Winter Meeting Reflections
(continued from page 9)

Keynote Address
Linda Christensen delivered the keynote address to a packed ballroom this year. Her speech was described as “energized” and “excellent” with “well-established content” by participants. The reading she provided, the introduction to her upcoming book, Rethinking Our Classrooms, served as a common text across the home groups and a unifying experience for participants. One participant even said she had rewritten a test on her plane ride home based on what she got out of it! This certainly speaks to the strength of having a classroom-based practitioner as our keynote speaker. A transcript of Linda’s address is available online, along with the reading.

Participant Evaluations
With the help of Ross Peterson-Veatch, our resident data-cruncher, we’re able to mine the evaluation data to identify our strengths and challenges and then address them in the planning of our next Winter Meeting. Take a look at some of this year’s data in the sidebar.

The implications of the occurrence of these figures in a year when we’ve made some significant programmatic changes, such as the introduction of strands and switching from Coaches Clinics to Open Space, and are working to identify areas for improvement and/or change. Our goal is to be responsive to the needs and feedback of participants in order to continually hone the Winter Meeting experience. I feel much as one participant described: “At the end of the three days I felt reinvigorated yet tired and found myself looking forward to next year’s Winter Meeting.” I look forward to continuing to learn with all of you this December 13th-15th in Florida.

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Winter Meeting Evaluation Responses
Total Responses: 217

“Agree” or “Strongly Agree” responses
1. I had the opportunity to present and get feedback on substantive work that is important and meaningful in my own setting. 87.5%
2. My seminar group became a place for professional interactions that embody the characteristics of a CFG. 93.5%
3. I learned something meaningful about the relationship between the work a CFG does together and the potential impact CFGs can have on student learning. 80.5%
4. I learned something meaningful about the relationship between the work a CFG does together and the potential impact CFGs can have on educational equity. 85%
5. The Open Space Technology sessions I attended enriched my learning at this meeting. 62%
6. Overall, I would rate this meeting as outstanding. 89%

J ust a couple of weeks ago, I found myself in one of the most anticipated and/or dreaded moments of parenthood — the big question. My son, a very scientific-minded young man at the ripe old age of seven, turned to me as we scrambled eggs one morning and asked me why there were no baby chickens in the eggs. Thus began “the talk” on fertilization and (heterosexual) intercourse. He handled it very well, and, as is his wont, with flair.

“Mom,” he said, “I always say ‘expect the unexpected,’ because that is just weird!” Not long after this, he asked me what “gay” meant. As a student at Harmony School, he’s probably more exposed to gay families than his contemporaries in more traditional schools, so he didn’t balk at my explanation in the slightest. For a second grader, it seems the concept of two people who love each other and are of the same gender is much more reasonable than explanations of the strange and murky operations of sexual reproduction.

For me, this experience reinforces my suspicion that children are not only capable of, but better at accepting differences than most adults are when they have the chance to discuss differences openly with a trusted adult. Opportunities to have these conversations may arise and any point during a student’s life. Afriyie Daniels, a work-study employee of the NSRF National Center and a brilliant woman, has compiled a list of resources about sexual orientation, specifically those that involve children in families with gay/lesbian parents, for use in your conversations with students of a wide range of ages.

- Sarah Childers

Zack’s Story: Growing Up with Same-Sex Parents
by Keith Elliot Greensberg

Growing Up with Same-Sex Parents is told through the eyes of an eleven-year-old boy named Zack. He lives in New Jersey, with his mom and her partner Margie, whom Zack calls his second mother. According to Zack, “sometimes kids say really mean things about gay people, and I know that some kids think that having lesbian mothers is strange. But I think we live the way every family does. When I’m not in school, I play baseball, go on picnics, and go in-line-skating.” Zack’s story continues by giving detailed descriptions of both of his mom’s roles in his life and the valued time that they spend together.

Daddy and Papa: A Story about Gay Fathers in America
a documentary film by Johnny Symons

Daddy and Papa explores the growing phenomenon of gay fatherhood and its impact on American culture. Through the stories of four different families, Daddy and Papa delves into some of the particular challenges facing gay men who decide to become dad.

“From surrogate, foster care, and intercountry adoption, to the domestic partnership, to divorce, to the battle for full legal status as parents, Daddy and Papa presents a revealing look at some of the gay fathers who are breaking new ground in the ever-changing landscape of the American family.” — from DaddyandPapa.com

DaddyandPapa.com also offers an extensive resource listing for would-be adoptive parents, as well as a discussion guide for teachers using Daddy and Papa in the classroom.

Molly’s Family
by Nancy Garden

“The members of Ms. Marston’s kindergarten class are busily cleaning and decorating their room for the upcoming Open School Night. While everybody’s family is invited to visit, Molly and Stephen and Tanya and Tommy work on drawing pictures to put on the walls. Molly draws her family: Mommy, Mama Lu, and her puppy, Sam. But when Tommy looks at her picture, he tells her it’s not of a family.

“You can’t have a mommy and a momma,” he says. Molly doesn’t know what to think; no one else in her class has two mothers. She isn’t sure she wants her picture to be on the wall for Open School.” (continued on page 14)
Letters To Our Children: Lesbian and Gay Adults

that they have demonstrated in the course of raising your children if you already had them. But with the “gaggyboom” in full swing, more and more gay and lesbian couples are having new babies, adopting children and continuing to raise the offspring of previous heterosexual relationships.

