Tenth Anniversary Celebration

Keynote Address from Maria Guajardo Lucero

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Victor Cary, California

Victor Cary, Program Director for Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) in Oakland, California, has been on a personal and professional journey with equity for many years. Victor, Daniel Baron and others have been collaborating on the first partnership between the BayCES and NSRF to design and present a Coaching for Educational Equity Seminar: A Journey of Interruption, Transition and Transformation. A pilot of the seminar will take place in Sonoma, CA the last week in July, 2005.

There is an urgent need to develop school coaches able to support a process of interruption, transition and transformation to small, equitable and high performing schools. Resistance to change is inevitable. And, however, is even more widespread than resistance in other areas of school change. There will not be deep and sustainable change if equity is not meaningfully and productively addressed.

The hardest part of coaching for equity is staying inside the struggle. This endeavor is a necessary element of both personal/collective consciousness and deep change. It requires skilled coaching and facilitation to “open space” where trust is established and truth is shared. It calls for compassion to “hold space” where pretense is eliminated, emotions released, new meanings constructed, and new relationships are established. We need coaches and leaders who can hold these spaces so others can learn how to do it alone. Coaches need opportunities for the self-reflective work necessary to create alliances within and across racial, gender and class boundaries to be effective as coaches for equity.

How does one develop the necessary will, skill and emotional intelligence to effectively coach for educational equity?

At the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES), we believe that powerful and effective coaching begins from the inside out. To do this, we believe that coaches should “be the change they wish to make in the world.” The work of creating equitable and excellent schools is fundamentally about changing ourselves, and thereby our relationship to others.

What this means for me is that anyone who aspires to coach for educational equity must begin by reflecting critically on their own identity and integrity in doing this work. Identity lies in the intersection of the many forces that make up a life, while integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that make us who we are or want to become. To grow as a coach in this way asks me to be able to reflect upon and talk about my inner life while also focusing on assumptions about oppression, power and hegemony.

Reflecting critically can happen privately or in a communal setting where we can speak our own truth without fear, as well as listen to the truths of others without rushing to judgment. It is also possible to create open and trustworthy communal spaces within a unifying commitment to establish alliances for the purpose of supporting one another. Few such spaces are created do this work in public education. I hold to the basic principles of no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting straight. We can learn instead to listen deeply; ask honest, open, questions; speak for ourselves rather than for another; and trust the “inner teacher” to do its work. Attending to the creation of a safe space for this work is essential—a space in which the noise within us and around us can subside and we can begin to hear our own inner voice.

In his book Courage to Teach,1 Parker Palmer suggests that every person has access to an inner source of truth, named by diverse cultures as soul, spirit, or heart. This inner source of strength and guidance is the place of truth telling within us where we know the difference between reality and illusion. Preparing to coach for equity is more a matter of “coach formation” than “coach training.” The notion of formation involves the inner teacher within each individual, and the vital relationship between inner clarity and lifegiving outer work. Where coach training is often about training in methods and techniques, coach formation is about the inner teacher within each individual, and the vital relationship between inner clarity and lifegiving outer work. Where coach training is often about training in methods and techniques, coach formation involves a concern for personal wholeness. It can also be thought of as permanent process, as being an exercise, a critical understanding of what we do. Through work that is at the same time gentle and firm, rigorous and relevant, we can help shape and reshape, to form coaches without being manipulative.2 Coach formation and training are both needed, but the concept of coach formation is given far less attention.

At the heart of formation is the understanding that there is a “hidden wholeness” at work in the natural world, in our lives, in our work—a hidden wholeness that often takes the form of paradox.2 For instance, Paulo Freire, in a conversation with Myles Horton, said, “We must be free; we must be free to believe in freedom. Do you see (continued on page 14)

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practice is embedded—when it is a part of how you operate on a daily basis—then sustainability is a given. The language of CFGs is a part of our culture. This initiative is also a valuable tool in identifying and supporting emerging leaders. We create leaders by giving them a space to practice new skills. Thinking again of our Career Growth Plan, I am aware that teachers could not have made their practice public unless we had created a democratic culture that supported collective learning. I am not at all worried about Souhegan. We have well-established practices in place such as the ninth and tenth grade teams, school-wide CFGs, senior project and Division I Exhibitions. My leadership supported these practices through advocacy with the superintendent and school board, as well as my own participation as a CFG coach and a senior project mentor. There is very strong support across all of the constituencies for these collaborative practices and they certainly won’t go away when I leave.

What is your response to NSRF’s increasing focus on equity?

I think the NSRF focus on equity is absolutely essential. We can have lots of discussion about the best ways to teach and learn and NSRF can be inclusive in including teachers and principals from many philosophically different schools, but we cannot sit by and pretend that we don’t have a serious issue of inequitable opportunities. We have made progress in providing equity of opportunity, but only because of our sustained focus in raising our awareness of inequities. We now need to focus our work to get to the point where we have equitable outcomes for students.

