The National School Reform Faculty® (NSRF®) publishes the Connections newsletter six times per year. To suggest a topic or submit an article, email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org or call 812-334-8379.

National School Reform Faculty®
Harmony Education Center

March 2013

Connections

From the Director

Stress Management, CFG-style

By Michele Mattoon, NSRF® Director, NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG® Coach in Indiana, michele@nsrfharmony.org

Many people who consistently use our protocols and are a part of active Critical Friends Groups, often talk to me about the unexpected benefits of this work. A typical comment sounds something like this, "It is such a pleasure to work deeply with other committed professionals to solve our problems and help each other improve our work." This comment is noteworthy for a couple of reasons:

1. It links the act of working together with pleasure.

2. It implies that solving problems and improving practice is a positive instead of a negative experience.

It probably is no surprise to you that most people have experienced the opposite. Outside of CFGs, working together on problems and giving "constructive criticism" to colleagues is historically associated with unpleasantness or stress, at best! So, why don't people in Critical Friends Groups feel that stress?

As a trainer in stress reduction, I know that stress is caused by three main conditions:

1. ***Feeling a lack of control***
2. ***Being subjected to unpredictable conditions***
3. ***Feeling a lack of social support***

With these in mind, let's look at why CFGs not only don't produce stress, but are actually good "stress relievers:"

1. Lack of Control. CFGs are built around the assumption that participants will only bring work or dilemmas to the group that they have some control over. In other words, CFG members develop skills to discern what things they can change and which of those things they want to spend time and energy changing. Getting ideas from colleagues about how to improve a situation, a piece of work, or a practice is very empowering. Presenters leave with a fist full of next steps and the attitude of "Yes! I can do it!"

2. Unpredictability. CFGs can form an island of predictability in the ocean of chaos that can be prevalent in an educator's life. Problems with students, parents, colleagues, or test scores can come up out of nowhere. Educators can also feel buried under the pressure of countless tasks that need to be taken care of, many of them having little to do with actual teaching in the classroom. CFGs can provide a safe haven for educators—a place where educators know they can take their work or their dilemmas. The protocols themselves are created to provide structures that ensure predictability. There is a prescribed way to talk to one another that allows for a particular actionable outcome. Other issues that arise during the CFG are not allowed to derail the process. They are simply put in the Parking Lot and dealt with at an appropriate time.

In this Issue ...

Stress Management, CFG-Style p. 1

CFGs and Protocols Transform School Culture p. 3

BOOK REVIEW: Healing The Heart of Democracy p. 8

The Role of "Stance" in Developing Probing Questions p. 11

What Would Martin Think p. 12

3. Social Support. CFGs are a group of "critical friends"—colleagues who are crucial when it comes to supporting each other in the constant pursuit of improving best practices. CFGs are places where feelings of trust and safety have been carefully constructed over time. Therefore, a member of the CFG knows that s/he can bring work or professional dilemmas to her/his group and their colleagues will spend the time needed to give thoughtful, creative, in-depth feedback. During the school year, each member has a chance to "get help" and many chances to "give help." This continuously strengthens the collegial (and congenial) bonds between members.

The fact that Critical Friends Groups can act as a stress reducer is a hidden benefit of CFGs, but one that is valued greatly in times of turmoil and change—the restructuring of a school, implementing new programs, adjusting during a change in administration, or any other major change that schools often go through. They can also feel like a gift after (or during) any stressful day. I can't tell you the number of times I walked into my CFG, plunked down my computer case, smiled at my colleagues and sighed, "Thank goodness for this CFG. Will someone please pass the chocolate before we get started?"

Michele Mattoon
Director, NSRF

P.S. Please feel free to forward Connections to friends and colleagues, and suggest they sign up for our Connections e-list!

Applications are now open for our

Summer Critical Friends Group New Coaches Open Training July 8-12

Bloomington, Indiana, $795 for five days' training
Visit the NSRF website or call 812-330-2702 to enroll.

