In August 2006, I arrived at Shanghai American School wondering what kind of community I'd find. My husband and I have been teaching overseas for thirteen years, at five different schools in Asia and the Middle East, and in that time many of our friends and family at home have asked us how we do it. How do we pack up our belongings and move with our two children to jobs, cities, and countries entirely new to us, where we don’t know the language and we can’t read the signs? A job at an international school, however, is much more than a hundred and eighty days of teaching and a check every month. When you take a job overseas, someone meets you at the airport and takes you to where you will sleep that night. Someone shows you where to buy bread and milk and toasters and televisions. As you start your new job you meet other teachers, some of whom are new, like you, and some of whom have been around for years. You swap stories with the former, and take advice from the latter. You go out for dinner, and you go shopping. You make friends, and with any luck your kids do too. You enter a community.

International school teaching has its material perks—tax free incomes, low cost daily living, and lots of opportunity to travel—but the best overseas posts, I think, are defined not by the salary package or living standards, but by the warmth of the community. International school teachers will often identify a posting with the time they spent in the most difficult circumstances, in developing countries or areas of conflict, precisely because the difficulty of day to day life brought people together. It was immediately clear that day to day life in Shanghai was going to be comfortable—our apartment was nice and the teachers’ lounge was comfortable. As we went through the orientation week activities with the other eighty or so new hires we quickly found other teachers, some of whom are new, like you, and some of whom have been around for years. You swap stories with the former, and take advice from the latter. It was clear that day to day life in Shanghai was going to be comfortable—our apartment was nice and the teachers’ lounge was comfortable.

It was then that I found an email in my inbox announcing an opportunity for teachers to join CFG training with Dr. Frances Hensley, a consultant from the University of Georgia and a member of the National School Reform Faculty. As I read the mission statement of the CFG for the first time, I thought about other schools I had taught in, schools where I had felt the essential support of community that the mission statement described, and about how that support permeated all facets of my life as a faculty member. The brief description of the CFG training sparked a hope that our large faculty could begin to find connections that could bring teachers together in meaningful ways.

On the first morning of our training the school superintendent took some time out from his busy schedule to join our meeting. He told us the story of how they engaged in collaboration, and how they worked together to provide learning experiences for kids? Would the community inside the school be as easy to fit into as the one outside seemed to be? A couple of months later, I was still knee-deep in transition, getting settled in at home and trying to make connections for collaboration both in my grade level team and in the sprawling elementary faculty. My classroom was on the first level of the elementary school and it took me months to see the second level and understand where the grade 4 and 5 classrooms were located. There are about 70 teachers in my division and my life in the initial stages focused on the six members of my grade level team. It was clear that there were many exceptional and talented teachers in the organization, but there just didn’t seem to be enough systems in place to allow teachers to take time to plan, collaborate, and grow together.

These three themes represent the beginnings of a research project about CFGs and are an exciting step forward from past years’ meetings to a new kind of research meeting. Next year’s meeting promises to be even more exciting as we begin to roll out more longitudinal work and new connections between our work and achievement measures. I would encourage any and all who are interested in research to participate—no matter what your role at home may be. This year we benefited from the participation of K-12 teachers and administrators, and higher-ed faculty and administrators.
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and had been so impressed that he traveled to small town Georgia to meet with our facilitator. He said that to do this kind of introductions of CFGs across our organization was a key to the success of our teachers and community. He also admitted that the empowerment of teachers could be scary for administrators, but he said he was willing to give it a try.

On that note, we started our CFG training with a cross-division group from the two campuses. As in any overseas setting, we had a wide variety of teachers in terms of experience, language, culture, and roles. Over those initial three days, what we came to call “The October Cohort” grew to understand CFG protocols as key in building relationships that foster trust and support among teachers. Every person in the group left feeling the warmth of their SAS community and the potential that CFG could create networks around the school and in their professional lives. Those of us who had undertaken the training started our own CFGs in our divisions and teams, and found that, slowly, administrators were beginning to understand the power of the protocols that were being used in these groups. Though the groups represented a small number of our faculty, the administration persisted with more training workshops and kept bringing Frances from Georgia to keep the CFG ball rolling. Mid year, our cohort completed its training and by the June of 2007, we had CFGs and the CFG curriculum and the NICL school had CFGs operating at some level in all divisions and were preparing to offer a week of training at the end of the school year.

So now, a year and a half later, what is the status of CFGs in our school? As the 07-08 academic year rolls full steam ahead, we find ourselves facing in an obstacle that all schools struggle with: time. It is that, to his mind, the introduction of CFGs across the school was only one of a number of school wide initiatives currently being implemented. We are in the middle of an accreditation process that involves numerous meetings outside of our regular commitments, and in a school as dynamic as ours in terms of extra-curricular activities, coaching, and clubs, teachers are struggling to find time to honor even a monthly commitment to CFGs. Though many people have expressed a keen and sincere interest in the groups, the fact is that the groups we started last year are meeting less and less. Nonetheless, I think that CFGs have changed the SAS community in very powerful ways.

