I was going through some boxes the other day and ran across my “office stuff” from my days at the Small Schools Workshop in Chicago. For me, office stuff is that assortment of paper, knick knacks, pictures, calling cards, and assorted paraphernalia that doesn’t fit neatly into a stack of files. After a very pleasant trip down memory lane, what caught my attention was a cartoon that once hung on the wall just next to my desk and that I looked at several times a day.

The cartoon depicts a student approaching a teacher’s desk with the simple but surprisingly complex statement, said in a bit of frustration, “yes, but it’s all a metaphor!” (emphasis added). The reader is left to wonder what prompted this exchange, as we don’t know what came before nor what occurred afterwards. The cartoon has special meaning for me, as this was how I was introduced to the small schools movement.

While I was teaching at DuSable High School in Chicago, the “Bills” from the University of Illinois at Chicago - Bill Ayers, Bill Schubert, and Mike Klonsky - would come by the school from time to time and meet with teachers and administrators about ideas related to small schools and, specifically, how we might think about restructuring our rather typical urban comprehensive academic neighborhood high school. This was in the early days of Annenberg, well before the Gates Foundation was even an idea, so this was all pretty new and powerful stuff for a group of teachers struggling to make sense of their students’ near total lack of achievement as evidenced on just about any metric.

Those early conversations were about learning and teaching. We struggled and fumbled through the organizational questions, but in those days, we didn’t know enough to know that those things would consume the conversa-
As facilitators of Critical Friends Group Seminars, we often hear feedback such as this was the most powerful professional development of my career’ and ‘CFGs have helped me to examine my practice and collaborate in new ways with my colleagues.’ The Washington State Center of Activity has been offering several Beginning and Continuing CFG Seminars for teachers in the region every year during the summer and school year. There are a great number of schools and organizations that have strong CFGs; many of the schools involved in transformation and school change attribute much of their success to their Critical Friends Groups and the collaborative and inquiry-based processes used. So as a region, we are very proud of our network, facilitators and participants.

But recently, one of our facilitation colleagues sent a letter to the area facilitation group, challenging us to go deeper in our learning together around issues of equity.

“As we continue to teach, coach, and lead in our schools, the evidence of the inequities speaks louder and louder. We need to work across difference to tune our ears to hear the screams in order to interrupt the inequities, as we shift our own practices in an effort to transition our schools to more equitable and proportionate institutions.”

—excerpt from Tanisha Davis Donn’s letter

Though we have discussed issues of equity and equity-centered activities, as I read this letter I still began to ask myself questions: Do we really understand what it means to focus on equity in our seminars and in our own work? Do we have the tools to engage in deep inquiry around issues of equity as a facilitation team and at the same time support our participants in doing so? What tools do we need to develop together? What does it look like to support colleagues from diverse backgrounds? How are we learning from each other? How do we keep creative and passionate with our CFG seminars so it does not become about the mechanics of a protocol but is truly about improving our schools (and our own practice) for each student? How am I modeling culturally competent pedagogy? The facilitation team in the Seattle area is (continued on page 13)

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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

when transforming our schools from an agricultural model to an industrial model, we can once again find the ability and passion to move from our current industrial model to a technological and knowledgeable model as yet to be invented.

We can decide to hold on to the metaphor of size for knowing each child well and taking responsibility for her experience and outcome. We can decide that instruction, pedagogy, and the very special relationship between child and teacher are the most important things we do. We can choose to educate most children well and to try our best with each child. We can and must find courage to face our fears and brace for change. We can choose equity over racism and the highest of locally devised standards and accountability metrics over standardization. And if we can and must, we will.

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Connections
The Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Connections: the journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Upcoming Events

February 7-9 & May 17-18, 2007
New Coaches Institute, Somerset, NJ

February 15, 2007
CFG Coaches Clinic, Los Angeles, CA

February 23, 2007
Creating & Sustaining Professional Learning Communities, Denver, CO

February 24, 2007 - March 31, 2007
Mondays and Saturdays
New Coaches Institute, Houston, TX

February 26 - March 2, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Pasadena, CA

March 3, 2007
NSRF San Antonio Spring Meeting, San Antonio, TX

March 26-30, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Orange Co., CA

June 13-15, 2007
CFG Administrators Seminar, Denver, CO

June 18-22, 2007
CFG New Coaches Seminar, Denver, CO

June 25-29, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Portland, OR

July 16-20, 2007
CFG Coaches Training for School Leaders, Keene, NH

July 30 - August 3, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Portland, OR

For more information on these events, visit www.nsrfharmony.org and click Upcoming Events.

To list your event in Connections and/or on NSRF’s website, contact Chris Jones at 812.330.2702
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 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 different 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 truths 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 a CFG seminar lies

Students at the Center…

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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Cleg Peters

I must think that this book shows many parallels between the work of Critical Friends Groups and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) because of the tremendous amount of post-it notes and underlining that was evident when I finished reading. Even after rereading to pull out significant quotes, I felt myself saying yes that is true and fits perfectly into what I am doing.

The book opens with a forward by Lee Shulman. He describes the work of CASTL as follows: “The scholarship of teaching and learning … views teaching as serious, intellectual work, asks good questions about their students’ learning, seek evidence in their classrooms that can be used to improve practice, and make this work public so that others can critique it, build on it, and contribute to the wider teaching commons” (p. ix).

He points out the need for making the work public, which is often the missed step or a step not included in past CFG work. I recognize there is a very fine line between making work public and breaking the trust of the CFG, and this could be part of the reason for the lack of substantial literature about the work of CFGs. But as I reflect back, I wonder about the paths the work of the critical friends traveled. As a first year coach, I went to a portfolio evaluation of the work of second-year coaches in Pawling, N.Y. There, experienced coaches were required, as part of the process, to document evidence through portfolio-making and to publicly defend the work of their CFG. I am wondering now whether the dropping of this component of the work seven years ago has contributed to the lack of current longitudinal evidence to substantiate the powerful work that has been happening in CFGs over the past ten years. I am in the process of a work of CASTL, points out that “few reform efforts reach directly into the classroom to look carefully at what teachers do” (p. 3). The work of the National School Reform Faculty and the Houston A+ Challenge (formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge) tried, and I think we were very successful in, reaching into the classrooms to the teachers and the students. There is powerful anecdotal information on the impact the CFG work has had in schools. This journal’s archive contains story after story about the positive impact of our collaborative, reflective work. The question is to what end. As a group of teachers and inquirers, we need to create the needed research and produce the literacy of our own work.

Hatch illuminates some of the pitfalls of teaching doing research, “the fact that the demands of teaching must take precedence over the demands of research makes it particularly difficult for teachers to maintain a focus on a particular issue or question. For teachers, the object of study is like a moving target that refuses to stay still long enough to get a careful look…” (p. 18). Hatch continues throughout the book describing the successes and challenges that faced the teachers participating in the program. The book brings the teachers to life, using their writings, until their voices are heard loud and clear.

The conclusions that Hatch presents are on target and speak to the trials that I go through in maintaining my own work with CFGs. He states in one conclusion, “the current working conditions for teachers fail to provide adequate time and rewards for the careful examination of teaching and learning, but they also underscore how much can be done even under adverse conditions.” He continued, “what might be possible if we had a system of education that … embraced the idea that teachers’ expertise can be a critical resource in reshaping classroom practice and improving schools” (p. 101).

