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 their school as the post that they spent the most difficult circumstances, in developing countries or areas of conflict, precisely because the distinction between 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 large enough, and it was close to our friends and family. I thought about other schools I had taught in, schools where I had felt the essential support of my peers and the school. This was especially evident in the sessions hosted by Donna Reid and Katy Kelly, and Doug Elder and Doug Wagner.

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 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 he had heard about CFGs in the US (continued on page 14).