Greetings Colleagues,

As I sit down to write my annual contribution to Connections, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is being broadcast on CNN. Forty years ago this week Dr. King threw down his prepared text and delivered a speech that has continued to remain relevant and unforgettable. On that hot August day, Dr. King woke the spirit of this nation by reminding us of the great promise of freedom, justice, and equality for all. He had the extraordinary gift of being able to challenge us to see and feel the enormous gap between our nation’s ideals and its existing injustices. Even as he held a mirror up to the nation that reflected all of our social inequities, he still inspired hope, fueled energy, and brought diverse people together to take action to close the great schism between our nation’s stated beliefs and its actual practices.

If we are to fulfill Dr. King’s dream we must address each of these gaps. The great injustice of the achievement gap condemns a generation of students to a life of economic hardship and less than full participation in our democratic society. This inequity must be addressed while accelerating the learning of all students. In order for NSRF to actualize our mission and close the achievement gap, I believe we must also support teachers and schools in closing two other substantive gaps in practice as well.

From a personal/professional perspective, we must help teachers get in touch with their identity and integrity and realize the powerful opportunity for personal/professional growth that is provided by looking critically at the dissonance between our core beliefs and our practice. Changing our practice is accomplished by adapting our teaching to align it with our beliefs about teaching and learning. On an organizational level, we must also help schools recognize and close the gap between their stated mission and purpose and the school’s actual practices and policies.

In last September’s Connections, I shared some burning questions. Among them were: “How can we nurture educators’ ability to identify the gaps between their core beliefs and their practice?”, “What are the necessary preconditions for our work to flourish in schools and districts?”, and “What makes our work (continued on page 13)
Confusion and curiosity are mainstays of my experience in education. They’ve taken over for anything I’d call absolute. It seems hard enough for us to figure out exactly what is going on right now with things like test scores, student motivation, and school culture. How in the world are we to predict what is going to happen with student scores next semester, their motivation next year, or the tenor of this school three years from now? One tool, however, in balancing that current confusion with hopeful curiosity is the Future Protocol, jokingly dubbed “Back to the Future” by new coaches two summers ago.

I developed the structure in 2001 at the request of our Superintendent to assist Jefferson County cabinet leaders in refocusing the district vision and fine-tuning the strategic plan. The idea was to give the diverse members of committees something to which they might all tether their ideas and to help them synthesize the relationship they saw between where the district was and where they wanted it to be. What was discovered in that meeting was what we already know. Folks like to be productive with their time and appreciate guidance to go deep in their dialogue and discussion. What also emerged, however, was this new energy on how we might help manage discussions and coordinate efforts to make us think less about wishful thinking and more about conscious effort.

To do this, several components seem key. One, participants must be able to really sense the future; I mean hear it, smell it, see it, and maybe even feel it. Buy-in cannot be at a tact, distant level, but must be an intimate, intelligent, and emotional one. To do this I designed the protocol to work with an altered “present.” When speaking about the future, what they hope to accomplish or see change, participants don’t talk in future tense. They speak in present tense, as if it had already happened. Phrases like, “I see,” “we have,” and “they do” begin to emerge and the language starts to shape a “can do” attitude toward this future time. Participants in the past have commented that the process itself is invigorating, hopeful, and engaging. It makes what seemed distant appear more real.

Second, a good way to stir the mind and body is to create what Peter Senge (1990) in a Sloan Management Review article calls “creative tension.” This component has been the most intriguing and the true crux of a successful Future Protocol. In this step, participants connect the “new” present (semester, next year) to the past (today, in real time). The idea is for people to explain how this change happened, what was put in place, and how things were altered. Continuing with past tense language, participants draw connections between where they were and what they’ve become. What develops in this step is a working draft for an action plan. These connections begin to explain what the school or organization must do to make its vision a reality.

Recent efforts to make the future less about wishful thinking and more about conscious effort. To do this I designed the protocol to work with an altered “present.” When speaking about the future, what they hope to accomplish or see change, participants don’t talk in future tense. They speak in present tense, as if it had already happened. Phrases like, “I see,” “we have,” and “they do” begin to emerge and the language starts to shape a “can do” attitude toward this future time. Participants in the past have commented that the process itself is invigorating, hopeful, and engaging. It makes what seemed distant appear more real.

The Details
Where
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
All Sessions will be held at the Philadelphia Marriott, 1201 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
When
January 15-17, 2004
Begins 8am Thursday, ends 12:30pm Saturday
Breakfasts are provided.
Cost
$350 per person
$100 for Students
(minors must be accompanied by an adult)
 Lodging
Philadelphia Marriott, 1201 Market Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 19107
215.625.2900
Rate- $132 single/double
Online registration is also available at
www.nsrfharmony.org/wintermeeting.html

We are delighted to invite you to Philadelphia for our 8th Annual Winter Meeting- our first time back in the State, since the Spring Colloquium in 1998. This year’s meeting is co-hosted by NSRF Centers of Activity in Lancaster, Philadelphia and New York City. As always, we will learn with and from each other. Many of us go to the NSRF Winter Meeting to be challenged and stretched, to be reinvigorated, and to publicly recommit to our work. We look forward to seeing old friends and meeting new ones, and leaving with a wealth of new ideas and resources. With others from around the country we will be able to:

• Co-construct a definition of equitable leadership & learn together about the ways we can build leadership capacity for all.
• Use the Success Analysis, Consultancy, and Looking at Student Work Protocols to deepen our work.
• Discuss a provocative reading.
• Take part in the World Café with colleagues, parents and students.
• Engage in Coaches Clinics that participants will self-select based on their personal coaching needs.

We hope you will join us. Our learning will be richer because you are there.
parallel to ours. The overarching goal of the institute was to help with the transition of the five big Indianapolis High Schools into Small Learning Communities. It was a brave adventure, with high goals, but success was achieved in the very act of bringing all of these stakeholders together in a meaningful way for all of them, collaboration... I am not sure if collaborative processes can be learned without collaborating. I can see now why our facilitators set straight to work in building us into a learning community. You have to model your goal. We were made responsible not only for our own learning, but also for the learning of everyone else. By sharing this responsibility, we were empowered to work together in ways that are meaningful and welcoming, but not necessarily easy. If collaboration was easy, it would be the norm. “Our work” of collaboration is hard and it does not help unless we make it public by sharing this work with others.

I got a chance to share my work a few weeks after the institute, I recently attended a wedding where I ran into the mother of a college friend, who has been teaching for years. In the standard catching up, I told her what I do, and when I mentioned CFGs, she lit up. She had been to the previous week and had heard about them. We started to gush. What resulted was a debriefing for both of us. It was done against the backdrop of the evergreen hills of Northern Idaho and after the contemplative silence of a Quaker wedding. It gave me a chance to reflect on what I had done and what “Our Work” really means. It is based on collaboration for student success, it is hard work because collaboration is not easy, but powerful in its ability to focus multiple resources on our practice, dilemmas and students. “Our Work” is driven on by making this collaboration possible for every educator who cares about students. “Our Work” is as hard as changing the world and as simple as asking other people what they think.

The scary part is that I am sure that I am not done changing. It is a frightening prospect that one week can change your life, so I am not sure if we should add that to the brochure, but it would be honest. I still know what my work is, but I think I can add more of “Our Work” in my answer when people ask me, “So, what do you do?”

Michael Fullan’s latest book, The New Meaning of Educational Change, reads like a college text or required reading. The storyline is not full of personal accounts, but the message is outstanding. In this edition, Fullan clearly identifies that educational reform is based on the improvement of relationships. “Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the culture of the classrooms, the schools, the districts, the universities and so on.” Changing culture is paramount to introducing, developing and sustaining reform. The heart of any school is the people and the relationships between the people. These relationships dictate how work is done or not done. Making and growing relationships at all levels and creating cultures to support inquiry, reflection, trust and innovation is essential for school reform to occur. As I read this edition, I saw my own school, C.W. Henry, emerge with all of the struggles and triumphs we encountered as we moved toward training teaching and learning better for everyone. As principal of C.W. Henry School I quickly discovered that students, as well as teachers, passively or aggressively resisted any new initiative that did not make sense or have meaning in the context of their lives. In order to introduce the work of CFGs we first created a school vision that meant in the context of their lives. In order to introduce the work of CFGs we first created a school vision that made sense and had meaning in the context of their lives. In order to introduce the work of CFGs we first created a school vision that
gave context to the work and used the Coalition of Essential Schools 10 Common Principles as a framework to align directives from local, state, and federal levels. Taking the time to develop meaning and achieve this coherence reduced or nullified resistance to our educational reform and change endeavors.

