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 district administrators. The study of the complexities of the coaching model will both alleviate tensions and observe our successes.

Reference:

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Director’s Report  Steven Strull, Director

NSRF has been making rapid progress on our restructuring. After all the struggle and advancement we have made and continue to make, I decided to turn my attention to our future - not our present. I began to imagine NSRF’s future using the Futures Protocol. In doing so, I was able to let go of the present and remember that, together, we can do anything we imagine to be possible. Below are my thoughts from my personal Futures Protocol.

Eighteen months from now

NSRF has maintained a small national center that continues to learn how to best serve our membership. Whether a coach, facilitative leader, National Facilitator and/or Center of Activity, we are all members of NSRF. Our National Center continues to take responsibility for convening and connecting NSRF through our membership, our annual meetings, our communication avenues and our protocols, linking with work in the field in collaboration with our Centers of Activity, research and documentation and the ongoing publication of Connections.

NSRF Centers of Activity have expanded our work in ways big and small that a National Center never could do. With and among National Facilitators, our Centers have the capacity to transform learning and teaching within their local contexts. Whether situated inside a school district, a school, an independent organization and/or a collection of NSRF members, local Centers are crucial to the continuing success of our mission.

NSRF has a membership council that is democratic and representative of our membership and serves as an advisory structure for our re-imagined governance council. Our membership council represents our mission statement and helps us answer the perennial questions of attributes and standards for National Facilitators and Centers of Activity that seem to vex our organization. Our membership council is the heart of our organization and the guardian of our mission and vision as referenced below.

We have a strong governance council that serves as a board of directors to our organization. We have codified some of our understandings of how we operate and re-affirmed that we are accountable to one another. We have an able and healthy structure that provides for checks and balances, as is appropriate for an organization based on democratic principals of equity and participation, and we experience a strong, more formal governance structure that serves us well.

Our membership has discretionary resources to seed work in the field and research and document what we learn together - working in local contexts alongside Centers of Activity. Our membership is well on its way to amassing those resources through what we have dubbed “Ten in Ten.” We have thought deeply and made commitments about what we will accomplish if we are able to achieve the goal of 10,000 dues-paying members in 10 years — we, the membership, have imagined our future.

Back to the present

I am quite optimistic that some version of my musings above, once tuned and re-tuned using the tools and processes at our disposal, will be accomplished. We will get to our future with deliberation and by accessing our stakeholders; by imagining what we want to be and what we want to stand for; and then by practicing locally, regionally and nationally, in person.
T
he 13th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting was held January 14–17th, 2009, in Houston, Texas, and was attended by 100 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 attendee 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 to Debbie Bambino, Texas, and was attended by 300 people, and to Brandon Cosby, Greg Peters, California.

Center of Activity Report: New Center Established in New York
William Pollock, New Jersey, and Deven Horne, New York

Students at the Center: The Reason for the National School Reform Faculty - Students
Michaelann Kelley, Mary Matthews and Paul Cross, Texas

Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

Editorial Board: Debbie Bambino, Sarah Childers and Greg Peters

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to Connections, contact us at 1213.303.2700 or dbambino@earthlink.net.

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone. - Adopted June 2001

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 wanted 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 experiences, 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 and a template for support, or disciplinary backup. Discourse II calls for “The Essential Conversation(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 bribe to get bodies into the seats 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 as white teachers and teachers of color, are struggling to reframe the process and our con-
versations into Discourse II. Working together as a Consortium for Educational Equity (CFEE), some of us are embracing the fact that we, either as edu-
ators 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 unfor-
table, waters of transformation. While we are still committed to educating other people’s chil-
dren, we recognize the importance of naming and reframing the culture of power (Delpit 1995) in order to support the access of each student, regard-
less 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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around the iceberg of racial and socioeconomic inequity; there has to be some diversity and di-sonance present among the adults. It's hard to take the risks needed to reframe and relearn in a atmosphere of sameness. Where's the provocation, the influx of multiple perspectives and divergent experiences, 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 hegemoni- 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 informed 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. Cubanks, Parish and Smith (1997) define Discourse I as the way we think, talk and plan in order to main- tain or reproduce the status quo in schools. They define 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 CFG. We represented differences of race, gender, religious upbringing and sexual orientation. And yet, in our fledgling efforts at collaboration, we were engaged in a relatively comfortable discourse 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 dilemma, or why our work was stuck. We were not offered simple solutions to complex problems that were often systemic in nature. The opportunity to discuss issues of oppression, power and ideology 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 the dilemma 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 acknowled- ge the skill 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 without- 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, at least on the surface.

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 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 31 adolescents. We stayed focused primarily on my students' tests, the work of 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 a year of working intentionally, I realized that, finally dawned on me that I needed to directly engage my students in these teaching and learning processes, the full text to distinguish between the two types of call for a new discourse, what they call Discourse I to maintain or reproduce the status quo in schools. 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:

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Coaching Whole School Change: Lessons In Practice From a Small High School
Book Review by Peggy Silva, New Hampshire
We are a group of African-American and white NSRF 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 averting racial 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, Deshalb at al and the Save the Last Word RoLesia: Fortunately, some Blacks have been taught and know the counter-narratives explained by Lisa Delpitt in “Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement Among African-American Students.” When taught by knowledgeable/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 make us face many, many, many times and push through it. So that becomes a strength for African-Americans and people of color.

Quote: The fact that people of color have had to face daily microaggressions and have continued to maintain their dignity in the face of such hostility is a testament to their resiliency. What coping strategies have they developed? A greater understanding of responses to microaggressions, both in the long term and the short term, and of the coping strategies employed would be beneficial in helping children of color for the life they will face.