Look what CFGs can do for your school:

- Help students succeed
- Model and build 21st Century Skills
- Build trust
- Reduce teacher and administrator isolation
- Transform school culture
- Build diversity of thought
- Extend and share leadership
- Facilitate participation from all members
- Provide healthy challenges
- Foster equity
- Honor and prioritize time for deep reflection
- Support strategic planning
- Reveal solutions to complex dilemmas
- Develop critical problem-solving
- Encourage creative, new thinking (sometimes around old problems)
- Carefully analyze work, and support everyone in receiving and giving focused, actionable feedback

"After a week of this training I feel we now have more tools to improve meetings, communication and the community at [my] school. Thank you so much." -- A new CFG coach from Wisconsin

Critical Friends Groups and NSRF protocols help transform The Bishop Strachan School culture

By Winnie Hunsburger, Barb McLean, Helen Pereira-Raso, and Angela Terpstra, all CFG Coaches in Toronto, Ontario

The Bishop Strachan School, a 146 year-old Canadian day and boarding school for girls, has been in a change paradigm for more than a decade as we re-visioned the JK-to-12 curriculum and pedagogy and changed the culture of our learning community. The process led by visionary School Heads, a supportive Board of Governors, sophisticated strategic planning processes, generous professional development budgets and strong leadership within has been intentional, thoughtful, and very carefully scaffolded. 2012 was a watershed year as we saw the culmination of a number of initiatives that we had been building towards. Key among these initiatives was our work with The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) and introducing the use of protocols to our whole school community.

Partnerships with global organizations, in both our Junior and Senior Schools, professional readings of the work done by Harvard Graduate School of Education in the Harvard Rounds, The Coalition of Essential Schools, and High Tech High, all referenced the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) as an obvious next step in the journey for BSS. The Power of Protocols, required summer reading for the Academic Program Team (Lead Teachers and Department Heads), led two of our Lead Teachers to request funding to attend a NSRF Critical Friends Group (CFG) training session. Our Professional Growth Committee determined we could leverage the learning by holding the five-day workshop at BSS thereby building greater capacity. So, in the winter of 2012, 15 of our Academic Program Team completed training to become NSRF-certified CFG coaches.

New Coaches Training

The training was powerful, the most powerful PD ever attended, as many commented. CFG training also had an immediate and ongoing effect on the practice of the Academic Program Team as they began to introduce protocols to their departments and teaching teams for planning projects and examining student work. It quickly became apparent that we needed to train the entire Leadership Team as well as all faculty and staff if we, as a learning community, were to continue to move our strategic vision forward and build community.

In July, our entire Leadership Team, including our Head of School, spent three full days in NSRF training. Again, it was extremely effective, exceeding already high expectations. We were able to increase our skill-base as active listeners, observers, and facilitators, as

This article was team-written by four staffers at The Bishop Strachan School.

Helen Pereira-Raso is Lead Teacher Curriculum and Innovation, and

Winnie Hunsburger is Team Leader, Research, Inquiry and Middle School.

Angela Terpstra is Principal, Senior School

Barb McLean is Assistant Head for Human Resources and Professional Growth

If you have questions or comments, contact them by clicking on their names above.

Photo adaptations by Roark Andrade

Leadership Team Training

well as giving and receiving feedback. We learned to appreciate what each department was dealing with from a strategic perspective, built a common language, and recognized the value of diverse input as we brainstormed strategic challenges in a structured, professional manner. Most importantly, we became a focused and more productive leadership team.

We then continued the training with the entire faculty and staff over two days in our August Professional Development week using the same facilitator. At this point, given the size of the employee base (180), faculty and staff, we needed a large number of table coaches, but we were able to activate the staff who had previously been certified as CFG coaches in winter 2012. This became an advantage in that our entire staff was able to see the skills being used by their own colleagues. In addition, those who had been trained were able to move their skills to a higher level, with coaching and check-ins, while allowing BSS to contain costs. The feedback, once again, was overwhelmingly positive.

