The waves are crashing on the shore and the kids are in camp. It is a magnificent July day and our summer is in full swing. As I’ve thought about this Connections article for the past several days – my editor would say weeks – my thoughts have swung back and forth from the school year just passed to the one ahead of us. Before looking forward, though, I am taking the time to reflect on this past year’s accomplishments, challenges, and considerable learnings.

My first trip as director was to Souhegan High School and our first-ever regional summit. We had never done a regional summit before and we didn’t really know what to do or what to expect. What Heidi, our National Center coordinator, and I did know was that we would be among friends and that the conversations were going to be critical. We also figured if we spent half the time on local matters, learning from each other about how the work was taking shape in New England, and half the time tuning our thinking about the directions we thought the national organization should head, that we would all learn a great deal and folks would feel their time was well spent.

I remember driving to New Hampshire realizing how much I missed certain aspects of New England. I had never been to Souhegan before and I was looking forward to being in that space. Heidi and I met the night before and talked through our hopes and fears for the coming meeting. And I was nervous – this was new to me and I needed it to go well. I’m not so sure NSRF needed it to go well, but I certainly did. What happened was of course the only thing that could have, that is, a day-long NSRF meeting where we used our tools and processes to learn from each other and gain insight into our individual and collective practices. We pushed, prodded, challenged, and supported each other and spent a day in critical friendship working the best we knew how. And it felt great.

There were three additional summits this past year – two regional summits in Milwaukee and Denver followed by a membership summit in Houston. Each summit built on the one prior, even though there were different people in the room. A real space of learning for me has been how deep and vast our knowledge base in NSRF is and how whoever comes are the right people. I know I’m borrowing from Open Space Technology, but as I think about the different experiences I’ve had, the four principles and the one law seem to have broad application.

The summits became significant because, along with the Centers Council meeting following the Winter Meeting, they informed and then defined our membership plan – the most significant piece of our restructuring effort. We learned from each meeting and refined our thinking and continued to tune it with trusted colleagues. By the time we issued the membership report, we had met with over a hundred and fifty National Facilitators in five or six separate meetings. I am very proud of the progress we made as a national organization toward our financial sustainability and I am clearer than ever that it will take our collective effort to realize our goals.

I think my greatest space of learning this year for my own practice was the BAEO conference this past spring. BAEO is the Black Association of Educational Options and I am a proud member. The leader is Howard Fuller – the former superintendent of the Milwaukee public schools – and he and the organization are “unapologetically (continued on page 16)
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 skill and 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 Strull 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 Ballcock’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 as a result of race or ethnicity.

Camilla Greene’s conversation with Dr. Paul Gonski 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 Feierele 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 roundup 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 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 facilitators’ lists. Tell us how you are using the articles in your CFGs 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.

Contact the Connections Editorial Board at dbambino@earthlink.net or call the NSRF National Center at 812.330.2702

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 academic 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 adult and receptive 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 on strengths. It avoids comparing to other students, or dwelling on past failures or misbehavior. Once the baselines are established, then specific feedback on progress toward long-term goals may be shared with the student and family. Even if a student is doing very poorly, avoid sweeping generalizations such as, “He’s doing badly in my class.” Instead, share specific data: “His test scores have gone down from C to B-.”

There are no 3s on your report card.” Specificity is especially important in describing behavior where the specter of subjectivity, color-blindness, and white privilege come into play. Specificity communicates fairness and objectivity, sets clear goals for students, and helps parents ally with the school in working with their children.

Describe the specific behavior in a nonjudgmental tone: “I asked him to take off his hat. He went down from 75 to 50 and his homework has gone down from 80 to 40. I’m concerned because we set a realistic goal for this term of having his grade go up from C to B.” Specifying is especially important in describing behavior where the specter of subjectivity, color-blindness, and white privilege come into play. Specificity communicates fairness and objectivity, sets clear goals for students, and helps parents ally with the school in working with their children.

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Planting Oak Trees, Harvesting Acorns... (continued from page 11)

nars, we gained five new Bloomington interns, and this year we are gathering interns from both Columbus and Indianapolis. We spent a good deal of time—perhaps four or five months—working out our theory of action and building an inductive “architecture” to use in supporting others. Our theory of action is now informing the practice of dozens of coaches who continue to sustain CFGs in their own buildings and we are using our architecture all over the state to support schools and districts in crafting their own theories.

This year, especially, we have seen educational equity become the focus of all our work. We put equity at the center of our theory of action—a serious commitment that is needed in all our seminars. Our experiments with small-sized New Coaches seminars have been productive both in giving participants an authentic CFG experience and considering their moral purpose as educators. In a five-day New Coaches Institute, for example, we have made it a habit to begin looking at student work on the first afternoon. Making the case for equity and engaging in difficult conversations about it also happen early on. The second morning, we typically begin a conversation about equity that is rooted in personal stories we elicit on the first day and flows from the first night’s reading and journaling assignment. Sustaining the conversation about equity over time involved renewing our understanding of how systems work to shape our experience and our decisions. As facilitators we have been working not only to identify and interrupt inequities, but also to provide structures (protocols, practices, and spaces) that support fragile new learning communities as they struggle towards more authentic and more just ways of educating their students.

We have also seen fruit from partnerships strengthened over the last two years with the University of Indianapolis’s Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL), the Monroe County Community School Corporation, and the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (in Columbus). This year there have been, or will be, Small Schools Coaching, an open CFG Coaches Seminar, funded in part through participant fees, an Advanced Coaches Institute held in partnership with various school corporations, and a Leading for Educational Equity Seminar.

So I didn’t know what to expect when I asked for the metaphors over e-mail. While not everyone involved in the center was able to submit a metaphor, the ones that came to my inbox were connected in my service of student achievement. For over a decade, NSRF practitioners have substantively contributed to school culture and community by utilizing NSRF’s core practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership, guided by our mission to foster educational and social equity for each child. At the Winter Meeting, we will further our learning using NSRF tools and processes to engage each other in questions in relation to our practice, our schools, and our students.

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

Together, we will bring our NSRF mission, principles and practices to life as we learn and work in home groups. Home groups are small groups of colleagues who work in the ways of Critical Friends Groups, an expansion of professional learning communities (PLC), by holding each other accountable for the continuous examination of our practice to meet the needs of each and every student. We will give and receive substantive and critical feedback and support each other in the discovery of new ideas and the implementation of new practices.

Make plans now to join us this December at our annual Winter Meeting to work with old friends and new from around the country who are committed to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for each child toward a more just and equitable society.

Pre-Conferences

To compliment your Winter Meeting experience, please join us on December 12, 2007, for our concurrent pre-conferences: 3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum and Core Principles of Critical Friendship.

3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum: This one day forum provides an opportunity to share what we have learned as researchers or practitioners and learn from others about the work of NSRF, CFGs, Coaches for Equity, Facilitative Leadership, and other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. Participants will have the opportunity to present work and give feedback on the work of others, as well as help shape NSRF’s growing portfolio of research. This pre-conference will be facilitated by Kevin Fahey, NSRF’s Research Coordinator.

Core Principles of Critical Friendship: This new session will offer an introduction to NSRF’s core principles and practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership in preparation for the Winter Meeting experience that follows. Together we will explore the purpose and implementation of these principles while experiencing their transformationative power. Participants in this session will continue to meet in home groups during the Winter Meeting, at which time we will practice peer observation to deepen our understanding of NSRF work and consider how best to translate it to support and enhance current job-embedded professional development efforts in our respective work contexts as well as consider implementing this new learning in our respective workplaces. This pre-conference will be facilitated by NSRF National Facilitators Pete Bermudez and Linda Erm of the University of Florida Leitiger Center for Learning, an NSRF Center of Activity.

Location

Marriott Tampa Waterside Hotel and Marina
700 South Florida Ave.
Tampa, Florida 33602
813-221-4900 or 800-228-9280

Faith Dunne/Nancy Mohr Scholarship Fund

Each year, NSRF keeps a commitment to providing scholarships for Winter Meeting attendees who would otherwise not be able to attend. To apply for a scholarship, please contact the National Office at 812.334.2702.

If you are able to contribute to the Faith Dunne/Nancy Mohr scholarship fund, please contact our Development Office at 812.334.8179.

More Information

Visit www.mrharmony.org to register, review fees, make your room reservations, attend conference sessions, and explore opportunities, and more, or call Sarah Childers at 812.330.2702 if you have questions.
Connections in Practice—Whose Voice?
Kim Feicke, Washington

I was Day Two of a CFG training and the only African-American participant had been talking more airtime than others, partially to better explain her cultural perspective. Her facilitator referred to a norm around equity of airtime to bring this to her attention. “Oh,” she responded, “I thought that since I’m the only person of color in the room it meant you needed to hear from me more often!” The group had a short discussion about the differences between equitable and equal and moved on.

Later in the training, this same participant wondered aloud if these protocols weren’t geared towards white ways of interacting, since people of color don’t use such structured dialogue. It wasn’t the first but I hadn’t heard that question. “No,” no, our white participants always say, “it’s weird for us too.” And it is. Many of us have found that there is a natural continuum in learning the protocols: from feeling still uncomfortable to valuing and embracing the structures. The protocols force us to think in new ways—breaking out of our assumptions and our everyday practice of telling people what they should or shouldn’t be doing. And while this is true, the question still lingers in my mind. When white people come to the training and feel uncomfortable within these same structures, I’ve never heard them try and attribute acting as if my presence means anything when white people are “conducting their business” in educating kids—mainly poor kids, but mostly kids of color. What does it mean for educators of color in the room and at the table with their privileged sisters and brothers? As I remember the event, I think what really embarrassed me—and yes, hurt me was that I went to the CFG training with an open heart. The teachers at my table were also open-hearted—asking me questions and engaging in dialogue with me both personally and professionally. I felt pretty comfortable in responding to the questions and comments. In other words, I felt that the interactions at that table were positive and productive. My identity as a black educator was intact and in fact honored by their questions, responses, and demeanor. I think one of the teachers was Mexican-American, so she would respond to questions from her cultural perspective, as well. I was aware that I was the only black person in the room, but that did not curb my enthusiasm or curiosity about the CFG training. Since all the white educators were convinced that the CFG process was the best thing since sliced bread, I felt I needed to find out what they knew so I would be “down with the program,” too. So I let my guard down and was prepared to be open-minded and accept learning as I could be. So imagine my surprise and dissonance when the facilitator warned me to curb my “airtime” in the training! I felt that I didn’t need to be there if I was not completely comfortable in very oppressive ways.

Quite frankly, I’m tired of talking about Ruby Payne. I am an activist. I do not particularly like to spend my time critiquing someone else’s work. But so many of my colleagues were bring in this work that I felt I had to present another perspective. The values Ruby Payne espouses conflict with the values we say we uphold.

Plus, Ruby Payne runs a for-profit business. She charges school districts tens of thousands of dollars for a workshop. Many of these school districts paying Ruby Payne’s business have families who cannot afford housing and meals on a daily basis. Somebody has to stand up and point out the lunacy of this.

What do you believe to be the most important actions needed to change the “savage inequalities” in American public schools that serve poor children? Policy makers need to understand the issues (of poverty) in a broader context. It is unfair to give schools the responsibility to correct all inequities. We need to fix the larger inequities instead of focusing merely on the symptoms. In schools we need to look at the ways in which poor children and children of color do not have access to quality education, starting in preschool. We need to start addressing these issues—in Jonathan Kozol’s words, these “savage inequalities”—and stop thinking we can fix poverty by “fixing” poor people instead of eliminating what oppresses poor people.

What do you believe to be the best strategy to dispel the middle-class myth that people of poverty are bad parents? I’ve done a bit of consulting at some affluent private boarding schools where tuition and fees can be close to $40,000 per year. Some parents have two and three children at these schools. We dispel myths by telling the truth. The myth is that poor people are bad parents. But what I see at these boarding schools are kids who are sent away from home so somebody else can take care of them—neglect by wealthy parents who can afford to mask their neglect. There are other myths out there, as well. According to Ruby Payne, alcohol and drug addiction and prostitution are more prevalent in poor communities than wealthy ones. This simply is not true. Drug and alcohol addiction and prostitution are as prevalent, if not more prevalent, in wealthy communities. So we dispel myths by telling the truth and with evidence of that truth.

