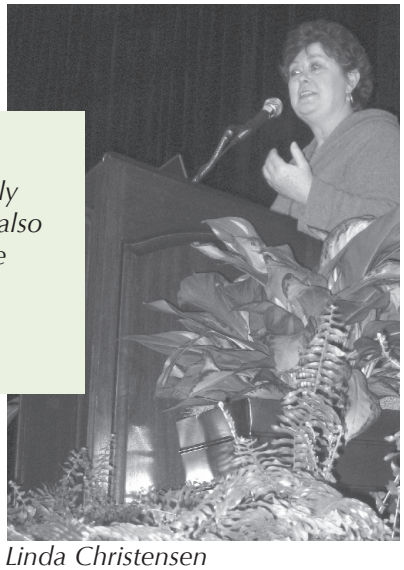
Winter Meeting Reflections

Sarah Childers, Indiana

Another January has come and gone, and with it another Winter Meeting. After 400 of us gathered in Seattle, we've now gone back to our homes and begun the process of sorting through our learning and experiences from those jam-packed two and a half days that are the Winter Meeting. All of us, I believe, have come home changed from our experiences in Seattle. We've learned, laughed, cried and come to a renewed commitment to our work together for the sake of students.

Throughout the exciting two and a half days, participants could be seen talking in small groups in the lobby and hallways of the buildings, or taking part in activities such as the zones of comfort, risk and danger in the foyer.

> *Teachers who want to construct more equitable, more meaningful, and more lively educational experiences for children must also concern themselves with issues beyond the classroom walls.*
> *-from the Introduction to* Rethinking Our Classrooms *by Linda Christensen*



Linda Christensen

Also seen in the halls during the Winter Meeting were some wonderful people from Youth In Focus, a Seattle area group that works with young photographers and filmmakers. We were very happy to have them working with us and taking wonderful pictures to document the experience. All of the pictures throughout this piece were taken by our Youth In Focus photographers, Wendy Dang and Jacob Eaton. More photographs are viewable on our website.

Highlights

This year, we used a new structure for home groups - strand topics. Participants were able to select a topic to focus on in their home group. Topics offered were:

- Coaching for Educational Equity, an Introduction,
- Collaborative Inquiry,
- Context Coaching,
- Facilitation, Collaboration and Reflection,
- Facilitative Leadership,

Most of the true highlights of the Winter Meeting took place in home groups, and often were personal realizations, affirmations or epiphanies. Some of the comments from participants give us a glimpse of these highlight moments that people experienced.

"For the past three years I have attended the Winter Meeting and each year I have been amazed by the amount I get out of three short days. Being in an environment with so many educators from around the country is energizing, motivating and grounding. Each year the dynamics and the chemistry within my home group that are formed give me motivation to bring that same energy, focus and enthusiasm back to my school and district. In addition, I am exposed to new tools that have an immediate impact on my coaching facilitation. I learn about myself as a coach and a teacher. I have deep and meaningful discussions about equity and leadership within my classroom and the school as a whole."
- Sarah Smith

"I'm pleased to be gently encouraged to be a facilitator. (I probably would not have done that otherwise.) Being expected to share and facilitate this week put me out of the comfort zone and into the risk zone. I needed that."
– Linda Geist

"Today has created a comfort with talking about and handling issues of race/ethnicity. I have never really had a problem with it in the past but today's experience put it at a different, higher place when dealing with that issue. It brought out an awareness and connection of how it resonates in my own life which provides power and confidence when dealing with it in the future." – Bennie Patterson

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Keynote Address

Linda Christensen delivered the keynote address to a packed ballroom this year. Her speech was described as "energized" and "excellent" with "well-established content" by participants. The reading she provided, the introduction to her upcoming book *Rethinking Our Classrooms*, served as a common text across the home groups and a unifying experience for participants. One participant even said she had rewritten a test on her plane ride home based on what she got out of it! This certainly speaks to the strength of having a classroom-based practitioner as our keynote speaker.

A transcript of Linda's address is available online, along with the reading.

Reception

Music, food, drink and friends - a recipe for a great time. Add to it a beautiful view of the Seattle skyline from the top floor of the hotel and you've got the Winter Meeting reception. Lots of laughter filled the room throughout the evening as everyone enjoyed some time to reconnect with old friends and get to know new ones. It was also a time to acknowledge those who have given greatly to the founding and leadership of NSRF. Founding Co-Directors, Accountability Council and Connections Editorial Board members were all honored.

Participant Evaluations

With the help of Ross Peterson-Veatch, our resident data-cruncher, we're able to mine the evaluations to identify our strengths and challenges and then address them in the planning of our next Winter Meeting. Take a look at some of this year's data in the sidebar.

While overall, these figures indicate a substantial approval rating, we can also see in these figures some definite need for improvement. For example, last year 98% of people answered Agree or Strongly Agree in response to question six, and Open Space responses were quite low compared with feedback from Coaches Clinics last year. We're considering the implication of the occurrence of these figures in a year when we've made some significant programmatic changes, such as the introduction of strands and switching from Coaches Clinics to Open Space, and are working to identify areas for improvement and/or change. Our goal is to be responsive to the needs and feedback of participants in order to continually hone the Winter Meeting experience.

I feel much as one participant described: "At the end of the three days I felt reinvigorated yet tired and found myself looking forward to next year's Winter Meeting." I look forward to continuing to learn with all of you this December 13th-15th in Florida. ■

Winter Meeting Evaluation Responses

Total Responses: 217

"Agree" or "Strongly Agree" responses

1. I had the opportunity to present and get feedback on substantive work that is important and meaningful in my own setting. 87.5%
2. My seminar group became a place for professional interactions that embody the characteristics of a CFG. 93.5%
3. I learned something meaningful about the relationship between the work a CFG does together and the potential impact CFGs can have on student learning. 88.5%
4. I learned something meaningful about the relationship between the work a CFG does together and the potential impact CFGs can have on educational equity. 85%
5. The Open Space Technology sessions I attended enriched my learning at this meeting. 62%
6. Overall, I would rate this meeting as outstanding. 89%

Sarah Childers can be reached at schilders@nsrfharmony.org

Pictures, resources and downloads from the Winter Meeting are online at www.nsrfharmony.org