I recommend this book to anyone in a CFG, working to develop CFGs, or interested in changing teaching and learning systems for the good of our students.

Michaela Kelley can be contacted at kelley34@yahoo.com

Michaela Kelley and Stephen MCowan
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using a recent CFG training, "Coaching for Equity" with a group of teachers from new small high schools throughout North Carolina, I used the Four "A's" text-based discussion protocol with chapter six — "Changing the Discourse in Schools" by Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith — from Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice (edited by Peter Hall, New York: Garland Publishing, 1997). As the "rounds" progressed from Assumptions to Agree to Argue and to Aspire, some people had selected the same passage to "Agree with" that others had selected to "Argue with."

One of the participants pointed this out during lunch, and so we returned to an extended discussion of the various places in the text where this occurred, giving the differing participants an opportunity to say what they "Agreed with" and why, and others what they would "Argue with" and why, for the same passages. This discussion produced considerably heightened awareness among the group, both about each other and about how different people bring different perspectives to the text. — it clearly took us deeper.

Thus, in using the Four "A's" protocol in the future, I intend to listen carefully to the selections for Agree and Argue, and to create a space for an extended conversation focusing on those passages where different people choose the same thing about which to Agree and to Argue. I also will modify the protocol so as to have a discussion after each round of hearing from everyone on each "A," and not wait until we have heard from everyone on all 4 "A's." Experience tells me this will lead to deeper, more meaningful conversations, and not just reporting-out.

Dave Lehman can be contacted at davelehmaz@mac.com

Four “A”s Text Protocol
Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, WA 2005

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin on post-it notes in answer to the following four questions (you can also add your own "A's"):  
   • What Assumptions does the author of the text hold?  
   • What do you Agree with in the text?  
   • What do you want to Argue with in the text?  
   • What parts of the text do you want to Aspire to?

2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.

3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining "A's", taking them one at a time — what do people want to argue with, agree with, and aspire to in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one "A" to the next, giving each "A" enough time for full exploration.

4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?

5. Debrief the text experience.

In addition to Dave's comments on going deeper with the Four "A's", I would like to add my use of “Application or Action” for the fourth "A" I have found that asking folks to commit to an action they will take as a result of our conversations about a text connects it directly to our practice with and for students.

- Debbie Bambino, Philadelphia

We are fortunate to work in a school system that has the resources and the community support to enable us to take on these challenges. Our work is both incredibly challenging and incredibly important. I feel more strongly than ever that we are the right group of people to take on these challenges together. Let’s get started.

You can reach David at david_summergrad@brookline.k12.ma.us

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

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

• School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
• Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
• The key to this effort is the development of a "learning community" based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
• To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

Critical Pedagogy  
(continued from page 7)

Critical pedagogy for any urban male at this time would have to center around the incident of the fifty shots fired by New York City under-cover cops that resulted in the murder of Sean Bell. I would have students think critically about this incident and I would use Papoose’s rap 50 Shots as text.

My friends, allies, colleagues, and others who use the CFG structures to collaborate, I challenge us to use critical pedagogy with each other and in our CFG groups. I challenge us to lose our fear and confront each other in ways that push us to be more effective and relevant to the lives of our urban high school students who are least engaged in public education. Perhaps we could begin by engaging in an ongoing, online conversation initiated by Debbie Bambino on the book Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. If we cannot be critical with each other in our work together, then we cannot work to help end the failures of large numbers of African-American, Latino, and poor urban children in our American public high schools. Do we have the courage, will and skill?

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Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

3) What will we do when they have not learned it? That is our call for appropriate differentiation business as usual to help us close the gap or it? That will determine whether we interrupt the momentum required to create sustainable change. We will need to tap into this resource to develop the resources and the persistence to make the changes required to close the gap:

1) What do students need to know and be able to do to build our instruction? That will guide our assessment.
2) How do we know when they have learned it? That will guide our assessment.
3) What will we do when they have not learned it? That will determine whether we interrupt business as usual to help us close the gap or whether we continue to accept the results we have now.
4) What will we do when they already know it? That is our call for appropriate differentiation that is so crucial to sustaining support for this effort.

If this were an easy task, teachers in schools like ours would have solved it long ago. Only if we are willing to face down a deeply entrenched problem and go at it with a resource and the persistence it requires will we get different results than we have been able to get in the past. The challenges that face us today as educators do not lend themselves to quick fixes or isolated workshops. They require us to deepen our understanding as we develop new ways to build upon and expand the successes of the past. Whether we are working on closing the achievement gap, reaching out to include children who are on the autism spectrum, ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment for all of our students, or using the tools of technology to improve instruction and learning, we need to be willing to learn from each other in order to grow and to improve our practice.

We will continue to open our doors to all students, and we will continue to support the staff in acquiring the skills needed to teach all children effectively. We will work hard to ensure that we all have the training and resources necessary to do our jobs well.

Bumper Sticker Activity

In the best tradition of political campaigns, I invite you to take a few minutes now to develop a slogan for a bumper sticker to represent your commitment to this effort.

- How can we expect equity when we don’t live in an equitable world?
- Keep Pace, Respect Race.
- Understanding Individuals.
- I’m the Solution.
- Equity = Commitment + Discomfort = I Change
- Every child can succeed. Every child deserves the chance!
- Go the distance… Equity for ALL!
- Success for all… not for most.
- Equity Equals Excellence.
- Fairness means you get what you need.
- Equality in the Classroom.
- Equal Educational Access.
- Change is good
- Coexist
- Affirm identity - Build community - Create leaders

Brookline’s Equity Project, we step back and consider the courage required to undertake this effort. First of all, it takes courage for a school system like Brookline’s to publicly acknowledge this glaring area of weakness. We continue to collect data that yield a sizable racial achievement gap. For example, nearly 400 points separate the average SAT scores of Brookline’s white students from those of our black and Latino students. The results on other standardized measures, like the MCAS, reveal similar gaps.

It is also courageous to state that we will take on this achievement gap and, over time, change the results in our schools. The title of our effort is: Brookline’s Equity Project – Taking Action, Getting Results. Our challenge this year is to continue to move from a study of the problems causing the achievement gap to an action-driven approach. Last year, we formed equity teams at each school so that we could begin to answer the kinds of changes we need to make in the classroom. Courageous conversations about race and the sharing of best practices are only effective if they connect with individual teachers and their students.

Do we have the guts and the fortitude it will take to challenge our own practices and to change the way we do things? Do we have the political will to take on the challenges of this effort in the face of the pressure and the resistance? In the movie An Inconvenient Truth, Al Gore reminds us that political will is a renewable resource; we will need to tap into this resource to develop the momentum required to create sustainable change. Dr. James A. Williams, Superintendent of Schools in Buffalo, New York, suggests that we must ask four essential questions to help us close the gap:

1) What do students need to know and be able to do to build our instruction? That will determine whether we interrupt business as usual to help us close the gap or whether we continue to accept the results we have now.
2) How do we know when they have learned it? That will guide our assessment.
3) What will we do when they have not learned it? That will determine whether we interrupt business as usual to help us close the gap or whether we continue to accept the results we have now.
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What does it mean that teachers feel they cannot relax around parents?

Many of us understand the power of collaboration and reflective practice within Critical Friends Groups. However, we need to ask ourselves the question, do teachers informally create networks to support their teaching?

