Connections

the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Winter 2008

Director's Report Steven Strull, Director

The room was very familiar; the scene predictable – we'd been there before but had never been there. A group of NSRF National Facilitators were working, eating, talking, and planning, in critical friendship. We were in Atlanta at the recent Center of Activity Summit, but we could have been anywhere and the thirty or so assembled National Facilitators could have been a very different bunch. But we were there, in Atlanta, to once again take up the conversation of standards and guidelines for National Facilitators, and this time we made real progress.

We met for a day and a half following up on a day-long Accountability Council (AC) meeting where we had gained some clarity around the purposes of our standards – we did not concern ourselves with the technicalities of this or that standard, nor how it would be measured or even what the metrics would be. Instead, from the AC meeting through the summit, we crafted our work in terms of what National Facilitators DO and therefore what they KNOW, as a result of NSRF's work. We were also very clear in our process – we were not deciding anything; we were working together to clarify our thinking and to propose direction to the National Center as we continue to hone our language and articulate our practice.

We have pages and pages of notes, dutifully typed up by work-study students who know little of our work. We have lots of ideas and we emerged from the summit with five broad themes – standards – to guide us as we continue to tune our language as we begin a process for public review of each National Facilitator's practice. I offer a reflection on each of the proposed standards, not as definitive, but as representative of the deliberations we are considering as we continue our journey as a national organization.

Standard #1 – Skills: I believe this standard begins to address the basic question, what do National Facilitators DO and therefore what do they KNOW? This questions turns the typical educational question of what children should know and be able to do on its head, and is borrowed from the essential question asked by Big Picture Company schools. It assumes National Facilitators have some practice in common, that we do certain things – not necessarily particularly – but in general and that as a result of our collective doing we are amassing a knowledge base that is identifiable, reportable, and replicable. Collectively, we generously throw around the best practices language, but in our case, over the years, we have individually and collectively honed our practice toward being able to collectively know. We know about our practice, what works and what doesn't, how it gets received and why, and in the end, we share a deep belief that to improve student learning and achievement we must learn together as adults. We agree that it takes certain skills, though varied, to do our work and that we can and should articulate those skills as we seek feedback on our practice.

Standard #2 – Addressing Issues Related to Equity: Our mission statement says that as an organization we have a commitment to fostering educational and social equity. Those of us who were around for the crafting of this language years ago remember the honest and sometimes tough conversations we had about including this statement in our mission. Over the years we have struggled with the construct of equity, *(continued on page 9)*

In This Issue

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

In this issue of *Connections*, our director, Steven Strull, shares news of our recent Centers' Summit and the launch of our new Accountability Council in his report. As we take steps toward long-term sustainability, we are making the road of our mission by walking it together. Read Steven's analysis of proposed standards for national facilitators that grow out of what we "do" and what we "know" about our work in support of students.

Pedro Bermudez and Linda Emm, two of our Southern Florida hosts for this year's Winter Meeting, bring us up to date on the state of their work in their Center's report and welcome us to their state. In addition, in our Living History feature, Linda shares her history as a coach and her hopes and fears about the future of our work.

This issue's Students at the Center finds Peggy Silva from Souhegan High sharing her writing and soliciting student feedback around a recent experience of her own white privilege, in her piece, White Privilege DNA.

Kevin Fahey, our Research Director, shares the story of two research studies about the initiation and impact of CFGs for administrators, raising still more questions about the ways we structure interventions and reforms.

Kim Carter and Camilla Greene offer us an eye on their individual experiences occurring in tandem, as colleagues across difference engaged in the ongoing online book chat about the text *Courageous Conversations about Race* by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton.

Diana Watson shares her perspective about the book "she keeps returning to," in her review of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* by Michael Fullan.

Finally, Dave Schmid and Linda Fiorella offer us a glimpse of the power of the circle and their use of protocols and collaborative structures in support of the Juneau community's struggle to confront educational inequities and design new high schools that are student-centered, in their Protocols in Practice piece, The Power of the Circle in Community Conversations about Equity. ■

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The New Meaning of Educational Change

A Book Review by Diana Watson, New Hampshire

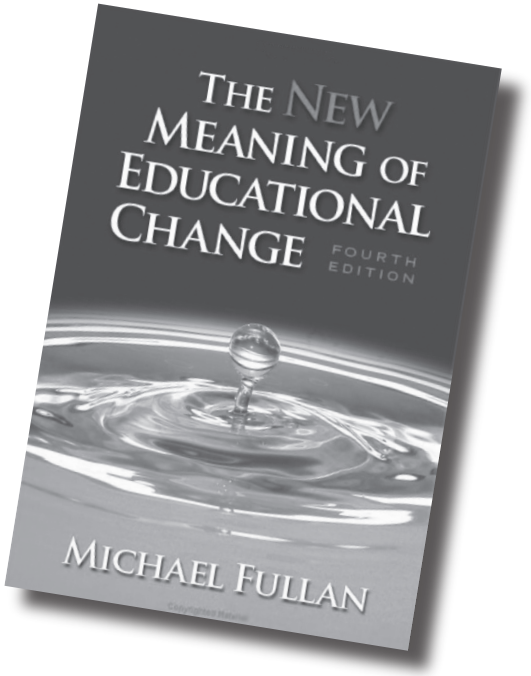
"Collaboration makes a positive difference only when it is focused on student performance for all and on the associated innovative practices that can make improvement happen for previously disengaged students." (p. 285)

In this fourth edition, Fullan reexamines educational change in light of the growing body of knowledge about the process of change. For change to actually occur, certain factors must be met. Citing numerous research studies, Fullan notes the importance of relationship, meaning and motivation in effective and sustained educational change. Change takes time, and effort, and on-going support. To further complicate things, it turns out that an individual must experience some part of the proposed change before understanding what the change really is. By experiencing the change, by achieving success, an individual can come to believe in the change. Fullan argues that belief underlies all action. For successful initiatives involving change, a critical factor is allowing an appropriate amount of time for the people to believe in the change. Therefore, according to Fullan, in order for real change to occur in schools, educators must:

1. Believe the proposed change can occur (motivation)
2. Believe the proposed change makes sense (meaning)
3. Feel they themselves have a meaningful role in the change
4. Experience some success with the change

Fullan recommends professional learning communities as a vehicle for providing effective support for teachers (relationships) as they implement changes in practice. While making a compelling case for collaborative practices as a means of supporting improvements in teacher practice, Fullan doesn't shy away from discussing just how very difficult collaboration has proven to be within schools. He identifies the factors which play against professional learning communities, and provokes the reader to consider, " . . . we knew specifically and clearly a quarter of a century ago how powerful collaborative or collegial cultures were and how they functioned. Twenty-five years is a long time to sit on knowledge that serves the very moral core of school improvement." (p. 153)

