Connections

the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Fall 2006

Director's Report Steven Strull, Director

At press time, summer will be melting into the new school year. As I sit here today and think about my first column for *Connections*, much of the country is experiencing a record heat wave and the world is experiencing devastating wars. I am struck, though, at how normal my days are – exciting, challenging, loving, and rewarding – yet, for me, normal still. For many in this world, and for many of the children within our reach, normal is much, much harder. It is for children that NSRF continues to critically examine school and schooling with an eye on equitable outcomes for each child.

The Director's Report seems to serve many functions; at times, this space is used to chart the course of historical decisions or to publicly discuss roles and purposes for Centers of Activity and National Facilitators. At other times, a director or directors, in an effort toward transparency and accountability, have given a gentle reminder as to our core principles and what we hold important in our work together. Finally, some have chosen to share a lesson about something they are passionate about, an insight into their thinking. I hope to continue in that tradition and offer columns that reflect my current thinking and the work of NSRF and our collaborative community.

When I was appointed Director of NSRF, it was with the understanding that we would, together, build a strong national organization that could advocate and negotiate on behalf of our work together. Toward that end, I would like to report to you about my initial investigation into our practice and the practices of other organizations with similar theories of action. I began to ask some questions about the business practices of NSRF and the practices of some other organizations that also offer professional development within the broad construct of professional community. I concluded two things that were already hunches: 1) when it comes to depth of learning and commitment to fundamental and critical change in the service of children and their achievement, NSRF is among the very best at what we do, and 2) many other organizations are better at marketing their services and explaining their work to professional development decision makers at the school and district level.

With that in mind, I began asking folks to think with me about exactly what business we are in and how we are going to go about explaining it to the market. We "tuned" this working document in response to my question at our recent director's retreat in July. Here is how we are beginning to discuss and differentiate our services:

Critical Friends Group Coaching Seminars have been the core of our work since our inception. These seminars are well-regarded experiences where participants learn the tools and techniques of coaching a CFG along with a substantive investigation into the importance and theoretical assumptions of professional collaborative community. Over the years, we have learned how to shape these experiences to be more context-specific. We have also learned that follow-up beyond the seminar experience is necessary for CFGs to be an effective component of any school reform initiative. While our work started with classroom teachers, we are finding more and more district personnel are out-of-classroom "coaches" and it is increasingly important for them to be able to facilitate adult learning as the center of their coaching practice. Within this line of work we also offer advanced coaches seminars, school culture semi-

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Taking Up the Research Challenge

Kevin Fahey, Massachusetts

It is not surprising that, in an organization whose essential principles include such commitments as making our work public, and both exposing and challenging our fundamental assumptions, research should claim an increasingly important part of the organizational conversation. After ten years of helping schools and districts build more collaborative, reflective communities that support good teaching, powerful learning and equitable practice, NSRF is in a unique position and perhaps even has an important responsibility to ask and answer some critical questions. And there is compelling evidence that NSRF has accepted this challenge.

This past year, NSRF has:

1. Created the position of National Research Coordinator,
2. Hosted an NSRF Research Conference, and
3. Created a task force to develop a multiyear NSRF research agenda, which was submitted to the Institution for Educational Research for funding at the end of July.

Each of these actions is evidence that thoughtful research that is helpful both to scholars and NSRF practitioners will be a crucial part of NSRF work as the work moves forward into its second decade.

National Research Coordinator: In the spring of 2005, the Accountability Council created the position of National Research Coordinator. The Accountability Council and the Co-Directors felt that if research and scholarship were to become a more central focus in NSRF work, then it would be important to have a formal position to support this focus. In the initial discussions, the Co-Directors felt that some initial goals for the Research Coordinator would be to (1) facilitate the creation of a multiyear research agenda, (2) partner with the Harmony Research Institute, especially in support of the Annual Research Conference, (3) develop an online database of NSRF-related research, and (4) facilitate a conversation around a theoretical framework of NSRF and CFG work. In general, like much of our work in NSRF, the job of the Research Coordinator is to "coach" – to support, to ask difficult questions, and to be transparent - an ongoing, complicated, professional conversation. Naturally, many of these goals for the National Research Coordinator are still in the beginning stages; however, there is reason, especially with our IES proposal and Annual Research Conference, to feel optimistic about the *(continued on page 15)*

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

Editorial Board: Debbie Bambino, Sarah Childers, Camilla Greene, Debbi Laidley, and Greg Peters

If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812.330.2702 or dbambino@earthlink.net

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

We are thrilled to be bringing 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 812.334.8379.

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.nsrfharmony.org/wm_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.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html or, you may register by phone at 812.330.2702

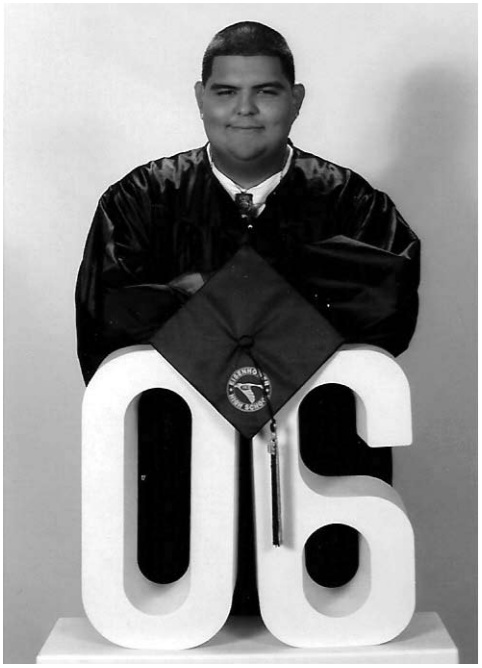
Transformation of Body and Soul: One Hispanic Teenager's Journey into Finding 'Self'

Michaelann Kelley, Texas

Monday, March 27, 2006, seemed like any other spring day until Beth Clayton, a world history teacher, came by to get a cup of coffee. Beth beckoned me, "Did you hear there is going to be a walkout today by the Hispanic students?"

I replied with a quick, "Had not heard anything and what about?"

As I was moving around the room the next period, a sophomore girl, Di, asked me to sit and talk to her. She informed me of the impending walkout. I asked how they pulled it together. Some of the kids had been talking on myspace.com and text messaging. She said, "You understand. You showed us the movie about the children's march during the civil rights movement." She was looking for my approval. I felt I could not promote the walking out of school and I was not even sure I understood the reason for the walkout yet. (To oversimplify the bill that prompted these reactions from students, HR4437 would make it a felony to be in the United States illegally, and impose new penalties on companies who employ illegal immigrants.) Yet, I could not tell her not to do it either; I knew the power of standing up for something in which you believe and the satisfaction and pride in realizing that you had the courage to make a tough decision.



Jesse's graduation portrait

The bell rang and masses of kids went to the front of the school and waited. They waited. The administration was there; they waited. The principal spoke briefly, saying that this was not the right thing to do and that there were other ways to get your voices heard. The group suddenly began moving forward – peacefully, but forward out the door, with Jesse in the front as the leader.

The group of about 150 students marched nine miles and concluded its march near the immigration department. "We just decided, hey, it's time for us to stand up for our rights and protect our citizenship and our families," Jesse said. "I know that our voice was heard today and it will be even stronger tomorrow." Students at school were kept informed of the students' progress through the internet, and impromptu discussions popped up in many classes. I received e-mail from a colleague in another district complaining that she wished her students were as motivated, organized, and passionate about an issue!

The media immediately spotted Jesse as the organizer and sought him out for interviews. Jesse said a larger rally was planned for Tuesday, downtown. "I challenge all Latino and Hispanic-descent people to come out with us tomorrow, to miss one day of work, because that will show the city of Houston, and everyone in the nation will see how badly this (proposed immigration restriction) will affect the country."

