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CONNECTIONS

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM FACULTY



FROM THE EDITOR

BY DAVE LEHMAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR,
NATIONAL FACILITATOR

On Saturday the 15th of October in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the Stonefly Brewery, **Rethinking Schools** held a **25th Anniversary Benefit**, and my wife, Judy, and I, now living just north of Milwaukee, were able to attend. So here I would like simply to acknowledge the outstanding work Rethinking Schools has been doing over these past 25 years – sharing NSRF's commitment to multicultural education, social justice and equity, particularly in public education. There was live music provided by two area bands, ample food and drink, wise words from key members of Rethinking Schools, and a keynote address by Bill Ayers, well known teacher, activist, award-winning author, and retired professor from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Bob Peterson, co-founder of Rethinking Schools, spoke first of the current situation of public education, particularly in Milwaukee where he is actively involved in the Teachers Union, and the crucial need to defend the "craft of teaching" in the wake of the "apartheid curriculum," then citing Jonathan Kozol's recent writings. He reminded us all to stay grounded, using the two lenses of classroom realities and social justice to develop child-driven, not data-driven curricula; noting that the real enemy is those who oppose and would take apart our free public education for all students, replacing it with vouchers and the corporate take-over of education.



Then, in his keynote address, **Bill Ayers** [there actually were a couple of dozen protestors across the street from the Stonefly Brewery with signs against Bill and his speaking] began by pointing out the importance of relationships, of knowing our kids well, and always striving to be better teachers. He stressed that in a democracy – particularly in a democracy! – every human being is of incalculable value, and that we must continue the fight for "participatory" democracy, noting the centrality of education and

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[Register](#) for your spot for the first three days of a New Coaches training February 20th – 22nd!

Inside this Issue:

- ❖ From the Editor Pages 1-2
- ❖ Article: "Only One Opportunity to Make a First Impression" By Dave Nelson of Athens, Greece. Pages 2-6
- ❖ Book Review: [MultiCultural Education and the Internet](#) By Paul Gorski Reviewed By Dave Lehman, Connections Editor Pages 7-9
- ❖ Ask the Director By Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director Pages 8 -9
- ❖ Article: CFG's Implications for Project Based Learning By Al Summer Pages 9-11
- ❖ Staff Changes at the NSRF Page 11
- ❖ Our Apologies Page 11

freedom to the fullness of a democracy of justice and joy! How could there, therefore, be any question of "public" education? And, shouldn't all children, all youth have the same quality schools to which Arnie Duncan and Barrack Obama send their children? Bill urged us to continue to use the power of the neighborhood, the community - and not to count on the President and those to whom we really don't have access - to "Occupy Wall Street," to fight back, to re-frame, to re-think our schools and the education of our children and youth, continuing to draw on **Rethinking Schools** which **is, and has been**, the public square!

So **HAPPY 25th Rethinking Schools! carry on!** And for those of you who may not yet be familiar with **Rethinking Schools**, go to their website at www.rethinkingschools.org and subscribe to their wonderful magazine, purchase their tremendously useful, teacher-friendly, student-centered resource books - and in the holiday spirit, make a donation to help sustain their work!

For questions/comments or for more information contact Dave Lehman at davelehman@mac.com

"ONLY ONE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION" HOW WE INTRODUCED STAFF TO THE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE GROUPS BY DAVID NELSON, TEACHER, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (ACS) OF ATHENS, GREECE

David Nelson brings 21 years of teaching experience to his high school Social Studies classrooms at ACS Athens, where he has taught for the past eleven years. Originally from the Hillsboro School District in Oregon, he has experienced a wide variety of administrative styles that empower faculty and seek to improve student learning. As a building coordinator for professional development at ACS Athens, he is applying his research and CFG coaches training to help establish "Collaborative Learning Communities" in his school.

We've all witnessed conference presenters who contend that they have the answers to the latest best educational practices, yet they don't seem to get one thing: they talk the talk but they don't ... *you know the rest*. Teachers keenly understand the power of experiential learning and can quickly spot professional presenters who practice the same. Our aim as teachers at ACS Athens was to introduce

the philosophy and goals of Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs), fundamentally *Critical Friends Groups*, to the school faculty so that they could experience the organizational philosophy of CFGs and consider their potential. With the cyclical changes in education rampant, teams striving to start CFGs in their schools must remember the power of first impressions and find an optimal way to introduce their



goals. With the help of some CFG "tuning" and collaboration with colleagues, we found one such way that I'd like share with those of you