A new school year can mean a fresh start, a chance for renewal with new students, new schedules and in some cases, new colleagues. In this issue, our colleagues invite us to reflect with them on ways to take our considerable, collaborative will and skill to a deeper level as we sharpen our focus on our mission, “to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools...”

In the Director’s Report, Steven Stull shares his reflection on his first year as our executive director, sharing his experiences and thinking about our next steps as we move toward a membership structure to sustain our work. Ellen Key Ballock’s article introduces her research into the impact of our CFG work and offers some insights and reflective tools to help us strengthen the connection between our espoused goals and our actual effect on teaching and learning. In NSRF’s Living History, Peggy Silva talks with Greg Peters of Leadership High and the San Francisco Center about his journey as a reflective practitioner focused on equitable outcomes for students. Joshua Frank from Brookline shares his questions about the equity issues behind disciplinary decisions when these decisions are made across racial difference. Maria Elena Rico reviews Principal Accomplishments: How School Leaders Succeed, calling it a “must read” for leaders who are willing to challenge their leadership assumptions.

Camilla Greene’s conversation with Dr. Paul Gorski invites us to think critically about issues of class and poverty and the underlying assumptions of Ruby Payne’s framework. In Protocols in Practice, Kim Feikie tackles issues of voice and privilege as she asks us to examine the ways our protocols can be used to silence some while empowering others. Lynda Robinson supports Kim’s analysis by sharing a candid reflection about her silencing as an African-American woman in a new coaches seminar.

From the National Center Chris Jones offers a summer round-up of seminars and institutes, while Sarah Childers paints a harrowing picture of the reality of anti-Muslim discrimination in our schools and the steps we can take to challenge these practices, as well as our own assumptions about Muslims, in our classrooms and communities.

The Courageous Conversations about Race book chat group shares quotes from our ongoing discussion and urges others to read the book and initiate a second tier of conversations, both electronically and in real time.

Finally, in Students at the Center, I offer a glimpse into the ways that a relatively new teacher has distributed ownership for classroom learning “with winning” results. We encourage you to respond to this issue on the coaches’ and classrooms. Let us know if you are interested in writing for Connections, or if you have a story that we can help you explore.

In This Issue

Debbi Bambino, Pennsylvania

When White Educators Discipline Students of Color (continued from page 12)

several things.

First of all, the interaction is completely student-centered. It is the difference between saying to a student, “I don’t want you to disrupt my classroom,” and saying, “I want you to earn a 1 or 2 for behavior, but today was a 4.” Second, the goals suggest that the relationship is ongoing and has a future. When the student doesn’t meet expectations for academics or behavior, then the discussion is about what happens tomorrow, rather than what went wrong today. This is expressed by saying to that same student, “Can you make sure tomorrow is a 1 or 2?” Third, long-term goals move the relationship away from the tense barriers of race toward the more rewarding and fulfilling relationship between guiding and helping the child. Finally, when measuring progress toward long-term goals, students may quickly experience some success and leave behind some of the lingering sense of unfairness. “Look at what you’ve accomplished this year. There are no 3s on your report card.”

When student progress is measured against a baseline of the student’s own past performance, and over a long time frame, we communicate to the student, “This is where you are now.” This approach avoids a deficit model, and instead builds up from C to B-.

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

Feedback to students and families should be balanced between positive and negative, and presented within a long-term future perspective. If a student doesn’t respond to limits during class, for example, confront the misbehavior calmly and, whenever possible, privately. Avoid focusing on behavior that is not directly connected to achievement or the orderly functioning of the school. Avoid code words like “disrespect” or “attitude” which may communicate dislike to parents of color, and serve to cut off, instead of nurture, a working relationship. Instead, try to balance positive and negative feedback, always in the context of future development.

Given the burdens and challenges that students of color and their families carry in attending public schools, it may seem unfair to focus on understanding the struggles of a group of educators privileged by the color of their skin, and often unaware of the ways that they have missed opportunities to work successfully with students of color. As a practical matter, though, understanding these struggles has a potentially profound payroll for students of color, and for white educators. Educators, students, and parents who are comfortable communicating with each other, and believe that they are working together in a spirit of fairness and shared concern for children, have a much better chance of succeeding in working together to educate those children. We also have the opportunity then to be enriched by our differences, rather than confused or frustrated by the difficulties of our work together.

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