How will you continue your work as a member of NSRF in Maine?

I have a great deal of respect for the schools in Maine. I know that I will have much to learn. Yarmouth has a collaborative relationship with the University of Southern Maine through the Southern Maine Partnership. I am looking forward to an active relationship with a university. I know that I will continue to train CFG coaches, and that I will embed this work in my practice as the Yarmouth High School principal. I know that I will be able to count on the relationships I enjoy as a member of NSRF to help me learn and grow in this new setting.

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Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

10th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting
Denver, Colorado • January 12 - 14, 2006

We know that sustained, focused conversations with one another are among the most essential elements of the work we do. So join us in Denver, Colorado to do the work you most need to do, with the people whose wisdom, perspective and skill you most need. Reconnect with colleagues from your CFG Coaches Institute, from your Facilitative Leaders Seminar, or from past Winter Meetings. Meet the colleagues from around the country you don’t yet know you have.

We will work in the ways our CFGs do, and for two and one half days we’ll use the tools and processes of our CFGs to deepen our skills, to press for insights, and to find courage in community. We’ll spend time in small groups, having in-depth, difficult and soul stirring conversation, asking tough questions, and taking the time we need to do the work we need to do most. Coaches Clinics will provide opportunities to learn from one another as we share what we know and what we still wonder.

Meeting Elements
• Keynote Address from Maria Guajardo Lucero of the Denver Mayor’s Commission on Education
• Seminar Groups
• Coaches Clinics
• Performance by Rattlebrain Theatre
• Tenth Anniversary Celebration

For More Information or to Register
Contact the NSRF National Office at 812.330.2702 or visit our website at www.nsrfrharm.org/winter_meeting.html

See you in Denver!

The 2006 NSRF Winter Meeting Planning Team

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this paradox? Without freedom it’s difficult to understand freedom. On the other hand, we fight for freedom to the extent that we don’t have freedom, but in fighting for freedom we discover how freedom is beautiful and difficult to be created, but we have to believe it is possible. Working with paradox helps us to see how things seem to be opposites, even when deeply understood, actually complement and co-create each other. You can’t know light without darkness, silence without speech, and solitude without community.

Understanding and exploring paradox is useful to the pedagogy underlying this idea of coaching for equity from the inside out. For example, the skill and art of facilitating is a key competency expected of school coaches. As a coach you may be called upon to “open space” for dialogue and practices that 1) interpret equity and oppression; 2) hold a powerful “proxy” vision for what could be; 3) create spaces across difference and 4) “open space” for new visions to become reality and for new leaders (formal and informal) to emerge. Therefore, it is important for a coach to consider the various forms of nonphysical space that will help a group do its work.

I have found Palmer’s six paradoxical tensions of pedagogical space very helpful in this regard and use it as a guide. The six paradoxes of space include:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and “charged.”
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honor the “little” stories of the participants and the “big” stories of teaching, learning, identity, and integrity.
5. The space should support solitude and support it with the resources of the community.
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

Reflecting on these paradoxes as I prepare to facilitate a group offers clues for creating the kind of intellectual, emotional and spiritual space that invites and encourages the building of diverse and equitable learning communities.

When working with coaches, administrators, teachers, and parents, I often use the process of Constructivist Listening Support Groups, a structure used in BayCES Leading for Equity Institutes, to embody this paradox of solitude and community. This practice is grounded in the belief that there are no external or independent truths. There is only the authority that lies within each of us waiting to be heard. A commitment to deep confidentiality and trust is essential to many aspects of our work as coaches. Making space for diverse voices, and clarifying boundaries and guidelines for our work together, helps make the space safe for the human soul.

At BayCES coaching from the inside out helps to build our alliances across difference, harnesses the power of our diversity and informs a “movement model” of social change. I think that lasting change occurs when individuals choose to live in what Parker Palmer calls “divided no more.” Living divided no more essentially means being congruent inside and out, experiencing no disconnect between inner motivations and outward actions. This in turn leads to greater personal wholeness and a changed relationship to each other, to role and our institution. Beginning with the individual, this chain of integrity has the potential to weave

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NSRF’s Living History: An Interview with Ted Hall
Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

Ted Hall’s personal history tells the story of the movement of school reform strategies from Arizona to New Hampshire. Ted left Souhegan High School in Amherst, New Hampshire in June to become the principal of Yarmouth High School in Maine.

What is your history with NSRF?