(D. W. Sue, 2003)

Discussion: Camilla: 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?

Rolesia: Attending to our intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional selves. This education is necessary because it is designed to help people of color to carry this burden alone. This is some of the reason our students check out and behave in non-productive ways in our schools and communities.

Debbie: 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 ‘darned 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 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 allyship 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 can be reached at windchimer357@aol.com, and Kim Feicke can be reached at feickel@lark.edu.
I felt affirmed in this space where both my questions and expertise counted, amazed by the potential learning from a long, deep, collaborative discussion of just one piece of student or teacher work. ...However, once the novelty began to wear off…

dissatisfaction grew. - Ellen Key Ballock (2007)

Many report being rejuvenated by the opportunity to work with each other in collaborative ways. But often after a good experience with other teachers, after learning what a learning community is, after learning some protocols to look at student work, very little happens when they return to their urban classrooms.

-Camilla Greene (2003)

These quotes, the first from a relatively new CFG coach and educational researcher, the second from a seasoned veteran teacher and National Facilitator of CFG seminars, point both to the possibilities and the pitfalls involved in this potentially powerful school reform model. CFGs are at the heart of the work of the National School Reform Faculty. I have been in a CFG since being trained as a coach in 1996, and I cannot imagine a return to teaching in isolation or facilitating school change without this collaborative support. But while learning and working in community with others is more productive and powerful, it is not a foolproof recipe for student success.

Collaborating with teachers and others, we create the schools our children need and deserve is an essential nonnegotiable for me, but in order to get into the potential power of CFG, a foundation of trust and a commitment to the struggle around issues that really matter must be nurtured and built. Simply dividing up staff members and labeling them teams, houses, CFGs or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) won't do it. Attending a summer seminar and dividing into family groups is not it either. In other words, as my colleague, Daniel Baron, often says, “CFGs are necessary but not sufficient,” if we are committed to transformational change in our schools.

In order to really learn and translate that learning into meaningful changes for students, individuals must be willing to change themselves, or as Margaret Wheatley (2002) says, we must be “willing to be disturbed.” Without an explicit focus on disturbing the status quo, CFG structures can become mired in the shallows. If participants don’t have the will, skill and access to the multiple perspectives needed to dig deeply into some of our own deeply held beliefs and practices, teacher communities can become little more than teacher support groups. Dennis Sparks of the National Staff Development Council recently defined reframing as “providing other ways to think about a situation” (2008). It is precisely this reframing coupled with changes in practice and consistent intentional group accountability (what I like to call “closing the loop”) that is needed to ensure that adults are thinking about what really matters for students and that our thinking and “talk” as adults gets translated into the “walk” or practice of real, changed learning experiences for students.

Talking about common problems and dilemmas is a big first step against teacher isolation, and our CFG protocols require that presenting teachers focus on changes we can make in our own practice, potentially flipping the script of deficit-based models that blame students and their communities for the gaps in our practice. This focus on teacher responsibility is significant. Nevertheless, many CFGs are made up almost exclusively of white, middle-class, teachers, and in elementary settings, the groups tend to be disconnected from one another well. In these homogeneous groups of dominant culture adults the practice of reframing does not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily. For example, if the teachers recognize the need to address gaps in achievement scores between their white students and their students of color, their results do not come easily.
Brandon Cosby is the new principal of Shortridge High School. For the last four years, Brandon has served as the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning’s (CELL) Senior Fellow for high school transformation and worked directly with Indianapolis Public Schools on high school conversions. Brandon joined CELL after serving nine years in the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation, where he worked as a principal, assistant principal and high school teacher. Additionally, Brandon is an anti-racis-t activist and works in numerous communities and schools around the country. A New Castle, Indiana, native, Brandon is pursuing his Ed.D. in education administration at Oakland City University. He holds an M.A. in education administration from Oakland City University and a B.S. in speech communica-tion and theatre teaching from the University of Indianapolis.

Brandon has two children: his son Zion (5) and his nephew Storm (17).

Who is Brandon Cosby?

I am a man who goes to work every day and tries to fix the system that I live in fear is going to claim my kids – when I say my kids, I mean my own boys.

What do you mean by “claim them”?

Kill them, incarcerate them, break their spirits, I am a man who goes to work every day and tries to fix the system that I live in fear is going to claim my kids – when I say my kids, I mean my own boys.

How do you try to fight it...to fix it?

We have to get to that level of specificity – it is in the air we breathe. We have to get to that level of specificity – it is in the air we breathe. How do you try to fight it...to fix it?

By working myself into positions of power and influence and taking those bureaucratic processes off-line in hopes of putting different methods in place. When battling a machine, it comes down to taking it off-line, that is, interrupting it and putting something new in its place. Sometimes it means forcing the conversations.

How does this thinking – who you are – relate to your work with NSRF and its larger network of school reformers across the country?

Before my introduction to NSRF as a whole, this was work I was doing by myself. It was me in isolation with some ideas, and I had strong feelings I had from my own experiences as a stu-dent. My work was as an advocate for students whom I saw having similar experiences. I was alone well.

When I interviewed for Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) in Indianapolis, I was interviewed by Camilla Greene, Lois Butler, Daniel Baron, Virginia Hardy, Tom Gregory, Wendy Branner and Kevin Horton; to hear a whole room of people having dialogue around stuff that was sitting in my head...it was overwhelming. It made me truly sat in this room – in the middle of an interview – and wept because it was beyond what I thought was within the realm of possibility in Indiana.