Michael Fullan corroborates what I believe to be true about educational change. He says the student must be at the center of all proposed



change. He says collaborative practices are the key to sustaining the changes that support student learning. And, he validates these arguments with research. This book has been at my fingertips for three months. I take it everywhere I go. I keep snatching it up and opening to one of the many sticky note marked pages to quote a pertinent paragraph. Frankly, I wish I could memorize the entire contents of the book so as to be able to cite it from memory. So often, when I am "selling" the idea of collaborative practices and the work of the National School Reform Faculty, I am asked if there is anything I can give to the administrators or school board to show that the work is effective. I finally have the tool I've been looking for: *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, fourth edition. ■

The New Meaning of Educational Change, Fourth Edition, by *Michael Fullan, Teachers College Press, 2007*

Diana Watson is the Director of Professional Development for the Center for School Success (CSS) in West Lebanon, New Hampshire. CSS is a non-profit organization established in 2003 to address the needs of students who struggle with learning, so they can achieve measurable success in school and in life. You can contact Diana Watson at watson.diana@yahoo.com

Protocols in Practice: The Power of the Circle in Community Conversations about Equity

Linda Fiorella and Dave Schmid, Colorado

Juneau, Alaska, located along Southeast Alaska's Inside Passage, is surrounded by glaciers, majestic mountains, and rainforest. A sense of isolation results from the lack of roads into Juneau, as the only way in is by plane or boat. Even with this isolation, it remains the capital of Alaska and represents a diverse population. The residents of Juneau take great pride in how they support their schools and the many sports and activities available to students. Since many of their sports programs are not school-funded, community groups raise millions of dollars to finance the travel of sports teams in and out of Juneau to insure high quality competition and participation. A great emphasis is placed on student involvement in the arts and other activities as well. A richness of cultural diversity, represented by Alaska Natives as well as people from areas throughout the world, exists in the community. After spending a significant amount of time there, one comes to realize that Juneau is a very special place to live, with its awe-inspiring natural beauty, strong sense of community, and cultural diversity.

Even in this special place, however, the cloud of racism and poverty thrives and impacts a significant number of people in the community. The Juneau-Douglas High School program has traditionally not served all students well, especially Alaska Natives and students of poverty. After a comprehensive look at the data, the grim facts show that the overall graduation rate is only 65%, and significantly lower

for Alaska Natives and students of poverty. Alaska Natives and students of poverty also achieve at lower levels, drop out more, participate less in activities, and are grossly underrepresented in upper-level classes offered by the high school.

In 1998, the School District and community members began advocating for another high school that would help to reduce the size of the current high school, in order to better meet the needs of more students. Not everyone in Juneau agreed with this approach, and it took eight years and seven different votes before the community finally approved another high school. Even after the vote of approval, there remained an air of anger and divisiveness over the building of the new school. The traditions of a one-high-school community remained a strong voice, and any change to move to two high schools was very hard for many people to accept. They feared that their strong sports program, as well as the entire tradition of a large comprehensive high school, would be compromised with the building of an additional school.

When the bond election finally passed in 2005, the Juneau School District made a bold move; instead of simply planning for the new school, they decided to develop an all-encompassing high school educational plan to address the protracted lack of student success and issues around equity. They realized that to make any significant change, they needed to go public with their data and actually create a process where all members of this diverse community would be heard. At this point, we were hired as facilitators, representing the Colorado Critical Friends Group, because we proposed a process that would utilize structures and protocols to create different types of conversations than had been previously used in community meetings. Working with school district leaders, we created a formal process called *The Next Generation: Our Kids, Our Community* that would include:

- forming an Advisory Committee,
- facilitating community forums,
- developing a website,
- creating and publicizing proposals, and
- submitting a final recommendation for a high school educational plan.

School district leaders realized that they faced several challenges. The community divided, not only on the need for a new high school, but also on the type of changes needed to address their lack of student success. Even some high school staff members were resistant to any type of change. Our challenge was to incorporate com-

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NSRF's Living History: An Interview with Linda Emm

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Linda Emm is a Curriculum Support Specialist in Miami Dade County Public Schools, working closely with colleague Pedro "Pete" Bermudez and the University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, an NSRF Center of Activity and a cadre of both long-time and new NSRF trained coaches, to grow the work of CFGs in a variety of contexts.

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what drew you to NSRF?

Kids are my passion. First I was drawn to children's theater and then to teaching. I thought teaching drama was the one job that would keep me grounded and make me want to come to work each day.

At my middle school my principal got me involved in thinking about learning styles and peer coaching and lots of new ideas about teaching. When I heard about NSRF and CFGs it felt like this was the way to focus on the real work, a way to put the big ideas into practice.

You've played a few different roles in your district since becoming a coach in 1996. Can you describe a few high points of your CFG experiences?

For the first ten years I did double duty as a middle school drama teacher and a CFG coach/facilitator, and it really suited me. There was never a separation in my mind between using this process with students or adults, so I used it with both. This work was at the heart of all I was doing. When I was working with Secondary School Reform and creating academies within larger schools, I worked with the adults in those Small Learning Communities as CFGs.

Working with my students in 2000, we were talking in class about what divided people in their schools and what it would take to build bridges across those divisions. We created a performance piece from those conversations and my kids co-facilitated home groups based on their piece at the Winter Meeting in Ft. Lauderdale. I fell and broke my arm the night before the meeting began, but my students carried on without me. It was one of the high points of my career, and the experience of being taken seriously by groups of adults from across the country changed my kids forever.

This work and its power to transform how teachers are in schools, the way we engage our students and each other is what keeps me going.

Can you tell us about some of the challenges you've faced?

Sustaining the work is always a challenge; figuring out what it means for teachers who have been silenced in the past, often for their entire careers, to collaborate and come up with their own solutions, is a challenge.

Customizing the work in response to each context is also a challenge. Recently, I was working with a group of internationally trained teachers, who were all experts in their content area. These "experts" needed tools that would help them make space for conversations about, and with, their kids. They needed help making connections with their kids and their kids' lives. Their CFG provided the space for them to make these connections.

Our CFGs are the only vehicle that I've seen that helps us keep the focus on ourselves and our place in this issue. In CFGs we don't complain about our students or their families, we focus on ourselves and what we can do differently.

This challenge turned into a high point when these teachers got their kids' scores up and presented their work at a recent event organized by their union.

How would you describe your current goals and their connection to NSRF's mission?

My goal is the transformation I talked about earlier . . . our kids have to be engaged and we can only focus on that, on their engagement, if we hold each other's feet to the fire and figure out what engages and disengages them. Our CFGs are the only vehicle that I've seen that helps us keep the focus on ourselves and our place in this issue. In CFGs we don't complain about our students or their families, we focus on ourselves and what we can do differently.