Jesse led an additional walkout the next day to City Hall; this time students from all over the city walked out with Eagle High School students. Politicians at City Hall spoke to the students giving their support for the students' activism, but also pointed out that an education is a needed part of success and encouraged them to stay in school and protest on the weekends and after school.

Jesse was on television, in newspapers, and in cyberspace. He took all of this attention in stride. Jesse was still a good academic student. Although he was a little more eager to participate in class discussions, even after all this attention, it still amazed me how the other students looked up to Jesse because I knew how the year began.

The beginning of school can always cause a little apprehension, even for the most well-adjusted of teenagers. But what if you had to worry about fitting your six-foot three-inch, 400-pound body into a desk made for a person about half your size? What if the school dress code policy required you to tuck in your shirt, which is the only thing covering your stomach? What if your new football uniform was taped to your undershirt just to stay down and your socks were taped to your legs to stay up? Jesse had to deal with these physical challenges as well as the psychological trauma of being

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A Tale of Two Schools, or The Role of a Principal in a Collaborative Culture

Debbi Laidley, California

How do the decisions and actions of a school principal determine the degree to which a faculty chooses to work collaboratively? In my work with administrators and their staffs in a large urban district, I've seen firsthand two very different approaches. These principals' stories give life to the research observations of author Warren Bennis, who said, "Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done. Managers push. Leaders pull. Managers command. Leaders communicate."

In one school (fictitiously named Parktown), I watched teachers make a tremendous shift: they began opening their doors and breaking down their isolation, co-planning and co-teaching, examining student work and sharing teaching practice. Meanwhile, in another school (fictitiously named Brighton) less than 5 miles away, the teachers expressed a sense of fragmentation and continuing isolation as they struggled to reorganize into small learning communities and implement new lesson designs in English and algebra classes.

At Parktown School, the English department spent most of this past school year piloting three sets of standards-based designed lessons, taking notes on their implementation of the curriculum and on the modifications they made to meet students' needs. In October, these teachers started out demonstrating strong resistance to the use of the teaching units that were provided to them. Despite their resistance within a few months, they had begun examining students' work (initially alone or in very small groups with the literacy coach) and providing feedback and ideas for revision to the consultants who had designed the units.

The school's second-year principal listened to their concerns, discussed the units and shared teachers' feedback with district personnel, and supported the literacy coach in her work with the teachers in the English department. In mid-January, the literacy coach became one of the first in the district to begin consistently co-teaching the lessons with a colleague, planning and reflecting on both process and progress together. The principal, an assistant principal, and the coach offered the teachers additional paid time to meet together to collaborate on the shared lessons. Perhaps most importantly, they all backed off when the teachers resisted the opportunity to work together.

By March, the tone of the Parktown teachers' interactions had begun to change. They brought student work to professional development meetings and shared with colleagues from other district schools. They provided district staff with samples of revisions they'd made to the lessons; citations of other resources they had used to augment the designs in order to provide necessary scaffolding for students; and copies of entries from their reflection journals. In June, the principal participated fully in two days of professional development along with the teachers. She and the literacy coach joined the classroom teachers in writing, sharing, and revising short memoirs. By the end of the second day, the principal approached district leaders with her teachers' request: "We'd like to come in for a full day of planning, a week after school is out, before people leave town for vacations and before some of us start teaching summer school. Is the funding still available?"

A few miles away, Brighton School's veteran principal juggled the demands of multiple initiatives required by the central district: conversion of the large school into small learning communities; implementation of designed lessons in algebra; and incorporation of required reforms that

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Hip-Hop: A Crucial Addition to the Curriculum

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

What do I as a middle class, baby boomer, African American female, former high school teacher of English, current NSRF National Facilitator and school coach from Brooklyn need to know and be able to do in order to interrupt the predictive factors of race, class, and gender on the success of African American males in school and in life? That is the essential question I grapple with every day in my work and in my life. Grappling with that question engages me in forging difficult alliances across generations, across gender, across cultural differences, and it engages me in going to the heart of my own fears. For much of my teaching career, I have turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to hip-hop music. For years I have been put off, disgusted by the rhetoric, demeaning lyrics, gestures and misogynistic gangsta' posturing that accompanies the hip-hop culture and those who create, sustain and market it. I conveniently blamed all the ills and/or lack of academic achievement of poor black males on THAT MUSIC!

Over the last couple of years I have been enlightened-by young African American males who have taken it upon themselves to "educate" me. First there were many long and difficult conversations about hip-hop. Then there were the times when I listened to certain hip-hop artists that they admired. My young male friends gave me six CDs containing their favorite hip-hop music. Listening to those CDs, with their politically conscious messages and positive black male affirmations, triggered the start of my self-reflective exploration of hip-hop.

But the turning point for me was when I had an opportunity to sit in on a hip-hop class at Drexel University conducted by Dr. James Patterson. During that class, a Socratic discussion focused on Dr. Gwendolyn Pough's book *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere* (2004), I noted the promise of the engaged, analytical minds of young black male students at work; I was forced to seriously reexamine my views about hip-hop.

During my intense reflection I had an opportunity to spend the afternoon with Brooklyn College professor Dr. Pryia Parmar, who, with Dr. James Patterson, coauthored a hip-hop curriculum for high school students. I also had a meeting with Dr. Imani Perry after reading his book, *Prophets of the Hood* (2004).

The insights of both my student friends and their author/professor allies have transformed me from someone who disliked hip-hop music and the culture that produces it, to a hip-hop novice embracing the beat, the message and the power of this complex art form.

Spreading the Word

If we espouse the belief that each student must be able to read for understanding, think critically, problem solve and reason; if we espouse a focus on developing the literacy skills of each student; and if we choose to engage marginalized students who are our most reluctant readers, then we need to incorporate hip-hop into our curriculum as a valid form of written, linguistic, and aesthetic art. Analysis of hip-hop, both critical and affirming, must become an integral part of our classrooms.

There has been much discussion around the notion of critical pedagogy. I propose that critical pedagogy is that learning that goes to the heart of a culture's lived experience in whatever format it is manifested. Critical pedagogy for poor African American males disengaged in our high school classrooms and dubbed "reluctant readers" must deal with identity, the study of difference, and the study of racism. hip-hop is the vehicle, the critical pedagogy, with the ability to engage all students, particularly poor urban African American males, and I might add all youth since hip-hop has become a global phenomenon, if only we are willing to acknowledge its powerful potential.

Our Task

The challenge in using hip-hop as a

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NSRF's Living History: An Interview with Heidi Vosekas

Peggy Silva, New Hampshire

NSRF's Living History is a series of interviews with members about our past, our present and our hopes for the future. In this issue we hear from Heidi Vosekas, NSRF National Center Coordinator, as she shares her story with Peggy Silva of New Hampshire for Connections.

Two-year old Cecilia Campbell Vosekas raced across the room to blow out the candles on NSRF's 10th Anniversary cake, completely convinced that the party was being held in her honor. Cecilia has been an important visitor to the Winter Meetings, in the company of her mom, Heidi, our National Center Coordinator. We wanted to bring Heidi out from behind the desk at Winter Meeting to get to know her work on behalf of NSRF National.

Cecilia Campbell Vosekas and Heidi Vosekas

Please talk about your history with NSRF.

Since travel has always been my primary goal, I never thought that I would be working in my hometown, back in the Harmony School from which I had graduated. I had returned home after graduating from Earlham College, a Quaker school in Richmond, Indiana, and was washing dishes in a restaurant when I learned of a job at the Harmony Education Center in 1999. Shortly after I arrived, my temporary job evolved into a chance to create a national center for NSRF. I vividly remember the excitement brewing as we dreamed about the future of NSRF. Two of us staffed the office in 2000; we grew to six people, and now there are four of us who support NSRF's work across the country.

So few of us have had the opportunity to visit Harmony School. Please describe your school experience as a student there.

