

December 2011

CONNECTIONS

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM FACULTY



FROM THE EDITOR

BY DAVE LEHMAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR,
NATIONAL FACILITATOR

On Saturday the 15th of October in Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the Stonefly Brewery, **Rethinking Schools** held a **25th Anniversary Benefit**, and my wife, Judy, and I, now living just north of Milwaukee, were able to attend. So here I would like simply to acknowledge the outstanding work Rethinking Schools has been doing over these past 25 years – sharing NSRF's commitment to multicultural education, social justice and equity, particularly in public education. There was live music provided by two area bands, ample food and drink, wise words from key members of Rethinking Schools, and a keynote address by Bill Ayers, well known teacher, activist, award-winning author, and retired professor from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Bob Peterson, co-founder of Rethinking Schools, spoke first of the current situation of public education, particularly in Milwaukee where he is actively involved in the Teachers Union, and the crucial need to defend the "craft of teaching" in the wake of the "apartheid curriculum," then citing Jonathan Kozol's recent writings. He reminded us all to stay grounded, using the two lenses of classroom realities and social justice to develop child-driven, not data-driven curricula; noting that the real enemy is those who oppose and would take apart our free public education for all students, replacing it with vouchers and the corporate take-over of education.

Then, in his keynote address, **Bill Ayers** [there actually were a couple of dozen protestors across the street from the Stonefly Brewery with signs against Bill and his speaking] began by pointing out the importance of relationships, of knowing our kids well, and always striving to be better teachers. He stressed that in a democracy – particularly in a democracy! – every human being is of incalculable value, and that we must continue the fight for "participatory" democracy, noting the centrality of education and



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Check out our new [FaceBook page](#) to make sure you are up to date on all NSRF events!

[Register](#) for your spot for the first three days of a New Coaches training February 20th – 22nd!

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freedom to the fullness of a democracy of justice and joy! How could there, therefore, be any question of "public" education? And, shouldn't all children, all youth have the same quality schools to which Arnie Duncan and Barrack Obama send their children? Bill urged us to continue to use the power of the neighborhood, the community - and not to count on the President and those to whom we really don't have access - to "Occupy Wall Street," to fight back, to re-frame, to re-think our schools and the education of our children and youth, continuing to draw on **Rethinking Schools** which **is, and has been**, the public square!

So **HAPPY 25th Rethinking Schools! carry on!** And for those of you who may not yet be familiar with **Rethinking Schools**, go to their website at www.rethinkingschools.org and subscribe to their wonderful magazine, purchase their tremendously useful, teacher-friendly, student-centered resource books - and in the holiday spirit, make a donation to help sustain their work!

For questions/comments or for more information contact Dave Lehman at davelehman@mac.com

“ONLY ONE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A FIRST IMPRESSION” HOW WE INTRODUCED STAFF TO THE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE GROUPS BY DAVID NELSON, TEACHER, AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS (ACS) OF ATHENS, GREECE

David Nelson brings 21 years of teaching experience to his high school Social Studies classrooms at ACS Athens, where he has taught for the past eleven years. Originally from the Hillsboro School District in Oregon, he has experienced a wide variety of administrative styles that empower faculty and seek to improve student learning. As a building coordinator for professional development at ACS Athens, he is applying his research and CFG coaches training to help establish “Collaborative Learning Communities” in his school.

We've all witnessed conference presenters who contend that they have the answers to the latest best educational practices, yet they don't seem to get one thing: they talk the talk but they don't ... *you know the rest*. Teachers keenly understand the power of experiential learning and can quickly spot professional presenters who practice the same. Our aim as teachers at ACS Athens was to introduce

the philosophy and goals of Collaborative Learning Communities (CLCs), fundamentally *Critical Friends Groups*, to the school faculty so that they could experience the organizational philosophy of CFGs and consider their potential. With the cyclical changes in education rampant, teams striving to start CFGs in their schools must remember the power of first impressions and find an optimal way to introduce their



goals. With the help of some CFG "tuning" and collaboration with colleagues, we found one such way that I'd like share with those of you

hoping to start CFGs or similar groups in your schools.

