NSRF
National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

CONNECTIONS

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How to enforce your CFG community Agreements

"enforce: (verb) 1. To compel observance of or compliance with (a law, rule, or obligation). 2. To cause (something) to happen by necessity or force."

"Enforcing" doesn't seem like something a welcoming Critical Friends Group® community would want to encourage, does it? The fact is, every group manages meeting behaviors either indirectly by following unspoken norms, or directly by consciously developing and collaboratively setting Agreements, for example, by using our Setting Agreements Activity. Regardless of the means of creating them, your group will need to enforce those Agreements or norms in some way. Otherwise, your participants' frustrations will rise and their trust will decrease with every infraction.

Michele Mattoon is the Director of the NSRF, an International Facilitator, and CFG Coach. Prior to leading NSRF, she taught first and second grade at Harmony School for more than 20 years and is an award-winning educator. Email her at michele@nsrfharmony.org.

Particularly if you've taken CFG Coaches' Training, you have likely heard all the arguments for having a list of Agreements (ground rules, norms, etc.). Some of these are detailed in a previous article I wrote for ***Connections*** entitled "Agree Now or Pay Later." Agreements can be empowering and help create an atmosphere of safety and trust. But if they're set but not followed, they can perpetuate a dysfunctional meeting atmosphere.

CFG community Agreements must not be made in isolation. They must be created amid a series of intentionally scaffolded activities to build trust. Keep in mind that part of trust-building is making sure that a majority of the group doesn't simply outvote or override the voices of the minority. Trust is necessary for someone with a different viewpoint, opinion, or mindset to be comfortable enough to be able to express this to their group of colleagues. Setting Agreements requires that the

Part of trust-building is making sure that a majority of the group doesn't simply outvote or override the voices of the minority.

group doesn't "vote" for each agreement, but rather that each Agreement is adopted through consensus after deep listening and discussion. For this reason, Agreements will always differ from group to group based on factors such as who is in the group, where the group is meeting, and what the group wants to accomplish.

Once, when I was facilitating a CFG training at a school with deep-rooted issues around trust, I worked with a group that struggled mightily with Setting Agreements. Although this happened many years ago, one interaction stands out in my memory quite clearly. One person in that group suggested including "Assume good intentions" on the list of Agreements. Another participant disagreed, saying, "I can't agree to that because I can't assume some of the people in this group have good intentions. In fact, it's been my experience at this school that some people harbor the worst intentions toward me." And, there it is. The group was actually well-served by that comment. Although the trust the speaker revealed was unsettling, if they hadn't been brave enough to reveal "the elephant in the room," the group may have gone on for some time unable to collaborate effectively because of the group's lack of trust in one another.

Even if a majority wants to believe it, "declaring" any particular agreement will not magically transform a group into a healthy collaborative learning community. Transformation and trust takes time and effort on the part of every member of that group. That brave participant's statement made it very clear that we needed to do a lot more work toward building trust with one another before we could even attempt to agree on a set of behaviors for how we were all going to work with one another.

That serious example aside, let's say that your group ***is*** at the stage where setting agreements makes sense. Let's go on to say that your group has completed the Setting Agreements Activity, and has a nice list of seven agreements that are designed to encourage the members to do their best work.

After defining the terms and honing the language of each agreement, all members of the group should give a signal (usually a "thumbs up") that they are each individually willing to do their best to abide by the list. Now comes the hard part: How do you make sure that people are committed to following the Agreements? Who is responsible for making sure the Agreements are honored? What happens if someone in the group breaks one?

Advertisement

How do you make sure everyone is committed to following the Agreements?

First of all, there are many things you, as the coach of a group, can do to make sure that the Agreements are always in the minds of the members each time they meet. Here are some recommendations:

1. Always make your Agreements visible to the group. Many groups post their Agreements prominently in the room where they are meeting. Others include the Agreements at the top of printed agendas distributed at each meeting. Some groups use technology to project an image of the Agreements throughout each meeting.

2. Review the Agreements to make sure the group remembers them. For the first two or three times you meet after Setting Agreements, start each meeting by reading them aloud. You may ask one volunteer to read through all of them, or ask someone to start by reading the first one and go around the circle with other participants reading the rest. I once participated in a CFG community where the members were challenged to popcorn out the Agreements from memory. We knew we had eight agreements. Could we remember them all?

3. Revisit your Agreements periodically to make sure they still work for your group. After those first few meetings, gauge whether the group can remember and maintain them all. Then, you may have the group read the list aloud only once every three or four meetings. But now you should ask the participants whether the list still works for them, or whether they feel like one item is no longer needed or something else needs to be added. The point is, the Agreements should be a living document that grows and changes over time. Telling the participants of the group you'll be periodically revisiting the list allows participants to, in a de-personalized way, address the fact that a particular Agreement is being broken, or that some need to be changed or added. Remember, as the coach, you are part of the group, and as such, you can also request a modification of the Agreements list.

Who is responsible for making sure the Agreements are honored?

Now comes the hard question, ***"Who is responsible for making sure that the Agreements are honored?"*** Generally, when I ask this question while conducting a training, one or more participants respond, "The facilitator!" Then, I will point out that we spent the better part of a day talking about the importance of a CFG community being equitable—all voices in a CFG group are heard and honored. I'll point to the Agreement Examples on page 14 of their Coaches' Handbook, and note that many examples reference each participant's responsibility to the group, including "Participate," "Support each other's learning," and "Share responsibility for the group." If all CFG members have equal voice, then does it make sense for only the facilitator to be responsible to make sure the Agreements are honored?

After I ask that question in the training, participants often look around and shift uncomfortably in their seats. Eventually, someone will say, "Well, it's probably the group's responsibility, then." Then, I'll ask another uncomfortable question, "OK. So, what do we do if someone breaks an Agreement?"

