

The American School in Japan

Margaret MacLean, Vermont

Finding the right mix of professional development for teachers can be challenging: searching for journal articles and books which are timely, finding workshops and graduate level courses that are locally available. Finding the balance between meeting the needs of individuals and the needs of the school or district can be daunting. Finding time is a constant issue all these tasks and more fall on the shoulders of the "Curriculum Coordinator". Imagine, however, you are a Curriculum Coordinator and the nearest college or university is seven hours away - by plane. Magazines arrive way past the month of issue, books need to be ordered sight unseen and take equally long to arrive and as for workshop leaders or consultants, they literally need days of travel to reach you and often arrive jet lagged and intimidated by their surroundings. These are the working conditions of Patty Butz the curriculum coordinator at the American School in Japan. So, it is no small miracle that Patty was not only able to connect with the work of NSRF but to bring the work of NSRF to her school.

The American School in Japan (ASIJ) is for all intents and purposes a "typical" American school of 1528 students PreK-12. Founded in 1902 to provide a high quality education to expatriate business, embassy and missionary families, it is housed on a campus setting of attractive buildings in the suburbs of western Tokyo. Students arrive daily on school buses as they would in the US, and their days follow a "typical" US curriculum, with the addition of Japanese language, history and culture at all levels. The philosophy of the school is embodied in the statement "Developing Compassionate, Inquisitive Learners Prepared for Global Responsibility".

The school would feel very familiar to any US teacher up to the point when the students entered the room. Yes, students are students, but at ASIJ

students are of 39 different nationalities. I suppose you might find this in a classroom in Boston, Houston or LA, but at ASIJ even the American students may never have lived in the United States and the impact of the students' experiences and cultural backgrounds is felt daily in the classroom. Add to this mix ASIJ's 160 faculty, who represent 12 different



nationalities, have been trained as teachers in varied programs throughout the world and have taught in varied settings. Many diverse and interesting experiences have led them to the school.

As you can see, providing this faculty and student body with the right mix of professional development is somewhat difficult, and that task falls on Patty's shoulders. Patty has taught in international schools for over 25 years, during which she has put her talents toward varied roles in schools from Scotland to Iran. She has been at ASIJ for the past four years arriving there from the American Embassy School in New Delhi, India. Due to the isolation of the faculty at ASIJ from mainstream US professional development it made sense to Patty to look for ways in which the faculty could work together to build on each others' experiences. It made sense to find a program that would build on individual knowledge by tapping into the skills and experience of colleagues. It was in her search for this kind of program that

Patty uncovered the work of NSRF.

Knowledge of the work of NSRF came to Patty and the faculty via the Internet and subsequently a few books. No one at ASIJ has attended a workshop or introductory session, never mind a five-day seminar. In fact, no one has had any formal training of any kind. Nevertheless, from reading articles and downloading protocols, Patty and the staff plunged in. During the 2003-2004 school year every staff member at ASIJ belonged to a collaborative group modeled on their understanding of a CFG. Being a member of a group was a requirement but the kind of group you joined was up to individuals, allowing a wide variety of groups to form. Teachers met in grade level groups, around subject matter, in special interest groups and in multi-age groupings. The groups met for five scheduled sessions throughout the year and some groups held additional meetings. Activities of the groups were limited, as no one had access to the full range of tools a typical CFG has at their fingertips. All the groups, however, used the *Tuning Protocol* and some used the *Success Analysis*. In the spring of 2004, during an evaluation of the school for accreditation purposes, when asked about the offerings at the school the staff overwhelmingly pointed to their collaborative work as a positive experience and one they wanted to continue.

It was at this point that Patty contacted NSRF and asked for someone willing to travel to Japan to work with the faculty. Although I live and work primarily in Vermont and work part time for VT NSRF, 20 odd years ago I was an international school educator. I spent 10 years travelling the world and teaching. I met my husband, Bruce, in Moscow in the 1970's and I feel very much at home in an international school setting. I ended up being a match for Patty and the needs of ASIJ. Consequently, I found myself travelling the 14 hours by plane to Tokyo to work with the faculty for two days, to

(continued on page 18)

enhance the tools they had available to nurture the growth of their collaborative groups.

