

and Matt Dunne have all, at one time or another, shared their thinking with us.

We also always facilitate our own work. CFG coaches, as well as local and national NSRF facilitators, lead home groups, workshops, coaches clinics, protocol sessions, open space sessions, and text-based conversations. Some facilitators are more experienced than others with designing and facilitating this kind of work, but the Winter Meeting gives us all an opportunity to “cross pollinate” — as people from different parts of the country work with each other — as well as an opportunity to try new things. With honest feedback, we all grow as we learn together.

Sometimes we try something new. Terry Tafoya captivated us with his stories, his drumming, his humor, and his wisdom this past year. One memorable year we sang. JoAnne Dowd convinced us that we could create our own lyrics—on the spot—to This Land is Your Land, and we did, led by the spirited fiddle playing of Emily Buckhannon. One year, Markie Hancock, a former CFG coach and teacher from Chicago turned NYC film producer, created a documentary of the Winter Meeting as it was happening, NSRF Goes South, and we showed it at the closing. In 1998, we premiered our video, Making Teaching Public, at the Winter Meeting, and wildly applauded Neville Brown and Christelle Estrada, two CFG coaches from Pasadena High School, who were



Dr. Terry Tafoya

featured in the video and who were with us at the meeting.

And always, we learn—with and from each other. I go to NSRF’s Winter Meeting each year to be challenged and stretched, to be reinvigorated, and to publicly recommit to the work I am doing — with young people and with my colleagues. I go because of the people I know will be there, and I look forward to seeing old friends, and meeting new ones. I go each year with the faces of my CFG members in my head, and leave with a wealth of new ideas and resources.

In January 2000, at our Winter Meeting in Los Angeles, we moved NSRF from the Annenberg Institute to the Harmony School Education Center in a Friday evening ceremony. We didn’t know what the future of NSRF would be. I think it was telling, however, that the first decision the Governance Council made, the day after the 2000 Winter Meeting, was that we would continue to gather someplace, every winter, to share our stories and to learn together. Pete Bermudez and his colleagues stepped forward and said, “Come to Miami next year.” And



Camellia Cosgray and Mary Mitchell

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we did. The rest, as they say, is history. We haven’t missed a year.

Next January 2004, from the 15th to the 17th, we will gather in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We hope you will join us. Our learning will be richer because you are there. ■

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I’ll never forget the scene. As the new district induction coordinator for the Roaring Fork School District, I surveyed the faces of the fifty or so rookie teachers on that first day in August two years ago. I could see it all in their eyes: idealism, fear, energy, naiveté, anxious expectation, and, when I handed out their packet of induction requirements, palpable shock, with perhaps a touch of loathing. I was the headlights and they were the herd huddled on the center stripe. I swear no one blinked for twenty minutes.

As supervisor to many student teachers through the years and as a frequent mentor for new teachers, I had heard it all, and most of it began and ended with the same primal yelp — Aarrghh! Meetings! Time? Theory? What do I do about the mother who blames me for her son’s D? I have a homecoming float to build! How can I convince my class that I’m concerned about hurtful remarks to each other? Are my expectations for this *Hamlet* assessment realistic and rigorous enough? I need to clean Marcy’s lunch off my shoe! I think this stack of papers is from last semester! How do I get that angry student to feel better and be more productive?

Reality, not theory.

This was the fate of the trembling masses before me.

It occurred to me that such practical concerns had been the subject of countless conversations in my school’s Critical Friends meetings since 1995. So, as a long-time CFG coach, my first proposal was to divide all of the new teachers into site-based induction groups. Numbers for each group would vary from 5 to 9. We would meet four times a year away from school. Meetings would be three hours long with a good meal as intermission. Each inductee would have at least one opportunity to present an issue or dilemma directly related to his or her school venue. We would help each other with our day-to-day work and offer insights.

When possible we would invite veteran teachers and mentors to contribute their wisdom.

Hmm...it walks like a duck... Although I didn’t call them CFGs, they were indeed the same collaborative entity that my school CFG and several others in the district had grown to anticipate and enjoy through the years.