Many of us believe this training has been instrumental in transforming our school culture.

All-school Training

Erin Mays, an administrative assistant noted, "The representation of differing members of our staff community [was] powerful and enabled multiple perspectives to be expressed and great outcomes achieved. It was very collegial and nicely scaffolded a horizontal workplace structure."

Many of us believe this training has been instrumental in transforming our school culture. We were able to build bonds between faculty and non-faculty as well as between departments in order to build community with a shared vision. Donna Jordan, a staff member in the Office of Philanthropy and Alumnae Relations commented, "It was really helpful to see that no matter what part of the school we belong to, everybody has sort of similar issues with juggling so much…after the training, people were much more open to saying 'Hello, how are you? ' and sticking their head in our office. It feels so much more connected." One of the teachers said simply, "This week, we shrunk the building" (James Stewart).

In building community, we gained an appreciation of each other's goals and dilemmas, and learned the value of diverse perspectives, while working through all kinds of strategic issues including and beyond classroom dilemmas. We then further leveraged our learning in November as we came together in the same cross-divisional integrated groupings to work on strategic issues. This time, however, the entire process was facilitated internally and led by our own Lead Mentor, Barb Bower, who was certified as a CFG coach in 2012.

The CFG Training and the dedicated time for protocols in November have helped teachers and staff use protocols productively and efficiently to address some of the dilemmas we face as our organization changes. Protocols and CFGs involve all sectors of our community in resolving these dilemmas and making plans for the future. Office Manager, Jennifer Dunbar said,

"They are a way to involve, engage and support each other across the school." Staff have also noted the efficiency of protocols, especially when working with several constituencies: "I got a lot more out of the combined collaborative group in a one-hour protocol than I would have if I had to meet with the different stake-holders separately" (Charlotte Fleming).

Janice Foster, our Middle School Student Life Coordinator was struggling with issues around the involvement of young students in service learning projects. She was hearing lots of complaints and getting plenty of advice from other teachers and parents, but she was perplexed by how to find the right experiences and help parents understand the situation. She decided to use a protocol and invited not only other faculty and staff who had faced similar situations, but Middle School parents, too. At the protocol, she asked, "how can we organize service learning opportunities for Middle School students that are age-appropriate and curriculum-related?" The experience generated new ideas for Janice, and helped bring parents into the process in a positive and respectful way with the added benefit of allowing them to see how we work.

Parental involvement

"I thought it was great to get the parents involved," Janice explained. "It was great to get their opinions, advice and ideas, but also for parents to see how a protocol actually works." The process was productive and efficient, too. "It amazed me how much information you get out of a one-hour conversation," Janice remarked. "And it was simpler than having individual conversations or reading dozens of emails."

Moira Dossetor, Executive Director, Office of Philanthropy and Alumnae Relations, took advantage of the all-staff CFG training and has started using protocols with her team. They were finding that research was taking a lot of time and effort but was not always yielding the key points the team needed, nor was it laid out in the most effective manner. The lead researcher used a protocol to bring his dilemma to the team and then listened to how the team used his research and heard their ideas for improvement. Moira says the protocol was particularly useful for the researcher: "Hearing all the knowledge around the table about the process, he got a deeper sense of how we use these things. Knowing that was important to him in helping him think about what he puts into it. I think it benefited him on that level and I think he has fine-tuned how he does it."

Rev. Cathy Gibbs and Krishpa Kotecha are the faculty advisors to the Wellness Council at BSS. The council has been very keen on developing a deeper understanding of bullying within the school across grades 7-12. One student took the initiative to develop a survey intended to gather data around the students'

perception of bullying, forms of bullying, and how it was occurring. However, the advisors felt that the survey lacked variety and depth. To deepen their questions, and ultimately, the data itself, they decided to use a protocol to gather ideas and insights from others. The protocol created a space where everyone's voice was respected and heard. Rev. Cathy pointed out, "Everybody had a voice in the process. Everybody participated. Every single person around that table said something. There wasn't anyone who said, too much and there wasn't anyone who said too little." The inclusion of all voices led to a better survey. "Our survey was ten-fold, twenty-fold better than what we started with," Krishpa added. "There was so much depth."