Well, as a piece of NSRF trivia, I think I have coached more CFGs than anyone else in this organization—leading it firmly to my coaching. I am a member of my own CFG with administrators from New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and serve on NSRF’s Accountability Council. Faith Dunne and Joel Karmen trained me as a CFG coach at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (co-director Daniel Baron trained in the same group) in 1995. At that time I was working with the Math/Science Fellows program at Brown University as part of a Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) initiative. I had recently moved from Tucson, Arizona where I spent three years planning and opening Catalina Foothills High School. Prior to moving to Tucson, I had always been a science teacher. In Tucson, I was the acting principal for one year and a house leader for another. After spending two years at CES/Amherst, I came to Souhegan High School, where I have been for nine years, two as dean of students and the last seven as principal.

In 1996, I facilitated a national coaches training in San Francisco with Faith Dunne and since that time, I have facilitated either a coaches training or a principals’ group every summer, working mostly in New Hampshire. I have attended and facilitated at most of the winter meetings and colloquia as well.

So, here is a question I always ask candidates during the New Hampshire Presidential Primaries: What didn’t you know and how did you learn it?

I have learned a lot through being a CFG member and working to help others find help in their work. As the principal of CES/Amherst, I came to CFGs constantly pushes me to improve my own work. CFGs create a disposition to work in a certain way. Every time I work with a protocol, explore a dilemma, or write an action plan, I am forced to think of both the application of the work and the implication of the work on student learning. I have learned that an individual’s role in school does not matter; the focus of CFGs is relevant for every practice. As a school leader, the support my participation gives to CFGs sustains the work. We sponsored a support staff CFG when people demonstrated an interest, and we obtained an outgrowth to board to sponsor CFGs one morning a month and to delay school opening by two hours on those days; we meet with our CFG coaches each month to debrief that morning’s meeting; and we sponsor three all-day coaches’ meetings each year so that we can calibrate the work that each of us does as coach of our own CFG. My work as a CFG coach and administrator helps to translate this work to our board and our superintendent; my participation as principal helps to create a sense of priority for the work in our district.

In what ways has this work improved student learning in your school?

The impact of the CFG work at Souhegan is our Career Growth Plan. Teachers pose a question of inquiry, improving student learning through teacher practice. They research this question in their practice for three years. They then present this work to their peers. They use their CFG colleagues as mentors to their learning, bringing the ongoing work to the CFG table frequently during each three-year cycle. Their CFG colleagues decide when the work is ready to present to a more public audience, and help to design the presentation. This work exemplifies our community of learning: CFGs at the heart of our work, we are all learners, and our culture forms accountability for that learning. And we know that when adults cast themselves as learners, student learning deepens.

CFGs, and all the learning that comes from CFGs, are at the heart of all we do. Collective work produces better work than individual work. CFG work raises our accountability for each other’s work. There is no question that the work we do in CFGs directly benefits student learning, sometimes on the same day as the CFG meeting. On those late start days when we meet in CFGs first thing in the morning, you walk around the building and people are always asking “what did you do in CFG today?” The replication of that question is really “what did you learn in CFG today?”

Michael Fullan’s new book stresses sustainability as an imperative. Could you discuss this concept in light of the fact that Souhegan will be changing leadership?

When collective
Using a Blog to Intensify Reflections
Donna Reid, Texas

“I want to teach like Tiger Woods plays golf.” I heard this declaration at a textbook presentation several years ago and it has really stuck with me. The speaker explained that Tiger Woods is truly a reflective practitioner when it comes to her golf. The public just sees him out on the fairways, but Tiger spends a lot of time behind the scenes studying the game, observing others, analyzing film, and reflecting on his own performance. The result is excellence.

Isn’t this what CFGs can help us achieve as teachers? My hope is that setting aside time for study and reflection about our teaching practice will help us achieve excellence in our classroom.

[Donna’s Reflections, 12-20-2003]

The above excerpt, from my blog, Donna’s Reflections (http://doma.robreid.com/weblog/), sums up why regular reflection is so important—a careful consideration and analytical deliberation of our experiences can help guide us to excellence whether our profession is teaching, coaching, or even playing golf. Writing reflections leads to powerful, personalized learning that sticks with us. Another entry puts it this way: Confucius said best: “By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” [Donna’s Reflections, 8-16-2004]

So how do we make time and space to engage in this “noblest” method of learning wisdom? I recognized the power of regular reflection when I served as a CFG coach and chair of the school-wide portfolio committee at Johnston Middle School in Houston, Texas. Simply encouraging the habit of regular professional reflection kept the faculty focused on the mission of developing a safe, caring, respectful learning environment where both faculty and students could challenge themselves to be life-long learners.

My own reflections blossomed two years ago when I considered the topic of CFG for my Support for the Houston A+ Challenge. At the time, I wondered how I could best encourage myself to continuously reflect, make my work public, and document my practice. To model these essential habits, I started authoring the blog Donna’s Reflections.

