Connections

the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Spring 2007

Director's Report Steven Strull, Director

We came home from dinner the other night and I had an extraordinary exchange with an amazing young woman – my kids' babysitter. Rebecca is most decidedly a child of privilege, our children adore her, and we trust her completely. She is graduating from a suburban high school toward the head of her class, has been accepted to Vanderbilt University and will most likely become a doctor, her chosen profession. As I was fishing in my pocket for her stipend, she nonchalantly threw her Snapple bottle into the front receptacle of my garbage bin – I watched this happen, walked toward her and the garbage bin, opened the bin and moved her bottle from the front compartment to the back compartment – the difference in my house being garbage in the front and recyclables in the back. As I did this I said, "could you please save the f(^k#&% planet!" With the timing of Jack Benny and the bite of Groucho Marx, she said in response, "what, are you Al Gore?" Both exchanges were light-hearted and good-natured – we like and respect each other and her placing the bottle in the wrong receptacle was inadvertent – yet her remark has stuck with me and I'm not completely sure why.

For me, I guess, part of it has to do with choices – I choose to recycle because it makes me feel better and I guess I'm contributing to our planet's health in some small way – but I think my real motivation is because it makes me feel better, and quite honestly isn't that taxing. It's the role of choice that I'm thinking a lot about these days and how choice plays into the continuing development of NSRF.

Between the writing of this director's report and its publication, NSRF will be unveiling our new membership structure. We have spent countless hours tinkering with, considering, tuning, receiving feedback, and landing on our structure and at the end of the day, what strikes me most is that deciding to join NSRF after all these years will be a choice – an individual choice for each of us.

My purpose here is not to outline our new structure, as that is being handled in a separate membership report – my goal, however, is to reflect on why we are making this transition and hopefully to articulate why I believe each of us ought to make a choice toward membership in our collective.

Quite simply, NSRF needs your support – not because you like us, but because your experiences resonate with our mission statement. We have been advised that folks join membership organizations either because they believe in what the organization does and what it stands for or because they want to get the "stuff" the organization has to offer – or some combination. While we certainly have some "stuff" to offer, much of it we give away for free anyway, and I am very comfortable in my assessment that the reason to join NSRF is because you not only believe in our mission statement but you think it vital for our future. And on this point, I want to be very clear: we have decoupled membership in NSRF from a financial ability to pay for membership, and as the structure gets unfolded, it is my hope that everyone realizes we are implementing a dues-paying membership construct specifically to support our mission,

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In This Issue

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Our face-to-face time has become increasingly rare, but in these pages our colleagues invite us into their learning communities, conversations and lives. We invite you to read and respond to these reflective pieces, either privately to the authors, or publicly on our coaches' listserv or the website. (See more about this below.)

In this issue's Director's Report, Steven Strull invites us to think together about the moves we need to make to grow and sustain NSRF as a membership organization. Pete Bermudez and Linda Emm from Florida share one way that inquiry and daily CFGs can be imagined and realized in their story of a district-based summer initiative. Marjorie Larner of Colorado shares her sense of urgency and her hesitation as she works to interrupt inequities as they happen in the schools she visits. In Students at the Center, Greg Peters shares his peer observation in the form of a letter from a student he observed, along with the teacher's response to the feedback in her letter to the student. In *Ask Mr. Reyes*, I share a snapshot of the power of the principal, and principal collaboration, across our district and state lines from two Philadelphia principals. Kevin Horton, from Illinois, shares the story of his journey as a school transformation coach, tracing his path from classroom teacher to CFG coach to aspiring administrator in our Living History interview.

Protocols in Practice by Dave Lehman, New York, and the review of resources dealing with sexual orientation by Sarah Childers and Afriyie Daniels, from Indiana, turn our focus to the question of equity and sexual orientation in our schools.

Finally, we have a roundup of this year's Winter Meeting in Seattle along with an insider's view of this year's Second Annual Research Forum from Donna Reid, of Texas. Donna closes her reflection with a hopeful challenge that we will all make our inquiry and research public in the coming year.

On the web…

- Let us know if you've tried the protocol offered in Protocols in Practice and any adaptations, questions or lessons you learned in the process.
- Try using Greg's strategy of giving feedback from a student's point of view as you engage in self and peer observation, or better yet, ask your students to write you letters with their feedback. Share your learning online or in an upcoming article.
- Send your feedback about Connections and the kinds of coverage you need in your work to the editors at nsrf@nsrfharmony.org. ■

Debbie Bambino can be reached at dbambino@earthlink.net

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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, Sarah Childers, Camilla Greene, Debbi Laidley, and Greg Peters

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

Inquiry Focus Puts Students at the Center

Pedro "Pete" Bermudez and Linda Emm, Florida

Linda and I have been training CFG Coaches in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools for almost ten years. From time to time, we have imagined what coaches training experience might be like under ideal circumstances. In our fantasy scenario, a group of educators would be selected, trained, and immediately start applying their learning with students in a clinical setting. The strength of this approach would be to move participants towards the immediate application of the training as CFG Coaches to adopt an inquiry stance, design learning, implement it, and study its effects on students within the context of a CFG. We often wondered if such a seamless integration of inquiry into the work of a CFG in the real world of schools was possible.

Well, last summer, the Miami-Dade Summer Demonstration School Project (SDSP) provided us the opportunity we had been waiting for.

Implemented at six school sites during the summer of 2006, the project aimed to improve summer school opportunities for students by creating instructional settings that provided high-quality learning experiences through the implementation of best practices in teaching. Four common design elements formed the foundation for teaching and learning at each of the six SDSP sites: quality instructional programs, responsive teaching, global citizenship, and student development. We believed that each of these elements could be most effectively addressed within the context of a high-functioning learning community and we jumped on the opportunity to prove it by putting our work to the test.

Each of the six SDSP sites was assigned an experienced NSRF coach responsible for facilitating daily team sessions—teachers taught for half a day and came together as a learning community during the second half of the day. The program enabled us to adopt an inquiry stance about our own work and led us to explore what would happen if students were taught by a group of teachers who were part of a learning community that met regularly to read and discuss relevant articles, design instruction, and collaboratively examine their practice and the student work resulting from their assignments. One of the questions we explored was: Will having an inquiry focus make a difference in how teachers approach instruction? If so, what impact will that have on student learning?