Teaching is a characteristically lonely vocation, offering the practitioners only limited opportunities for adult-to-adult interaction in the course of the average workday. Once the classroom door is closed at the start of the day, each teacher becomes separated from the rest of the school, a characteristic which has created an isolationist and alienating culture (Little, 1990; Rogers & Babinski, 2002) endemic to the teaching profession. The individualistic nature of our educational system (Hargreaves, 1988) and the rigidity of the academic structure and schedule (Court, 1999) hinder teacher interaction during the workday. Moreover, current educational reforms and new curricula have added to the teacher workload, leaving even less time for professional interaction on a daily basis. If this were an easy task, teachers in schools like ours would have solved it long ago. Only if we are willing to face down a deeply entrenched problem and go at it with a resource and the persistence it requires will we get different results than we have been able to get in the past. The challenges that face us today as educators do not lend themselves to quick fixes or isolated workshops. They require us to deepen our understanding as we develop new ways to build upon and expand the successes of the past. Whether we are working on closing the achievement gap, reaching out to include children who are on the autism spectrum, ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment for all of our students, or using the tools of technology to improve instruction and learning, we need to be willing to learn from each other in order to grow and to improve our practice.

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Fear, Mistrust, and Misunderstanding in the Teachers’ Lounge: An Ethnography

Lynnette Mawhinney, Pennsylvania

An Ethnography

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An Ethnography
Interrupting Business as Usual: A Principal’s Reflection on the Equity Project in His District and School

David Summergrad, Massachusetts

A Principal's Reflection on the Equity Project in His District and School

Interrupting Business as Usual: an underlying, often unspoken, belief that we must interrupt business as usual. We must challenge an assumption that education is like a field trip. If you believe, as I do, that education is the key that opens the door to a more fulfilled and satisfying life, then our failure to educate well the children of color in our classrooms effectively determines for many of them the downward trajectory of their lives.

Doug Reeves at Harvard has put this to us directly: if a student needs help in math or reading when the achievement data shows it, what makes the student's race is? Is there not “African-American math” or “Hispanic geometry” – let’s just give all students GOOD math and GOOD writing. Therefore, when the issue is planning curriculum, assessment, and effective teaching strategies, the only “subgroup” that matters is who has met the standard and who needs additional help. This is the first part of a two-part conversation.

But the second part of this conversation is one that goes to the heart of equity: If we do not believe that education should be equitable, whatever that means, then our failure to educate well the children of color in our classrooms effectively determines for many of them the downward trajectory of their lives. If you believe, as I do, that education is the key that opens the door to a more fulfilled and satisfying life, then our failure to educate well the children of color in our classrooms effectively determines for many of them the downward trajectory of their lives.

David Summergrad, Massachusetts

Instead of interrupting conversations around learning and teaching as evidenced in authentic assessments, the small schools, smaller learning communities, themed academies, and the like have generally suffered from “formitis.” That is, the structure of school reform often precludes the possibility of developing meaningful and authentic conversations about transformation toward a new construct. Our system of public schooling was never intended to succeed at universal academic achievement – only a small percentage of high school students were supposed to receive a college preparatory program of study, thus maintaining a power elite tied to public schooling. The structural debates continue as we try to shoehorn a new standard into an obsolete construct, the modern high school. And as we should all know by now, the metaphor for the modern comprehensive academic neighborhood high school is a factory.

I recently had the privilege of attending the National Academy Foundation (NAF) conference in Orlando. NAF is an organization that helps schools create career academies as part of a smaller learning community approach. NAF has been at this for quite some time and has learned and grown along with the larger school reform community. The foundation, while not perfect, is well thought out, well researched and resourced, and delivered respectfully with their school and school district partners.

The president of NAF is John Ferrandino, an accomplished urban educator working on his second retirement. John previously held a senior superintendent position in New York where he was responsible for supervising and evaluating scores of high schools and high school teachers and principals. By experience and stature, John Ferrandino is a qualified expert on the modern high school.

As I continue traveling the country reacquainting myself with old friends and meeting new colleagues, I am increasingly encouraged by a shift I am noticing in the conversation toward instruction. There are definitely encouraging and discouraging aspects of this shift, but I do believe that the notion that students are universally reject the high school construct wholesale, this group of educators knew why they were seated in that ballroom and that at least some change was necessary. And I was encouraged. For as we all know, the current schooling conditions, whether large or small, for most poor children and children of color are akin to what Deborah Meier has recently described as “Dickensian drudge mills.”

We have the power to decide what our schools ought to be. We can be a voice for play as the way children learn best, and as children age through our system we can carefully guide them, as Dewey would argue, from the psychological to the logical. We can embrace accountability as evidenced through the backlog of locally devised, debated, and demonstrated standards, and as we did...
school for the last twelve years, explains her fears as to why she chooses not to use the new lounge. “Personally, I don’t use the teachers’ lounge, but my opinion is negative because I find that at lunch I just want to talk about children. If I had a really bad day with the child I’d feel better if I could just say, you know, so-and-so drove me crazy today or didn’t do any work, and I don’t feel comfortable saying that there are parents in there because it’s the Home and School Room. You don’t know who’s going to carry that, that’s uncomfortable. It’s sort of like saying that in front of other teachers, that’s not going back to that child. I would hate that. But if you say that, you’re never sure who’s there and it may not be their par- ent but they could be friends with . . . it’s an uncomfortable situation so I would not use it, even, and I love the Home and School folks, nothing against them, but it’s just not, I don’t feel com- fortable because we [teachers] do talk about kids.” Again, Laura discusses how teachers venting frustrations or getting other ideas with fellow teachers can be misunderstood by the parents. The fear of generating gossip is a risk she is not willing to take. Yet, she explains, her trust that other teachers will not share the information exchanged. Why are the teachers more trusted than the parents? Is it because they can sympathize and understand the practice? Laura is not the only teacher in the school with these concerns about conversation. One group of kindergarten-to-second-grade teachers had eaten in the previous teachers’ lounge. After the combined lounge was set up, they tried for a couple of weeks to eat in there. Sandy, one of the kindergarten teachers, explained at length in an interview that during these attempts to help students question and challenge the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right. The question is not “how do we close the achievement gap?” Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right. The persistence of privacy: }
“W 

White people need to do their homework. 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 assignment; she was telling us mostly white, mostly middle-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 physiological 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 inequities?” “Am I seeing things that aren’t there?” “Am I missing things that are there?” “What do I say?” (If you believe conversation 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 it happening. 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 grandmothers 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 interesting sites where we came upon a collection of trailers, cans, old washing machines, rubber tires, and many other rusty, dusty scraps. The bus driver pointed out the collection and said—on the intercom—“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 aloud 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, truthfully, 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 part 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 re-use 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.

The “Going to the Sun” road in Glacier National Park, Montana

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Center of Activity Report... (continued from page 2)

 comprised of classroom teachers (both current and retired), institutional 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 do their homework. It’s a given, a nonnegotiable viewpoint. But at the same time, many members 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.

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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.

Holly Hanson-Moore may be contacted at hollhanson@lmsn.com

who had collected each item with a purpose in mind. I wanted her to be interested in a spirituality and rich culture outside her own small existence. But, until now, none of this had been spoken.

