

What Would Martin Think? By Dave Lehman, Connections Executive Editor, NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG Coach in Wisconsin, davelehman@mac.com

Each year, in the time between the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1st) and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, (he would have turned 84 on January 15th), I read or re-read a number of Dr. King's addresses given in his last two years of his life. I ask myself, "What might he think were he alive today?"

For example, in "A Time to Break Silence" delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, it was the first time Dr. King publicly expressed his opposition to the Viet Nam War and linked it to the Civil Rights movement. Dr. King stated, "...there are twice as many Negroes dying in Viet Nam as whites in proportion to their size in the population." I imagine he would be pleased to know we ended our military involvement in the Viet Nam War in 1975, but wonder if he wouldn't be more than disappointed in our military expenditures and involvement in Iraqi and Afghanistan?

In his last address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), entitled "Where Do We Go From Here?," Dr. King pointed out the alarming statistic that the infant mortality rate among Blacks was twice that of whites. Today, I wonder what he would say about the infant mortality rates for the time period 2006-08, which was 5.6% white, and almost three times that, 13.1% for Blacks. In the same speech he stated there are twice as many Blacks unemployed as whites, and so I wonder what he would say about our 2012 general unemployment figures of 7.2% whites and 13.8% for blacks; still almost double, and more than double for males over the age of 20 – 14.0% for Blacks to 6.7% for whites.

But we are not necessarily directly involved in policy decisions about war, or improving the health care system to address infant mortality – we here are educators, teachers, guidance counselors, school social workers, psychologists, and administrators, working with an increasingly diverse student population. I can only imagine that Dr. King would be pleased to see the official integration of public schools throughout the country, but wonder if he

wouldn't be disappointed—no, even angered—at the re-segregation occurring throughout the urban schools of the country. In that same speech he disapprovingly noted that only one-twentieth as many Negroes as whites attend college. And so I wonder – would he be pleased with the progress made, since as of the 2009-10 school year, there now are 10.3% Negroes to 72.9% whites not just attending, but graduating from college with a Bachelor's Degree? Yet, I think he would be anxious to see those figures improve. And I wonder if Dr. King wouldn't want to take to the streets and once again rally non-violent protestors to address these persistent education figures as reported by Pedro Noguera in summarizing current educational data:

"African-American and Latino males are noticeably distinguished from other segments of the American population by their consistent clustering at the bottom. With few exceptions, these dismal patterns exist in urban, suburban, and rural school districts throughout the United States. Nationally African-American and Latino males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school. In most American cities, dropout rates for African-American and Latino males are well above 50%, and they're less likely to enroll or graduate from college than any other group."

African-American and Latino males are more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or to be identified as suffering from a learning disability and placed in special education. They're more likely to be absent from gifted and talented programs, Advanced Placement and honors courses, and international baccalaureate programs. Even class privilege and the material benefits that accompany it fail to inoculate Black males from low academic performance. When compared to their white peers, middle-class African-American and Latino males lag significantly in grade point average and on standardized tests."

So what can be done about this? Several of my book reviews have been about books which speak to these issues and offer practical things that can be

done in the classrooms of our schools, tomorrow. Here is a short list which I recently compiled from a number of resources on effective teaching, particularly of African-American males.

- 1) Establish and follow-through on, high expectations of mastery for Black males. Use whole group, small group, and individual activities. Use combinations of verbal, visual, and physical means for helping them understand content and processes.
- 2) Maintain consistency of high expectations for African-American males across the school. In all classes and activities, use positive feedback, and other means of acknowledging accomplishments.
- 3) Build relationships with African-American males. Find out their interests and talents in school and in the community, and not only in sports.
- 4) Hold voluntary conversations with a small representative group (3-5) of African-American males at lunch or after school. Seek their input on making class more successful for them.
- 5) Have Black males share in the teaching, roles and responsibilities of the classroom. Demonstrate for the class the understanding of a concept or process, and perform tasks, e.g. collecting papers, distributing materials, mentoring/assisting other students, taking leadership.
- 6) Affirm Black males' cultural diversity (U.S., African, and Latin based). Enhance meaning and relevance by incorporating community-based cultural practices into routines and rituals of the classroom, e.g. use art, rap, hip-hop and other music, spoken word, TV shows, diverse texts. Compare and contrast different cultures of the students in your classroom.
- 7) Become a "student of your students." Visit neighborhood(s) where Black males live. Meet their parent/caregivers and seek their input. Invite community people and parent/caregivers into your classroom as "Artists or Crafts-Persons in Residence" to share their expertise.
- 8) Engage African-American males in building their cultural competence. Have them research and critique current society. Validate their multicultural experiences. Have them analyze local issues of social justice, and engage in community problem solving.
- 9)? What would you add to the list? Let us know here at NSRF and we'll post an updated list on our website.

I believe that teaching diverse students is more an art than a technical list of strategies, but I drafted this list of suggestions in hopes that some of these ideas might spur fresh ideas for you. Clearly "no one size fits all."

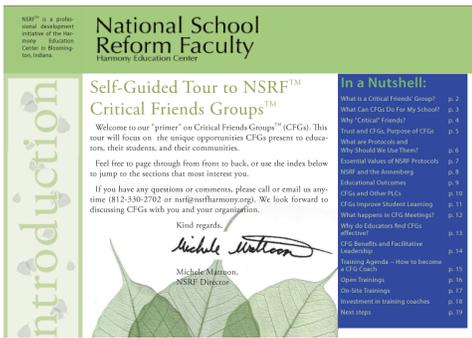
And maybe, just maybe, we can offer up at least some improvement when it's time to re-read Dr. King's speeches next year.



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Although the focus in this list is on African-American males, as was pointed out to Gloria Ladson-Billings regarding her multi-year research on successful teachers of African-Americans, "but that's just good teaching."

These suggestions no doubt could be used effectively with all students!



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National School Reform Faculty®
909 E. Second St.
Bloomington, IN 47401
<http://www.nsrffharmony.org>
812-330-2702

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