From the beginning, inquiry and data collection were embedded as part of the professional development expectations for all participants—teachers, site learning community facilitators, and district support facilitators. During the On-Boarding sessions held at a local university, participants documented their learning by writing daily session reflections. These reflections were reviewed, shared, and discussed at the learning community facilitator debrief session, held at the conclusion of each day. These reflections provided valuable information about the experiences, concerns, and needs of participants in their seminar groups (SDSP site teams), which led to ongoing adaptation of the agendas to better serve the group's needs.

The On-Boarding experience began with a focus on understanding the twenty-first century learner as a springboard for reflection and thinking about the kind of teaching and learning experiences that would be necessary to fully engage every student in powerful learning. This activity was done with the entire group of teachers before they received their assignments to the specific SDSP site teams. Participants read several articles describing twenty-first century learners and discussed them in small groups using the Three Levels of Text Protocol. Working in groups, they then constructed their own graphic representation of the students they would expect to teach. The entire group then examined each other's creations by engaging in a gallery walk. The activity concluded with reflective dialogue prompted by the following questions: How would the characteristics of the twenty-first century learner add to the complexity of addressing the needs of these students? How might working as a learning community enable us to meet the needs of all students?

This activity set the tone for the kind of professional development that would follow. It focused attention on students and

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Interrupting Inequities

Developed by Dave Lehman with thanks to friend and colleague Anne Rhodes for the original version of these adapted activities.

Purpose:

- To gain a deeper awareness of hurtful heterosexist and homophobic things being said and done among students and staff in your school (the focus could be adapted to address racist, sexist or classist remarks and practices as needed).
- To work on ways to effectively interrupt inequitable behaviors that are biased and unfair to members of your school community

Time: 1-2 hours depending on the size of the group and the number of incidents discussed.

Part I
Recognizing Heterosexist & Homophobic Incidents of Bias

The following is a list of actual homophobic or heterosexist incidents of bias which have taken place in middle and high schools. [Participants may read these silently at first, then add their own examples of incidents they have witnessed or heard about at their school] (10-20 minutes depending on whether participants add their own incidents).

The Incidents

1. You hear students walking down the hall together using the word "faggot" as a way to put each other down.
2. A staff member is overheard in the office referring to the student-organized day to address homophobia as "sexual confusion" day instead of an "infusion" day.
3. A boy in the school reports that his father objects to his learning about homophobia in school and says that "Gay men and their homosexual activities are the cause of AIDS."
4. Male staff members overreact in embarrassment and have to joke about it and slap each other on the shoulder when they accidentally touch each other.
5. Student is overheard saying that: "...all dykes hate men; they're all ball-busters."
6. You hear through the grapevine that some young women in the school are upset because someone yelled "Dykes are ugly," and everybody laughed.
7. A staff member at a staff social event is talking about what he perceives to be a lack of empathy among students for the work that teachers do. He says "when they get married and have kids and have a full-time job, maybe then they'll understand."
8. In a class discussion, a student of color says that "all gays are white," and that homophobia is not an issue for people of color.
9. In an informal discussion, one student confronts another about a homophobic comment, and is told they were just kidding and to "lighten up."
10. A staff member says that homophobic harassment and violence are not a problem here.
11. Students discussing another student who is not present comment on her black boots and short hair, and laugh when somebody says she's probably a lesbian.
12. Staff members covering historical or current events fail to mention that some of the prominent people discussed are gay or lesbian.
13. Staff member teaching Sex Ed in a Health class does not mention gay, lesbian or bisexual sexuality, and only talks about heterosexual intercourse.
14. Gay and lesbian students come into school extremely upset because a gay student at another local high school was beaten up. Other students tell them that it was his own fault because he "should have known not to dress like that and tell people he was queer."
15. Students are encouraged to ask their mother and father if either would be interested in participating in a committee at school.
16. Staff attitudes about heterosexual romances at school are positive and supportive, but lesbian dating is seen as a "fad" or as another way for girls to rebel or be "different," like getting a nose ring.
17. Students in school are spreading a rumor that a gay student is suicidal after being rebuffed by another boy. Neither boy is out to the staff.
18. A presenter from a local organization talks to students about date rape and violence from a completely heterosexual perspective.
19. Staff person questioning why staff has to go to diversity sessions says they "don't understand why we are taking so much time to focus on this issue."
20. Staff members are talking about a

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Resources for Gay and Lesbian Families and Students

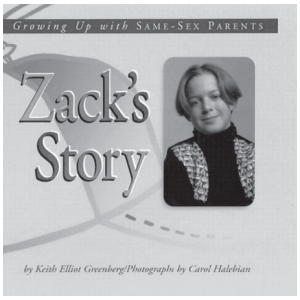
Sarah Childers and Afriyie Daniels, Indiana

Just 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 students 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 moms' roles in his life and the valued time that they spend together.

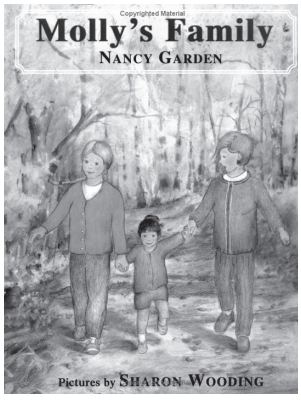
Daddy and Papa: A Story about Gay Fathers in America
a documentary film by Johnny Symons

"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 dads."

"From surrogacy, foster care, and interracial adoption, to the complexities of gay marriage and 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, when 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

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Leaps

Marjorie Larner, Colorado

"Was Molly smarter than all the experts? No, she was just braver. The Administration's exploitation of 9/11 created an environment in which it took a lot of courage to see and say the obvious… Molly had that courage; not enough others can say the same…

And it's not over. …Now, more than ever, we need people who will stand up against the follies and lies of the powerful. And Molly Ivins, who devoted her life to questioning authority, will be sorely missed." - Paul Krugman in a column mourning the death of columnist Molly Ivins

On Monday morning, I barely stopped myself from standing on a table at a faculty meeting in an urban school and yelling, "Stop! Stop talking about the kids that way!"