The transformation is bound up with social justice and that's what got me involved in theater and in education, and it seems like when *(continued on page 14)*

Center of Activity Report: Florida

Pedro Bermudez and Linda Emm, Florida

As we prepare to come together for the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting in Tampa Bay, Florida this December, we want to provide you with a brief snapshot of the work of the Florida Center of Activity. We were very fortunate to have gotten an early start with the work of the NSRF in 1995 and by the time funding for NSRF Coaches training ran out, we had built a small cadre of trained coaches working in a cluster of schools. To this day, most of these individuals are still actively engaged in CFG work—work that, in a multitude of ways, has transformed our personal and professional lives.

Like many other "Centers" of Activity, we formed from a network of colleagues who strongly believed in a new way of working and learning together that had not yet been embraced by the prevailing culture of our district. Indeed, some saw us as a band of subversives whose methods were so radical that our true motives had to be suspect. Still, like Jim Collins' Hedgehog in *Good to Great*, we remained focused on our "one big thing." With the support of key individuals in the district—our "embedded champions,"— we grew in numbers.

Five years ago, we had the good fortune to meet Don Pemberton, Director of the Lastinger Center for Learning of the College of Education at the University of Florida, at a Lucent Learning Communities CFG Coaches Institute. After sharing our dreams and comparing notes, we soon realized that our work had much in common. The Lastinger Center had spent a year visiting elementary schools in some of the poorest communities in the state and listening to the teachers in order to understand how best to support their work on behalf of children. One story that was heard over and over was that teachers were hungry for meaningful professional relationships. They were tired of being told what to do by outside "experts" who failed to understand their context. Teachers were eager to learn from each other in community with those who shared their concerns. This need to establish communities of practice where teachers could support and learn from each other as part of their regular work experience was the magnet that drew us together.

Five years later, we have built a relationship on positive interdependence. We continue to learn much from each other, and are working hard to sustain and expand our work with schools throughout Florida. The Lastinger Center, the NSRF Center of Activity in Florida, is currently working in 39 schools in 5 different districts (Alachua, Collier, Duval, Miami-Dade and Pinellas). We have about eleven university faculty and doctoral students, along with a growing number of NSRF National Facilitators and school-level coaches, working with us in our center. We have 3 levels of measurement to assess center effectiveness (internal team, external team, and grant-sponsored evaluation) which will help us to determine the impact of our work on teachers, schools, principals, and of course STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. Preliminary research results indicate that our Lastinger Schools, when compared with matched control-group schools, show significant differences in student achievement scores on Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in math and reading.

We are especially proud of the fact that we actively seek to work with under-resourced schools and communities. Although Linda and I primarily focus on training coaches and providing follow-up support, the work of the Lastinger Center actively seeks partnerships with organizations that provide a wide array of critical services for the students. For example, at present, the Lastinger

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Camilla Greene, Pennsylvania

Developing the will, skill and courage to engage in difficult conversations is a luxury. As an African-American female, developing the will, skill and courage were part of my birthright. The America I inhabit is a racialized society. The stories of my childhood are stories of indignities and inequities suffered by people who look like me, in my family, in my community, in America. Those stories, both historical and current, those visual pictures both historical and current, and those articles both historical and current that I read in the mainstream and black press media, coupled with my life experiences, prepared me to be courageous. One thing I figured out early on was that I was a proud and unapologetically black child. I did not want to assimilate and become an unconscious black person. There were examples of family and friends who used their courageous voices to speak out about injustice. In order to survive with my self intact, I had to speak out. I developed my voice in high school and I have continued on my journey strengthening my will, skill, and courage to interrupt and challenge inequities whenever and wherever they occur. Each time I speak out I get stronger and more courageous.

I have also had a geographical advantage. Growing up in Brooklyn and attending a progressive school, I was surrounded by dominant culture, Latino and African-American people who did not shy away from confrontation. We had many a strong, courageous conversation on race.

Outside of Brooklyn and my progressive school I learned that when I bring my authentic self to dominant culture folks unaccustomed to having their long-held beliefs challenged by someone who does not look like them, the push-back and fallout have been very interesting, hurtful and sometimes problematic. Most recently, on the NSRF

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Kim Carter, New Hampshire

When I began the Courageous Conversations book chat, I was eager to participate and fearful of being misunderstood. With only words to communicate through, I was cautious about how I constructed my e-mails, worried about inadvertently conveying prejudice and/or naivete, but also intent on communicating my curiosity and wonderings. I felt inept and unable to contribute much of substance, and I found it hard to stay in the conversation. But I had committed to the agreements: to stay engaged, to speak my truth, to experience discomfort, and to expect and accept a lack of closure. And Camilla's posts pulled me in, drew me on.

I fought being one more white person, and wanted to believe my questions were authentic, meaningful, of value. My experience caused me to question the impact of class, while Singleton, the author of the text, insisted that race was the more powerful oppressor. I didn't want to be using class as an excuse to not look at race, as Singleton suggested was too often the case, but I found it hard to believe, and so questioned what I was reading.

One of the first profound ahas that began to chip away at the shell of whiteness I live in was an early perception check in the book about the relationship of race to one's life. Confident that I was at least somewhat enlightened, I answered the questions, only to be startled by the authors' point that WHITE is a race as well. Wow! How utterly obvious and profoundly commonsensical. And yet, I had so missed it. How was that possible?! So much for enlightenment!

I began to question and test my perceptions, and to seek ways to invite others in my life into conversation. I brought the discussion to our school community, building on talk show host Don Imus's racist and demeaning remarks about the Rutgers Women's Basketball team. In the course

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Leading the Work by Doing the Work

Kevin Fahey, Massachusetts

The experience of everyone who has coached or participated in a Critical Friends Groups (CFG) suggests that the support of the school principal is an important factor in implementing and sustaining CFGs. In fact this was one of the findings of the very first study carried out around NSRF work (Dunne, Nave & Lewis, 2000). This study found that, "Principals who failed to actively support the work of CFGs were the greatest hindrances to their success." However, as often happens, this study, raised other important questions.

One question was, "How could principals who work in very fragmented, isolated, competitive ways ever learn to value and support the collaborative, reflective, learning-centered work that happens in CFGs?" Two groups of school leaders whose work I have documented have tried a very simple answer to this question: They learned about CFG work by doing it themselves.

How could principals who work in very fragmented, isolated, competitive ways ever learn to value and support the collaborative, reflective, learning-centered work that happens in CFGs? They learned about CFG work by doing it themselves.