If you could put together a reality show to demonstrate the clashes between someone who believes the fault lies in the victim and someone who is a perceived victim but has a strong sense of self and a grasp of the reality of the shams in this world, where would you put them and how long would you have them interact?

I would place Ruby Payne in this reality show for her own good. Plus, because so many people know who she is, there would be a large audience. I would have poet Gwendolyn Brooks on the show, too. Brooks wrote a poem called “The Lovers of the Poor” about wealthy white do-gooders who do their charitable giving, but go running back to their wealth at the first sign of discomfort. I use it in my classes. I would ask Paris Hilton and Jonathan Kozol. The location: a remote island where they have nothing to do but sit around and discuss classism and racism for a month.

My attention to and interest in Dr. Gorski was sparked by Debbie Bambino when she asked if I would like to do an interview with Dr. Gorski, who is a staunch critic of Dr. Ruby Payne. I took on the challenge. In preparation for the interview, I read Dr. Ruby Payne’s book A Framework for Understanding Poverty and I read several articles written by Dr. Gorski. I learned a lot and I hope this interview has enriched your knowledge of classism as it relates to our mission and your notions of the equity conversation.

For more information, go to www.EdChange.org.
Dr. Gorski can be reached at pgorski1@uvu.edu
Camilla Greene can be reached at camillagreene@att.net
fall into that trap more often than not. I am conscious of that and try to work on not falling into the allure of the path of least resistance, but the allure is always there.

It has been helpful to surround myself with a group of people committed to change who are relentless about challenging class injustices. I have surrounded myself with a group of people who are not shy about calling me out when I begin drifting to the path of least resistance.

This is difficult and sometimes confrontational work, often because people tend to confuse peace with social justice. If we want justice, we, in the activist community, must be relentless with our feedback to each other and with other well-meaning people who are actually contributing to injustices through what they perceive to be social justice work. We must stop worrying about hurting each other’s feelings.

This brings us back to Ruby Payne because, despite the egregiousness of her work, so few people have been willing to speak up to her and say, “This is classism and racism.” We do not want to hurt anyone’s feelings, despite all the hurt that results from allowing the injustices to go unchecked.

How have your experiences with classism in America influenced your views on Ruby Payne’s poverty framework?

As I mentioned earlier, my mother grew up in the Appalachian Mountains between West Virginia and Maryland. Ruby Payne stereotypes poor people in ways that do not fit my experience with my own family or with people of poverty. I worked in the D.C. area with people in poverty, and again, her stereotypes of poor people did not fit the poor people I knew.

For example, here in Minnesota there are large and very poor Somali and Hmong refugee populations. When I compare the cultures of these communities with those of the Appalachian side of my family, they have absolutely nothing in common. I was actually contributing to injustices through what they perceive to be social justice work. We must stop worrying about hurting each other’s feelings.

This brings us back to Ruby Payne because, despite the egregiousness of her work, so few people have been willing to speak up to her and say, “This is classism and racism.” We do not want to hurt anyone’s feelings, despite all the hurt that results from allowing the injustices to go unchecked.

What feedback have you received from readers of your articles on Ruby Payne?

I have received a range of feedback. Some of the feedback has been very angry.

Ruby Payne threatened to sue me. I received a call from her attorney.

Bill Sommers, one of her trainers, called different people at my university in an attempt to silence me. In fact, several times when I’ve been scheduled to speak at an event, Sommers has called the event organizers to try to convince them to uninvite me.

I have received several other angry responses. What’s been interesting, though, is that none of these angry responses critiques my specific critiques of Ruby Payne’s framework. Instead, they attack me, like how dare I critique Ruby Payne.

Payne’s framework is popular because it does not challenge the status quo. The majority of the folks who agree with Payne’s framework do not recognize that what they are buying into is racism and classism.

I have received a lot of positive feedback as well from teachers, administrators, fellow activists, people who are horrified that their school districts are paying up to hundreds of thousands of dollars to have somebody come in and talk about

(continued on page 25)

Interview with Dr. Paul C. Gorski...

(continued from page 10)
First there is silence. More often than not after the to what is being discussed and what was an intel. I will interject a comment about race and its lects from the dominant race. The subject is a the only person of color in a room full of intel. believe me.'" (page xiv)

this?' Glenn's answer is simple but profound: 'Just forgive me for having been racist?' 'How can I fix do now?' 'How can I be anti-racist?' 'How can you they have heard, often approach him (Glenn) at "we will never...," "just believe me," etc. As prem. "what I don't know that I don't know." So, it's tions unforeseen ideas will emerge in the area of well to reduce the connection between race and truth but I am willing to spend a significant amount of time exploring the intersection because thus far it doesn't seem that these strategies have worked swell to reduce the connection between race and achievement. Perhaps by having these conversa. I don't know if this quote reflects the as a white ally, I feel stung by the "truth"/pain of a colleague of color's experience when I have to reckon with my piece of responsibility, my role in causing the pain. In the heat of the moment, I may not know what to say. In my discomfort, I may wel. "Free the break from the "business as usual" discourse of race. They are far more promising working hypotheses rather than "the truth.""-

"White people, emotionally moved by what they have heard, often approach him (Glenn) at the end of these seminars and ask, "So what do I do now?" How can I be anti-racist? How can you forgive me for having been racist? How can I fix this? Glenn's answer is simple but profound: 'Just believe me.'" (page xiv)

This is the quote that resonates for me largely because there are many times when I have been the only person of color in a room full of intel. The subject is a very intellectual discussion on teaching and learning. I wish that I could offer the intellectually sophisticated leaders collectively view themselves and the schooling enterprise to be inherently non-racist. In fact their tightly held beliefs and understandings regarding the significance of race make it difficult for teachers to com-prehend, examine, and - (continued on page 19)

population are Indonesia and India.) Students who dress or appear as Muslims may struggle with teas. Many Muslims do not dress in an obvious way, and their inner struggles are just as painful. Consider some of these questions and what you think about how you can best support Muslims in our classroom.

• Are they afraid to come to school?
• Are they scared to practice their religion in school (via dress, prayer, reading scripture, etc.)?
• What accommodation can you offer?
• Do they have family or friends who are affected by war?
• Are they suffering from fatigue, depression or lack of sleep with international family?
• Are they concerned about discussion about current events, religion, or culture, do they prefer to avoid attention?
• Are they scared that their perceived connection to current events, or their opinions about current events, will be held against them by teachers or principals?
• Have they been threatened or assaulted by fel. students or teachers?
• Are there students in the classroom who have expressed biased opinions or made negative remarks? How can you support those students' learning and growth?

Even if there are no Muslim students in your classroom, the following tips and guidelines can help students introduce new ideas and perspectives into the class. I will share my personal experiences with this. I was at the Winter Meeting in Denver, Colorado, I received a phone call from my husband, who was distraught. Our mosque had been the target of an early-morning bombing attempt, which thankfully only caused minor damage and hurt no one. The bomber was by all definitions a terrorist, as the act was designed to bring fear to our community. And it was frightening, the bomber left a burned Qur’an behind.

Many positive things came out of this incident. Other religious communities rallied to our side to stand against hate in our town, and our relationships with those communities were further strengthened. However, when my husband was interviewed several times on local radio about the incident as a represen.
inequities we have identified within our own context? How are we responding?
• What biases and stereotypes have we identified within our practice or within ourselves? How are we responding?
• What are we learning about the relationship between culture and student learning? How are we working towards more culturally responsive practices?
• How do we hold one another accountable to taking action based on what we learn and discuss as a group, whether within our own individual practice or within our organization as a whole?
• How do we know whether we are making progress as a group? How do we measure success? What evidence or documentation do we have of our own learning and impact? What differences can we identify in student achievement across all subgroups?


This research has been funded in part by a grant from the Lastinger Center for Learning.

Elen Key Ballock can be reached at elenkey@hotmail.com

there were 32 new CFG Coaches seminars. CFG Coaches seminars are our most typical introduction to the work of NSRF and our mission. These 32 sessions reached educators in 19 states through 20 Centers of Activity in every region from Massachusetts to Hawai‘i.

NSRF dues-paying membership added a new dimension to sessions this summer. Offering membership to seminar participants provides a new opportunity for them to be engaged in the national NSRF community and support the mission of NSRF. The summer sessions in Hawai‘i were the first to build in a one-year NSRF membership for participants.

This summer has been another learning opportunity for all of us. Our continued work has come a long way in spreading our mission and vision for democratic and equitable schools. The door has been opened to hundreds of new NSRF colleagues and scores of old ones have been renewed in their practice and purpose. We look forward to reflecting on the important work of this summer in search of its impact on the lives of our students this fall.

The NSRF events database was the source for the information in this article. This database is only as good as the data provided, so if you are an NSRF National Facilitator, please let the National Center know about any upcoming NSRF seminar experiences, so we may promote them on our website and use the collected information to enrich our network.

Chris Jones can be contacted at cjones@nsrfharmony.org

Greg Peters

T
two years ago, Gregory Peters became the director of SF-CESS, the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools, a regional center of the Coalition of Essential Schools and a center of activity of the NSRF. Prior to this work, Greg served as principal of Leadership High School in San Francisco, a ten-year-old charter school in the southeastern section of this city. Of the 140 students currently enrolled at Leadership, 95% are students of color, and 40% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Greg remains coprincipal of Leadership High School, serving as a liaison between this laboratory school and the larger network of organizations focused on school change.

Greg notes that poor nutrition, gangs, and violence are major factors in his students’ daily lives.

Leadership High School is a safe community for our students, but our students are victims and witnesses and even sometimes purveyors of the violence that surrounds them.

We absolutely know our children well, and as a result are committed to serving them even though we know any one of them could exist on either side within the cycle of violence and oppression that plagues our urban youth.

How were you introduced to NSRF? What is this organization’s role in your work?

I was a member of a CFG just as they were introduced. The following year (1996) I trained with Juli Quinn as a coach, and coached a group from Oceana High School, where I was a math and art teacher for six years. CFGs became essential in my work as a new principal at Leadership High School.

Just in its third year, Leadership was not a good place for students or for their teachers. The school lacked a strong culture of professional development. CFGs were a natural fit in helping to shift the culture to that of a learning organization. The faculty of Leadership High School was firm in its commitment that I serve as an instructional leader, so we had to negotiate what that meant in the daily life of our school. We spent that first year learning how we needed to work together. CFGs provided a needed structure for our learning. We used that structure, but operated under a different name.

At the time, NSRF did not have a presence in the Bay Area, so we chose to call our groups “I-Groups,” a combination of CFG and mini-research groups. We trained our department leaders as coaches, although we did not have heterogeneous groups, not department members. Our I-Groups meet every three weeks in a rotation of collaborating on topics - departments, teams, and professional development.

We are very conscious in our school’s I-Groups and in our five-day training seminars about our focus on equity. While it is the challenge for every participant to keep equity at the center of our work, how do we ensure that the coaches’ responsibility to ensure this.

Our school is located in a tough place, but we have a lot to be proud of. Following an independent audit of the San Francisco Unified School District, Leadership High School was one of only two schools cited for making progress in closing the achievement gap. I chose saying this out loud because our progress still is not even close to being enough. We need to share this information to help sustain the work, but in the larger context, our successes are merely a blip on the screen of an intense urban area such as San Francisco.

Greg, please describe the roots of your commitment to equity in your life and your work.

As an openly gay school leader, the concept of equity is an innate part of my individual profile. However, my greater sense of empathy comes from growing up as a gay and closeted member of a poor Rhode Island family on welfare. As a teenager I passed for straight because that is the role社会ization taught me to play. However, my greater sense of empathy comes from the experience of facing without a filter because they didn’t know I was their target. I learned quickly what those with power and prejudice said of others when they believed the others were not in their presence. Out of fear, defense, anger and frustration - and in ignorance of what exactly to do - I learned
What Happens When We Intentionally Reflect on Our CFG’s Work?
Ellen Key Ballock, Pennsylvania

What really struck me at the last Winter Meeting was the number of individuals who shared with me some degree of discontent with their CFG’s processes. They spoke of a mismatch between their group’s actual collaborative work and their vision of the possible, of wondering how to push their CFG to the next level, or of the challenges of doing CFG work in their specific contexts. This was particularly interesting to me since it was the incongruity between my hopes and the reality of CFGs that first motivated me to explore critical friends groups as a researcher.