Molly Ivins

Marjorie Larner

The odds are if I had, I wouldn't have been satisfied with the results. And yet, I still wonder. The picture replays in my head like a cartoon where my body stays seated listening to the discussion of how to control the kids with systemized and incrementally more serious punishments for infractions of dress code, being in the hallways without a pass and rude behavior, while my alter ego rises up to interrupt the direction of the discussion.

The next morning, in a more affluent school a few miles outside the city boundaries, I walked through the hallways surrounded by kids enjoying freedom of movement, choice of clothing, joking around with each other and with their teachers. The cartoon replayed in my head, this time with more specific questions: Why are the kids in the affluent school met with words and behaviors that release and empower them while the poor kids and kids of color are met with demands for compliance and control? What adult beliefs and perspectives support this disparity?

Over the past year, as we have pushed ourselves harder to think, talk and act around issues of equity, I have been disturbed. I have listened and heard more. My own story bubbled up, and my capacity to keep my mouth shut, never great to begin with, diminished.

Yet, what stops me from leaping onto tables and yelling, "Stop it!" when I see inequities? I question myself as a coach and facilitator in new ways, not sure if I can trust my old instincts. Am I quiet or tactful to keep myself safe? Am I saying something offensive or naïve? Who am I to facilitate this learning unless I am taking the same risks into unknown territories, not only on my own, but with this community?

I don't often have the luxury of days set aside for "trainings," or workshops to build new awareness through carefully crafted experiences. Rather, my work has to occur in real time in classrooms and hallways and committee meetings. I have to find ways to insert questions, new perspectives that shed light on assumptions and name inequities in the moment. With these short chances at conversation, each move has to count toward affecting instructional practice and relationships with students.

Once as a meeting was starting, a teacher with whom I was feeling some beginning alliance whispered to me, "Many of these kids are involved in gangs and drugs. We can't compete with that." I whispered back to him, "If we don't do it in this school, who will? What will happen to them?" He looked at me in a way that I interpreted as, "You are naïve. You are not in the classroom with these kids." I wondered what he did to cope with the horror of kids being just let go. I wanted to tell him stories of students and their teachers whose lives refuted his assumption. I suspected he could match me story for story, and I would not change his mind. My question was just a beginning for both of us.

I keep looking at how my beliefs about what actions are possible and right are influenced and limited by my own experience. My perceptions are colored by my Midwestern childhood in a school that was 100% Jewish kids with no Jewish teachers and no external acknowledgment ever

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NSRF's Living History: An Interview with Kevin Horton

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

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.

Kevin Horton

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

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What's *Your* Question?

Reflections on the Second Annual NSRF Research Forum

Donna Reid, Texas

"I'm grateful for this opportunity to get folks together who are interested in studying systematically CFG work. It's affirming and energizing!"—Research Forum participant

That quote sums up the positive response to the second annual NSRF Research Forum held on January 24, 2007. Around 30 practitioners associated with NSRF gathered in Seattle to examine and advance research related to CFG practices. The thirteen sessions covered a wide range of topics that prompted another participant to reflect: "A revelation to learn the scope, variety, and quality of research."

Donna Reid

What sets the NSRF Research Forum apart from other similar gatherings is a collaborative atmosphere that fosters questioning and transparency and encourages presenters and participants to connect with each other as well as to connect with new knowledge. The stodgy rectangular set up of tables and chairs that the hotel provided quickly gave way to presenters and participants forming circles to better interact with each other. As both presenters and participants, we took responsibility for each other's learning, and, to that end, many session leaders chose to use protocols to examine their research. For example, I attended Pat Norman and Angela Breidenstein's session titled "Learning to analyze student work: The use of protocols to develop teacher candidates' assessment skills and dispositions." As professors and CFG Coaches at Trinity University in San Antonio, Angela and Pat asked "whether and how protocols support teacher candidates' ability to assess student work as well as whether and how the engagement in protocols influences teacher candidates' stance toward assessing children's work." They collected data by videotaping university class sessions where teacher candidates used the ATLAS protocol to describe poetry written by elementary students. They transcribed the videotaped discourse and analyzed it along with the teacher candidates' reflections.

Unlike the norm at other research gatherings, where presenters rehash dry descriptions of their research design and findings, Pat and Angela plunged us into their data by asking us to engage in the ATLAS protocol using one of their class transcripts as a text. Yes, we were doing an ATLAS protocol of a transcript of an ATLAS protocol—with powerful results. Together the participants described and interpreted the transcript and then reflected on the implications for our practice. The process democratically validated the presenters' research and reminded every participant that conversation is at the center of CFG work.

This format encouraged us not only to share knowledge, but to influence each other's practice. At the end of Angela and Pat's session, I wasn't just thinking "Hmm, that's a good idea," but "Wow! I'm going to try that out myself." With the permission of our own critical friends back home, another colleague and I plan on making transcripts of protocols in action to possibly use as texts in our New Coach training seminars.

Other participants echoed this appreciation of interactive sharing in their reflections at the end of the day. One shared, "I very much enjoyed being here, felt heard and felt like the setting(s) allowed me to give good feedback to others." Another wrote, "Please know that, for emerging and continuing scholars, this is an important community to foster. Connections are being forged and collaboration is taking place." Finally, a participant new to NSRF wrote, "I very much appreciated the openness and active connection-making."