Bullying

Charlotte Fleming, Director of Service Learning was considering ways that she could gather feedback from the multiple stakeholders in her Service Learning program at BSS. Every year around the holiday season the school runs a Holiday Love Campaign where students, families, and a community partner come together to provide working-poor families a Christmas wish. Charlotte requested a protocol that would invite all the stakeholders in our school to help her expand the campaign and find ways to communicate the program's goals and expectations more accurately. She invited members from our parent, faculty, boarding, and Student Recruiting office to participate in this conversation. Charlotte noted, "The feedback, particularly from the parents and the non-teaching faculty that were involved in the protocol showed an incredible amount of learning that went on about the nature of our program."

Service learning

Indeed, helping us listen to each other respectfully and patiently has enabled us to really hear the dilemmas our colleagues face. Now we not only recognize that we all face similar challenges, but that we can contribute useful ideas, even when the presenter works in a very different area or department in the school. Lina Kim, School Data Administrator, commented that in her position it is not easy for her to know what is going on elsewhere in the school. However, through participating in protocols, she feels she can help others with their dilemmas. "You can have your opinion really open and give suggestions that your colleagues might really like." And as Donna Jordan points out, "We're all so nose-to-the-grindstone that sometimes you forget that there can be a bigger picture."

Moira Dossetor calls it "mutually reinforcing." She explains, "I think the people on the protocol teams that weren't in our area learned a lot about what we're doing. And

Now we not only recognize that we all face similar challenges, but that we can contribute useful ideas, even when the presenter works in a very different area or department in the school.

people on my team really benefitted from hearing their perspective. There is a lot of depth and a lot of great ideas, and that creates mutual enthusiasm about what we are trying to do."

Deryn Lavell, Head of School, adds "School communities are by nature, complex and value-laden. Individual values may or may not be fully aligned with the values of the organization. This is not to say they must be entirely aligned in order to be a successful and forward-thinking community. Rather, there must be respectful dialogue, opportunities to problem solve, present dilemmas, and work together to harness different viewpoints into a more harmonious and strategic 'whole' for the vision of a School community to be realized. The use of protocols has indeed been transformative for our community to come together in order to be the best that we can be for our students and our vision."

Protocols, at heart, push transparency and help us tolerate discomfort. We use protocols to fulfill our ambition of becoming a true professional community—to incorporate best practices modeling collaboration, communication, citizenship, critical thinking, problem-solving, and adaptability. At The Bishop Strachan School, NSRF training and protocols have given us a shape and a pattern with which we can continue refining our best practices and modeling behaviors we seek to instill in our students.

If you're interested in using NSRF protocols in similar ways to what The Bishop Strachan School has described here, please visit our website for information on training, email us for specific questions, or call our office at 812-330-2702 for a consultation.—editors

Book Reviews

BOOK REVIEW: Healing the Heart of Democracy

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

Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit

By Parker J. Palmer, 2011,
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

"In memory of
Christina Taylor Green (2001-2011)
Addie Mae Collins (1949-1963)
Denise McNair (1951-1963)
Carole Robertson (1949-1963)
Cynthia Wesley (1949-1963)

"Christina died when an assassin in Tucson, Arizona, opened fire at a public event hosted by Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was seriously wounded. Addie Mae, Denise, Carole, and Cynthia died when violent racists bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

"When we forget that politics is about weaving a fabric of compassion and justice on which everyone can depend, the first to suffer are the most vulnerable among us – our children, our elders, our poor, homeless, and mentally ill brothers and sisters. As they suffer, so does the integrity of our democracy. May the heartbreaking deaths of these children – and the hope and promise that was in their young lives – help us find the courage to create a politics worthy of the human spirit."