The Critical Friends Groups at C.W. Henry School depends on each other to help implement mandated changes in the District’s curriculum and change implementation. This became the focus of our CFG work for the school year. The criteria that Fullan says an organization should apply to determine if a particular change is worth the effort can be used by learning communities as they reflect on their progress and refine their planning. These criteria can be stated as questions: “Does the change address an unmet need? Is it a priority in relation to other unmet needs? Is it informed by some desirable sense of vision? Are there adequate resources committed to support implemen-tation?” These questions help guide our information-gath-ering process to determine if we have developed enough meaning to imple-ment the change effectively or whether to reject it.

Fullan also shares some “do and don’t” assumptions, the final one being, do not assume there is a “silver bullet.” Implementing change is really recruting a school to develop habits of mind that foster reflective practice, collabora-tion, and informed decision making. These skills help practitioners embrace educational reform and change in ways that make sense to their organization and add to the coherence of a shared vision.

Once a school or organization has begun the change process it is important to share in a collaborative way with other schools. Just as teachers begin to open their practice up to collaboration, it is important to share our learning experiences with others. I can see now why our facilitators set straight to work in building us into a learning community. You have to model your goal. We were made responsible not only for our own learning, but also for the learning of everyone else. By sharing this responsibility, we were empowered to work together in ways that are meaningful and welcoming, but not necessarily easy. If collaboration was easy, it would be the norm. “Our work” of collaboration is hard and it does not help unless we make it public by sharing this work with others.

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Camellia Cosgray can be reached via e-mail at camelliacosgray@hotmail.com

NSRF Mission Statement

The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.
Playing Doubles—Moving Beyond Tag-Team Facilitation
Nancy Mohr, New York

promise you, I am not always thinking about coaching while on vacation. Nonetheless, I was playing tennis with Alan Dichter this past weekend and it got me thinking about partnering and facili-
tation. Probably if I kept my mind on the game, it would improve, but there is something about being on vacation that fires up thinking.

Anyway, we both had a great feeling about the relationships across what have been traditional boundaries I think we’ve been able to create a new sense of credibility by avoiding the blame game trap while simultaneously staying focused on the real problems. The understanding that “educating every child well means sup-
pporting the families who care for them” is at the heart of the social justice plat-
form that is this partnership’s initial focus. As long as we are all committed to that outcome, I think we will continue to trust each other enough to sometimes be uncomfortable in specific conversations.

Are there any tools you’ve found especially helpful as a coach in this trust-building process?

The first thing the staff of the elementary school said was that we had to do was to form cross-grade Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) that would look at students working with a partner through their inquiry into effective teaching and learn-
ging. The use of CFGs and protocols has spread in light of their effectiveness at the elementary school. We are actively using protocols to change the ways we relate to each other as adults and we hope to begin using these tools as part of our efforts to increase student voice in this work.

Do you have any closing com-
ments or questions you’d like to share with our readers?

I think if I didn’t mention the powerful support I’ve received from my colleagues in BayCES. As an organiza-
tion we have made a commitment to leading for learning and we are continu-
ously reflecting on our progress toward that end. The critical friends as a re-
source on my practice with colleagues who share a similar commitment and represent vastly different experiences of the world both fortifies and challenges me as I do this work. Reflecting and questioning in affinity groups of white colleagues and being vulnerable and taking risks in our larger cross-race group provides me with an extraordinary community of practice. I know that I can’t do this work if I paralyze by the fear that I might make a mistake, or if I’m falsely humble and leave the job for the next person. Holding myself accountable to a collaborative where we unpack our assumptions and mistakes in order to move forward with the work is the key to my growth as an aspiring leader for equity.

After my conversation with Tony, I visited the Emeryville Education Network’s website (www.emeryednet.org/publiccontent/get_involved.php) to look for further insights into this...
Naming the Elephants
(continued from page 9)

each other, it is important for schools and districts to do the same. It is the only way to achieve real large-scale reform.

This past spring the faculty of Henry School went through a change process in collaboration with the Coalition of Essential Schools. Visitors from schools across the country and across the neighborhood came to share, reflect and give feedback on Henry’s efforts to implement the 10 common principles. Over a two-day period, visitors talked to teachers, parents, support staff and students. They visited classrooms and participated in focus group discussions.

Gender Equity Lit... (continued from page 12)

away from their emotional lives at a young age? Questions like these are addressed by Kindlon and Thompson in ways that I found pushed my thinking.

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Book Review
(continued from page 3)

A modified Tuning Protocol was used at the end of the two days to share feedback and dialogue – giving up for the moment our pretentious to work – that for us was situated in the hallway of the 10th floor – opposite the elevators – of a large building. All participants deepened their understanding of our mission as they examined the relationships within and that the school. There she is! Something about the arms slung wide, about the smile, about the elegance of her clothes and her stance that signaled all of us who are intuitively less open, less optimistic, and less elegant that she would give over to us some of these qualities without our even asking, just because we were special to her.

But others will situate the image differently – at the front door of a school in the Bronx, at the opening or close of a workshop for school leaders, or in coming upon her suddenly at the movies or at the market – to name just four of her many favorite places in the world. But what is this image of? What shall we call it? I want to address this question, having the honor of speaking today on behalf of the legion of Nancy Mohr’s colleagues and friends. Nancy had what may have seemed to us an uncanny ability to make friends feel like family and colleagues feel like friends. But I don’t think it was after all uncanny. It was a gift, a very personal gift.

She was a connector. The vitality of any society and its capacity to embrace novelty and to undergo real change is about improving relationships at all levels. Last year at Henry we instituted weekly Classroom Meetings as a way to regularly facilitate our increased inclusion of student voice in the way we do business. Making space for all voices has improved our relationships and we believe it has further solidified our reform efforts.

The New Meaning of Educational Change is a must read for anyone involved in school reform. The structure of the book lends itself to be read entirely or in pieces, according to the reader’s area of interest. Fullan states that the most pressing reason we need school reform is because we “need citizens who can learn continuously and work with diversity locally and internationally.” Reading this book renewed my understanding of change and helped me plan more effectively as I move into a new leadership position in the upcoming school year.

Carol Nejman can be reached via e-mail at cnejman@uecl.com

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Eulogy for Nancy Mohr
Joe McDonald

Everyone here has his or her own image of it, but Sherry King and I discovered the other day as we talked on the phone – giving up for the moment our pretentious to work – that for us was situated in the hallway of the 10th floor – opposite the elevators – of a building. All participants deepened their understanding of our mission as they examined the relationships within and that the school. There she is! Something about the arms slung wide, about the smile, about the elegance of her clothes and her stance that signaled all of us who are intuitively less open, less optimistic, and less elegant that she would give over to us some of these qualities without our even asking, just because we were special to her.

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Connections invites its readers to share other resources and learning experiences around equity issues. Please contact us at nsrf@harmonyschool.org

Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughters Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence, Rosalind Wiseman

The media had a field day in 2002 when there seemed to be new sound bites every day about the inherent meanness of girls. Queen Bees offers some sound advice for parents and educators without falling into the trap of seeing a predisposition for evil in all females.

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Ships with people in and across all systems’ problems and work together to increase the pressure needed to sustain system-wide change. When I think about “different paths” I’m talking about everything from different ideas to different ways of expressing similar ideas. I’m thinking that while I might assume I have a pretty good research-based idea about all of the services a child needs from birth to age 19, my idea isn’t relevant unless it’s contextualized for understanding, while the project clock is ticking. If we want the transformation we’re working for, and we do, then building relationships with parents and community members can’t be put off until later. Understanding that the trust required for authenticity takes time and that everyone always has to be included is a lesson I have to remind myself of more than one occasion. This requires being very conscious of the planning process and doing the facilitation work necessary before each meeting. And sometimes, it has meant reminding ourselves of what parents and community members have shared when they aren’t present during a particular conversation, and often it has meant making decisions while parents are present.

You’ve talked a fair amount about differences and barriers. How do you engage folks in the hard conversations, the dialogue we often ignore in an effort to keep the peace?

The ethos of community is an essential precondition for educators to expose their own vulnerabilities. I am afraid that we are destined to a “world according to gap” if we do not provide the support of intentional learning communities to educators at all levels of schooling. The establishment of a learning community committed to the growth of each of its members is a necessary precondition if our work is to flourish in schools and districts so that all students can find success at school. Making our work public, in the context of community, creates the possibility of dismantling the Big Three Gaps and fulfilling the mission of NSRF “…to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved in schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic learning communities…”. Although Dr. King has not been fully realized, our nation continues the struggle for social justice. NSRF’s work for educational equity is an important part of that struggle.
changes took place is usually devoid of dates, persons responsible, priority, and feasibility. It usually requires more inspection and then some follow-up to begin acting upon the information. Some have commented that the protocol leaves the group with much more to do.