There were twelve students in my graduating class, many of whom had attended Harmony for their entire school experience. The courses that made the most lasting impressions on me included a ninth grade course in Greek and Latin roots, and a health class in my senior year. We were required to teach our peers the information we had learned during the first semester of that health course. I still remember dressing like queens with a friend and handing out condoms on a street corner in Bloomington!

During my junior year in high school, my mom planned a kind of Swiss Family Robinson experience for my sister and me. I took study courses from Harmony while camping in Jamaica for seven months. This experience changed the course of all of our lives.

I built on this experience as a senior, designing an independent study as my semester-long senior project. I studied German, then lived in Switzerland and Austria for several months, implementing a series of community service projects there. Since my high school career had afforded me so much international travel, I decided to spend a college semester in El Paso, Texas, studying border issues. Harmony School trained me to be a self-directed learner and to cast a wide net in seeking learning experiences in diverse places.

The connection between Harmony School and NSRF makes sense to me. Harmony is backed by 30 years of community building and has a strong dedication to kids and families.

What is the work that is most satisfying to you?

The organization comes to life when we begin to plan the Winter Meeting. It is the time when all the work we do coalesces into direct support of our membership. We have conversations with those planning the event for thousands of committed CFG coaches. We see the support we offer people who are directly impacting the lives of students. That is both satisfying and rewarding. Reading the evaluations makes it all worth it.

Our staff has been together for five years, so we know how to work together effectively. What is difficult for us is that as the work deepens and expands, we are experiencing growing pains. The organization has so many fluid definitions of its work in various places, yet as we grow it would benefit us to establish a common language the

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Changing the Work: A Report from the Houston Center of Activity

Donna Reid, Texas

"Looking at my work is hard: Changing my work is even harder," observed CFG Coach and high school art teacher 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 the many 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 clinics for experienced coaches, and supporting TAR grants for CFGs across the city.

Teacher as Researcher Karen North with a student at The Rice School/ La Escuela Rice

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 research questions that these CFGs have been studying include:

1. Can computer programming increase mastery of algebraic computation skills? led by Karen North, Westside H. S., Houston ISD
2. How can social studies teachers improve the academic achievement of our students who are non-native speakers of English? led by Peggy Given, Johnston M. S., Houston ISD
3. How can we better work with special populations such as severely handicapped, resource, content mastery, and English as a Second Language students to increase their literacy? led by Michaelann Kelley, Eisenhower H.S., Aldine ISD
4. How do CFGs impact student achievement in the core curriculum? led by Mary Matthews, Best Elementary, Alief ISD, and
5. How do teachers and administrators know that their individual practice impacts learning in aesthetics and literacy? a multidistrict, multi-institution group led by Gayle Curtis, Hamilton M. S., Houston ISD.

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 at 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)*

Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning

A Book Review by Chris Kingsbery, Pennsylvania

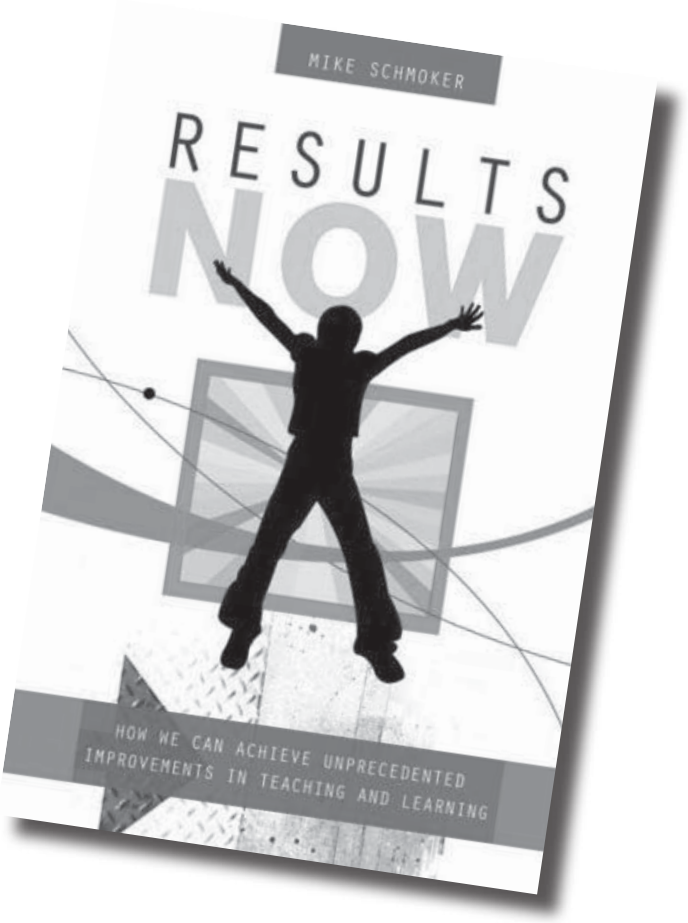
Mike Schmoker, in his new book *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning*, urges educators to confront the brutal facts about American public education. Rather than offering a defeatist attitude about these facts, Schmoker encourages his readers to see them as opportunities to "blow the lid off school attainment, dramatically and swiftly reduce the achievement gap, and enhance the 'life chances' of all children, regardless of their social or economic circumstances." (p. 2)

Schmoker's focus is clear: in order to make any kind of gain the focus must be on instruction and the supervision of instruction. We must "address the monumental gap between common and effective teaching practices, and between typical and effective instructional supervision." (p. 3)

In this very accessible text, Schmoker sets a tone of urgency for American educators and provides a simple yet elegant framework for using what we already know to transform both adult and student learning in our nation's schools. The book moves from stating the brutal facts into a rationale for a focus on academic literacy across all content areas. Schmoker speaks to the power of "authentic literacy" and describes it as "teaching critical and argumentative literacy" (p. 165) through authentic experiences. His advocacy is strong and convincing.

His final chapter focuses on leading a professional learning community. This focus on clear leadership to sustain this learning environment was refreshing to read, as this seems to be the area where many such initiatives falter. He considers not only building-level leadership, but the role of the central office and state in promoting professional learning and accountability for that learning in our nation's schools. His final conclusion is a call to action for "teachers and school leaders at the state or province, district and school levels to immediately and relentlessly begin to share, examine, and engage in dialogue about [the reality of schooling in America] on every occasion—until our actions and commitments begin to erase the awful inertia of past decades." (p. 164)

> *"The 'solutions' offered are achievable and the results are what we are looking for."*



This book would be a useful text to use with school leaders to focus their improvement efforts. The language and message are simple yet compelling. The "solutions" offered are achievable and the results are what we are looking for. This is not a cookie-cutter formula for school improvement; it is a conversation starter that raises the sense of urgency we all need to share around the very real gap between what we know about instruction and supervision and what we commonly see in our schools. ■

Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning, *by Mike Schmoker, ASCD, 2006*
www.ascd.org/books

Chris Kingsbery can be contacted at ckingsbery@aol.com

"I Don't See Color, Kids Are Just Kids"

Tanisha Davis-Doss, Washington

I have heard this statement over and over in my years of education, and quite frankly, I'm terrified rather than being impressed. Educators tell me this continually, and I believe they want me to be impressed with their color-blind philosophy, but I am not. Let me tell you why.

When you say you do not see color, you are telling me that you do not see me. So, if you say you don't see color and kids are just kids, you are telling me that you are ignoring specific details that comprise the character and being of individual children. Each child comes into your classroom with different experiences, needs, thoughts, and perspective. That child's color has a great deal to do with their experiences, needs, thoughts, and perspective. Take me for instance; I have many identities that make me who I am. I am black, I'm a woman, and I'm an educator, just to list a few. Black is the most essential identity because it is the one element that I am judged on every single day of my life. Before society sees a woman, they see a black woman; before society sees an educator, they see a black educator. With both positive and negative implications alike, it is how I am viewed once I step outside of my home each day.