Although the second annual NSRF Research Forum displayed the NSRF community's strengths as open-minded, reflective collaborators who actively create new knowledge, there is more work to be done to get the organization closer to fully realizing our shared values and beliefs. The NSRF mission statement includes language about "empowering all people" involved with schools to do the work of building reflective communities. Yet of the many researchers who presented at the 2007 forum, only one is currently a classroom teacher. All the others listed universities and other educational organizations as their primary contact. Perhaps this is to be expected, since classroom teachers have a harder time leaving work to attend conferences, but NSRF's research agenda could be strengthened by encouraging moreteacher

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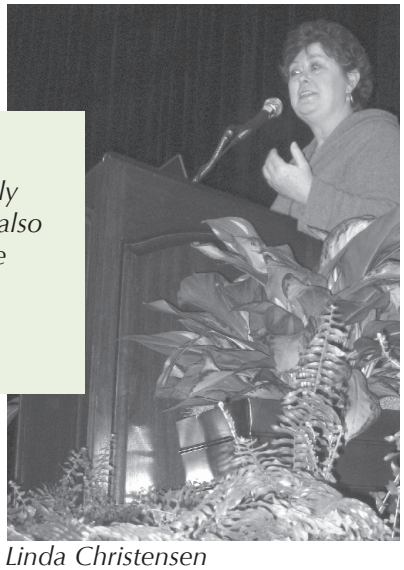
Winter Meeting Reflections

Sarah Childers, Indiana

Another January has come and gone, and with it another Winter Meeting. After 400 of us gathered in Seattle, we've now gone back to our homes and begun the process of sorting through our learning and experiences from those jam-packed two and a half days that are the Winter Meeting. All of us, I believe, have come home changed from our experiences in Seattle. We've learned, laughed, cried and come to a renewed commitment to our work together for the sake of students.

Throughout the exciting two and a half days, participants could be seen talking in small groups in the lobby and hallways of the buildings, or taking part in activities such as the zones of comfort, risk and danger in the foyer.

> *Teachers who want to construct more equitable, more meaningful, and more lively educational experiences for children must also concern themselves with issues beyond the classroom walls.*
> *-from the Introduction to* Rethinking Our Classrooms *by Linda Christensen*



Linda Christensen

Also seen in the halls during the Winter Meeting were some wonderful people from Youth In Focus, a Seattle area group that works with young photographers and filmmakers. We were very happy to have them working with us and taking wonderful pictures to document the experience. All of the pictures throughout this piece were taken by our Youth In Focus photographers, Wendy Dang and Jacob Eaton. More photographs are viewable on our website.

Highlights

This year, we used a new structure for home groups - strand topics. Participants were able to select a topic to focus on in their home group. Topics offered were:

- Coaching for Educational Equity, an Introduction,
- Collaborative Inquiry,
- Context Coaching,
- Facilitation, Collaboration and Reflection,
- Facilitative Leadership,

Most of the true highlights of the Winter Meeting took place in home groups, and often were personal realizations, affirmations or epiphanies. Some of the comments from participants give us a glimpse of these highlight moments that people experienced.

"For the past three years I have attended the Winter Meeting and each year I have been amazed by the amount I get out of three short days. Being in an environment with so many educators from around the country is energizing, motivating and grounding. Each year the dynamics and the chemistry within my home group that are formed give me motivation to bring that same energy, focus and enthusiasm back to my school and district. In addition, I am exposed to new tools that have an immediate impact on my coaching facilitation. I learn about myself as a coach and a teacher. I have deep and meaningful discussions about equity and leadership within my classroom and the school as a whole."
- Sarah Smith

"I'm pleased to be gently encouraged to be a facilitator. (I probably would not have done that otherwise.) Being expected to share and facilitate this week put me out of the comfort zone and into the risk zone. I needed that."
– Linda Geist

"Today has created a comfort with talking about and handling issues of race/ethnicity. I have never really had a problem with it in the past but today's experience put it at a different, higher place when dealing with that issue. It brought out an awareness and connection of how it resonates in my own life which provides power and confidence when dealing with it in the future." – Bennie Patterson

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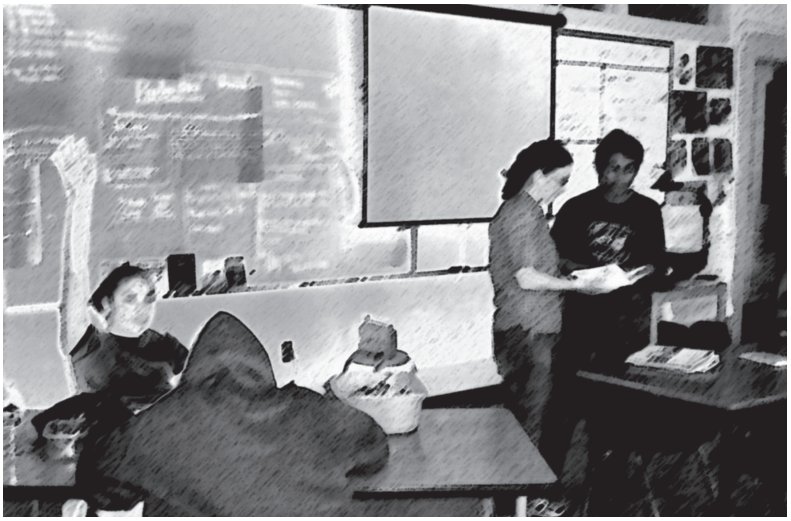
Dear Rachel

Greg Peters, California

Rachel, an experienced and talented educator, having just joined the staff of SF Community in December, asked me to visit her seventh grade humanities class, where she was worried about engaging three of her students. Two males – one African-American and one Latino - regularly don't complete class work for the most part due to acting out of classroom expectations. Vivian – an Asian American female – is simply distant. She often does little to no work and has little to say about it. During my observation, the two young men came in late; still it was Vivian who made an impression on me. While my observations most often are objective and descriptive, this visit left me wondering about Vivian's voice. I asked Rachel permission to share a fictional letter from Vivian that was meant to communicate one of many possible connections between the snapshot I observed and what actually may have been happening. Rachel agreed to the exercise in an effort to consider "What if…". She then responded to the letter before we debriefed the actual visit and exercise. Actual observations are italicized in the letter.



Dear Rachel,

I heard that you were concerned about me and about my participation in class because you have not seen a lot of my work. You also haven't heard me ask or answer a lot of questions.

Well I guess I want to thank you. It is really nice to know that you are thinking about me. Do you worry about everyone this way – or just me?

Anyway, I was thinking, maybe I should tell you about my day today. Not the whole day – I don't know if you want to hear that, but I want to tell you about today in class. I don't remember what I was doing at the beginning of class, but I remember when I started to think about it. You were giving directions to the class and I had my hand up while you were walking around the room. After about a minute I put my hand down. Then you went to Sergio's table.

