NSRF
National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

Connections

November 2014

In this issue

3 great ways to open a workshop
3

10 multicultural education and equity websites for teachers
4

3 excellent books for discussing race
7

Improve your Powerpoint presentations
9

And more!

If you're reading on an electronic device, watch for icons O M C *and blue type indicating hotlinks to more content or email addresses.*

How might we introduce Probing Questions more effectively?

"A good question is never answered. It is not a bolt to be tightened into place but a seed to be planted and to bear more seed toward the hope of greening the landscape of idea." — John Ciardi, American poet

What do we want from a question? Defying logic, I contend that we don't want questions with clear answers. The ideal question doesn't have an answer. Or, more clearly, it doesn't have ONE answer. Rather, the most powerful questions push us to think about possibilities, probing us to contemplate further. I call it the "lingering factor of a more powerful probing question," and I believe probing questions are at the heart of our work as facilitators, coaches and participants of Critical Friends Group® communities.

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As an International Facilitator for NSRF® and an active CFG™ Coach, I've witnessed numerous participants leave a training session or meeting carrying those lingering probing questions. Even the expression on their faces shows that they're looking more deeply into their work.

While arguably probing questions are the most important part of so many CFG protocols and the key to innovation, they are also the most difficult to generate and especially challenging to teach. I've come across a wonderful method for introducing probing questions that can be used not only with Critical Friends Group communities, but also with students and colleagues alike.

How might we create more powerful probing questions?

I was first introduced to the Right Question Institute (RQI) while reading ***A More Beautiful Question*** by Warren Berger (in my opinion, a must-read for all facilitators and educators). The founders of the Right Question Institute, Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana have devised a method known as the Question Formulation Technique (QFT), which Berger praises as a process that is "simple enough that teachers can learn it in an hour, and students can grasp it immediately." I couldn't agree more!

As an offshoot, the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) provides an innovative way for participants to experience probing questions, while also offering a powerful process for use in the classroom, boardroom, or other collaborative group. Best of all, their website offers most of their materials free of charge, only requiring that you register your email. Check out their

One of the most difficult challenges when introducing probing questions is to convince the participants that they need not begin with 'the answer' in mind. In fact, they should not begin with ANY answers. Only questions, and the more, the better.

website at www.rightquestion.org. You can download the templates, explanations and handouts. I also suggest you watch Dan Rothstein's TEDxSomerville Talk, "Did Socrates Get it Wrong?" which will help you to understand the QFT and to probe the possibilities.

How might you apply the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) within your group?

In my latest training for New CFG Coaches, I have found the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) extremely effective to introduce probing questions. Here's how I applied it: participants were divided into smaller groups, each given a large piece of butcher paper and their own space to work. They were all introduced to the four key rules of the QFT (see mini protocol at right). The process requires that participants only ask questions, not discuss, that they write down all questions, and that they change all statements into questions.

Essentially, the process asks the participants to brainstorm, not with answers or ideas, but only with questions. At the center of the process is the Question Focus or Q-focus, a statement (similar to NSRF's Focusing Question) providing the frame and focus for the brainstorming. I instructed the participants to write "We can affect student learning" in the center of their group's paper, which provided their Q-focus.

Setting the timer for six minutes, I watched the groups take off, scribing question after question and laughing periodically while reflecting the breadth of their interests and experiences related to the Q-focus. Closely following the QFT from the PowerPoint slides downloaded from the RQI website, I then asked members to classify their questions as "open" or "closed" (i.e., do they require more than a yes or no answer). Next, they inverted several of those questions from open to closed and vice versa, taking mental notes of what took place along the way.

I then asked the group members to rank their most powerful questions as defined by those that "push the group's thinking" and "suggest that 'ah-ha, hmmmm' lingering sensation." We then shared those questions out to the large group.

In the next step I moved into the Probing Question Materials from the nsrfharmony.org website, introducing them to the participants. The Pocket Guide to Probing Questions, and the newly created Probing Questions Cheat Sheet and Probing Question Approaches provide an excellent overview of probing questions, including their design and function.