I returned to Athens, Greece after spending seven days in Bloomington, Indiana, the home of the National School Reform Faculty and the Harmony School, where I had embarked on a different kind of journey: I had joined a group of highly professional educators from around the United States to explore the power of the CFG model and to become a trained coach. Before the training I had researched quite extensively and I knew that I wanted to introduce a similar collaborative model to our school; however, after experiencing numerous protocols in the CFG training, I left the USA with even more tools than I had hoped.

Before sharing what our school's "kick-off" looked like, I'd like to give credit to my CFG group from the last day of the training, where I presented with the use of the Issaquah Protocol, used in that setting as a type of "tuning" for my plan for kicking-off CFGs in our school. The team not only helped me to better understand my own goals, but also honed in on the methodology for introducing

CFGs to a faculty and offered numerous suggestions. With the added advice of Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director and former teacher, I began to sharpen the plan. Her guidance in the training and her tips for initiating a CFG have been invaluable to the process.

Our goal this year is to initiate a pilot Collaborative Learning Community and then to train those participants from each of the schools, Elementary, Middle and High, to initiate their own collaborative groups next year. Our school created the title Collaborative Learning Communities or CLCs because it mirrors our schools' goals and allows us to integrate methods from a variety of PLCs, chiefly the CFG model.

Unquestionably the protocols and publications from NSRF maintain the CFG title and are vital tools in the process.

Our kick-off involved 110 faculty members from each of the three schools and took place in the library, close to nine break-out rooms essential to our activities. We had 70 minutes to establish our first impressions. As teachers entered at 3:45, classical music played in the background,

refreshments were served and teachers were handed a response card with one of nine colors and one of twelve concepts; the atmosphere already helped them to adjust their state of mind after the full teaching day.

The goals of the meeting were framed as a four-fold of opportunities: to get to know each other better, to explore alternative ways for teachers to collaborate, to discuss what makes for the most productive gathering of teachers, and to learn how to maximize the professional conferences offered in Athens this year.



One of our colleagues, who is a Mindfulness practitioner, brought the staff through a five-minute relaxation and focusing exercise, freeing them from their day. On their response cards, each faculty member was then asked to record his/her own vision of an ideal gathering, or meeting of

educators, who come together with the goal to improve student learning. Soft music still played in the background as teachers jotted down their ideas.

Three minutes passed and the teachers were then asked to focus on the role that their concepts, the ones given to them when they entered, might play in an ideal meeting of educators. These carefully chosen words or phrases are



philosophical elements of what we see as critical to the success of CLCs and instrumental to CFGs: collaborative, inclusive, interactive, reflective, engaging, “teacher inspired,” “mutual support,” relevant, synergy, “give and receive feedback,” “cycle of inquiry, action and reflection,” and “center of improving teaching & learning.”

I then explained to the staff the tradition of an American Block Party, a spin-off of the CFG Block Party Protocol. The faculty was instructed to find another staff member who carried the same concept and pair up to share their thoughts. As “Cool and the Gang” livened up the airwaves, some teachers danced across the library searching for another with the same concept card. Faculty members were encouraged to use only future tense in their discussions, to avoid observations of the present, and to utilize “I wonder” and “I believe” in their exchange. Teachers were refining and expanding their understanding of the concepts, and only minutes had passed. My colleague and co-coach Penny Kynigou noticed that a few pairs were bringing in some negativity and comments of forces out of their control. With police siren ready, I sounded the alarm and gathered everyone’s attention. I humorously explained that the “police” had broken up the block party because the local “noise”

ordinance had been broken. We reminded everyone to speak only in future tense and to focus on their beliefs about the concept. The music started up again, and the block party continued as faculty members sought out a different partner.