"When you say you do not see color, you are telling me that you do not see me."

If I am being judged day to day by the color of my skin, how can we ignore the color of our students? When we teach, we must realize that the students coming into our classrooms have not necessarily had the exact same experiences that we may have had. Judging those students on our own experiences and biases leads to institutionalized racism, so I ask you, how can you not see color? I am not asking you to allow the color differences to prevent you from being a thoughtful educator, I am simply asking you to be aware of those differences and allow yourself to live in "awareness." Living in awareness simply means that you realize the differences, you don't feel compelled to apologize for the differences, and that you consider those differences when you are working with all students.

Please do not read my message and confuse the term *color* with *low-income*. The two are not the same. *Low-income children* does not equal *children of color*. I am stating this for my colleagues teaching in private schools and privileged neighborhoods. Just because a student of color comes from a middle-class family, does not mean that student is now "raceless." No disrespect to Ruby Payne, but we educators tend to hide behind the poverty issue when speaking on racism and the two are different entities. Each adds to the disproportionate circumstances in our nation's school buildings, but they are not the same.

I get discouraged at the end of our trainings when participants make comments like, **"I like the training, but leave the equity stuff out, kids are just kids."** I'm even more discouraged when I realize these educators are teaching children, and I'm not sure I have succeeded in my goal of energizing them about CFG work. To me, CFGs give us a tool to live in "awareness," so if a participant in my training still feels that "kids are just kids" at the end of the week, I feel as though I have failed that educator, but most importantly, I have failed their students. ■

Tanisha Davis-Doss may be contacted at tanishad@rdcc.org

Diversity Books for Young Children

Sarah Childers, Indiana

Young children may be my best teachers when it comes to issues of equity. With their open, inquisitive minds and often brutal honesty, young children are unmatched when it comes to asking hard questions, pointing out differences, and keeping parents and teachers accountable. When someone looks, speaks or acts differently from their accustomed norm, young children are not shy to ask why, often loudly and in public.

The conversation between adult and child (and the unwilling subject of conversation) can be profound, funny or startlingly tragic. How many times have we overheard a child in the grocery store ask their parent something along the lines of "why is that man walking funny?" only for the parent to shush the child and tell them not to stare. How many times might we have responded this way ourselves, out of fear of embarrassing the person of interest? While thinking we are being "polite," this response sends the message to the child that differences are not okay to talk about, see, or point out, and are therefore shameful and bad. The child's voice gets silenced, and an opportunity is lost.

Young children also love to point out differences among themselves, excluding others because of any of a million reasons. Questions arise among preschoolers about why one child doesn't eat meat, or another child has two moms. Young children notice differences in skin color too, differences we are often reluctant to address. In hindsight I'm wondering who is really protected by the silencing around difference; is it the person who is different or the adult who does the silencing?

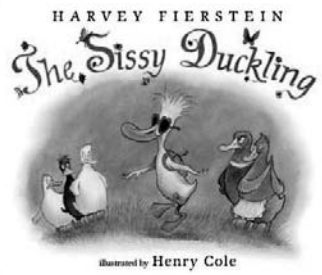
We must answer questions when they arise, honestly and openly, so that differences are not kept in the shadows, unspoken and unvalued. We must recognize differences *with* young children in order to build within them the capacity to feel secure about their own individuality and differences as well as value the differences in others.

A visit to my local library's web site proved very helpful in finding resources for addressing diversity issues with young children. Their diversity booklist provided a wealth of children's books, of which I picked only a handful to review. I found the following books helpful and often simply profound.

Who is the Beast?
by Keith Baker

Suitable for the youngest listeners, *Who is the Beast?* is a gorgeously illustrated picture book that introduces us to a tiger who wonders why all of the animals in the jungle are scared of him. The snake is scared of his big green eyes, the monkey of his swishing tail. But the tiger is wise, and points out that they all have eyes, and that the monkey too has a swishing tail. By finding common ground, they come to understand one another and see that, in fact, they are all beasts.

The Sissy Duckling
by Harvey Fierstein



Elmer is a duck who has many talents. He loves to bake, put on puppet shows, and build sand castles. But none of the other boy ducks like to do the same things as Elmer. When Elmer's dad tries to teach him baseball, Elmer is relieved when he strikes out and can go back to the things he enjoys. His father is ashamed, especially when the other boys call him a sissy. His father disowns him, and Elmer leaves home to make his way alone. But when a hunter shoots his father, Elmer's unique talents and caring save his life, and open the door to renewing their relationship. A great story about being different, strained family relationships, and accepting your own gifts and uniqueness.

Bigmama's
by Donald Crews

In this nostalgic story, a black man recalls a summer from his childhood when he and his family took a long journey to Bigmama's ("Not that she was big, but she was Mama's mama") and tells of their delight in discovering that everything is just as they remember it. The children explored around the house, the pond, the chicken coop, and found an adventure at each turn. Better yet, they found strength in family and created

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Protocol Structure as an Equity Pedagogy for Student-to-Student Critical Friendship

Greg Peters, California

This month in Connections, *we've combined two regular features, "Protocols in Practice" and "Students at the Center" in this piece about students and protocols.*

This past July, Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) National held its annual Small Schools' Project Summer Institute. Having just provided CFG Coaches Training for dozens of its participants, the organizers wanted to hold "critical friends' conversations" within this professional development week. Aware that a fair number of schools would bring students, I requested that during this time we provide an opportunity for interested students to engage in some critical friendship of their own.

The hope was to explore what was necessary to leverage the tools used to support teachers to reflect on and improve their own work as an equity pedagogy to engage and support students to reflect on and improve the work that is most important to their own learning. Students from Global Connections (a new small school in Seattle) and from San Francisco's Leadership High School agreed to bring pieces of individual work that they wanted or needed to improve. In addition, students from Leadership agreed to facilitate the protocols for the Global Connections students. We knew the approach would be organic: they would bring a piece of work and I would bring a toolbox of protocols to consider. Together the whole group would discuss and decide this might be a powerful strategy for students and if so, how to best fine-tune it and bring it back for future use.

Students at Leadership High School use protocols to prepare for their Senior Exhibitions

During the first of two ninety-minute sessions, Jacob and Domenic, Global Connections students, presented while Guilder and Israel, Leadership students, facilitated Tuning and Consultancy Protocols. The group was fortunate to have two trained CFG coaches who supported the facilitators. After reviewing the tuning protocol with the whole group, both students – about to become seniors - presented work from their school's junior project which would be used as a basis for a deeper, richer and more researched senior project. After the first set of protocols, debriefing with the presenters and the adult and student facilitators brought a couple of immediate lessons to the surface which, I must confess, I am a bit embarrassed to say should have seemed obvious:

1. Student presenters – just like adult presenters – need the support of a preconference meeting with the facilitators to review the work and match the protocol. I too fall into the trap of under-preparing students who cooperatively take on the challenges we put before them. In this case it led to one of our student presenters – Domenic – checking in with me just before the protocol and telling me his work was not ready to present. Upon further dialogue, this was only part of the anxiety that was welling up for him. In fact, he had not anticipated the group would be so large (there were about 16 other students in the room from other schools) and was much more nervous about presenting than about his work. After a bit of a pep talk in which I clarified the expectations of the group – and of his ability, Dom agreed to present if we broke the group into two smaller, concurrent protocols. In the end, Dominic said he got a lot out of sharing his work – and part of his challenge to grow and improve was in the actual act of receiving feedback. He even shared, "I had to get up a couple of times and get a drink

of water. I had to clear my head, calm my nerves." This relates to my second learning for the day:

2. If we are learning that even adult learners need significant scaffolding to enter risk zones and zones of proximal development, we should give that much more attention to the students we are committed to serve. For all the predictable reasons related to the group dynamics and institutional power structures, I still can fall into the trap of over-preparing adults and under-preparing students. In actuality, there should be little difference between the best practices and pedagogies of professional development and of our classrooms. If the tool of the protocol is to be used as an equity pedagogy, our students will need the same direct instruction that our adult learners often need in order to make the most of these tools. This includes preparing and practicing the arts of presentation, facilitation and participation as well as the skills of observing, reflecting, questioning and providing and receiving feedback. How much of Domenic's experience was about his presentation anxiety vs. the quality of his dilemma? How much was about not having an opportunity to have a preconference with facilitators from another state vs. the fact that as a group, we had not practiced giving and receiving feedback?