The District Team

The first study focused on one suburban district's administrative team (superintendent, assistant superintendents, principals, and directors – 19 members). The superintendent, frustrated by the lack of collaboration and focus on issues of teaching and learning on the administrative team, convened the team in a monthly CFG- like format. The group used the Collaborative Assessment Conference as a vehicle to look at student work, raise issues of teaching learning and connect those issues to administrative practice. A National Facilitator agreed to coach the group, and I documented the work. The goal was to meet in this format for one school year.

The first meeting confirmed the superintendent's notion that the group was neither collaborative nor focused on teaching and learning. The group was clearly meeting only at the insistence of the superintendent, and was suspicious both of the facilitator and my documentation of the work. Nor was the group particularly interested in issues of teaching and learning. Comments such as "Principals negotiate their contracts individually here and there is a history of distrust" and 'There is talk about instructional leadership, but principals are not instructional leaders, and should not try to be" were typical in the first meeting.

Despite the lack of trust, and collaborative and reflective capacity, the group began to use the Collaborative Assessment Conference to look at student work. Initially, the group struggled with the protocol. However, by the third session, the group had learned the protocol and comments such as "I find the process beginning to work," "Today's efforts were well focused and felt easier than previous sessions" and "Good process involving nearly everyone" began to surface. In the fourth session, three principals talked about using the Collaborative Assessment Conference in their own schools. Surprisingly, in the seventh and last session of the year, the group agreed to continue to meet and to use the Consultancy Protocol to look at their leadership practice.

During the second year, the group stumbled again as it learned the new protocol but by the third session, the feedback was very positive. Comments such as "Working together on a real system issue was good," "This type of discussion would be great if it could be expanded throughout the system" and "We were able to openly share differing ideas and to respectfully listen to each other" were common.

Overall, the study found that over time, the team learned to use the protocols efficiently and productively, the facilitator gave fewer and fewer instructions, and the feedback was increasingly positive. Importantly, the team agreed to both continue the work a second year and five of the members of the team used the protocols in some way in their schools. An administration of the Team Learning Survey (Dechant & Marsick) at the end of the first and second years confirmed that the team had indeed become more collaborative and reflective. However, the study also found important limits to this team learning because some members were clearly more positive about this work than others and some members began the work in their own schools while others did not. Three principals remained steadfastly resistant.

The results suggested that these limits *(continued on page 16)*

but as a national movement we have never wavered in our commitment. As National Facilitators we are charged with linking the examination of adult and student work to issues of expectations, assumptions, and beliefs based on the hidden curriculum, i.e., that part of the curriculum that addresses institutional and systemic bias as it relates to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, learning abilities, and language. In addition to addressing these issues as practitioners, this standard also asks how National Facilitators incorporate aspects of equity into NSRF's journey as they work in diverse teams, across differences and commonalities, in local, regional, and national settings. Implicit in this standard, I think, is what we say to each other, how we say it, and what we notice and act upon within our practice.

Standard #3 – Living the Work: This standard seems to ask what obligations we have as National Facilitators to model reflective practice, asking for and receiving critical feedback, and making our practice public, demonstrating the need for continuous self-learning and improvement. While the core of this standard is making one's practice public, I think there is a huge meta-cognitive piece here as well, i.e., how might we continue to know what we don't know, and how can we make that public while teaching others? What vulnerabilities are required to facilitate others' learning in this work while continuing to develop our own practice? In the face of increasing obstacles and in a climate of continued onerous support for testing each child as an educational outcome, what responsibilities do we have to carry the message of our faculty as a positive intervention to mitigate against the destructive forces of the hidden curriculum and the testing madness? Additionally, this standard seems to ask for evidence of a National Facilitators' stance as practitioners not just during "CFG time," but as an embodiment of our complete practice.

Standard #4 – Commitment to the National Mission of NSRF: National Facilitators are charged with seeing the big picture of NSRF's mission, including our history, core beliefs, and commitment to building democratic learning communities – adult learning communities that positively impact student achievement. Most importantly, NSRF National Facilitators must keep an equity lens trained on our practice toward realizing our mission of a more equitable system of schooling leading to a more equitable society. How we each do that is less important than our willingness to have critical and sometimes difficult conversations about our individual and collective role in perpetuating the perennial inequities within which our children are raised.

Standard #5 – Significant Experience in the Four Other Standards: This standard is about skills, i.e., the disposition and knowledge each National Facilitator brings to the work; our flexibility to design our work to meet the needs and interests of the folks we work with and the children in their care; and courage, the stance we take to declare that what adults do together in schools matters, that we, the teachers, ought to make many if not most of the decisions that directly impact learning and teaching, and that we have the ability to engage in difficult conversations recognizing that our ability to give and receive critical feedback directly relates to the achievement of the children in our charge. This standard is a reconsidering of the other four. It asks us to consider the type of professional community in which we participate – do we coach a CFG? Are we members of a CFG? Does our practice reflect our core beliefs and do we work on our practice within the context of critical friendship and facilitative leadership? Each National Facilitator is responsible for reflecting on these questions and, as we move toward our public examination of our practice, these questions should probably be considered as we work to craft our portfolios.

The artifacts from our Centers' Summit and the memory of creating them have furthered our work and given us data to reflect upon as we continue to hone our standards document into something that is useful in each of our practices. The spirit of the meeting stays with us as well – especially true for the folks who were able to participate, but also for NSRF. I believe one of the strengths of our movement is the spirit that carries us from meeting to meeting, place to place. Sometimes years go by until we are once again able to see a "most trusted colleague," but our connection is strong and our commitment growing ever stronger. Our standards document, when crafted and published, coupled with our willingness to hold each other accountable for our standards, will create even stronger and more purposeful connections. ■

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Using Protocols with Students in a Writing Workshop

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

I am extraordinarily lucky to work with a small group of student writers every day in a room with schlumpfy old sofas and Barcaloungers. We operate in exactly the same way my adult writing group has for the past twelve years. We learn some new skills, we read short texts, we give and receive feedback, and sometimes we explore publishing options. Establishing a culture of writing is the most important aspect of this workshop. The first few days are often filled with awkward silences, but my first goal is to have everyone read a piece aloud. We need to hear each other's writing voices, and I need to protect those fragile new voices from thoughtless or hurtful responses. Teenagers can be very vague and very blunt, so I spend a lot of time establishing rules of how we will respond to each other, and I underline that I mean rules, not guidelines. My only absolute in this class is that we will follow a very strict protocol of giving feedback. Our goal is to respond to the questions the writer has asked of the work. The control of the feedback requested always rests with the writer. As writers, we do not have to open ourselves to thoughts we are not ready to hear.

