

Critical Friendship Groups (CFGs) or circles (CFCs) are groups of critical friends who meet for feedback on practice. Typically a protocol is used to minimize confusion and conflict and maximize time use and useful focused feedback. Although the concept of Critical Friendship has a history of over 30 years in the field of education, the idea of critical Friends (CFs) is not as widespread in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). A longitudinal grounded theory study that uses reflective essays, focus groups, and transcripts of CFC meetings as data was carried out at an

American university in Egypt using 95 participants in an MATESOL program. Four important theoretical categories were revealed: cultural intolerance to open negativity, fear and/or rejection of giving or receiving cool feedback, uncertainty about and neglect of the use of protocols and appropriate language as well as usefulness in terms of personal and professional growth.

The first important issue for the success of CFCs in this non-Western cultural context was metacognitive understanding of the differences in cultural orientation towards cool and challenging feedback. Teachers needed to understand their own cultural orientations, those of their

fellow teachers and how this affected their fears, usages of protocols and ultimate goals. The second important issue was training in language use. Second language users needed guidance with protocols and what pragmatic use of language was needed for successful CFC meetings. While almost all participants in the research project agreed on the usefulness of CFCs, many found immense challenges due to culture, especially in the phase of cool feedback.

Wachob, P. (2011). Critical Friendship Circles: the cultural challenge of cool feedback. *Professional Development in Education*, 37:3, 353-372.

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A FRIEND OF THE NSRF: “COLLABORATIVE ART, EMPOWERING EDUCATION” By Laura Bryant about Collaborative Artist Joe LaMantia, Bloomington IN

Visual artists work in all kinds of media. Community artist Joe LaMantia uses many media in his

work, too, but his primary medium by far is people.

“My artistic vision is about the process,” says LaMantia, who has been leading collaborative, community-based public art projects since 1993. Over the last two decades, he has worked on more than 100 school-based projects, primarily in Indiana.

LaMantia's method is holistic and all-inclusive. Unlike artists who may come to a project with preconceived designs to be executed, LaMantia starts by meeting with students, parents, and school personnel to gather ideas and inspiration. When he's collected a range of ideas, he designs the project with the aid of a core group representing the school community. “The end result is a creative process that empowers each individual with a sense of being part of the work of art,” he says.

Through pitch-in lunches, community suppers, class meetings, and other conversations, LaMantia's projects proceed from design to creation to installation. The end results are unusual public art works uniquely related to a school's history, students, or curriculum. For example:

The Villagers' Bell Tower at Glens Valley Elementary School, Indianapolis IN.

This 32-foot tower pays homage to the original school and bell tower created by villagers in the Glens Valley area during the 1800s. The open, four-sided tower features 80 flat bells, showcasing student paintings on both sides that reflect specific learning and curriculum themes. The poles of the tower are recycled utility poles donated and put in place by Indianapolis Power & Light Company (IPL).



“Aristicat” at Fairview

Elementary. Fairview, in Bloomington, Indiana, recently adopted the Artful Learning model, a national school reform model orchestrated by the Leonard Bernstein Center. Appropriately, LaMantia led the creation of an artful, all-steel Fairview wildcat mascot. Through

community planning sessions facilitated by LaMantia, the concept of the cat sculpture was inspired by several students drawings and created in part from pieces of the original 1950s-era Fairview building. Aristicat's eyes are lights from the old entry area, its nose comes from the door to the old coal room, and its mouth is cut from the fire escape slide. All of the school's students painted distinctive spots on the cat with their handprints.

LaMantia, whose own children attended Fairview, notes that the project was truly a school-community collaboration involving more than 30 businesses, school staff, and other community members who donated time, materials, equipment, and expertise.

Tag!, at the the Twin Lakes Recreation Center. Working together, LaMantia and students from Edgewood High School in Ellettsville, Indiana, filled the large façade of Bloomington's Twin Lakes Recreation Center with art. The students implemented their designs by applying colored vinyl to large pieces of flexible magnetic material. The final 6 ft. x 7 ft. designs were attached to the front of the center, arranged around the metal façade's central hexagonal window. The

artwork featured a mathematical compass, a double helix, and a pencil. "Each piece is a symbolic representation of subject matter important to the students involved," LaMantia says. Creating the artwork also taught the students a lot about the process of design, according to LaMantia. "The students had to revise and retool to get things to work," he says. "This project taught a lot about things such as the use of scale and negative space."

LaMantia notes that his school projects function as centers of learning, attracting ideas from different disciplines and subject areas "like scraps of metal drawn to a magnet." For example, he says, math is often used when creating public art projects. "By approaching the project from a variety of disciplines and subject areas, the students become aware of the connective nature of learning," he says.

For a collaborative community artist like Joe LaMantia, making connections is the key to true art. "To me, it's all about the experience, it's all about the stories and the discoveries that the people involved make over the course of a project. They start looking at life differently, and I think transformation is what we're all

about as human beings.”

In the end, he says, “how public art comes to be is as important as what it is.”

To learn more about Joe LaMantia and his work, visit www.lamantiastudio.com

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LaMantia working on “Aristicat” with a Fairfield Elementary Student



“Aristicat” at Fairview Elementary Bloomington, Indiana

“...the concept of the cat sculpture was inspired by several students drawings and created in part from pieces of the original 1950s-era Fairview building...”



Attendees of the Open New CFG Coaches training July 11-15th participate in the text and Issaquah protocols.