Now, two years later, Consultancies continue to be the staple protocol for new teachers encountering challenging situations for the first time. The notion that one must have years of experience to



offer insights has no foundation in these meetings. Marie Voss Patterson, third grade teacher at Carbondale Elementary School, says, “Stepping back, talking about a problem, listening to other cohorts has made a huge difference in minor and major problems. I actually enjoyed our meetings and believe every teacher should have such a strong support group.” These valuable peer collaborations, combined with a required journal, peer observations, and my visitations at their request (frequently generated at a meeting), possess a facet of Critical Friends that is so essential: reflection.

Such meetings raise important questions for inexperienced teachers. One such concern comes from Susan Stockhouse, a seventh grade math teacher at Glenwood Springs Middle School: “Do I have the energy it takes

to allow each student to feel special, wanted, and taught? Coming in with no background in classroom teaching, am I truly a fit?” More experienced teachers would do well to engage in such ongoing self-evaluation.

Occasionally a teacher will get valuable feedback on a unit or lesson plan. When Ted Frisbee, a teacher at Carbondale Community School, presented a geographically localized adaptation of Monopoly in his social studies class, he was unsure of the quality and relevance of the creative exercise. He said, “The [tuning] protocol was great, and I loved the way we...allow for both my reflection and the presentation of my lesson... Offering ‘warm’ and ‘cool’ comments was extremely helpful.”

Our final meetings have focused on individual successes rather than the traditional dilemmas so frequent for new teachers. We “tweaked” the Success Protocol into a briefer “Success Charrette” to accommodate each member. Physical education teacher Darcy Kyle’s thoughts are

typical of the upbeat mood: “I liked talking about successes and reflecting on how and why something works and how it can be used in other areas of our teaching.”

In a profession in which we have the tendency to devour our young, here is yet another way for the Critical Friends model to serve us. And for impressionable, vital new teachers with staggering potential, this collaboration can have a lasting effect. Just last evening I read a reflection that has far-reaching implications: “I’m really excited about next year, and I’m looking forward to applying all of my new-found knowledge. I wonder — is there some kind of support base set up for second year teachers? Or third? Or fourth...?”

The deer are safe in the field now, happily blinking and grazing. ■

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What do Chicago, Providence, Waltham, Santa Monica, Boston, Atlanta, Miami, Houston and L.A. all have in common? If you guessed that these cities have all been sites for NSRF's annual Winter Meeting, you would be right!

We held our first CFG Coaches/Principals Winter Meeting in December 1995 in Chicago. The previous summer, 94 coaches had been "trained" in one of four 6-day seminars in Providence, San Francisco, and Wisconsin. 91 out of that 94 showed up in Chicago that December. We were all struggling with implementing our very first CFGs, and we were desperate (or so it seemed) to talk to our colleagues from the summer. What were they doing that worked? How did they know it was working? What were their struggles?

That first year, we presented Consultancy dilemmas about our work as CFG coaches. We read a common text and discussed it, and we listened to a panel of our colleagues talk about their learning. We looked at our own students' work in home groups, and we even formed a 91-person continuum in the ballroom around issues of standards and CFG portfolios. Little did we know at the time, but a pattern — now familiar — had been established for NSRF's Winter Meetings.

Our work at the Winter Meetings has changed some each year — depending on the needs of the people who attend, and on our learning from previous years. One year, we tried regional Winter Meetings, but people yearned for a national meeting, so we went back. Home groups used to be the place where you saw the people from your summer institute session,



Consultancies on the terrace

but as our numbers grew and people had to pay their own way, we began to form heterogeneous home groups, and began experimenting with role-alike groups. The Atlanta meeting in 1997 was the first meeting at which we tried Open Space — one day and 32 sessions



World Café

later, 400 people declared it a success. The popular "coaches clinics" of this past year's meeting were actually first tried in Boston in 1998 — we called them workshops, and we didn't know as much as we do now, so we said they were just okay, and abandoned that format. We keep growing as we learn

more, and sometimes we find ourselves circling back. The World Café from last January may someday find its way back into one of our meetings as we learn more about how to use it well.