Finally, I took the participants back to their own questions from the QFT and we debriefed as a large group, discussing the impact of the most powerful probing questions. It was in this context that I introduced the pivotal role that probing questions can play in Critical Friends Group work, especially when unraveling the complexities using an Issaquah Protocol, or a Dilemma Analysis Protocol, or exploring the possibilities within a Consultancy Protocol or a Dilemma Consultancy Protocol.

One of the most difficult challenges when introducing probing questions is to convince the participants that they need not begin with "the answer" in mind. In fact, they should not begin with any answers. Only questions, and the more, the better. It is through the QFT that the CFG participants begin to realize that probing questions are not only intended for the presenter of an NSRF protocol, but strategically placed to encourage the entire group to widen possibilities before even considering answers.

As educators, CFG Coaches, and NSRF Facilitators, we can indeed provide opportunities for colleagues and students to explore more powerful questions. The RQI technique as well as numerous NSRF protocols continue to find their way into the classrooms, trainings and meetings of several of my colleagues, who have raved about their use. I hope that you can try them out for yourself. A more powerful probing question awaits!

Mini-protocol around the Right Question Institute "Question Formulation Technique" (QFT)

1. Create groups of 5-6. (2 min.)

2. Present each group with a large sheet of butcher paper, markers, and space to work. (2 min.)

3. Instruct groups to write the Q-focus statement in the middle of their papers. (1 min.)

4. Review the QFT Rules: Ask only questions, no discussions, writing down all questions, and change all statements into questions. (2 min.)

5. Participants write as many questions as they can think of around the Q-Focus statement. (6 min.)

6. Invite participants to classify all questions as "open" or "closed," and then invert those questions. Remind them to take notice of the process for later reflection. (5 min.)

7. Each group ranks their most powerful questions according to the NSRF descriptions and models for creating effective probing questions. (5 min.)

8. Share out to the larger group. (5 min.)

9. Debrief: What surprised you? How did the results of this protocol differ from other means of brainstorming questions? How might this protocol be helpful to you in your work? (10 min.)

Three great ways to open a workshop

The "ice breaker" is a mainstay of workshops, seminars, and team-building exercises. Trust us: they aren't all silly.

creative commons *Icebreaker Sisu, by HugoVK, http://flic.kr/p/dUN4eo*

Good ice breakers will not only start people on the process of getting to know each other, but also introduce the topic of the event in a fun and interesting way. If participants already know each other, ice breakers can be used to move conversations into new and unexplored territories.

Some ice breakers are "just for fun." Although I do like to have fun, the pragmatist in me wants there to be a reason beyond having fun if I'm to do something at a work-related session. I believe that it's activities like the "just for fun" ice breakers that cause people to quickly label a session "touchy-feely" and use that as an excuse to buy out of the whole process from the beginning. That being said, many others find these a useful way to start an event out on a light-hearted note. Examples of this type of icebreaker are:

1. Top Fives: Have people pair up with someone they don't know and share their top five lists of anything—books, movies, desserts, vacation spots, etc… If time, they can share why these things are their favorites. I find that giving participants a silent minute to think first, helps participants get to the meat of the matter faster.

2. Ten Things: Have folks divide into groups of four or five. Ask them to find 10 things they all have in common. These things cannot be items we all share as human beings (same body parts, we all need to eat, sleep, wear clothes for protection, etc…) This one takes a bit more time—allow 10-15 minutes for this discussion. At the end of the time, have someone from each small group share out in the large group.

3. Speed Introductions: Have people break into pairs. They must tell each other their name, their job title, one thing they love to do on their free time and one thing that's on their bucket list. Afterwards, pairs introduce one another to the whole group.

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Other ice breakers are segues into the work at hand or are actually based on the purpose of the session. These ice breakers serve the purpose of getting to know the folks in the room, while also preparing their brains for the task ahead. Many ice breakers can be tweaked to move participants in this direction. For example, we can do this with the above ice breakers, just by changing the prompts:

1. Top Fives: Use a prompt such as this one, "What are the five most powerful learning experiences you had between the ages of 6 and 16?"

