We are a group of African-American and white NSF facilitators actively striving to build alliances across race in our work. As a part of learning how to work together in new and different ways, we structured a dialogue around this question: What do we need from each other across difference in order to sustain and deepen our alliances and work in the face of aversive racism and racial microaggressions?

“Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities.”

We used the article “Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life, Implications for Clinical Practice” by Wing Sue, Desialt et al and the Save the Last Word everyday Life, Implications for Clinical Practice” by Wing Sue, Desialt et al and the Save the Last Word... [Page 7]

Debbie: Getting it in one instance doesn’t necessarily mean getting it in the next instance. There’s always that tension of trying to understand but trying to be vigilant and not feeling like my progress is the responsibility of my colleagues of color but wanting to make sure that we have the kind of honesty where people don’t feel that they have to continue to manage the business of whether we are worth telling the truth to, because we may come back with “oh no it was something else” or “oh no you misunderstood.”

Quote: Microaggressions are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous. Yet, as indicated previously, microaggressions are detrimental to persons of color because they impair performance in a multitude of settings by sapping the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients and by creating inequities.

Discussion: Camilla: I think all of us have been in situations where people of color get quiet and we know people have something to say. Or where one of you said something and it doesn’t get followed up on and then becomes our idea or some other white person’s idea a few moments later, as if you didn’t say something in the first place. I think it’s our responsibility not to let that go and not to always make it the responsibility of the person who’s being given the look or being passed over.

Mary: I just saw myself in this quote. I saw it loud and clear and it’s not that I’m much better at it but it is something. I feel I’m getting more conscious of and I agree with Kim, it is something we have to be in together and be conscious of it all the time.

Quote: In essence, the catch-22 means you are ‘damned if you do, and damned if you don’t.’

Discussion: Wendy: This takes me back to how much power silence has. We give the power to the person who has launched the microaggression and for me it becomes more difficult if I choose to ignore it.

Camilla: I also see this from my point in my life and throw caution to the wind more often than not and just do... for all the people who cannot find their voices, for all the people who are not at the table, and so I think I can take whatever’s going to be handed or dished out in certain environments. However, I think in our alldish it’s not an either or. That it’s an understanding. I don’t know how to explain it, so that I can actually say I don’t choose to address this right now and that would be okay.

Kim: How are we pushing that for ourselves, how can we at least, for ourselves, create the space where we’re not damned if we do and damned if we don’t? Some way that we can begin to unpack this for ourselves in a way that provides a different way to work together and a different level of honesty about the work that we’re doing.
Wendy Brannen, New York, and Kim Feicke, Oregon

Connections

Protocols in Practice: Racial Microaggressions Text-Based Discussion

Wendy Brannen, New York, and Kim Feicke, Oregon

Protocols in Practice...

(continued on page 7)

by Lisa Delpit in “Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement Among African-American Students.” When taught by knowledgeable/able/culturally aware Blacks, we know the truth in addition to what’s been told/said/shown about us by Whites. We have a foundational knowledge that counters the negative images and inferiority perpetuated upon us by Whites. It’s imperative that we teach our children how to navigate these two worlds.

Camilla: This passage pointed to the fact that kids and people of color have these coping strategies that in the face of racial microaggressions help them maintain their dignity and help them persevere. I’m wondering what it is that we need to know about this and study it and figure out how people of color (cope). A lot of people in the dominant culture say they’re fearful and I think partly our coping strategies make us courageous. They may not know how many, many, many times and push through it. So that becomes a strength for African-Americans and people of color.

Debbie: Getting it in one instance doesn’t necessarily mean getting it in the next instance. There’s always that tension of trying to understand but trying to be vigilant and not feeling like my progress is the responsibility of my colleagues of color but wanting to make sure that we have the kind of honesty where people don’t feel that they have to continue to maintain a choice of whether we are worth telling the truth to, because we may come back with “oh no it was something else” or “oh no you misunderstood.”

Quote: Microaggressions are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous. Yet, as indicated previously, microaggressions are detrimental to persons of color because they impair performance in a multitude of settings by sapping the psychic and spiritual energy of recipients and by creating inequalities.

Discussion

Kim: This is not only detrimental for kids of color but for white kids as well. What are the microaggressions that are reinforced for them and caused them to doubt themselves? A greater understanding of microaggressions, both in the long term and the short term, and of the coping strategies employed would be beneficial in thinking of children of color for the life they will face.