The brain is amazing, and I managed to edit out this memory for years. But it and several others came rushing back at me the first time someone told me “White people need to do their home- work.” The shocking phrase—because she did mean me, she did mean white people specifically, not just all people—helped me realize that if I am serious about and committed to interruption, I must do more than treat people well. Systematically, I must read, initiate conversations, ask questions, and think so that I am ready and will have the words, not just the intention, even on my vacation on a bus heading down a mountain.

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 viewpoint. But at the same time, many members 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.

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Jodi Goldberg may be contacted at jgoldberg@talcnwvision.org

winter 2007

connections: the Journal of the national School Reform Faculty

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winter 2007
NSRF’s Living History
Interview with Kim Feicke and Tanisha Davis Doss
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

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.
Kim: Wow, that’s a big question! My goals in life are continuous personal growth and achieving social justice, which for me revolves 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 a NSRF member?
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 Steve 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 Brems 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.”

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 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.

Tanisha: Through NSRF, I have established relationships with other educators who share my passion. I have also established strong alliances across different educational whole. The compass graphic is then revisited by participants as part of an ongoing self-reflective process that encourages self-monitoring and full participation (doing) as equivalent parts of a foundational whole. The compass is a graphic that helps us to see the whole as a whole. The compass graphic is

Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools
Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

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Glen E. Singleton and Curtis Linton design transformative professional development for school districts. Singleton is African-American and Linton is white. These two leaders have formed a powerful alliance and friendship based on their mutual passion for having courageous conversations about race in order to address its impact in our schools today. This guidebook is a personal/professional inquiry that is guided by the following essential questions:
• What is it that educators should know and be able to do to narrow the racial achievement gap?
• How will educators know when they are experiencing success in their efforts to narrow the racial achievement gap? And…
• What do they do as they discover what they don’t yet know and are not yet able to do to eliminate the racial achievement gap?

I haven’t finished reading this book, it just arrived yesterday in the mail, but I know in a way that touches all the points of the compass the authors describe that this is going to be a critical resource for me in this next period. Lately, I’ve felt overwhelmed by recent developments like the murder of Sean Bell by the police in New York and the profiling and violent arrest of the Iranian student by campus police at UCLA. This book has already helped me to proactively own what I don’t know as a white educator in a way that empowers me to step up as an ally and an advocate. Cornel West describes what I’ve been feeling lately as being “…trapped in the narrow framework of the dominant liberal and conservative views of race in America, which with its worn-out vocabulary leaves us intellectually debilitated, morally disempowered, and personally depressed…” (West 2001). I don’t do empowered well and I welcome this book and its strategies as a much-needed support in my efforts to hold myself accountable for the intersection of educational inequities and the creation of equitable opportunities for each student. If you purchase this book and are interested in developing an ongoing online conversation about the book, you are using it, e-mail nsrf@nsrfharmony.org. We can start our online chat in January.

Contact Debbie Bambino at dbambino@earthlink.net
Melinda
Greg Peters, California

After recently crossing paths with a former student, I recalled this reflection written in November of 2007.

On Thursday, November 6, 2003, DeShawn was shot on the #14 Mission bus at 3:37 pm. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time—too close to a gang-related incident. Noting helicopters circling overhead had become all too “noninterruptive” for me. It was just before 4:00 that I first noticed them. They weren’t over the highway, so I ruled out an accident or traffic. Around his last, I received a fax from the district informing me of the shooting. The next morning, the school car from our neighborhood police station visited and informed our dean, Betty, about the details of the shooting and the potential impact on our community. Our school had faced crises before and we knew we had to respond.

To some, the shooting of DeShawn would not be considered a “crisis” for us. He was not our student. However DeShawn was a student at our neighboring school, which resides on the same block. The shooting itself was gang-related (even though DeShawn was not in a gang; this allowed him to escape violence). He was shot on “the 14,” a bus many of our students take home. He came from the same neighborhood as many of our students and was known by them. DeShawn was an African-American pub-

lic high school student in the same city as our students. Our students are deeply connected to the reality of their peers—especially when their reality is one of life and death—a topic our urban youth know far better than they should.

Advocacy—our most personalized class—stays together for a student’s entire four years, has the lowest student-teacher ratio, and is the vehicle for our schoolwide communication. I wrote a letter to distribute the following morning to our students and parents.

It is very easy for us to believe that these students are deeply connected to their schools and those involved in the shooting.

Gang issues have been hot in San Francisco lately. In part due to our local gang, our school has a dress code. Recently, Betty had been experiencing recurring acts of disrespect from our students around our dress code. Students who normally had little issue complying were now coming to school out of dress code and displaying defiance when addressed about it. As a community, we knew there was a correlation between the rise in such infractions and the extent to which students felt (or did not feel) safe in their community. As individuals and as organizations, I think we are slower to respond to our local context than our students are because it is their home.

That Friday, Melinda (an African-American female) walked by Betty (a white woman) sporting a prominent red hat (that’s the color red, a gang color, are not permitted) and her hat. Melinda blatantly ignored Betty and continued on her way. As Betty pushed back, telling Betty, in so many not nice words, to back off and keep to herself because she intended on wearing the hat. I love our students, and so I draw a line with them when they show blatant disrespect and defiance even when I agree with their reasons as I believe they need additional tools and strategies for when they leave our school site. I followed Melinda into the school lobby and I also felt obligated to continue to demonstrate that consequences still follow our actions. She respectfully agreed. I told her

that I did not want her to be home on Monday if she was going to be alone without support. I wrote my home number on a piece of paper and invited her to call me if she wanted to be around her school community on Monday. If so, I noted, her suspension could be in-house and she could sit with me or with her counselor. She took the number and got up to go home.

As she walked out of my office, I noticed her backpack. In bold black marker it read, “Fred – October 10, 1999 – RIP”. She had been here before.

DeShawn died later that afternoon. Melinda chose to stay home on that Monday. She never apologized to Betty.

My heart aches. It aches for Melinda; it aches for all the “Melindas” of whom I am unaware. Most of all, it aches at the recognition that alone, I am not enough. I will need the “Melindas” and their grandmothers before me to keep educating me. I will need to listen more and when I am done, I will need to listen harder—for alone, I am not enough.

I sat with many unanswered questions—questions that make me wish to rethink other ways I should have engaged with Melinda:

• What was the role of race for this African-American woman dealing with two white administrators at a time when the black community of San Francisco is being killed off—literally—every weekend?

• On a similar note, what was the role of authority? More than just the authority of an administrator, what is the authority of a school, a family or the street? Which authority takes priority for which students and under which circumstances? Is it the service of our students, how can we bring all of these together for consideration?

• Finally—what of this “disrespect”? We are quick to cry,”vulnerable” or “disrespected, but I cannot help but (continued on page 18)
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That Friday, Melinda (an African-American female) walked by Betty (a white woman) sporting a prominent red hat (hats and the color red, a gang color, are not permitted) and her hat – Melinda blatantly ignored Betty and continued on to class. As Betty pushed the issue, Melinda vehemently pushed back, telling Betty, in so many not nice words, to back off and keep to herself because she intended on wearing the hat. I love our students, and so I draw a line with those who show blatant disrespect and defiance even when I agree with their reasons as I believe they need additional tools and strategies for when they leave our school.

I followed Melinda into her homeroom and we had a conversation. It seemed to be an easy task. I asked her to consider an apology after she returned from her suspension; she said she would.