To understand how we will respond to each other's writing, we read the Feedback Principles published by NSRF. We talk about the best and worst feedback we have ever received. I talk about how deeply a thoughtless comment can influence someone by telling the story of my younger sister's fourth grade teacher commenting that my sister would never go to college with her math skills. My sister was ten years old, but she listened hard to that teacher and never even attempted one college course until she had turned forty and was weary of dead-end jobs. That story resonates with my students, as we all have someone's thoughtless comment buried inside us.

We read Liz Lurman's wonderful piece, "Towards a Process for Critical Response," and we talk about the care that artists need when learning from their work. And finally, we are ready to offer feedback to each other. I begin this phase of the workshop by sharing a piece of writing of my own. Sometimes it is a finished piece, sometimes a work in progress, sometimes an idea. It is hard to ask students initially to help me with an idea I am wrestling with because their inclination is to offer a lot of "shoulds," a word I never want to hear in our writing circle. When I shared my newest essay, "White Privilege DNA" (see sidebar), I told them that it was a third draft, that I was pretty satisfied with it, but wondered whether it needed more exposition—a wider lens. I wondered whether I needed a more reflective ending. I wondered whether the writing flowed, or whether they had questions as they read. I wondered whether the title worked. A friend had told me he didn't "get" the title. For this first round, I facilitated my own session, although we eventually ask for someone else to facilitate for us. I asked for fifteen minutes of time.

My students liked that I had not taken much

time to get to the meat of the story. They thought the title hooked the reader. They disagreed as to whether to widen the lens and to spend more time on my conclusion. They asked me to put in a couple of words that cemented the concept of place, and they wondered if I should—and then they cringed when they realized they had used that dreaded word—add the assumption that all Whites were members of the same club,—and they wanted the word "club" to appear with quotation marks. When they finished I told them that I had held my breath as they read because I had never written anything like this piece and I wondered what readers would think of me as they read. Their reading and discussion had helped me learn from my own writing. I talked about someone using the word "should." We talked about a simple change in phrasing, something like asking if I had consid-

ered introducing the concept of white privilege as a club. That took away the "should" and pushed my thinking, and how that subtle shift made a difference in the way I heard the feedback.

After modeling a feedback session, I turn them loose to listen to each other in small groups. I do not join these groups, not wanting my teacher voice to interfere with their own learning. I reserve the right to overhear them, and sometimes issue a time-out when I hear something that needs to be restated. In an early session, a student stated that the middle section of a peer's writing was "boring," and I asked the group to think about feedback that would be more actionable for the writer. They wrestled with it for a few minutes, and then were able to say that as readers the first few sentences provided good information and they were

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White Privilege DNA

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

I thought I knew what I didn't know. In discussions about issues of race and equity, I put my dislaimer out on the table--as a white, upper-middle class teacher who lives in a Brigadoon of privilege, I am uber-aware of all that doesn't touch me in my daily teaching life. Or so I thought. Recently, however, I have been made aware of a starting gate I didn't even know I occupied. I am a white woman—and that one fact allows others to assume the DNA of my beliefs. No other markers are needed.

I entered a small mall food court restaurant at the same time as another woman. The hostess sat us at adjoining tables and the other woman asked me to keep an eye on her shopping bags while she used the restroom. When she returned we fell into that idle conversation of strangers. She was visiting her second home in Florida, here from Dallas for a few days of shopping and sailing. I was visiting Sarasota as a school consultant. Her sister was an educator, she said, and had recently returned to a middle school classroom. Her sister's story, she said, finally had a happy ending. She had once been the head of a strong Federal pre-school program in the Southwest, but the Blacks had wanted the position for themselves, and had made her life hell--suing her left and right for things like supposedly not saying 'good morning' as she passed them in the hall. Finally, she quit and let them have the job.

I had sent no signals that we were of the same mind. We were in a mall food court. I had on jeans shorts and a plain white tee shirt. The only thing we had in common at that moment was that we were sitting side by side and that we were both white. We had said nothing as a prologue to her story. We were two strangers at a 'pass the salt' level of conversation. I said nothing. Our waitress brought our two lunches and we turned to our food.

Fast forward to the check-out counter of my local market. Two acquaintances and I were praising the day—a glorious end of summer afternoon. I remarked that it was

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listserv I expressed my opinion on the film *Freedom Writers*. My opinion was in opposition to the glowing praise online. The push-back and feedback were interesting. Only a white ally was able to hear what I was saying and not deny or try to sugar-coat it.

Most dominant culture folks are not aware of the impact of race and historical oppression on African-Americans. Let me restate that . . . perhaps most dominant culture people are aware on a cognitive level about racism, but they have not developed the will, skill, and courage to go to the emotional space to work through and challenge their own long-held beliefs so that they can deconstruct racism and other inequities that live in their belief systems and are played out in their lives and in their classrooms. I believe educators in America cannot teach high school students well if they have not engaged and cannot engage in courageous conversation on race. I believe that in order to successfully teach each high school student well, we must be very much aware of the role of race on the cognitive level and able to take political, social, psychological and personal actions to interrupt racist thinking and behaviors. Racism has developed in America to a point where it is insidious. The impact of living in a racist country has a harmful effect on us, on others, and on the high school student we are educating.

Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton, in their book *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*, have outlined a way for educators to engage in a series of reflective, collaborative, courageous conversations about race. For the last six months, fifty-three of us in NSRF have engaged in Courageous Conversations about Race online. Of the four guidelines for the courageous conversation, "experience discomfort" is the one guideline that jumpstarts and holds the courage in the conversation. My experience in having conversations about race is that there is always some unwritten rule that white people are not to be made uncomfortable during any conversation about race. There is always someone, generally another white person or an unconscious person of color, who will rush to make white people comfortable whenever the conversation gets real and honest. Race is an emotionally charged subject for me. I cannot promise that I will always speak in the comfort zone when I am having a conversation about race across difference. If I have to edit what I say, and tone down the *(continued on page 13)*

Kim Carter, continued

of having that discussion with students and staff, I made a statement that the one black staff member didn't want to have to represent all people of color, but did want to be able to be able to share his perspective and be in community with us authentically.

Later, I was struck by the arrogance of my statement. I say that, but in reality it was an intellectual realization that while I thought I was operating from the overlapping roles of principal, community leader and discussion moderator, there was a significant probability that I had classically illustrated white privilege. I made the good choice to apologize to my staff member. When he accepted my apology graciously, but didn't brush it away or deny it, I realized I had unconsciously hoped he would tell me there hadn't been any problem at all and I shouldn't worry. I am profoundly grateful to him for his honesty, which helped chisel away another chunk of the white privilege shell I have been encased in. He helped me begin to move past the vague pervasive guilt of being white (which I could deny individually) into a more concrete and personalized awareness of how I contributed in myriad unintentional – and thus mindless – ways to perpetuating white privilege.

