NSRF's Living History

Interview with Kim Feicke and Tanisha Davis Doss

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 Tanisha Davis Doss, a coach/national facilitator from the Seattle Center of Activity and CES Northwest, and Kim Feicke, a coach/national facilitator from the Oregon Center of Activity. Here are the highlights of their conversation with Debbie Bambino.

How would you describe your goals and your work to our readers?

Tanisha: I entered education to advocate for homeless and at-risk students. My passion for social justice and equity drove my decision to step up as an educational leader because the students I advocate for are failing terribly in our educational institutions.

Tanisha Davis Doss and Julie McCann

Kim: Wow, that's a big question! My goals in life are continuous personal growth and achieving social justice, which for me revolve around doing what it takes to interrupt and transform the institutional oppression that is built into both our school system and our larger society.

How did you get involved with NSRF and how are your goals aligned with our mission?

Tanisha: In 2000 I was involved in a principal internship program and my placement was the Madison Middle School. My supervising principal was Jill Hudson and she invited me to attend a summer CFG training. After my CFG training, I was involved in coaching at the middle school and following my internship, I began facilitating for CES Northwest. Eventually, I began to facilitate nationally for NSRF.

Kim: I attended an introduction to CFGs that Steven Strull organized while I was in Chicago in 1998 or 1999, but it wasn't until I moved to Oregon that I really got involved as a coach. Carrie Brenna facilitated a coaching seminar at Southridge High in Beaverton and I became an external coach at the school. Later, through our practice in Beaverton, Amy Schuff and I realized that we needed ongoing support for our coaching work and we established the Oregon Center of Activity.

The NSRF mission statement said to me, "here's a group of people with similar goals, let's figure out how to do this." I know a lot of work went into crafting the mission statement and as part of the next generation of the organization, I see it as my/our responsibility to figure out how we can actually implement it so it's not just words on paper. I've seen too many schools with mission statements that are crafted and never looked at again. I want to figure out how to use our mission to challenge and hold ourselves accountable for the work that needs to be done for kids.

In my work as a school coach and NSRF facilitator, this translates into finding whatever avenue I can to deepen awareness and a sense of urgency around breaking down our individual biases so we can figure out how to work collectively toward equitable student outcomes, regardless of a student's race, class, gender or culture.

How has your involvement in NSRF supported your efforts in support of marginalized students?

Kim: My work with NSRF has given me valuable tools and skills for collaborating with others to improve our practice, and I'm beginning to learn how to better use them in order to address the gaps in who succeeds, who doesn't, and what I need to do about it. It's been a journey for me to get to this place. I had to use the tools for several years before coming to the conclusion that it's possible, and even common, for people to use collaborative tools and practices without disrupting the status quo. I was getting feedback and improving my practice, but I wasn't translating those changes into an impact for marginalized students, and the folks I was training were doing the same.

Debbie Bambino and Kim Feicke

Tanisha: Through NSRF, I have established relationships with other educators who share my passion. I have also established strong alliances across difference through the CFEE (Coaching for Educational Equity)

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work. These relationships and alliances provide me with the support I need to maintain the strength to continue this work.

Tanisha, you mentioned CFEE and I know Kim is involved in that work as well. How is CFEE the same as or different from your work as facilitators of new coaches' seminars?

Tanisha: CFEE provides the tools, definitions, and support needed to lead for educational equity. Personally, I see this as differing from coaches' seminars because it creates the space for the emotional, realistic and appropriate "self-work" needed to lead for educational equity.

When I am facilitating a traditional CFG Coaches Seminar, as opposed to a seminar focused on equity, I do not always have the support I need from my co-facilitators to be able to speak my truth. When I am involved in CFEE work, I know that my truth, and the truth of the participants, is needed and supported by my colleagues. In traditional seminars, I have been asked to lead the "equity day,"or the "equity exercise." With CFEE, I know that equity is at the center of our work, and that we are ALL responsible for it; it's no longer the special responsibility of colleagues of color.

Kim: For me the difference between a CFEE and a CFG seminar lies in its primary goal. Very briefly, a CFG seminar gives you the skills and tools to run a CFG– with all that entails. The goal of a CFEE seminar is to come out prepared with tools and the disposition to use them to challenge, interrupt and transform the status quo. CFEE uses some CFG processes, but also many others. I have come out of CFEE with a heightened awareness of my privilege as a white woman and a deeper understanding of where I need to take my facilitation in order to challenge and support others in this journey. I've gained a new understanding of what it means to work across difference with colleagues who look and think differently from me.

As NSRF continues to evolve and grow, what are your greatest hopes and fears for our work?

Tanisha: I hope that we continue to grow by cultivating increasing numbers of thoughtful, critically thinking educators. I fear that as we move forward with the CFEE work, we may become more divided into two groups: those of us who see CFEE as an intricate, essential piece of all CFG work, and those who see it as a separate entity that we should be able to "choose" if and when we incorporate it into our curricula and work.

Kim: My greatest fear for NSRF is that we will allow ourselves to be immobilized by the discomfort that comes with unpacking and addressing our own biases and assumptions around equity work, and that this will block our ability to hold ourselves accountable for moving forward in our work.

My greatest hope is that as an organization, we will be able to develop the processes we need to engage in dialogue and reflection to strategize where we are in our mission and what our next steps are so that we can have a decisive impact on the enormous gap that exists between who achieves and who does not. ■

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Students at the Center...

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wonder what respect looks like in the eyes of our students – especially those students whose lives are defined by race and authority and family and the street.

Melinda attended school through her senior year but did not graduate. Her relationship with me through that time continued to be "cold and yet soft."

I recently ran into Melinda – three years later – while walking downtown; she gave me a big hug and proudly proclaimed that she had earned her diploma and was working for social justice at AmeriCorps. She said she'd stop by to see me soon. I still find myself questioning the inequity embedded in the ways we define respect.

I look forward to exploring my questions with Melinda in the struggle for equity. I still have much to learn from her. ■

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