Debbie: This takes me back to how much power silence has. We give the power to the person who has launched the microaggression and for me it becomes more difficult if I choose to ignore it.

Camilla: I also see from this point in my life and throw caution to the wind more often than not and just do...for all the people who cannot find their voices, for all the people who are not at the table, and so I think I can take whatever’s going to be handed or dished out in certain environments. However, I think in our alldisp it’s not an either or. That it’s an understanding. I don’t know how to explain it, so that I can actually say I don’t choose to address this right now and that would be okay.

Kim: How are we pushing that for ourselves, how can we at least, for ourselves, create the space where we’re not darned if we do and darned if we don’t? Some way that we can begin to unpack this for ourselves in a way that provides a different way to work together and a different level of honesty about the work that we’re doing?


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around the iceberg of racial and socioeconomic inequity, there has to be some diversity and idiosyn- 
caron present among the adults. It’s hard to take the risks needed to reframe and reframe in an atmos-
phere of sameness. Where’s the provocation, the influx of multiple perspectives and divergent experi-
ences, the disturbance? Where’s the willingness to engage in the inside-outside work called for by our colleague, Victor Cary of the Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools (BayCES)! Cary (2005) states that, “The work of creating equitable and excellent schools is fundamentally about changing ourselves, and thereby our relationships with others.” He goes on to say that doing this work means being able to reflect on our inner lives while also focusing on our assumptions about oppression, power and hegemo-
ny. I’m not saying white teachers can’t do this trans-
formational work, but as a white teacher myself, I 
am saying we cannot do it in isolation. Our learn-
ing must be jointed by alliances with colleagues and stakeholders across difference, and it requires a 
conscious decision to change the way we frame the discourse.

Changing the Discourse

Working in alliance and changing our discourse opens up possibilities for the transformation of our 
practice and our vision, with and for our students. Elubanks, Parish and Smith (1997) define Discourse I 
as the way we think, talk and plan in order to main-
tain or reproduce various school systems. They 
call for a new discourse, what they call Discourse II, 
as the basis for real change in our schools. BayCES (2003) offers the following excerpt from the 
full text to distinguish between the two types of discourse:

**Discourse I**
- Singular Truths
- The work of adults
- Discipline & control
- Dropouts

**Discourse II**
- Multiple Stories
- The learning & experience of students
- Alienation & resistance
- Pushouts

There was some limited diversity in my first 
CG. We represented differences of race, gender, 
reflexive upbringing and sexual orientation. And yet, in our fledgling efforts at collaboration, we 
were engaged in a relatively comfortable Discourse

I exchange of feedback, in which the presenting 
teacher framed the examination of student work 
with a question, and no one ever questioned or 
pushed back on the “frame” or focus. We did not 
discuss the foundations of our individual or col-
lective dilemmas. We went to work on simple 
solutions to complex problems that were 
ever systemic in nature. The opportunity to discuss 
issues of oppression, power and hegemony was 
present, but the opportunity was not addressed. 
Instead, our CFG was energizing and as Ellen said, 
“we felt affirmed…” after each meeting, but as 
Camilla indicated, it was unclear what, if anything, 
was changing for the bulk of our students.

At one CFG meeting, I presented a videotape 
of my science class and shared information about 
my students’ lack of reflection. I wondered aloud 
what I could do differently to support greater stu-
dent reflection and the transfer of knowledge from 
a lab activity to a pencil and paper test and on to 
their future studies. However, I never acknowl-
edged the skin I was in and in the ways it shaped 
my perspective. I was concerned that my kids 
completed lab experiments, enjoyed the hands-on 
activities, and then moved on to the next lab with- 
out grasping the real science content involved. I 
got some good, concrete ideas from my colleagues, 
ideas about slowing down and using our science 
journals more. I put my CFG’s feedback to use the 
very next day and the lab was much more success-
ful, if at least on the surface of the work.