At the May Facilitators' Meeting in Indianapolis, folks from the book chat took time to meet. That meeting brought me face to face with the transparency of not so much my whiteness as my blandness. Being white felt like a subtle kind of invisibility or namelessness. With just over half a century of life to draw on, I still could not name my identity; my ethnicity was like white bread – what I call "air bread" because it's all air and no substance. I hungered for the fierce belonging I perceived in those of color, and wondered at ways of being in communities of skin, of language, of hurt. I felt a longing, at the same time I sensed the necessity that I remain outside; that no amount of desire, goodwill, or positive intentions could change the fact that my existence was on the inside of a sea of privilege, however confining and limiting that might feel to me.

That evening, when the meeting was over, I was deeply disturbed, wondering where "the will and the skill" to interrupt come from, and whether I had the courage to pursue that course of action. I turned to my triage – reading more of Courageous Conversations – and encountered White Talk and Color Commentary.

To say I was star- *(continued on page 13)*

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emotion, I am not able to engage in the conversation in an authentic way. In order to engage in this Courageous Conversation about Race you have to have or develop both your cognitive and emotional muscles.

I have enjoyed reading and noting the dawning of new realities about race in the consciousness of white people in our online chat. I applaud the courageous white people who have been willing to put themselves out there, making themselves vulnerable on the emotional level. These courageous folks have stopped intellectualizing the topic of race in order to begin to learn how to develop the will, skill, and courage to form alliances across difference in order to interrupt inequities in life and in the classroom. Most white people do not have a clue about what they do not know about race. If you do not live as the constant "other" how can you possibly know the impact of race? Alliance with people who have lived as the racialized "other" are critical if we are to create a new reality for ourselves, and our students. In the online chat, white people were able to get to a space where they could state what they did not know. It is in the space of being willing to know what we don't know that we can begin to forge true alliances. I know a lot of white people, but a lot of white people are not my allies. My white allies across difference are folks with whom I have forged a relationship that holds continuous space for Courageous Conversations about Race and other inequities. We have learned how to bring our authentic selves to our conversations. My white allies know how to hold a difficult space to have these conversations. They also know when and how to challenge the belief systems of other white people who have not yet begun to recognize their own white privilege. My white allies engage in conversations with other whites in ways that demonstrate their ability to be self-critical and reflective. White allies speak about and challenge their own long-held beliefs about race, which allows them to truly see both the impact of historical oppression and the strengths and the needs of their students of color and other adults of color.

One thing I dislike about our online conversation about race is the number of people I refer to as "voyeurs," people who have signed on but do not speak/write. These "voyeurs" read the online postings filled with emotions and whatever else others have put out there, but do not put themselves out there. I believe these folks are "piggy-back-

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tled is a vast understatement. The degree to which Singleton's depiction of White Talk articulated my engagement in the previous three or so months of conversation about race was stunning. More than any ethnic or cultural traditions, these characteristics sum up my heritage from my upbringing. And they map one for one onto the "cultural parameters" of dominance in racial discourse today in the United States:

- My compulsion to find just the right words to ensure understanding;
- My use of examples from the lives of people I know to illustrate my beliefs;
- My reliance on "the research" and the statistics; and
- My urgency to find the right action to make things better

These have long been hallmarks of the way I walk through this world. I sobbed for over an hour at this realization. And then I turned to attending to the characteristics of Color Commentary, so I might better understand the dialogue and discourse in which I want to partner. As I read, I replayed in my mind interactions from the Facilitators' Meeting, including Camilla's statement that as much as she appreciated what was shared, she could not trust any of us to be there in the future, when the going got rough. And I began to have inklings of understanding. I finally began to turn away from the shadows on the allegorical cave wall and take some first steps to move out of the cave, ready to enter a much richer, more multidimensional reality.

I want to live in a different world so badly my chest and heart ache. What I'm finding, as a result of the online book discussion and the follow-up interactions I've had, is that the action I believe I need to take is both simple and profoundly challenging. I need to be willing to speak, to name what has been unnameable in our culture, to question, to be clumsy and inept and not at all politically correct. I currently believe one of the most important contributions I can make to "bringing wreck" to the inequities and oppressions I have participated in is to commit to being an ally – to using the privilege of my skin color to hold space for the voices that will help me learn what I need to give over and give up, as well as what I need to embrace, in order

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ers" who benefit from the emotional energy of others, without having to make themselves vulnerable or do the hard work. Voyeurs do not expend emotional energy. Perhaps I have some personal work to do around this. My truth at this time is I still do not like or appreciate "voyeurs."

I continue to speak out and I continue to grow and develop new and meaningful alliances across difference. I am particularly proud of the alliances I have forged with the hip-hop generation. Strong, young African-American men and women in their twenties, thirties and forties and I are working collaboratively on several education projects. I continue to speak out and grow as I develop alliances with my white colleagues. I used to feel isolated in my work. Now I feel supported, understood, challenged and respected. Having many strong allies across difference has had a significant impact in my work as a CFG facilitator and school coach. ■

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Kim Carter, continued

to move toward the world I want to live in, where my being is not taking away from or diminishing another's but rather contributing to healing and transformation.

Since I entered the book chat, I've become more aware and able to interrupt, to raise questions, to hold space, with adults in various contexts. I wrestle mightily with questions of how to do this with an open hand and open heart in situations such as disciplining a child of color; coaching, evaluating or disciplining a staff member of color; or disagreeing with a parent of color. My journey has just begun. My gratitude for my colleagues of color and their willingness to enter into, stay in, and be patient with me as I develop skill through these courageous conversations is immense. ■

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NSRF's Living History . . .

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we added "social justice" to our mission we took it, as we say in the theater, "from the page to the stage". We decided to really walk our talk in schools. It's like moving from Discourse I and talk about drop-outs, to Discourse II and the recognition that our kids are being pushed out of our schools.

Our CFGs are the space, and social justice is the work.

What are your hopes and fears for NSRF in the next period?

In our quest to sustain ourselves organizationally and financially, a quest I support, I hope we don't lose sight of our core practice of working together to sustain communities of practice that focus on social justice. I guess my hope and my fear are bound up in this question, How do we raise our profile about who we are and what we do, without losing the essence of who we are and what we do? I think if we stay true to our essence, when people think about learning communities, they'll think of us, of CFGs, as the real thing! ■

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White Privilege DNA
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such different weather than in Sarasota, the city I had just returned from. One asked what I thought of that city, and I praised the beaches and damned the heat. The second woman asked whether the Mexicans had started creeping in yet, although she supposed they were all over Florida by now. Her question and her tone did not signal that she was crossing a boundary, and my lack of a response did nothing to enlighten her. It was my turn at the cashier, so I was distracted as I said that I was struck by the diversity I saw in the schools—but by then I was blocking another customer and it was awkward to continue to stand in that spot. I waved and left the store.