“Gay and lesbian parents still face unique challenges in building and rearing a family, as well as the usual problems heterosexual couples encounter. Gay and Lesbian Parenting unflinchingly examines these concerns and offers positive suggestions and ideas for dealing with these difficulties.” - Gay and Lesbian Parenting

Families of Value: Personal Profiles of Pioneering Lesbian and Gay Parents by Robert A. Bernstein

Bernstein has compiled various stories about GLBT families and their quest to exist in a heterosexual world. “Families of Value offers a positive portrayal of GLBT/LGBT parents who are at the forefront of social change in America. By turns hard-hitting and stories these portray the resistance these brave parents have faced, their views of the current cultural climate, and, most importantly, the intense passion and dedication that they have demonstrated in the course of raising sound, healthy, and well adjusted children.” - Families of Value

Letters To Our Children: Lesbian and Gay Adults
Speak to the New Generation

Compiled and Edited by Larry Dane Brimner

The author has compiled essays by writers of wide-ranging experiences and viewpoints to give the next generation of out homosexuals a chance to hear and a chance to socialize with gay and lesbian elders. The letters offer solutions, wisdom, and experience learned from those who have gone before.

Postcards from Buster

Buster Baxter is the infamous cartoon rabbit who stirred up so much controversy in 2005 for an episode of his show, Postcards from Buster, in which he visited a family with lesbian moms. Episode number 133, entitled Sugartime!, is about Buster’s trip to Vermont (one of the first states to legalize civil unions) during the maple syrup harvest. Sugartime! came under heavy criticism by then-U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, claiming that “many parents would not want their young children exposed to the lifestyles portrayed in this episode.” In fact, the episode deals with the issue very naturally and simply, which suits the intended audience, young children, well. The words “lesbian” and “homosexual” are never used in the episode, and there is no complicated explanation of the family’s composition - just the statement of one child in the family, “I have two moms.” However, the controversy was so intense that PBS was forced to pull the episode. Sugartime! will never appear on PBS again (unless policy changes), but it is available on the VHS/DVD collection of Postcards from Buster entitled Busters’ Outdoor Journeys. A book adaptation of the episode, entitled Buster’s Sugartime!, by Marc Brown, is also available.

If you are interested in ordering any of these books, please use NSRF’s Amazon.com Associates program and up to four percent of your purchase will be donated to NSRF. Just follow the link from our website, www.nsrfharmony.org!

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NSRF’s Living History is a series of interviews with members about our past, our present and our hopes for the future. In this issue we hear from Kevin Horton, who shares his story with Debbie Bambino of Connections.

How would you describe your goals and early work with NSRF?

I got involved with the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) in 1993 as a Social Studies teacher at Paul Robeson high school. Back then we had the Nine Common Principles and we focused a lot of our energy on the size of the school and our classes, teacher isolation and the way we were using our time. I attended a lot of conferences through CES, went to Fall Forum and got lots of good ideas about changes we needed at our school.

In 1996 when I was trained as a CFG coach in San Francisco, I felt that the protocols and processes brought me the facilitative tools I needed to put the CES ideas into practice. My CFG training really helped me get the ideas out and on the table with colleagues.

Did your coaching lead to the changes you thought were needed?

It was exciting when meetings felt productive. We had two groups with about eight teachers in each CFG and some changes were made, but it wasn’t enough. Test scores started to improve but I wanted a bigger response for all kids, not just the kids in the classes of the CFG members. CFGs were kind of a back-door approach, because they were voluntary and didn’t pull everybody into the change. We had about a hundred folks on the staff and only 16 of us were involved. We needed something that would make an impact on the whole school. We needed to collaborate across the disciplines throughout the school.

How did you try to expand the lessons you were learning in the CFGs?

We started using something called “Cognitive Coaching” across the school. It took three years to reach everybody but eventually everyone had the training and was scheduled for peer visits during the school day. Teachers had pre-conferences, reciprocal visits and feedback sessions.

What impact did the cognitive coaching have at Robeson?

Initially, the results of cognitive coaching were good, the test scores were improving and I was optimistic. But then we had a change of administrators and the progress dwindled. Our new principal wanted higher scores and wanted them faster. “Teaching to the test” pulled the collaborative progress we had begun to make backwards.

You’ve been involved in Small Schools work in Chicago and around the country. What’s the connection between that reform and the CFG and cognitive Coaching initiatives?

The Small School tie-in is that the small school structure provided the structure to create CFGs across the whole school. In small schools you have a smaller staff that should share a common vision and have the opportunity to collaborate with their peers regularly around the issues of improved teaching and learning.

How would you describe your current goals and how are they aligned with NSRF’s mission?

My goals are still pretty similar. I’m still committed to working with disadvantaged students and I still think adult collaboration is critical. I call myself a school transformation coach now. Today I’m hoping to join the staff of a small, college prep charter high school as a vice-principal. As an administrator I hope to initiate CFGs across disciplines at the school. I hope the CFGs will work as structures that introduce and support distributed leadership practices and shared instruction.

NSRF’s mission speaks of empowering all people and reflective democratic communities and it talks about all of it in support of educational and social equity. It’s my greatest hope that the staff at my new school will share the values of this mission and support their passion for the students through the use of collaborative... (continued on page 17)