After you were done at that table, you walked closer to me so I raised my hand again. You started to walk around the room again; this time you went to Jenet's group table. After you were done, you went to Isais' table and then back to Sergio's table so I put my hand down again.

After a while, you walked over to my table – but to be honest, I did not ask my question to you. I don't really know why. I think I gave up. I am not sure. But, you asked me which chapter I remembered best. You said I could use the notes I handed in if I needed them to help me remember. I guess we handed them in, but I just sorta was moving my stuff around in my bag – I don't like taking it off, so I keep it hanging in front of me. Then Tavia told me what to do and then I started reading the book again.

After a little while (you were still helping a lot of the class), Dontel and Jorge came back to class. Then you had to spend a lot of time with them. I understand why. I know they give you a lot of trouble and you have to keep talking to them. So when it looked like you were done, I raised my hand again to ask my question but you still had to deal with Jorge… and then you had to introduce him to our visitor so I still waited. Then you came near me, but you had to give directions for us to take out paper. When you went back to Jorge, I put my hand down.

Maybe I shouldn't have put my hand down because then I saw Kaleb raise his hand and you went and answered his question. So I put my hand

back up and you did come and stand next to me. But you didn't say anything so I did not want to interrupt you – but Tavia didn't care. She said out loud that I had a question. I was glad she did, but I still was a little embarrassed.

You put your hand on my chair and told me you would get to me after an announcement. Now, I was kinda tired, so I put my head down. I had my back to you, but I was listening – sorta.

After you finished giving us directions, you answered another one of Kaleb's questions. Then a bunch of other kids had questions and you had to answer all of them too. I understand that you had to do this – this is your job, but I started to get bored I think… I don't know. I just started to drift and was looking away.

Now, you said we had to start working in 100% silence (we were practicing for a big state test). I kinda knew that and what to do… I think. Maybe not, because Tavia had to tap on my paper and help me – she just told me what to do – oh and asked for a piece of paper. Then that's it, I did what I was supposed to and then finished writing this letter.

Anyway, I don't know if I will give this to you, but I am thinking maybe I should move my seat. I mean my back is to the board and to you most of the time and I don't really turn around when you teach. But I do see other students raising their hands and getting their questions answered… and some don't even have to raise their hands. So maybe I am not doing something right.

I am not complaining. I know you have a lot of work to do and I really like you as a teacher. That's why I don't want to cause any trouble. But maybe I shouldn't be quiet either because Jorge gets all his questions answered and he is not quiet. But he also gets in trouble a lot and I don't want to get in trouble. To be honest, I really don't want a lot of attention. But deep down I think I do want to pass even if it looks like I don't – maybe I just don't know how to.

Writing this letter was not so hard – I think about things all the time. If you are reading this, that means I gave it to you and that's cool. I guess I am just surprised to hear you were thinking about me.

Thank you again.

Vivian

Dear Vivian,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful letter to me. I really appreciate you taking the time to tell me how you were feeling in class that day.

I've been thinking about you a lot, because I see that you are a bright young person who wants to do well in school, but that you sometimes don't do your class work. I want to know more about what is happening for you in class that helps or makes it harder for you to get your work done.

I also wanted to let you know that I read the writing that you began on that day, and you have a great beginning. You did a good job of putting the story in your own words and adding details of what you thought Ulysses was feeling.

I'm sorry for all the times you've raised your hand and I didn't see you, and the times when I asked you to wait a minute, and then I forgot to come back to you. I don't do those things because I don't think your question is important. That happens because I can get distracted really easily and sometimes forget who is waiting with a question. I need to work on making sure I remember the list of students with questions and making sure that I look around the room to see who has a hand up.

Every time I see your hand up, I am glad to see you participating in class or wanting to ask a question. It is a sign to me that you want to do your best, and I want to help you do that. I'm also glad that Tavia has been helping you out, either explaining directions to you or reminding me that you had a question.

I appreciate your patience with your classmates who "give me trouble" and your understanding that I need to talk to them a lot, but that does not mean it is okay for me to not talk to you, and one of my class goals is to talk more to students who are quiet. You deserve just as much time to ask questions as they do, and I want to be better about doing that.

I am going to be making a new seating chart this week, and I will give you a new seat where you will be facing the board and me directly. I would like to know if there are any students you would like to sit with. Other than Tavia, are there other students you feel comfortable talking to about work?

I know that you *(continued on page 17)*

Ask Mr. Reyes
A Tribute to the Power of Principal Collaboration
Philadelphia Area Leadership CFG

Written by Debbie Bambino with the permission of Nelson Reyes and Karen Dean, principals in the School District of Philadelphia.

Principals often tell me that they miss their time with students, those times when we are privy to the wonder of young minds learning and growing, the times that energize us and make our work worthwhile. Stuck in their offices with deadlines looming and seemingly endless meetings to attend, administrators can sometimes feel isolated and out of touch. However, at a recent CFG meeting in Philadelphia, our group was treated to a heartwarming story of the power of the principal's role and a glimpse of the exponential power of principals who collaborate across the city and beyond.

Nelson Reyes and Karen Dean

During Connections, one member, Karen Dean, began to share the story of a new student, a student who was not happy about changing schools midyear. The young boy was fussing and actively resisting entry at the start of his first day. Karen went into her office and looked at the child's paperwork and noticed that he was transferring from a fellow CFG member's school, so she called her fellow CFG member, Mr. Nelson Reyes. After quickly sharing the situation with Nelson, Karen handed her cell phone to the young boy, who was visibly calmed by the sound of a familiar voice. A bridge had been shared and the child was able to trust Karen and make a new start.

Nelson spoke next. Prompted by Karen's reflection, he told us about another child who had recently transferred to a school in Florida. The child was having a tough time and his new principal was at his wits' end. The new principal asked the young boy, "What am I going to do with you"? To which the young boy replied, "Ask Mr. Reyes, he knows what to do." The principal then called Nelson and they had a brief conversation, and once again, Nelson was able to speak to the child and help him calm down.

It has been months since Karen and Nelson shared these stories in our CFG meeting, but I find my thoughts returning to that young boy's words whenever I'm feeling overwhelmed or anxious about the next steps I need to take in my work. "Ask Mr. Reyes" has become a code for me, a reminder that I may not know what to do alone, but I can always turn to my CFG colleagues for the personalized support and encouragement I need. ■

Please send tales from your CFG or school to Connections in care of dbambino@earthlink.net for publication.

