

Connections

the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Spring 2007

Director's Report Steven Strull, Director

We came home from dinner the other night and I had an extraordinary exchange with an amazing young woman – my kids' babysitter. Rebecca is most decidedly a child of privilege, our children adore her, and we trust her completely. She is graduating from a suburban high school toward the head of her class, has been accepted to Vanderbilt University and will most likely become a doctor, her chosen profession. As I was fishing in my pocket for her stipend, she nonchalantly threw her Snapple bottle into the front receptacle of my garbage bin – I watched this happen, walked toward her and the garbage bin, opened the bin and moved her bottle from the front compartment to the back compartment – the difference in my house being garbage in the front and recyclables in the back. As I did this I said, "could you please save the f(^k#&% planet!" With the timing of Jack Benny and the bite of Groucho Marx, she said in response, "what, are you Al Gore?" Both exchanges were light-hearted and good-natured – we like and respect each other and her placing the bottle in the wrong receptacle was inadvertent – yet her remark has stuck with me and I'm not completely sure why.

For me, I guess, part of it has to do with choices – I choose to recycle because it makes me feel better and I guess I'm contributing to our planet's health in some small way – but I think my real motivation is because it makes me feel better, and quite honestly isn't that taxing. It's the role of choice that I'm thinking a lot about these days and how choice plays into the continuing development of NSRF.

Between the writing of this director's report and its publication, NSRF will be unveiling our new membership structure. We have spent countless hours tinkering with, considering, tuning, receiving feedback, and landing on our structure and at the end of the day, what strikes me most is that deciding to join NSRF after all

these years will be a choice – an individual choice for each of us.

My purpose here is not to outline our new structure, as that is being handled in a separate membership report – my goal, however, is to reflect on why we are making this transition and hopefully to articulate why I believe each of us ought to make a

choice toward membership in our collective.

Quite simply, NSRF needs your support – not because you like us, but because your experiences resonate with our mission statement. We have been advised that folks join membership organizations either because they believe in what the organization does and what it stands for or because they want to get the "stuff" the organization has to offer – or some combination. While we certainly have some "stuff" to offer, much of it we give away for free anyway, and I am very comfortable in my assessment that the reason to join NSRF is because you not only believe in our mission statement but you think it vital for our future. And on this point, I want to be very clear: we have decoupled membership in NSRF from a financial ability to pay for membership, and as the structure gets unfolded, it is my hope that everyone realizes we are implementing a dues-paying membership construct specifically to support our mission, *(continued on page 15)*



including scholarship support when necessary.

We are the protocol people – we're also the CFG people, the CFEF people, and the facilitative leadership people – no one else, and no other organization may lay claim to those things (one exception is our partner organization in the CFEF work, BayCES, with whom we are codeveloping that work). Choosing to support NSRF is a choice toward supporting the things we do coupled with our theory of action, which supports our mission statement of educational and social equity.

The choice to support NSRF is made with the understanding that the organization stay committed to its core values and principles. We have had many conversations and thought openly and honestly about the business of NSRF. NSRF is worthy of your support because we are, have always been, and will continue to be an organization committed to mission first. What we have realized and what we are asking you to support as a dues-paying member is that we must operate as a business in order to have the resources to further our mission.

And our time is now. I believe we are entering a perfect storm for teacher voice and teacher empowerment. In the face of the punishing effects of an unsustainable accountability system based on standardized test scores, school systems across the country are asking out loud what service they are providing their schools. Systems from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles are considering and reconsidering their carrot-and-stick approach to school management and governance and are seeking ways to reward school success with increasing levels of school-based decision making and management autonomy.

New York City alone is in the process of dismantling a failed bureaucratic school management structure in favor of locating as much power, decision making, and resources as possible at the schoolhouse level. With that type of administrative discretion, teachers and principals will get to choose the type of professional development and external support they buy and receive. Imagine, no longer will a central office staffer demand this or that type of professional development in over 1,000 schools representing tens of thousands of teachers. This is not a dream but a reality that will take effect July 1. Our time is indeed now.

As you consider your memberships, professional affiliations, and obligations this year, I am confident you will not only choose to become a dues-paying member of our organization but that

you will encourage others to do so as well. I have had great counsel from trusted colleagues and critical friends in this time of transition for NSRF; our work is stronger, more important, and more critical than ever – it is up to each of us to choose to make our organization equally strong as a voice for adult learning in the service of student achievement. We can choose to make NSRF strong and I believe deeply that if we stay committed, we can and will choose a more socially just and equitable society. ■

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What's Your Question?

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researchers to attend the forum and share their work.

Other participants pointed out that "work is needed. . . to document the research agenda, some essential history, etc." and one suggested "incorporat[ing] the research into each local center's work plan." These comments reinforce the idea that in order to further influence others to transform schooling, CFG practitioners must be more deliberate about collecting data and presenting evidence that demonstrates how we make a difference for our students.

Because NSRF's history is rooted in a tradition of "building reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone," NSRF is in a unique position to bridge the gap between theory and practice and use our strengths to transform student learning by transforming ourselves.

So what is YOUR research question? How does your practice influence others, and how can you share that? Hope to see you at the third annual NSRF Research Forum in Florida on December 12th, 2007. ■

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