That was my initial intro to NSRF, so I assumed NSRF as a national organization looked very much like my experience in Indianapolis. I assumed NSRF was about 70 percent African-American; I thought they were bringing people in the room proportionately. When I went to my first Winter Meeting, I nearly passed out as I realized that the folks they brought in for the interview made up about 70 percent of all the people of color.

So a lot of that initial CELL conversation, which drilled into this thing we call equity, became a real thing for me when we were having our national conversation about whether or not every CFG was equity-based. My question was, “How can they not be?” CFG work that is done in the absence of explicitly named inequities will only prevent you from falling through the cracks.

Any inquiries regarding Vladimir should be directed to his teacher, Michaelann Kelley, at mkelley@aldine.k12.tx.us.

Students at the Center

It is impossible. Think of the Vladimirs and De’Vontas students don’t always realize the effect an adult teacher and professor has impacted a student’s life. The students at the Center

Mr. Kelley’s knowledge of his students and their personal backgrounds is a testament to his dedication and passion for teaching. He is always willing to go the extra mile to ensure their success.

Director’s Report

I believe we are unique as a movement and an organization. There are many worthy school reform and professional development collectives and com-panies serving schools, teachers and children in multiple ways. Some of their methods we would find encouraging; others would cause us some concern – and my guess is we probably wouldn’t all agree on the lens we put on this or that entity or program.

But we are different – we are a FACULTY – our name says much about our relationship with any in a common vision as practiced through our mission. It doesn’t matter if we work independently as consultants or in the company of dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of colleagues, students and par-ents. Many of us are in classrooms every day; a window on the world of schooling and education that reinforces our understanding of the need for our faculty to be successful.

Whether past, present or future – in whatever iteration we imagine ourselves to be in – NSRF was, is and will be a strong voice for collaborative practice, critical friendship and facilitative leader-ship as adult learners in the service of every single child and teacher we encounter and influence. In turn, our faculty will be influenced by those - we touch; those we work with and those we engage with at the deepest critical levels. Our democracy deserves nothing less.

Steven Strull can be contacted at stevenstrull@optonline.net.
During my middle-school years, I was reluctant to participate in class and couldn’t care less. As I was entering high school, my eldest brother was graduating high school at the top of his class and I was accepted in a prestigious Ivy League school—the first person to do so in the family. There I sat at my brother’s graduation, with his name being called so often for so many honors that the crowd became tired of clapping. That was the moment that my eyes were opened to not only going to school and attending classes, but also excelling to being involved in my school community. Even though you might not be an older sibling, you can still make a difference in someone’s life and that is my goal as a CFG facilitator.”

Denise

“I am the first of my class, head drum major of my high school marching band and the only black male left standing in Eisenhower’s first class of International Baccalaureate Diploma Program students, but who would have guessed at one time I was falling through the cracks? There was a point right after my mom died when everything started to go wrong. My dad, his job, the bills, the mortgage, stress and above all, my education were all tumbling down around me. My grades began to fall and it was evident to a certain teacher, Ms. Candy Core. She saw my grades, my test scores and my attitude take a dramatic drop. “De’Vonta there is something wrong!” she asked over and over again. Being proud, I would tell her “nothing,” and she would leave it there.

One day while working on my homework after school in her room, I became frustrated and broke down; I was a mess. Ms. Core came over to me and hugged me. “Everything’s okay, De’Vonta,” she told me. From there I told her my story, she listened, she understood, and she helped. She helped in improving my test scores to As, and by reminding me how to study. She edited and checked all my homework assignments and ultimately helped reinvent me. If it was not for Ms. Core, I would still be a mess and only the Lord knows where I would be today.

I am now the head drum major of my school’s marching band and the only black male left standing in my school’s first class of IBDP students, and I was saved by Ms. Candy Core from falling through the cracks.”

De’Vonta

These students shared their stories of adults who had made differences in their lives. We are sure each and every teacher, administra-

(continued on page 11)

investigation into his grades. High 90s, all we could figure out was that he was a quiet, good kid in a sea of rowdy regular students, and his teacher did not want to lose him. So we asked Vladimir if he wanted Mari to change his schedule, and he said he didn’t know and probably not, and he was wavering on what to do. So, I nudged him to make a decision. He moved to honors, and three weeks later he moved up to AP. Although progress was made academically, Vlad still only spoke minimally.

Months later, an opportunity to be a part of a student CFG raised its head, and I encouraged Vladimir to attend. He did, but just five months ago, I remember instructing (and if you know me, I instruct a lot) him that his mission during the last three days of the CFG seminar was to initiate a conversation with an adult. He told me he did on the last day.

Fast forward to present day, Vladimir is active in school, taking three Advanced Placement courses. He has joined the speech and debate team and has spoken in front of an international conference – who knew!

Michaela Nelson Kelley can be reached at mkelley@vail.k12.tx.us

Vladimir’s Story

Vladimir, Eisenhower High School
Houston, Texas

I remember sitting in class daydreaming all the time about what I could be, but never actually taking the steps to achieve my dreams. For me it was not until I was given an ultimatum that I actually began my ascent into education. I was sitting in my art class, a sophomore, with no real goals in life. My teacher, Ms. Kelley, came over to my table to talk about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be 10 or 20 years from now. But that day was different. She called over a fellow teacher, Mr. Glamser, and they told me about challenging myself, and how I could do so much better if I could take more advanced classes. I was

(continued on page 11)

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Connections

William J. Pollock, New Jersey and Deven Horne, New York

T he state of New York established 37 Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to support local school districts and meet their educational and financial goals. The BOCES model provides accountability, municipal sharing, efficiency and expand services. Deven assists local districts with many facets of professional development, as well as a myriad of other services, recently expanded to include CFG support at the Capital Region BOCES.