Soon into the process, nine faculty volunteers held up large Colored Cards, which they had cleverly identified as matching something of their own personalities. All staff members with the same color, followed their color-coded group facilitator to a break out room, where each member paired up with someone whom he/she knew the least for an interview. The facilitators instructed the members that they would introduce their partners after the interview and especially that they were to explain their partner’s beliefs about the concept on their card, all of which were represented in each color coded group. The randomly formed, largely diverse groups, created a unique opportunity for staff members to meet others from across campus.

As the introductions commenced, the facilitators took brief notes of each member's beliefs about his/her concept. Sitting in small relaxed circles, faculty members in the break-out groups listened intently. Once the introductions were complete, the group facilitator constructed one-two sentences that represented the group's beliefs about the key elements of effective meetings, based on their concepts. Collaboratively, the members discussed, briefly edited the phrase, and agreed on its wording that would later

be shared with everyone. In sync we reconvened in the library where each facilitator shared the group's phrase. In a very short period of time, everyone had been heard, everyone's ideas had been incorporated; above all, those ideas were not only being celebrated but also validated as themes emerged from among the groups. Below are four of the group's statements:

After only 70 minutes the faculty had been invited to think about possibilities, share insights, learn about their colleagues, and collaborate on a theme. That theme,

which had become evident, offered an alternative way for faculty members to collaborate. We had demonstrated the basis of our Collaborative Learning Communities and we had utilized the best of the CFG protocols. Teachers better understood our goals, while many also became more intrigued with the possibilities. Closing the meeting, we offered two answers as to what the meeting could mean for them:

One, teachers were invited to participate in our pilot CLC group at ACS Athens

Purple Group- "We envision meetings where inspired and energized educators share issues and concerns to come up with practical solutions in a collaborative and supportive environment."

Pink Group- "Our group envisions ACS as a place with the sharing of best practices, in a calm, informal setting, where teachers collaborate with each other and see each other more often in order to work towards the student's best interest."

Green Group- "We wonder what it would be like if we had the time, as teachers, across grade levels and subject areas, to meet in a safe environment where each member played an important part in a common goal: the children."

Blue Group- "We need time to discuss and share ideas across disciplines and grades to create engaging lessons through cooperative interactions, which lead to support and acceptance of each student." Collaboration among teachers in a non-intimidating, inspiring environment, can lead to authentic, meaningful teaching and learning experiences.

and meet at least once monthly throughout the year. We received interest from nearly twice the number of teachers who could be accommodated in the pilot group, but have since developed ways to narrow the field while involving everyone in some capacity. Secondly, the faculty members were invited to participate in focus groups that will utilize specific protocols so that faculty members can take full advantage of the professional development conferences that are being offered in Athens this year. All interested teachers will meet in collaborative groups to review professional offerings at three local conferences prior to the sessions. In these focus groups, teachers will share their goals and key outcomes from the conferences. After having implemented one or more of the new ideas gained from the workshops, teachers will have

the opportunity to share the impact of those practices with their colleagues in those groups.

We are three months into the school year and our pilot group has a firm base, one made possible with strong administrative support, time in the regular meeting schedule, and willingness of teachers to explore. The group met during one professional day to “break the ice,” to establish the group’s understandings, and to create a foundation of questioning skills so crucial to CFG protocols. We understand that some of the best professional development comes when teachers have time to share and focus on their practices to improve student learning. The first impressions that our faculty had of Collaborative



Learning Communities resulted in greater interest and increased potential. Teachers were not told of the possibilities that CLCs offered, rather they experienced the collaborative potential that groups like CFGs hold. We look forward to collaborating with NSRF and other schools in our region as we seek to realize the full potential of our collaborative groups.

A special thank you to Penny Kynigou, ACS Elementary School Teacher and co-organizer.

Questions or Comments? Contact David Nelson at nelsond@acs.gr.