NSRF's New Membership Model

This summer, NSRF will begin a new chapter in our organizational development by becoming a voluntary, dues-paying membership organization. This decision has been made carefully and collaboratively between the director and staff of the NSRF National Center and has been informed by a growing chorus of national colleagues. We have relied on the work and feedback from many groups including Centers Council meetings, regional summits, Accountability Council meetings, and a special summit specifically on membership. All these gatherings of national colleagues have helped us to construct a membership plan that cultivates our national reach while remaining committed to and grounded in our mission.

Watch your mailbox for the NSRF Membership Report!

student whose parents are gay. One of them says "I bet you a hundred dollars that kid turns out gay too."

21. Except for the out members of the staff, people in the school assume that everyone is exclusively heterosexual, particularly if they see a partner of the opposite sex.
22. Staff members gossiping together assume that a single older staff member must be gay.
23. A bisexual student reports to you that a friend told them "You're confused. Just make up your mind what you want to be."

Process

1. Have pairs or small groups discuss the impact of an incident on the students and staff involved and on the whole school community. Each pair/small group will report out to the larger group. (20-30 minutes).

2. Individual Writing time - for each of the incidents chosen write down any suggestions about what could be done immediately, soon after or in the long-term - notice especially which interventions you think would be difficult for you personally and why. (10-15 minutes):

a) immediately in the situation (to interrupt the behavior)
b) next, soon after, later the same day or the next day (to educate)
c) long-term/proactive (to create student and staff leadership in this area)

3. Whole Group discussion - participants share with the large group their suggestions related to the 3 steps above - a) immediate, b) soon after, and c) long-term/proactive (10-30 minutes depending on the number of small groups and incidents discussed):

4. Debrief Part I of the Protocol (5-10 minutes)

Part II

How do you interrupt or intervene when you see/ hear heterosexist or homophobic speech/practice?

1. Brainstorm in the whole group possible kinds of interventions [the following is a partial list] and ask for an example of each (10 minutes):

Humor.
Turn it around.
Offer correct information.
Ask for more information.
Ask questions.
Address underlying hurt.
Exaggerate original comment.
Listen carefully.
Join with the other person.
Show pleasure for opportunity to discuss.

2. In choosing what intervention to make, consider - What, When, Where, How? Discuss in general the following questions in the whole group - Would it be more effective now or later? Would it be more effective one-to-one and in private, or with the whole group? Is this something that one person needs to change, everyone needs to learn, or the whole community needs to establish norms about? (10 minutes)

3. By way of review/overview, put the following chart on newsprint (chalkboard, overhead, or power point) and distribute it as a handout as well; ask for any clarifying questions (5 minutes):

Levels/Stages of Intervention - Progression toward long-term change

- Interrupt the behavior, or change the dynamics that support it - Stop! Invoke rules or guidelines. Consequences / discipline. Alter the context.
- Educate - Why should they stop? Why the behavior is hurtful. Provide information, correct misinformation.
- Create opportunity for leadership - Validate the person. Encourage self-examination. Provide way to practice new skills.

4. Put the following on newsprint (chalkboard, overhead, or power point) and distribute it as a handout as well; ask for any clarifying questions (5-10 minutes):

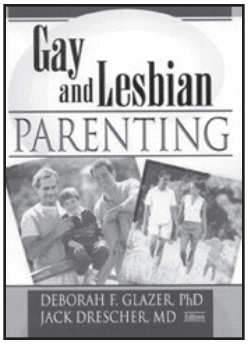
How to choose?	What helps?
Consider...	empathy
• your relationship with the person	connection
• the situation	opportunity
• how much time you have	no defensiveness
• your energy level	self-awareness
• the impact on the other in the situation	no blame
• how clear/confused you are	
• their mood	

Continue with Part II for practice on specific examples of incidents of bias or prejudice that need interrupting.

5. Debrief the process.

(continued on page 17)

Night. But after talking to Mommy, Mama Lu, and Ms. Marston, Molly does some hard thinking and realizes that even if a family is different from others, it can still be a happy, loving - and real - family." *-Molly's Family*

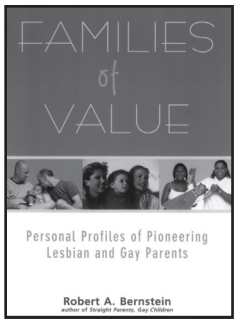


Gay and Lesbian Parenting by Deborah F. Glazer, PhD and Jack Drescher, MD (editors)

"Traditionally, coming out as gay or lesbian meant abandoning any hope of becoming a parent or keeping your children if you already had them. But with the "gayby boom" 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

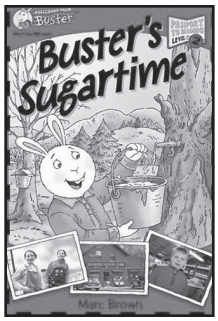


Bernstein has complied various stories about GLBT families and their quest to exist in a heterosexual world. "*Families of Value* offers a positive portrayal of GLBT/LGBT parents who are at the forefront of social change in America. By turns hard-hitting and affecting, these stories portray the resistance 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 B*usters' 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! ■

Sarah Childers can be reached at schilders@nsrfharmony.org
Afriyie Daniels can be reached at ardaniel@indiana.edu

Director's Report
(continued from page 1)

including scholarship support when necessary.

We are the protocol people – we're also the CFG people, the CFEE people, and the facilitative leadership people – no one else, and no other organization may lay claim to those things (one exception is our partner organization in the CFEE work, BayCES, with whom we are codeveloping that work). Choosing to support NSRF is a choice toward supporting the things we do coupled with our theory of action, which supports our mission statement of educational and social equity.

The choice to support NSRF is made with the understanding that the organization stay committed to its core values and principles. We have had many conversations and thought openly and honestly about the business of NSRF. NSRF is worthy of your support because we are, have always been, and will continue to be an organization committed to mission first. What we have realized and what we are asking you to support as a dues-paying member is that we must operate as a business in order to have the resources to further our mission.