Blogs, or web logs, are journals that are posted on the World Wide Web. Besides text, the entries may include photographs, document files, and links to other websites. Because they allow readers to add their own comments to an entry, blogs are more interactive than a typical format. They are also far more public since blogs are accessible anytime, anywhere, from any computer connected to the web.

Of course, anyone can keep a journal with pen and paper, but the blog ramps journaling up a notch by making it public and making the reflections interactive. For example, after every meeting of my current CFG, I post a summary of our activities and every member’s written reflections. Each member is encouraged to make comments that express their own thinking and learning, and these comments enliven the blog by turning the reflections into a conversation instead of a monologue: This is my first time responding in this medium, and I’m amazed by the different modes of sharing technology provides us. I find great value in having a “voice,” but more value in being able to share it in this way and get feedback. [Hurrah for CFG work! [Marcia, 3-24-2004]

I love the quick posting of everyone’s thoughts. It makes my own reflection of the meeting more insightful and deep. [Michaela, 4-13-2003]

Interestingly, the blog has strengthened our CFG in several ways. First, through regular postings and comments from our group. This is how we maintain a way to sustain conversation in between meetings.

Second, it produces an ongoing record of our work together, and importantly, that record is public. Most importantly, writing the blog has intensified my own reflections by helping me discover that reflecting is not just something to do during the final ten minutes of a meeting—it is truly at the core of my work. Earlier this year, I admitted: I’ve once again been struck by how central the act of reflecting is to my work and how my work unravels when I do not deliberately reflect. I’m embarrassed that I have posted so few entries over the last few months. I slacked off when a colleague wondered out loud if anybody was really reading the blog. The implication was that the time I spent writing entries wasn’t “worth it.” As a result, I feel like I’ve just been moving from deadline to deadline in my work without much inspiration. I’ve learned that my blog is as much a tool for motivating current planning and action (continued on page 16) participants resisted our structure. The resistance was directed mainly toward the limitations of our categories. It seemed difficult for the participants to talk about what it meant to be male, female, black, white, etc. We found that this protocol pushed participants to think about the intersections of their identities and to try to make sense of these relationships.

The comfort or discomfort with race was not limited to classroom discussions. A discomfort was also felt with regard to gender. The discomfort was not limited to race. A fact of men broke off from the white group and became a men’s group. Some black men joined the men’s group and defined themselves as males. There was a black women’s and a white woman’s group. The group were no mixed-race women’s groups and only one birth order group (which was mixed race). Once the participants had moved beyond their discomfort, however, which usually was moved by being more honest and coming from their heart, they became immersed in the dialogue. They were so involved in their discussions, in fact, that they resisted again when we began to reconvene the groups.

This experience forced the participants to deal with their good, bad, and ugly assumptions and stereotypes. Their learning was revealed as we deliberted the protocol. A connection had been made. The realization that we had just put them through was what many educators put their students through every day in our classrooms. We harbor assumptions, and we form relationships and create expectations based on those assumptions. Furthermore, our students rise to those expectations both positively and negatively. This is how we begin the first step of the process and become successful or fail with students. It was an eye opener for just about everyone who participated.

We learned that using CFG practices can help facilitate transformation. In developing safe spaces that allow for discussing difficult issues, if we are grounded, we can make an honest and productive approach to relationship building resulting in reflective practice. Who we are, and what we bring to our work-matters. Sometimes in the process, we experience discomfort, sometimes resistance. The process of improving learning experiences for children and adults requires that we look at our motivation, the assumptions that shape our expectations, and finally at our practice.

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Search for Answers...

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Endnotes
1. See Parker Palmer, Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life, Chapter 1, 1998. In this chapter, Palmer addresses the issue of identity and integrity when it comes to teaching in the classroom. The idea is very forward and just as relevant and challenging when thinking about coaching for educational equity.

2. See Julian Wergin, Diaries of Hope, Building Relationships for Educational Change, 1998. My thinking and understanding of the many forms that oppression takes and what can be done to interrupt that belief is it has been deeply influenced by this book and my association with the author.

See also Stephen D. Brookfield, Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, 1995. This book gave me new insight into the connection of critical reflection and the recognition of hegemonic assumptions. Brookfield writes, “The subtle tenacity of hegemony lies in the fact that, over time, it becomes completely imbedded, part of the cultural air we breathe. We cannot peel back the layers of oppression and identify any particular group or groups of people actively conspiring to keep others silent and disenfranchised. Instead, the ideas and practices of hegemony are part and parcel of everyday life—the beliefs and values that we affect and commonplace ways of seeing and ordering the world that many of us take for granted. If there is a hierarchy here, it is the hierarchy of the normal.”


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