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comprised of classroom teachers (both current and retired), instructional facilitators, school change coaches, administrators, college faculty and a mental health service provider. With the make up of this group, there is a richness of perspectives and viewpoints. But at the same time, many members have been facilitating together for four or five years. So at what point do we become too familiar and comfortable facilitating? The group has decided that we need to go beyond examination of our seminar agendas and engage in deep inquiry together, trying to explore some of the above questions. As a result, the Seattle area facilitation group has committed to meeting as a CFG, seven Saturdays over the course of the year, with a focus on equity. We will be asking each other tough and uncomfortable questions, better understanding who we are and how our identities influence how we see and act in the world. We will be sharing much of who we are as individuals and as educators. But we will not lose sight of our mission and passion for making our schools intellectually challenging and relevant learning communities. As we invite you to the wonderful city of Seattle for the Winter Meeting, we also invite each of you to engage with us in making our work public and to follow the challenge posed to each of us to engage in the difficult conversations.

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I choose to accept the responsibility of being a white ally and live in this state of uncertainty because to do otherwise would be unconscionable. But it’s tough to realize I don’t deserve any special accolades for making this choice. That’s what it means when someone says, “White people need to do their homework.” It’s a given, a nonnegotiable if I want to live and act equitably and work toward broader systems and beliefs that support equity.

Day four of our CFG/Equity training session was a little bit different. In the morning home group, after an opening discussion about our norms, someone raised concerns about the statement, “White people need to do their homework,” which led to a long emotional discussion. I realized that, like me, many people had been shocked; too shocked to respond in the moment. They just didn’t have the words.

It was a good reminder, and a little bit soothing to realize that, while I am still too often caught unprepared, I have a lot more words than I used to. During the conversation, I was reminded again of the reasons for CFG/Equity meetings; they’ve provided for me more forums in which to practice, more tools with which to safely structure riskier conversations, and more friends who show me things I can’t always see for myself.

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“W”hite people need to do their homew-ork. This time I just nodded and waited, a little surprised when the other ten white people in my home group barely reacted on day three of CFG/Equity Training. The facilitator wasn’t talking about a specific assign-ment; she was telling our mostly white, mostly mid-dle-class group that we had real work to do—on ourselves.

Goodness knows, the first time I’d heard the thought spoken aloud—the first time someone said it to me—I was shocked. I felt an almost dizzying, drop-in-the-pit-of-your-stomach, ear-ringing phys-iological jolt that accompanied the realization that being a good person who tries hard isn’t sufficient. The person who said it to me was white, unlike the person who said it to the home group, and I wondered briefly if that’s why no one in the home group responded. And then the conversation moved on.

Very little about doing equity work is easy. It seems that as a white ally, I’m always walking on that edge between risk and danger. “Will I know when to interrupt inequity?” “Am I seeing things that aren’t there?” “Am I missing things that are there?” “What do I say?” If you believe con-versation is the lever for change, being good with words feels very important!

Being a white ally is choosing to live in a state of uncertainty. I remember very vividly the first time I felt that way. My family was on vacation in Glacier National Park. My husband had volunteered to stay at the lodge with our two-year-old daughter while I took my four-year-old son on an all-day bus tour of the “Going to the Sun” road through Glacier. It was the first all-day alone time we’d had, and we were having a ball counting the different animals we saw. My son and I were the only two people on the tour under the age of fifty, and we were made much of by all the grandmother- ers on the trip. Everyone was really, really nice.

And white. And middle-class.

As we were driving down and around through the mountains the bus driver was identifying inter-esting sites when we came upon a collection of trailers, cars, old washing machines, rubber tires, and many other rusty, dusty scraps. The bus driver pointed out the collection and said—on the inter-com—“those no-account Indians live like trash and ruin the land” and then continued with her canned speech. I couldn’t believe it. My brain froze. My hands jerked to cover my son’s ears, but it was too late. In a split second I tried to think how to interrupt. I couldn’t let this go by, but I literally couldn’t think in words. It seemed like an eternity, but it was probably only two or three seconds later when I said out loud as I could. “Maybe they don’t want to be you. Maybe they don’t want to live like you.” And then I sat back and tried to figure out what I meant, and how I could explain to my four-year-old why I was shaking.

It took a way-too-close black bear and a few other local attractions to get the bus back into tourist mode. The nice, white, middle-class grandmas pretended nothing had happened, and, truth-fully, so did I for the rest of the day.

I felt too raw and embarrassed to talk to my husband about it when I got back, because I was afraid that he would have had the words I’d lacked. I already felt stupid and inadequate. He would have been supportive of me for speaking up at all, but I couldn’t take any more risks, not even that little one.

It was a really long time later, much longer than I’d like to admit, when I figured out some of the words. I wanted the bus driver to consider the past she and her ancestors had in the economic and political conditions that led to reservation lands, much less trailers on reservation lands. I wanted her to consider the ecological conservation represented by the use and reuse of the collection of goods we’d seen. I wanted her to consider the strong will and indomitable spirit it took to make a home amidst others who hate you. I wanted her to think of the mothers, fathers, and children—the individuality and humanity of the people.

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