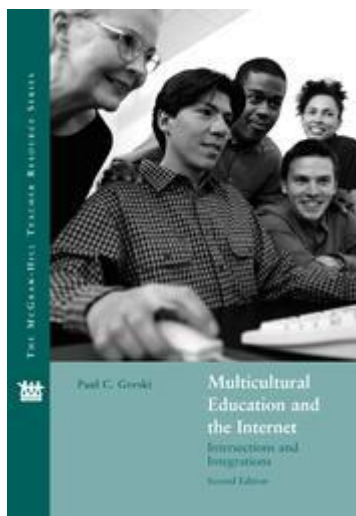
BOOK REVIEW: MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION AND THE INTERNET: INTERSECTIONS AND INTEGRATIONS, 2ND EDITION BY PAUL GORSKI BY DAVE LEHMAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR, NATIONAL FACILITATOR

Readers of Connections may remember Paul Gorski from the outstanding interview done by Camilla Greene in the

Fall 2007 issue in which Gorski – Founder of the websites, EdChange and the Multicultural Pavilion, and

Assistant Professor of Integrative Studies at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia - presented a

compelling case against Ruby Payne's A Framework for Understanding Poverty, dispelling her myth* of a "culture of poverty." Here, in the 2nd Edition of his Multicultural Education and the Internet, Gorski provides not only a strong argument for the thoughtful use of the internet in our schools, but in addition



gives us annotated lists of useful websites in a number of key curricular areas.

In the Preface to this book, Paul Gorski states his concerns about the increasing use of computers and the Internet by educators, particularly classroom teachers:

"Before considering the ways in which the Internet can contribute to multicultural education, we must understand its relationship to the ways in which it may contribute to existing inequities.

Before hopping on the Internet bandwagon I must be sure that my teaching is grounded in sound multicultural pedagogy, not driven by the latest educational fad. We must collectively reflect on the implications of the growing reliance on computers and the Internet in education when there is little evidence that these technologies improve teaching and learning."

With that said, Gorski continues in the Preface to make the case for the appropriate use of the Internet: *"If we dedicate to engaging ourselves in individual reflection and collective dialogue about thoughtful and equitable employment of these technologies, I still believe that the Internet can be the most contributive, progressive, multicultural teaching and learning medium."*

Paul Gorski then goes on to spell out clearly his conceptualizing of multicultural education in a chapter on "The Multiculturality of the Internet," first noting the crucial difference in the way educators ask themselves questions as they make decisions in designing their teaching – "... when the

question becomes 'How do I incorporate this technology into my teaching?,' instead of 'What is the most effective way to teach this lesson or unit and how does this technology fit into that scheme, if at all?,' it becomes crucial to reflect deeply on what drives our educational decisions." He continues in this chapter noting that the basis of multicultural education can be effectively expressed by another key question – "Does every student who walks into our schools or your classroom have an opportunity to achieve to her or his fullest, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, first language (dis)ability, national origin, or any other personal social, or political identifier around which we have historically experienced and continue to cycle achievement gaps (including gaps in dropout rates)?"

In a new chapter in this 2nd Edition, Gorski discusses thoroughly "The Digital Divide," referring to various studies on: racism and the digital divide, sexism and the digital divide, classism and the digital divide, linguisticism and the digital divide, and ableism and the

digital divide, then provides a summary and closing section on dismantling the divide. After each of the discussions of the “digital divides,” he gives several ways to counter these issues, citing means of “access” that address the various divides. For example, in the section on “ableism and the digital divide,” he includes descriptions of access to computers and the internet, access to affordable equipment, and access to a nondiscriminatory and supportive IT culture. Gorski ends this chapter with a list of five websites which specifically address issues of the “digital divide,” as well as a lengthy bibliography.

