Looking at my work is hard: Changing my work is even harder,” observed CFG Coach Ron Venable when asked what was most surprising about participating in a Teacher as Researcher (TAR) CFG last year. Hard as it may be, changing the work of schools is the ongoing mission of many of the CFG coaches and facilitators who practice in the Houston area. As a not-for-profit public, private partnership, the Houston A+ Challenge advances Critical Friends Group work in Houston by sponsoring New Coach Training Seminars three times a year under the leadership of National Facilitator Michaelann Kelley, offering coaches the leadership of National Facilitator and five of these groups are still active. The action Seven two-year, $10,000 grants were awarded, trained CFG Coach in the greater Houston area.

Teacher as Researcher Grants

One of the newer initiatives promoted by the Houston A+ Challenge is the TAR Grant. In March of 2004, a request for proposals was sent to every trained CFG Coach in the greater Houston area. Seven two-year, $10,000 grants were awarded, and five of these groups are still active. The action

With a strong focus on equity, these five groups have collected data that shows that CFGs can have a huge effect on teacher and student learning. For example, TAR participants reported that being in a CFG helped them focus on student needs and student achievement. The most powerful learning came with the realization that “our group learned to value our own knowledge.” Being in the TAR CFGs has encouraged many members of the five inquiry groups to reach out to other educators and spread their knowledge by presenting seminars and conferences such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the NSRF Research Forum.

This growth in teacher learning affects student learning as well. Besides improvements in standardized test scores, the teacher researchers report that students are more engaged in classroom activities and more reflective in their work. Being in a CFG helps educators become more focused, collaborative, and reflective. These important habits are then passed on to students through such means as assignments that depend on collaboration and portfolios that develop skills in reflection. Thus, through the support of the TAR Grant, these CFGs have changed teacher practice and student work.

CFG Reunion

The Houston CFG Reunion was held on Saturday, February 25, at the University of Houston Hilton. Daniel Baron, Co-Director of NSRF (continued on page 20)
indicates wealth and inherited importance. Yet he also proves elemental and powerful like rain from the heavens. Rain as an image is both ordinary and holy because it defies human control, gives life, and yet forms an integral part of everyday existence. Craig Mack enters into the music community from a position of authority, as a sheriff and through the strength of his groove, defeating all challenges...

Hip-hop and its concomitant culture expose us to the underbelly of the poor urban experience. Hip-hop presents, explains, and unapologetically exposes the lived experiences of urban east coast and west coast youth and their families and their communities. It is through these lived experiences portrayed in their raw form that we can engage as audiences. Hip-hop music expresses a complex dichotomy: music simultaneously speaks of love and hate; the high and low of human existence; the sacred and the profane. In spite of our annoyance with the many ways in which the lyrics, gestures and icons of the rappers, Hip-hop dancers, “MCers” and “Djers” and other players and creators of the hip-hop culture and its music assault our sensibilities, in just as many ways the beat and the rhythm and the lyrics compel us and hold us in awe.

As an “old head,” in hip-hop jargon, I am proud to have met Hip Hop...
Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Hip-Hop... (continued from page 20)

Additional Resources:

Pough, Gwendolyn, Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere, 2004, Northeastern University Press.


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Changing the Work... (continued from page 20)

NSRF’s Living History... (continued from page 7)

strands within NSRF. For example, there is no one definition of a Center of Activity, so it is hard to design strategies to support the various applications of the work for vastly different centers.

The creative tension we feel as a very small staff is to support the ever-expanding work with our limited resources. We are proud of our work, and delighted when people seek us out to thank us for our support.

When not working for NSRF, what makes up your life?

My husband, my daughter Cecilia, stepdaughter Emilie, and I spend time each winter on our working farm in Jamaica. We have chickens and goats. We grow pineapples, mangos, ginger, potatoes, and cabbage. This farm has been in my husband’s family for many generations. My life is rich in love and family.

Heidi Vosekas can be reached at jvosekas@nsrharmony.org

Peggy Silva can be reached at psilva@nsrse.com

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.

adopted June 2001

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

• School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
• Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
• The key to this effort is the development of a “learning community” based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
• To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.


Donna Reid can be contacted at cfgecoach@nsrreid.com

11th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting
January 25-27, 2007 • Seattle, Washington

W e are thrilled to bring our 11th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting to Seattle. Washington. The combination of the growing work of our Centers of Activity in Seattle and Portland with the incredible location promises to create a truly memorable event.

With educators from across the nation, we will work in ways our CFGs do to deepen our skills, press for insights, and find the courage in community to ensure that our work reflects our mission to foster educational and social equity. This year’s Winter Meeting will provide a structure to support varying entry points to the work of NSRF, as well as topic-based home groups allowing participants to delve deeply into an area of interest.

Since 1995, the Annual NSRF Winter Meeting has been a source of renewal for thousands of educators, providing time to think and inquire, and a space for courageous work to take root. We invite you to grow with us in our tradition of adult learning in the service of student achievement.

Scholarships for Winter Meeting

Each year, NSRF keeps a commitment to providing scholarships for Winter Meeting participants. If you would like to attend the Winter Meeting and are in need of a full or partial scholarship, particularly if you are a classroom teacher, please contact the National Center at 812.330.2702 to apply.

If you are able to contribute to the scholarship fund, please contact our Development Office at 812.334.8179.

2nd Annual NSRF Research Forum

There is a deep and growing interest in research related to the work of NSRF, CFGs, and other efforts to create learning communities within schools. This one day forum, held on January 24th provides an opportunity to share what you have learned as a researcher or practitioner and learn from others about the work of NSRF, CFGs, or other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. If you are interested in attending or presenting, please visit our web site at www.nsrharmony.org/wrm_research.html.

NSRF Centers Council Meeting

The Centers Council Meeting is open to all people involved in the work of NSRF who want to share the successes, challenges, and dilemmas related to the work of their NSRF Center of Activity. Join us on January 28th to share your learning, raise issues, and co-construct our collective work as a national organization.

What participants have to say:

“I’ve experienced transformation and community like nothing else.”

“Fantastic. [The Annual] NSRF [Winter Meeting] is not a sit and get kind of conference. It is truly about getting people to have meaningful conversations.”

“My [Annual NSRF Winter Meeting] home group was one of the greatest professional experiences of my life.”

“I grew, I gained confidence, I’m excited about the possibilities!”

“This has been the most powerful three days of my educator life!”

Meeting Elements:
• Topic-Based Home Groups
• Keynote Address
• Reception
• Open Space Technology

Location:
Sheraton Seattle Hotel
1400 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101
206.321.9000

Sleeping Rooms:
Single/Double $139/night
Mention NSRF Winter Meeting for group rate.
Rate available until 12/30/06

Fees:
$390 Winter Meeting
$100 Research Forum
No fee - Centers Council Meeting
Register now and we’ll bill you later!

Registration:
Registration is online at www.nsrharmony.org/wintermeeting.html or, you may register by phone at 812.330.2702

Registration: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

22 Fall 2006