2. Ten Things: "What ten changes/improvements to the education system would all of you make?"

3. Speed Introductions: Along with sharing their names and job titles, ask participants to share one goal they have for the upcoming day and one concern they have around doing this work.

When beginning a 5-Day New Coaches CFG training, I must admit, I do have my favorites. Here are my top three:

A. Quotes Introduction Activity: This activity calls for participants to choose a quote from the quotes cards around education that is particularly meaningful to that participant. The quotes are varied and from many different sources, allowing participants to pick text that most closely articulates what they feel to be true about education.

This allows a particularly deep and meaningful professional conversation to happen between two people who don't know each other. It also sets up the training well—participants are now eager to further interact with their colleagues on this level.

B. Education Metaphors: This ice breaker uses the creative power of a metaphor to unlock participants' perceptions of themselves when they are doing their best work and the weaknesses that might be associated with those strengths. Talking to someone you don't know well about what inspires/guides you in your work as a professional and what weakness you might have encourages feelings of bonding and trust. It's a great way to start 5 days of hard work together.

C. Education Pennies: This activity is a good one to use with people who have known each other a long time. Interesting things arise when participants are asked to dredge through their memories to come up with a powerful learning experience they've had during their penny's year!

NSRF is now in the process of rewriting and creating more activities, including ice breakers, for our members. Join our membership and visit our website regularly to see the new activities and protocols we add every month!

From the Research Desk

Ten multicultural education and equity websites for teachers

Educators can easily find a wealth of information addressing issues of equity, diversity and multicultural education on the internet. I have chosen ten that have been particularly useful to me in the hope that you may find them useful as well. ~ Dave Lehman, Connections Executive Editor

This fall, struggles continue in Ferguson, Missouri in the aftermath of the killing of a young Black man. The first two resources below created background materials for people seeking understanding of the history involved.

1) Teaching for Change www.teachingforchange.org
For a perspective on the Ferguson situation, simply enter "Teaching about Ferguson" in the search box. On their home page you will notice that their slogan is "building social justice starting in the classroom."

Click through the photos at the top of the page to find a multitude of free resources, including materials about Central America and the current issue of immigration. For example – "Put Central America on the Map in Schools," lessons and poetry for k-12 on Central American history and culture. You will also notice they have a quarterly journal, "Teaching for Change" as well as connections to the Zinn Education Project.

2) Zinn Education Project www.zinnedproject.org
Near the top of their home page you will note the availability of "teaching materials" in two categories: "explore by time period," and "explore by theme." Clicking on "teaching materials" in the banner heading, you will see a third category, "explore by resource type."

Here you will find lists of articles, fiction books, non-fiction books, picture books, audios, films, posters, songs and poems and Spanish/bilingual resources as well as teacher guides and a reference to related websites. Clicking on the heading "If We Knew Our History," you will find a series of insightful articles providing much needed different perspectives on various current and past issues of equity and justice. The article, "Is This America?: 50 Years Ago Sharecroppers Challenged Mississippi, Apartheid, LBJ, and the Nation" is a particularly important read in the context of the Ferguson situation.

3) Rethinking Schools www.rethinkingschools.org
Like the Teaching for Change website, Rethinking Schools also cross references the Zinn Project and Teaching for Change. Rethinking Schools publishes a quarterly journal by the same title, about which Jonathan Kozol says: "Absolutely the best, most important education publication in the country... a gutsy, dynamic magazine that I have been reading now for 20 years." They have a number of books which are collections of articles from past issues, e.g. "Rethinking Popular Culture and Media," "A People's History for the Classroom" (in conjunction with the Zinn Project), "Teaching for Joy and Justice," "Rethinking Early Childhood Education," "Rethinking Multicultural Education," and "The New Teacher Book."

4) EdChange: Professional Development, Research, and Resources for Diversity, Multiculturalism and Cultural Competence www.edchange.org EdChange is primarily the work of Paul C. Gorski, Assistant Professor of Integrative Studies at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia. EdChange's mission, "Building equitable and just schools, communities, and organizations through transformative action" sounds a lot like NSRF. Under the Projects tab, look for "Multicultural Pavilion," and sign up for the weekly newsletter, "Justice: The People's News."