The remaining nine chapters of Multicultural Education and

the Internet are devoted to different topics and means of accessing information on the Internet – e.g. “Web Integration and Multicultural Curriculum Transformation,” “Bridges and Dialogues: Online Networking for Educators,” and “Evaluating Educational Web Sites: A Multicultural Approach.” Each of these chapters ends with a list of specific websites and useful references. And, as mentioned in the introduction of Paul Gorski, he maintains two excellent websites – www.edchange.org and www.edchange.org/multicultural - which are continually updated and are full of references to websites useful to educators from kindergarten through college/university. The book is only 226 pages long,

easily accessed, highly readable and full of useful materials; Gorski has provided us with a truly valuable resource.

*** Note** – see Paul Gorski’s thorough analysis of Ruby Payne’s writings in the article – “Peddling Poverty for Profit: Elements of Oppression in Ruby Payne’s Framework” (2009, originally published as in “Equity and Excellence in Education”) to be found in the section “Our Publications” of the EdChange website.

For questions/comments or for more information contact Dave Lehman at davelehman@mac.com

ASK THE DIRECTOR

Dear NSRF,

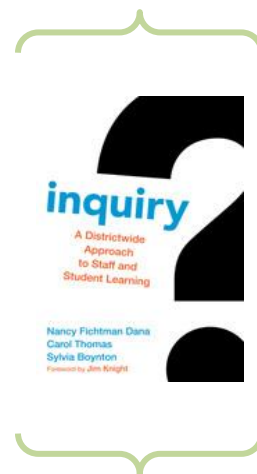
I am trying to get buy-in for Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) at my school. Many of our staff are in a pretty negative place over our “low performance” on our current high stakes test. We are doing all we can to bring up those scores, but many feel that none of the things we’ve tried in the past worked, and this is just one more thing. Can CFGs really change school culture for the better?



From the Director:

In this current wave of “school reform,” our poorest children’s education consists of being drilled in facts, learning rules and following directions with the explicit intent of raising test scores. Maybe more than ever, educators need tools to raise student achievement by developing critical thinking skills, fostering creativity and encouraging reflective practice. In conveying the power of CFGs to those unfamiliar with the practice, it can help to reference schools that have successfully used them to help create a positive school culture of high achievement.

A good example is illustrated in the book “District-Wide Professional Development: An Inquiry Approach” by Nancy Fichtman Dana, Carol Thomas and Sylvia Boynton. By using the inquiry model of learning, the educators in Pinellas County School District brought out their student’s passions by showing them how to target their interests, collect and analyze data to inform their questions and share out the results. Just as importantly the central office administration sent out a very clear message to all students, teachers, principals and other administrators—learning is the most important job of everyone in the school district. As such, all educators were required to participate in inquiry themselves through ongoing, job-embedded professional development, (CFGs). The result? A school culture where all students and staff members are dedicated to achieving high levels of learning by continually improving their performance.



Questions/Comments Contact Michele Mattoon at Michele@nsrfharmony.org

ARTICLE: CFG’S IMPLICATIONS FOR PROJECT BASED LEARNING BY AL SUMMER

Al Summer has been working in education for 40 years. He is an instructional coach for Region 8 ESC who provides follow up coaching to teachers who were trained in project based learning this past summer under a generous grant from Talent Initiative. Previously, he taught middle school science for 28 years in a rural district in Ohio.

We were in our fourth day of training being led by members of NSRF when, out of the blue, one of our group said, “every meeting should be run like this!” Although to a casual observer that statement may have seemed a

revelation, to those of us in the training it was a rather matter of fact remark. It could have come from any one of us.

We were a group of instructional coaches, trained in Project Based Learning (PBL) and charged with working with

teachers throughout the coming school year. We had gotten a “taste” of critical friends on the third day of PBL training when we were involved in a protocol they called “Critical Friends.” This protocol was actually a slightly

modified Tuning protocol- something I later determined. But we were each wondering just how the five-day training from NSRF would enhance our coaching capabilities. We are now a Critical Friends Group of coaches, staying together to further extend the influence we have received from the critical friends' training.

