

Center of Activity Report: Florida Pedro Bermudez and Linda Emm, Florida

As we prepare to come together for the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting in Tampa Bay, Florida this December, we want to provide you with a brief snapshot of the work of the Florida Center of Activity. We were very fortunate to have gotten an early start with the work of the NSRF in 1995 and by the time funding for NSRF Coaches training ran out, we had built a small cadre of trained coaches working in a cluster of schools. To this day, most of these individuals are still actively engaged in CFG work—work that, in a multitude of ways, has transformed our personal and professional lives.



Like many other “Centers” of Activity, we formed from a network of colleagues who strongly believed in a new way of working and learning together that had not yet been embraced by the prevailing culture of our district. Indeed, some saw us as a band of subversives whose methods were so radical that our true motives had to be suspect. Still, like Jim Collins’ Hedgehog in *Good to Great*, we remained focused on our “one big thing.” With the support of key individuals in the district—our “embedded champions,”—we grew in numbers.

Five years ago, we had the good fortune to meet Don Pemberton, Director of the Lastinger Center for Learning of the College of Education at the University of Florida, at a Lucent Learning Communities CFG Coaches Institute. After sharing our dreams and comparing notes, we soon realized that our work had much in common. The Lastinger Center had spent a year visiting elementary schools in some of the poorest communities in the state and listening to the teachers in order to understand how best to support their work on behalf of children. One story that was heard over and over was that teachers were hungry for meaningful professional

relationships. They were tired of being told what to do by outside “experts” who failed to understand their context. Teachers were eager to learn from each other in community with those who shared their concerns. This need to establish communities of practice where teachers could support and learn from each other as part of their regular work experience was the magnet that drew us together.

Five years later, we have built a relationship on positive interdependence. We continue to learn much from each other, and are working hard to sustain and expand our work with schools throughout Florida. The Lastinger Center, the NSRF Center of Activity in Florida, is currently working in 39 schools in 5 different districts (Alachua, Collier, Duval, Miami-Dade and Pinellas). We have about eleven university faculty and doctoral students, along with a growing number of NSRF National Facilitators and school-level coaches, working with us in our center. We have 3 levels of measurement to assess center effectiveness (internal team, external team, and grant-sponsored evaluation) which will help us to determine the impact of our work on teachers, schools, principals, and of course STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. Preliminary research results indicate that our Lastinger Schools, when compared with matched control-group schools, show significant differences in student achievement scores on Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in math and reading.



We are especially proud of the fact that we actively seek to work with under-resourced schools and communities. Although Linda and I primarily focus on training coaches and providing follow-up support, the work of the Lastinger Center actively seeks partnerships with organizations that provide a wide array of critical services for the students. For example, at present, the Lastinger

(continued on page 15)

such different weather than in Sarasota, the city I had just returned from. One asked what I thought of that city, and I praised the beaches and damned the heat. The second woman asked whether the Mexicans had started creeping in yet, although she supposed they were all over Florida by now. Her question and her tone did not signal that she was crossing a boundary, and my lack of a response did nothing to enlighten her. It was my turn at the cashier, so I was distracted as I said that I was struck by the diversity I saw in the schools—but by then I was blocking another customer and it was awkward to continue to stand in that spot. I waved and left the store.

My skin, not my being, allowed these conversations to happen. The initiators assumed a shared belief and a shared bias based on skin color, not words or actions. These two tiny moments allowed me a small sliver of seeing. Each incident forced me to see a little bit more of how much I do not understand about white privilege—and forced me to question the sound of my own silence. ■

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Using Protocols with Students. . .

(continued from page 10)

ready to move on. As readers, they did not need the second and third paragraphs of this piece to understand the writer's point of view. They could see immediately that that was more helpful to the writer than the word "boring."

After the first two weeks of Writing Workshop, my presence as teacher fades as we become fellow writers striving to improve our work. ■

The Writing Workshop Feedback Protocol can be found on our website, www.nsrffharmony.org, in our protocol section.

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Center, together with Collier County Public Schools, The Education Foundation of Collier County, the Naples Children and Education Foundation, the Immokalee Foundation, and the Community Foundation of Collier County, are collaborating in a broad effort to improve student achievement and child well-being in Collier County.



This effort is multi-faceted and includes intensive work in Immokalee elementary schools, an executive doctoral program for district administrators, improved access to health and dental care for low-income children, and increasing the availability of quality pre-school education for Immokalee children. Immokalee is one of the poorest communities in the nation, with close to 40% of

its population living below the poverty line. Since 1997, investigations by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department have prosecuted six slavery cases in Florida's produce fields - freeing over a thousand workers held against their will.

The work of the Florida Center of Activity is profoundly satisfying for all of us. It is also intense and difficult work fraught with disappointment and constant struggle. Indeed, all of us in the NSRF know something about how hard it is to do authentic work in real contexts. That is the one thing that separates us from so many others who have joined the collaboration bandwagon in recent years.

And for those of you reading this at the 12th Annual NSRF Winter Meeting, all of us here at the Florida Center of Activity welcome you to Florida! We know that as we engage each other in thoughtful and challenging conversations, we will all be smarter, stronger, and more courageous than we were when we arrived. ■

For more information about the work of the NSRF Florida Center of Activity visit www.coe.ufl.edu/centers/lastinger/index.html Pedro Bermudez may be contacted at pbermudez@dadeschools.net, and Linda Emm at lemm@dadeschools.net