What has been wonderfully exciting has been the variety of ways for which the Futures Protocol has been used and the discoveries its use has created. The Futures Protocol is reprinted in part below. You can get a full version by calling NSRF at 812-330-2702 or visiting www.nsrfharmon.org.

Scott Murphy can be contacted via e-mail at smurphy@jeffco.k12.co.us

The Futures Protocol

1. Present what you are trying to accomplish:
   Presenter: shares what he/she is trying to do and how it might look when it is all done.
   • Presents: presents with each other what it would like to accomplish and how it would look when done. (5 minutes)
   2. Clarifying Questions:
   • If presented by a single person and not a whole group, the rest of the group asks clarifying questions. If a group presents together, no clarifying questions. (5 or 10 minutes)
   3. Probing Questions:
   • If a single presenter, the group asks probing questions to further the presenter’s thinking. The presenter may choose to answer, think aloud or quietly consider it.
   • If a group presents, they raise probing questions to the whole group with perhaps no real expectation of answering them in this step. Again, the idea is to extend the thinking about what they want to accomplish. (10 minutes)
   -- Presenter steps out --
   4. Project into the future (whatever timeline seems appropriate) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished this endeavor.
   • Must talk in present tense.
   -- Describe what is in this best case-scenario. Do not yet describe how.
   • Focus on the sights, sounds, behaviors and feelings surrounding this accomplishment.
   Examples:
   • 5 years later in a school’s reform efforts
   • The end of a team’s project with students

   Results from a group of new teachers that focused on classroom management for one year
   • It is really helpful to chart steps 4, 5, and 6 so that everyone can see what is being said. (10-15 minutes)
   5. Look “back” from your projected present and describe how it looked when it started.
   • Must talk in past tense
   • Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher’s work, student achievement, etc.
   • Try to remain as tangible as possible
   • Continues to chart this conversation. It is helpful to put dates at the top of the chart to identify the time period to which the group is referring. (5-10 minutes)
   6. Continue looking back from the “projected present” and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present.
   -- Must talk in past tense
   • Directly relate the previous description of how it looked when it started.
   • Consider discussing how, when, with what resources and by whom. (5-10 minutes)
   -- Presenter returns to conversation.
   7. Return to “projected present” and discuss if it can get any better than it is or is this as good as it could possibly be? Again, think about how it will look, sound and feel if it can get even better. (5 minutes)
   8. Presenter shares group with thoughts about the future and info she has gathered. (5 min)
   9. Debrief the process (10 minutes)

P art of the vocabulary that gets thrown around at the National School Reform Faculty is the term “Our Work.” I have been confused by this term for a while. I know what my work is: building websites, answering phones and e-mail, helping to put together institute materials, but what is “Our Work?” I finally got to see “Our Work” recently. I have been working at the NSRF National Center in Bloomington, Indiana, for over a year. It is never easy to integrate new people into an existing institution and there is not exactly a manual for working at NSRF. I was told a few things, had some questions answered, and was integrated into our NSRF staff CFG.

This arrangement worked well, but eventually the time came for my initiation: attending a coaches’ institute. I never like to ask anyone to do things that I am not willing to do, so when a chance arose to go to a new coaches’ institute in Indianapolis as part of the First Leadership Institute, I knew I needed to go. I had spent the last year making a website to try to encourage educators to become coaches and start CFGs, so I owed it to myself and the people I want to help to gain a better understanding of “Our Work.”

I saw educators with real concerns take the time - a full week - to try something new. Many of them have been to several seminars, but what could make this one different? How could this one matter in a sea of seminars focused on improving schools? But it did. Over the week, you could see the change in everyone. I could see it in myself.

The “aha” factor is so high, it feels like it is something you always knew but forgot. At the same time it is one of the most difficult things I have done in my life. Distrust and competition are a part of my (and I suspect many others’) culture. It is a hard thing to ruffle your work to be more responsive, collaborative.

I am not sure if there is a standardized model of a New Coaches Institute, given the individual needs of different groups and talents of each facilitator, but this institute was pretty unique. It was designed to integrate teachers, community groups, students and parents at various points who were doing their own leadership development (continued on page 18)

Understanding “Our Work”
Chris Jones, Indiana

When I was 6 years old, I began first grade at Harmony School. Harmony is a unique place. With 180 students from age 3 through age 18, all in the same building, there is a familial atmosphere, and collaboration is the rule rather than the exception. Though there have been many changes since that fateful first day of school 20 years ago, Harmony is still my second home and my extended family.

Last December, I completed the Coaches Education program at Indiana University (Bloomington), and I now hold an Indiana Teaching License. Though I am not teaching in the traditional sense, I am working with kids at Rhino’s, the local all-ages club and youth center, which is also affiliated with Harmony School. I have also been working for the National School Reform Faculty (housed at the Harmony School Education Center) for about two and a half years, putting together binders for trainings, designing brochures, editing protocols, and generally trying to support coaches and facilitators in any way that I can.

During this time I went from having no idea what protocols were and even the organization itself were all about to feeling very comfortable with NSRF materials and having a good understanding of NSRF’s mission and purpose. I know what CFGs were all about. I understood the purpose of protocols and how to use them. I knew why we read the articles we read. Then I went to a CFG coaches institute in Indianapolis.

What I found was that I actually knew and understood very little. I’d read all the protocols countless times, I knew at least the titles of most of the articles (and the content of many). I’d even put together the binder we were using for this particular institute; all that “preparation.” All that prior knowledge, didn’t prepare me for the power of protocols and the importance of CFG work.

What I found was that I had assumptions about what I knew, the work that I did, the work of coaches all over the country, and about myself. Although many of these assumptions were of a positive nature, they were still assumptions.

I used to believe that CFGs were easy, that they just “happened.” I seem to have been so obvious to me: CFGs are an amazing tool, therefore most educators will buy in easily and quickly, and trust will follow. Since I had grown up in a place where collaboration was the norm, I assumed that

What We Did Over Summer Vacation

Understanding “Our Work”
Camellia Cosgray, Indiana

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In my second year, after reading Horace’s School and participating in a workshop on the subject, I began to see a need for a new kind of educational structure. I joined the second design team and started advocating for a small academy or “house” structure for the high school. I saw real possibilities in the Common Principles that CES (Coalition of Essential Schools - ed.) was advocating for. The whole idea of graduation by final examination reengendered my interest in curriculum design. I started tinkering with my ideas of teaching, ideas about timing, topics, materials and assessment. With this initial idea of developing assessments for students and then planning backwards with colleagues to design instruction was powerful. Around this time I attended an Authentic Assessment seminar at Brown University and I was really hooked! Our design efforts were often turbulent, but with the Common Principles as a guide we pressed on. At the end of that summer we opened our new high school, the first Vocational-Technical school in the District, and the first CES high school in Miami-Dade County. Today you’re actively involved in the national expansion of Critical Friends Groups. When did you move into this level of involvement and what thoughts can you share about your view of next steps? I began facilitating nationally in either 1997 or ’98 when two colleagues from the NSRF asked me to co-facilitate a School Culture seminar with them. Co-facilitating really stretched me and I began to look at the elements of the deeply fragmented culture in our schools and started to really understand the potential of CFGs as vehicles that could change that culture from one that was fragmented to one that was collaborative. As far as next steps go, I’m really hopeful about the possibilities for public education. I see leaders in business, the medical profession, education and even the military, pointing to the power of collaboration and reflection, and I think this convergence of thought will help us in our efforts to redesign public education on a national scale.

Character of the student who attended, and their genuine desire to share, collaborate, and take risks. BRAVO! Obviously students gain a tremendous amount from being involved in the Symposium as well. Conversing with teachers in a context that looks so familiar (the conference is held at a school, sessions take place in classrooms) but at the same time is so removed from the usual teacher-student classroom dynamics is a powerful way for the young people to participate. We appreciate conversing with teachers on a more equal footing. As one student reflected, “It’s good to have students and teachers interact outside our normal environment, we can have real conversations, not as friends really but as peers or colleagues in some way.” Another student, who had had few opportunities to connect personally with her teachers in the past, writes “Sitting down for lunch with students and teachers together was probably the best part of the day.” Students also get a behind-the-scenes look at teaching and gain a new appreciation for the challenges of the job. One student noted that he got to “see what teachers do, and how they feel.” Another writes, the day “gave me a new perspective on education.”

