Reflections on the Equity Conversation

Good start to the equity conversation ... How do I begin these talks in my school? What does “equity of outcomes” look like? How do we deliver it? My lack of ability/clarity in this area scares me.

Racism is so prevalent in our society, it is in the air we breathe. It is part of the operational practices in the institutions that function in our society. What is important for individuals, I believe, is to understand how it operates, understand our own beliefs and values with regard to people of color, and monitor our own behavior. Each of us can influence the institutions in which we function and act to impact individuals.

Many children of middle and upper class African Americans do poorly on standardized tests etc. Why is this so? Can we have a discussion about equity without discussing race in a country that in the last century segregated and in the century before enslaved? I don’t think so. Race is a difficult, painful topic but we cannot ignore it. I have been troubled every time I am present at a national meeting and the issue of equity arises either purposefully, placed on the agenda or by accident. I often feel that people don’t speak their minds because they are afraid. We need to continue to talk about race and class.

I really appreciate this conversation. It’s probably the dilemma that troubles me most. Can we as a humanity move forward and what is this going to take? It seems to me that dealing with our fears is part of it. I wonder if we also have to “hold our own views gently” as Senge says in his piece on dialogue. This is difficult for me. I have always viewed my beliefs as who I am. I realize how this gets in the way of communicating or connecting to people who think differently from me.

I can tell you why unraveling racism in particular is important to me. In my writing about racism so far, I have focused on the person of color. I believe that dealing with our fears is part of it. I wonder if we also have to “hold our own views gently” as Senge says in his piece on dialogue. This is difficult for me. I have always viewed my beliefs as who I am. I realize how this gets in the way of communicating or connecting to people who think differently from me.

What’s Happening

In Arizona
In 2002

April 19
Southwest Regional CFG Coaches Retreat

April 20
Spring Symposium on School Improvement

July 29 - August 2
New Coaches’ Institute

for more information
<www.nsrfharmony.org>

In October a diverse group of educators met along the shores of Lake Champlain to discuss how to continue the work of the National School Reform Faculty that Faith Dunne had fostered in Vermont. We explored the extensive impact she had had on Vermont schools and how we could each play a role in supporting, sustaining, and deepening her work. Three months later, after responding to the immediate needs created by Faith’s passing, we reconnected with the expanded purpose of establishing explicitly what it means to be an NSRF Center of Activity. Highlights of that meeting were:

- We are compiling a range of information on the CFGs currently meeting around the state to help support their work. Initial work has also begun on a database of seminar participants. In addition we are exploring the variety of seminar formats currently used in Vermont to assess the value of each method. Lastly, we are working to identify experienced coaches interested in becoming facilitators.

Vermont as a Center of Activity

Gavin Wallace, Vermont

Support

We looked at what regional and national support is presently available to coaches and schools supporting CFGs and brainstormed ideas for increasing it. We also explored the connection between CFG/NSRF work to the broader concept of learning communities and how the Vermont Center of Activity could work to support these efforts.

Steps towards facilitation

We discussed establishing a state-wide process from participant/coach to facilitator. We looked at Nancy Mohr’s rubric that sets out the process of training, application of new skills, and demonstration of competence that leads to NSRF facilitation endorsement in the New York Center of Activity as a possible model.

What we’d like to accomplish in the next year as the Vermont Center

- Complete the database of Vermont coaches and seminar participants;
- Implement supports to sustain the work that has begun;
- Develop a regional coaches support system;
- Work to establish teams – principal and 2 staff attending initial seminar followed by ongoing support for participants;
- Set up a Vermont coaches listerv to be moderated and active;
- Hold a colloquium followed by a Vermont Center of Activity meeting;
- Help to sustain existing CFGs by preparing new coaches;
- Have CFG concepts be broadly understood by DOE/local standards boards/TQN etc.;
- Establish an administrators’ CFG, to provide continued support for principals;
- Plan for an experienced coaches seminar (summer 2003);
- Conduct three effective seminars in summer 2002.

Affiliated Organizations

Vermont Institute for Science, Math & Technology: Teacher Quality Enhancement – strives to strengthen leadership capacity in education

Vermont Rural Partnership/Rural School & Community Trust – Committed to making a seamless connection between schools & community

Americorps*VISTA – Exploring how CFGs can be used to incorporate service-learning.

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