And our time is now. I believe we are entering a perfect storm for teacher voice and teacher empowerment. In the face of the punishing effects of an unsustainable accountability system based on standardized test scores, school systems across the country are asking out loud what service they are providing their schools. Systems from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles are considering and reconsidering their carrot-and-stick approach to school management and governance and are seeking ways to reward school success with increasing levels of school-based decision making and management autonomy.

New York City alone is in the process of dismantling a failed bureaucratic school management structure in favor of locating as much power, decision making, and resources as possible at the schoolhouse level. With that type of administrative discretion, teachers and principals will get to choose the type of professional development and external support they buy and receive. Imagine, no longer will a central office staffer demand this or that type of professional development in over 1,000 schools representing tens of thousands of teachers. This is not a dream but a reality that will take effect July 1. Our time is indeed now.

As you consider your memberships, professional affiliations, and obligations this year, I am confident you will not only choose to become a dues-paying member of our organization but that you will encourage others to do so as well. I have had great counsel from trusted colleagues and critical friends in this time of transition for NSRF; our work is stronger, more important, and more critical than ever – it is up to each of us to choose to make our organization equally strong as a voice for adult learning in the service of student achievement. We can choose to make NSRF strong and I believe deeply that if we stay committed, we can and will choose a more socially just and equitable society. ■

Steven Strull can be reached at sstrull@optonline.com

What's Your *Question?*
(continued from page 8)

researchers to attend the forum and share their work.

Other participants pointed out that "work is needed. . . to document the research agenda, some essential history, etc." and one suggested "incorporat[ing] the research into each local center's work plan." These comments reinforce the idea that in order to further influence others to transform schooling, CFG practitioners must be more deliberate about collecting data and presenting evidence that demonstrates how we make a difference for our students.

Because NSRF's history is rooted in a tradition of "building reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone," NSRF is in a unique position to bridge the gap between theory and practice and use our strengths to transform student learning by transforming ourselves.

So what is YOUR research question? How does your practice influence others, and how can you share that? Hope to see you at the third annual NSRF Research Forum in Florida on December 12th, 2007. ■

Donna Reid can be reached at cfgcoach@robreid.com

(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.

Reception

Music, food, drink and friends - a recipe for a great time. Add to it a beautiful view of the Seattle skyline from the top floor of the hotel and you've got the Winter Meeting reception. Lots of laughter filled the room throughout the evening as everyone enjoyed some time to reconnect with old friends and get to know new ones. It was also a time to acknowledge those who have given greatly to the founding and leadership of NSRF. Founding Co-Directors, Accountability Council and Connections Editorial Board members were all honored.

Participant Evaluations

With the help of Ross Peterson-Veatch, our resident data-cruncher, we're able to mine the evaluations 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.

While overall, these figures indicate a substantial approval rating, we can also see in these figures some definite need for improvement. For example, last year 98% of people answered Agree or Strongly Agree in response to question six, and Open Space responses were quite low compared with feedback from Coaches Clinics last year. We're considering the implication 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. ■

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. 88.5%
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%

Sarah Childers can be reached at schilders@nsrfharmony.org

Pictures, resources and downloads from the Winter Meeting are online at www.nsrfharmony.org

NSRF's Living History...
(continued from page 7)

practice. I hope folks will move from seeing it as all about their subjects to seeing that it's all about the students.

I hope as an administrator I'll be able to provide the follow-up, the extra push or accountability that's needed to transform our practice.

What's your greatest fear?

My greatest fear is that teachers will pay lip service without really changing their practice or improving instruction. I don't want to be involved in lots of planning unless it leads to changes in the classrooms.

What's your greatest hope and greatest fear for NSRF in the next period?

I think the organization is evolving and needs to continue to find ways to reach all students and not just the kids in the classrooms of the teachers who are the first ones to volunteer for CFGs. I think we need to expose everyone to best practices continually. My hope and fear for NSRF are related to my hopes and fears for my school. I hope we continue to connect our ideas to real changes in practice. I'm always worried about talk without action and hope we will hold ourselves accountable to each other in support of our students. ■

Kevin Horton may be contacted at kbhort@aol.com. Debbie Bambino may be contacted at dbambino@earthlink.net

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

Students at the Center...
(continued from page 11)

were unsure about giving me this letter, and I am happy that you did. It shows a lot about your character, that you are brave, thoughtful, and caring. It also helps me to understand you better so that I can make class better for you.

I see that you are raising you hand and asking questions A LOT more than you did when I began teaching, and it is my goal now to make sure I am there to be answering your questions. I would like to ask you to write me another letter in a few weeks to let me know if you think class is getting better.

Thank you,
Rachel

Rachel later said that she really appreciated this exercise and how it allowed her to think about her initial questions. The *Connections* editorial board is wondering how others would respond to Vivian's letter and invite you to try this same reflective activity. To continue the shared reflection and learning we hope you will post your own letters to Vivian on our website at www.sfcess.org! ■

Rachel Kliegman is a middle school English teacher at San Francisco Community Alternative School – a San Francisco Small School.

Gregory Peters may be contacted at gpeters@sfcess.org.

Protocols in Practice
(continued from page 13)

Thanks to friend and colleague Anne Rhodes - who lives outside of Ithaca in Freeville, New York and is a facilitator/trainer working on "Creating Inclusive Schools" - for the original version of these activities which I have adapted. ■

You can contact Anne Rhodes at arf1945@hotmail.com, and Dave Lehman at dlehman@aol.com

of our culture and difference from the mainstream society. Our parents unquestioningly came to the Christmas programs where we sang carols, including the German "O Tannenbaum," in those years not long after WWII, where some of the parents had survived German Concentration Camps.

In my family, if I squinted, I could almost imagine us as Dick, Jane and Sally, which gave me great satisfaction on top of the uneasiness that no matter how close we might come, we could never really match that American picture. We internalized the dominant view of our difference as partially shameful. We were very verbal people and yet something deep within us was silenced.