One of the most obvious changes has been the opportunity for expatriate teachers to get a glimpse of the professional lives of our Chinese colleagues. The great success of the June cohort was that Chinese teachers numbered more than half of the group. Here, I had the chance to see part of the Chinese education model and cultural barriers that often separate expat and host country teachers. As facilitators and participants, we were thrilled to spend the week learning so much about the Chinese language program, their professional dilemmas, teaching and assessment strategies, and their lives as the host country teachers in an American school. The power of these protocols and their systemic inclusion for all participants provided us with a view of the Chinese teacher’s professional lives that we would not be exposed to in other contexts; we got to see what their lives as teachers in this large American organization was really like. The week ended with feelings of elation, possibility, and cross-cultural connections as we said our goodbyes for the summer.

A less obvious change, but one that I think has far reaching potential, has been the increased interest and support that the administration provided for the administration to incorporate CFG protocols into the day to day running of the school. When the new teachers arrived in August, for example, they were divided into groups of 8-10, each with a CFG trained leader. These “mentor groups” had regular meetings throughout the orientation process, and at each meeting the leaders used the protocols to help move new people through important school wide documents, have text discussions, and provide practical support for transition. Most importantly, these mentor groups provided a friendly place to go when dealing with the rigors of adjusting to a new and challenging work environment. Participants were known to put aside other meetings and push past first agenda.

Still Separate and Unequal:
Segregation and the Future of Urban School Reform
Book Review by Susan Schooler, Indiana

Barry A. Gold's title seems to say it all: schools in this country are Still Separate and Unequal. What is compelling about the book is that Gold has conducted an extensive field study of perhaps the greatest single experiment attempting to create equity for poor segregated urban schools. Gold's documentation that the experiment failed dismally, and his assessment of what that failure means, are the real contributions of the book.

The schools Gold studied were four “Abbot” schools, so-called because of the 1986 New Jersey Supreme Court case Abbott v. Burke-V. The ruling in this case mandated unprecedented reforms for “isolated, racially segregated urban elementary schools” and the funds to carry them out. Using ethnographic methods of collecting data, Gold focused on two schools each in Elizabeth and Newark, New Jersey, over seven years, from 1998 through 2005. In 2002, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) took effect, so Gold was also able to observe the effects of NCLB implementation in the four schools.

Gold devotes his initial chapters to a history of the Abbott V decision as well as the changes that produced the economically depressed and highly segregated residential neighborhoods where the Abbott schools are located. After explaining his theoretical frameworks, he presents detailed records of his observations. These sections are slow reading, but they are necessary to support Gold’s conclusions in his final two chapters.

Throughout the book, Gold uses the word “equality,” echoing the language of Brown v. Board of Education, though he appears to mean “equity” rather than “sameness.” As a result of his observations, he concludes that separate schools cannot be equal, no matter how much money is poured into them. Not only did the major reforms of Abbott V and NCLB fail to close the achievement gap, but in some cases, the gap widened. Gold concludes that a major reason for this is that in implementing the Abbott reforms, “administrators and teachers ignored, rejected, or modified [proposed new programs] in the face of existing education practices.” This resistance to change in many cases stemmed from the convictions of well-intentioned teachers and/or administrators that the appropriate methods for teaching these kids are different from methods that work in suburban schools.

Thus, we see in one school, “I don’t care if you don’t know what you’re doing. I just want you to get the right answer,” and in others the conviction that their students “needed discipline, structure, and ‘the basics,’” rather than methods which were perceived as “too child-centered.” Gold refers to this attitude as the “eco-cognitive framework,” and laments how, because of it, the “administrators and faculty of these schools managed to reshape or resist the most powerful interventions to improve student learning that American society has developed” (p.86) — this includes that “integration is the only way to reconfigure the deep structure of urban education by delegitimizing the eco-cognitive framework.”

Unlike Abbott V, the NCLB Act had the power of external intervention behind it, and did succeed in making significant changes, but Gold asserts that those changes “further increase[d] the inequality of separate schools” by narrowing the curriculum as schools focused on standardized test scores.

Even without the rest of the book, I believe Gold’s last chapter is essential reading for anyone concerned with urban education reform. Gold considers a number of possibilities for change and evaluates them based on the conclusions stemming from his research. Many of his ideas are not new. What is new is the weight of well-designed and well-documented research behind the conclusions. The book thus provides a major contribution to the research literature on educational reform.

I find two major weaknesses in Gold’s conclusions. First, I would not be so quick to give up on the possibility of changing the eco-cognitive framework. Perhaps it is a major contribution of Gold’s research to point out that we must work on that, first of all, before any reform has a chance to succeed. I believe well-intentioned teachers can unlearn the stereotypes beliefs they hold about their students. We at the NSRF have the tools to help them do that, and Gold’s discoveries make
The Triple Chalk Talk- An Alternative Way to “Set It Off”
Rolesia Holman, North Carolina

Explicitly recalling having a conversation with Nancy Mohr when she, Katy Kelly and I participated in the Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools’ (BayCES) Leading for Equity seminar in the summer of 2004, I remember thinking, it seems like a perfect marriage. If we could integrate BayCES’s equity pedagogy with the processes and protocols of NSRF, Lo and behold, it wasn’t long afterward that the work began with a few of our National Facilitators and BayCES colleagues, work that launched the Coaching for Educational Equity (CFEE) Seminar in the summer of 2005.