Gorski is the author of ***Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty***, (which I reviewed in the November 2013 issue of ***Connections)***, and several other books.

Also on the EdChange home page, on the banner heading, click on "Hand-Outs" for a number of excellent, free papers, including "20 Things I Can Do to Be a Better Multi-

cultural Educator," "Eleven Things You Can Do to Bring Class Equity to Your Classroom," and "Five Shifts of Consciousness for Multicultural Educators." They also offer workshops and a unique approach to assessment.

TEACHING TOLERANCE
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

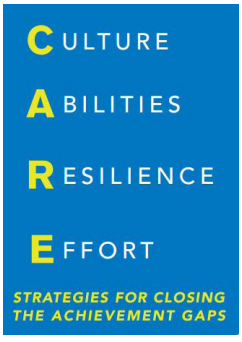
5) Teaching Diverse Students Initiative (TDSi) www.tolerance.org Founded in 1991 by the Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance is dedicated to "reducing prejudice, improving intergroup relations, and supporting equitable school experiences for our nation's children." The organization provides free educational materials to educators in the U.S. and Canada. Their self-titled magazine is sent to 450,000 educators twice annually, and "tens of thousands of educators use our free curricular kits."

Subscribe to their free online weekly newsletter and their journal, ***Teaching Tolerance***, published twice a year. Click on classroom resources, film kits, or publications on the banner of their home page for their resources and a reference to a brochure describing all they offer.

6) What Kids Can Do www.whatkidscando.org This website, subtitled "Voices from the next generation," offers a number of resources including books they publish, short videos, and stories about what youth have done and are doing to address various educational and socio-political issues.

You can subscribe to their "News Blast," and download valuable information for first generation young people, and their parent/caregivers, about applying to colleges. Their books (see my article entitled ***"In Search of Good Things People Worldwide Have Done, Are Doing, and Can Do"*** in the Spring 2011 issue of ***Connections***) are primarily based on extensive interviews with students giving their ideas about how to improve schools to better serve diverse student needs.

7) 2011 C.A.R.E. Guide: Strategies for Closing the Achievement Gaps, 4th edition www.nea.org/assets/docs/CAREguide2011.pdf According to the website, "Recently, more than 350 users of this C.A.R.E. strategy guide were surveyed and eight out of 10 reported changing their teaching practices and found its contents useful in closing achievement gaps. Two-thirds of these educators also saw an increase in students' motivation and interest in their studies. And seven of 10 say their relationships with students and their family members improved."



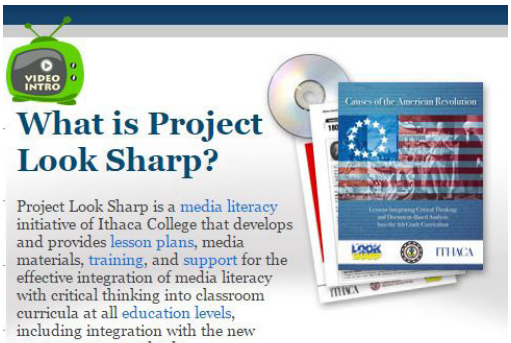
CARE stands for "Culture, Abilities, Resilience, and Effort," and this 174-page free download Guide is organized into five categories: 1) Enduring Understandings, 2) Student Activities, 3) Reflections, 4) Resources, and 5) Video Clips (done in conjunction with Teaching Diverse Students Initiative). Other NEA resources can be found by going to nea.org/tools.

8) The National Equity Project www.nationalequityproject.org Formerly BayCES, operating out of Oakland, California, their home page provides a thorough overview of their "approach, impact, partners, and events." Having participated in one of their introductory workshops I recommend their training most highly. Within the banner of their home page click on "Resources," then "News and Publications" for various articles and interviews describing their work and the results in improving multicultural relationships and teaching strategies. There also is a listing of upcoming conferences and presentations.

NATIONAL EQUITY PROJECT

9) Project Look Sharp www.projectlooksharp.org Project Look Sharp is a media literacy initiative of Ithaca College that develops and provides lesson plans, media materials, training, and support for the effective integration of media literacy with critical thinking into classroom curricula at all education levels, including integration with the new common core standards. They offer webinars, a summer institute, workshops, keynotes and consulting, articles and publications, a Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy, other resources and organizations as well as a number of free media literacy handouts.

