we spend as much of our summer as possible. We share a small cabana (wooden shack with shower) with two other families, we have direct access to the beach and there’s a swimming pool and concession stand. We even have a “cabana boy” (read Flamingo Kid) and my children attend camp there as well. It provides us with the most amazing family time I can imagine, and it is how we choose to spend our summers. As I arrived that Friday afternoon I began to think about my opportunity to even have such a choice, and I acknowled-
ged my thankfulness for my circumstance. My thoughts then returned for a bit to the East 50s in Brooklyn, a neighborhood I rarely visit. In country clubs, at least the few that I have been to, there are members, guests, and workers – with an unspoken (usually) code among them. I began participating and observing, making eye contact and little comments with Michelle, my wife and partner, and the thoughts came flooding in as an insight. I was replaying my day in bits and pieces, thoughts and images, and the notion of privilege came washing over me.

In the span of a day I had experienced privilege at a mix of African-Americans, Caribbean Americans, African and Latinas and Latinos – and almost all of the children attending school receive free or reduced price lunches, a true metric of pov-
erty. Two of the four principals I worked with that morning are African-American; two are white, and all, by definition are middle or upper middle class. At the beach club, the membership is almost exclu-
ively white and predominately Jewish; the cabana boys are of the community and the sons of our neighbors, yet the maintenance staff are all people of color – a pretty stark distinction linked to who does what for whom the members, who are seen and we are unseen. At the private country club, the mem-
bership and guests were all white and overwhelm-
ingly Jewish, while the wait staff were people of color or recent white immigrants – immigrants not too dissimilar from my own grandparents. Race and privilege were front and center for me; there were no easy correlates to define what privilege went with which race... yet there were tendencies that were hard to ignore.

My goal in thinking and writing about my day and about privilege is not to offer a sermon or pretend that I have some unique insight. But as I considered this particular day with all the ideas, thoughts and feelings it showed me, I found myself

Ambassadors of Peace and Hope... The Khalil Gibran International Academy
Sarah Childers, Indiana

Debbie Almontaser built on her teaching career and history of “interfaith activism and outreach across the boundaries of race, ethnicity, and culture” to reach her dream of open-
ing a school that would focus on Arab culture and language. Her vision was that the multicultural cur-
riculum and environment of the school would help students to become “ambassadors of peace and hope.” However, days after her school’s plans were announced, she and the school board began receiving threats and生产经营 equity and some newer work, from within our network, of interrupting inequity.

At our recent Accountability Council meeting we began wrestling with the issue of equity and, for the first time, wondered aloud if a fault line had emerged between our theoretical understanding of our mission and its practical implications. Indeed, when is it appropriate to foster equity and when might it be necessary to interrupt inequity? Who decides? Can two seemingly oppositional ideas be mutually compatible? How might this be a compet-
ing tension that we can all learn from? Is there right and wrong? Truth? Whose truth? Is race the only difference to consider when choosing a facilitation team? Or is that just the first rung to climb? Or do race and racism trump all other similarities and differences? Do the principals of color in Brooklyn have more power in the hierarchy when they are charged with teaching with or their white collea-
geagues? What does “across difference” mean in this context?

These are big questions for NSRE and big ques-
tions for our schools. Some other questions I bet folks are thinking about as another school year begins: Do we really know how to teach everyone to read? How come only 50% of urban children graduate from high school in four years? Is this the best history curriculum? Who should pick the prin-
cipal? How big should our classes be? How many fire drills do we have to do before December? Can I really spend a month on estimation? What’s “Facebook” again? Winter play? Fall (continued on page 11)


The Five Freedoms Project Leadership Academy
Kim Carter, New Hampshire

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States

My religion is very important to me. The school I used to go to had a lot of students, but I felt invisible. Religion wasn’t something we could talk about there. When I went to a new school, I felt that I could bring my religion to my work, I felt like I could be a whole person again.

At the school I went to before, kids would get detention for talking about religion. I’m glad to be at a school where I can ask the questions that I wonder about. I recently researched evolution and creationism, and presented what I found at a School Board meeting.

When we were new students at the school, the older students weren’t as respectful to us. The new students got together, talked about it and called a community meeting to discuss respect. Things are better now.