However, I didn’t seek or receive feedback 
about the lack of student-centered conversation in 
my class, where all discussion and all power 
flowed through me. As the presenter, I did not 
directly address my role as a white teacher working with 
students of color, and no one else identified these 
differences as a fundamental feature of my class-
room instruction. My limited frame set the bound-
aries, and no one mentioned my failure to differen-
tiate supports for my students with limited literacy 
skill or English language fluency. Instead there was an 
unspoken acceptance that I was doing the best 
I could as a teacher who only spoke English in a 
linguistically diverse class of 33 adolescents. We 
stayed focused primarily on the students’ 
proficiency in the work and adults, and we missed the 
chance to really explore what it would take to reframe 
my/our focus on the learning and experience of my/our students.

After about a year of intentional, self-patterned, self-directed work, I finally dawned on me that I needed to 
directly engage my students in these teaching and

Coaching Whole School Change: Lessons In Practice From a Small High School

David Allen and his colleagues have done 
much to demystify the concept of school 
coaching with their new book, Coaching 
Whole School Change, Lessons in Practice from a 
Small High School, published in 2008 by Teachers 
Collaborative Press. Derived from a pilot study on 
school coaching at New York City’s Park East 
High School as it transitioned from an alternative 
school to a four-year, four-year high school. The early stages 
of this transition focused on school safety and shift-
ing roles within the school, but it also became 
apparent that there was little consistency of instruc-
tion and insufficient focus on complex thinking 
and/or extended reading and writing. A new prin-
cipal built on an already-existing relationship with 
student Achievement (ISA) by 
accepting Suzanne Or, who had recently completed her doctor-
ate at Columbia, to be Park East’s 
time-two-part coach.

Allen tracks Suzy’s interac-
tions at the school over two years. Suzy is an inside-outside coach, 
working first one day, then two 
days each week at Park East. 
Allen and his writing colleagues observe Suzy at 
Park East, and discuss the habits of an effective 
school coach. Their goal is not to write a 
textbook on the 
account of school coaching or of a specific school’s work, but to “illuminate 
the nature of coaching practice.”

Allen states that coaching is 
not only complex, but intensely 
context-bound.” Suzy keeps her 
eye on the long-term goals of elevating discourse, 
improving teacher collaboration, and deepening 
instruction through her constant communication 
with a wide range of school practitioners. Often 
these communications take place in hallways or “in 
drive-by” moments of post it note exchanges; 
at other times, Suzy is sharing 
how her school works with individuals, connecting 
coaches and assisting in the 
planning of meetings, acknowledges 
administrative barriers to 
change and forges onward. Her days are varied, as 
she seize moments to create opportunities to 
boost confidence and retention. Suzy spends time 
ftening curriculum, solving problems, easing 
burdens, supporting teachers, providing tips and

offering a new perspective on teaching and learn-
ing. No one work is magic or transformative, 
but each successful encounter slowly shifts the school’s focus.

As in any complex social system, Park East experiences administrative shifts, diminishing 
resources and a range of social politics. Allen 
keeps his lens focused sharply on Suzy’s emerging 
coaching habits, in spite of typical distractions. 
He provides administrators, teachers and organizations 
with a template of how to build a collaborative 
school culture through the dedicated time of one 
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Coaching Whole School Change: Lessons In Practice From a Small High School

Book Review by Peggy Silva, New Hampshire
Winter Meeting Wrap-Up
Sarah Childers, Indiana

The 13th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting was held January 14–17th, 2009, in Houston, Texas, and was attended by 300 people, including facilitators and critical friends. For three-and-a-half days, teachers, administrators and educational leaders worked together on the issues that matter most to them. Many sought to improve their coaching skills and to learn more protocols. Others needed the vital feedback of peers on difficult dilemmas. Some were just getting started and needed to build strong foundations for bringing CFGs into their workplaces. Opportunities to meet all these needs, and more were offered this past January in Houston.

Our post-event evaluations showed high levels of attendees satisfaction with the Winter Meeting experience. In fact, when asked if they agreed with the statement “Overall, I would rate this meeting as outstanding,” 93 percent of respondents answered “Agree” or “Strongly Agree,” resulting in an average score of 4.7 out of 5. When asked if they agreed with the statement “My home group became a place for professional interactions that embody the characteristics of a CFG,” 90 percent of respondents answered “Agree” or “Strongly Agree.” That question had our highest average score of any question, 4.8 out of 5.

The NSRF National Center and Winter Meeting planning team want to thank everyone who helped to make the 13th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting such a huge success. The participants, facilitators, critical friends, students and planning team all made this event happen. In particular, our gratitude goes out to Detective Eubanks, a CFG in Oregon who recognized this framing of parents as the problem as Discourse I and flipped the script to Discourse II, reframing the problem as one of “hard to access schools.”