Culture and Climate. In our training, it was about noon on the second day when I exclaimed, "This is what I have been waiting for -- this is the stuff that will help us in our PBL work!" Later in the day, one of the NSRF trainers talked about my remark and the first day and a half of training. He explained that the protocols they were getting into would not have worked well had the proper climate not been first created. And, of course, he was correct. We had learned fundamentals -- good listening, clarification, watching air time -- and, above all, we had built the kind of trust necessary to go deeper into the work that would help us learn how to create a Critical Friends Group. This lesson was called up on a number of occasions in my work with the teachers and principals in their schools. Although most principals were not trying to create a Critical Friends Group of their faculty and most teachers were not trying to create a critical

friends group of their classes, the same climate that must exist for the success of Critical Friends must exist for a faculty to operate at its optimal level and for a classroom to be effective with peer feedback and peer evaluation.

Early in the school year, a high school principal told me that the adults in the school were not doing well in their discussion circles. The culture of the group had not gotten to the place it needed to be. I also had several teachers tell me that they had originally planned on initiating their first PBL project at the beginning of the school year but were postponing the project because they needed to do some work on the culture and climate of their classroom.

A faculty, a class, almost any group you care to mention is just like our group of instructional coaches- a climate of trust and responsibility must be created before the group can function effectively. Just as our NSRF trainers would have been remiss to move into the more involved protocols of CFG with us before making sure the climate was conducive, a teacher cannot expect success with the all-important 21st century skills in her classroom unless the climate is right. And each class is made up of different students --

which means that the work a teacher must do to create that climate may vary depending on the make-up of the class.

21st Century Skills. Project Based Learning focuses on teaching important content and 21st Century Skills through engaging projects in which the students have significant voice and choice and take a major role in -- and responsibility for -- their learning. As the students take on more and more responsibility, the teacher's work can actually be lessened as the feedback, questioning, and providing answers come more from other students and less from the teacher. The teacher truly moves from being the sage on the stage to the guide on the side. However, to be successful in the 21st century skills like collaboration, critical thinking, and communication, students must learn how to do them effectively. Working in a group and doing a lot of talking is not necessarily collaboration. Students must practice and learn how to ask clarifying and probing questions, distinguish between observations and assumptions, learn effective ways to select team members, analyze other students' work and provide feedback, and learn how to inquire deeply -- all things that CFG protocols can be helpful with. In Project Based Learning, students

create products of their learning which they present to authentic audiences. The ability to communicate comfortably and effectively with significant adults is another characteristic that can be honed through CFG protocols. As these “end” products are developed, the students themselves must engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative work. The students then decide what

parts of their work are good, what parts need improvement, and set about to make those improvements.

Although a classroom of students may not become a Critical Friends Group in the truest sense, their learning will be more effectively facilitated if their classroom displays the characteristics of a critical friends group. And, no longer will it be the adults analyzing student work and discussing

ways to improve it, the students themselves will take on part of that responsibility and be able to do it effectively -- thanks to lessons learned from CFG tenets and protocols.

Questions/Comments?
Contact Al Summer at asummers@r8esc.k12.in.us

Staff changes at NSRF

This issue of Connections is one of the last responsibilities of Sierah Moore, our Office Manager since 2009. Sierah's leaving NSRF to return to her hometown of Fort Wayne, Indiana for new opportunities. We will miss her professional attitude, her consistent support and her smiling face.

Joining our team is Luci Englert McKean, our new Special Projects Manager. Luci's background is in marketing and publications, and she was the co-curator of TEDxBloomington in May. Look for a newly-reorganized website and more benefits to membership in NSRF, coming soon!

Our Apologies

We'd like to apologize again for the "reply all" problem on November 2 when we migrated our email list from one service provider to another. Isn't it amazing how much email can be generated by accident in an hour? If you're reading this, know that we **truly** appreciate your "hanging in there" with us through that complication, and we have taken steps so that problem never arises again! If you know of any friends who unsubscribed, but who might be missing us, please let them know that the problem is solved and we'd love to have them back in the family of subscribers.