Creating Community, The Spring Symposium... (continued from page 11)
into white culture toward a desire to be accepted and valued on their own terms.

Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap, Peggy Orenstein

The guided imagery in the first chapter that has students thinking about their lives as members of the opposite gender ... I also like the way Orenstein deals with urban and suburban girls’ experiences. Too many of the books about girls are Orenstein

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them, Garberino

Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Can Save Them, Garberino examines the epidemic of violence in our society and contends with the historic racism and class bias that accepts violence as “normal” in urban areas but alarming when it shows up in the suburban and urban girls’ experiences. Too many of the books about girls are really about white middle-class girls.

Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls, Mary Pipher

The book I wish I had read before my daughters became teenagers. One of the texts I used to guide the reflections we wrote and talked about in my Ask the Girls club. How can we go deeper? – hadn’t I repeatedly stated I wanted to ‘go deeper’? – I had to acknowledge the elephant in my heart. I felt I had to be more comfortable dealing with issues of equity in school... I want to gain the confidence that it’s OK for an entitled white woman to deal with this issue…

Naming the Elephants-Breaking the Uncomfortable Silence, Katy Kelly, Indiana

In June 2001 NSRF adopted a powerful mission statement that I’ve distilled a framework for me to think about my daily work and that of the NSRF National Center:

The goal of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

Wearing the lens of the mission statement has forced me to acknowledge the different “elephants in the room” – those sticky issues that are at the back of everyone’s mind but no one wants to address.

Elephants like the fact that my sons, Christian and Bennett, have greater opportunities to nurture and follow their dreams in life because they were born white, middle class, and of educated parents. Elephants like the times I have hidden from parents in the hall because they were too complicated, or chaotic, and it took too much time for me to want to deal with them. Elephants like the observation that often in group situations white men usually speak first, and second, and third. Naming elephants out loud can be difficult and uncomfortable for me. I’m acknowledging hard truths and taking action resulting in more work that can rock the boat. Not naming the elephant unseizes. If I try to ignore them they follow me around and demand my attention. They nudge me with their trunks and leave uncty elephant messes everywhere until they become so big I keep bumping into them and am forced to face them. And there are lots of elephants lurking that I’m oblivious to. I discovered this recently when an elephant became the “elephant” that nobody wanted to acknowledge.

I attended the BayCES “Coaching for Educational Equity” Institute in July, together with NSRF colleagues RoLesia Holman and Nancy Mehe. Our goal was twofold: to learn about the work of BayCES around breaking the cycle of inequity in schools; and to see how that work into NSRF. I went knowing I wanted to “push myself deeper” in my understanding of equity issues.

In my reflection on day one to the prompt: “what I want to learn about coaching this week” I wrote...how can I get more comfortable dealing with issues of equity in school...I want to gain the confidence that it’s OK for an entitled white woman to deal with this issue…

By Wednesday afternoon we had done a lot of content work in full group, dyads, and small groups. We had gone far in creating an environ-ment in which we could explore issues and speak our personal truths. Still, I wanted to go deeper. Again. From my reflections...I think this group has an integrity that makes it a safe place to engage in healthy conversations around tricky race/culture issues.

We read Paula Evans’ article “A Principal’s Dilemma: Theory and Reality of School Redesign.” In the introduction to the text the statement... Ms. Evans decided to return to the trenches” appears. During our discus-sion of the absence of male role models in our textbooks. I get more comfort-able dealing with issues of equity in school...I want to gain the confidence that it’s OK for an entitled white woman to deal with this issue...
that was both practical and inspiring, but that was based locally, allowing participants to follow up on the connections they had made.

Over the years, as Critical Friends Group participation increased significantly in Arizona and the leadership of the Symposium broadened to include more and more CFG members and coaches, we revised the structure of the conference to reflect ideas learned through the National School Reform Faculty. Roundtables and workshops are still at the heart of the agenda, but Symposium participants now convene in home groups at the start and close of the one-day conference. The home groups, co-facilitated by CFG coaches and experienced CFG members, foster the formation of a learning community. They strengthen the connections participants make with one another and model the power of collaborative learning.

At the same time that the Spring Symposium was evolving to reflect more of the collaborative learning structures and experiences we had learned through our work with Critical Friends Groups, another shift in the focus of the conference was occurring as well. When we started the Symposium, we were committed to involving students in the day’s events in some way. Our initial approach was to ground the conference in the voices of students by opening the day with a panel of high school students (in lieu of a keynote speaker). A couple of school, Catalina Foothills High School – returned from the Coalition of Essential Schools’ Full Forum in the neighboring state of New Mexico, inspired to reach out to other reform-minded educators in our region. We didn’t want to wait another year for the opportunity to meet with educators from other schools, so we decided to organize a smallgrassroots conference ourselves. The goal was to establish a common time and place for teachers and administrators from a variety of Arizona schools to share, reflect, and learn together.

The first Spring Symposium on School Improvement was held in March of 1997. It was organized entirely by teachers, all of whom were members of Critical Friends Groups and believed strongly in the power of collaborative professional development. Initially the agenda for the Spring Symposium was modeled directly on the Full Forum, with one-hour roundtables and two home groups scheduled throughout the day. We wanted to create a similar event mentioned more often on the conference feedback forms that adults filled out over the past three years, conversations with students about teaching and learning was mentioned more often than any other aspect of the event. Regardless of their grade levels, disciplines, years of experience, or roles, educators seem to gain new insights about their practice from listening to young people. A twenty-year veteran math teacher reflects at the end of the day, “I motivate students?” A kindergarten teacher writes, “I appreciated hearing the voices of students at the Symposium. Seeing such young students lead a session like those listed above, it became increasingly evident to us that there was a lot we all could learn from students as well. This year’s Symposium, the seventh annual, included a diverse group of educators from throughout southern Arizona. There were kindergarten teachers, community college professors, librarians from all levels, principals, district-level folks, and middle school and high school teachers; there were teachers from a variety of disciplines, including math, English, social studies, Spanish, science, and business. But perhaps the participants who made the biggest impact were a contingent not usually in attendance at educational conferences: students.

“When teachers invite students to become partners in inquiry, to collaborate with them in wondering about what and how students are learning, schools become more thoughtful places.” — Nancie Atwell, 1991

Over the past few years, students have become an increasingly integral part of the Spring Symposium on School Improvement. We’ve moved beyond having students in the opening panel only and now encourage student participation in all aspects of the day. We have, as Nancie Atwell challenges us to do, invited students to become our “partners in inquiry” as we strive to improve teaching and learning in Arizona schools. High school students have led roundtables or workshops on their own and their conversations with a teacher at the past three conferences. The student-led sessions include: Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in the Classroom: A Student’s Perspective (2001); Creating a Student Communication and Conferencing (2002); Taking Risks in the Creative Writing Classroom (2002); A Question of Passion: What Students Want to Know (2003); Acting Out: Student Activism in School (2003); Connecting School and Self: Pursuing Research We Care About (2003).

These sessions have proven to be very popular, some of them filling up to standing-room-only status. The students and kids alike are eager to listen to students talk about their own perspectives and experiences regarding teaching and learning. And now they no longer have to rely only on a panel at the beginning of the conference to hear these voices.

At the most recent Spring Symposium, in March 2003, close to a quarter of the 100 or so participants were high school students. Some led sessions like those listed above, but many just attended the day’s events – including the opening session, home group meetings, roundtables and workshops, and the conference closing – engaging fully in the learning and conversations alongside the adult participants. Student involvement seemed especially relevant this year with inquiry as the theme of the conference. Students and teachers were able to engage in in-depth conversations alongside the adult participants. Student involvement has had a significant impact on all involved. On the conference feedback forms that adults filled out over the past three years, conversations with students about teaching and learning was mentioned more often than any other aspect of the event. Regardless of their grade levels, disciplines, years of experience, or roles, educators seem to gain new insights about their practice from listening to young people. A twenty-year veteran math teacher reflects at the end of the day, “I motivate students?” A kindergarten teacher writes, “I appreciated hearing the voices of students at the Symposium. Seeing such bright kids question the worth of rote learning that might not have carry over or application to their futures was their own. I was even more surprised by how many students shared this sentiment.” A middle school administrator, attending the Symposium for the first time, exclaims, “I am awestruck at the strength in
Creating Community: The Spring Symposium on School Improvement
Carrie Brennan, Arizona

If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft. — Parker Palmer, The Courage to Teach, 1998

often in the day-to-day routines of teaching we have little time and energy to really talk with — and learn from — those around us. How do we begin to break down some of the isolation that exists within schools and across schools, in order to create Palmer’s notion of a “community of fellow teachers” that helps us strengthen our teaching and improve student learning? One way is simply to carve out a time and a place to gather.