In the fall of 2006, William Pollock from Rutgers University Center for Effective School Practices (ESP) presented a new coaches institute to 13 people from the Capital Region BOCES and Schenectady City School District. That seminar was the spark that began a continued inquiry into the resources and professional development offered by the National School Reform Faculty. The original group of participants included special education professionals, school leaders, principals of special education programs, a director of special education and principals of regular education elementary schools. A relationship was ignited and a bond formed between those who participated; that bond has grown and touched countless individuals statewide as well as in the Capital Region BOCES.

The new coaches immediately created a coaches support group of their own CFG to help each other as they practiced their newfound craft and to continue learning. The coaches support group has met quarterly since that time and each individual has continued to learn and grow with new skills. What they have learned has been embedded in many school districts’ professional development opportunities, in the local BOCES’ coaching models, and in the leadership activities of the BOCES. The BOCES special education leadership continued its relationship with Bill Pollock over two summer retreats in 2007 and 2008. The leadership utilized the tools of the CFGs to assist them in analyzing their data and developing plans for school improvement and future initiatives.

Out of the new work in the Capital Region, two experienced coaches, Deven Horne and Renee Beaulieu, were inspired to set their sights on becoming National Facilitators and creating an upstate Center of Activity. A need had been recognized to offer another new CFGs institute with the emphasis on building and supporting professional learning communities. Deven and Renee asked Bill Pollock to mentor them in a new coaches seminar, which was offered in the late fall of 2008.

Sixteen participants registered and the BOCES supported the offering so that its components and services could receive continuing aid from the BOCES to participate. Deven and Renee’s personal growth in providing this seminar and the local coaches’ support and encouragement led the pair to become National Facilitators as part of the process. The new coaches five-day institute was completed in early March. The 16 participants came from three school districts, the BOCES and the National School Leaders Network. The three-day introductory part of the new coaches institute in the fall was used to get folks started on the process in their schools. Three months later, the group reconvened to complete the process of growth and complete the five-day seminar.

One of the protocols used in one session was reflection upon the meaning of a word. The word used was “courage,” a prelude to a text rendering of a section of the book The Courage to Teach by Peter Balacheff. The findings on that word were enlightening and encouraging. Palmer emphasizes “the growth of any craft depends on shared practice and honest dialogue among the people who do it.” As a group of educators using the protocols, we have to call upon our own courage to move forward with our convictions and the value we hold for the CFG process. We are continuously buoyed by the courage of the educators in the CFGs to share, to live up to the norms established by the group, to encourage each other and to examine deeply our missions as educators.

The Capital Region BOCES is now an established center of activity with two new National Facilitators leading a new direction in developing professional learning communities in the New York upstate geographic region. Plans are being

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Students at the Center...

(continued from page 9)

William J. Pollock, New Jersey and Deven Horne, New York

Center of Activity Report: New Center Established in New York

(continued on page 11)
The Reason for the National School Reform Faculty - Students

Michaelann Kelley, Mary Matthews and Paul Cross, Texas

"I have come to the realization that, despite age, we all share the same problems and enjoyments. I found myself talking to an adult who actually knew who Jack White and the White Stripes were. This was eye-opening and an encounter that has taught me that we are all humans and that we all have the common goal of creating a better society." – Eisenhower student's reflection from the Winter Meeting

The most recent NSRF Winter Meeting began similarly to those winter meetings I had attended in the past: great breakfast, big hotel ballroom and reacquainting myself with old friends while making new ones. The opening seemed to be on track with what everyone was expecting, then the students made an appearance. Thirteen students, from Eisenhower High School and Challenge Early College High School in Houston, all of whom had become CFG Coaches in the summer of 2008 (see Connections, fall 2008), took part in the Winter Meeting in a way students never had before. They played a critical part in the opening and closing sessions and joined home groups like other (adult) participants. In doing so, the learning of the entire group of attendees was enriched in ways that we, their teachers and CFG Coaches Seminar facilitators, did not expect.

Jasmine, a senior from Eisenhower High School, welcomed the participants at the opening session and shared a video created by the students. "I really enjoyed my experience here at the Winter Meeting. I refreshed my memory of professional development work, and remembered why it is so important that teachers/leaders work with what they have to change lives. I learned a lot while working with the adults. The problems that I face in my Houston organizations, the people in Vermont face with their faculty members and counselors every day." – Eisenhower student

"The conference was an excellent and enlightening experience, mixing and mingling with teachers and administrators never felt strange, we were all here for the same purpose and that connection made it easy to become a "home group." Age was never an issue, status never mattered, we were here to learn, discuss, and solve." – Challenge student

In this CFG conference, I was very nervous, I was going to be with teachers, the complete opposite of me, but by the end of the conference there was no difference. They were the same as me, wanting to learn from the dilemmas, experiencing new techniques and eager to take (them) back to our schools. I did, however, realize that teachers have just as much stress as the students." – Eisenhower student

Vladimir, who read the poem at this year's Winter Meeting opening session, is one of my students. Here is my perspective on a pivotal moment in Vladimir's life. He shares his perspective on the same event later in this piece.