I decided to provide some of that support during the second session. I searched some PowerPoint presentations I have used as direct instruction for staff to find one that I felt this group of students needed at this time. I found one on "Giving and Receiving Feedback" and made adjustments for this context. The students had a positive response, asking for copies of the slides related to giving "Warm, Cool and Hard Feedback." In particular, they appreciated the examples (see box above) and asked for copies to bring back to their schools.

What was most powerful – and not so surprising – was to see how these students from Washington to California to New York so readily adopted and began using their newly discovered tools to make the most of another opportunity for critical friendship. Israel also came prepared to present some of his work - an epic poem he had completed as a major piece of work during his own junior year. In particular, he wanted feedback on "tuning" his writing.

With English as Israel's second language, he shared that, "sometimes I don't write what is up here [his head]. I always know what I mean, but I am not sure I am communicating it clearly enough when I write so others know." (See excerpt of Israel's poem on page 23)

Israel stated why he was sharing his writing and the context of the assignment, and after answering clarifying and probing questions (everything from "Why did you format it this way?" to "What research did you do for this?", Israel requested to read an excerpt out loud. This gift made it easy for fellow students – and the adults – to formulate authentic warm feedback. What was more challenging for the *(continued on page 21)*

Warm, Cool and Hard Feedback Examples

Warm: supportive, appreciative and meaningful. "It was great to see how much care you put into your project. It is clear that you were not doing this just for a grade, but that you actually care about your community. Specifically, you are still doing community service - even though that part of your project is finished."

Cool: distanced, offers different ways to think about work, raises questions that may be easy to answer or consider. "It was good to see that you included different types of research (you did library research AND conducted interviews AND a focus group!). I noticed that the kids in your focus group were the same kids you interviewed. To what extent would using different students have led to a more diverse response and changed your conclusions?"

Hard: challenges thinking behind work, raises concerns - does not require immediate answer. "You included a summary of the book you read which was downloaded from the internet (the web address was at the bottom). I am not sure if you provided this to me so I could understand what you read or if it was part of your project. Either way, your final analysis used some of the same language. To what extent might I - or your teacher - question the ownership of your analysis? What is at risk? How might this be addressed?"

nars, and collaborative inquiry institutes. Equity is central to our mission statement and an equity lens is embedded in all our seminars. We continue to refine that lens and offer experiences for educators to use in schools to tackle equity issues head-on and not filter the hidden curriculum through traditional school talk.

Context Coaching allows us to embed our principles within the language and overarching strategy of a partnering agency's paradigm. We are learning about this work and forming a theory of action based on our experiences with large projects where we were not the lead reform group. Since our platform is adult learning in the service of student achievement, we are learning how to coach within a specific context (e.g., a district-wide small school restructuring effort, or a uniform math curriculum or curricular approach). In each of these cases, NSRF provides the tools, techniques, and professional coaching for and within a specific context. In some very recent discussions we are considering how we might be of service to a district that already has a professional coaching staff in place (literacy, math, and career). The goal is for NSRF to engage existing staff with decreasing amounts of time over the period of the relationship toward a true legacy of creating and nurturing local capacity to self-reliance.

Executive Coaching is a new area of work that we will be exploring and developing over the coming 12 months - reimagining the district office in the service of the schoolhouse. It stems from our experiences with the types of conversations in which principals, superintendents, and other school executives need to be involved so they may empower those closest to the learner. We trust this work will allow superintendents and other district personnel to engage with their work keeping authentic student achievement as their constant lens and will prepare school districts to organize as service providers to the schools and classrooms they represent. The basic assumption is that district offices ought to be aligned to the schools within their district and meet the needs and interests of the students, teachers, and principals they serve. Additionally, engaging district leadership in our work will allow for district-wide focus on professional learning and equitable student achievement.

While beginning to craft language that differentiates and explains our service offerings we have been investigating the practices of other providers and how they approach their work. We are asking questions about competition and collaboration and what we might learn from others' work and what they might learn from our work. I have been open to conversations across broad constituencies and continue to believe that the one quality that distinguishes us from all others is that our work is practiced through our core beliefs, with our mission statement in mind, and that we understand our work is about the adults we work with in the service of the children they are responsible and accountable to and for. That is, the context of our work is rooted in the specifics of the town, school, classroom, teacher, and child and that a CFG makes this possible.

I look forward to exploring these ideas with you at the regional summits and to learn more about the work you are doing in each of your communities. The greatest strength of NSRF is our national network and the understanding that for work to be embedded in a local context there should be strong local presence in the promotion and facilitation of NSRF work. My continued hope is that we can make a case together for a strong national office working with strong centers of activity across the country and, together, meet the high expectations of the people in the schools we serve.

I hope to see as many of you as possible at this year's Winter Meeting in Seattle. The Winter Meeting planning team has been working together for months and I am looking forward to another great meeting. This year we are encouraging both CFG coaches and members to attend. Some parts of this year's meeting will be familiar and some will be new – this year's home groups will focus on an area of interest consistent with our service offerings in anticipation of forming new knowledge, informing our collective work, and deepening the learning and commitment of each individual to end the predictive value of the hidden curriculum on student achievement.

My family and I have always loved September. Though we are beach bums in the summer, come Labor Day the mums and cabbages are planted and the Halloween decorations are making their way out of the garage. This particular September, my oldest, Isabella, will be entering the first grade in our neighborhood school within the Lynbrook, New York School District – a suburban district on Long Island. We are entering this experience with our eyes wide open, yet full of hope and promise. My sincere wish for each of you is that your September is full of hope and promise and that collectively we are making progress toward peace and equity. ■

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progress that has been made so far. I was asked to serve in this role and have done so during this busy and exciting past year.

National Research Conference: Another important research-related step that NSRF took last year was to host the 2006 NSRF Research Conference. At the 2005 Winter Meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a number of folks interested in research-related issues met and brainstormed ways to both support and focus research efforts around NSRF work. One suggestion was to sponsor a conference to highlight CFG- related research, offer scholars and practitioners an opportunity to learn from each other and to connect the efforts of NSRF scholars nationwide. Jesse Goodman, Director of the Harmony Institute of Research, offered to coordinate the first conference. This small group was excited by the possibility of a conference; however, not a few of us wondered if we would end with just the same group sitting around the same table, except this time in Denver.

The very good news was that over twenty researchers presented papers and another thirty participated in the many related conversations. Scholars from San Antonio to Gainesville to Seattle to New York presented on issues such as sustaining CFG work, small school CFG work, and CFG theory. Many of these papers can be found on the research page of the NSRF web site. On January 24th, the Second Annual Research Forum will take place before the 11th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting in Seattle (see page 3 for more information). Scholars, practitioners, researchers, teachers and students are encouraged not only to attend, but also to present papers, studies, and works in progress.

Multiyear Research Agenda: This spring, a small group of NSRF folks including Frances Hensley, myself and Daniel Baron began a conversation about how it was time – or past time – for NSRF to craft and fund a multiyear research project that would inform our work and help it move forward. Scott Hutchinson, the Harmony Education Center Director of Development, quickly suggested that we meet with Rockman et al., a national research and evaluation organization with offices in Bloomington and multiple sites across the country. Two of the Rockman folks, Teri Ackey and Cathy Spagia, were introduced to the National Facilitators at the May meeting. After more discussion, the group - now expanded to include Steven Strull, Gene Thompson-Grove and Heidi Vosekas - decided to formally pursue an ambitious, national research opportunity funded by the Institute for Educational Services, the research arm of the US Department of Education. The proposal represents a partnership between NSRF and Rockman et al. Teri Ackey, representing Rockman, and I, representing NSRF, will be the co-principal investigators of the study, with ongoing involvement of colleagues from our organizations we represented. After long hours of discussion, writing, rewriting, more discussions and more editing, our proposal was submitted to IES on July 27, 2006.