In the fall of 1996, a group of teachers in Tucson, Arizona — all members of the first Critical Friends Group at Catalina Foothills High School — returned from the Coalition of Essential Schools’ Fall Forum in the neighboring state of New Mexico, inspired to reach out to other reform-minded educators in our region. We didn’t want to wait another year for the opportunity to meet with educators from other schools, so we decided to organize a small grassroots conference ourselves. The goal was to establish a common time and place for teachers and administrators from a variety of Arizona schools to share, reflect, and learn together.

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When we started the Symposium, we committed to including students in the day’s events in some way. Our initial approach was to ground the conference in the voices of students by opening the day with a panel of high school students (in lieu of a keynote speaker). A couple of years, students from the host high school shared anecdotes about their own significant learning experiences; another year students from a variety of Arizona schools shared their experiences in their respective schools. One year we used a panel format with a student-produced video in which student work was showcased and students were interviewed about the work they had created.

The student-centered opening was always an inspiring way to start the day. It received high ratings in participant feedback; and, perhaps more telling than the ratings, each year the question remained: how to expand the panel extended well past the time we had scheduled. It was clear that the educators in the audience hungered to hear more from students. How do students perceive what is working and not working in our classrooms and schools? What do students experience and remember as powerful learning? Caring and committed educators come together at events like the Spring Symposium to learn from one another, but it became increasingly evident to us that there was a lot we all could learn from students as well.

This year’s Symposium, the seventh annual, included a diverse group of educators from throughout southern Arizona. There were kindergarten teachers, community college professors, librarians from all levels, principals, district-level folks, and middle school and high school teachers; there were teachers from a variety of disciplines, including math, English, social studies, Spanish and biomedicine. And science. But perhaps the participants who made the biggest impact were a contingent not usually in attendance at educational conferences: students.

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The home group sessions highlighted ways that teachers were able to engage in in-depth conversations with their students, and that schools and classrooms can become more infused with the wonder and curiosity that drive authentic learning. Raising students’ status at the Spring Symposium has had a powerful impact on all involved. On the conference feedback over the past three years, conversing with students about teaching and learning was mentioned more often than any other aspect of the event. Regardless of their grade levels, disciplines, years of experience, or roles, educators seem to gain new insights about their practice from listening to young people. A twenty-year veteran math teacher reflects at the end of the day: “Listening to what [students] said today made me think: I need to be very aware of where my students are coming from and then go from there. Somehow I need to make it more interesting. It made me stop and think, How do I motivate the first time, exclaims, “I am awestruck at the strength in what was showcased and students were interviewed about the work they had created.”

Would you like to know more about this? Please visit our website at www.springsymposium.org.
gender equity in our schools... ...hmm. I must confess that when I first began thinking about this issue, I was preoccupied with concerns about the ways I would get my students to see that background when they moved from seventh to eighth grade. I'd been loopng with my classes for a few years and I couldn't help noticing the way my noisy, adventurous seventh-grade girls were becoming quieter, denser students of the “follow the boys” club as eighth graders. Since I was unwilling to let this phenomenon take hold in my classroom, I then began to systematically alternate between boys and girls when I called on students in my classroom conversations. I also began to read what I could get my hands on about the ways girls seemed to lose self-esteem in direct proportion to the increase in their hormones. Finally, I co-sponsored an extra-curricular club called “Girls Talk Like the Girls at my middle school. Our club flourished for the next five years and my classes got to the fact that the women and girls sometimes went to wait for a girl to speak, even if five boys were waving their girls at me. But somewhere after the first year of my crusade to stem the tide of lost female self-esteem, I became painfully aware that my boys needed some special attention too. Maybe it was the way they hid under my desk on Friday afternoons to try and crash our club meetings, or maybe it was the data that got to me, data that showed beyond any shadow of a doubt that my girls were under-represented in my classroom. I knew that I needed to acknowledge different “elephants in the room” – those sticky issues that are at the back of everyone’s mind but no one wants to address. Elephants like the fact that my sons, Christian and Bennett, have greater opportunities to nurture and follow their dreams in life because they were born white, middle class, and of educated parents. Elephants like the times I have sometimes felt as if I were in parents in the hall because they were too complicated, or chaotic, and it took too much time for me to want to deal with them. Elephants like the observation that often in group situations white men usually speak first, and second, and third. Naming elephants out loud can be difficult and uncomfortable for me. It requires acknowledging hard truths and taking action resulting in more work and due diligence. If I try to ignore them they follow me around and demand my attention. They nudge me with their trunks and leave untidy elephant messes everywhere until they become so big I keep bumping into them and am forced to face them. And there are lots of elephants lurking that I am oblivious to. I discovered this recently when an elephant became the “elephant” that nobody wanted to acknowledge.

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Naming the Elephants—Breaking the Uncomfortable Silence

Katy Kelly, Indiana

I had our own personal debrief and reflection. RoLesia, who is African American, noted how certain people of color in the room had felt silenced by my statement. Then I was some time to consider whether this situation might have played out differently. Shortly after that, Victor Carey, one of our facilitators, mentioned me and wanted to talk. Participating reflections from the day had confirmed what RoLesia had noted – reaction to my statement “I’m not comfortable using the war metaphor for schools” had become an elephant in the room. Many people, particularly those of color, felt shut down, put down, or silenced, because that particular metaphor is very real to them. What they were unable or unwilling to voice in the group they could express in their reflections to facilitators. The facilitators felt that it was important to follow up with the situation the next day but wanted to talk to me first. I assured Victor that I had trust in the BayCES team to deal with it as they saw fit and welcomed a chance to follow up on the issue. While I did welcome it in my head – hadn’t I repeatedly stated I wanted to ‘go deeper’? – I had to acknowledge the elephant in my heart. I felt I had spoken my truth in good faith and was betrayed by the group for not speaking theirs. As a result I became fearful of saying anything in dread of saying the ‘wrong’ thing. From my journal on Thursday morning: “I had noted – reactions... I feel like everyone is avoiding my eye – I’m a leper – I’ve shut down and I’m in holding mode – hoping that I...”
A Conversation with Pete Bermudez
Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Pete Bermudez currently works as a member of a professional support team in Miami-Dade, Florida. His role is to provide curriculum support and professional development. He received a five-year federal grant intended to create six new Choice Zones in the Miami-Dade County Public School District.

I enjoyed my recent conversation with him about my experiences as a longtime member of the National School Reform Faculty.

How did you get involved with NSRF?

Well, I was trained as a coach in 1995, but I need to go back a bit to really explain how I got involved in this work… In 1993 I was involved in my second effort as part of a high school development team. I was fortunate to have a team of teachers in place with six months worth of “time to talk” about their teaching. We were exploring what we really wanted our new high school to be. Many of my ideas were shaped by my earlier, disappointing, first efforts to form a new high school. During that first project, I had served as a Department Head for a group of 38 Social Studies teachers in a school that grew to house over 5,000 students. I had been taken with the idea of redesigning curriculum, but found that changing this or that piece of instruction wasn’t enough to really make an impact on the fundamental way kids were experiencing school in this large, comprehensive high school.

However, while I was working at that school I met an intern who was reading Sizer’s book, “Horace’s School,” and she shared it with me. Reading Sizer’s work really informed my decision to leave my role at the new school and helped me understand the possibilities of the curriculum, schools couldn’t work for all kids unless we made fundamental changes in the ways we design and deliver instruction, changes that went far beyond the efforts of one department.

What kinds of changes did you try to make as a result of reading Horace’s School?

After reading Horace’s School I joined the second design team and started advocating a small academy or “house” structure for the high school. I saw real possibilities in the Common Principles that CES (Coalition of Essential Schools.) is advocating. The whole notion of graduation by final exhibit reenergized my interest in curriculum design. I started talking with my ideas of teaching, ideas about timing, topics, materials and assessment. The whole idea of developing assessments and then planning backwards with colleagues to design instruction was powerful. Around this time I attended an Authentic Assessment seminar at Brown University and I was really hooked! Our design efforts were often turbulent, but with the Common Principles as a guide we pressed on. At the end of that summer we opened our new high school, the first Vocational-Technical school in the District, and the first CES high school in Miami-Dade County.

So how did you connect with NSRF?

