The Trouble With Friendship: Why Americans Can’t Think Straight About Race
A Book Review by Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

The most striking effect of our new community was among students who, in the past, had been told—implicitly, or explicitly—that they could not learn. The success they began to experience as they “began to move beyond what could be given up to the hold they had on “knowledge,” and to discover the passion that is waiting to be unleashed in every student, was infectious. Kids who had been previously denied access to quality instruction discovered multiple entry points to learning. They were invited to ask questions, and practiced crafting better ones. Teachers held higher expectations of their students. There was a feeling of “we can do this!” in our school. As we developed portfolios and presentations, too, students became more accountable for their learning. Parents who attended and participated in these student-led presentations often left in tears of joy, for they had never before seen their child as learner. We had tangible evidence (significant increases in state and national test scores and college attendance, decreases in dropout rate, acts of violence, and discipline issues, and, most importantly, the narrowing of gaps in achievement among racial and socio-economic groups) to support the claim that ours was a learning community. But statistics cannot bring to life the “feel” of our school. In the present tense, the experience of working with “equity” as their theme or focus. And this past June, about twenty of us held an electronic book chat to discuss

Supporting Coaches
Six clinics for new and experienced CFG coaches were held during the 2003-2004 academic year at no cost to participants. These 2 or 3 hour clinics were facilitated by experienced facilitators and group home discussions. A hallmark of the FRSS is the home groups, comprised of about 20 participants each. Facilitated by teams of new and experienced Critical Friends Group coaches, the home groups give each participant a taste of the power and effectiveness of being part of a professional learning community.

Supporting Facilitators
The Houston A+ Challenge supported the development of a regional CFG composed of experienced facilitators. Called the K-16 CFG because its 17 members hail from elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, universities, foundations, and administrative posts, the CFG met monthly and developed the inquiry focus “How can our CFG training and experience be used to its maximum potential in our work?” This group serves as the main pool of facilitators for CFG seminars and clinics in the Houston area.

The need to embed a focus on equity in our work is an issue for me because I am white. Last year, a colleague of color from Bay Area Coalition of Essential Schools (BAYCES) made it very clear that equity and race are on the table for her by virtue of her presence in any conversation. I cannot lay claim to that same consistency because as Peggy MacIntosh describes in "Unpacking the Knapsack of White Privilege," being a white person in our society, I have the option to check in and out of this struggle at will. Given this reality, I am faced with ongoing choices and a need to continually examine both my attitudes and my practice on behalf of students, especially those students of color who make up the majority of our student body in the urban schools where I work.

So I’m asking myself, how will am I to be disturbed? How much energy am I willing to spend moving beyond what Victor Cary calls “admiring the problem” to actually working to disrupt the status quo of discrimination in our schools and society—and more important, how will I gauge my progress?

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DeMott debunks what he calls the “orthodoxy of friendship,” describing in detail the ways that a celebration of “buddy films,” a white person in our society, I have the option to check in and out of this struggle at will. Given this reality, I am faced with ongoing choices and a need to continually examine both my attitudes and my practice on behalf of students, especially those students of color who make up the majority of our student body in the urban schools where I work.

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sitcoms and TV commercials that Madison Avenue dishes up regularly to reassure well-meaning whites, like me, that racism was laid to rest by the Civil Rights legislation of the sixties. 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