Although we will not know about the funding of the grant until next spring, the group, as well as our Critical Friends who read through numerous versions of the proposal, feels that it is particularly strong and fundable. And through the grant-writing process we have already gained three substantial and important insights about NSRF work.

The first is related to findings of existing research related to CFGs and other kinds of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). It seems that there is broad support in the literature for ideas like "professional community," "communal schools," and "collaborative, transparent practice." Lots of researchers and theoreticians support NSRF's core ideas and practices. On the other hand, there is very little research literature on how CFGs (or any other PLC) connect to changes in teacher practice or gains in student learning. It is this connection between sustained, solid CFG work and changes in teacher practice and gains in student learning that our IES proposal addresses.

Secondly, we learned that sustaining CFG work, especially in high schools (the focus of the grant), and especially in urban high schools, is very difficult. The site-selection process for the IES proposal, despite a nationwide network of facilitators and Centers of Activity, was more difficult than we had imagined. We heard stories of isolated instances of persistent quality practice, exciting new work, and good work that has struggled or even lapsed for a variety of reasons, but fewer accounts of sustained and widespread high school work that offered the possibility of examining the connections between the work of CFGs and the work of kids and teachers. One of the grant proposal's goals is to begin to document some of the factors that sustain our work in high schools.

Finally, we learned something that NSRF practitioners already know - that in the world of

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PLCs, collaborative practice, and schoolwide professional communities, CFGs are unique. In our review of the literature we found that terms like "Professional Learning Community" are used in a variety of often contradictory ways and for a variety of purposes, and that in some cases, the term was never defined. Further, the literature on Professional Learning Communities had little to say about how to actually create and sustain PLCs, school wide communities or communal schools. On the other hand, CFG coaches know, for example, how to begin a meeting, how to look at and learn from student work or dilemmas of teacher practice, and how to offer both support and challenge to their colleagues. In thinking about our research agenda, we realized that we were in a unique position simply because all CFGs share clear commitments and a substantial repertoire of skills that, at their best, are used in the service of kids. Unlike all of the other versions of PLCs that we examined, CFGs have a very intentional and focused approach to building reflective, professional collaborative communities.

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As NSRF moves into its second decade of work, it will need to continue to accept the challenge of posing, and working hard to answer, complicated questions about the connections between its work and the learning of every student. To fulfill the promise of this second decade of work our organizational practice will need to mirror the work of our very best CFGs, whose members have the courage to ask each other difficult questions, dare to expose and explore fundamental assumptions and are skilled enough to uncover thoughtful, authentic answers. We need to accept and continue to accept the research challenge. ■

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large at school. The statement, "Kids can be cruel" may ring true for us but Jesse lived it. Faced with challenges like Jesse's, some kids become the class clowns, others become violent, and still others learn to fade into their surroundings.

Jesse learned to fade. It is hard to believe that a 400-pound teenager could go unnoticed in a classroom, but Jesse had learned to do just that. He was quiet and unobtrusive in the classroom, making sure not to draw attention. He would not talk to anyone, except maybe a couple of teammates. He worked hard and always produced solid 'B' work. I was empathetic to Jesse, as I was overweight as a teenager and have carried that into my adult life. I was friendly and allowed time and space outside of class for Jesse to open up to me as a teacher and a caring adult.

The fall semester was eventful; the football season was uncharacteristically bad, which led to many additional disparaging remarks to Jesse. Also, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita disrupted calendars, classrooms, and learning in our district. The new seven-period 50-minute class schedule adopted by the school board was a nightmare for teachers and students alike. The opportunity to learn about each student and build relationships was destroyed with the changes and lack of routines. All the stakeholders were feeling the effects, especially students like Jesse, the quiet, well-behaved ones that just want a little of your time. Their needs were trumped by the needs of hurricane refugees and early teacher burnout due to the new schedule.

During my planning period on a day close to Christmas, Jesse dropped by; he wanted to talk. We joked a little as I tried to enter grades into the computer. I was busy, but Jesse lingered. I went to make photocopies and when I returned he was still waiting for me at my desk, sitting in my chair. I was thinking, "I have so much to do before exams next week I could use some time to myself." It was a brilliant move for Jesse to sit in my chair. He made me change my perspective and get out from behind my 'To do list.' It finally hit me; Jesse wants to talk about something serious.

I asked him, "Jesse, what are you doing over the holidays?"

He gave me an answer I was unprepared for: "I am getting gastric bypass surgery."

We talked about the surgery. We talked, well mostly, he talked and I nodded in agreement, about how hard it is growing up fat or, to be politi-

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cally correct, overweight. I listened and offered little in advice except an open heart and arms.

After his surgery, Jesse came back and was very self-conscious because he had permission to drink in class (which is against school policy) and was asking to go to the restroom two and three times a period. We talked and Jesse told me about the surgery and his doctor putting him on an all-liquid diet.

Everything seemed to be going well until Jesse passed out. He was so worried about being treated differently that he had stopped drinking the liquids that were required and it was having adverse effects on his body. He was out from school for a few days and upon return found his comfortable place in the classroom… fading.

"The implication for me as a teacher is remembering the need to reach and get to know all of my students."

School continued and Jesse and I would talk outside of class. I would ask how many pounds he had lost and comment on how great he was looking. Then one Tuesday in February, I got an e-mail that Jesse was back in the hospital with bleeding. I went to the hospital that day after school; Jesse and I had a long talk about his plans for college, his family, and all the health problems that had led to his decision to have the gastric bypass surgery.

Jesse recovered excellently; pounds melted off. He tried to belt his pants up but all they did was fall. He had to give in and buy some new clothes. Week after week, as the pounds came off, his confidence level grew. Jesse began to talk in class. I even spied him talking to a few girls in the hall and he later told me he had gotten one of the girl's digits (translation – phone number). He beamed from ear to ear most days.

Spring break came and I vacationed in Turkey. Upon my return, Jesse wanted to hear about my travels and Turkish culture and to see pictures of a world he had yet to explore. Our relationship had moved beyond discussions of weight to issues of making personal choices and making hard decisions that affect your life.

After the walkout, another student, Twanda, asked Jesse about the student march to the immigration office and commented that nine miles was really far. She then looked at Jesse and said to him, "Walking really was good; you look like you lost some weight." I could do nothing but laugh. When Twanda made this statement, Jesse had lost 125 pounds already. She had not even noticed.

I think this speaks volumes about how well Jesse had done at fading into his surroundings. Some students had not even noticed a quiet 400-pound student every day in their class, yet now at a more self-confident 275 pounds, they see him. Jesse was given a chance at reinventing himself through both the surgery and his social activism. The combination of the two events can be seen as the 'perfect storm' in Jesse's journey.

Jesse commented on his transformation, "I see myself as a whole different person, someone that I want to get to know more and I want others to get to know, also."

The implication for me as a teacher is remembering the need to reach and get to know all of my students. The students who are doing well academically, even those who are well behaved and involved in extracurricular activities, could be hiding behind a painful persona. Jesse's pain was evident in his eating disorder; others' pain might not manifest itself in the same way. The only way to find out if a student is wearing a mask or a persona is to work at getting to know them beyond the surface.