This particular article is intended to put to paper some thinking around an NSRF process, Chalk Talk, content that emerged from CFEE as a result of the partnership with BayCES; and the Gates Foundation’s attributes of high-achieving small schools - rigor, relevance and relationships - for those involved in the national Small Schools movement.

As we sought to create agendas for those who were interested in professional learning communities that were a radical departure from business as usual, we knew that we had to research, adopt, and implement critical pedagogy and practices that were engaging and potentially transformative. As a group comprised of some of the National Facilitators from our CFEE cohort, we continued to grapple with processes and content that would deepen our practice and intensify the experiences of those who passionately wanted to explore what it might look like to interrogate, interrupt, transition and transform our cognitive and emotional selves as part of our quest to create small, personalized, equitable learning communities for students.

But for those in our cohort, we knew there would be no shortcuts. From our collective observations and data compiled from national and local reports on school achievement, most new high schools were turning out to be miniature replicas of large comprehensive high schools with minimal changes in performance results or adult/student relationships. Having the experiences of serving as a director of creating new small schools, advocating for them and coaching in them, I took the liberty of putting my spin on what we conventionally know as the Chalk Talk.

Chalk Talk: its purpose was clear and familiar in most contexts, but for the onset of a seminar, was to follow? The responses to that question lead to one to many, this is a good way to look at and learn from student work.

Facilitators from our CFEE cohort, we continued to create new small schools, cultivating students, and asking ourselves “How could we preserve and protect the integrity of Chalk Talk while increasing its rigor, relevance and relationships to the content which was to follow? The responses to that question lead to the “Triple Chalk Talk.” The thought was to ask not just one question, but three that would cause people to enter a space of dissonance - dissonance that was intended to direct us inward and call to the fore that which was both personal and professional, cognitive and emotional.

Protocols in Practice: Winter Meeting Wrap-Up
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Reflection quotes:

Warm
• Our facilitators did an excellent job of meet-
ing all needs of our group.
• Incredible! This was an unbelievably relevant
and productive conference.
• Thank you for bringing in Gloria Merriex.
She was quite an inspiration. What an amaz-
ing “giver” she is.
• We worked together more deeply than any other group I have ever been a part of!
• I plan to do this work at my school. I think this is a great way to look at and learn from student work.

Cool
• I would like more “nuts and bolts” informa-
tion/resources about how to implement SLCs within different school settings.
• I was disappointed in the facilitation of my Home Group. It felt like the main facilitator was teaching us. The focus seemed to be on acting as a CFG rather than on deepening any aspect of our facilitation. Not much pro-
cessing – and even sometimes, no debrief.
• As far as I could tell issues of equity were not part of the ongoing conversation.
• Time was rushed but meaningful.
• I brought student work and was disappointed I did not get to present.

Instead, those of us who remained met to debrief the meeting and discuss plans for the next Winter Meeting.

The 2009 Winter Meeting, which will be our lucky 13, will be held in Texas, where we will be hosted by no fewer than three NSRF Centers of Activity, Houston Independent School District Center for Leadership and Learning/Houston Independent School District, and San Antonio NSRF Center at Trinity University. We look forward to seeing you all again next January!

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13th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting
Houston, Texas
January 15th-17th, 2009

year fatigue to be with their groups. Similarly, this fall the school superintendent proposed a program based on CFG protocols for site leaders. This developed into our TFT (Teacher Facilitator Training) program. The TFT was designed to provide two to three day training for all teacher leaders to become facilitators of CFG protocols for all school meetings and collaboration on every team across the school. The intent of this program was to initiate a kind of systemic CFG presence across the school to provide equity, voice, and effectiveness in meetings at every level.

I cannot help but be disappointed that the essential work of teachers sharing their teaching practices and strategies in the context of comfortable community circles is not moving forward as quickly as I would like. I am encouraged, how-
ever, by the positive reactions of many of my colleagues as they are exposed to the protocols in areas like full faculty meetings, key accreditation committees involving parents, admin, and teachers, as well as developing programs like teacher assistant training, parent education groups, and high school student associations. That’s not to say that we have found no resistance to the use of protocols, but what began as an October cohort of 15 participants is moving into a scope of accep-
tance and use across an organization of hundreds. Indeed, as we get ready to go back to school after the Chinese New Year break, I feel that, by and large, the majority of teachers in this faculty of about 300 are feeling the community building power of the conversations that CFG protocols bring to their professional lives.

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for more information, visit: www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html

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for Winter Meeting follow-up, including evaluation results and please visit our website, www.nsrfharmony.org