Having worked with the staff of Project Look Sharp over the years (one of the social studies teachers from our school in Ithaca is a part-time member of their staff), I can vouch for the excellent materials and training they provide. Free to download curriculum kits cover six areas: U.S. History, Global Studies, Science and Environment, Health, Psychology and Aging Studies, and General Media Literacy. You can use their "Lesson Plan Index for Kit Documents" and choose specific material by content, grade level, and media type – e.g. a kit about "Stereotyping Arabs and Muslims" or use the whole kit on the "Middle East."



10) International Journal of Multicultural Education www.ijme-journal.org The International Journal

International Journal of Multicultural Education
Equity Focus ■ Open Access ■ Peer Review

of Multicultural Education (IJME) is a peer-reviewed, open-access journal for scholars, practitioners, and students of multicultural education. The journal is committed to promoting educational equity for all, cross-cultural understanding, and global awareness in all levels of education including leadership and policies.

This journal offers articles, book reviews, art and media reviews. For example, the media review in the current issue is of the film "Bully," a book review is of ***Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms***, and one of the scholarly articles is "Fostering Awareness through Trans-mediation: Preparing Pre-Service Teachers for Critical Engagement with Multicultural Literature." This journal is relatively new, having just begun publishing in 2007. They publish three issues each year and their articles can be downloaded for free.

These are the ten websites I recommend as resources for multicultural education addressing issues of equity and diversity, race and racism, gender and learning disabilities discrimination. We would be interested in any additional sites you believe educators at any level would find useful.

Dave Lehman is the former founding principal/teacher of the Lehman Alternative Comunity School in Ithaca,NY. This public middle-high school was named for Dave and his wife Judy by the Ithaca, New York Board of Education upon their retirement after 30 years. Dave was a member of the very first "Principals Seminar" leadership group at the beginning of the NSRF, under the umbrella for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Soon thereafter he was trained as a CFG coach and then an NSRF National Facilitator. His email is davelehman@mac.com

NSRF WILL BE EXHIBITING AT THE NAIS PEOPLE OF COLOR CONFERENCE IN INDIANAPOLIS, DECEMBER 4-6

Find us at Table 10 in the Exhibit Hall. Friday morning at 9:35 a.m., hear Michele speak on "The Secret to Great Facilitation" in the Exhibit Hall presentations.

If you've been trained as a CFG Coach, stop by early for a free gift, and anyone can enter our drawing for great prizes — including a $795-value seat in an upcoming Open Training for New CFG Coaches! You may even see a glimpse of our upcoming New Coaches Manual, due to be printed later this winter!

Ready to sharpen your facilitation skills?

Critical Friends Group® New Coaches Open Training begins Feb. 9-11

Bloomington, IN, $795 for five days' training*

*(*On Feb. 11, the group decides when to return for the last two days.)*

Rave reviews from participants about NSRF CFG training:

"Best PD EVER!"
~ A new coach in North Carolina

"This training introduced me to a supportive group of colleagues. I did not have this before this training." ~ A new coach in Toronto

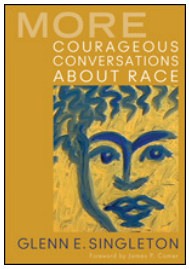
"I learned that the protocols are really useful in bringing out our 'best selves.' They drew me into the activities in a way that nudged me towards being fully present. I developed a greater awareness of the effect of my behavior and how it might benefit or hurt the rest of the participants." ~ A new coach in Michigan

To enroll or learn more, click through to the NSRF website or call 812-330-2702!