Jesse was able to break out of his shell, shed his fear of being noticed, and become a leader. This high school student took a stand by walking out of school and marching nine miles to make the plight of so many immigrants front-page news. Jesse continued being a leader with his compassion for his fellow students by shouldering the blame and taking the consequences from the school district for his friends' protesting beside him. The courage to take a position on a hot topic such as immigration was no small feat, but then to maintain your leadership while facing the consequences of your actions makes you not only brave – but also a hero in more ways than one. ■

Jesse's story is not offered as an endorsement of gastric bypass surgery; rather it is shared as a reminder of the pain and invisibility that so many of our students face because of their difference. Jesse approved this article before it was published. Michaelann Kelley is an art teacher, NSRF National Facilitator and CFG Coach in Houston, Texas and can be contacted at mkelley@aldine.k12.tx.us

had resulted from district- and state-supported evaluations of the school's instructional programs. Resistance to the reforms was widespread and deeply rooted. Members of one entire department at Brighton School informed a literacy coach that he "should not even think about coaching anyone" in their department.

Even though nearly 25 percent of the teaching staff and the administrators had been trained as CFG coaches, a large number of teachers remained resistant to using protocols for looking at student work, or to examining student learning data in any way. A number of teachers and CFG coaches have expressed frustration about the way the CFG work is being implemented: the principal requires all faculty members to participate in monthly CFG meetings held during school time; all CFGs face a mandated reorganization at the end of each school year, with the members being reshuffled, necessitating months of work developing trust among newly-formed groups. Some staff members were happy with the reassignments, because their CFGs had been only moderately effective, or even dysfunctional, all year. Other faculty members were highly disappointed about the changes in membership, because they felt they were just beginning to get past the "getting-to-know-you" stages, and were starting to do some substantive work together.

The initial phase of development of the small learning communities at Brighton was described by one teacher as "very similar to picking softball teams when we were kids: the people who were considered weak players were picked last. We've put into place a system of tracking the teachers even before we figure out which students will be part of any of the SLCs. I'm afraid we're going to be tracking the kids, too."

At Brighton, there was high motivation to do the right things for the students. The principal and his administrative staff put forth tremendous efforts and committed substantial resources to professional development and to well-grounded research-based approaches. They consistently communicated a sense of urgency around the need to do a better job for the students in their school. Often, though, it seemed that in the fervor to get "the right things" in place immediately, there was not sufficient time to make sure that there was a sense of ownership of the changes among the people who would carry out the work (or not).

What principal moves may have contributed to the differences in culture at these two schools? The framework below from Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood, *Results-Based Leadership,* may offer some insights:

What do successful leaders do?

Summary of Leadership Attribute Frameworks

- **Set Direction**
  (vision … future)
- **Demonstrate Personal Character**
  (habits, integrity, trust, analytical thinking)
- **Mobilize Individual Commitment**
  (engage others, share power)
- **Engender Organizational Capacity**
  (build teams, manage teams)

At Parktown, the principal **set direction** by communicating a clear focus on the importance of examining data and student work to inform and improve instructional practices and decision making, including her own. She **mobilized individual commitment** by celebrating innovation and effort, and giving people the space and the confidence to take the initiative to make their own improvements. She **demonstrated personal character** and habits of leadership by analyzing data, including student work, as one of many tools to provide needed information, and by encouraging others to challenge and question the data along with her. These conversations about what's going on with our efforts for our students were conducted formally in faculty meetings, and informally in the hallways. Additionally, the fact that their principal dedicated time to learn right along with the faculty delivered a significant message to the teachers about the importance of the work in which they were engaged together. She **engendered organizational capacity** by practicing the patience necessary to allow teams to become ready to form, rather than mandating that pseudo-teams must give the appearance of working together.

As a result, the literacy coach has begun to collaborate with the math coach at Parktown and with the literacy and math coach at another school to incorporate lesson study into the practices of both the departments at both schools. The two literacy coaches have enrolled in a summer Critical Friends Group Institute to gain the tools and the habits of thinking that will support the work they're starting with the lesson study model. (They recognized the need for specific processes for focusing the observation and feedback sessions, and for learning from student work. Such processes had not been provided in the lesson study train-

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ing they had attended.) The English department members have completed their all-day summer meeting, and are now primed to implement the first designed unit and to use the lesson study approach as a vehicle for their collaborative work.

In the words of their literacy coach… The doors are always open for anyone to come in and talk, regardless of who it is. Our leaders are approachable and want to help. The administration ensures that there is ample time for teachers to meet and discuss instruction… The principal is an instructional leader in every sense…

Brighton's principal also **set direction** for the work of the school by communicating a sense of urgency around the need to improve student achievement results. He put great effort into **engendering organizational capacity** through the huge investment in professional development for more than 30 CFG coaches. Further support for that effort was evident in the consistent commitment of school time for the groups to meet. The fact that the principal himself participated in the week long CFG coaches' seminar provided additional evidence of the depth of his desire to see the school start to become a professional learning community. Several teachers, however, demonstrated a lack of buy-in for the mandated CFG participation, so that the CFGs' potential positive school wide impact instead became a missed opportunity for the principal to **mobilize individual commitment**.

If Warren Bennis is correct in his observation that "Management is getting people to do what needs to be done. Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done," then it appears that both principals are good managers, while Parktown's principal is the more effective leader. How might district leaders design ways for principals to share, reflect upon, and collaboratively improve their practices, so that students benefit equitably from effective leadership at all schools? How might school principals, like the teachers did at Parktown, create their own structures for this type of collaborative leading and learning to take place? ■

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medium for analysis is two fold. First of all, most educators of all colors working in urban high schools are not familiar with hip-hop, and what little they do know repulses them. Second, hip-hop is complex. It is not readily decipherable. As with a Toni Morrison novel, the reader must work to understand the text and its plethora of meanings and interpretations. It is in our best interest and in the best interest of those of us who want to engage poor, young, black urban youth to refuse to be deceived by the image of hip-hop that is promoted. We must do our homework and research for ourselves the power, complexities, and engaging literacy of hip-hop music and its culture. We must inform and reeducate ourselves so that we can in turn provide a hip-hop curriculum that is simultaneously engaging and academically rigorous for poor black urban males. Once we have engaged the poor, black urban males in embracing an academically rigorous curriculum that will lead to success in school and in life, it then behooves us to use the same curriculum to engage all of American youth. I propose that hip-hop has become a global phenomenon which bridges all cultures and all continents in ways that no other art form has.

Among the excellent resources I've found to assist us in connecting the study of hip-hop to the development of literacy skills for reluctant and struggling readers, the following two stand out:

- Dr. Alfred Tatum's *Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males* (See "It is not Rocket Science", *Connections*, Winter 2006)
- Dr. Imani Perry's *Prophets of the Hood: Politics and Poetics in Hip Hop*.

Chapter 5 "B-Boys, Players, and Preachers: Reading Masculinity" describes the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane and the complexity in Hip Hip artistic expressions. For example, Dr. Perry explains,

> In 'Get Down' Craig Mack rhymes:
>
> *Imma reign*
> *Reign forever*
> *Rain like bad weather*
> *Reign like whoever never*
> *A brand new sheriff that's in town*
> *Getting down*
> *Leavin' bodies in the ground*
>
> Using the homophone reign/rain, he puts a multiplicity of meanings in the oral space of his self-identification. His "royalty"

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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 comes 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 those lived experiences portrayed in their raw form that repel us. It is the engaging music, rhythms and beats that engage us. hip-hop music expresses a complex dichotomy which 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 and gestures 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 of the bridges I have been able to build between me and my love for jazz and the hip-hop generation. It is with the exchange of ideas and wisdom that reach across generations that I am able to make connections between teaching and learning, rigor, critical pedagogy and disengaged African American high school students.