These are comments from students telling their stories in a fishbowl at the first inaugural Five Freedoms Project Leadership Academy, held July 7 – 11, 2008, at the newly opened Newseum in Washington, D.C. A total of forty principals from around the country, representing urban, suburban and rural schools, K – 12, gathered for a week to explore the Five Freedoms Project five-part framework for leading change and to delve into the implications of the five First Amendment liberties. If there was ever a critical venue to explore the gap between beliefs and practices, how we live out our structural protocols and practices. We engaged participants in critical friendship and honed facilitative leadership skills while deepening our individual and shared understandings of the history, development and implications of the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment.

Hailing from educational environments as diverse as Nanakapono Elementary School in Hawaii, Damascus Technical High School in Michigan and School for the Creative and Performing Arts in Kentucky and communities as varied as Florida, North Dakota, Washington, New Mexico, Texas and Pennsylvania, participating school leaders brought diverse experiences, perspectives and concerns. Their commitments to their students was immediately evident from their spirited responses and dialogue during the first day’s Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger protocol. As one might expect with a group of committed school leaders, dialogue was intense as the group considered scenarios such as the following:

A first year teacher comes into your office asking for help, saying, “I am uncomfortable teaching the remedial class, which is 90% students of color, and I don’t know what to do to help them.”

In a faculty meeting, a faculty member raises a question about the amount of time allocated to AP classes and notes that students in the AP classes are mostly white in a school with wide ethnic diversity.

A group of parents comes to your office asking to use the school auditorium to hold a public meeting to discuss racism in the school and the community.

Interspersed with protocols such as Success Analysis, Attributes of a Learning Community, Microlabs, Collaborative Assessment Conference, and Wagon Wheels were presentations and interactive case explorations digging into the implications of religious liberty, freedom of speech and press, and the right to assembly and petition (continued on page 7)

My Reflection
Sarah Childers, Indiana

I wonder if Ms. Almontaser or her students have had negative experiences due to their dress, names and/or ethnicity. If their community publicly attacks KGIA, then what goes on in private?

I can speak to the prevalence of fear and bias against Muslims. Cowards who preferred to strike anonymously, firebombed my local mosque five years ago. In consideration of that event, what threats might have KGIA received, or Ms. Almontaser herself?

For a time, I chose to wear the hijab, or headscarf, on a daily basis as a symbol of my Muslim faith. I no longer do, except at services, largely because I personally no longer agree with the practice as a mandate, though I maintain full respect for those who choose to wear it. But to be honest with myself, there is an aspect to my choice that is about acceptance, feeling different, to the extent of receiving hostile glances, being judged and living with fear.

My sisters and me on Eid, 2003

Left to Right: Sadia (Pakistan), Wat (Malaysia), Coumba (Somalia) and me (USA).

Although I am white with blonde hair and blue eyes, when I don a hijab, I become the “other,” to many people, the enemy. As I wore the hijab, I realized how differently people looked at me (or often averted their eyes from me), treated me, spoke to me, identified me. My family was judged along with me. Without my hijab, our family is “normal” and white. But during the time period I wore it, our car was vandalized twice while parked in public places. I was scared that our children might be targeted next. Today, as I walk bare-headed and blonde, I often feel pain at my choice, the easy road, compared to that of my Muslim sisters who continue to endure abuse for their chosen religious practice. Despite that, I am still more dedicated to supporting the freedoms guaranteed us all to practice (or not) as we choose.

It is now Ramadan (approximately Sept. 1 through Sept. 30), a perfect opportunity to act on Ms. Almontaser’s advice to build bridges with your students or friends or neighbors who may be celebrating this month. Ramadan Mubarak!

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1 New York Times, 8/29/07, Samuel C. Freedman
2 New York Sun, 3/7/07, Sarah Garland “New Brooklyn School to Offer Middle East Studies”
3 New York Post, 8/6/07, Chuck Bennett and Ana Winter “City Principal is ‘Revolting’: Tied to ‘Intifada NYC’ Shirts”
4 CNN, 9/5/07, Richard Roth “New York public school accused of radical Islamist agenda”
5 New York Times, 4/28/08, Andrea Elliott “Critics Cost Muslim Educator Her Dream School”
6 Democracy Now, democracynow.org, 4/29/08, with Amy Goodman, “Crested NYU Arabic School Principal Debbie Almontaser Speaks Out on the New McCarthyism and Rightwing Media Attacks”