I really became a coach by default. The training opportunity was raised by a District colleague, whom I respected, but I declined because I really wanted others on our staff to have the experiences I had to begin to have outside our district. However, when nobody else volunteered, I decided to check out this thing called “CFG” training.

We talk a lot about Coaches’ Training as being “transformational”, was that your experience?

Well actually, I sometimes felt a little out of it at the start of my training. I was out of my element with a group of people that I didn’t know. But something happened when I began to connect with a core of folks from Miami-Dade and neighboring Broward County. I started to see the possibility for really growing the changes we wanted to see in schools.

Would you say you were “transformed”?

I definitely did begin to change my ideas about myself and the process of change. I think our society always holds up models of lone educators and rugged individualites as heroes. We hear about the Joe Clarks and the Jaime Escalantuses, but we don’t hear enough about the critical need for a collective endeavor to move schools beyond the limits of their early industrial beginnings.

Can you give us a sense of how the “collective endeavor” has grown in your area?

In February of 2001 I was the first trained coach in ‘95, and by ’97 our pool had expanded to include a dozen coaches. By 1999 there were 30 coaches in Dade County and today we have almost 100 coaches working in over 70 schools!

Today you’re actively involved in the national expansion of Critical Friends Groups. When did you move into this level of involvement and what thoughts can you share about your view of next steps?

I began designing nationally in either 1997 or ’98 when two colleagues from the NSRF asked me to co-facilitate a School Culture seminar with them. Co-facilitation really stretched me and I began to look at the elements of the deeply fragmented culture in our schools and started to really understand the potential of CFGs as vehicles that could change that culture from one that was fragmented to one that was collaborative. As far as next steps go, I’m really hopeful about the possibilities for public education. I see leaders in business, the medical profession, education and even the military, pointing to the power of collaboration and reflection, and I think this convergence of thought will help us in our efforts to redesign public education on a national scale.

You can reach Debbie Bambino at dbambino@earthlink.net

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Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Becoming an assistant principal CFG meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee is like being a thirsty camel at a big oasis! Each month, around 17 busy assistant principals opened some time focusing on the ‘real’ work that we as administrators should do every day.

This year, the Assistant Principal CFG in Chattanooga centered on ways to raise student achievement through supporting teachers in our buildings. We decided to focus on how to help raise teacher expectation of student achievement. We started the process with a text-based discussion using an article about highly effective teachers.

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However, while I was working at that school I met an intern who was reading Sizer’s book, “Horace’s School,” and she shared it with me. Reading Sizer’s work really informed my decision to leave my role at the new school and helped me understand the possibilities of the curriculum, schools couldn’t work for all kids unless we made fundamental changes in the ways we design and deliver instruction, changes that went far beyond the efforts of one department.

What kinds of changes did you try to make as a result of reading Horace’s School?

After reading Horace’s School I joined the second design team and started advocating a small academy or “house” structure for the high school. I saw real possibilities in the Common Principles that CES (Coalition of Essential Schools.) is advocating. The whole notion of graduation by final exhibit reenergized my interest in curriculum design. I started talking with my ideas of teaching, ideas about timing, topics, materials and assessment. The whole idea of developing assessments and then planning backwards with colleagues to design instruction was powerful. Around this time I attended an Authentic Assessment seminar at Brown University and I was really hooked! Our design efforts were often turbulent, but with the Common Principles as a guide we pressed on. At the end of that summer we opened our new high school, the first Vocational-Technical school in the District, and the first CES high school in Miami-Dade County.

NSRF’s Living History: Assistant Principal’s CFG
A Conversation with Pete Bermudez
The Futures Protocol

1. Present what you are trying to accomplish:
   - Presenter: shares what he/she is trying to do and how it might look when it is all done.
   - In doing so: presents with each other what it would like to accomplish and how it would look when done. (5 minutes)

2. Clarifying Questions:
   - If presented by a single person and not a whole group, the rest of the group asks clarifying questions. If a group presents together, no clarifying questions. (5 or 10 minutes)

3. Probing Questions:
   - If a presenter, the group asks probing questions to further the presenter’s thinking. The presenter may choose to answer, think aloud or quietly consider it. (if a group presents, they raise probing questions to the whole group with perhaps no real expectation of answering them in this step. Again, the idea is to extend the thinking about what they want to accomplish. (10 minutes)

   -- Presenter steps out --

4. Project into the future (whatever timeline seems appropriate) and thoroughly describe what it looks like, sounds like and feels like having accomplished this endeavor.
   - Must talk in present tense.
   - Describe what is in this best case-scenario. Do not yet describe how.
   - Focus on the sights, sounds, behaviors and feelings surrounding this accomplishment.

Examples:
   - 5 years later in a school’s reform efforts
   - The end of a team’s project with students

• Results from a group of new teachers that focused on classroom management for one year
   - It is really helpful to chart steps 4, 5, and 6 so that everyone can see what is being said. (10-15 minutes)

• Look “back” from your projected present and describe how it looked when it started.
   - Must talk in past tense.
   - Think about issues, culture, conversations, teacher’s work, student achievement, etc.
   - Try to remain as tangible as possible

• Continue to chart this conversation. It is helpful to put dates at the top of the chart to identify the time period to which the group is referring. (5-10 minutes)

6. Continue looking back from the “projected present” and discuss how you addressed the starting place and how you moved from that to the projected present. (whatever timeline seems appropriate)

   -- Presenter steps out --

7. Return to “projected present” and discuss if it can get any better than it is or is this as good as it could possibly be?
   - Again, think about how it will look, sound and feel if it can get even better. (5 minutes)

8. Presenter shares with group thoughts about the future and info she has gathered. (5 min)

9. Debrief the process (10 minutes)

The Futures Protocol is reprinted in part below. You can get a full version by calling NSRF at 812.330.2702 or visiting www.nsrfharmony.org. Scott Murphy can be contacted via e-mail at smurphy@jeffco.k12.co.us

Understanding “Our Work”

Chris Jones, Indiana

Part of the vocabulary that gets thrown around the national center, at the office or at national meetings is the term “Our Work.” I have been confused by this term for a while. I know what my work is: building websites, answering phones and e-mail, helping to put together institute materials, but what is “Our Work?” I finally got to see “Our Work” recently.

I have been working at the NSRF National Center in Bloomington, Indiana, for over a year. It is never easy to integrate new people into an existing institution and there is not exactly a manual for working at NSRF. I was told a few things, but had some questions answered, and was integrated into our NSRF staff CFG.

This arrangement worked well, but eventually the time came for my initiation: attending a coaches’ institute.

I never like to ask anyone to do things that I am not willing to do, so when a chance arose to go to a new coaches’ institute in Indianapolis as part of the First Leadership Institute, I knew I needed to go.

I had spent the last year making a great effort to encourage educators to become coaches and start CFGs, so I owed it to myself and the people I want to help to gain a better understanding of “Our Work.”

I saw educators with real concerns take the time - a full week - to try something new.

Many of them have been to several seminars, but what could make this one different? How could this one matter in a sea of seminars focused on improving schools? But it did. Over the week, you could see the change in everyone. I could see it in myself.

The “aha” factor is so high, it feels like it is something you always knew but forgot. At the same time it is one of the most difficult things I have done in my life. Distrust and competition are a part of my (and I suspect many others’) culture. It is a hard thing to rewire your work to be more collaborative. I am not sure if there is a standardized model of a New Coaches Institute, given the individual needs of different groups and talents of each facilitator, but this institute was pretty unique. It was designed to integrate teachers, community groups, students and parents at various points who were doing their own leadership development.

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“Work” is a website to changing the world, and as simple as asking other people what they think.

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Challenging Assumptions

Camellia Cosgray, Indiana

When I was 6 years old, I began my education at Harmony School. Harmony is a unique place. With 180 students from age 3 through age 18, all in the same building, there is a familial atmosphere, and collaboration is the rule rather than the exception. Though there have been many changes since that fateful first day of school 20 years ago, Harmony is still my second home and my extended family.

Last December, I completed the First Leadership Education program at Indiana University (Bloomington), and I now hold an Indiana Teaching License. Though I am not teaching in the traditional sense, I am working with children at Rhino’s, the local all-ages club and youth center, which is also affiliated with Harmony School. I have also been working for the National School Reform Faculty (honored at the Harmony School Education Center) for about two and a half years, putting together binders for trainings, designing structures, editing protocols, and generally trying to support coaches and facilitators in any way that I can.

During this time I went from having no idea what protocols and even the organization itself was all about to feeling very comfortable with NSRF materials and having a good understanding of NSRF’s mission and purpose. I knew what CFGs were all about. I understood the purpose of protocols and how to use them. I knew why we read the articles we read.

