Winter Meeting Review

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 premiered our video, Making South, and we showed it at the Winter Meeting as it was happening, NSRF Goes South, and we showed it at the Winter Meeting as it was happening.

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 all in their eyes: idealism, question, nervousness, and an anxious expectation, and, when I handed out their packet of induction requirements, palpable shock, with a touch of longing. 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 yell — Aargghh! 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 realistic and right for each member? Do I need to clean Marcy’s lunch off my shoe? I think this stack of papers will give me enough? I could get that angry startup 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 long enough to allow each student to feel special, wanted, and taught. Coming in with no background in critical thinking, 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 briefer “Success Consultancy” to accommodate his busy schedule, the Physical education teacher Darcy Kyle’s thoughts are typical of the meetings and me talk 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 impressive, 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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Winter Meeting Review
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W
h
at 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
time. What were they doing that worked?
How did they know what 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 now — a pattern — now
we know how 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
to 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 Laden-
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, Tari Schrader,
Khadijah Abdul-Aleem, Larry Myatt.

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uous improvement to guide schools as
they stock their effectiveness as a standard in each of the following areas:
• Leadership
• Student Achievement
• Continuous Improvement
• Infrastructure
• Partnership Development
• Quality Planning
• School Design and Development.
The schools used the 7 rubrics to chart their current reality and plan their future success. The school portfolios provided an accurate picture of the school’s current reality, presented the school’s qualitative and quantitative data as supersedes in the portfolios to their self assessment rating on each of the 7 rubrics, included a rationale for their ratings; and proposed a strategic plan for how for them 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, teachers and staff in the self-
evaluation process and in the construc-
tion of their school portfolios.

="World Cafes"
The schools in the Columbus, Ohio school district. 1 and 18 other School Improvement Coaches work with Marcy Raymond, who is the School Design Manager. Our col-
laboration 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 col-
leagues. In my two high schools I work with teachers, principals, students, parents, and community members on an ongoing basis as they work to cre-
ate, submit, improve and resubmit their community school portfolio. Much of our work together is centered on discussions about what it is we value, and our
believes about teaching and learning. At the conclusion of this talk, we
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.

OHSIT 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 dis-
tricts were selected to move to be early implementation schools. The selection process was based on three dynamics:
• the strength of the school portfo-
lio; 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 person-
nel’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 feed-
back 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 phase. The
deep planning year 2003-2004 will engage community leaders, school
leaders and educators in defining the
human, philosophical, physical struc-
tures and the human philosophical,
technology and advanced
communication resources
Clearly stated benchmarks for improved student achievement
Performance assessment for students
Authentic community engagement as defined by substantive com-
community conversations that engage
the 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

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

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