I first saw Vladimir in August of 2007. I am not sure when during the hustle and bustle of school and an Art 1 class of almost 40 students I really met Vladimir…or when I started seeking interactions with him.

There was a time when Vladimir never talked– not to me, not to the other students, not to ask a question, not to answer a question. He never raised his hand, never asked for help, never even asked to go to the bathroom. I am going to be open and honest: at first, I thought it was great. In a class of 40, one kid hardly had to mess with…but if you knew me a little bit, you know I could not let that go. I made a deliberate effort to ask Vladimir more than yes or no questions but even then, it was a struggle to get answers. He was very tight-lipped about his home life, which made building that relationship even more difficult. I had made some progress by November, but at that point I didn’t even know if Vladimir was falling through the cracks, or not.

I knew Vladimir was smart from grading his work, so when a colleague of mine, Mari Glamser, was talking in my room one day about the social studies department moving kids up to honors and Advanced Placement, I suggested moving Vladimir. She asked why his social studies teacher had not suggested moving him. I said I had tried to do so, but knew. After

Reflection from a participant of the Winter Meeting

HOSA, speech and debate and band! Or do you know us as a Title 1 school with 71 percent of our students qualifying for free and reduced lunch? Do you see us for who we are, or do you just see the numbers printed in the newspaper?" - Alejandro

"I am a sophomore at Challenge and a straight-A student. I read, write and am an active member of my community. Though all this is true, I could have and may still fall through the cracks.

"The conference was refreshing, insightful and enjoyable." - Challenge student

The students, with guidance from their teachers, developed a presentation for the closing during their time at the Winter Meeting. The closing was inspired by the children’s book, Through the Cracks by Carolyn Sollman, Barbara Emmons, and Judith Paulini. Students were given homework (we know they were mad, too– at a conference and getting homework!) to either write about a time when they were prevented from falling through the cracks, write about their schools or edit their peers essays and practice with them. Each came in the next day with their homework complete and excited about the powerful closing. The following are excerpts from their presentation at the closing session.

"Unlike most schools in the district, Challenge creates a comfortable and almost unique atmosphere for not only its students, but for teachers as well. The school allows its teachers and students to have close-knit, trusting relationships. At this school falling through the cracks is difficult." - Stephanie “Eisenhower High School- what do you think when you hear this name? Do you know of the rigorous academic activities and programs that go on in the school? Or do you know the statistics that are posted in the newspaper? Do you recognize us for going to national competitions in history fair, through the cracks.

(continued on page 10)
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“Eisenhower High School- what do you think when you hear this name? Do you know of the rigorous academic activities and programs that go on in the school? Or do you know the statistics that are posted in the newspaper? Do you recognize us for going to national competitions in history fair, math, science or debate? Do you know us as a Title 1 school with 71 percent of our students qualifying for free and reduced lunch? Do you know us as a school and an Art 1 class of almost 40 students in this piece.

Vladimir, who read the poem at this year’s Winter Meeting opening session, is one of my students. Here is my perspective on a pivotal moment in Vladimir’s life. He shares his perspective on the same event later in this piece.

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I knew Vladimir was smart from grading his work, so when a colleague of mine, Mari Glamer, was talking in my room one day about the social studies department moving kids up to honors and Advanced Placement, I suggested moving Vladimir. She asked why his social studies teacher had not suggested moving him. I didn’t know. After (continued on page 10)
During my middle-school years, I was reluctant to participate in class and couldn’t care less. As I was entering high school, my eldest brother was graduating high school at the top of his class and was accepted into a prestigious Ivy League school—my first person to do so in the history of our family. There I sat at my brother’s graduation, with his name being called so often for so many honors that the crowd became tired of clapping. That was the moment that my eyes were opened to not only going to school and attending classes, but also excelling to and being involved in my school community. Even though you might not be an older sibling, you can still make a difference in someone’s life and that is my goal as a CFG facilitator.” – Denise

“I am the head drum major of my high school marching band and the only black male left in the band. If you knew me, I am in the top 5 percent of my class, and I have excelled in my grades and assignments and ultimately helped reinvent me. If you knew me, I would have guessed at one time I was falling through the cracks? There was a point right after my mom died when everything started to go wrong. My dad, his job, the bills, the mortgage, stress and above all, my education were all tumbaling down around me. My grades began to fall and it was evident to a certain teacher, Ms. Candy Core. She saw my grades, my test scores and my attitude take a dramatic drop. “De’Vonta is there something wrong?” she asked over and over again. Being prideful, I would tell her “nothing,” and she would leave it there. One day while working on my homework after school in her room, I became frustrated and broke down; I was a mess. Ms. Core came over to me and hugged me. “Everything’s okay, De’Vonta,” she told me. From there I told her my story, she listened, she hugged me. “Everything’s okay, De’Vonta,” she told me. She called over a fellow teacher, Ms. Glamser, and said she didn’t know how to help me and that he was wavering on what to do. So, I nudge him to make a decision. He moved to honors, and three weeks later he moved up to AP. Although progress was made academically, Vlad still only spoke minimally. Months later, an opportunity to be a part of a student CFG raised its head, and I encour-aged Vladimir to attend. He did, but just five months ago, I remember instructing (and if you know me well. I was a good mimicking, pushing and usually a little “barking” in there) him that his mission during the last three days of the CFG seminar was to initiate a conversa-tion with an adult. He told me he did on the last day.

