

CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2002

a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

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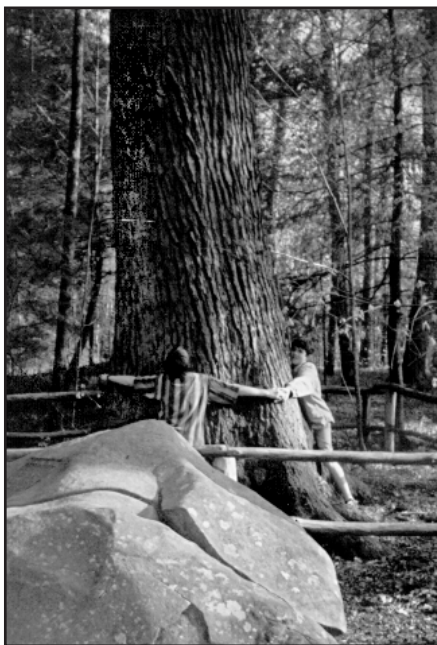
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Protocols In Practice

Director's Report

Daniel Baron, Steve Bonchek & Gene Thompson-Grove

It is with great pleasure that the Directors of the National School Reform Faculty welcome you to the first edition of the NSRF journal, *Connections*. This journal will provide an ongoing opportunity for reflective educators to share their practice in a most public forum!

When NSRF moved to the Harmony School Education Center in July, 2000, it was one of the best kept secrets in the



field of education. The Annenberg Institute of School Reform had spent five years supporting a research based professional development process that provided teachers and administrators with the necessary tools and structures they needed to support the development of professional learning communities within their schools. Those of us who were fortunate to be involved quickly understood that creating Critical Friends Groups in schools was the best professional development that we had ever experienced.

When NSRF moved from Providence, RI, to Bloomington, IN, it came with a

powerful toolbox for reflective educators, approximately 1500 trained coaches, and well over 10,000 teachers and principals in Critical Friends Groups across the country. The NSRF move also brought many questions:

- How do we continue to support current NSRF coaches across the country while expanding trainings for future coaches?

- Can we continue to have our annual winter and spring national gatherings?


- How do we continue to learn from each other and continually refine our delivery of high quality coaches' seminars?

- Can we create a communication network that is interactive, dynamic, and useful to coaches?

- How can NSRF engage in joint school reform initiatives with other networks and organizations across the country?

Needless to say, we haven't fully answered all of these questions, but we are well on our way! Since moving to Harmony, NSRF has hosted two Winter Meetings (in Fort Lauderdale and in Houston), and one Spring Colloquium (in San Francisco). This spring there will be smaller regional colloquia across the country. We have also hosted two national facilitator meetings with this years' meeting scheduled for June. The NSRF website is up and running and we have taken responsibility for hosting the *Looking at Student Work* website as well. We have had an article in *Educational Leadership* published on our work and 100,000 Research Bulletins distributed by Phi Delta Kappa. CFGs figure prominently in Carl D. Glickman's new book *Leadership for Learning* and in Peggy Silva & Bob Mackin's new book *Standards of Mind & Heart*.

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Directors' Report

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We have trained over 2000 new coaches and have established 25 regional centers (see article on page 10).

In addition, some of the most exciting news lies in the many projects NSRF has been supporting over the last year. Below is a brief description of many of them. Please visit our website to learn more about these initiatives (www.nsrffharmony.org).

Small School Coaches' Collaborative

This is a partnership between NSRF, the Coalition of Essential Schools North West Center, and the Small Schools Project at the University of Washington. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funds this collaboration. The project is designed to support educational reinvention in Washington State. This reinvention has the potential to create over 200 small high schools of less than 400 students each. An additional 200 elementary and middle schools will also be transformed as a result of this endeavor.

Cleveland Municipal School District

In Cleveland, Ohio NSRF is supporting the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) as it attempts to start a new small high school as a part of the Model Secondary Schools Project. The school will have no more than 400 students and is scheduled to open in September of 2002. Fourteen NSRF national facilitators are also working with all 83 elementary and middle schools in CMSD. NSRF's role is to train two people as coaches in each of

the 83 schools in order to provide support for the teachers as they work to enhance student learning. The principals in these schools are exploring ways to support this collaborative work with NSRF.

Rural Schools and Community Trust (The Rural Trust)

The Rural Trust is the leading school change organization for rural schools. The Trust's primary mission is to organize school and community support around the issue of sustainability. NSRF will be supporting the Rural Trust leadership along with teachers and community members from their seven regions of the country in the development of facilitation skills to hold school/community conversations. These conversations will deal with a variety of "place-based learning" problems and possibilities.

VISTA Service Learning Demonstration Project

The VISTA Service Learning Demonstration Project is a project involving Indiana and Vermont. The purpose of this ground-breaking project is to "explore the nexus between school reform and anti-poverty work." The VISTA participants will become school/community organizers and build alliances with students, teachers, and community members to help achieve their goals. CFGs are the vehicle being explored in order to develop and sustain these alliances. This project will be a catalyst in the effort to make sure that service learning results in

more than volunteering. The results we seek are for youth to experience making a contribution to meaningful change in both their schools and communities. VISTA also hopes to extend the NSRF project to additional states. NSRF has hired state coordinators for this project in both states.

Lucent Peer Collaboration Project

The Lucent Peer Collaboration Project is an innovative project designed to establish and institutionalize new strategies for teacher learning as members of Collaborative Learning Communities in four school districts: Albuquerque; Seattle; Broward County (Fort Lauderdale); and Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The project, which began in June 2000 and initially involved twenty schools, now envisions steadily expanding work in school clusters within and beyond these four districts.

As you can see, there have been extraordinary opportunities for NSRF to live up to its new mission of supporting educational social equity for all. We could not have been in position to contribute to the national discourse without the tremendous contribution of our colleague, Faith Dunne. She inspired us to work toward equitable outcomes for every learner. This issue of *Connections* is dedicated to her honor and memory. □

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What if ... ?

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"I am proud of this work. My students' performance has improved with every new standard I have added. As colleagues became aware of my work, they offered to teach a variety of ethnic dishes to my students, as did our foreign exchange students. My work became far more public. I was able to arrange for my students' work to be critiqued by the art and production director of a national cooking magazine. I have been asked to present my work to a state conference this spring.

"I did not think that a question could drive my work, but it has truly transformed my practice. My question causes me to focus on my work in a new way every day. Sometimes I take

a breath and realize that I am in way over my head, but my students' excitement for our work together leads me to continue my exploration. I have begun to plan an interdisciplinary course with our photography teacher that would allow students to create displays in area restaurants. All of this started with a question, a little question, that kept growing. I have not simply pushed my comfortable limits, I have bulldozed them. I have learned skills of creativity, writing, editing, revising, photography, formatting -- the list is long, and will undoubtedly grow as I apply this learning to my other courses."

Regina's reflection reveals that our questions, like those of our students, are often messy and non-linear, and the

end of each period of inquiry begins a new cycle of questions. Regina has begun to apply her new learning to her other courses, while I am at a far earlier stage in my own research. My entry point is the question of what I can learn from observing my students read. I want to know how I can improve their reading and writing skills by giving them more autonomy. My CFG will help me to tune my question and offer support during my research. They will also prepare me to present my work to my peers. After many, many years of teaching ninth grade, I am looking at my work with fresh eyes and new excitement for the teaching and learning process. □

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