. Our theory of action is now informing the practice of dozens of coaches who continue to sustain CFG’s in their own buildings and we are using our architecture all over the state to support schools and districts in crafting their own theories.

This year, especially, we have seen educational equity become the focus of all our work. We put equity at the center of our theory of action, to introduce more authentic and more just ways of educating learning communities as they struggle towards our decisions. As facilitators we have been of how systems work to shape our experience assignment. Sustaining the conversation about flows from the first night’s reading and journaling in personal stories we elicit on the first day and begin a conversation about equity that is rooted in the afternoon. Making the case for equity and engaging participants in giving participants an authentic CFG experience.

We put equity at the center of our theory of action, and this year we are gathering interns from eighty-five percent of Indiana, but so far, our efforts have only seen根植于森林。”

Another was a wheel: “I keep coming back to some version of a wheel. We individuals are the spokes. We are each different, have different orientations; but we are also all connected. And working together we can move in any direction we want. We can even move something very heavy that none of us would be able to do anything with on our own. I think of crafting the facilitators’ agendas, running coaches’ seminars – each one of us made contributions that made the whole better. I also think the metaphor is good for one of our major strengths/weaknesses as a group: there is no one in charge any more than anyone else. One spoke can’t really do anything to move the wheel without the rest of us."

Recalling my own metaphor – that a center’s work was like that of a board of directors – I was already thinking of a management team, a “board,” and in my mind an image of trees, arms of consciousness, and lenses of interest of each and every one of us. I began to see us engaged in a grand project of the “reforestation” type. Over the last two years we have done mostly “organ- ic” work that attended to our moral purpose – what we might call the soil of our reforestation. And even as we continued to work that soil, we trained coaches, gathered interns and cultivated partnerships with others to form a healthy underlayer. From that work grew theories, structures, and a new resilience that has helped us take risks and learn from each other. Having attended to the soil and the underbrush, we are now ready to concentrate on nurturing the trees we’ve planted to make sure our forest continues to thrive. Through our current pre-conferences and eighty-five percent of Indiana, but so far, our reforestation project is giving us all great hopes for the future of the Hoosier state.

Ross Peterson-Veatch can be reached at rosspv@goshen.edu

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12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting- Your Invitation
December 13-15, 2007 • Tampa Bay, Florida

Please join us at the 12th Annual National School Reform Faculty Winter Meeting in Tampa Bay, Florida. Teachers, administrators, and educational leaders from across the country will gather once again at the Winter Meeting to connect in the service of student achievement. For over a decade, NSRF practitioners have substantively contributed to school culture and community by utilizing NSRF’s core practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership, guided by our mission to foster educational and social equity for each child. At the Winter Meeting, we will further our learning using NSRF tools and processes to engage each other in questions related to our practice, our schools, and our students.

The work of NSRF is rooted in its mission: 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.

Together, we will bring our NSRF mission, principles and practices to life as we learn and work in home groups. Home groups are small groups of colleagues who work in the ways of Critical Friends Groups, an extension of professional learning communities (PLC), by holding each other accountable for the continuous examination of our practice to meet the needs and interests of each and every student. We will give and receive substantive and critical feedback and support each other in the discovery of new ideas and the implementation of new practices.

Make plans now to join us this December at our annual Winter Meeting to work with old friends and new from around the country who are committed to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for each child toward a more just and equitable society.

Pre-Conferences
To compliment your Winter Meeting experience, please join us on December 12, 2007, for two of our current pre-conferences: 3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum and Core Principles of Critical Friendship.

3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum: This one day forum will provide an opportunity to share what we have learned as researchers or practitioners and learn from others about the work of NSRF, CFGs, Coaching for Equity, Facilitative Leadership, and other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. Participants will have the opportunity to present work and give feedback on the work of others, as well as help shape NSRF’s growing body of research. This pre-conference will be facilitated by Kevin Fahey, NSRF’s Research Coordinator.

Core Principles of Critical Friendship: This new session will offer an introduction to NSRF’s core principles and practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership in preparation for the Winter Meeting experience that follows. Together we will explore the purpose and implementation of these principles while experiencing their transformative power. Participants in this session will continue to meet in home groups during the Winter Meeting, at which time we will practice peer observation to deepen our understanding of NSRF work and consider how best to translate it to support and enhance current job-embedded professional development efforts in our respective work contexts as well as consider implementing this new learning in our respective workplaces. This pre-conference will be facilitated by NSRF National Facilitators Pete Bermudez and Linda Emr of the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, an NSRF Center of Activity.

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More Information
Visit www.nsrfharmony.org to register, review fees, make your room reservations, and for other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. Participants will have the opportunity to present work and give feedback on the work of others, as well as help shape NSRF’s growing body of research. This pre-conference will be facilitated by Kevin Fahey, NSRF’s Research Coordinator.

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Location
Marriott Tampa Waterside Hotel and Marina
700 South Florida Ave.
Tampa, Florida 33630
813-221-4900 or 800-228-9280

Faith Dunne/Nancy Mohr Scholarship Fund
Each year, NSRF keeps a commitment to providing scholarships for Winter Meeting attendees who would otherwise not be able to attend. To apply for a scholarship, please contact the National Office at 812.330.2702.
If you are able to contribute to the Faith Dunne/Nancy Mohr scholarship fund, please contact our Development Office at 812.334.8179.

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