I’d read all the protocols countless times, I knew at least the titles of most of the articles (and the content of many), I’d even put together the binder we were using for this particular institute; all that “preparation,” all that prior knowledge, didn’t prepare me for the power of protocols and the importance of CFG work. What I found was that I had assumptions about what I knew, the work that I did, the work of coaches all over the country, and about myself. Although many of these assumptions were of a positive nature, they were still assumptions.

I used to believe that CFGs were easy, that they just “happened.” It seemed so obvious to me: CFGs are an amazing tool, therefore everyone will buy in easily and quickly, and trust will follow. Since I had grown up in a place where collaboration was the norm, I assumed that

What We Did Over Summer Vacation

Understanding “Our Work”
Schools as Centers of Community Life: A Conversation with Tony Smith

Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

Recentl...r different layers of the project has been critical. Building trust in order to allow for a frank discussion about “What’s good enough for our children?” has meant debunking the myth that the “experts” have all the answers. Concretely, it has also meant that I have had to work very hard to avoid the use of jargon and “education-ese” as we pull back the layers of our system’s problems and work together to increase the pressure needed to sustain system-wide change.

When I think about “different paths” I’m talking about everything from different ideas to different ways of expressing similar ideas. I’m thinking that while I might assume I have a pretty good research-based idea about all of the services a child needs from birth to age 19, my idea isn’t relevant unless it is actively and consistently checked for understanding, while the project clock is ticking. If we want the transformation we’re working for to last, and we do, then building relationships with parents and community members can’t be put off until later. Understanding what the trust required for authenticity takes time and that everyone always has to be included is a lesson I have to remind myself of more than once.

Critical Friends Groups are the distinguishing characteristic of our work. They provide the collaborative culture where learning community members can be safe to explore the distance between personal core beliefs about teaching and learning and their daily practice, as well as the contradictions between a school’s stated mission and its daily practice.

Critical Friends Groups have the potential to tap the passion and intentionality of teachers and schools by exposing the gaps between purpose and practice, which lie at the heart of NSRF work. CFGs provide the safety and trust among colleagues where teachers can take the risk to suspend and examine their assumptions and practices. In particular, I think we have to be prepared to unravel the onions of our biases toward those students who have historically been unsuccessful in our classrooms and schools, children of color and children from lower socio-economic strata. Our good intentions are too often part of the problem.

I now believe that the establishment of learning communities committed to the growth of each of its members is a necessary precondition if our work is to flourish in schools and districts so that all students can find success at school. Making our work public, in the context of the Big Three Gaps, creates the possibility of dismantling the Big Three Gaps and fulfilling the promise of Dr. Martin Luther King, August 28th, 1963:

“Go back to Mississippi, go back to Alabama, go back to Georgia, go back to Louisiana, go back to the slums and ghettos of our northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair. I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, August 28th, 1963

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Naming the Elephants (continued from page 9)

Book Review (continued from page 3)

each other, it is important for schools and districts to do the same. It is the only way to achieve real large-scale reform.

This past spring the faculty of Henry School went through a change process with the Coalition of Essential Schools. Visitors from schools across the country and across the neighborhood came to share, reflect and give feedback on Henry’s efforts to implement the 10 common principles. Over a two-day period, visitors talked to teachers, parents, support staff and students. They visited classrooms and participated in focus group discussions.

Gender Equity Lit... (continued from page 12)

away from their emotional lives at a young age? Questions like these are addressed by KDinkon and Thompson in ways that I found pushed my thinking.

The media had a field day in 2002 when there seemed to be new sound bites every day about the inherent meanness of girls. Queen Bees offers some sound advice for parents and educators without falling into the trap of seeing a predisposition for evil in all females.

Connections invites its readers to share other resources and learning experiences around equity issues. Please contact us at nsrf@harmonyschool.org

Carol Nejman can be reached via e-mail at cnejman@aol.com

Eulogy for Nancy Mohr
Joe McDonald

Everyone here has his or her own image of it, but Sherry King and I discovered the other day as we talked on the phone that for us the image was situated in the hallway of the 10th floor – opposite the elevators – of a building on the campus of Emory University. There’s something about the arms slung wide, about the smile, about the elegance of her clothes and her stance that signified all of us who are intuitively less open, less optimistic, and less elegant that she would give over to us some of these qualities without our even asking, just because we were special to her.

But others will situate the image differently – at the front door of a school in the Bronzes, at the opening or close of a workshop for school leaders, or in coming upon her suddenly at the movies – to name just four of her many favorite places in the world.

But what is this an image of? What shall we call it? I want to address this question, having the honor of speaking today on behalf of the legion of Nancy Mohr’s colleagues and friends. Nancy had what may have seemed to us an uncanny ability to make friends feel like family and colleagues feel like friends.

But I don’t think it was all after all uncanny. It was caring. She was a connector. The vitality of any society and its capacity to embrace novelty and to undergo real change is in this case, to improve, depend on those few people who can do what Nancy could do.

Malcolm Gladwell points out that along the route that William Dawes took to warn that the British were marching toward Lexington and Concord, hardly any of the colonial militia turned out, whereas they did wherever Paul Revere, the connector, delivered the message. . . . I know it’s absorbed, but I thought Nancy would have gotten a kick out of being compared to Paul Revere.

If Nancy had planned this event today, she would certainly, as Pat Wasley mentioned to me, want someone to point out that she died at the height of Fashion Week in New York. I think she’d also want someone to offer a recipe. That’s not just because of her love of recipes – you know, she actually kept a locket with two pictures – of Alan and of Michelle. It’s because recipes pass on wisdom – not just wisdom of cooking, but of other things too. So, here’s the recipe for being a connector, as taught to me in Nancy’s kitchen – and I mean the word kitchen not just because of her love of recipes, but because of her love of learning. It is a text – some-thing invested with meaning and beauty. Nancy worked with many texts: protocols, old postcards, student work samples, her own extraordinary photographs.

Remember that Nancy started off as an English teacher, and she never lost the touch. I was an English teacher too, and I want to end this talk by inviting us all – in, I suppose, an English teacher-kind-of-way, to think about a poem. It is entitled “for Nancy,” and was written just in the last few days by one of her friends, Carole Saltz (see page 44). It’s the fate of connect-ors to inspire poetry, but this is a better poem than the one Longfellow wrote about Paul Revere.

Inspiring poetry is just one of the reasons I am so certain, as Pat Wasley mentioned to me, want someone to point out that she died at the height of Fashion Week in New York. I think she’d also want someone to offer a recipe. That’s not just because of her love of recipes – you know, she actually kept a locket with two pictures – of Alan and of Michelle. But it’s because recipes pass on wisdom – not just wisdom of cooking, but of other things too.

So, here’s the recipe for being a connector, as taught to me in Nancy’s kitchen – and I mean the word kitchen to stand in for all the contexts in which she worked. First, you have to take a genuine interest in people as people.

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

Fall 2003

Katy Kelly can be reached at kskelly@harmonyschool.org

Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughters Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence, Rosalind Wiseman

Second, you have to reach well beyond the people you would ordinarily take an interest in if you were just letting life pass by without seizing it. Third, you have to base your work on what people need, but you have to press them to need a better world, and you have to offer them a way to get there.

Fourth, you have to dare to transgress in your connect-ing work – to violate the rules, cut across ordinary expecta-tions, step out of bounds, change the rules of the game. So, for example, I saw a lovely, gentle example of this when I read the other night the answers Nancy had written to Questions for Grandma – a child’s book that her granddaughter, Jenna Emily, had given her through her parents, Graham and Michelle. One of the questions was, “What kind of garden would we plant together, Grandma?”

Crossing the boundaries of the ques-tion, wrote, “We’d plant a garden with some plants that were easy care for, so that we’d have more time for cooking together.” I’d prefer that. Fifth and finally, you have to give people a context for coming together, and you have to understand that at the heart of any context is some-thing invested with meaning and beauty. Nancy worked with many texts: proto-cols, old postcards, student work sam-ples, her own extraordinary photographs. Her home is a text, and, of course, her meals were texts.