Maybe I'm overly sensitive about uniforms and hallway passes because of how stifled, controlled and bored I felt in school and how hard I took it when I got in trouble for noncompliance. School for me, to borrow the words of a colleague, was soul-crushing. I hear the opinions that what appear to me as harsh words and heartless authority might not appear that way to all kids. But I can't help it. I feel an unbearable tug to act every time I sense anyone is silenced. So for me the question is not about whether to act but about how.

In my family, if I squinted my eyes, I could almost imagine us as Dick, Jane and Sally, which gave me great satisfaction on top of the uneasiness that no matter how close we might come, we could never really match that American picture.

When I am told that many of the rules in a high poverty school are in place in response to what the kids expect because of what they are used to in their home cultures, I need to ask someone how they know about these students' home cultures. I also want to ask why so many kids are in trouble all the time for infractions of these rules. I want to say, "It looks like you're picking and choosing what to lift and what to omit from your students' home culture, do you know enough to determine if you are picking and choosing what matters?"

Underlying these questions is my assumption that there are pieces in every culture that outsiders are not able to see, such as qualities of relationship, social and historical context, intonation, and so on, that make different customs and rules work. When I hear the generalizations about kids from particular races, cultures, socioeconomics, even regions of the country, my instinct is to hold those assumptions as context to be filled in by the real people, and have them confirmed…or not.

I am exploring opportunities for interactions to help myself and everyone I work with really see and hear each other within the constraints of day-to-day school life. We don't have time to wait for in-service days or retreats to get started. Since it is only when we infuse this work into who we are and all we do that things will change for kids, I think we need to just do it. I need to just do it. If I question systems and practice or offer my opinion with a genuine desire to learn more about another person and about the experiences that have led to that person's practice, I hope I can convey a spirit of real dialogue. I rely on dispositions and habits established and reinforced through CFG experiences, especially in using protocols for Constructivist Listening, Making Meaning, and Descriptive Review. I am working on a hunch that when I speak my truth, really listen to the responses and explicitly hold clear guidelines for maintaining safety, we can become actual allies. Not just teachers and me but all of us – staff, students and parents.

I am not finding it easy. A principal at a school where I'm working said his bottom line is, "We have to take care of our kids at all costs." In a conversation with a couple of African-American parents, we shared a fear for our sons in the face of racism and anti-Semitism – and an uncertainty as to whether we should tell them the potential dangers they face so they would know how to protect themselves, or let them live unknowing and unafraid. And hope for the best.

If history is any indication, hoping for the best, being silent, is probably a risky way to go. And so, I am relieved to share in the drive to live our mission at NSRF – for the dissonance we create, for the urgency to rethink instructional practices, increase awareness of assumptions and develop tools to listen without defensiveness. And perhaps, sometimes, with women like Molly Ivins for inspiration, we do need to leap onto tables and yell. ■

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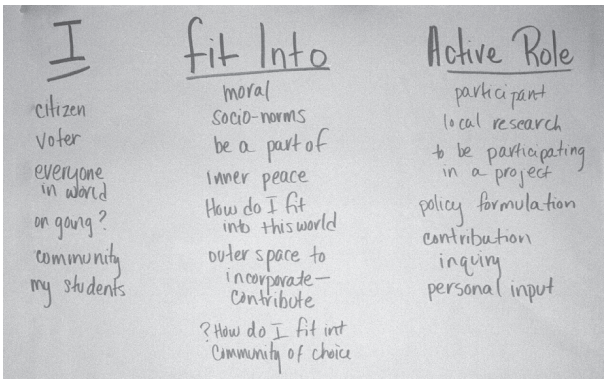
encouraged teachers to think about curriculum as a means to engage all students in powerful, relevant, and authentic learning. This initial phase of the On-Boarding helped to develop an integrated approach that touched on each of the major design elements of the SDSP—quality instructional programs, responsive teaching, global citizenship, and student development. Perhaps more importantly, it helped teachers anchor their conversations around the students they would expect to be teaching and not those they wish would show up.

Building on this attempt to put students at the center of their work, each team developed an inquiry focus that would help them study the effect of their instructional approaches on students and document their learning.

The image below shows how one of the teams began to articulate the question they wanted their students to explore: "How do I fit into and play an active role in my community, the world, and beyond?" They generated specific, teacher-created markers that served to both design instructional activities and document student progress over time.



Facilitated by a district science supervisor who is also a trained CFG coach, the work proved exciting, generative, and empowering for the members of this team. The initial focus on inquiry created a sense of ownership and collective responsibility for teaching and learning that was visible throughout the rest of the six weeks in every SDSP school site.

We were determined that this Summer Demonstration School Project become a learning experience for all of us, to inform our future work with embedding inquiry into the CFG process. We became data obsessed. Data collection within and across sites included:

- Observation/field - notes;
- Critical Incident Reports;
- Student and teacher artifacts;
- Reflection on lessons and responses from students;
- Discussions with peers about daily activities and outcomes;
- Focus groups;
- Learning community session reflections;
- Teacher journals; and
- Photographs and video.

As we began to examine the data, we noted patterns related to the four major design elements of the program as well as to our wonderings about the ways the program would affect teachers, coaches, and students. Initial site visits focused on capturing evidence of how participants had adjusted from the On-Boarding phase which had mostly focused on building a learning community, developing an understanding of the curriculum models that would be implemented at each site, and developing site-specific inquiry focus, as well as logistics, planning, and preparation to receive students.

Participants reported that having done the collaborative work to develop the inquiry questions that would guide their instructional choices for the summer gave them a focus they had not experienced in their work before. Planning cross-curricular projects and events became easy because the theme gave them a way to connect their individual content areas to the bigger picture. Students reported being engaged and energized by the process.

The best way to sum up the experience came from a fourth grader. When asked by the videographer about his experience in the Summer Demonstration School Project he said, "This is way better than real school." Asked to explain further he said, "In real school – if you want to tie a knot, they make you read a book and you still don't know how to tie a knot. Here we get to do the real thing."

Teachers reported feeling the same way. Because the inquiry focus was their choice, and the collaborative work they did was driven by their own needs and wonderings, the experience was powerful for them. As one veteran teacher says in her exit interview, "I've waited thirty years for this".

We have a lot more to learn and think about, but we are feeling that our initial sense that inquiry work and CFG work are a natural match has been enhanced by this experience. ■

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