I found that these people, despite several having been in the district for a number of years, really didn’t know each other very well, and needed to build a sense of trust, particularly as they are ever to engage in the more difficult challenges facing us all in public education. We established our Group Norms, and used all varieties of protocols for getting help on an issue. Most particularly Consultancies, Sticky Issues, and One Minute Consultants – as this was frequently what they appreciated the most. Also, we used all of the variations of Text-Based Discussions – including The Final Word, Save the Last Word for Me, and Text Rendering (now a personal favorite). We discus work with the various protocols for looking at student work, sometimes using these actually to look at administrators work. Although experience with one of these administrator CFGs taught me that, when using the Tuning Protocol for a particular piece of administrator work, that regular person says they really want to hear the cool feedback first and it doesn’t matter if it’s mixed in with anything else. I will always insist on beginning with the warm feedback before going to the cool. Particularly with the Secondary Principals and Associate Principals, we frequently did a check-in at the beginning of our sessions, going around the group, asking each person simply to share where they were, what they were feeling, experiencing, dealing with, excited about, or preoccupied by – then sometimes using something from that process as the focus of a Consultancy even if it is nothing but the short Sticky Issues Protocol.

Lastly, at the end of the second year of coaching these three CFGs I indicated to the Superintendent and subsequently to each of the groups that I would not continue facilitating their sessions and encouraged them to get coaches training for themselves. This led to a Coach with very varied settings. I was offered a one-week “Beginning CFG Coaches Training” last summer, which was paid for by the district through the Staff Professional Development office. As a result, all three administrator CFGs are at some stage of functioning on their own with trained Coaches from their ranks now in each group. An additional positive spin-off from all of this work has been the ever-expanding use of some of the protocols by our district administrators while working with their various staffs, tackling real issues, looking at student work, and beginning CFGs among the teachers in their buildings. It has taken five years to get this far, but it seems to have been worth the effort and I’d like to believe that it has at least some acceptance with the students in the elementary and secondary schools throughout our district.

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American School in Japan
(continued from page 5)

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 easier to practice to 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 - Problematic 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 new and how appreciative of the body of knowledge they are tapping into: “The discussion was extremely rich. I left thinking about the group, listened openly.” “Collaborage 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.

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

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Directors Report
(continued from page 17)

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 11
Marlborough, MA
CCE New Coaches Institute
July 10-15

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 28 - July 7
Oshkosh, WI

Open Space Technology
August 4
Oshkosh, WI

The Practice of Freedom
Camille Green, Connecticut

D o we all share a common theory of action or a common philosophy about teaching and learning? I wonder. Do we all believe that we need to educate our urban youth to view education as – to use bell hook’s phrase “the practice of freedom”? What does and means that what would and practice look like and sound like in our newly formed small urban high schools? For the last three years I have been an external coach in schools and school districts engaged in a variety of transformational initiatives mostly in urban areas and in mostly high schools. The Gates High School Transformation initiative in urban areas stresses personalization and establishment of relationships in small schools and small classrooms. Given the opportunity to create a new paradigm of teaching and learning, I have been disheartened when I have visited newly established small urban high schools. More often than not I have observed not the practice of freedom but the practice of continued domination and control of the students by the adults. The discipline that I have observed is a discipline that grows out of oppression, external control of those with power (adults) over those who ostensibly have no power (the high school students). Something is amiss here. This oppressive discipline is metered out to students by mainstream and non-mainstream educators alike.

Very few adult educators in urban educational settings seem to know how to transform the behavior and will of those students least served by the education system without resorting to external control and discipline. This knowing how to teach to transform does not occur overnight rather it is a journey you take over time as a teacher. It is a journey informed and shaped by an unshakable belief in the humanity and dignity of each urban high school student. It is a journey that requires that we as adults suspend and examine our previously held assumptions and expectations about students who are “other” than ourselves because of their racial or national heritage, historical oppression, or their socioeconomic status. Your job, should you decide to accept it, is to touch the spirit and the humanness of each urban teenager and channel that spirit to engage in positive ways with learning and academic excellence.

The challenge is to engage the urban student in meaningful curriculum and learning experiences, to see him or her and help him or her make sense of his or her current condition in life. The content and the process of education should enlighten the learner to see how to shape another reality, through receiving an education, without compromising what he or she value as members of the non-dominant culture whether that culture be Haitian, Vietnamese, African, Carribbean or another.

As a teacher of English in urban high schools for many years, I found that my ability to connect with urban teenagers disengaged from the educational process depended on developing relationships with them.

Getting to know my students as unique individuals was one of the many joys of teaching. The more I got to know each one of my students well helped me to develop a lot of strategies that helped me in my journey to empower them to become more authentic learners. In order to get to know each one of my students well I found that the most essential is to construct with the student a sense of community. In our learning community the notion that we could learn from each other and the notion that we all brought our strengths and weaknesses to our community was... (continued on page 14)

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NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

Connections: a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG Coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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