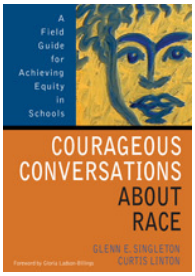
Book review

Three excellent resources for discussing race

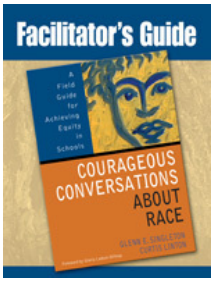
By Dave Lehman, Connections Executive Editor



More Courageous Conversations About Race
(link to purchase on NSRF website)
by Glenn Singleton
Corwin Press, 2013



Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools
(link to purchase discounted first edition from NSRF)
by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton
Corwin Press, 2006



Facilitator's Guide to Courageous Conversations About Race
(link to purchase on NSRF website)
by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton
Corwin Press, 2007

Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton wrote ***Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*** in 2006, and the following year the ***Facilitator's Guide*** for the original volume was published. Now comes the sequel, ***More Courageous Conversations About Race***, also published by Corwin, this time written by Singleton as a solo author. Glenn is the founder of PEG Inc., the Pacific Educational Group, and FCE, the Foundation for a College Education. He is also an adjunct faculty member at San Jose University.

The original volume introduces the "Four Agreements:"

1) stay engaged
2) expect/accept non-closure
3) speak your truth
4) experience discomfort

Additionally, people need to remember a progression of "Six Conditions" foundational to conversing about race:

1) getting personal, right here and right now
2) keeping the spotlight on race
3) engaging multiple racial perspectives
4) keeping us all at the table
5) what do you mean by race?
6) let's talk about whiteness

Both volumes also refer to the "Courageus Conversations Compass" which resembles a five-coordinate Chinese compass: east, west, north, south, and center. The compass offers a metaphor about the various perspectives from which individuals might begin speaking about race, and the challenges when different people in one conversation are coming from different "directions," not necessarily valuing the opposite. The center space — where thinking, feeling, believing, and doing all come together — is the most productive place for conversations, honoring all "compass points."

In ***More***, Singleton revisits his "Courageous Conversations Protocol," a series of writing exercises a reader can conduct after having begun work with the Six Conditions. The practice is designed to deepen thought around race and race relations as they relate to schooling:

Level I — Memorization. Singleton asks whether a reader can write each Condition on a separate piece of paper, without referring to his book or written notes;

Level II — Internalization. Now, on each sheet of paper, write your understanding of the definition of each Condition, using your own words, and explain the significance of each Condition in advancing courageous conversations about race.

Level III — Application. Now remember when you have participated in a courageous conversation. Explain how you applied each Condition to navigate into and through that conversation.

Together, the Agreements, Conditions, and Compass comprise the key elements of the Courageous Conversation, and the Protocol facilitates further reflection on the process.

More builds on all these elements and goes deeper. The goal is to engage the reader in "narratives that compel you to synthesize your knowledge and transform it into direct and measurable action….to close the 'knowing-doing' gap in education." The primary difference in the two volumes is that the earlier work was "primarily descriptive and theoretical," and the new book "focuses on implementation," with two major objectives:

"…to help White educators move beyond guilt and rhetoric to a place of purposeful action,

"and to support educators of color in finding the courage and language to name the individual and systemic racism around them, accept the challenge to speak their truth, and feel empowered to hold the system ac-

countable for providing quality education for all children."

Thus, there are new chapters here, such as Ch. 3, "Revisiting the Courageous Conversations About Race Protocol," in which he introduces an expanded version of a horizontal, six-point "Courageous Conversation Protocol Developmental Scale," where readers can assess themselves to see where they fit beginning with "Knowledge," and progressing to higher levels — "Comprehension," "Application," "Analysis," "Synthesis," and finally "Interruption." This "Developmental Scale" is presented in a 4-page table with the left-hand, vertical column encompassing 10 categories beginning with the above "4 Agreements," including the "Compass," and other categories such as "Examining Whiteness." (This table reminds me of Sonia Nieto's table of 7 "Levels of Multicultural Education" and 5 "Characteristics of Multicultural Education" in her book, ***Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education***, which I expected to be referenced by Singleton.)

Also, new is Ch. 6, "Moving Courageous Conversations Beyond Black and White," in which Singleton addresses the unmet needs of other people of color, specifically "Brown" (Hispanic) and "American Indians," and all those for whom English is a second language. Additionally Ch. 8, "Leadership for Racial Equity From Theory to Practice" is new in this book and includes more acronyms — "District Equity Leadership Teams" (DELT and DELTA), "Site and Central-Office Department Leaders Engaged in Equity/Anti-racism Development" (LEADs) and "Students Organized for Anti-Racism" (SOAR).

The Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools featured little boxes throughout each chapter with "Reflection" questions addressed to the reader e.g. *"Before you opened this book, how consciously aware of race were you?"* At the end of each chapter there are "Implementation Exercises" and "Racial Autobiographies." Similarly in ***More Courageous Conversations*** these are replaced with "Essential Questions" at the end of each chapter that are related to one's own personal preparation for engaging in courageous conversations, along with "Voices from the Inside," personal stories of people involved in the struggle.

With this summary and brief comparing of the original volume with ***More***, for the rest of this review I will use NSRF's Four A's Text Protocol. I'll offer some thoughts about content within the books with which I "Agree," identify some "Assumptions" I believe Singleton makes, share aspects about which I might "Argue," and close with that to which I "Aspire" in the books.

To begin, I certainly Agree that we are not in some mythical post-racial biases era, and need courageous conversations more than ever. I also concur with the following statement of the dilemma facing those educators like Singleton — and hopefully many of you readers of ***Connections***! — who are willing to face and work on these issues:

"I learned in crafting my first book that writing about race for a U.S. audience requires that I first state exactly what must be said to enlist the confidence of and maintain my credibility among racially conscious people of color. It next demands that I craft a revision that does not overwhelm or alienate my majority White readership. This is because, alongside my critical and targeted audiences, there exists a powerful and largely White body of critics who will indiscriminately challenge any attempt I make, meaningful or otherwise, to elevate the conversation and consciousness about race and racism in this country to a higher and more urgent level."

However, I would question an Assumption which I believe is embedded in the following statement Singleton makes so emphatically:

"….put this book aside right now if you have not read and internalized its precursor, ***Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide to Achieving Equity in Schools****. …..It is my steadfast view that this first text is effective only when readers carefully consider the narratives contained with in it, complete the book's exercises, and apply its Protocol to their personal, professional, and organizational racial equity challenges."*

Glenn E. Singleton

I understand that Singleton intends to take his readers deeper and wants them to have done some initial work on issues of race, but I believe he assumes that reading his first book and doing the exercises therein is the only way to be prepared to go deeper. There are too many others laboring in these same fields to see his introductory work as the sole point of entry. I think of the work of the "National Equity Project," a near neighbor to Singleton in California, the work of Henry Louis Gates, Geneva Gay, Pedro Nogeura, Gary Howard, Lisa Delpit, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Linda Darling-Hammond, Julie Landsman and Chance Lewis, as well as others who continue to write about, speak-out about, and do workshops about race, working with people of all backgrounds.

I would Argue with Singleton that, although he is to be lauded for recognizing an area of his own growth by adding a chapter addressing the educational inequalities facing countless Latino/Latinas and Native Americans, I do not see a discussion of the devastating impact of poverty as a frequent additional contributing factor

to racial discrimination, nor is there discussion of the gender bias which is so destructive to all too many of our young women of all races. Rather he focuses in depth only on the acknowledged challenges facing Black males in our society. Also missing is a discussion of the challenges facing our gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgender young people — particularly those of color — among whom there are all too many suicides. Suicide is but one dramatic indicator of the tremendous challenges they face.

Furthermore, although I recognize that his two books are specifically addressing issues of race, I would argue that this discussion is incomplete without actual discussions — courageous conversations and exercises — to help educators work more effectively with students of all races, all sexes and genders, from all economic backgrounds, and sexual preferences, as well as students who have learning disabilities and physical handicaps, thus facing doubly difficult challenges as second-class citizens. Thus, I look forward to a third book by Singleton in which he addresses these disparities in our education system.

Lastly, I Aspire to the same kinds of things that Singleton hopes for and longs to see — more demonstrably effective changes in our schools and school systems, addressing the needs of students of color. And I admire the thoughtfulness and thoroughness with which Singleton presents the chapters in his latest book, ***MORE Courageous Conversations About Race***. Would that all educators, not only White, but of all races, genders, cultures, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and income level could work through Singleton's exercises, reflections, and essential questions, doing the personal work needed to carry on the struggle for social justice.

