How did the Emeryville Campaign begin? Can you give us some idea of the major players? 

BayCES involvement began with a proposal for a GATES grant to build a small demonstration school with a focus on Math, Science and Technology. The goal was the establishment of a school that the community would be proud of, that the teachers would be trained and would serve students of color in a low-income setting. The Unified School District of Emeryville was in a state of fiscal crisis and its schools were facing state takeover. These factors and others set the stage for the development of a partnership to create a school, which would be a part of the Unified School District and city, committed to full service community schools for all students, especially students in a district with fewer than 1,000 students in three schools. Of those students, approximately 70% qualify for free and reduced lunch. 70% of the student population is African-American, followed by 15% Latino students and 10% White, Asian with White, Pacific Islander and Filipino students comprising the rest of the school district. The Unified School District of Emeryville had a history of fiscal mismanagement and low performance on standardized measures, hence the recent state takeover. The Memorandum of Understanding that was agreed to by Emeryville Unified School District (EUSD), BayCES and the City of Emeryville (City), cites the following three goals: One, To redesign the educational programs of EUSD from K-12 so that students are proficient, or better, in core academic subjects and have many choices in postsecondary education and other endeavors; Two, To build strong partnerships across EUSD, the City and the community, so that powerful learning is a citywide experience and responsibility; Three, To create an exemplary program for educator training and professional development in math, science and technology.

Those are admirable goals; how has the coalition worked to include all stakeholders in the process and how will the group sustain the active engagement of such a diverse group over the long haul? Forming the coalition has meant working on multiple fronts with whole school Councils, entire staff bodies, parent groups, business partners and community leaders. We continue to work to foster ongoing dialogue and healing in a community where the history, traumatic effects of the schools and social service agencies have left their mark. As Project Manager and a white male, I have needed to be especially mindful of the barriers of race and culture that have kept the conversations about our schools and communities and the issues we face. Working to facilitate joint conversations among all parties has meant that I had to really listen to people’s experience, check my assumptions about what I understand and listen for “different paths.” Building relation- ships with people in and across all layers of the project has been critical.

Building trust to allow for a frank discussion about “What’s good enough for our children?” has meant debunking the myth that the “experts” have all the answers. Concretely, it has also meant that I have had to work very hard to avoid the use of jargon and “education-ese” as we pull back the layers of our system’s problems and work together to increase the pressure needed to sustain system-wide change. You said you need to continually “listen for different paths”, can you tell us more about that? When I think about “different paths” I’m talking about everything from different ideas to different ways of expressing similar ideas. I’m thinking that while I might assume I have a pretty good research-based idea about all of the services a child needs from birth to age 19, my idea isn’t relevant unless it is grounded in the needs of the parents and families are expressing. It means taking the time to listen actively and constantly check my understanding, while the project clock is ticking. If we want the transformation we’re working for to last, and we do, then building relationships with parents and community members can’t be put off until later. Understanding that the trust required for authenticity takes time and that everyone always has to be included is a lesson I have had to remind myself of more than once. This requires being very conscious of the planning process and doing the facilitation work necessary before each meeting. And sometimes, it means reminding ourselves of what parents and community members have shared when they aren’t present during a particular conversation, and often it means making decisions until parents are present.

You’ve talked a fair amount about different paths, so could you explain your view about different paths? How do you engage folks in the hard conversations, the dialogue we often ignore in an effort to keep the peace. We’re so critically different from previous work?”

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You’ve talked a fair amount about different paths, so could you explain your view about different paths? How do you engage folks in the hard conversations, the dialogue we often ignore in an effort to keep the peace (continued on page 17)
I promise you, I am not always thinking about coaching while on vacation. Nonetheless, I was playing tennis with Alan Dichter this past weekend and it got me thinking about partnering and facilitation. Probably if I kept my mind on the game, it would improve, but there is something about being on vacation that fires up thinking. Anyway, we both look for the creative relationships across what have been traditional boundaries. I think we’ve been able to create a new sense of credibility by avoiding the blame game trap while simultaneously staying focused on the real problems. The understanding that “educating every child well means supporting the families who care for them” is at the heart of the social justice platform. The idea that this is a partnership initiative. As long as we are all committed to that outcome, I think we will continue to trust each other enough to sometimes be uncomfortable in specific conversations.

Are there any tools you’ve found especially helpful as a coach in this trust-building process?