I called Melinda’s grandmother, who was apologetic and supportive of both the rule and the consequences. My students’ parents and grandparents have consistently taught me a vital lesson – our students are not our kids. Our students come to us with the values and morals of their families deeply imbedded in their being. I find that our schools’ expectations of our students often fall short of those of their families.

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I cannot help but be aware of Melinda and so many others who have been shot or disrespected, but who have not apologized to Betty. I asked her if my letter had been respectful. She simply acknowledged it was wrong. She also expected and accepted suspension as the consequence for extreme defiance. By this time, she was going to be alone without support. I wrote her a letter saying that I did not want her to be home on Monday if she was going to be alone without support. I wrote my home number on a piece of paper and invited her to call me if she wanted to be around her school community on Monday. If so, I noted, her suspension could be in-house and she could sit with me or with her counselor. She took the number and got up to go home.

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How would you describe your goals and your work to our readers?
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Kim: Wow, that’s a big question! My goals in life are continuous personal growth and achieving social justice, which for me revolves 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 a NSRF member?
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Kim: I attended an introduction to CFGs that Steve Single at Chicago, Illinois 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 Brennan 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 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 look for opportunities to 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. Tanisha: Through NSRF, I have established relationships with other educators who share my passion. I have also established strong alliances across different CFCEs (Coaching for Educational Equity) (continued on page 18)
“W”hite people need to do their homework.” 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 assignment; she was telling us mostly white, mostly middle-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 physiological 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 inequities?” “Am I seeing things that aren’t there?” “Am I missing things that are there?” “What do I say?” (If you believe conversation 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 flew solo. Miles and miles above the ground in an all-day bus tour of the “Going to the Sun” road through Glacier National Park. My husband had volunteered to stay at the lodge with my 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 mountains the bus driver was identifying interspersed with stories of the people his family knew. Everyone was really, really nice. And we were made much of by all the grandparents 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 interesting 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 intercom—“Those no-count 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 aloud 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.

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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—

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Read more on this and other articles in this edition of Connections magazine by visiting www.eqconnections.org and clicking on our Winter 2007 magazine.

“Can I briefly introduce you to Discourse I (talking the talk) and Discourse II (walking the walk). Being transformed into an ally using Discourse II language in protocols is powerful. Constructivist Listening with equity prompts is moving. Lastly, having facilitators purposefully selected to represent all walks of life in order to make the collaboration needed by allies awesome.”

Excerpt from Tanisha Davis Doss’s letter

Jodi Goldberg may be contacted at jgoldberg@tlacnevvision.org

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Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
school for the last twelve years, explains her fears as to why she chooses not to use the new lounge.

“Personally, I don’t use the teachers’ lounge, but my opinion is negative because I find that at lunch I just want to talk about children. If I had a really busy day with the child I’d feel better if I could just say, you know, so-and-so drove me crazy today or didn’t do any work, and I don’t feel comfortable saying that there are parents in there because it’s the Home and School Room. You don’t know who’s going to carry that, that’s one concern if I say it. And I feel that in front of other teachers, that’s not going back to that child. I would hold it. But if you say that, you’re not sure who’s there and it may not be their parent but they could be friends with . . . it’s an uncomfortable situation so I would not use it, even, and I love the Home and School folks, nothing against them, but it’s just not, I don’t feel comfortable because we [teachers] do talk about kids.”

Again, Laura discourses how teachers venting frustrations or getting other ideas with fellow teachers can be misunderstood by the parents. The fear of generating gossip is a risk she is not willing to take. Yet, she explains her trust that other teachers will not share the information exchanged. Why are the teachers more trusted than the parents? Is it because they can sympathize and understand the practice? Laura is not the only teacher in the school with these concerns about conversation. One group of kindergarten-to-second-grade teachers had eaten in the previous teachers’ lounge. After the combined lounge was set up, they tried for a couple of weeks the previous teachers’ lounge. After the combined kindergarten-to-second-grade teachers had eaten in these concerns about conversation. One group of teachers even refer to their classroom lunchtime space as the teachers’ lounge. Teachers separated into the different congregational spaces based on teaching level, teaching experience, and the actual age of the teacher.

Reflecting back on my ethnography and my own teaching experience, I find myself sympathizing with the teachers. I, too, do not think that I would find myself comfortable talking about my practice or students around parents. I remember that when a parent or student would walk into our lunch-time, the conversation would shut down. My observations and experience make me ask: what is really at the root of our fear and mistrust?

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References:


I have a T-shirt from a Coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum. On it is the question: What Is Essential? This is a question asked by a number of people. I believe that in our urban high school classrooms, what is essential is not being addressed, questioned or taught. We ask the wrong questions. We ask how can we close the achievement gap. We ask how can we get reluctant high school students to read or, at the very least, we ask how can we get the reluctant learners engaged in learning. The real question is: what does each high school student in America need to know and be able to do to live in a racially and economically divided global society? We need as educators to focus the learning of poor teens and teens of color on the dynamics of real life’s realities. We need to be critical friends who engage in critical pedagogy with our urban, and I would venture, suburban youth.

At this stage in my journey as an educator, facilitator, school coach, and technical assistance provider, I work in a variety of contexts. My most rewarding work is working and interacting with high school students from around the country. Whether I am working with or interacting with Matt Brown, a student at The High School for the Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota, or Jermina, Ashley or Batelle, students at CEO Leadership Academy in Milwaukee, there are consistent practices that engage each of these students in critical and crucial ways. The educators who engage, teach, transform, support and help to develop these students and link to what they are doing and engage in critical pedagogy. I try to understand critical pedagogy; it is by understanding critical pedagogy in context that one can develop a critical pedagogy stance as an educator; and it is consistent application and practice of critical pedagogy both in and outside a classroom setting that an educator or any conscious adult is able to build across generational difference, across gender difference, across differences in life experiences to transform the lives of marginalized, disengaged high school students.

Caring is not enough to help urban high school students beat the odds. Beyond caring, our challenge as educators is to be conscious adults who can analyze our own belief systems and assumptions and critically question the purpose of education in a democratic society. Once we have gotten a clear picture of the realities of public education in America, our job is then to help each student think and look critically at their lives and begin to chart their personal agenda on how each is going to define excellence, use their education to further their own development as individuals, and how each is going to use the knowledge, will and skills to strengthen his or her community. The question is not “how do we close the achievement gap.” Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right.

The question is not “how do we close the achievement gap.” Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right.

Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right. The question is, how do I build a relationship with each individual, pick and historically oppressed teen so that he or she gives me permission to
Interrupting Business as Usual:
A Principal’s Reflection on the Equity Project in His District and School
David Summergrad, Massachusetts

There’s an old saying: “If we keep doing things the way we have always done them, then we will keep getting the same results we have always had.” And that is fine, if the results we have always had are ones we want them to be. But if they are not what we want them to be, then we have to be willing to change our way of doing business; in the words of educator Victor Cary, we need to interrupt business as usual, to create change and to achieve a different kind of result.

The issue of racial equity and achievement is simply too important for us to push aside, even if we have talked about it before; even if it makes others uncomfortable.

So what are we to do about it in Brookline School District and at Runkle School?