Several years ago I had gone through coaches training and I was a member of several CFGs. I developed a reflective tool, or framework, highlighting the attributes of CFGs that seemed most essential and how they might develop over time. I began drafting a reflective tool for each participant to complete a questionnaire and then through a more detailed interview with each group’s coach.

The data collected during the two phases of this research process has both challenged my thinking and reinforced certain questions that I have ventured to ask in my research. First, the data shows that CFG members engaged in the process of analyzing and goal-setting had more important insights. The process deepened participants’ sense of purpose and helped them to develop a common understanding of their work together as a CFG. It was a reflective process that allowed them to celebrate their group’s strengths, but also to identify areas for growth or to clarify their direction and focus. It was a process that does not provide immediate solutions, but following a vision for the possible or a clearer direction for their work. One participant wrote, “We became more aware of where we were, as a group, may be off track, the direction we want to go, and how we need to rethink our group’s path in order to reach our goals and deepen the effectiveness of the work we do and the support we provide to one another.” This research study has not examined the long-term benefits of this process, but it does suggest that periodically stopping to reflect on our collaborative work and vision can be very helpful for pushing work forward, giving a commitment to following through on the goals and plans that CFG makes. It does indeed appear possible for CFG members to reflect on the growth and development of their group, pushing through struggles in order to collaborate more meaningfully.

Second, my reflections on both the amazing strengths and the persistent struggles of the three CFGs in this study have led me to stronger convictions and new burning questions. Although I do believe this study has confirmed the importance of each of the seven attributes I listed above, I have also been reminded that neither a foundation of strong community nor tools of effective processes are sufficient for impacting teaching and learning. As a mentor of mine recently quoted, “it is possible that our major mistake is doing things right, but if we are not doing the right things, what does it matter? Our interactions and processes may be improving, but if we are not asking important questions, questions that are rigorous or challenging, questions that we pursue over time, then will there be powerful sustained learning?” Since most CFGs tend largely on the questions we as practitioners bring to the group, then how do we learn to ask the “right” questions, the questions that are most important to our learning and the learning of our students? How do we sustain these important inquiries over time and how do we ensure that we are continually gaining outside perspectives as well, so that we do not become isolated and insulated in our own experiences and perspectives?

I suggest that we need to hear more about the questions that CFGs around the country are pursuing, particularly those that result in powerful learning experiences for group members. We need practitioners to write about the specific questions they have asked that have led to powerful learning opportunities, how those questions have been addressed within the group, and what actions have resulted over time that has led to two important purposes. First, it may provide a stimulus for others to ask similar questions about the work in their context. Second, it will begin to build a more concrete collection of evidence for the organization about ways this work really does make a difference in teaching and learning.

I would also suggest that we continue work to develop tools to help us ground our inquiries in NSRF’s mission of “educational and social equity.” These words are so laden with meaning that unpacking what this means in terms of a group’s next steps can seem overwhelming. Developing tools to help new groups identify appropriate and concrete beginning questions and to help experienced groups to make plans for sustained growth in this area and make plans for specific next inquiries would be challenging, but so useful.

Though there is not ample space within this article to share all the specifics of the reflective tool and process that I have been working to develop, I conclude here with several questions based on this work, with the hope that they will facilitate purposeful reflection for taking stock of a CFG’s work:

- What is our purpose as a group? What concrete goals or inquiries are we working towards individually and/or as a group? Why are these pursuits important?
- To what extent does our work depend on actual data, whether student achievement data, work samples, or reading research from the field?
- To what extent have we committed ourselves to NSRF’s mission of pursuing educational and social equity?
- What kinds of (continued from page 22)
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Taking Responsibility for Anti-Muslim Discrimination in our Schools
Sarah Childers, Indiana

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Given the frequency of instances of discrimina-
tion at the hands of teachers and students, what is our responsibility to students who are Muslim,
or who are perceived to be Muslim? How can we

Amir is in fifth grade. Today is the day of his
family history report, which he must give in
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Elementary in Daly City, California. He’s nervous
because his family is from Iraq, and some of his
family has been here for many years and he doesn’t even know any of his
family’s history in Iraq. The teacher asks, “So you don’t know if they are terrorists?” Amir shakes his head.

In Minnesota, a Muslim girl who wears the tradi-
tional Islamic head-scarf, or hijab (hee-jab), is repeat-
edly taunted by a schoolmate, called “terrorist,” told
to “Go back to your country” and “the Qur’an is full
of lies.” She tells her school counselor, but no action is
taken.

A guest has been invited to speak to Mr. Ercanrud’s class. Greg, what is your

about Islam and Muslims is crucial.

Given the wide variety of cultural and ethnic
backgrounds of Muslims, each individual’s customs
and practices will vary. (Only 15% of all Arabs are
from the Middle-Eastern countries, and only 35% of
Arabs have an Arab identity, while 65% are seen as
“Arab Americans.”) The center of Muslim culture in the
United States is California, which is home to the largest Muslim
population in the U.S. Given the frequency of instances of discrimina-
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bring perspective into the classroom about
Islam, Muslims, terrorism and the war is crucial. As part of NSRF’s mission to “foster social and
educational equality,” it’s our responsibility to further educate ourselves, and to provide unbiased informa-
tion to students and teachers alike, whether or not Muslims or Arab students are a part of our school’s
classroom or curricula. See the sidebar on page 23 for adult
reading suggestions.

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An Interview with Dr. Paul C. Gorski
Camilla Greene, Pennsylvania

connections: the journal of the national school reform faculty
Fall 2007

how would you describe yourself?

activist, educator, writer in that order. My background is community activism and organizing and it was through activism that I came into education.

when did you first become aware of classism?

I don't know that I became aware of classism as a system until then. My mother's family had lived in poverty in a mining town in the mountains between Maryland and West Virginia. Even as a kid, when I'd visit, they had no running water, dilapidated housing. I didn't see this as poverty but rather a lack of resources. In terms of a process for understanding racism and classism, I started seeing systemic and purposeful inequitable conditions once I started asking big questions about the world around me. In school, we would talk about what it was like to be poor. But we didn't ask why people were poor. Very few people talk about why poverty exists in the wealthy country on the planet. For whose benefit does poverty exist? For whose benefit is the world around me working as it works right now? It's only when I learned to ask these questions that I began to see classism.

what have you been able to do to interrupt classism in your work or in any community or classroom? at the university, I name it when I see it. But I'm not mostly focused on the university. I am more someone working in the larger community, teaching about and acting against classism. But in my classes specifically, I do this by challenging the myths about class and poverty, by challenging my students to engage in reflective work in preparation for understanding institutionalized classism.

how do your students describe you?

"politically radical." I do not see myself as politically radical. "Passionate." "engaging." They would describe me as an activist, and that is threatening to many of them, most of whom are teachers.

what would you like to be your legacy?

That is something I do not think about. I turn 45 tomorrow, so it feels odd to think about a legacy.

maybe my legacy, at this point, would be about bringing people together, people immediately around me. I try to work collaboratively, pull people in, build movements. My legacy would be organizing, drawing people together who have resisted the temptation to soften the conversation about racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, imperialism, and other oppressions.

to what extent do you believe educators are capable of examining their own class-based prejudices?

First, I should say that the problem of classism is not specific to educators. We are all socialized to buy into the myth of meritocracy and consumer culture, and to be measured by what we have rather than by who we are. But I do wonder why.

This is where Ruby Payne and her popularity come into play. She draws on these assumptions, already present in most people attending her workshops. She's contributing to the lack of understanding---to the classism.

Everyone is capable of examining their class prejudices only when they're willing to engage in rethinking everything they thought they knew about the world around them. This is difficult, and not something with which I'm always successful. One of my biggest challenges in doing this work is with my own assumptions. I certainly do not have it all figured out.

how in your own life have you not fallen into the trap of “the allure of the path of least resistance?”

I have fallen and do...
Principal Accomplishments... (continued from page 5)

Protocols in Practice... (continued from page 17)

a combination of case studies and self-reflections. The benefits of professional cases include the extension of the profession’s knowledge base by recognizing the value of the practitioner’s knowledge, connecting practitioner knowledge with formal research, supporting transitions in responsibility that may facilitate smooth leadership succession, easing communication among various school constituencies, and becoming a basis for professional development and learning. Such professional case studies provide real-world examples for educational programs as well as practicing principals, affording both groups the means to study practices and develop strategies to address daily challenges. Finally, the authors explore the knowledge that is critical to principals in their school. They examine the important knowledge for principals, how principal candidates can structure their developing knowledge, suggest performance tasks that support the development of structured knowledge, and propose contexts to help principal candidates use their knowledge.

Bellamy, Fulmer, Murphy, and Muth provide a fresh approach to developing the design of school leadership practices while offering valuable insights and ideas for analysis and reflection for principal leadership. The four leadership domains and the Framework for School Leadership Accomplishments challenge the principal to establish measurable goals and identify desired results that improve student learning. These domains provide a means for principals to embrace the core tenets of critical friends groups, namely a press for achievement, adaptive practice, and improved student learning. Indeed, the authors’ call for an “annual case [study] of school leadership” (p. 139) in support of continuous learning provides a vehicle for principals and their case teams to address the mission of the NSRF by reflecting on their practice and working collaboratively to create powerful learning experiences that improve student learning. This book is a must-read for anyone open to having their assumptions about effective school leadership challenged!

“Principal Accomplishments: How School Leaders Succeed,” G. Thomas Bellamy, Connie L. Fulmer, Michael J. Murphy, Rodney Muth Teachers College Press, © 2007

Plants Oak Trees, Harvesting Acorns and Building towards “Reforestation”

Indiana Center of Activity Report by Ross Peterson-Veatch, Indiana

Two hundred years ago, as much as eighty-five percent of our great state of Indiana was covered with trees. With logging in the 19th century came forest management practices based on replanting trees to replace and replicate the forests so that the basic organic resources around us could sustain our communities for the future. But just planting more trees ignored the crucial roles that the other layers of the forest played in the system and gave us what we might call “the woods” — trees without dense undergrowth, and dirt covered only by leaves. What we now know about reforestation tells us to attend to the soil, and nurture the shrubs, even as we plant seedlings and saplings that continue to grow into healthy trees that can sustain the forest. This attention to the layers in between might be one of the keys to the future. I can think of do what we’ve been doing in the two years since our last Center of Activity report in Connections.

When the NSRF National Office asked us to write a report from the field, none of us really knew where to start. So many things have happened in the interim that it is hard to get a handle on all of our activities statewide. We have just finished a very successful seminar that we ran from Bloomington, but from Columbus, Indianapolis, and Goshen. The surge in other and to choose projects, glean strategies and ideas from Georgia – and seven interns who had been successfully running CFGs in their own schools in Bloomington for at least a year.

At that point we had enough of a critical mass of people who were obviously passionate about CFGs and learning to consider forming a Center of Activity that was larger than just a few individuals, but we had no concrete plans. So, in February of 2006, after the Winter Meeting in Denver, we began meeting as a group of facilitators and interns, intent on making something happen. In the interim we have met monthly for some stretches and “every three or so months” at other points, for multiple purposes: to get to know each other and to choose projects, glean strategies and forge the strong connections with one another we know will serve to propel us into the future.

The initial Bloomington crowd has become a larger statewide group both through opening our selves to opportunities for great partnerships and by invitations to like-minded colleagues. Colleagues from Indianapolis have begun to join us in delivering coaches’ trainings, not just in organizing them. For last summer’s round of semi-
When White Educators Discipline Students of Color
Joshua Frank, Massachusetts

This article is an excerpt from an article tentatively scheduled to appear in an upcoming issue of Education Digest.

In discussing the achievement gap, educators often talk about the need for relevant and representative curricula for students of color. They discuss the need to recruit more educators of color. They also underscore the power and the reality of white privilege. At my current school we hold “courageous conversations” to build a dialogue across boundaries of race. There is rarely a discussion, however, of white educators teaching, and needing to discipline, students of color. Why do we need to think about what happens when a white educator disciplines a student of color? For me the answer begins with what’s happening at my school.