In order to embrace hip-hop culture, we must come to grips with its cooptation. The worst images of a very complex art form are nurtured and presented for public consumption and "enjoyment." The media powers, who regulate what sells and gets airtime, are dominant culture folks who have their own agendas that have nothing to do with the uplifting of the black race. A critical study and analysis of hip-hop and the powers who promote it with our students would allow us to build a strong literacy program that would develop the skills and competencies of our reluctant, disengaged urban learners. Are we willing to be disturbed for the sake of the urban learner in our classrooms? ■ *(continued on page 22)*

and one of the facilitators of the first CFG training in Houston, co-facilitated with Donna Reid and Tim Martindell. Thirty-five area coaches participated in a full-day program that allowed for people to reconnect with each other as well as reconnect with the work. The morning session included Connections, a text rendering of "Am I willing to reclaim time to think?" by Margaret Wheatley, a Chalk Talk with the prompts "What role do CFGs play in your professional life?" and "What barriers and obstacles do you face?", and an introduction to Discourse I and II.

The afternoon session of the CFG Reunion focused on the dilemma "How do we build capacity to deepen and sustain CFG work in Houston?" By combining the Issaquah protocol with the Charette, the participants not only practiced asking questions and surfacing assumptions, but took ownership of the dilemma and offered solutions.

As a result of that reunion, CFG facilitators in Houston are changing the model used for supporting CFG coaches. Instead of offering a series of stand-alone clinics throughout the year, we will sponsor CFGs for coaches, both new and experienced, where they can bring their own coaching dilemmas and build relationships with critical friends from across the region.

Reforming Schools Summer Institute

The Houston A+ Challenge also nurtures CFG habits such as collaboration and reflection by hosting the Reforming Schools Summer Institute (RSSI). During this annual institute, almost 400 teachers, administrators, parents, and community members gather for two days in July for new learning in seminars as well as smaller home groups or learning communities. Facilitated mostly by experienced CFG coaches, these learning communities model how to build professional relationships.

One participant summed up his RSSI experience this way: "I learned that change (reform) must come from within. Whether the focus of that change is a school district, a campus, a department, a lesson, or a student's own achievement, no expert can walk in and say, 'Here is your answer.' Instead, change is a process initiated and followed through by the stakeholders themselves."

The 2006 RSSI featured keynote addresses from Tony Wagner, author of Change Leadership and George Thompson, from the Schlechty Center, which recently published Working on the Work. *(continued on page 22)*

group was to provide the cool and hard feedback requested to improve his written communication.

I wondered to what extent time was being taken up with compliments because Israel shared a passionate and powerful piece of work or because within this piece of work, Israel already surpassed the limited expectations we hold, socially and institutionally, for our English language learn- *(continued on page 23)*

In The Times of Gold
(excerpt from Israel's epic poem)

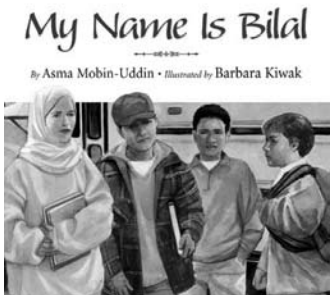
The end of the month is hear and we
get the money, which appears not to
be ours
The white men has collected his dinero
just as usual and once again the
Tortilla, salt, and lemon will fill the
stomach of my family
The earth would be sad now that she
knows that I would be leving her
For a different land
She cries because the hands that will
touch her
Leave scratches
I cry too, because I don't know how the
earth
Would treat me now that she knows I
have substituted her for the white,
red, and blue
But before I leave I live my patria I lave
you this message that "I would never
change
You for anything"
I love you but the leaders of
This time don't really want me here
because
I don't know How to read, write, and
even talk
They say it's my fault, but
They don't see that they have kept me
oppressed for centuries
Now I know how to see the truth
beyond the lines
I have crossed two worlds to come into
this one...

cherished memories to last a lifetime.

More More More Said the Baby
by Vera B. Williams

A tickling, hugging, laughing good time for "babies" (early childhood through kindergarten)! This story tells of three different families and how they adore their little ones. The books' three love stories are Little Guy, about a white boy and his father, Little Pumpkin about a black girl with her white grandmother, and Little Bird, about an Asian girl and her mother. *More More More* is a great introduction to variety in family compositions and similarities in love.

My Name is Bilal
by Asma Mobin-Uddin



Bilal and his sister Ayesha are the new kids at school, and on top of that, they are the only Muslims. When some boys tease Ayesha and pull off her hijab (headscarf), Bilal is too scared to help her. He tells the children in his class that his name is Bill, and Al is his middle name. He doesn't want anyone to know he's Muslim, for fear that he will be teased and tormented too. Fortunately, Bilal's teacher offers him some help in the form of a book about his namesake, and by reading that powerful story, Bilal is able to stand up for himself, his sister, and his beliefs. ■

For a more complete list of children's books that address diversity, see our web site at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html

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Hip-Hop...
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Additional Resources:

Parmar, P. & Bain, B. (forthcoming, December 2006) "Spoken word and Hip Hop: The power of urban art and culture," (three-part series). In J.L. Kincheloe & K. Hayes(Eds). City Kids: Understanding, Appreciating, and Teaching Them. *New York: Peter Lang Publishing,*

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

Ptah, Heru, A Hip Hop Story*, 2002, Pocket Books, NY.*

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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, mangoes, ginger, potatoes, and cabbage. This farm has been in my husband's family for many generations. My life is rich in love and family. ■

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

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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.

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Participant Feedback

"I want to bring this protocol back to school and apply it in the classroom. I got a lot out of this… not only the idea of a protocol working for… feedback, but also the knowledge of these epic poems, which I have not had the chance to try yet." - Student

"I got a practical experience with something I had often thought could be done, but had never tried. It's a new tool for my coaching toolbox." - CFG/ School Coach

"I valued the protocol and actually getting feedback from different points of view. I had a good experience receiving feedback." - Student

"I valued the step-by-step approach and that (presenters) did not have to take anything (feedback) to the face." - Student

"I think these would be powerful in school." - Student

"… or even in personal life outside of school." - Student

"I got to watch teens provide critical feedback." - CFG Coach

"I learned different ways to give advice in a manner that didn't hurt people's feelings." - Student

"I appreciated everyone's thoughts and respect for each other. This learning experience will help me a lot in future projects I have to do." - Student

"I valued that the presenters did not have to feel vulnerable at all when everyone gave feedback in a way that was organized to not hurt feelings." - Student

"I definitely learned a different way to help give respectful feedback." - Student

"I will bring this to English class and see how it works when you put it to work." - Student

ers? While that question would be a perfect one to explore with a CFG, Israel needed feedback.

When I pushed the group to push into cool and hard feedback, one student particularly appreciated the invitation – Israel. Slightly breaking protocol, he reminded us that the world is a competitive place and he is especially concerned about next year when his essays will influence which colleges and universities do or do not accept him. His fellow students rose to the challenge and continued their conversation with ideas and strategies based on their own experiences. They respectfully pointed out minimal spelling and grammatical errors AND pushed the thinking behind the intended message and how it was communicated. During his response, Israel shared that he got exactly what he wanted from the protocol and wondered how to get more formal training to be able to use what he had heard.

During the debrief, students shared even more lessons from this experiment.

1. If protocols are to be used with and for students, besides providing training, practice and support, we will need to revise materials so that they are written to and for students as well.
2. Protocols are for the presenters, but they serve the participants as well – perhaps even truer for students. One of the most powerful lessons came from the one student who was quietest during Israel's protocol. She stated that she barely spoke because she felt Israel's question could have been her own. Even though she was not very verbal, she was taking all the peer feedback as if it were directed to her; she said, "I got a lot out of this protocol - to improve my own work!"

The day after the critical friends' conversations, a number of students approached me to ask how to get more training and how to bring this tool more formally to their own schools. (One even asked if students could attend CFG trainings. Hmmm.) In the end, students decided that we should take advantage of CES' upcoming Fall Forum in Chicago and propose a pre-conference day-long training for students in the art of using protocols as tools for reflecting on and improving their work. If so, let's hope this reflection is a "Part 1" and that "Part 2" will be written by one of those students. ■

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