My skin, not my being, allowed these conversations to happen. The initiators assumed a shared belief and a shared bias based on skin color, not words or actions. These two tiny moments allowed me a small sliver of seeing. Each incident forced me to see a little bit more of how much I do not understand about white privilege—and forced me to question the sound of my own silence. ■

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Using Protocols with Students. . .
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ready to move on. As readers, they did not need the second and third paragraphs of this piece to understand the writer's point of view. They could see immediately that that was more helpful to the writer than the word "boring."

After the first two weeks of Writing Workshop, my presence as teacher fades as we become fellow writers striving to improve our work. ■

The Writing Workshop Feedback Protocol can be found on our website, www.nsrfharmony.org, in our protocol section.

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Center of Activity: Florida
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Center, together with Collier County Public Schools, The Education Foundation of Collier County, the Naples Children and Education Foundation, the Immokalee Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Collier County, are collaborating in a broad effort to improve student achievement and child well-being in Collier County.

This effort is multi-faceted and includes intensive work in Immokalee elementary schools, an executive doctoral program for district administrators, improved access to health and dental care for low-income children, and increasing the availability of quality preschool education for Immokalee children. Immokalee is one of the poorest communities in the nation, with close to 40% of its population living below the poverty line. Since 1997, investigations by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department have prosecuted six slavery cases in Florida's produce fields - freeing over a thousand workers held against their will.

The work of the Florida Center of Activity is profoundly satisfying for all of us. It is also intense and difficult work fraught with disappointment and constant struggle. Indeed, all of us in the NSRF know something about how hard it is to do authentic work in real contexts. That is the one thing that separates us from so many others who have joined the collaboration bandwagon in recent years.

And for those of you reading this at the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting, all of us here at the Florida Center of Activity welcome you to Florida! We know that as we engage each other in thoughtful and challenging conversations, we will all be smarter, stronger, and more courageous than we were when we arrived. ■

For more information about the work of the NSRF Florida Center of Activity visit www.coe.ufl.edu/centers/lastinger/index.html
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were connected to (1) the isolated and fragmented nature of the team; (2) the power of the isolated, competitive culture in which the leaders worked; and (3) the behavior of the superintendent who, in effect, had ordered the team to be more collaborative. Simply put, the team had a long way to go to become a professional learning community and ordering them to go there, only got them part of the way.

The TILE CFG

The context of the second study is quite different. In this study, 14 graduates of a M.Ed. Leadership program met in a CFG. The group had been trained in a two year, cohort-based M.Ed. program called the TILE program (Teacher Initiative for Leadership in Education) which was very much based on ideas of critical friendship, and used protocols as the central element of its pedagogy. The group was multi-district, regionally based and completely voluntary.

The TILE CFG has met continuously since fall 2004. Because the group was trained in the use of protocols as part of their leadership education program, they used many more protocols than the district group, facilitated the conversation themselves, had no difficulty bringing dilemmas of practice, student work or relevant texts to the table, and in the third year agreed on a focus of difficult conversations, especially as they related to equity.

In a series of interviews, the members of the group stated that the TILE CFG continued to support their own leadership learning and their ability to bring this perspective back to their own schools. One principal summed up the experience by saying:

You have to trust in the group. I knew that when I missed CFG meetings, I was really missing something. I think it was the honest, truthful conversations, and knowing that you had a voice. I don't always feel I have these in my own district.

Another added:

For me, the CFG groups are places where you can test your hypotheses. It is the safest place. I do not know any other place where I can do that. I cannot do that with my staff. I cannot do it with my boss. And the only place where you will be taken seriously in this way is the CFG. School is a lonely place with regards to this type of conversation.

In general, the principals recounted how the only way that they could ever hope to support and sustain professional collaborative communities in their schools was to participate in one themselves. Comments such as, "In this job you can go weeks without this type of conversation" and "Now I have a place to come and hash things out. The CFG almost has a spiritual quality" were common.

During the interview process, the principals were also asked about the connections between their work in their CFG and their work in schools. In the interviews, every group member gave numerous examples of how their participation in the TILE CFG sustained and informed their leadership practice. The examples fell into three broad areas. First, members shared how the TILE CFG continually refocused them on larger issues of school culture and professional community, encouraging them to look beyond the immediate problems that they faced as school leaders. Second, the principals described specific structures, tools or practices that were used in the TILE CFG , tools that they also used, in some way, in their schools. Finally, three members of the group from the same district recounted the effect that having TILE CFG colleagues in their district had on the work of the district administrative team.

One principal, for example, described how the TILE CFG supported her persistent focus on teaching and learning by saying, "Are kids learning or are we just teaching? You have to create that culture where you can have conversations around instruction." Another noted, "It is about always bringing the conversation about teaching and learning. It is about building a CFG language with the staff." Every CFG member identified a connection between the culture of the TILE CFG and the culture they were trying to build in their schools.

The administrators were also able to provide many examples of tools, protocols and ideas that were used in the TILE CFG that they also used in their practice. Some examples were using the Collaborative Assessment Conference to look at student work, collaborative data analysis sessions, using a Tuning Protocol to look at a crisis plan, and reflective journaling. One principal described the progress she had made in her school by saying, "But you learn. You have to do it. But I am to the point that we have made some progress. In my school, we have introduced norms for *(continued on page 17)*

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our work, use essential questions to drive faculty meetings and collaboratively examine data." Another principal described a more ambitious use of the CFG ideas, "I decided that my approach was to run my faculty meeting as a CFG."

Two principals depicted two very powerful examples of connections between the TILE CFG and the leadership practice of the district administrative team. In the first example, one principal explained how a presentation that she made about her CFG work influenced how the district administrative team functioned. She explained the connection in this way:

I made a presentation about CFGs to the district leadership team. I presented on CFGs and PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). We first did a Chalk Talk; I talked about National School Reform Faculty and the components of a CFG. We did a Consultancy about a professional dilemma presented by one of the principals. We did a check in. We ended with a closure piece. Ultimately, what happened was the Assistant Superintendent decided that the district leadership team meetings would be run as a CFG. Throughout the year, principals brought student work, a dilemma or a text based discussion to the meeting. They still do it today. This year, the principals are running their grade level meetings as CFGs.

A second connection to district leadership practice surfaced because one district had hired three TILE CFG members as elementary principals. These three principals explained that having three TILE principals - out of six elementary principals in the district - eased their transition into the district and changed the conversation and practice on the district team. One principal described the effect,

Before my TILE CFG colleagues arrived, the previous superintendent tried to get conversations about teaching and learning going on the leadership team. He tried to do a book study on Good to Great (Collins, 2001). They rode him out of town. But now it makes a difference with three of us who understand the value of this work.