Despite a wonderful diversity that is truly valued by the entire community, despite having a series of well-received—by me and others—“courageous conversations” that involve staff and families in diverse and growing numbers, the majority of discipline reports I receive as vice-principal are for students of color, and this is in a school that is 55% white. Beyond the reinforcement of stereotypes that lurks behind these numbers lies another, very practical, point. When discipline works, by holding students accountable in a way that they feel is fair and aimed at helping them grow, those students are able to get back to work. When students get back to work, their misbehavior is less likely to reoccur, and more likely to make academic progress. While ideally the students of color who fail to achieve reinforce stereotypes, they are accomplishing goals and perceived as the unacknowledged heroes of their schools. Any thoughtful person who enjoys an unearned privilege is going to experience some guilt in the enjoyment of that privilege.

As a result, white educators often try to convince students of color and their families that they want to “help”—to “help” them achieve at a high level, to “help” them achieve to the same level as the white majority. When and if that “help” fails to result in high achievement and positive behavior, though, guilt can easily give way to fear. It might be that the students of color who fail to achieve reinforce stereotypes that a white educator holds reluctantly and secretly, and fears will be discovered. It might be the fear of being misunderstood in the effort to hold students of color to a high standard, and of being branded a racist. How then, given the prevalence of color-blind thinking and white privilege, should white educators strive to work with students of color, both in terms of academics and discipline? Below are four simple ideas: focus on goals, use baseline measurements, share specific data, and give balanced feedback. When educators focus on goals for students as individuals, based on measurement of long-term improvement, within the context of a long-term relationship that builds trust, they may simultaneously acknowledge race and transcend some of its barriers.

When educators help students set goals for their development, they are accomplishing transparent and open to learning the process. I needed to ask questions and meditate the answers so that I could understand and use the process as part of my work toolkit. Needless to say, being openly reframed that “talking too much” in my group on the first day of CFT training closed the door to my interest in using “the process” as part of my professional practice. I left feeling, and didn’t go back, that was through, finished, and cynical about how CFTs could ever positively impact my learning or that of my community.

As an experienced educator, I know that my community would not sit still for a process that did not listen, hear, or change to suit the needs of the players. It might be the whole year of serious conversations with my personal critical friends that I regained the desire to revisit CFT training. I traveled over two hundred miles to attend a week long NSRF CFT training. Again, I was the only black person in the group. I still smarted from the sting of “airtime” over “why?” questions. I still wanted to go deeper—and there was nobody there to talk that over with. I completed the test, got the certificate, and went back to my personal critical friends to debrief and unpack my experience.

So you see, I will always relive that moment as part of my critical friends training experience to make sure that that is not what I replicate in my practice, but what I use as a transformation tool. Our work should be about transforming education, not replicating it.

—Lynda

Protocols in Practice...
(continued from page 4)
in cross-difference groupings, I am finding that our protocols are designed to support and build on what is being said, and that we don’t create space to hear what’s not said.

So when my colleagues of color speak to the silences that they hear, it begins to shift my thinking about what I’m hearing (missing?). I feel that I am slowly building my capacity to see and hear things that the lens of my white privilege has prevented me from seeing/hearing for most of my life. This shift makes me wonder whose voices we hear and prioritize in our protocols and whose voices we might be silencing.

I am now struggling with how to use our protocols to hear and respond to what’s not being said and changing the student experience. It might be that I need to better understand that tension in order to engage it, if I am truly going to implement the NSRF mission in my work. I had a recent experience that exemplified this for me.

Doing an Isaaquah protocol in a recent training, a vice principal brought this question to the table:

How do I motivate my teachers to take attendance consistently? When I made the request, it became clear she needed better attendance records so she could document who was skipping and give them consequences as a way to reduce skipping, which was chronic at the school.

In the probing questions, a couple of us asked questions like “Why do you think kids are skipping?” and “Do you see any connection between what’s going on in the classroom and who skips?” It was evident from her answers that she was not ready or willing to go in the direction of these questions. She needed strategies to motivate teachers. That’s what she asked for and that’s what she responded to in the questions and feedback.

I struggled with this because my experience in school is that teachers often wish kids out of classes by using teaching strategies, curricula and subtle behaviors that offend and don’t meet the needs of many of our student populations. By allowing the vice principal to not address a potential underlying issue, I felt I was complicit in supporting a school curriculum that potentially pushes kids out of classrooms and then punishes them for not being there. Because I followed the protocol and responded to the focus question and the adult need, I supported her in continuing her practice of recording who was in the room without figuring out why they were or weren’t in the room. For whom did I create a powerful learning experience?

What has begun to help me in situations like the one above is working with a revised tool for framing dilemmas (see protocol on our website). The tool supports participants in fram...
Director's Report (continued from page 1)

fall. They also run their organization unapologetically and neither you nor anyone else, including funders, have to like what they have to say, but neither Howard Fuller nor anyone else I met at the conference tailored their message based upon whether you were for or against privatization. BAEO believes in educational options for Black kids – period. And they mean all kinds of options: public school, private school, charter school, religious school, public vouchers for all kinds of schools, and home school, meeting the needs of each child as decided by the child’s parents. There simply is nothing to defend in traditional public schools if those schools do not meet the needs of each child, and for poor black and brown kids in this country, public schools is moderately fair at best and abusive and damaging to another generation of children at its worst – and there is plenty of the worst.

What I learned at the conference was that my privilege and access afford my children an OPTION that most urban kids don’t have. My children, in practice, receive a voucher to attend school. The voucher is only good in the town I live in and its value – both monetarily and educationally – is largely based on the family’s income. There is a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and school success are striking. So, I think the real question is how to provide real OPTIONS for kids in all socioeconomic strata and not just my kids and other pretty-well-off kids. The realization hit me smack upside my head and I can no longer defend allowing politicians and bureaucrats to decide how best to educate other people’s children. I didn’t leave the conference with a whole lot of answers, but I certainly left with many questions that remain with me, and I know I don’t look at schools in quite the same way.

One of my regrets this year was the opening at the Winter Meeting. We paraded one white person after the next onto the podium without intent and, worse, without consequence. After all the conversations and all the individual and collective work we’ve done around equity, our blindness was striking as we swam in the sea of white privilege.

What I learned doing some motivational reading recently and one of the lessons is to learn from mistakes and not be afraid to make them. I learned a great deal from that mistake and I believe our organization will become stronger if we unpack our mistakes publicly and hold ourselves accountable for changes in our practice. We cannot be afraid of making mistakes but we also need to stop making the same mistakes, time and time again.

As summer seminar agendas fade from planned to historic and we begin the new school year, I wonder what type of reflection I’ll have after another year of struggle and accomplishment. What type of reflection might you have a year from now; what would the futures protocol have us understand about the school year ahead?

What type of reflection might you have a year from now; what would the futures protocol have us understand about the school year ahead?

How many children will enter kindergarten this year; how many will learn to read? How many will drop out, commute or tune-out; how many will gradu

Steven Strull can be contacted at stevenstrull@optonline.net

Director’s Report
Collaboration + Relevant Content = Award-Winning Student Work
Debbie Bambino, Philadelphia

In April a national service organization, The Links, Inc., launched an art contest in Philadelphia with the theme, Respectfully Relating . . . Forget About Hating! Students were asked to design posters that illustrated how courage, hope, and compassion could be used to address violence. It was suggested that students focus on youth violence, gang violence or domestic/family violence. In addition to prize monies, the winners of the contest were told they would have their work displayed inside city buses and on a billboard.

A group of graphic design students at Jules E. Mastbaum, Area Vocational-Technical High School, in inner-city Philadelphia, has been winning art contests lately. In late May, I visited their classroom to see if they would unpack their success with me. Here’s a summary of what they shared with me.

When the bell rang at the end of the period, some additional students came in from lunch duty. They made up some work for their digital portfolio. When the bell rang at the end of the period, some additional students came in from lunch duty. They made up some work for their digital portfolio.

Katie Newnam, the graphic design teacher at Mastbaum, shared the contest specifications, what they call the “specs,” with her students. She stressed their participation in this contest was assigned for a grade; however, what began as a teacher-initiated effort soon became a collectively owned project. Once the students received the contest specifications, what they call the “specs,” they were free to create and collaborate.

Students were quick to tell me:

“They didn’t tell us exactly what had to be on the poster. I liked being able to play into it creatively.”

“We set our own deadlines and we meet them!”

“When asked why they were so successful in their efforts the young women had this to say: “I got a lot from the slogan and liked developing my own pictures.”

“The topic was a positive one . . . It’s real events. It goes on every day. When they talked about the ways they work together as a group, using a rubric to give each other feedback, I wanted to know more. They said, “After setting their ideas up on the white board and then we all share our ideas and questions about the work. It’s not like a disagreement, it’s about being skilled in working as a group. We go into detail, we don’t just say, I like it or I don’t. It’s not a put-down. It’s important to have a group environment to do our work.”

“We have fun with our work. It’s not a drag. We enjoy doing it and Ms. Newnam breaks it down for us. It’s not easy, we work hard, but it’s easier to understand when it’s explained with an easy-to-follow rubric. You can follow the rubric like a checklist to make sure you have everything you need.”

“I asked the students if they thought the way they learned and worked in graphic arts could be used in other classes and they said: “Definitely, we learn more in groups! You don’t feel alone, you get help with your ideas.”

“Any class can work as a group, it’s a group effort to learn together. When you work as an individual, it can make you pull your hair out!”

“I like it because if you know something and they (another student) know something else, then together you know twice as much!”

“It’s projects without pressure.”

“It’s important that we have some choice, that we don’t all have to work the same way, or else . . .”

At the end of our conversation, I thanked the students for their time and asked them how they felt about winning. One young woman, a senior, said, “I’ve never had anything displayed outside school before, it’s cool! She went on to quote her grandma as saying, “I get to see my baby on the bus!”

After the students left, I spoke to their teacher, Katie Newnam. Katie is in her fourth year of teaching; she was a graphic artist in industry before coming to Mastbaum. Katie makes assignments the way jobs are given in industry. She talks about clients and audience, skills and responsibility, practice and proficiency, and she talks a lot about community.

In this classroom, students move about purposively. It’s not unusual to see students with headsets on, listening to music while they complete their work. The steady hum of talk in the room is mostly on task and when it isn’t, gentle reminders from the teacher refocus the group. During this visit, one student was taking digital pictures, while a small group gave feedback to a student who was making up some work for her digital portfolio. When the bell rang at the end of the period, some additional students came in from lunch duty. When the bell rang at the end of the period, some additional students came in from lunch duty.

When Katie’s students won this most recent contest, she was quick to thank Wendy Shapiro, her former principal, and me, her former CFG coach, for introducing her to ideas and tools in support of student-centered classrooms, but we both know that while we have supported Katie’s instincts, it’s her own respect for her students, as demonstrated in her explicit teaching for their abilities, that has made the difference in this classroom.

Debbie Bambino can be reached at dbambino@earthlink.net
Collaboration + Relevant Content = Award-Winning Student Work
Debbie Bambino, Philadelphia

In April a national service organization, The Links, Inc., launched an art contest in Philadelphia with the theme, Respectfully Relating . . . Forget About Hating! Students were asked to design posters that illustrated how courage, hope, and compassion could be used to address violence. It was suggested that students focus on youth violence, gang violence or domestic/family violence. In addition to prize monies, the winners of the contest were told they would have their work displayed inside city buses and on a billboard.

A group of graphic design students at Jules E. Mastbaum, Area Vocational Technical High School, in inner-city Philadelphia, has been winning art contests lately. In late May, I visited their classroom to see if they would unpack their success with me. Here’s a summary of what they shared with me.

Katie Newnam, the graphic design teacher at Mastbaum, shared the contest specifications with her students, and encouraged them to think about the current epidemic of violence in our city. At the start, participation in this contest was assigned for a grade; however, what began as a teacher-initiated effort soon became a collectively owned project. Once the students received the contest specifications, what they call the “specs,” they were free to create and collaborate.