For me, personally then — beyond being a writer of book reviews and articles for ***Connections*** — I know, and accept that my work as an NSRF National Facilitator has "no closure" as Singleton puts it. It is a life-long commitment to which I aspire.

So I recommend you get a copy of ***More Courageous Conversations About Race*** and let us know at NSRF what you think; how it might help you and the people with whom you work in education?

Improve the effectiveness of your audiovisual presentations

*In the September issue of the journal, **Mind, Brain and Education**, an excellent article on "The Neuroscience of PowerPoint" includes research-based tips on preparing Powerpoint presentations.*

1) Written text with spoken word does not work.

2) Visual images with spoken word is much more effective.

3) Utilizing the "point" in PPT can help.

Drawing not only on years of research from earlier behavioral studies, but on current neuro-imaging studies, the author, Jared Cooney Horvath (Professor of Psychological Sciences at the University of Melbourne, Australia), reports on recent findings from brain scans of students and others when looking at visual PPT slides and text while listening to an accompanying aural presentation.

*The researchers observed that the same region of the brain is involved in reading text on a PPT slide as listening to the concurrent oration of the presenter. Reading competes with listening rather than enhances it. **So, drop text slides from your presentations and give people a chance to really hear what you're saying.***

*The "modality principle" of multi-media learning theory is now supported by other current neuro-imaging studies. These studies tell us that aural presentations supported with relevant IMAGES (rather than words) enhance learning. Scans of these test subjects show that combined visual and auditory presentations activate different, complementary regions of the brain. **So, keep those slides with images and illustrations, but make sure they're relevant and don't overdo it.***

*Another key concept in multi-media theory, the "signaling principle," suggests that learning can be enhanced when attentional cues are used to highlight essential learning during a presentation. For example, circling or adding an arrow to highlight a slide's details (such as a graph or chart) can focus the observer's attention to key aspects of your presentation. **So, try using graphic signals as a way of emphasizing key points.***

Lastly, keep those slides to a reasonable number — remember that old principle, less is more!

More on improving presentations

Nancy Duarte has written several books about presentations, and coaches many of the greatest TED speakers. Her talk at TEDxEast offers more great advice on presentations and is a wonderful example of the power of simple slides. http://bit.ly/1A7WuqN

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NSRF is a non-profit, professional development initiative that focuses on increasing student achievement through a specific variety of professional learning communities. Part of Harmony Education Center, we train educators to coach Critical Friends Group communities. CFG communities use NSRF protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving, and learning.

Paid membership helps us continue to provide NSRF materials via our website, as well as support our mission to offer training across the nation and world. We encourage you to support the Lois Butler Scholarship fund so that any teacher could participate in a training regardless of ability to pay our fee.

Shout-out to researchers

Have you written a thesis or dissertation on a topic associated with Critical Friends Group® work or NSRF® protocols?

Now and then, we hear from someone seeking published research on the efficacy of Critical Friends Group® work, or the use of protocols in the classrooms. We're happy to share research we have on file, but realize that it's a bit dated. We expect some of you can point us to fresher research. If you know of any studies we should know about, too, please contact luci@nsrfharmony.org. Thanks so much!

Shout-out to EVERYONE!

What do you think? How are we doing with the new design and content of Connections, and with the new website?

We're working hard to eliminate bugs and add all current members and member-coaches to the new website. We really want to hear your perspectives, whether you have warm or cool feedback to share ... especially if you're having a problem finding something you need!

Please send comments of any variety to luci@nsrfharmony.org. We appreciate whatever you have to say!

Want to write for Connections?

Submit your ideas to luci@nsrfharmony.org and let's talk. Authors of published articles receive one free year's subscription to NSRF.

MANY WAYS TO STAY IN TOUCH

http://www.fb.com/NationalSchoolReformFaculty

http://www.twitter.com/TheNSRF (We don't tweet much but we love being tweeted about!

We're just starting to learn about LinkedIn, but we'll be here soon, too.

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