Changing the discourse led to a host of new possibilities and responsibilities for welcoming parents into the schools. Discourse II challenges mostly white, middle-class participants to surface and examine both their assumptions and the power dynamics parents and families face in meetings and spaces that we organize and control. Reframing the problem challenges us to ensure that invitations to parents and other family members are more than one-sided requests for homework support, or disciplinary backup. Discourse II calls for “The Essential Conversations(s)” (2003) that Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot describes where both parents’ ghosts of former experiences with schooling and the inherent power of home and school partnerships are acknowledged, allowing alliances based on mutual respect to be forged on behalf of students. Conversely, staying stuck in Discourse I means more of the status quo, an ongoing search for the right prize or tribe to get bodies into the schools at the next parent or family night, without launching or sustaining a partnership in any true sense of the word.

As our experiences with CFGs evolve, many of us, both white teachers and teachers of color, are struggling to reframe the process and our conversations into Discourse II. Working together as a Consortium for Educational Equity (CFEE), some of us are embracing the fact that we, either as educators in isolation, or as CFG members stuck in Discourse I, especially in schools where we teach across differences of race and class, don’t have all the answers, and that we often aren’t asking the right questions. We are working in alliances across difference to extend the collaborative process to include the voices of students and their families. In our individual practice and in our schools and systems, we are moving beyond the shallow Discourse I, the familiar, surface level of school reform into the deeper Discourse II, the unfortifable, waters of transformation. While we are still committed to educating other people’s children, we recognize the importance of naming and reframing the culture of power (Delpit 1995) in order to support the access of each student, regardless of their race, socioeconomic status, national origin or special needs, to academic and social success in our schools and communities. We are no longer content to simply revise our practice, or restructure our schools, the critical outside work of school reform: instead we are committed to doing the inside work as well, in order to transform our relationships and our teaching to meet the needs of each student in our care.

References:

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Learning conversations. Like the V-8 commercials in which people slap themselves in the heads, I realized that my diverse group of students had critical information to share with me, their white teacher, about what they didn’t understand about my content, and where whether my directions, which were clear to me and to my similarly educated colleagues, were in fact clear as mud to them. Looking back this seems like an obvious step, but in my experience, sharing power with students was relatively unusual, especially between white teachers and their students of color, who were generally treated as disinterested parties in their own education.

Along similar lines, I have been involved with teams of urban educators in CFGs across the country, teams in which predominantly white teachers describe their problems with “hard to reach par-

ents.” Recently, a CFG in Oregon recognized this framing of parents as the problem as Discourse I and flipped the script to Discourse II, reframing the problem as one of “hard to access schools.” Changing the discourse led to a host of new possibilities and responsibilities for welcoming parents into the schools. Discourse II challenges mostly white, middle-class participants to surface and examine both their assumptions and the power dynamics parents and families face in meetings and spaces that we organize and control. Reframing the problem challenges us to ensure that invitations to parents and other family members are more than one-sided requests for homework support, or disciplinary backup. Discourse II calls for “The Essential Conversations(s)” (2003) that Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot describes where both parents’ ghosts of former experiences with schooling and the inherent power of home and school partnerships are acknowledged, allowing alliances based on mutual respect to be forged on behalf of students. Conversely, staying stuck in Discourse I means more of the status quo, an ongoing search for the right prize or tribe to get bodies into the schools at the next parent or family night, without launching or sustaining a partnership in any true sense of the word.

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into a professional learning community. Allen ends this study with the statement that, “Extraordinary coaches come in all kinds of ‘personality packages’ but will be unified by their tenacious commitment to the individual growth of the individual teachers and administrators with whom they work, as well as the development of the professional community and school community that those people create and re-create every day.”

The Appendix of this text outlines the structure of the ISA, a model that many schools will seek to emulate in their own change processes.

I will recommend this text to my school and disseminate its ideas. The Appendix of this text outlines the structure of the ISA, a model that many schools will seek to emulate in their own change processes.

Correction
In the Winter 2009 issue of Connections, we mistakenly credited the article “Center of Activity Report: San Antonio” to Ileana Liberatore. The author, in fact, was Patricia Norman. We apologize for the error.