Fast forward to present day, Vladimir is active in school, taking three Advanced Placement courses. He has joined the speech and debate team and has spoken in front of an international conference—who knew? ■

Michaelann Kelley can be reached at mkelly@alldine.k12.tx.us

My Story
Vladimir, Eisenhower High School
Houston, Texas

I remember sitting in class daydreaming all the time about what I could be, but never actu-ally taking the steps to achieve my dreams. For me it was not until I was given an ultimatum that I actually began my ascent into education. I was sitting in my art class, a sophomore, with no real goals in life. My teacher, Ms. Kelley, came over to my table to talk about what I wanted to do and where I wanted to be 10 or 20 years from now. But that day was different. She called over a fellow teacher, Ms. Glamer, and they told me about challenging myself, and how I could do so much better if I could take more advanced courses. I was investigation into his grades, high 90s, all we could figure out was that he was a quiet, good kid in a sea of rowdy regular students, and his teacher did not want to lose him. So we asked Vladimir if he wanted Mari to change his schedule, and he said he didn’t know probably not, and he was wavering on what to do. So, I nudged him to make a decision. He moved to honors, and three weeks later he moved up to AP. Although progress was made academically, Vlad still only spoke minimally. Months later, an opportunity to be a part of a student CFG raised its head, and I encour-aged Vladimir to attend. He did, but just five months ago, I remember instructing (and if you know me well. I was a good mimicking, pushing and usually a little “barking” in there) him that his mission during the last three days of the CFG seminar was to initiate a conversa-tion with an adult. He told me he did on the last day.

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Brandon Cosby is the new principal of Shortridge High School. For the last four years, Brandon has served as the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning’s (CELL) Senior Fellow for high school transformation and worked directly with Indianapolis Public Schools on high school conversions. Brandon joined CELL after serving nine years in the Evanston Township High School Corporation, where he worked as a principal, assistant principal and high school teacher. Additionally, Brandon is an anti-racist activist and works in numerous communities and schools around the country. A New Castle, Indiana, native, Brandon is pursuing his Ed.D. in education administration at Oakland City University. He holds an M.A. in education administration from Oakland City University and a B.S. in speech communica- tion and theatre teaching from the University of Indianapolis.

Brandon has two children: his son Zion (5) and his nephew Storm (17).

Who is Brandon Cosby?

Brandon is someone who is very driven and has an idea of what he wants to achieve. He is very passionate about his work and is always looking for new ways to improve the educational system. Brandon is also very community-oriented and is always working to make a positive difference in the lives of the people around him.

What do you mean by “claim them”?

The term “claim them” is a phrase used by Brandon to describe the process of taking ownership of a problem or issue. He believes that in order to make meaningful changes, one must first claim ownership of the problem and then work towards finding solutions.

How do you try to fight it...to fix it?

Brandon believes that in order to make meaningful changes, one must first claim ownership of the problem and then work towards finding solutions. He is very passionate about his work and is always looking for new ways to improve the educational system.

What is “the system”?

The system is the institutional, racist bureaucracy that exists in every aspect – the political, the social, the educational institution – it is everywhere around us. It is a complex system that is difficult to disentangle.

How do you do this thinking – who you are – relate to your work with NSRF and its network of school reformers across the country?

Before my introduction to NSRF as a whole, this was work I was doing by myself. It was me in isolation with some ideas and every strong feelings I had from my own experiences as a stu- dent. My work was as an advocate for students whom I saw having similar experiences. I was a lone wolf.

When I interviewed for Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL) in Indianapolis, I was interviewed by Camilla Greene, Luis Butler, Daniel Baron, Virginia Hardy, Tom Gregory, Wendy Branner and Kevin Horton; to hear a whole room of people having dialogue around stuff that was sitting in my head... it was overwhelming. I literally sat in this room – in the middle of an interview – and wept because it was beyond what I thought was within the realm of possibility in Indiana.

That was my initial intro to NSRF, so I assumed NSRF as a national organization looked very much like my experience in Indianapolis. I assumed NSRF was about 70 percent African-American; I thought they were bringing people in the room proportionately. When I went to my first Winter Meeting, I nearly passed out as I realized that the folks they brought in for the interview made up about 70 percent of all the people of color.

So a lot of that initial CELL conversation, which drilled into this thing we call equity, became a real thing for me when we were having our national conversation about whether or not not every CFG was equity-based. My question was, “How can they not be?” CFG work that is done in the absence of explicitly named inequities will only continue to get us what we have always gotten...
and we already know that’s unacceptable. Anyone who has done anti-racist work knows you cannot fight racism and “back equity” if you cannot first name the issue of race and what your goals are. It does not happen by accident.

What was your experience in being trained as a CFG coach?

I was trained in Indianapolis by Daniel Baron. I was in charge of bringing in the training prior to being trained myself, I was being trained along with all the school leaders I was responsible for. It was awkward to go with my role as a senior fellow, switch to participant at the table with teachers and new principals for whom the work was new, and then debrief each night to assess the quality of work. It was a huge dance of stepping in and out of the role of being trained vs. worrying about quality assurance and making sure coaches had the resources and materials they needed. Then, I had to go to the next level of discourse when considering the political implications and consequences for our district, our center and our university partner. I was wearing many different hats.

It was beneficial in that it enabled me to talk of the power and significance of CFG work through the varied lenses of teacher, central office, university partner and even board for relevant decisions. (As a side note, I think we are missing a lot of important work by not preparing pre-service teachers in CFGs.)

How has being part of a larger – albeit not as large as you originally thought – national effort impacted your original journey to interrupt the system?