In the three years since Brookline began its equity project, with a goal of eliminating the racial achievement gap, we have looked at clear and compelling data that tells us that not all of our students are making a successful academic journey through our schools. Black and Latino children are disproportionately underrepresented in the upper tiers of our classes whether it is on measures like MCAS, DRAs, or classroom-based teacher-developed assessment. There are some groups of students are over-represented in special education programs and on the list of students sent to the office.

Many of my colleagues have heard me use the analogy of a class field trip. If a teacher takes a class of twenty children on a field trip and at the end of the day returns with just nineteen of them, he or she could say: “I brought back nineteen out of twenty – that’s 95% – that’s an A so that’s a pretty good result.”

I think it is safe to say that none of us would find it acceptable if we lost even one child on a class trip.

Yet, in year and year out, we are losing more than one child per class on the academic journey from grade to grade. In order to change this result we must interrupt business as usual. We must challenge an underlying, often unspoken, belief that may be held by some teachers that it is okay if some children don’t learn, that it is not realistic to think that they will all get it.

The racial achievement gap in America’s schools today can be, in the long run, every bit as life-threatening as the child on the school field trip. If you believe, as I do, that education is the key that opens the door to a more fulfilled and satisfying life, then our failure to educate well the children of color in our classrooms effectively determines for many of them the downward trajectory of their lives.

Doug Reeves at Harvard has put this to us directly: if a student needs help in math or reading when one teaches does it make what the student’s race is? There is not “African-American math” or “Hispanic geometry” – let’s just give all students GOOD math and GOOD writing. Therefore, when the issue is planning curriculum, assessment, and effective teaching strategies, the only “subgroup” that matters is who has met the standard and who needs additional help. This is the first part of a two-part conversation.

But the second part of this conversation is one that goes to the heart of equity: If we do not acknowledge that there are differences based on gender, race, economic status, and language, then we will never admit that there is a problem.

Call it “Educational 12-step” – the first step is admitting, “I’m Doug, and even though I’m not a bigot, I’ve got to admit that poor and minority kids in my classroom are performing at a level well below their Anglo and economically advantaged counterparts. I’m not saying that this is my fault, but I am admitting that it’s a problem, and that I’ve got to be part of the solution.”

The result of this two-part conversation will not, I hope, be to create separate math programs for minority kids. Rather, we should create specific interventions for ANY student who needs help. And by conducting the gender, economic, and ethnic analysis, we should admit that if we fail to inter-vene, our failures disproportionately hurt poor and minority students.

As we enter the fourth year of (continued on page 16)

Instead of intensifying conversations around learning and teaching as evidenced in authentic assessments, the small schools, smaller learning communities, themed academies, and the like have generally suffered from “formitis.” That is, the structure of school reform often precedes over the more difficult conversation about transformation toward a new construct. Our system of public schooling was never designed to succeed at universal academic achievement – only a small percentage of high school students were supposed to receive a college preparatory program of study, thus maintaining a power elite tied to public schooling. The structural debates continue as we try to shoehorn a new standard into an obsolete construct, the modern high school. And as we should all know by now, the metaphor for the modern comprehensive academic neighborhood high school is a factory.

I recently had the privilege of attending the National Academy Foundation (NAF) conference in Orlando. NAF is an organization that helps schools create career academies as part of a smaller learning community approach. NAF has been at this for quite some time and has learned and grown along with the larger school reform community. The founders, while not without their struggles, are well thought out, well researched and resourced, and delivered respectfully with their school and school district partners.

The president of NAF is John Ferrandino, an accomplished urban educator working on his second retirement. John previously held a senior superintendent position in New York where he was responsible for supervising and evaluating scores of high schools and high school teachers and principals. By experience and stature, John Ferrandino is a qualified expert on the modern high school.

At the opening of the NAF conference after the usual preambles, niceties, and thank-you’s, John began speaking of the modern high school with passion and deep personal experience. Part-way through his informal talk he declared with full emotion, that “high school sucks for kids – they survive, not thrive.” The room was silent – awed but silent – and John continued with his talk and the program, as naturally as if nothing had been said. But it was said and the truth was out. There was a palpable and collective nod, the unspoken word spoken of publically and the charge was to take note and take responsibility for change. It was a simple statement, placed openly and honestly in front of a friendly audience who saw their work as responsive to the conditions they face.

In that one sentence, John framed the conversation for a group of co-competitors for change. What do we want to do? Perhaps not universally reject- ing the high school construct wholesale; this group of educators knows why they were seated in that ballroom and that at least some change was necessary. And I was encouraged. For as we all know, the current schooling conditions, whether large or small, for most poor children and chil- dren of color are akin to what Deborah Meier has recently described as “Dickensian drudge mills.”

As I continue traveling the country reacquaint- ing myself with old friends and meeting new col- leagues, I am increasingly encouraged by a shift I am noticing in the conversation toward instruction. There are decidedly encouraging and discouraging aspects of this shift, but I do believe that the conversation has opened up the door to a more authentic understanding that what is most important in the whole school reform conversation is the experience of the child, the quality of her experience, and the equity of outcome attached to meeting each child’s needs and interests. That is not to say we have resolved structural issues nor that the increas- ing accountability demands will not come crashing down from their own weight, but perhaps, just per- haps, we are entering an era when we can finally stop tinkering with the construct of the modern high school toward inventing the next iteration of post-elementary schooling.

We have the power to decide what our schools ought to be. We can be a voice for play as the way children learn best, and as children age through our system we can carefully guide them, as Dewey would argue, from the psychological to the logical. We can embrace accountability as evidenced through the honest locally devised, debated, and demonstrated stan- dards, and as we did... (continued on page 19)
Brookline’s Equity Project, we step back and consider the courage required to undertake this effort. First of all, it takes courage for a school system like Brookline’s to publicly acknowledge this glaring area of weakness. We continue to collect data that reinforces a sizable racial achievement gap. For example, nearly 400 points separate the average SAT scores of Brookline’s white students from those of our black and Latino students. The results on other standardized measures, like the MCAS, reveal similar gaps.

It is also courageous to state that we will take on this achievement gap and, over time, change the results in our schools. The title of our effort is: Brookline’s Equity Project – Taking Action, Getting Results. Our challenge this year is to continue to move from a study of the problems causing the achievement gap to an action-driven approach. Last year, we formed equity teams at each school so that we could begin to consider the kinds of changes we need to make will reach the classrooms. Courageous conversations about race and the sharing of best practices are only effective if they connect with individual teachers and their students. Do we have the guts and the fortitude it will take to challenge our own practices and to change the way we do things? Do we have the political will to take on the challenges of this effort in the face of the momentum required to create sustainable change.

Dr. James A. Williams, Superintendent of Schools in Buffalo, New York, suggests that we must ask four essential questions to help us close the gap:

1. What do students need to know and be able to do? That will guide our instruction.
2. How do we know when they have learned it? That will guide our assessment.
3. What will we do when they have not learned it? That will determine whether we interrupt business as usual to help us close the gap or whether we continue to accept the results we have now.
4. What will we do when they already know it? That is our call for appropriate differentiation that is so crucial to sustaining support for this effort.

If this were an easy task, teachers in schools like ours would have solved it long ago. Only if we are willing to face down a deeply entrenched problem and go at it with the resources and the persistence it requires will we get different results than we have now. It is time to move from analysis to action.