Delivered at Nancy’s Service on September 21, 2003, at Riverside Chapel, New York City.
Playing Doubles—Moving Beyond Tag-Team Facilitation Nancy Mohr, New York

I promise you, I am not always thinking about coaching while on vacation. Nonetheless, I was playing tennis with Alan Dichter this past weekend and it got me thinking about partnering and facili-
tation. Probably if I kept my mind on the game, it would improve, but there is something about being on vacation that fires up thinking. Anyway, we really look at our relationship past the first elimination. We both agreed that this could only have happened because our partnership is greater than the sum of its parts. Alan is a very good player; I am, as in golf, an eternal beginner. I have a wicked net shot and Alan is great about running back and forth doing most of the work. I do contribute, but don’t necessarily work up the same sweat that he does. In the end, too well because we have developed this rather unorthodox way of doing things, one which works for us—and we maintain good spirits throughout, and I don’t have to tell you how important (and rare for married partners) that is.

As my thoughts stray to facilitation with a partner, especially one I haven’t worked with often—it is a case of OK, you do this and I’ll do that—but feel free to butt in if you want to. I was thinking about how that wouldn’t be too useful in tennis. We do have our respective specialties, but if it were, I’ll do this and you do that, then we would be like some partnerships we’ve overheard: Don’t you know you’re supposed to be up front; couldn’t you tell that shot? Those are usually the partner-
ships that start floundering. How often are facilitation partners dividing responsibility instead of sharing it? And then how often is there unspoken blame? And the need to be better than the other? Good.

Sharing of facilitation would not look like each person running after each ball trying to hit it. It would not look like one person watch-
ing while the other took a turn running around. And it would not look like one person taking the shaky shots and leaving the tough ones for the other: Why weren’t you there?

Luckily, it’s not even possible in tennis to do what some facilitation teams do: I make a pithy comment, you make an even pithier one—we start to do all the talking. Basically that involves competing with your own partner—or just forgetting who this is. Alan reminds me that the difficulty of developing a truly productive partnership (and I must say, our sar-froid on the tennis court was not an automatic thing when we were first married— you should hear the bridge stories) is that great partner-
ships take a lot of time and energy and it is just not worth it if you are going to work together once and then “change partners.”

Often we do partner people at meetings/conferences and it is only temporary. I have had a rare instance or two where the experience was truly synergistic. Often, however, it is pleasant, but not necessarily more productive—perhaps just more fun than being alone. Not that’s bad, but it is rather luxurious. The thought crosses my mind: What’s the matter with having fun? Maybe nothing except it’s not our fun. Partners do, however, enjoy partners who enjoy each other. And it does model collegiality—but it can and should do more than that. Partnering is especially valuable when each mem-
ber brings a decidedly different perspective to the mix. And this works when it is made clear that there are multiple points of view at play. If you happened to think that we are always in sync with one another and don’t expose our differences, there is a valu-
able teaching opportunity lost.

So why do Alan and I play tennis well together? For starters, we know each other’s strengths, limitations and preferenc-
es well. But that isn’t enough. So what else? To this end, I am reflecting on my practice with colleagues who share a similar commitment and represent vastly different experiences of the world both fortifies and challenges me as I do this work. Reflecting and questioning in affinity groups of white colleagues and being vulnerable and taking risks in our larger cross-race group provides me with an extraordinary community of practice. I know that I can’t do this work if I parlayed by the fear that I might make a mistake, or if I’m falsely humble and leave the job for the next person. Holding myself accountable to a collaborative where we unpack our assumptions and mistakes in order to move forward with the work is the key to my growth as an aspiring leader for equity.

After my conversation with Tony, I visited the Emeryville School District. Seeing the words in an email: “Don’t you know you’re supposed to be up front; couldn’t you tell that shot?” Those are usually the partner-ships that start floundering. How often are facilitation partners dividing responsibility instead of sharing it? And then how often is there unspoken blame? And the need to be better than the other? Good.

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After my conversation with Tony, I visited the Emeryville Educa-
tion Network’s website (www.emeryvillesd.org/publiccontent/ get_involved.php) to look for further insights into this ground breaking initiative. I was impressed with the user-friendly nature of the site and was pleased to read the welcoming invitation to parents and community members. All concerned adults are asked to join in the efforts to support their young people. The site goes on to list seven different ways that adults can mentor students, from acting as tutors to acting as com-
panions, or challengers. This approach is clearly a break from the usual “one size fits all” tutoring model of adult sup-
port. I will be following the progress of this project throughout the next period as I think it offers many lessons for all of us as we work to unite our communi-
ties in support of our kids.

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Playing Doubles (continued from page 5)

Schools as Centers … (continued from page 8)
parallel to ours. The overarching goal of the institute was to help with the transition of the five big Indianapolis High Schools into Small Learning Communities. It was a brave adventure, with high goals, but success was achieved in the very act of bringing all of these stakeholders together in a meaningful way for all of them, collaboration...

I am not sure if collaborative processes can be learned without collaborating. I can see now why our facilitators set straight to work in building us into a learning community. You have to model your goal. We were made responsible not only for our own learning, but also for the learning of everyone else. By sharing this responsibility, we were empowered to work together in ways that are meaningful and welcoming, but not necessarily easy. If collaboration was easy, it would be the norm. “Our work” of collaboration is hard and it does not help unless we make it possible by sharing this work with others.

I got a chance to share my work a few weeks after the institute. I recently attended a wedding where I ran into the mother of a college friend, who has been teaching for years. In the standard catching up, I told her what I do, and when I mentioned CFGs, she lit up. She had been to my school the previous week and had heard about them. We started to gush.

What resulted was a debriefer for both of us. It was done against the backdrop of the evergreen hills of Northern Idaho and after the contemplative silence of a Quaker wedding. It gave me a chance to reflect on what I had done and what “Our Work” really means. It is based on collaboration for student success; it is hard work because collaboration is not easy, but powerful in its ability to focus multiple resources on our practice, dilemmas and students. “Our Work” is done on a stage, this collaboration possible for every educator who cares about students. “Our Work” is as hard as changing the world and as simple as asking other people what they think.

The scary part is that I am sure that I am not done changing. It is a frightening prospect that one week can change your life, so I am not sure if we should add that to the brochure...
Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

It’s Not Magic, It’s the Future
Scott Murphy, Colorado

Confusion and curiosity are mainstays of my experience in education. They’ve taken over for anything I’d call absolute. It seems hard enough for us to figure out exactly what is going on right now with things like test scores, student motivation, and school culture. How in the world are we to predict what is going to happen with student scores next semester, their motivation next year, or the tenor of this school three years from now? One tool, however, in balancing that current confusion with hopeful curiosity is the Future Protocol, jokingly dubbed “Back to the Future” by new coaches two summers ago.

I developed the structure in 2001 at the request of our Superintendent to assist Jefferson County cabinet leaders in refocusing the district vision and fine-tuning the strategic plan. The idea was to give the diverse compilation of members something to which they might all tether their ideas and to help them synthesize the relationship they saw between where the district was and where they wanted it to be. What was discovered in that meeting was what we already know: folks like to be productive with their time and appreciate guidance to go deep in their dialogue and discussion. What also emerged, however, was this new energy on how we might help manage discussions and coordinate efforts to make us less about wishful thinking and more about conscious effort.

To do this, several components seem key. One, participants must be able to really sense the future; I mean hear it, smell it, see it, and maybe even feel it. Buy-in cannot be at a tacit, distant level, but must be an intimate, intellectual, and emotional one. To do this I designed the protocol to work with an altered “present.” When speaking about the future, what they hope to accomplish or see change, participants don’t talk in future tense. They speak in present tense, as if it had already happened. Phrases like, “I see,” “we have,” and “they do” begin to emerge and the language starts to shape a “can do” attitude toward this future time. Participants in the past have commented that the process itself is invigorating, hopeful, and engaging. It makes what seemed distant appear more real.

Second, a good way to stir the mind and body is to create what Peter Senge (1990) in a Sloan Management Review article calls “creative tension.” This component has been the most intriguing and the true crux of a successful Future Protocol. In this step, participants connect the “new” present (next semester, next year) to the past (today, in real time). The idea is for people to explain how this change happened, what was put in place, and how things were altered. Continuing with past tense language, participants draw connections between where they were and what they’ve become. What develops in this step is a working draft for an action plan. These connections begin to explain what the school or organization must do to make its vision a reality.

In the last couple years, some important discoveries have emerged from this step. One, when I facilitate it, I now put all thinking on paper. I use a large wall space and start with the future, dated at the top for a future time, but labeled “today” on the far right. On the far left, I put the current date and the word “then.” In the middle, I put the question “How did we get from ‘here’ to ‘there’?” with arrows pointing to the other two charts. The visual component seems to stimulate thinking, assist in making connections, and serve as a working document beyond the time of the protocol.

But when the protocol is over, the work is not done. In reality, it is just begun. The middle section on how the (continued on page 14)