It was 95 degrees and very humid in Tokyo. School was about to start the following week. Most teachers had just returned from summer travelling and were dealing with the resulting jet lag. Many staff were moving classrooms after summer renovations. Perhaps not an ideal time for professional development days! Despite these inconveniences, the staff took to the work with open minds and were eager to practice the new skills and protocols introduced to them. The enthusiasm was palpable in all three groups of teachers I worked with. During our time together we packed a lot in - *Probing Questions, Feedback Nightmares, Zones, Chalk Talk, Compass Points, Save the Last Word For Me* and *The Consultancy Protocol*. The reflections from participants indicated how thirsty they were for the material and how appreciative of the body of knowledge they are tapping into: "The discussion was extremely rich, we really thought as a group, listened openly," "Colleague interaction was excellent," "Now I think I get it! I am looking forward to CFGs this year!"

Hopefully they now have enough new tools to keep their groups productive during the 2004-2005 school year. They are working on sending teachers to a CFG Coaches Institute this summer.

Since returning from Japan and reflecting on the experience, I have come to see with increased clarity how perfect the work of NSRF is for an international school setting. To open doors, deprivatize practice, and enhance our work with students through mutual support is important work for all our schools, but essential for schools as isolated as those in international school settings.

Patty we are glad you found the work of NSRF and hope you will bring new places to our doors! ■

Margaret MacLean can be contacted at margaretmaclean@netscape.net

tices called "looking at student work."

In addition, NSRF supports the planning of an annual national meeting of the LASW Collaborative, and provides space and materials for that meeting.

- Each spring since 1996, at the *National Facilitators' Meeting*, National Facilitators have gathered to reflect on their work from the past year, plan for summer (and beyond) work, and share new learning and questions. The group that gathers has grown from 10 people in 1996 to over 50 people last year.

NSRF staff plans the design and content of the meeting, arranges all of the logistics, and pays for space and materials. NSRF also provides help to those who couldn't otherwise afford the expense of travel and lodging. The registration fee covers meals only.

National Facilitators are asked to attend this meeting at least once every two years, and each Center of Activity sends at least one representative to the meeting each year. Most people attend regularly, as a way to keep in touch with new learning across the country and as a way up-date their resources.

The next National Facilitators' meeting will be held April 29-30, 2005 in Chicago.

- *Materials Project*- NSRF Facilitators and CFG Coaches from around the country have easy to access to the most recent materials and resources via a continuously updated CD-ROM that is distributed at all CFG Coaches Seminars and many NSRF Meetings. National Facilitators and CFG Coaches can stay current by accessing the "Protocols On-Line" section of the NSRF web site. In addition, NSRF supports an active CFG Coaches listserv. ■

Gene Thompson-Grove is one of three Co-Directors of NSRF. She can be contacted at gthompsongrove@earthlink.net

2005 Events

California

New Coaches Institute
February 14-18
New Coaches Institute
February 28-March 4

Connecticut

New Coaches Institute
April 4-8
Hartford, CT

Massachusetts

New Coaches Institute
January; Newton, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute
Jan 26-28, March 30-31,
April 1
Marlborough, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute
July 10-15
Cape Cod, MA

National Center

Facilitators' Meeting
April 29-30
Chicago, IL

New Hampshire

New Coaches Institute
July 25-29
Keene, NH

Oregon

New Coaches Institute
February 17-19, April 15-16
Portland, OR

Tennessee

New Coaches Institute
June 20-24
Chattanooga, TN

Wisconsin

New Coaches Institute
June 20-24
Oshkosh, WI
New Coaches Institute
June 27 - July 1
Oshkosh, WI
Open Space Technology
August 4
Oshkosh, WI