The challenges that face us today as educators do not lend themselves to quick fixes or isolated workshops. They require us to deepen our understanding as we develop new ways to build upon and expand the successes of the past. Whether we are working on closing the achievement gap, reaching out to include children who are on the autism spectrum, ensuring a safe and respectful learning environment for all of our students, or using the tools of technology to improve instruction and learning, we need to be willing to learn from each other in order to grow and to improve our practice.

We will continue to open our doors to all students, and we will continue to support the staff in acquiring the skills needed to teach all children effectively. We will work hard to ensure that we all have the training and resources necessary to do our jobs well.

Bumper Sticker Activity

In the best tradition of political campaigns, I invite you to take a few minutes now to develop a slogan for a bumper sticker to represent your commitment to this effort.

- How can we expect equity when we don’t live in an equitable world?
- Keep Pace, Respect Race.
- Understanding Individuals.
- I’m the Solution.
- Equity = Commitment + Discomfort = I Change.
- Every child can succeed. Every child deserves the chance!
- Go the distance… Equity for ALL!
- Success for all… not for most.
- Equity Equals Excellence.
- Fairness means you get what you need.
- Equity in the Classroom.
- Equal Educational Access
- Change is good
- Coexist
- Affirm identity - Build community - Create leaders

M any of us understand the power of collaboration and reflective practice within Critical Friends Groups. However, we need to ask ourselves the question, do teachers informally create networks to support their teaching? Teaching is a characteristically lonely vocation, offering the practitioner only limited opportunities for adult-to-adult interaction in the course of the average workday. Once the classroom door is closed at the start of the day, each teacher becomes separated from the rest of the school, a characteristic which has created an isolationist and alienating culture (Little, 1996; Rogers & Babinski, 2002) endemic to the teaching profession (Court, 1999) hinder teacher interaction during the workday. Moreover, current educational reforms and new curricula have added to the teacher workload, leaving even less time for professional interaction on a daily basis (Court, 1999). I decided to explore this information by informal support networks in an ethnography that I conducted for the last two years in an inner city K-8 school. I wanted to explore if, where, and how teachers informally support each other’s teaching. The teachers at John E. Farmer School1 were interviewed during their interview how lunch-time was viewed about their social relationships, observed during their lunch periods, and completed a survey. Although the objective of this project was to look at social interactions, an interesting picture of how teachers design safe congregational spaces started to emerge. At Farmer School, the lunch hour is the only consistent time in the day when the teachers can connect with other adults. Many teachers discussed during their interview how lunch-time was important because it helped to alleviate the isolation of the teaching profession. What became an important basis for informal interactions between teachers was the space where the interactions took place.

Contractually, every school in the district is required to provide a formal space for teachers to interact (i.e. the teachers’ lounge). At many schools in the district, lack of space is a constant issue. Farmer School is no exception, as it is a school built for a capacity of 500 students, but actually holds 900. Due to the overcrowding, Farmer School combined its teachers’ lounge and Home and School Office at the start of the 2005-2006 school year. The new relaxing space was run by volunteer parents. As a result, many of the teachers indicated that they no longer view this space as a place for teachers to informally interact and to have open and honest conversations about their practice. For example, Cindy, a thirty-year veteran teacher, has been working at Farmer for thirty years. In an interview, she indicated her feelings about a teachers’ lounge filled with volunteer parents.

“…To speak for myself, it’s not that I don’t want to socialize with the extra staff members who are not professional teachers, it’s not a snobby issue, but I don’t want to chill out. I don’t want parents looking at me like, oh look, she’s never working. … I like those people and everything and I do schmooze with them when I see them in the hallway, but to do it all the time, you know, to kick back and relax all the time in one specific space, I never really want it to look like I’m never working.”

Cindy’s feelings reflected that of other teachers as well, that the new designated teachers’ lounge is actually a space for parents. Thus, it is not a space conducive to building relationships. Two new teachers did not even know that there was a teachers’ lounge. Consequently, teachers rarely used the space for informal interaction. Throughout the observations, I never once witnessed teachers using the space to socialize. If teachers entered the space, it was to make photocopies on the available machine. This view of teachers and parents together brings up interesting questions. What does it mean that teachers feel they cannot relax around parents? The teachers and the parents are at the school with the same objectives of supporting the students, but the teachers seem to fear being misunderstood around the parents. What would happen if the teachers were misunderstood? Would their abilities as a teacher be questioned? Laura, a twenty-two-year veteran teacher who has been at the

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Four “A”s Text Protocol
Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, WA 2005

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin on post-it notes in answer to the following four questions (you can also add your own “A”):
   - What Assumptions does the author of the text hold?
   - What do you Agree with in the text?
   - What do you want to Argue with in the text?
   - What parts of the text do you want to Aspire to?

2. In a round, have each person identify one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.

3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining “A”s, taking them one at a time — what do people want to argue with, agree with, and aspire to in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one “A” to the next, giving each “A” enough time for full exploration.

4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?

5. Debrief the text experience.

In addition to Dave's comments on going deeper with the Four “A”s, I would like to add my use of “Application or Action” for the fourth “A” I have found that asking folks to commit to an action they will take as a result of our conversation about a text connects it directly to our practice with and for students.

Debbie Bambino, Philadelphia

We are fortunate to work in a school system that has the resources and the community support to enable us to take on these challenges. Our work is both incredibly challenging and incredibly important. I feel more strongly than ever that we are the right group of people to take on these challenges together. Let’s get started.

You can reach David at david_summergrad@brookline.k12.ma.us

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

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

- School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
- Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
- The key to this effort is the development of a “learning community” based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
- To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

Critical Pedagogy
(continued from page 7)

We teach him or her? How do I engage each student in critical pedagogy that allows each student to see education as a practice of freedom and a place where he or she can grow intellectually, spiritual ly, and physically in order to help themselves and their communities thrive in an uncertain, global world.

The principal of Harambee, a successful African-centered K-8 school in Philadelphia, told me yesterday that he engages his students in “naked” math. He explained naked math as having a variety of contexts based on origins, civil rights or the practice of freedom. He provided the following example of “naked” math with this problem: Rosa Parks initiated a bus strike that meant that ten-thousand African-American people who rode the bus twice a day did not ride the bus for a year. The bus fare at that time was twenty-five cents. How much money did the bus company lose? (The success of Harambee is partially evidenced by the fact that it has received an award for making Annual Yearly Projection for each of the last two years.)

Critical pedagogy for any urban male at this time would have to center around the incident of the fifty shots fired by New York City undercover cops that resulted in the murder of Sean Bell. I would have students think critically about this incident and I would use Papoose’s rap 50 Shots as text.

My friends, allies, colleagues, and others who use the CGF structures to collaborate, I challenge us to use critical pedagogy with each other and in our CGF groups. I challenge us to lose our fear and confront each other in ways that push us to be more effective and relevant to the lives of our urban high school students who are least engaged in public education. Perhaps we could begin by engaging in an ongoing, online conversation initiated by Debbie Bambino on the book Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. If we cannot be critical with each other in our work together, then we cannot work to help end the failures of large numbers of African-American, Latino, and poor urban children in our American public high schools. Do we have the courage, will and skill?

Camilla Greene can be reached at camillagreene@worldnet.att.net
work. These relationships and alliances provide me with the support I need to maintain the strength to continue this work.

