that pervades NSRF work drives three following essays that explore such issues as teachers’ cultural blinders; defining a moral institution; and the inherent difficulty of school reform. In the final section, “Unhandling the Elements,” a middle-school principal recounts how she reshaped her management policies to reflect her CFG experience. A final entry, “NSRF-New York,” shows how NSRF’s principles can take on a life of their own, largely or completely independent of the organization itself.”

Educational HORIZONS can be downloaded in its entirety from our website, www.nvtharmony.org

Daniel Baron can be contacted at dbaron@indiana.edu

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.

Resolutions” (i.e., we are going to focus on results... somehow) to using a language of commitment (...we are going to create a systemic plan to focus on the results of our students by incorporating the following benchmarks)..., the participants are committing themselves to the concept that failure is not an option. Using the Individual Monthly Action Plan framework, each participant has set a goal that is personal and focused. While it is clear that this will help create actionable plans for Critical Friends Group participants over the final year of the project, it is also understood and articulated to the participants that much of this will not be sustainable without the commitment and understanding of all the stakeholders. Our work with the principals these past years has helped us see that schools truly want to work toward the academic success of all kids, but that very few have individualized plans within their schools to support this type of success.

One critical element in the success of this project is the component aptly entitled, “Circuit Riders.” These two positions are filled by former administrators who travel to the rural districts and provide on-site, sustainable support to the cohort participants. These Circuit Riders are trained as Critical Friends Coaches and continue to ask the tough questions of principals as they visit and listen.

A reflection from one of the participants states it best, “Our district is better because of LeadNM—because our vocabulary has changed as a direct result of the knowledge and wisdom shared by our trainers. We are moving in a positive way from the language of complaint to the language of action and collaboration for our students.”

Ann House may be contacted at ahouse@unm.edu, and Connie Chene may be contacted at cchene@comcast.net


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A review of Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males: Closing the Achievement Gap, by Dr. Alfred Tatum.

October 2, 2005 marked the passing of August Wilson, one of the prominent African-American playwrights to chronicle the plight of Africans in America. In a radio interview on WWLS a friend and colleague of Wilson noted that Wilson had dropped out of public school in 10th grade and educated himself in the literary tradition that August Wilson would have become the chronicler of the African experience in America and prominent playwright that he did become if he had remained a student in public education! In reflecting on the notion that public high school education might do more harm than good in confining African-American male identity, and might not equip them with the knowledge, skills and critical thinking they need to become productive citizens and lifelong learners, I have come to the conclusion that public school classrooms as they are currently structured do not develop the full potential of African-American males. And I maintain that most African-American males engaged in learning and skill acquisition in most public high school classrooms find it irrelevant at best and hostile at worst to their lives and life experiences.

This is why Dr. Tatum provides us with a framework that authentically validates the life experiences of these students and at the same time teaches literacy in ways that engage the heart, mind and soul of these Black adolescent males. Dr. Tatum, in his book Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males (Stenhouse Publishers, 2005) states that successful teachers of Black male students see “…literacy instruction as a tool of resistance” (81). In his book he puts forth that Black male students need to have literacy skills embedded in the reading and understanding of short and long texts written by Black males describing the realities of Black males in America. To that end, Dr. Tatum includes a two-paragraph text by Michael Eric Dyson (2004), “Letter to My Three-Year-Old Son in Prison,” that describes the use of the letter as an example of the Black male surrender. “Their surrender is in large part connected to an arrested development resulting from their inability to resist their social conditioning” (87). The teaching of literacy skills and reading strategies in

Must-Read Texts

“Below is a list of other must-read texts I would recommend for Black males reading amid turmoil. Most of them can be used as ‘cultural hooks’ to engage Black male students. My list is by no way exhaustive; I do not mean to suggest that these are the only must-read texts for Black males. Beyond these recommended texts, Black males need exposure to a vast array of fiction and nonfiction texts across genres as suggested by Carol Collins (1993).”

Source: Dr. Alfred Tatum, Teaching Reading to Black Adolescent Males, Stenhouse Publishers, 2005, Must-Read Texts: Pages 58-59

- The Fact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream, by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins and Rameck Hunt
- There Are No Children Here, by Alex Kotlowitz
- A Hope in the Unseen: An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League, by Ron Suskind
- The Beast, by Walter Dean Myers
- Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago, by LeAlan Jones, Lloyd Newman, and David Isa
- The Greatest, by Walter Dean Myers
- Letter to My Nephew, by James Baldwin
- Stories of the Scoundrels, by James Goodman
- Workin’ the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History, by Walter Mosley
- Think Big, by Ben Carson
- And Still We Rise: The Trials and Triumphs of Twelve Gifted Inner-City Students, by Miles Corwin
that weren’t in the article or in our notes, took it place different.
• If you didn’t get something, you get to see their perspective.
• Knowledge grew—much bigger thinking.
• Get the knowledge of things I didn’t understand.
• We laughed a lot.
• We probably could have talked about swamp life forever!

What the teachers noticed the kids get from these conversations that are part of their educational goal:
• Laughter and fun. They like to talk. They areMeta-cognition: students were able to identify and develop strategies designed to lead the students to think critically and to challenge the curriculum we are often mandated to teach.

In particular, I’m thinking today of the way Rosa Parks gets treated in our classrooms and in the media. Mrs. Parks died yesterday and was described in the Philadelphia Inquirer as the “Montgomery, AL seamstress...whose simple, spontaneous act of defiance...brought a spark to a movement...” Describing Mrs. Parks and her actions on that day in 1955 has long been a staple of classroom instruction, especially in February. However, the standard script about Mrs. Parks is often simplistic and comfort, it is disempowering. Mrs. Parks’ actions were neither simply spontaneous nor the result of her exhaustion after a hard day’s work.

Being willing to be disturbed in the case of how we teach about Rosa Parks for me means being willing to flip the script and write a letter to the editor. In classrooms, I hope it will mean an analysis of Mrs. Parks’ history as an organizer and activist for civil rights, who also happened to be a seamstress. A closer look at the facts will show that Mrs. Parks and a number of other women had been put off the buses for their refusal to move before Dec. 1, 1955. In fact, some of these African-American women were members of the Woman’s Political Council (WPC) and had refused to fight segregated seating on the buses as far back as 1949! Mrs. Parks’ refusal to move and her subsequent arrest were selected as the case to launch the bus boycott because of Mrs. Parks’ proven leadership ability. This story of collective decision making, willed risk and coordinated action is more dramatic than the story of a tired or angry individual who sparked a demonstration (Kohl, 2005).

I hope our script will also introduce students to the Highlander School in Knoxville, TN, where Mrs. Parks, Dr. King and countless others attended training, and designed strategies designed to lead the struggle against racism in this country. And finally, I hope we will begin to ask students why they think the “official story” promoted about Mrs. Parks is inaccurate, incomplete and fails to acknowledge the role of others. The students in our classrooms, flipping the script about Rosa Parks in many ways mean we begin to acknowledge the role of our schools as sites where inequity and the status quo are reinforced. Will we begin teaching students to become critically thinking citizens who are willing to be disturbed and disturb the system? Will we open the doors to our students’ questions about the curriculum and its inherent bias? If we do, it won’t be easy to return to page 92 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter. Once our kids experience the power of an authentic curriculum powered by their own questions, it’s likely they’ll demand more of us as their teachers and as citizens. Motivating our kids as co-designers of their own learning based on an accurate understanding of the power of collaboration seems like a fitting way to honor Mrs. Parks’ legacy and put our willingness to be disturbed on an authentic test.

Debbie Bambino may be contacted at dbambino@earthlink.net

For more information: