principals are now engaged in central office work that it was inevitable that our work would eventually flourish at the district level. These administrators have experienced the power of making their authentic work public to their peers for the purpose of receiving feedback to improve the effectiveness of their work. We now know that whole districts can be transformed when the practice of professional learning communities becomes embedded into the culture of teachers, principals, and central office administrators.

Much has been written recently about the essential role of professional learning communities in improving student achievement. It seems as though every educational journal I read has a reference to learning communities. However, not enough has been written about NSRF practice and effectiveness in improving the quality of the educational experience for students and teachers. Until now. This fall, the educational honor society Phi Lambda Theta’s journal “Teaching and Learning,” devoted to the practice of reflective journals in schools and universities across the country. Each Center of Activity will receive ten copies to share with their colleagues.

In celebration of NSRF’s tenth anniversary, the Lastinger Center, an NSRF Center of Activity in Southern Florida, has received funding from the Vachos Foundation to document our learning over the last ten years. This publication will be an invaluable resource to coaches and facilitators across the country working at any level of schooling.

It is our hope that this collection of resources will support and document research that will provide the evidence necessary to deepen and sustain our work through our second decade of Critical Friends Groups and facilitative leadership.

At this year’s Winter Meeting, my colleague Gene Thompson-Groce boldly stated that our work “goes against the tide of current educational reforms.” I take great pride in that statement. I am also aware that we are contributing to a very powerful undertow pulling us back to our core beliefs of equity and social justice for every child. Although the tide is easier to see, it is the undertow that disrupts the status quo that can cause the sands to shift. NSRF is committed to continuing our tradition to build on the talents and strengths of all our members and to interrupt those practices that do not serve our students well.

I wish you all a school year guided by inquiry and curiosity, supported by colleagues and community, and focused on the success of each child.

Daniel Baron may be contacted at dbaron@bloomington.in.us

as it is a tool for encouraging reflection on the recent past. [Donna’s Reflections, 1-11-2003]

Maintaining the blog actually helps me reflect on my reflections. Studying the entries over time helps me see connections and reinforce the good work that we do for students, teachers, and schools. Now if I could just find time to work on that golf swing…

Donna Reid may be contacted at cfcgcoach@robreid.com

Visit our web site at www.nsrfharmony.org for our online archive of Connections, Upcoming Event listings, Winter Meeting registration, Protocol library and more!

Intelligences at the Table
Christina Landini, Connecticut

“Why don’t we use a Data Analysis Protocol for the kids who talk at the funeral speeches?” he said. I was floored—offended—utterly resistant. The mere suggestion of looking at any part of Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar as “data” was anathema! A decade waiting to happen—and in my classroom, no less.

In all seriousness, Peterson Toscano, close colleague and esteemed fellow CFCG coach, and I had been doing this kind of thing for years, using Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory to add depth and texture to my teaching of English to ninth graders, albeit on a much less radical scale. This plan of his would be, in fact, the ultimate test of my theory in practice: employing a protocol designed to analyze data (numbers, charts, timelines and the like) to look closely, rather, at language, thereby providing a way for students who are naturally alienated by Shakespeare to understand why Mark Anthony’s speech is dramatically more provocative and, in the end, successful, than Brutus.

During the ensuing class, we actually made good Peterson’s idea: we asked the students to count words in many times each orator mentions Caesar, how many times he mentions Rome, how many times he refers to himself; how many total lines in each speech; how many different verbs each man uses, and how many times each is used, how many pauses, how much interaction with the Plebeians, etc.). Then they charted and/or graphed their findings, hypothesizing as to why the Plebeians respond the way they do in that scene and what the eventual outcomes of these speeches might be, using evidence from the collected data. Without prompting, students who had been almost entirely passive that year—most prominently, the math/logical and naturalist kids—eagerly pulled out calculators and pencils, and hunched over their texts with zeal. They loved the counting! They made connections that they genuinely would never have made otherwise and, best of all, they seemed confident, pleased, and engaged.