The first thing the staff of the elementary school agreed to do was to form cross-grade Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) that would look at student work in a way that is different. I want to work on getting past “tag-team” facilitation and put in the hard work that true partnering means. I think that means not short-changing our own self-reflections; starting to ask how could we as a team have been more effective, not what either of us separately could have done differently. And not over-planning, but maybe planning differently. The plan needs to be more about how we are going to work together, and less about the precise details of the agenda—in fact, ironically, the more detailed and well-timed the agenda, the less the opportunity to imagine that the thoughts that are entertained are entitled to “think on their feet.” Planning well also means respecting our respective strengths but not falling into the habit of always doing what each of us does well, instead stretching ourselves to a place where our work is more seamless. And finally, it means paying attention to one another—why are they doing what they’re doing, and where are they on the court?

Another important aspect of work in partnership is that there is more than one person to keep an eye on what is going on within the group. That can’t be useful unless people are able to make use of what they see—in the moment. That requires a high degree of transparency and a high tolerance for change. While it is helpful to know that one member of the team is perhaps the “leaf” in an activity, a highly developed partnership would not just tolerate, but would require that other partner could speak up and say, “out loud,” “I would like to take the moment here to take stock of the group’s go around/take a break—something that will allow us for course corrections without fear of outset/tipstaging being out of turn/being rude/embarrassing one another. So what else is this all about? I’m not entirely sure, but in the meantime, I’ll keep on working remembering that Alan, Alan says I’ve got it; I still need to be backing him up.

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Playing Doubles—Moving Beyond Tag-Team Facilitation Nancy Mohr, New York

and make sure things are comfortable.

We’re really trying to have a changed discourse where problems are named and hard truths are heard from all angles. We were playing mixed doubles, which is an old-fashioned format that was used after the first elimination. We both agreed that this could only have happened because our partnership is greater than the sum of its parts. Alan is a very good player; I am, as in golf, an eternal beginner. I have a wicked net shot and Alan is great about running back and forth doing most of the work. I do contribute, but don’t necessarily work up the same sweat that he does. Together, we do well because we have developed this rather unorthodox way of doing things, one which works for us—and we maintain good spirits throughout, and I don’t have to tell you how important (and rare for married partners) that is.

As my thoughts stray to facilitation with a partner, especially one I haven’t worked with often—it is a case of OK, you do this and I’ll do that—but feel free to butt in if you want to. I was thinking about how that wouldn’t be too useful in tennis. We do have our respective specialties, but if it were, I’d do this and you do that, then we would be like some partnerships we’ve overheard: Don’t you know you’re supposed to be up front; couldn’t you tell that shot? Those are usually the partnerships that start floundering. How often are facilitation partners dividing responsibility instead of sharing it? And then how often is there unspoken blame? And the need to be right?

Good sharing of facilitation would not look like each person running after each ball trying to hit it. It would not look like one person watching while the other took a turn running around. And it would not look like one person taking the shaky shots and leaving the tough ones for the other: Why weren’t you there?

Luckily, it’s not even possible in tennis to do so. What facilitation teams do: I make a pithy comment, you make an even pithier one—we start to do all the talking. Basically that involves competing with your own partner—or just forgetting who this is. Alan reminds me that the difficulty of developing a truly productive partnership (and I must say, our on-court and partnered sense was not an automatic thing when we were first married—you should hear the bridge stories) is that great partnerships take a lot of time and energy and it just is not worth it if you are going to work together once and then ‘change partners.’

Often we do partner people at meetings/conferences and it is only temporary. I have had a rare instance or two where the experience was truly synergistic. Often, however, it is pleasant, but not necessarily more productive—perhaps just more fun than being alone. Not that that’s bad, but it is rather luxurious. The thought crosses my mind: What’s the matter with having fun? Maybe nothing except it’s not about fun. Participants do, however, enjoy partners who enjoy each other. And it does model collegiality—but it can and should do more than that. Partnering is especially valuable when each member brings a decidedly different perspective to the mix. And this works when it is made clear that there are multiple points of view at play. If we pretend that we are always in sync with one another and don’t expose our differences, there is a valuable teaching opportunity lost.

So why do Alan and I play tennis well together? For starters, we know each other’s strengths, limitations and preferences well. But that isn’t enough. So what else is it? One thing that I can reflect on now is that our partnership gained in the momentum department. Opponents start gnawing at each other, or themselves, getting into bad frames of mind. We wink and know that we can win even though they are better players.

When facilitating, I find, to my dismay, that the all-important reflection time is what we tend to skip. Too busy, we assure one another that it was well and if we didn’t we didn’t even imagine. And that would be different if the participants... (continued on page 17)