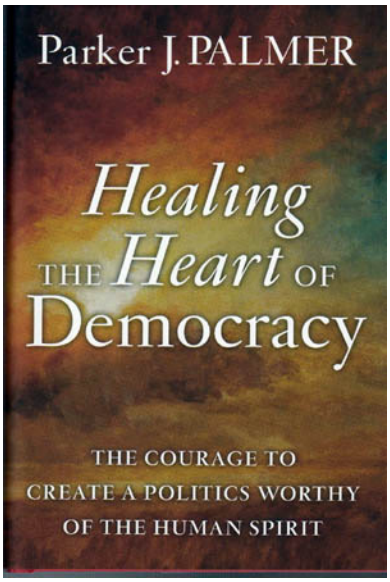
I begin this review with Parker Palmer's dedication because it speaks volumes about the gift of light he brings to all of us in this country in the midst of what seems like an endless dark night of our democracy. ***Healing the Heart of Democracy*** is both a deeply personal account of Palmer's struggle out of a deep depression, and for those of us who are committed to democratically-run schools, a hopeful beacon forward.

Palmer recounts his history with the perils of American democracy:

"….precipitated by Democrats and Republican alike. I lived through McCarthy's communist witch hunts; the pushback to the civil rights movement; the political assassinations of the 1960s; the burning of our cities; Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate; and the electoral debacle of 2000. I have witnessed the rapid erosion of the middle class and the growing power of big money, an oligarchy of wealth, to trump the will of the people. But with fear and fragmentation becoming staples of our national life, and with the haunting sense that our 'booming economy' was likely to implode, democracy felt even more imperiled to me in the America of 2004 [the year Palmer began this book]."

And in 2013, when our governmental officials seem incapable of finding common ground or compromising, and stagnation, stalemate, and dead-on-arrival greet all too many legislative proposals, Palmer's book is a welcome breath of fresh air, offering thoughtful approaches to re-discovering the true sense of "citizen." In a day when "Career and College Ready" is the mantra throughout our nation's schools, it is refreshing and reassuring to read about "the third C," citizenship. Palmer encourages readers to become "intentional citizens," fully active participants in our democracy, rather than "accidental citizens," who happen to have been born in the United States of America.

Living in a time when our politics is the "politics of the brokenhearted," and by way of explaining the book's title – Healing the Heart of Democracy – Palmer takes us to the very root of the word, heart:



"'Heart' comes from the Latin 'cor' and points not merely to our emotions but to the core of the self, that center place where all of our ways of knowing converge – intellectual, emotional, sensory, intuitive, imaginative, experiential, relational, and bodily, among others.... 'Cor' is also the Latin root from which we get the word 'courage.' When all that we understand of self and world comes together in the center place called the heart, we are more likely to find the courage to act humanely on what we know."

"When all of our talk about politics is either technical or strategic, to say nothing of partisan and polarizing, we loosen or sever the human connections on which empathy, accountability, and democracy itself depend. If we cannot talk about politics in the language of the heart – if we cannot be publicly heartbroken, for example, that the wealthiest nation on earth is unable to summon the political will to end childhood hunger at home – how can we create a politics worthy of the human spirit, one that has a chance to serve the common good?"

"For those of us who want to see democracy survive and thrive – and we are legion – the heart is where everything begins; that grounded place in each of us where we can overcome fear, rediscover that we are members of one another, and embrace the conflicts that threaten democracy as openings to new life for us and for our nation."

Palmer then discusses the tension between the individual and community—between independence and interdependence, individualism and communalism. He writes of striving for balance in each of these areas as essential to a fully functioning democracy. He then presents his "Five Habits of the Heart," and first suggests two words which summarize these habits: "chutzpah"and "humility."