Despite this success, this class was incredibly hard for me. I had to take a gigantic leap of faith and let go not only of control, but also of myriad assumptions about how literature should be taught and, moreover importantly, how students might learn, if given the chance—about Shakespearean language, about thesis development, about finding and forwarding evidence to support these. Admittedly, the kids who usually found English class easy and enjoyable were genuinely at sea and displeased. So, in addition to confirming the power of leveraging multiple intelligences in the classroom, I learned another important thing: enlist other intelligences when possible, but don’t go too far in the opposite direction from the majority’s comfort zone. As in thought bubble: Critical Friends Groups and the individual, be creative, push beyond the routine but maintain circumspection and overall balance.

This winter, I found myself at dinner in the North End of Boston after a grueling day of being Critical Friends of Ross Peterson-Veatch’s coaching at Winter Meeting, discussing with my Watkinson colleagues something that had been nagging at me for months. Why, if I have for years now so deliberately studied and implemented MI theory (to great, last-ing effect, I believed) and yet have I have not been doing the same in my work with adults in my CFCG coaching? Although I felt like an idiot, this conversation served as a major “Aha!” moment, and I tripped over my own tongue trying to ask all the questions that arose: What if the coach’s attentiveness to multiple intelligences really could have something to do with engagement in CFCG work? Might we invite more people to the table—or people back to the table who have “tried” CFCGs and determined that it’s not for them—by being more inclusive of all of the intelligences? What if we routinely applied the same concepts and methodologies to working with adults that we do with kids? What if we pushed ourselves to broaden our practice, make it more inclusive, more diverse, more welcoming of learners and thinkers in our CFCGs, as we do in our classrooms?

Let me speak plainly here: NSRF protocols do work for the people at the table and, no matter what, the content is the content—examining student work, pushing our thinking and practice as teachers and educators of all kinds. Further, there are many, many coaches and facilitators who already do what I am suggesting, because they’re smart and versatile, and because they intuitively know how to stretch and reach out to those who would otherwise be alienated by the highly cerebral, verbally/linguistic, intrapersonal, interpersonal work that we generally do in CFCGs.

But what about the people mentioned above, those who have never come to the CFCG table or, worse, those who have left the table? When I look around at my school, the vast majority of these people (in both capacities) are my colleagues who tend heavily towards the body/kinaesthetic,
Mighty Times: The Children’s March
A Teaching Tolerance & HBO Film
Movie Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Most of the material in textbooks used to teach about the Civil Rights struggle in this country focuses on a handful of heroic individuals. Very little attention is paid to the mass character of the movement, and still less notice has been given to the crucial role of young people in the fight for equal rights. Our collective failure to teach young people about the strength and courage of other students who have led the way has helped to disempower the youth of today.

In their 2004 Academy Award winning documentary, Mighty Times: The Children’s March, Debbie Bambino may be contacted at dbambino@earthlink.net

On May 10, 1963, after some five-thousand arrests and 72 hours of negotiations between local white leaders and Dr. King and his delegation, segregation was broken. The students had won!

Watching this video taught me about the courage and power of those African-American students of forty-plus years ago, but more importantly, it underscored the value of student empowerment in our current struggles to transform our schools into equitable learning communities. Designing equitable schools isn’t something that can be done by well-meaning adults “for” kids. New schools must be co-constructed with all stakeholders at the table, including the young people who will participate directly in the programs.

I urge you to order this free video for your schools. My hope is that as we view it with our students, we can invigorate their leadership potential as co-designers of our journey toward social justice.

You can order the free video, complete with standards-based lesson plans, by visiting www.teachingtolerance.org

On the first day, 973 students were arrested and held in cells for parading without a permit. On the second day, 1,922 kids were jailed, after they’d been set upon by fire hoses and vicious attack dogs. On day three, 4,163 young people were arrested and interrogated. The arrests and the demonstrations continued for the next two weeks in the “hog-pen” and all other facilities were filled with singing students, who maintained their spirits and their demands for equal rights and freedom.

Then, President John F. Kennedy tried to get Dr. King and other leaders to remove the young people from the struggle, but the involvement of the students was non-negotiable; these kids were not going to be intimidated. The kids knew that they could be hurt or killed in the struggle for justice, but they reasoned that by “being born Black in Alabama, they’d get hurt if they didn’t do something!”

On May 10, 1963, after some five-thousand arrests and 72 hours of negotiations between local white leaders and Dr. King and his delegation, segregation was broken. The students had won!