More than anything, I have greater resolve and confidence in my work when I know that I have colleagues who are doing the same work, the same way, in other parts of the country. There was a giving a lecture and someone said to him afterwards, “Thank you for just letting me know that I am not crazy.” When Tim asked why he said this, the person explained that when thinking about feeling things, the tendency is to be made to feel that you’re the only one and that this somehow relates to an abnormality. When we are not alone, we know we are not crazy and our work is not in vain, we are not the sole voice in the wind.

I felt affirmed in this space where both my questions and expertise counted, amazed by the potential learning from a long, deep, collaborative discussion of just one piece of student or teacher work. However, once the novelty began to wear off…(disappointment grows) - Ellen Key Ballock (2007).

Many report being rejuvenated by the opportunity to work with each other in collaborative ways. But often after a good experience with other teachers, after learning what a learning community is, after learning some protocols to look at student work, very little happens when they return to their urban classrooms. - Camilla Greene (2003)

These quotes, the first from a relatively new CFG coach and educational researcher, the second from a seasoned veteran teacher and National Facilitator of CFG seminars, point out both the possibilities and the pitfalls involved in this potentially powerful school reform model.

CFGs are at the heart of the work of the National School Reform Faculty. I have been in a CFG since being trained as a coach in 1996, and I cannot imagine a return to teaching in isolation or facilitating school change without this collaborative support. But while learning and working in community, we find what is more productive and powerful, it is not a foolproof recipe for student success. Collaborating with teachers and other stakeholders to create the schools our children need and deserve is an essential nonnegotiable for me, but in order to get into the potential power of a CFG, a foundation of trust and a commitment to the struggle around issues that really matter must be nurtured and built. Simply dividing up staff members and labeling them teams, houses, CFGs or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) won’t do it. Attending a summer seminar and dividing into families groups and picking it up after learning what a learning community is, after learning some protocols to look at student work, very little happens when they return to their urban classrooms. - Camilla Greene (2003)

Finally, what are your hopes and fears for NSRF?

I hope that NSRF will truly insert itself in the national dialogue for authentic school reform. With President Obama’s push for authentic learning environments and alternative assessments, we are the perfect organization to be at the forefront of that change.

Brandon Cosby can be reached at bcosby@yahoo.com. Greg Peters can be reached at gpeter@sfcess.org.
We are a group of African-American and white NSRF 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 race and racial microaggressions?

"Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, denigration, 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." 1

We used the article "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life, Implications for Clinical Practice" by Wing Sue, Desmond et al and the Save the Last Word for Me Protocol. Since members of our group live in different locations, our discussion occurred over the phone. We asked folks to post their selected quote from the article online before the discussion to make it easier to follow along and respond. The following are edited excerpts from our discussion.

Participants: Camilla Greene, Wendy Brannen, Debbie Bambino, Mary Hastings, KimFeicke, Rollesia Holman

Quote: The fact that people of color have had to face daily microaggressions and have continued to maintain their dignity in the face of such hostility is a testament to their resiliency. What coping strategies employed would be beneficial in arming children of color for the life they will face. (D. W. Sue, 2003)

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 taught right now that they don’t even know they’re being taught? When do we get to a place where the work isn’t about teaching coping strategies to kids of colors, but about educating and preventing racial microaggressions from taking place?

Rolesia: Fortunately, some Blacks have been taught and know the counter-narratives explained by Lisa Delpit in "Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting high achievement among African-American Students." When taught by knowledgeable and culturally aware Blacks, we know the truth in addition to what’s been told/said/done 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 make us face many, many, many times and push through it. So that becomes a strength for African-Americans and people of color.

Quote: Minorities, on the other hand, perceive Whites as (a) racially insensitive, (b) unwilling to share their position and wealth, (c) believing they are superior, (d) needing to control everything, and (e) treating them poorly because of their race. People of color believe these attributes are reenacted every day in their interpersonal interactions with Whites, oftentimes in the form of microaggressions.

Discussion: Mary: My reaction to that was, yeah, the sense of the superiority and the need to control and that being in and of itself, a microaggressive attitude toward people of color and even people of the same culture in some cases. And I guess when I read that too I think about, wow, that’s how I am perceived by people of color in general. I’m part of that culture that has those qualities or appears to have those qualities.

Wendy: It’s sad in terms of the oppression and unfortunately the anger and stress that the kids have reacting to this and possibly not knowing and also knowing why. And I think it’s wrong to lie to our white colleagues here it’s just been so ingrained. It’s a work in progress but it’s still basically within our group. It’s going to be an ongoing process to work towards it and I respect that fact that there’s growing awareness amongst... (continued on page 13)

you to look at how you are perceived by people of color.

Rolesia: Yeah! To some extent I believe these to be true for all/most Whites. I believe they would agree for the most part. I also think some people of color feel similarly. Likewise after assimilating to a certain level of status. Internalized oppression is what comes to mind.

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 prove the 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 inequities.

Discussion: Camilla: I think about sitting in meetings, often when you’re the only person of color and someone from the dominant culture will roll their eyes at you and say something. That is an image I have in my mind of when I’ve touched the nerve of someone in the dominant culture. People may not even be aware that they have that kind of reaction. I think an ally is someone who has stopped not knowing and someone who is on guard and is trying to reverse a lot of this. Rollesia: Attending to our intellectual, physical, spiritual, and emotional selves. This education is necessary for us to then begin to educate and just do…for all the people who cannot find a way to work together and a different level of honesty about the work that we’re doing.