Students were quick to tell me:

“They didn’t tell us exactly what had to be on the poster. I liked being able to play into it creatively.”

“We set our own deadlines and we meet them!”

When asked why they were so successful in their efforts the young women had this to say:

“I got a lot from the slogan and liked developing my own pictures.”

“The topic was a positive one . . . It’s real events.

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“Definitely, we learn more in groups! You don’t feel alone, you get help with your ideas.”

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In this classroom, students move about purposively. It’s not unusual to see students with head sets on, listening to music while they complete their work. The steady hum of talk in the room is mostly on task and when it isn’t, gentle reminders from the teacher refocus the group. During this visit, one student was taking digital pictures, while a small group gave feedback to a student who was making up some work for her digital portfolio. When the bell rang at the end of the period, some additional students came in from lunch to work on their work. The seamless movement of students in and out of the room spoke volumes.

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They also run their organization unapologetically and neither you nor anyone else, including funders, have to like what they have to say, but neither Howard Fuller nor anyone else I met at the conference tailored their message based upon whether or not their ideas were popular.

BACE believes in educational options for Black kids – period. And they mean all kinds of options: public school, private school, charter school, religious school, public vouchers for all kinds of schools, and home school, meeting the needs of each child as decided by the child’s parents. There is nothing to defend in traditional public schools if those schools do not meet the needs of each child, and for poor black and brown kids in this country, public school is moderately fair at best and abusive and damaging to another generation of children at its worst and there is plenty of the worst.

What I learned at the conference was that my privilege and access afford my children an OPTION that most urban kids don’t have. My children, in practice, receive a voucher to attend school. The voucher is only good in the town I live in and its value – both monetarily and educationally – is largely based on my involvement. Those who have no involvement, and thus no correlate between socioeconomic status and school success are struggling. So, I think the real question is how to provide real OPTIONS for kids in all socioeconomic strata and not just my kids and other pretty-well-off kids. The realization hit me smack upside my head as I was entering first grade. We entered the experience with many questions and apprehensions, but most of all, resolve. The mission was to have the participants gain more skills and a greater understanding of how to create and sustain a professional learning community.

The Leading for Educational Equity seminar was one offering this summer based on this work. A central feature in the design of this seminar was the intentional diversification of both the facilitation and participant pools as an effort to build alliances across differences.

Once the facilitators and participants were in place, we began our work. The objective for the day was to have the participants engage in a day of coaches’ clinics in Los Angeles on August 21st. Our purpose was to bring all the NSRF groups together for a day of coaching their CFGs.
When White Educators Discipline Students of Color

Joshua Frank, Massachusetts

This article is an excerpt from an article tentatively titled “Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty.”

It discussing the achievement gap, educators often talk about the need for relevant and representative curriculum for students of color. They discuss the need to recruit more educators of color. They also talk about power and the reality of white privilege. At my current school we hold “ courageous conversations” to build a dialogue across boundaries of race. There is rarely a discussion, however, of white educators teaching, and needing to discipline, students of color. Why do we need to think about what happens when a white educator disciplines a student of color? For me the answer begins with what’s happening at my school.

Despite a wonderful diversity that is truly valued by the entire community, despite having a series of workshops and seminars that address the realities of teaching in a school that is 55% white, beyond the reinforcement of stereotypes that lurks behind these numbers lies another, very practical, point. When discipline works, by holding students accountable in a way that they feel is fair and aimed at helping them grow, those students are able to get back to work. When students get back to work, they are less likely to re-offend, and less likely to misbehave again or as often, and more likely to make academic progress. While ideally the staff of a public school would mirror the diversity of its student population, the fact that most teachers who work with students of color in a diverse public school setting are white. As one of those white educators, I have long been encouraged to move beyond my own sense of color-blindness, beyond the mantra to “treat all kids the same.” Given that a person’s race is an important part of his or her identity, this makes perfect sense to me. When I think about what happens when a white educator disciplines a student of color, both in terms of academics and discipline, I am finding that my whiteness as a racial identity that promotes privilege, rather than as the unacknowledged factor against which others are measured.

I’m encouraged to think in terms of my own race, to think of my whiteness as a racial identity that promotes privilege, rather than as the unacknowledged factor against which others are measured. I think about what happens when a white educator disciplines a student of color? For me the answer begins with what’s happening at my school.

When we don’t attend to what’s not being said, I find that too often white adults like me leave the table feeling good about the issues and strategies that matter most to our struggling students. There’s often a tension between where adults are willing and ready to go and where our students need us to go. I know that I need to better understand that tension in order to engage it, if I am truly going to implement the NSRF mission in my work. I had a recent experience that exemplified this for me.

Doing an Ihasquah protocol in a recent training, a vice principal brought this question to the table:

*What do I motivate my teachers to take attendance consistently?* In the clarifying questions, it became clear she needed better attendance records so she could document who was skipping and give them consequences as a way to reduce skipping, which was a constant concern.

In the probing questions, a couple of us asked questions like “Why do you think kids are skipping?” and “Do you see any connection between what’s going on in the classroom and who skips?” It was evident from her answers that she was not ready or willing to go in the direction of these questions. She needed strategies to motivate teachers. That’s what she asked for and that’s what she responded to in the questions and feedback.

I struggled with this because my experience in school was that too often we push kids out of classes by using teaching strategies, curricula and subtle behaviors that offend and don’t meet the needs of many of our student populations. By allowing students to discharge their anger by not addressing a potential underlying issue, I felt I was complicit in supporting a school curriculum that potentially pushes kids out of classrooms and then punishes them for not being there. Because I followed the protocol and responded to the focus question and the adult need, I supported her in continuing her practice of recording who was in the room without figuring out why they were or weren’t in the room. For whom did I create a powerful learning experience? What has begun to help me in situations like the one above is working with a revised tool for framing dilemmas (see protocol on our website).

I needed to ask questions and mediate the answers so that I could understand and use the process as part of my work toolkit. Needless to say, being openly rebuked for “talking too much” in my group on the first day of CFT training closed the door to my interest in using “the process” as part of my professional practice. I left feeling angry, and didn’t go back. It was, however, of white educators teaching, and needing to discipline, students of color. Why do we need to think about what happens when a white educator disciplines a student of color? For me the answer begins with what’s happening at my school.

As an experienced educator, I know that my community would not sit still for a process that did not listen, hear, or change to suit the needs of the people. In the whole year of serious conversations with my personal critical friends that I regained the desire to revisit CFT training. I traveled over two hundred miles to attend a week long NSRF CFT training. Again, I was the only black person in the group. I still smarted from the sting of “airtime” over “why?” questions. I still wanted to go deeper – and there was nobody there to talk that over with. I completed the test, got the certificate, and went back to my personal critical friends to debrief and unpack my experience.

So you see, I will always relive that moment as part of my critical friends training experience to make sure that that is not what I replicate in my practice, but what I use as a transformation tool. Our work should be about transforming education, not replicating it.

- Lynda

Protocols in Practice...

(continued from page 4)

in cross-discipline groupings, I am finding that our protocols are designed to support and build on what is being said, and that we don’t create space to hear what’s not said.

So when my colleagues of color speak to the silences that they hear, it begins to shift my thinking about what I’m hearing (missing?). I find that I can slowly build my capacity to see and hear things that others have not, when my white privilege has prevented me from seeing/hearing for most of my life. This shift makes me wonder whose voices we hear and prioritize in our protocols and whose voices we might be silencing.

I am now struggling with how to use our protocols to hear and respond to what’s not being said and sometimes not being asked. They also discuss power and the reality of white privilege. At my current school we hold “coura" protocols. When White Educators Discipline Students of Color. This article is an excerpt from an article tentatively titled “Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty.”

Protocol in Practice...

(continued from page 4)
ing their dilemma in a way that ensures that the focusing question is focused around what’s going to make the greatest difference for students with the greatest needs. It helps to surface some of the assumptions we bring into the work.

This vice principal left with great ideas for getting better attendance records, but I would argue that it didn’t create more powerful learning experiences for students. Our mission states that our end goal is to “create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.” As practitioners and as an organization, I think we have barely dipped our toes into unpacking what our mission statement really means and what it looks like in action.

CFG work has changed the lives and practices of many educators, including myself, but the elephant in the room is that most of us doing the work are white. If this work, as we’re currently doing it, really empowered all voices, wouldn’t we see more faces of color at our national meetings? Wouldn’t we see stronger data around equitable student outcomes connected to our work?

What do we need to do to think differently about our work in the future as we shift our thinking and our structures to better engage the “everyone” in our mission statement? I’m left with the conviction that we still need protocols to support our collaborative work across difference. However, my conviction is now tempered by an awareness that protocols are guidelines that must be revised, interrupted and sometimes scrapped, in the moment, if the process is not serving the needs of our most underserved students. I’m talking about stepping into the “zone” of dissonance and staying there because we know we can’t really grow until we are disturbed and uncomfortable enough to change our practice.

Kim Feicke can be contacted at feicke@licdark.edu
Visit our website at www.nsrfharmony.org/connections.html to download Kim Feicke’s Framing Dilemmas tool as cited in this article.

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Two hundred years ago, as much as eighty-five percent of our great state of Indiana was covered with trees. With logging in the 19th century came forest management practices based on replanting trees to replace and replicate the forests so that the basic organic resources around us could sustain our growing population. But just planting more trees ignored the crucial roles that the other layers of the forest played in the system and gave us what we might call “the woods” — trees with out dense undergrowth, and dirt covered only by leaves. What we now know about reforestation tells us to attend to the soil, and nurture the shrubs, even as we plant seedlings and saplings that continue to grow into healthy trees that can sustain the forest.

This attention to the layers in between might be one of the keys to the future. I can think of do what we’ve been doing in the two years since our last Center of Activity report in Connections.

When the NSRF National Office asked us to write a report from the field, none of us really knew where to start. So many things have happened in the interim that it was hard to get a handle on all of our activities state-wide. We are a small group from Bloomington, from Bloomington, from Columbus, Indianapolis, and Goshen. The surge in our growth prompted a brief conversation on e-mail about what we should do for the report and who should do it. Tom Gregory came up with the idea of using a modified online metaphors activity, and I agreed to write that up in the form of this report.

Tom began the metaphors conversation with me on the phone, at which point I used the metaphor of a center of activity’s work being like a board of directors. Tom’s metaphor began to evolve as he wrote this to me the next day.

Your goal (in creating your metaphor) was probably to keep things manageable so that good deliberations could continue. My goal was to have an army so that when one of us faltered another could take her place. We cast a broad net when we started this, probably thinking that a few would fall away. The surprise may be that almost no one has. That’s a really good sign that, despite our stuttering start, enough good stuff is occurring to keep people engaged—and hopeful for the future.

Over the next few days, I sent out a call to everyone involved in our work. Arriving at a comprehensive list of folks involved in NSRF work through our center was a task in itself, and I found myself recalling the debrief session following a Coaches Institute in the spring of 2006. I had just finished a very successful seminar that we ran at Bloomington’s South High School, and we were sitting around a big table looking at each other with “what next?” on our minds.

Since there were twelve of us there, we had been able to form and maintain small CFG-sized groups of ten participants and two facilitators for practically the entire week. We all found it remarkable that there were enough facilitators in Bloomington to connect everyone to one National Facilitator from out of town. Around that table, we had five National Facilitators working out of the Indiana Center, a sixth group from Georgia — and seven interns who had been successfully running CFGs in their own schools in Bloomington for at least a year.

At that point we had enough of a critical mass of people who were obviously passionate about CFGs to get the discussion going forming a Center of Activity that was larger than just a few individuals, but we had no concrete plans. So, in February of 2006, after the Winter Meeting in Denver, we began meeting as a group of facilitators and interns, intent on making something happen.

At the Winter Meeting in Denver, we began meeting as a group of facilitators and interns, intent on making something happen. In the interim we have met monthly for some stretches and “every three or so months” at other points, for multiple purposes: to get to know each other and to choose projects, glean strategies and forge the strong connections with one another we know will serve to propel us into the future.