"By 'chutzpah' I mean knowing that I have a voice that needs to be heard and the right to speak it. By 'humility' I mean accepting the fact that my

Dave Lehman is the former founding principal/teacher of the Lehman Alternative Community School, a public middle- high school recently named after him and his wife by the Ithaca, New York Board of Education upon their retirement after 30 years. He currently is doing "School Improvement Coaching" with the middle schools and high schools in Madison, Wisconsin.

Contact him with your questions or comments at davelehman@mac.com

truth is always partial and may not be true at all – so I need to listen with openness and respect, especially to 'the other,' as much as I need to speak my own voice with clarity and conviction. Humility and chutzpah equals the kind of citizens a democracy needs."

The first three of these habits are about chutzpah, and the last two, humility:

"We must understand that we are all in this together.
We must develop an appreciation of the value of 'otherness.'
We must cultivate the ability to hold tension in life-giving ways.
We must generate a sense of personal voice and agency.
We must strengthen our capacity to create community."

Palmer then uses a series of four chapters to lay out ways in which these habits may be practiced and fully developed in our homes, in art, religion, and education. Specifically turning to education, Palmer notes, "The K-12 classrooms where we all spend much of our youth, and the college and university classrooms where about one-quarter of us earn postsecondary degrees, are the venues in which we are most likely to be formed or deformed as citizens." It is in our schools that young people can exercise their learner's permits to practice driving the democracy of their schools. Democracy is not a spectator sport. It requires citizens who have developed such essential qualities as: "the sense of curiosity, responsibility, and agency." Palmer urges everyone in schools to engage actively in their classrooms and school communities, and in the greater political dynamics of their larger communities.

Here Palmer quotes Thomas Jefferson: "I know of no safe repository of the ultimate power of society but people. And if we think them not enlightened enough, the remedy is not to take the power from them, but to inform them by education."

For those of us who are teachers, counselors, social workers, psychologists, coaches, teachers aides, custodians, secretaries, administrators, we spend so much of our lives in our workplaces—schools. Palmer believes we can develop his "Habits of the Heart," practicing such democratic skills as mutual respect and trust, open listening and courageous speaking, and individual and collective intention to work for the common good. Here Palmer quotes Terry Tempest Williams:

"The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up, ever-trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy?"

With this in mind Palmer suggests that teachers, as some have already begun to do, could mount an effective challenge to high-stakes testing which distorts serving the real needs of the young. Good democratic citizenship is not limited to institutional politics, but requires active practice in every area of our lives. It is within a caring community of learners that the "Habits of the Heart" may come to heal this country's ailing democracy.

In this vein, I'll close this review with a poem, "A Great Need," by the thirteenth-century Persian poet Hafiz. Parker Palmer uses this poem to emphasize the importance of us staying the course, being called to hang on and hang together:

Out
Of a great need
We are all holding hands
And climbing.
Not loving is a letting go.
Listen,
The terrain around here
Is
Far too
Dangerous
For
That

The role of 'stance' in developing Probing Questions

By Jim McKean, CFG Coach in Indiana
jmckean@coltraingroup.com

I am relatively new to the idea of probing questions, and frankly they run counter to my instincts. After twenty years in management consulting I have developed a real skill in asking leading questions—using questions to nudge people toward the answer I think is right. (I imagine this might also be true for some classroom teachers.) After all that experience, it is hard to walk away from such a successful (for me) tactic.

But the power of probing questions is not in getting people to do what I want them to (as satisfying as that is). It is in the power of unfolding other people's thinking and watching where it takes them. Probing questions encourage lateral thinking, the discovery of self-imposed barriers, the rethinking of assumptions and the kinds of leaps of insight that create a real break through.

So I struggle between my learned behavior and the power of probing questions. At a recent NSRF event, I found three pretty good probing questions in rapid succession. Eager to build on that success, I spent a little time thinking about what exactly was going on in my head that allowed me to find the questions.