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 College Press. It was born 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 high school. The early stages of this transition focused on school safety and shifting roles within the school, but it also became apparent that there was little consistency of instruction and insufficient focus on complex thinking and/or extended reading and writing. A new principal built on an already-existing relationship class and shared a dilemma about Student Achievement (ISA) by accepting Suzanne Or, who had recently completed her doctorate at Columbia, to be Park East’s part-time coach.

Allen tracks Suzy’s interactions 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’s interactions as she extracts the habits of an effective teacher. Her goal is not to fix the school’s work, but to “illuminate the nature of coaching practice.”

Allen sets “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 shown collaborating with students, connecting colleagues and assisting in the school’s work, through an extended study of one coach from multiple perspectives, in multiple roles. Allen provides a research methodology for analyzing the complexity of coaching.

As an internal school literacy and writing coach, I found tremendous value in reading this study. District colleagues who hold similar positions in their schools often feel pressured to define exactly what a coach does on a minute by minute basis. A mere listing of daily time spent does not provide a thoughtful overview of the work nor the small increments of change embedded in every collaboration. Allen’s study of Suzy’s interactions demonstrates that the definition of a school coach includes elements of cheerleading, problem-solving, facilitation, making connections, sharing strengths, clarifying, pushing, empathizing, setting achievable targets, nailing down the details, making agendas, persevering, celebrating success, closing gaps, identifying future goals and noting the work of others. This last point is a significant one. Suzy thanks a teacher for her work in the school-wide Thanksgiving feast. The teacher replies that Suzy’s work has been appreciated by many, including teachers who are sometimes never offered by other staff members after events. A simple acknowledgement and thank you made a teacher feel valued for her effort.

Readers who see the slow but steady progress towards the transformation of a school (continued on page 16)
Winter Meeting Wrap-Up
Sarah Childers, Indiana

Connections

Sarah Childers, Indiana

Winter Meeting Wrap-Up

Coaching Whole School Change: Lessons in Practice from a Small High School
Book Review by Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

Protocols in Practice: Racial Microaggressions Text-Based Discussion
Wendy Bramen, New York, and Kim Feike, Oregon

Forming Learning Communities is Just the Beginning...and Can Be a Dead End
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Brandon Cosley
Greg Peters, California

Center of Activity Report: New Center Established in New York
William Pollock, New Jersey, and Deven Horne, New York

Students at the Center: The Reason for the National School Reform Faculty - Students
Michaelann Kelley, Mary Matthews and Paul Cross, Texas

Connections is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty, a division of Harmony Education Center. Published three times per year, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone. - Adopted June 2001

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 even 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-

tests.” 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; we need to make our support, or disciplinary backup. Discourse II calls for “The Essential Conversation(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 title to get bodies into the spaces that we organize and control. 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.

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As our experiences with CFGs evolve, many of us ask ourselves if white teachers and teachers of color, are struggling to reframe the process and our con-

Our post-evaluation events showed high levels of audience 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 all those involved in the Texas Centers of Activity: Houston A+ Challenge, Houston Independent School District and San Antonio. We hope to see you all next year! 

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References:

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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 to the development of the professional community and school community that those people create and recreate 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 district administrators. The study of the complexities of the coaching model will both alleviate tensions and offer a new lens through which to view the many strands of human interactions that contribute to building a positive school climate.

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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.

NSRF has been making rapid progress on our restructuring. After all the struggle and advancement we have made and continue to make, I decided to turn my attention to our future - not our present. I began to imagine NSRF’s future using the Futures Protocol. In doing so, I was able to let go of the present and remember that, together, we can do anything we imagine to be possible. Below are my thoughts from my personal Futures Protocol.

Eighteen months from now

NSRF has maintained a small national center that continues to learn how to best serve our membership. Whether a coach, facilitative leader, National Facilitator and/or Center of Activity, we are all members of NSRF. Our National Center continues to take responsibility for convening and connecting NSRF through our membership, our annual meetings, our communication avenues and our protocols, linking with work in the field in collaboration with our Centers of Activity, research and documentation and the ongoing publication of Connections.

NSRF Centers of Activity have expanded our work in ways big and small that a National Center never could do. With and among National Facilitators, our Centers have the capacity to transform learning and teaching within their local contexts. Whether situated inside a school district, a school, an independent organization and/or a collection of NSRF members, local Centers are crucial to the continuing success of our mission.

NSRF has a membership council that is democratic and representative of our membership and serves as an advisory structure for our re-imagined governance council. Our membership council represents our mission statement and helps us answer the perennial questions of attributes and standards for National Facilitators and Centers of Activity that seem to vex our organization. Our membership council is the heart of our organization and the guardian of our mission and vision as referenced below.

We have a strong governance council that serves as a board of directors to our organization. We have codified some of our understandings of how we operate and re-affirmed that we are accountable to one another. We have an able and healthy structure that provides for checks and balances, as is appropriate for an organization based on democratic principals of equity and participation, and we experience a strong, more formal governance structure that serves us well.

Our membership has discretionary resources to seed work in the field and research and document what we learn together – working in local contexts along-side Centers of Activity. Our membership is well on its way to amassing those resources through what we have dubbed “Ten in Ten.” We have thought deeply and made commitments about what we will accomplish if we are able to achieve the goal of 10,000 dues-paying members in 10 years – we, the membership, have imagined our future.

Back to the present

I am quite optimistic that some version of my musings about, once tuned and re-tuned using the tools and processes at our disposal, will be accomplished. We will get to our future with deliberation and by accessing our stakeholders; by imagining what we want to be and what we want to stand for; and then by practicing locally, regionally and nationally, in person.