The initial Bloomington crowd has become a large statewide network, expanding our opportunities to great partnerships and by invitations to like-minded colleagues. Colleagues from Indianapolis have begun to join us in delivering coaches’ trainings, not just in organizing them. For last summer’s round of semi...
An Interview with Dr. Paul C. Gorski
Camilla Greene, New Hampshire

Dr. Gorski is an assistant professor at Hamline University in Minnesota, and is founder of EdChange, described on its website as being “dedicated to diversity, equity, and justice in schools and society. We act to shape schooling, and consequently the lives of all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, (dis)ability, language, or religion to promote equitable opportunities to thrive and achieve free from oppression.” Dr. Gorski is also known as a frequent critic of the work of Dr. Ruby Payne, author of A Framework for Understanding Poverty, and her expressed and practiced theory of poverty.

How would you describe yourself?
Activist, educator, writer in that order. My background is in community activism and organizing and it was through activism that I came into education.

When did you first become aware of classism?
I don’t know that I became aware of classism as a system until my teens. My mother’s family had lived in poverty in a mining town in the mountains between Maryland and West Virginia. Even as a kid, when I’d visit, they had no running water, dilapidated housing. I didn’t see any of that but I didn’t wonder why. In terms of a process for understanding racism and classism, I started seeing systemic and purposefully inequalitiable conditions once I started asking big questions about the world around me. In school we would talk about what it was like to be poor. But we didn’t ask why people were poor. Very few people talk about why poverty exists in the wealthy country on the planet. For whose benefit does poverty exist? For whose benefit is the world around me working as it works right now? It’s only when I learned to ask these questions that I began to see classism.

What have you been able to do to interrupt classism in your work? In my work is struggling with my own orientation. At the university, I named it when I see it. But I’m always successful. One of my biggest challenges is to the classism.

Dr. Paul C. Gorski

How do you students describe you?
“Politically radical.” “I do not see myself as politically radical. “Passionate.” “Engaging.” They would describe me as an activist, and that is threatening to many of them, most of whom are teachers.

What would you like to be your legacy?
That is something I don’t think about. I turn 45 tomorrow, so it feels odd to think about a legacy.

Maybe my legacy, at this point, would be about helping people together, people immediately around me. I try to work collaboratively, pull people in, build movements. My legacy would be organizing, drawing people together who have resisted the temptation to soften the conversation about racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, imperialism, and other oppressions.

To what extent do you believe educators are capable of examining their own class-based prejudices?
First, I should say that the problem of classism is not specific to educators. We are all socialized to buy into the myth of meritocracy and consumer culture, and to be measured by what we have rather than by who we are. So if you believe that if you work hard enough you will succeed, then you probably believe poor people must not work hard enough. Therefore, you probably believe poor people must be deficient. This is where Ruby Payne and her popularity come into play. She draws on these assumptions, already present in most people attending her work so far. Even when we (collective “WE”) really think about it at all most days. The urgency of the now has a way of overpowering the important things. Even when we do take time to reflect and discuss, such as in work sessions and CFG meetings, I find raising questions about race and inequities brings a lot of silence. It’s a silence that doesn’t seem to be emotionally laden, but like there’s no connection. It doesn’t seem to even be a delayed reaction, but rather a lack of comprehension.

This book provides a foundation … for those educational leaders at the system and school level who are willing and ready to begin or accelerate their journey toward educational equity and excellence for all children . . . It is designed to assist in facilitating effective dialogue about the racial issues that impact student achievement. As you progress through each chapter, you will be prompted to reflect on your learning and, in particular, your own racial experience . . . As a . . . leader, this book will guide you in engaging your staff in a conversation on race as a first step in closing the racial achievement gap.

I have chosen to highlight this paragraph because it reminds me that my work begins with critical self-reflection that is both emotional and intellectually demanding. And, that this self-reflection is in service of engaging in dialogue that will lead to actions to end equitable transformative policies, practices and behavior. This notion challenges me to stay grounded and focused on what the authors of this text are inviting me to do. Namely, be courageous enough to begin by interrogating my own assumptions (beliefs, values and feelings) provoked by the text and make them as transparent as I can as part of the ensuing online discourse. For me this allows the possibility that I can grow in my sensitivities and insights in participating in critical discourse - having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, “bracketing” premature judgment, and seeking common ground. This requires that I bring whatever emotional intelligence I have to self-awareness, impulse control, persistence, zeal and self-motivation, especially begin to carefully assess alternative beliefs, and participate fully and freely in critical-debacle dialogue. I am excited to have a chance to practice this sort of communicative learning because of the emphasis on critical self-reflection in assessing and navigating the knowing and not-knowing to make a more dependable working judgment on the actions I need to take. -V

Our conversation has slowed down during this peak vacation and travel season, but we are not calling it to a close. We share this sound bite from the chat in the hopes that our reader-colleagues will begin to have similar conversations in their local contexts. In the next issue, two colleagues have agreed to share their thoughts about “white talk and color commentary” as it is posed in the text and in their lives. Stay tuned!

Debbie Bambino can be contacted at dbambino@earthlink.net
to speak up for myself by speaking up for the others who actually represented me. Before long it was obvious that doing so was important to do - period. Somehow, somewhere along this journey, before I knew of the word “ally,” I learned deeply the importance of: relationship. My personal education taught me the impact of oppress- ion and how it maintains a status quo of privilege and access.

My work in leading for equity is to interrupt this pattern. This is my work. To be interruptive does not make me a well-liked person. To take up the difficult conversation of what needs to happen to achieve equity is a commitment to rela- tionship and a commitment to transformation - a different way of being. How can I hold this so pas- sionately? This for me is not about choice. I cannot sit in a school on any given day and see an indi- vidual life that has not been impacted by inequities - inequities of poverty, violence, sexual identity, or educational achievement. I have seen enough of this - it is time for systemic interruptions. I never want anyone to feel the sense of unwant or unsafety that I experienced. If my passion for equity scares people away, my hope is that I have at the very least lessened their pain and more joy than currently is our reality.

When I consider what challenges I have in my future, I have to say that the one that means most to me is the challenge of ensuring that my work is meaningful and relevant. While leadership seems to pull me further from the classroom, I never want to be so far removed that my work is not informed by what is happening in the classroom that day. One of the ways I strive to maintain this sense of humility is to ensure that my work is supposed to serve most but actually serves least. In particular, we must involve our students. We must consciously educate and be aware of our students. We must commit to educating and supporting our kids to be able to participate in creating and meeting extraordinarily high expectations and outcomes. Our students need to be active partici- pants in shifting their own culture. I want to believe I am part of a movement in our society in which our students and their families will achieve equitably.

As you transition from being a school leader to a coach of other school leaders, Greg, what is your next challenge?

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Read Talking Back: What Students Know About Teaching by the students of Leadership High School in conjunction with 826 Valencia to hear Greg’s students’ voices.

Greg Peters can be reached at: gpete@ksess.org and Peggy Silva can be reached psilva@sprise.com

Taking Responsibility for Anti-Muslim Discrimination in our Schools
Sarah Childers, Indiana

A mir is in fifth grade. Today is the day of his family history report, which he must give in front of the rest of his class at Skyline Elementary in Daly City, California. He’s nervous because his family is from Iraq, and some of his family members have been killed. Once he finishes his report, he asks if anyone has questions. Amir’s teacher asks him if his family in Iraq supports the war. Amir does not know, his family has been here for many years and he doesn’t even know any of his family’s that is in Iraq. The teacher asks, “So you don’t know if they are terrorists?” Amir shakes his head.

In Minnesota, a Muslim girl who wears the traditional Islamic head-scarf, or hijab (hee-jub), is repeat- edly taunted by a schoolmate, called “terrorist,” told to “go back to your country” and “the Qur’an is full of lies.” She tells her school counselor, but no action is taken.

A guest has been invited to speak to Mr. Escamilla’s science class (and all others in the school) about Islam and Muslims in the United States. After the presentation, students begin asking questions about how they can be helpful, and one student says, “I’m going to help out a Muslim family that’s in Iraq.” The teacher asks, “So you don’t think they are terrorists?”

Given the frequency of instances of discrimina- tion at the hands of teachers and students, what is our responsibility to students who are Muslim, or who are perceived to be Muslim? How can we gain understanding and compassion for what these children are going through? How can we express our solidarity for these students who are vulnerable in this society? What support can we give them? And how can we pursue adult and student learning in an effort to eliminate these biases and support our mis- sion for social and educational equality?

To begin to understand and gain compassion for Muslim and Arab students, we have to look at our- selves in the mirror to reflect on our own beliefs and practices. As a nation, we generally do not know very much about Islam, Muslims, or Middle-Eastern cultures. In CARP’s 2006 American Public Opinion poll about Islam and Muslims, only 2% responded that they considered themselves “very knowledgeable” about Islam and Muslims. Most of us consider ourselves “somewhat knowledgeable.” Additionally, only 20% had Muslim friends, and only 13% had Muslim colleagues. Only one-fourth consid- ered themselves to be tolerant and accepting of Muslims.

For many Americans, our primary exposure to Islam and Muslims is through the media. However, accord- ing to a study conducted by California State University, “the American media has been a pri- mary agent responsible for creating racist stereotypes, images and viewpoints of Arab Muslims before and after September 11, 2001.” This media exposure, for the majority of Americans, is the number one information source about nearly one-third of the world’s population.

Bringing perspective into the classroom about Islam, Muslims, terrorism and the war is crucial. As part of NSRF’s mission to “foster social and educational equality,” it’s our responsibility to further educate ourselves, and to provide unbiased informa- tion to students and teachers alike, whether or not Muslim or Arab students are a part of our schools or classrooms. See the sidebar on page 23 for adult reading suggestions.

Given the wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds of Muslims, each individual’s customs and practices will vary. (Only 15% of all Arabs are Muslim; the countries with the largest Muslim... (continued on page 21)
What Happens When We Intentionally Reflect on Our CFG's Work?
Ellen Key Ballock, Pennsylvania

What really struck me at the last Winter Meeting was the number of individuals who shared with me some degree of discontent with their CFG's work. They spoke of a mismatch between their group's actual collaborative work and their vision of the possible, of wondering how to push their CFG to the next level, or of the challenges of doing CFG work in their specific contexts. This was particularly interesting to me since it was the incongruity between my hopes and results of CFG's work that first motivated me to explore critical friends groups as a researcher. Several years ago I had gone through coaches training by being a member of a group of colleagues from our local school district and university, and as a group we had initiated several new CFGs. I felt affirmed in this space where both my questions and expertise counted, amazement by the potential learning from a long, deep, collaborative discussion of just one piece of student or teacher work, and excited to learn about how many different types of protocols would work. However, once the novelty began to wear off and I grew weary of the monthly question, I began questioning whether my discontent related to my own unrealistic expectations or to our CFG's work. I began pursuing answers to questions such as the following: What is the ultimate potential for a CFG? What factors help or hinder a group in meeting this potential? How do CFGs develop into strong learning communities? How can this development be facilitated?

My research began in the library as I searched for research reports specifically related to CFGs and more generally related to professional learning communities and group development. My interest in pursuing these questions was heightened as I realized the matching claims about the effectiveness of CFGs in enhancing collegial relationships and teacher professionalism, and in impacting teaching and learning, the existing body of research and CFG's work. However, the incongruity between my hopes and results of CFG's work and my own unrealistic expectations or to our CFG's work for me and to the group members may have difficulty engaging in the process of analysis and goal-setting. As a mentor of mine recently quipped, we can be engaged in the process of analysis and goal-setting. As a mentor of mine recently quipped, we can be engaged in the process of analysis and goal-setting. As a mentor of mine recently quipped, we can be engaged in the process of analysis and goal-setting. 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inequities we have identified within our own context? How are we responding?
• What biases and stereotypes have we identified within our practice or within ourselves? How are we responding?
• What are we learning about the relationship between culture and student learning? How are we working towards more culturally responsive practices?
• How do we hold one another accountable to taking action based on what we learn and discuss as a group, whether within our own individual practice or within our organization as a whole?
• How do we know whether we are making progress as a group? How do we measure success? What evidence or documentation do we have of our own learning and impact? What differences can we identify in student achievement across all subgroups?