And our work has remained the same. We always read something together — the more provocative the better. In doing this, we acknowledge that if we are to construct our own learning, we must periodically introduce new ideas into the mix, as well as challenge our old assumptions. Sometimes the writer of the article or chapter we are reading comes and

provokes us further; Carl Glickman, Patricia Wasley, Gloria Ladsen-Billings, Tony Alvarado, and Rob Evans have all joined us at our National Meetings. Some years, our colleagues are our keynote speakers; Paula Evans, Kevin Horton, Teri Schrader, Khadijah Abdul-Aleem, Larry Myatt,

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ous improvement to guide schools as they take stock of their effectiveness as a school in each of the following areas:

- Leadership
- Student Achievement
- Continuous Improvement
- Information and Analysis
- Partnership Development
- Quality Planning
- Professional Development.

The schools used the 7 rubrics to chart their current reality and plan their future success. The school portfolio provided an accurate picture of the school's current reality, presented the school's qualitative and quantitative data as support and evidence for their self assessment rating on each of the 7 rubrics, included a rationale for their ratings; and proposed a strategic plan for how they are to improve in their small schools. Also included in the school portfolio was a narrative of their goals for students, their vision for small high schools based on their students' needs and their school community's beliefs, values and vision. All of the 41 Ohio high schools have engaged their parents, students and staff in this self-evaluation process and in the construction of their school portfolio.

I work with two high schools in the Columbus, Ohio school district. I and 18 other School Improvement Coaches work with Marcy Raymond, who is the School Design Manager. Our collaboration as school coaches is part of our work, and one of the reasons I am willing to travel from Connecticut to Ohio on a regular basis to work with KnowledgeWorks and my NSRF colleagues. In my two high schools I work with teachers, principals, students, parents, and community members on an ongoing basis as they work to create, submit, improve and resubmit their comprehensive school portfolio. Much of our work together is centered on discussions about what is it we value, and our beliefs about teaching and learning. We ask ourselves how we can create small schools that reflect the best of our values, beliefs about our

children and our schools, and what do we know about how our students learn. Our school portfolios are manifestations of those beliefs and values. The school portfolios were delivered to KnowledgeWorks in Cincinnati, Ohio on April 21, 2003. All 41 high schools submitted their portfolio on time. This was not an easy task for these high schools because they were meeting the challenges of the Ohio High School Transformation Initiative while in full operation.

OHSTI is a five year initiative. Of the 41 high schools in 17 Ohio school districts who have submitted their school portfolios to KnowledgeWorks Foundation, 8 high schools in 6 districts were selected to move to be early implementation schools. The selection process was based on three dynamics:

- the strength of the school portfolio- a portfolio that demonstrates and reflects a passion for what effective, small schools can do for students
- the school's participations in KnowledgeWorks events aimed at strengthening school personnel's ability to transform
- the school's presentation of their portfolio.

Those high schools that did not make the May selection to transform into small schools have received feedback on their portfolios, and they are eligible to resubmit their improved portfolios in August, 2003.

After a school is selected, it will move to the second phase of the Initiative. This second phase is referred to as the "deep" planning year. The deep planning year 2003-2004 will engage community leaders, school leaders and educators in defining the human, philosophical, physical structures and designs of each small school following the small outlined vision and strategic plans in its portfolio. Leaders for each small school will be chosen, autonomous budgets for each school created, and the standards based curriculum will be designed. The small

The 15 Non-Negotiables

- Autonomous governance, budgets, structures, and staffing; flexible use of resources
- Distributed leadership
- Open access and choice for students
- Identification of and release time for principal in first year of implementation
- Professional development that clearly links changes in teaching practice to improved student achievement
- A clearly-defined system of central office support of small school design and implementation
- A curriculum clearly aligned with state standards and focused on helping students use their minds well
- Non-traditional scheduling that promotes deep student learning and meaningful relationships with teachers
- Clearly demonstrated use of technology and advanced communication resources
- Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement
- Performance assessment for students
- Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive community conversations that engage a broad array of stakeholders, and connect with and influence official decisions
- Clear community involvement in the daily life of the school
- Individual teacher advisors for each student
- Target maximum population of 400 students

schools will open September, 2004. It is the intent of KnowledgeWorks to continue to work with the high schools that have been a part of this initiative even if they are not selected to implement small learning communities for their students.

Every high school involved has reported that they have been positively affected by this initiative. They believe that they are better at being able to use their data to improve student learning, more reflective, have gained insights into their approaches to certain dynamics of

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