In general, the TILE CFG members saw a number of very strong connections between the work of the TILE CFG and their leadership practice.

Summary

In summary, these two studies describe, in two different contexts, one way school leaders can learn to value and support CFG work in their schools. Simply put, supportive school leaders do the work for themselves. In the first study, a district team made significant gains towards becoming a more reflective, collaborative learning community, and to a lesser extent transferred some of that learning to their leadership practice. In the second study, a group which had a more robust understanding of CFG work created and sustained a leadership CFG, whose work then influenced their work as school leaders.

The comparison of the two studies, however, opens up other dilemmas. The district team was coerced by the superintendent to do collaborative work, and although it took a great deal of support and good facilitation, the power of the work eventually began to get some traction and show some results. Because the group was made up of an entire district team, the potential benefit to the district and the district's children seems much greater than in the second group whose members were much more skilled, but from a variety of districts. The next challenge is to figure out a way to leverage professional community building on a district and regional level. Our second regional TILE CFG started in October. I will keep you posted ■

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These studies are available on the NSRF website, at www.nsrfharmony.org

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munity voice and the best practices in high school reform with a focus on improving learning success for *all* students. Having used protocols and structures successfully with educators and students, we believed that these same structures for creating conversations would help us find common ground around tough issues with community groups. We were told that previous activities to gather community input had often resulted in only the same few voices being heard, with no follow up, after these meetings. We wanted to make sure that all the voices were heard and would be represented in any plan that was developed. We believed that protocols and similar structures could work to allow people to feel safe and would allow the community to heal the rift that the many years of debate over the need for a new high school had created. We were reminded that this process was not only about changing a high school, but a step in changing an entire community and its culture.

During the summer of 2006, a voluntary two-day workshop was held for the high school staff, in which a majority of teachers participated. The focus was on collaboration and learning how to work together to see what was possible for their school. Protocols were used to help them look at texts on school change, examine student work, and build greater awareness of equity issues within the school. The Futures Protocol led to a powerful description of what their school could be. In order to help the school district build capacity to continue such conversations and promote Critical Friends Groups, we facilitated training for district staff during the school year.

A vital component of this process was the formation of a thirty-five member Advisory Committee that was representative of parents, school staff, students, cultural, business, and university representatives, and other community members. The mission of the Advisory Committee was to create a secondary educational plan that was:

- Dedicated to high expectations and success for all students
- Reflective of the needs, values, and beliefs of the Juneau, Alaska community
- Based on current educational research and best practices
- Supportive of the goals of rigor, relevance, and relationships, and the strategic plan of the Juneau School District

Because our time with the Advisory Committee was limited and the issues so complex, we spent a great deal of time planning sessions to help build a sense of trust within the group and allow us to have the hard conversations. We worked exclusively out of a circle because we wanted to make sure that we distributed the power among all the members of the committee as we symbolically created a sense of community and equity within this group. The community agreements that we developed helped us listen to each other and respect the many different perspectives represented within the group.

We began with the Atlas Looking at Data Protocol. It was a powerful moment as the group began to realize the implications of this data. It became obvious that Alaska Natives and students of poverty were being failed by the current school system. The impact of this data remained with us throughout the entire process and created many opportunities for the group to discuss issues of equity within the school and community. From this session, we came away excited that both school and community people appreciated the use of a protocol that promoted honest conversation and forced us to be more thoughtful.

To achieve our goal of hearing the community's voice, we scheduled over twenty-five community forums. The forums were scheduled purposely to ensure that all voices in the community be heard, especially those of different cultural groups. We worked hard to make sure that people of color and people representing the dominant culture sat next to each other in the same circles to hear each other's comments and concerns. All forum participants responded to the following questions:

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1. Describe the learning environment in a high school that you do not want to see.
2. Describe the learning environment in a high school that you want to see.
3. Describe your student when he/she graduates from high school.
4. What advice do you have for us as we develop a high school educational plan?

Participants wrote their responses on 3x5 note cards and went around the circle as each person shared what he/she wrote. The power of this process was the opportunity for all people to speak and truly be listened to as they presented their different perspectives and hopes and dreams for their students and the school district. Not everyone appreciated this process, especially some from the dominant culture. However, a majority felt like their time spent was much more than token feedback and that it would truly make a difference in any plan that was presented. We collected every 3x5 card and published comments verbatim on the website that was created to make the entire process public and transparent. Advisory Committee members then read every comment from every forum before they began creating proposals for the educational plan.

Several proposals were created, and a second round of community forums was held to enable the public to respond to the proposals. Four themes emerged at these forums and became the guiding principles for our work: *Unity, Equity, Personalization,* and *Choice*. Taking the themes from the community forums and what they learned about best practices and high school reform, the Advisory Committee recommended three smaller high schools that included the following key components:

- 9th Grade Learning Communities
- Small Learning Communities Based on Themes in Grades 10-12
- Advisory Program for All
- Flexibility to Move Among Themed Academies
- Core Content/State Standards in All Academies
- Multicultural and Anti-Racist Teaching
- Post-Secondary Preparation for All Students
- Improved Access to and Participation in Expanded Extracurricular Opportunities
- Enrollment Based on Choice and Equity
- Secondary Planning Team

Reaching consensus on this educational plan was a long and difficult process. We were constantly asking ourselves, *Will this plan truly make a difference for all students, and especially for Alaska Natives and students of poverty?* Confronting issues of equity and racism resulted in some hard and arduous conversations. Based on these conversations it was agreed that the key component of multicultural and antiracist teaching should remain at the forefront of the educational plan. After the Advisory Committee came to consensus on the proposal for a high school educational plan, it was unanimously approved by the School Board. The Juneau School District is currently working to implement the plan for the fall of 2008.

We believe that the educational plan that was created has the potential for improving learning for all students in the Juneau community. After working with this process for over a year, we've gained the following insights:

- Without addressing issues around equity, significant change in schools will not be possible.
- Protocols and other structured methods of conversation that we have used with educators and students for years can and do work in community settings.
- Protocols and other similar structures help people from different cultures engage in difficult and respectful conversations about race.
- Representative student voice is a perspective in school change that must be valued.
- Change, especially when it is focused on the high school, is difficult. Significant high school change, even when the shortcomings become evident and public, does not happen easily.
- Sharing data is a powerful approach to promoting change; however, one must dig deeply to find data that shows the entire picture.
- The community can and should be a powerful voice in creating significant change in schools. However, any opportunity for input must allow for all the voices to be heard, not just the most vocal.

For more information on *The Next Generation: Our Kids, Our Community*, please visit the website www.nextgenerationjuneau.com. ■

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