The NSRF events database was the source for the information in this article. This database is only as good as the data provided, so if you are an NSRF National Facilitator, please let the National Center know about any upcoming NSRF seminar experiences, so we may promote them on our website and use the collected information to enrich our network.

Chris Jones can be contacted at cjones@nsrfharmony.org


This research has been funded in part by a grant from the Lastinger Center for Learning.

Ellen Key Ballock can be reached at ellenkey@hotmail.com

In two years ago, Gregory Peters became the director of SF-CESS, the San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools, a regional center of the Coalition of Essential Schools and a center of activity of the NSRF. Prior to this work, Greg served as principal of Leadership High School in San Francisco, a ten-year-old charter school in the southeastern section of this city. Of the 140 students currently enrolled at Leadership, 95% are students of color, and 40% of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Greg remains coprincipal of Leadership High School, serving as a liaison between this laboratory school and the larger network of organizations focused on school change.

Greg notes that poor nutrition, gangs, and violence are major factors in his students’ daily lives. Leadership High School is a safe community for our students, but our students are victims and witnesses and even sometimes perversaries of the violence that surrounds them. We absolutely know our children well, and as a result are committed to serving them even though we know any one of them could exist on either side within the cycle of violence and oppression that plagues our urban youth.

How were you introduced to NSRF? What is this organization’s role in your work?

I was a member of a CFG just as they were introduced. The following year (1996) I trained with Juli Quinn as a coach, and coached a group from Oceana High School, where I was a math and art teacher for six years. CFGs became essential in my work as a new principal at Leadership High School.

Just in its third year, Leadership was not a good place for students or for their teachers. The school lacked a strong culture of professional development. CFGs were a natural fit in helping to shift the culture to that of a learning organization. The faculty of Leadership High School was firm in its commitment that I serve as an instructional leader, so we had to negotiate what that meant in the daily life of our school. We spent that first year learning how we needed to work together. CFGs provided a needed structure for our learning. We used that structure, but operated under a different name. At the time, NSRF did not have a presence in the Bay Area, so we chose to call our groups “I-Groups,” a combination of CFG principles and mini-research groups. We trained our department leaders as coaches, although they were diverse groups, not department members. Our I-Groups meet every three weeks in a rotation of collaborative groups - departments, teams, and professional development.

We are very conscious in our school’s I-Groups and in our five-day training seminars about our focus on equity. While it is the challenge for every participant to keep equity at the center of our work, how do we focus on the coaches’ responsibility to ensure this. Our school is located in a tough place, but we have a lot to be proud of. Following an independent audit of the San Francisco Unified School District, Leadership High School was one of only two schools cited for making progress in closing the achievement gap. I choke saying this out loud because our progress still is not even close to being enough. We need to share this information to help sustain the work, but in the larger context, our successes are merely a blip on the screen of an intense urban area such as San Francisco.

Greg, please describe the roots of your commitment to equity in your life and your work.

As an openly gay school leader, the concept of equity is an innate part of my individual profile. However, my greater sense of empathy comes from growing up as a gay and closeted member of a poor Rhode Island family on welfare. As a teenager I passed for straight because that is the first assumption of others, and for middle-class because I am white and educated. As a result, I was able to hear what my own oppressors (those who looked like me) said about me while I was in the very same room. I was hated in front of my face without a filter because they didn’t know I was their target. I learned quickly what those with power and prejudice said of others when they believed the others were not in their presence. Out of fear, defense, anger and frustration - and in ignorance of what exactly to do - I learned...

(continued on page 20)
First there is silence. More often than not after the to what is being discussed and what was an intel impact on me or students in classrooms pertinent very intellectual discussion on teaching and learn what does now? 'How can I be anti-racist?' 'How can you the only person of color in a room full of intel lects from the dominant race. The subject is a the only person of color in a room full of intel lects from the dominant race. The subject is a..."..."

As a white ally, I feel stuck by the "truth"/pain of a colleague of color's experience when I have to reckon with my piece of responsibility, my role in causing the pain. In the heat of the moment, I may not know what to say. In my discomfort, I may wel come the chance to just move on if nothing has been said, or happened. What I am learning, and it is an ongoing process of learning, is that it is pre cisely at those uncomfortable moments that I need to slow down and acknowledge what was said/ happened and own it to consider: how best to respond... that I need to think about it, or talk more with colleagues about it. As a coach/facilita tor, I am working on holding the space & time for these admittedly intense and awkward conversa tions because I know that it is only by working in this risky zone that I can move forward. Concretely, this means changing the agenda and being willing to go beyond the tried-and-true steps of the protocol, if the protocol's not working. Based on conversations C and I have had in our work, I know that this willingness to "hold the space" is part of her definition of having her back. -D

"Courageous Conversation, as a strategy, begins with the premise that the intentionally educational leaders collectively view themselves and the schooling enterprise to be inherently non-racist. In fact their tightly held beliefs and understandings regarding the significance of race make it difficult for teachers to com prehend, examine, and..."..."

not say anything. I wonder if I am crazy. Did I not speak? Am I not speaking a truth that needs to be explored deeply in order for us to do our best work in schools? Invariably, someone will come up to me after the meeting and say "I am so glad you said what you said." I then wonder why "Why in the fr**** double hockey sticks did you not acknowledge or expand on what I said?" Another response after the meeting is often a need to negate what I might have said. That conversation starts off with "You can't possibly feel that way." or "Things are not that bad, are they?" Once some one shared with me after such a meeting that white people, including the speaker, were afraid of being called racists that is why they shy away from conversations on race. Once I wanted every white per son to stand up in a crowd and shout "I am a racist!" Great! Now let's get on with what could be a substantive and courageous conversation about race..."

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fall into that trap more often than not. I am conscious of that and try to work on not falling into the allure of the path of least resistance, but the allure is always there.

It has been helpful to surround myself with a group of people committed to change who are relentless about challenging class injustices. I have surrounded myself with a group of people who are not shy about calling me out when I begin drifting to the path of least resistance.

This is difficult and sometimes confrontational work, often because people tend to confuse peace with social justice. If we want justice, we work in the activist community, must be relentless with our feedback to each other and with other well-meaning people who are actually contributing to injustices through what they perceive to be social justice work. We must stop worrying about hurting each other's feelings.

This brings me back to Ruby Payne because, despite the egregiousness of her work, so few people have been willing to stand up to her and say, “This is classism and racism.” We do not have the experience of classism. When I compare the cultures of these communities with those of the Appalachian side of my family, they have absolutely nothing in common. I work in the D.C. area with people in poverty and again, her stereotypes of poor people did not fit the poor people I knew.

For example, here in Minnesota there are large and very poor Somali and Hmong refugee populations. Ruby Payne stereotypes poor people in ways that do not fit my experience with my own family or with people of poverty. I worked in the D.C. area with people in poverty and again, her stereotypes of poor people did not fit the poor people I knew.

I have received a lot of positive feedback as Bill Sommers, one of her trainers, called difficult people in my life at an attempt to silence me. In fact, several times when I’ve been scheduled to speak at an event, Sommers has called the event organizers to try to convince them to uninvite me.

I have received several other angry responses. What’s been interesting, though, is that none of these angry responses critiques my specific criticisms of Ruby Payne’s framework. Instead, they attack me, like how dare I critique Ruby Payne.

Ruby Payne’s framework is popular because it does not challenge the status quo. The majority of the folks who agree with Payne’s framework do not consider that what they are buying into is racism and classism.

I have received a lot of positive feedback as well from teachers, administrators, fellow activists, people who are horrified that their school districts are paying up to hundreds of thousands of dollars to have somebody come in and talk about how they have a model for understanding major responsibilities of school leadership and organizing those responsibilities around student learning. (p. 40).

Once the authors clearly explain the leadership domains and the idea of school accomplishments, they focus on how the accomplishment-minded practice helps school leaders improve their practice. The four domains, leadership for sustainable goals, leadership for strategic focus on student action, and leadership for social capital, represent distinct responsibilities. The professional uses three domains to attend to different aspects of the school and work with different constituencies, with an intended result of a school vision and goals that are articulated in success criteria for accomplishments, school structures to reach all accomplishments, better school conditions, and more interconnection among teachers and with community members.

Each leadership domain is closely examined: specifically, how it supports student learning as well as responsive leadership to the daily challenges principals face. The authors provide real-world examples of each leadership domain and how the FSLA offers a framework to focus daily actions on student learning.

The final section of this book addresses the professionals who frame educational leadership programs or offer professional learning opportunities for principals. The authors address the knowledge that principals need to succeed in their role of instructional leader. They propose organizing this professional knowledge around an accomplishment-based structure that “includes simultaneous consideration of a more eclectic knowledge base that includes consideration of moral, legal, critical, and practical aspects of the school.” (p. 117), while making professional knowledge more accessible to the practitioner.

Along with the development of this accomplishment-based knowledge base, the authors advocate narrative practice and a commensurate craft knowledge,
Connections appreciates Lynda Robinson’s contribution to our expressed desire to hold “Courageous Conversations” across difference as adults in order to better serve students across difference in our classroom.

Hi Kim,

Thank you for gathering your thoughts on paper for this important piece. Even in reading your piece again, I found my chest tighten up a bit and a warmth sweep over me. Every time I relive that experience it makes me feel my “otherness” in the room and in the work. It is not a good feeling. It is a shameful feeling. The thinking makes me acutely aware that I have been tricked twice again, twice acting as if my presence means anything when white people are “conducting their business” in educating kids – mainly poor kids, but mostly kids of color. What does it mean for educators of color in the room and at the table with their privileged sisters and brothers? As I remember the event, I think what really embarrassed me – and yes, hurt me was that I went to the CFG training with an open heart. The teachers at my table were also open-hearted – asking me questions and engaging in dialogue with me both personally and professionally. I felt pretty comfortable in responding to the questions and comments. In other words, I felt that the interactions at the table were positive and productive. My identity as a black educator was intact – and in fact honored by the educator who was Mexican-American, so she would respond to questions from her cultural perspective, as well. I was aware that I was the only black person in the room, but that did not curtail my enthusiasm or curiosity about the CFG training. Since all the white educators were convinced that the CFG process was the best thing since sliced bread, I felt entitled to find out what they knew so I would be “down with the program,” too. So I let my guard down and I was prepared to be open-minded as I could be. So imagine my surprise and disdain when the facilitator warned me to curb my “airtime” in the training! I felt that I didn’t need to be there if I was not completely (continued on page 17)

I was Day Two of a CFG training and the only African-American participant had been taking more airtime than others, partially to better explain her cultural perspective. Her facilitator referred to a norm around equity of airtime to bring this to her attention. “Oh,” she responded, “I thought that since I’m the only person of color in the room it meant you needed to hear from me more often!” The group had a short discussion about the differences between equitable and equal and moved on.

Later in the training, this same participant wondered aloud if these protocols weren’t geared towards white ways of interacting, since people of color don’t use such structured dialogue. It wasn’t the first or the last time I’ve heard that question. “No, no,” our white participants always say, “it’s weird for us too.” And it is. Many of us have found that there is a natural continuum in learning the protocols: from feeling still uncomfortable to valuing and embracing the structures. The protocols force us to think in new ways – breaking us out of our everyday practice of telling people what they should or shouldn’t be doing. And while this is true, the question still lingers in my mind. When white people come to the training and feel uncomfortable within these same structures, I’ve never heard them try and attribute it to another racial culture. If people of color often need to adjust the way they speak and act in dominant cultures, it seems like an easy leap to connect one more uncomfortable form of dialoguing to that same source. But what if there is something deeper in how the protocols are structured that helps support dominant culture thinking and keeps us from hearing a truly diverse set of voices?

That is why I was so relieved when the facilitator warned me to curb my “airtime” in the training! I felt that I didn’t need to be there if I was not completely poverty in very oppressive ways.

Quite frankly, I am tired of talking about Ruby Payne. I am an activist. I do not particularly like to spend my time critiquing someone else’s work. But so many of my colleagues were brought in to work that I felt I had to present another perspective. The values Ruby Payne espouses conflict with the values we say we uphold.

Plus, Ruby Payne runs a for-profit business. She charges school districts tens of thousands of dollars for a workshop. Many of these school districts paying Ruby Payne’s business have families who cannot afford housing and meals on a daily basis. Somebody has to stand up and point out the lunacy of this.