After some reflection, I realized that the only difference was what I will call my "mental stance." I realized that if I stand too close to a problem, I am sucked into it -- and my reaction is to immediately begin "solution finding" behavior.

"What are you most afraid of?"

But if I can step back from the problem, create a mental space around it and allow myself to try to understand the problem rather than solve it, new questions begin to emerge. It is a matter of concentrating on understanding the context of the problem, and not on solving the problem itself.

"Which of your assumptions is most likely to be wrong?"

Two of the questions that occurred to me were "What are you most afraid of?" and "Which one of the assumptions you are making are most likely to be wrong?" The third question was more specific to the situation, but was based on the idea "What if the opposite were true?"

"What if the opposite were true?"

If you are struggling with asking probing questions, and especially if you are guilty of suggestions masquerading as questions, maybe this experience can help you, too.

Jim McKean is a new Critical Friends Group coach in Bloomington, Indiana. A management consultant with 20+ years' experience, he also uses his new skills with protocols in his work at the Coltrain Group.

Contact him at jmckean@coltraingroup.com

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 January15th), 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 publically 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.

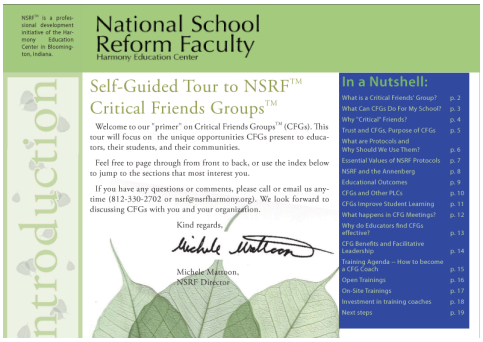
I believe that teaching diverse students is more an art than a technical list of strategies, but I drafted this list of suggestions in hopes that some of these ideas might spur fresh ideas for you. Clearly "no one size fits all."

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.

This article is available as a 2-page PDF if you'd care to use it in your CFGs for text protocols. Call NSRF at 812-330-2702 or email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org.

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!



Want to clarify your understanding of NSRF's Critical Friends Groups? Want some support explaining CFGs to friends, colleagues, and administrators? Click thephotos above or the links below to review our latest promotional materials, or email us to request copies and links:

A Self-Guided Tour to NSRF Critical Friends Groups (pdf)

and

Video Glimpse of NSRF New CFG Coaches Training

Help us give you what you want!

Are you looking for advanced protocol training, beyond the basics taught in a five-day training? Would you feel more confident with an intermediary step toward becoming an NSRF National Facilitator? Want advice on 'tough crowds' or difficult dilemmas?

We want to hear from you!

Please email nsrf@nsrfharmony.org or call us at 812-330-2702 to discuss what "next steps" appeal to you in your use of NSRF® Protocols and Critical Friends Groups®!

How'd we do?

How did you like this issue? Do you have ideas for future articles, book reviews, or topics you'd like to explore (or you'd like us to explore)? We'd love to hear your experiences with NSRF Protocols and CFGs. Email us, or call 812-330-2702.

The National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) is a professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through professional learning communities. We train individuals to coach Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs, a specific type of Professional Learning Community (PLC). Critical Friends Groups use protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving and learning.

As the NSRF does not receive grant support, your paid membership helps us continue to freely provide the original NSRF protocols and supporting materials via our website, as well as support our mission to continue offering training across the nation and world. We encourage you to support our scholarship fund so that any teacher could participate in a training regardless of ability to pay our fee.

Join or renew online at http://www.nsrfharmony.org/membership.html

National School Reform Faculty®
Harmony Education Center
Adult Learning in the Service of Student Achievement

National School Reform Faculty®
909 E. Second St.
Bloomington, IN 47401
http://www.nsrfharmony.org
812-330-2702
Please "Like" us on Facebook and join the conversation!
http://www.Facebook.com/NationalSchoolReformFaculty
Executive Editor: Dave Lehman
Managing Editor: Luci McKean
Director: Michele Mattoon