As facilitators of Critical Friends Group Seminars, we often hear feedback such as “this was the most powerful professional development of my career” and “CFGs have helped me to examine my practice and collaborate in new ways with my colleagues.” The Washington State Center of Activity has been offering several Beginning and Continuing CFG Seminars for teachers in the region every year during the summer and school year. There are a great number of schools and organizations that have strong CFGs; many of the schools involved in transformation and school change attribute much of their success to their Critical Friends Groups and the collaborative and inquiry-based processes used. So as a region, we are very proud of our network, facilitators and participants.

But recently, one of our facilitation colleagues sent a letter to the area facilitation group, challenging us to go deeper in our learning together around issues of equity.

“As we continue to teach, coach, and lead in our schools, the evidence of the inequities speaks louder and louder. We need to work across difference to tune our ears to hear the screams in order to interrupt the inequities, as we shift our own practices in an effort to transition our schools to more equitable and proportionate institutions.”

–excerpt from Tanisha Davis Doss’s letter

Though we have discussed issues of equity and equity-centered activities, as I read this letter I still began to ask myself questions: Do we really understand what it means to focus on equity in our seminars and in our own work? Do we have the tools to engage in deep inquiry around issues of equity as a facilitation team and at the same time support our participants in doing so? What tools do we need to develop together? What does it look like to support colleagues from diverse backgrounds? How are we learning from each other? How do we keep creative and passionate with our CFG seminars so it does not become about the mechanics of a protocol but is truly about improving our schools (and our own practice) for each student? How am I modeling culturally competent pedagogy? The facilitation team in the Seattle area is

(continued on page 13)
“W
ight people need to do their home-
work.” This time I just nodded and
waited, a little surprised when the
other ten white people in my home group barely
reacted on day three of CFG/Equity Training. The
facilitator wasn’t talking about a specific assign-
ment; she was telling our mostly white, mostly mid-
dle-class group that we had real work to do—on
ourselves.

Goodness knows, the first time I’d heard the
thought spoken aloud—the first time someone said
it to me—I was shocked. I felt an almost dizzying,
drop-in-the-pit-of-your-stomach, ear-ringing phys-
ological jolt that accompanied the realization that
being a good person who tries hard isn’t sufficient.
The person who said it to me was white, unlike
the person who said it to the home group, and I
wondered briefly if that’s why no one in the home
group responded. And then the conversation moved
on.

Very little about doing equity work is easy. It
seems that as a white ally, I’m always walking on
that edge between risk and danger. “Will I know
when to interrupt inequities?” “Am I seeing things
that aren’t there?” “Am I missing things that are
there?” “What do I say????” (If you believe con-
versation is the lever for change, being good with
words feels very important!) Being a white ally is choosing to live in a state
of uncertainty. I remember very vividly the first time I felt truly, really, finely, tingly
aware of the difference between how I was treated and how I was treated. My family was on
vacation in Glacier National Park. My husband had
volunteered to stay at the lodge with my two-year-
old daughter while I took my four-year-old son on
an all-day bus tour of the “Going to the Sun” road
to Glacier. It was the first all-day alone time we’d had, and we were having a ball counting the
different animals we saw. My son and I were the
only two people on the tour under the age of fifty, and we were made much of by all the grandmoth-
ers on the trip. Everyone was really, really nice.

And white. And middle-class.

As we were driving down and around through the mountains the bus driver was identifying inter-
esting sites when we came upon a collection of trailers, cars, old washing machines, rubber tires,
and many other rusty, dusty scraps. The bus driver
pointed out the collection and said—on the inter-
com—“Those no-account Indians live like trash and
ruin the land” and then continued with her canned
speech. I couldn’t believe it. My brain froze. My hands
jerked to cover my son’s ears, but it was too late.
In a split second I tried to think how to interrupt. I
couldn’t let this go by, but I literally couldn’t think
in words. It seemed like an eternity, but it was
probably only two or three seconds later when I
said aloud as I could. “Maybe they don’t want to
be you. Maybe they don’t want to live like you.”
And then I sat back and tried to figure out what I
meant, and how I could explain to my four-year-
old why I was shaking.

It took a way-too-close black bear and a few
other local attractions to get the bus back into
tourist mode. The nice, white, middle-class grand-
mas pretended nothing had happened, and, truth-
fully, so did I for the rest of the day.

I felt too raw and embarrassed to talk to my
husband about it when I got back, because I
was afraid that he would have had the words I’d
lacked. I already felt stupid and inadequate. He
would have been supportive of me for speaking up
at all, but I couldn’t take any more risks, not even
that little one.

It was a really long time later, much longer
than I’d like to admit, when I figured out some of
the words. I wanted the bus driver to consider the
part she and her ancestors had in the economic
and political conditions that led to reservation
lands, much less trailers on reservation lands. I
wanted her to consider the ecological conservation
represented by the use and reuse of the collection
of goods we’d seen. I wanted her to consider the
strong will and indomitable spirit it took to make
a home amidst others who hate you. I wanted her
to think of the mothers, fathers, and children—the
individuality and humanity of the people

Jodi Goldberg may be contacted at jgoldberg@talcnwvision.org

Jodi Goldberg, Wisconsin

CFG/Equity Training and the Experience of a White Ally

Jodi Goldberg, Wisconsin

Comprised of classroom teachers (both current and
retired), instructional facilitators, school change
coaches, administrators, college faculty and a men-
tal health service provider. With the make up of
this group, there is a richness of perspectives and
viewpoints. But at the same time, many members
have been facilitating together for four or five years.
So at what point do we become too familiar and
comfortable facilitating? The group has decided that
we need to go beyond examination of our seminar
agendas and engage in deep inquiry together, try-
ing to explore some of the above questions. As a
result, the Seattle area facilitation group has com-
mitted to meeting as a CFG, seven Saturdays over
the course of the year, with a focus on equity. We
will be asking each other tough and uncomfortable
questions, better understanding who we are and
how our identities influence how we see and act
in the world. We will be sharing much of who we
are as individuals and as educators. But we will not
lose sight of our mission and passion for making
our schools intellectually challenging and relevant
learning communities.

As we invite you to the wonderful city of Seattle
for the Winter Meeting, we also invite each of you to
engage with us in making our work public and to
follow the challenge posed to each of us to engage
in the difficult conversations.

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