What do you believe to be the most important actions needed to change the “savage inequalities” in American public schools that serve poor children? Policy makers need to understand the issues (of poverty) in a broader context. It is unfair to give schools the responsibility to correct all inequalities. We need to fix the larger inequalities instead of focusing merely on the symptoms. In schools we need to look at the ways in which poor children and children of color do not have access to quality education, starting – in preschool. We need to start addressing these issues – in Jonathan Kozol’s words, these “savage inequalities” – and stop thinking we can fix poverty by “fixing” poor people instead of eliminating what oppresses poor people.

What do you believe to be the best strategy to dispel the middle-class myth that people of poverty are bad parents? I’ve done a bit of consulting at some affluent private boarding schools where tuition and fees can be close to $40,000 per year. Some parents have two and three children at these schools. We dispel myths by telling the truth. The myth is that poor people are bad parents. But what I see at these boarding schools are kids who are sent away from home so somebody else can take care of them— neglect by wealthy parents who can afford to mask their neglect. There are other myths out there, as well. According to Ruby Payne, alcohol and drug addiction and prostitution are more prevalent in poor communities than wealthy ones. This simply is not true. Drug and alcohol addiction and prostitution are as prevalent, if not more prevalent, in wealthy communities. So we dispel myths by telling the truth and with evidence of that truth.

If you could put together a reality show to demonstrate the clashes between someone who believes the fault lies in the victim and someone who is a perceived victim but has a strong sense of self and a grasp of the reality of the shams in this world, where would you put it in the show? Where would you place them and how long would you have them interact? I would place Ruby Payne in this reality show for her own good. Plus, because so many people know who she is, there would be a large audience. I would have poet Gwendolyn Brooks on the show, too. Brooks wrote a poem called “The Lovers of the Poor” about wealthy white do-gooders who do their charitable giving, but go running back to their wealth at the first sign of discomfort. I use it in my classes. I would add Paris Hilton and Jonathan Kozol. The location: a remote island where they have nothing to do but sit around and discuss classism and racism for a month.

Dr. Gorski was sparked by Debbie Bambino when she asked if I would like to do an interview with Dr. Gorski, who is a staunch critic of Dr. Ruby Payne. I took on the challenge. In preparation for the interview, I read Dr. Ruby Payne’s book A Framework for Understanding Poverty and I read several articles written by Dr. Gorski. I learned a lot and I hope this interview has enriched your knowledge of classism as it relates to our mission and your notions of the equity conversation.

For more information, go to www.EdChange.org.

Dr. Gorski can be reached at pgorski1@gwu.hamline.edu

Camilla Greene can be reached at camillagreene@att.net
nars, we gained five new Bloomington interns, and this year we are gathering interns from both Columbus and Indianapolis. We spent a good deal of time – perhaps four or five months – working out our theory of action and building an inductive “architecture” to use in supporting others. Our theory of action is now informing the practice of dozens of coaches who continue to sustain CFGs in their own buildings and we are using our architecture all over the state to support schools and districts in crafting their own theories.

This year, especially, we have seen educational equity become the focus of all our work. We put equity at the center of our theory of action, and participated in our own efforts to gain the confidence in our work that comes from being sure the structure is sound. We experimented with small-sized New Coaches seminars which have been productive both in giving participants an authentic CFG experience and also in helping them uncover their moral purpose as educators. In a five-day New Coaches Institute, for example, we have made it a habit to begin looking at student work on the first afternoon. Making the case for equity and engaging in difficult conversations about it also happen early on. The second morning, we typically begin a conversation about equity that is rooted in personal stories we elicit on the first day and flows from the first night’s reading and journaling assignment. Sustaining the conversation about equity led to all involved rethinking our understanding of how systems work to shape our experience and our decisions. As facilitators we have been working not only to identify and interrupt inequities, but also to provide structures (protocols, practices, and spaces) that support fragile new learning communities as they struggle towards more authentic and more just ways of educating their students.

We have also seen fruit from partner- ships strengthened over the last two years with Indiana University’s School of Education, the University of Indianapolis’ Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning (CELL), the Monroe County Community School Corporation, and the Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation (in Columbus). This year there have been, or will be, Small Schools Coaching, an open CFG Coaches Seminar funded primarily through participant fees, an Advanced Coaches Institute held in partnership with various school corporations, and a Leading for Educational Equity Seminar.

So I didn’t know what to expect when I asked for the metaphors over e-mail. While not everyone involved in the center was able to submit a metaphor, the ones that came to my inbox became connected in my service of student achievement. For over a decade, NSRF practitioners have substantively contributed to school culture and community by utilizing NSRF’s core practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership, guided by our mission to foster educational and social equity for each child. At the Winter Meeting, we will further our learning using NSRF tools and processes to engage each other in questions related to our practice, our schools, and our students.

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

Together, we will bring our NSRF mission, principles and practices to life as we learn and work in home groups. Home groups are small groups of colleagues who work in the ways of Critical Friends Groups, an expansion of professional learning communities (PLC), by holding each other accountable for the continuous examination of our practice to meet the needs and interests of each and every student. We will give and receive substantive and critical feedback and support each other in the discovery of new ideas and the implementation of new practices.

Make plans now to join us this December at our annual Winter Meeting to work with old friends and new from around the country who are committed to improving educational opportunities and outcomes for each child toward a more just and equitable society.

Pre-Conferences

To complement your Winter Meeting experience, please join us on December 12, 2007, for our concurrent pre-conferences: 3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum and Core Principles of Critical Friendship.

3rd Annual NSRF Research Forum: This one day forum provides an opportunity to share what we have learned as researchers or practitioners and learn from others about the work of NSRF, CFGs, Coaching for Equity, Facilitative Leadership, and other activities related to the building of intentional learning communities in schools. Participants will have the opportunity to present work and give feedback on the work of others, as well as help shape NSRF’s growing body of practices. This pre-conference will be facilitated by Kevin Fahey, NSRF’s Research Coordinator.

Core Principles of Critical Friendship: This new session will offer an introduction to NSRF’s core principles and practices of critical friendship and facilitative leadership in preparation for the Winter Meeting experience that follows. Together we will explore the purpose and implementation of these principles while experiencing their transformative power. Participants in this session will continue to meet in home groups during the Winter Meeting, at which time we will practice peer observation to deepen our understanding of NSRF work and consider how best to translate it to support and enhance current job-embedded professional development efforts in our respective work contexts as well as consider implementing this new learning in our respective workplaces. This pre-conference will be facilitated by NSRF National Facilitators Pete Bermudez and Linda Emm of the University of Florida Latenser Center for Learning, an NSRF Center of Activity.

Location

Marriott Tampa Waterstreet Hotel and Marina
700 South Florida Ave.
Tampa, Florida 33602
813-221-4900 or 800-228-9280

Faith Dunn/Mary Mohr Scholarship Fund

Each year, NSRF keeps a commitment to providing scholarships for Winter Meeting attendees who would otherwise not be able to attend. To apply for a scholarship, please contact the National Office at 812.330.2702.

If you are able to contribute to the Faith Dunn/Mary Mohr scholarship fund, please contact our Development Office at 812.334.8179.

More Information

Visit www.nnrharmony.org to register, review fees, make your room reservations, and learn more about upcoming symposium opportunities, and more, or call Sarah Childers at 812.330.2702 if you have questions.
In This Issue
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

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 skill and to a deeper level as we sharpen our focus on our mission, “to foster educational and social equity by involving 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 Ballack’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 NSF’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 by a single teacher. 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 Protocol in Practice, Kim Feicke 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 community.

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 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 colleagues’ listserv. Tell us how you are using the articles in your CFGs 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.

Contact the Connections Editorial Board at dbambino@earthlink.net or call the NSF National Center at 812.330.2702

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

several things.

First of all, the interaction is completely stu-
dent-centered. It is the difference between saying to a student, “I don’t want you to disrupt my class-
room,” 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 relation-
ship away from the tense barriers of race toward the more rewarding and fulfilling relationship between guiding the student towards an attitude of self responsibility. Finally, when measuring progress toward long-term goals, stu-
dents may quickly experience some success and leave behind some of the lingering sense of unfair-
ness. “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 on strengths. It avoids comparing to other students, or dwelling on past failures or misdemeanor. Once the baselines are established, then specific feedback on progress toward long-term goals may be shared with the student and family. Even if a student is doing very poorly, avoid sweeping generalizations such as, “He’s doing badly in my class.” Instead, share specific data: “His test scores have gone down from 75 to 70 and his homework has gone down from 80 to 40. I’m concerned because we set a realistic goal for this term of having his grade go up from C to B.”

Specificity is especially important in describ-
ing behavior where the specter of subjectivity, color-blindness, and white privilege come into play. Specificity communicates fairness and objectivity, sets clear goals for students, and helps parents ally with the school in working with their children.

Describe the specific behavior in a nonjudgmen-
tal tone: “I asked him to take off his hat. He did, but put it back on a minute later. In the end I had to ask him to take it off four times.” Parents are in a much stronger position when they can say, “Do your homework and keep your hat off in the class-
room,” instead of, “You’ve got to do better and stop having an attitude.”

Feedback to students and families should be balanced between positive and negative, and pre-
vented within a long-term future perspective.

If a student doesn’t respond to limits dur-
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 “attitu-
de” which may communicate dislike to parents of color, and serve to cut off, instead of nurture, a working relationship. Instead, try to balance posi-
tive 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 understand-
ing 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 payoff for students of color, and for white educators. Educators, students, and par-
ents 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.

Joshua Frank is vice principal of the Pierce School in Brookline, Massachusetts, and can be contacted at joshua_frank@brookline.k12.ma.us

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, Debbie 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
The waves are crashing on the shore and the kids are in camp. It is a magnificent July day and our summer is in full swing. As I've thought about this Connections article for the past several days – my editor would say weeks – my thoughts have swung back and forth from the school year just passed to the one ahead of us. Before looking forward, though, I am taking the time to reflect on this past year's accomplishments, challenges, and considerable learnings.

My first trip as director was to Souhegan High School and our first-ever regional summit. We had never done a regional summit before and we didn't really know what to do or what to expect. What Heidi, our National Center coordinator, and I did know was that we would be among friends and that the conversations were going to be critical. We also figured if we spent half the time on local matters, learning from each other about how the work was taking shape in New England, and half the time tuning our thinking about the directions we thought the national organization should head, that we would all learn a great deal and folks would feel their time was well spent.

I remember driving to New Hampshire realizing how much I missed certain aspects of New England. I had never been to Souhegan before and I was looking forward to being in that space. Heidi and I met the night before and talked through our hopes and fears for the coming meeting. And I was nervous – this was new to me and I needed it to go well. I'm not so sure NSRF needed it to go well, but I certainly did. What happened was of course the only thing that could have, that is, a day-long NSRF meeting where we used our tools and processes to learn from each other and gain insight into our individual and collective practices. We pushed, prodded, challenged, and supported each other and spent a day in critical friendship working the best we knew how. And it felt great.

There were three additional summits this past year – two regional summits in Milwaukee and Denver followed by a membership summit in Houston. Each summit built on the one prior, even though there were different people in the room. A real space of learning for me has been how deep and vast our knowledge base in NSRF is and how whoever comes are the right people. I know I'm borrowing from Open Space Technology, but as I think about the different experiences I've had, the four principles and the one law seem to have broad application.

The summits became significant because, along with the Centers Council meeting following the Winter Meeting, they informed and then defined our membership plan – the most significant piece of our restructuring effort. We learned from each meeting and refined our thinking and continued to tune it with trusted colleagues. By the time we issued the membership report, we had met with over a hundred and fifty National Facilitators in five or six separate meetings. I am very proud of the progress we made as a national organization toward our financial sustainability and I am clearer than ever that it will take our collective effort to realize our goals.

I think my greatest space of learning this year for my own practice was the BAEO conference this past spring. BAEO is the Black Association of Educational Options and I am a proud member. The leader is Howard Fuller – the former superintendent of the Milwaukee public schools – and he and the organization are “unapologetically...” (continued on page 16)