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

Tanisha: CFEF provides the tools, definitions, and support needed to lead for educational equity. Personally, I see this as different 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 CFEF 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 CFEF, 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 CFEF and a CFG seminar lies in its primary goal. Very briefly, a CFEF seminar gives you the skills and tools to run a CGT—what all that entails. The goal of a CFG seminar is to help its educators prepare with tools and the disposition to use them to challenge, interrupt and transform the status quo. CFEF uses some CFG processes, but also many others. I have come out of CFEF 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 relationships. Hatch presents us with a call to life, using their writings, until their voices are heard loud and clear. The conclusions that Hatch presents are on target and speak to the trials that I go through in maintaining my own work with CFGs. He states in one conclusion, “the current working conditions for teachers fail to provide adequate time and rewards for the careful examination of teaching and learning, but they also underscore how much can be done even under adverse conditions.” He continued, “what might be possible if we had a system of education that . . . embraced the idea that teachers’ expertise can be a critical resource in reshaping classroom practice and improving schools” (p. 101). I recommend this book to anyone in a CFG, working to develop CFGs, or interested in changing teaching and learning systems for the good of our students.

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

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 Tanisha in the struggle for equity. I still have much to learn from her.

Creg Peters may be contacted at gpeters@fsscscs.org

I must think that this book shows many parallels between the work of Critical Friends Groups and the Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (CASTL) because of the tremendous amount of post-it notes and underlining that was evident when I finished reading. Even after rereading to pull out significant quotes, I felt myself saying yes that is true and fits perfectly into what I am doing.

The book opens with a forward by Lee Shulman. He describes the work of CASTL as follows: “The scholarship of teaching and learning . . . views teaching as serious, intellectual work, asks good questions about their students’ learning, seek evidence in their classrooms that can be used to improve practice, and make the work public so that others can critique it, build on it, and contribute to the wider teaching commons” (p. ix). He points out the need for making the work public, which is often the missed step or a step not included in past CFG work. I recognize there is a very fine line between making work public and breaking the trust of the CFG, and this could be part of the reason for the lack of substantial literature about the work of CFGs. But as I reflect back, I wonder about the paths the work of the critical friends traveled. As a first-year coach, I went to a portfolio evaluation of the work of second-year coaches in Pawling, N.Y. There, experienced coaches were required, as part of the process, to document evidence through portfolio-making and to publicly defend the work of their CFG. I am wondering now whether the dropping of this component of the work seven years ago has contributed to the lack of current longitudinal evidence to substantiate the powerful work that has been happening in CFGs over the past ten years.

Into the Classroom: Developing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

Book Review by Michaelainn Kelley, Texas

Based on the work of CASTL, I point out that “few reform efforts reach directly into the classroom to look carefully at what teachers do” (p. 3). The work of the National School Reform Faculty and the Houston A+ Challenge (formerly Houston Annenberg Challenge) tried, and I think we were very successful in reaching into the classrooms to the teachers and the students. There is powerful anecdotal information on the impact the CFG work has had in schools. This journal’s archive contains stories about the positive impact of our collaborative, reflective work. The question is to what end. As a group of teachers and inquirers, we need to create the needed research and produce the literature of our own work.

Hatch illuminates some of the pitfalls of teachers doing research, “the fact that the demands of teaching must take precedence over the demands of research makes it particularly difficult for teachers to maintain a focus on a particular issue or question. For teachers, the object of study is like a moving target that refuses to stay still long enough to get a careful look…” (p. 18). Hatch continues throughout the work describing the successes and challenges that faced the teachers participating in the program. The book brings the teachers to life, using their writings, until their voices are heard loud and clear.

The conclusions that Hatch presents are on target and speak to the trials that I go through in maintaining my own work with CFGs. He states in one conclusion, “the current working conditions for teachers fail to provide adequate time and rewards for the careful examination of teaching and learning, but they also underscore how much can be done even under adverse conditions.” He continued, “what might be possible if we had a system of education that . . . embraced the idea that teachers’ expertise can be a critical resource in reshaping classroom practice and improving schools” (p. 101). I recommend this book to anyone in a CFG, working to develop CFGs, or interested in changing teaching and learning systems for the good of our students.
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Holli Hanson-Moore, Washington

As facilitators of Critical Friends Group Seminars, we often hear feedback such as this was the most powerful professional development of my career’ and ‘CFGs have helped me to examine my practice and collaborate in new ways with my colleagues.’ The Washington State Center of Activity has been offering several Beginning and Continuing CFG Seminars for teachers in the region every year during the summer and school year. There are a great number of schools and organizations that have strong CFGs; many of the schools involved in transformation and school change attribute much of their success to their Critical Friends Groups and the collaborative and inquiry-based processes used. So as a region, we are very proud of our network, facilitators and participants.

But recently, one of our facilitation colleagues sent a letter to the area facilitation group, challenging us to go deeper in our learning together around issues of equity.

“As we continue to teach, coach, and lead in our schools, the evidence of the inequities speaks louder and louder. We need to work across difference to tune our ears to hear the screams in order to interrupt the inequities, as we shift our own practices in an effort to transition our schools to more equitable and proportionate institutions.” —excerpt from Tanisha Davis Doss’s letter

Though we have discussed issues of equity and equity-centered activities, as I read this letter I still began to ask myself questions: Do we really understand what it means to focus on equity in our seminars and in our own work? Do we have the tools to engage in deep inquiry around issues of equity as a facilitation team and at the same time support our participants in doing so? What tools do we need to develop together? What does it look like to support colleagues from diverse backgrounds? How are we learning from each other? How do we keep creative and passionate with our CFG seminars so it does not become about the mechanics of a protocol but is truly about improving our schools (and our own practice) for each student? How am I modeling culturally competent pedagogy?

The facilitation team in the Seattle area is

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

when transforming our schools from an agrarian model to an industrial model, we can once again find the ability and passion to move from our current industrial model to a technological and knowledge model as yet to be invented.

We can decide to hold on to the metaphor of size for knowing each child well and taking responsibility for her experience and outcome. We can decide that instruction, pedagogy, and the very special relationship between child and teacher are the most important things we do. We can choose to educate most children well and to try our best with each child. We can and must find courage to face our fears and brace for change. We can choose equity over racism and the highest of locally devised standards and accountability metrics over standardization. And if we can and must, we will.

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Upcoming Events
February 7-9 & May 17-18, 2007
New Coaches Institute, Somerset, NJ

February 15, 2007
CFG Coaches Clinic, Los Angeles, CA

February 21, 2007
Creating & Sustaining Professional Learning Communities, Denver, CO

February 24, 2007 - March 31, 2007
Mondays and Saturdays
New Coaches Institute, Houston, TX

February 26 - March 2, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Pasadena, CA

March 3, 2007
NSRF San Antonio Spring Meeting, San Antonio, TX

March 26-30, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Orange Co., CA

June 13-15, 2007
CFG Administrators Seminar, Denver, CO

June 18-22, 2007
CFG New Coaches Seminar, Denver, CO

June 25-29, 2007
CFG New Coaches Seminar, Denver, CO

July 16-20, 2007
CFG Coaches Training for School Leaders, Keene, NH

July 30 - August 3, 2007
CFG New Coaches Institute, Portland, OR

For more information on these events, visit www.nsrfharmony.org and click Upcoming Events.

To list your event in Connections and/or on NSRF’s website, contact Chris Jones at 812.330.2702