What happens if someone breaks one?

It's hard to confront a person who's breaking a rule if you feel that you have no authority in the situation. (Hence the reason the facilitator often gets tagged as "the protocol police.") In a CFG community, we are essentially saying that we all have the authority and the responsibility to uphold the Agreements we've created as a group. That being said, how exactly do you do that without the "offender" feeling attacked, called-out, or humiliated? Well, hopefully, you've had this frank talk with in your CFG community on the day when you created your Agreements, and can agree on a plan of action that everyone will feel comfortable with. Here are some solutions that others have come up with:

1. Issue "Gentle Reminders." One of the "Agreement Examples" in the Coaches' Handbook is "Gentle Reminders," and many groups who anticipate trouble make a point to include it. The idea is simply to gently remind any person breaking an Agreement that they are, in fact, breaking it. When faced with a reminder that's gently given with no hint of judgment, people often react by saying something like "Oops! Sorry!" and immediately stop. Gentle reminders should be given in a light, maybe even humorous, way.

Downside—Not everyone will feel comfortable issuing "Gentle Reminders," especially if the group hasn't established a strong sense of trust. This might lead to only a couple of people in the group issuing those gentle reminders, which can reinforce a sense of non-equality.

2. Agree on a physical, silent signal. Groups agree on a silent signal to use if they notice an Agreement being broken. Examples of signals:

- *Finger on closed lips*

- *Tugging an earlobe*
- *Making a "T" with your hands (like "Time out")*
- *Making an "X" with your arms*
- *Covering your eye or eyes*

Downside—The "offender" must see the person sending the signal to receive it. That won't happen if that person is breaking an Agreement like "Practice being present" by checking their email or intensely engaging in a side conversation with their seatmate. To remedy this, you can add a gentle reminder, as well as the signal.

3. Use a prop as a silent signal. Some groups use red cards to signal that an Agreement has been broken. (One is given to each member of the group at the beginning of the meeting, and upon a need, the card is held up like a "stop sign" used by a school crossing guard.) When the offender is no longer breaking the Agreement, the red card is put back on the table. Other groups use flags or handkerchiefs in the same way. I've heard of groups who choose to put a bowl of lightweight red foam balls in a bowl in the middle of the table. When someone breaks the rules, that person is pelted by the others in the group.

Downside—props can be distracting and disruptive (particularly if you are using the red foam ball method). Once a meeting has been disrupted, it can be difficult to bring everyone back to the correct mindset.

4. Appoint a rotating "Process Person." To avoid the facilitator from having to always point out Agreement violations, some groups assign one person in the group to provide "gentle reminders" as well as make notes about how the group is working together in general. This post is rotated every meeting, so all group members take on the process person responsibility at some time during the school year. Sometimes the process person will immediately respond to Agreement breaches by issuing gentle reminders. At other times, they will list out what Agreements were broken and how many times, and report back to the group at the end of a protocol or activity.

Downside—Not everyone is comfortable being a process person, and as a result, may not bring attention to any broken Agreements. If this happens, it could cause frustration in the group with the agreement breakers and the process person, as well.

Clearly, establishing trust among the members of your CFG community is the best way you can ensure that your group's selected Agreements will be honored. Without trust, members might feel resentful, attacked, and/or defensive when reminded that they have broken an Agreement. Keeping your Agreement List as "a living document" will also go a long way to making sure that your Agreements will help nurture an environment that allows each member to do their best work when working in their CFG community.

Administrators, what's on your mind?

For help with these issues and more, attend the Critical Friends Group® Administrative Training
October 9-11 2017 • Bloomington, IN • $600 • More info on our website

Friendly critics and Critical Friends in South Carolina

Previously published in the November 2016 issue of Palmetto Administrator magazine
from the South Carolina Association for School Administrators (SCASA)

Take the Lead was the theme of the 2016 (South Carolina Association of School Administrators) SCASA i3 Conference in June in Myrtle Beach. President George Ward challenged the membership to be a role model; to mentor someone; to enhance our leadership and to be a change agent. Leaders in Lexington School District One take these challenges seriously and have spent the past year engaging in leadership through the lens of a Critical Friends Group (CFG) Model to enhance our leadership skills.

We selected the Critical Friends Model as a strategy for developing the leadership capacities outlined in our professional learning design for school and district leaders. In 2015-2016, district-wide professional learning was restructured to design common areas of focus and "systemness" (a term from Michael Fullan's ***The Principal***) across schools while still allowing schools the autonomy to customize professional learning. The district professional learning design includes aligned learning targets for teachers, instructional coaches and school and district leaders. Learning targets were intentionally designed as "we can" statements instead of "I can" statements, emphasizing the important role collaboration plays in continuous improvement. (See Fig. 1)

Dr. Gloria Talley serves as the Chief Academic Officer of Instructional Services for Lexington School District One. She is the current President of the SCASA Instructional Leaders Roundtable. Mary Gaskins is the Director of Professional Learning in Lexington School District One, and a CFG Coach. Before serving in this role, she was a middle school special education teacher, literacy coach, and curriculum specialist. Email her at mgaskins@lexington1.net

Leadership is a lonely proposition. We cannot do our jobs alone. We must surround ourselves with good people and build positive relationships with them. David Brooks, author of ***The Road to Character***, reminds us "that people are much stronger than they think they are when in pursuit of their telos, their purpose for living. As Nietzsche put it, 'He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how'." Critical Friends Groups combat the loneliness of leadership, allowing for purposeful work in a trusting learning community.

We are excited about our CFG work as it represents the basic unit of support for educators engaged in improving schools and increasing student achievement. These efforts are leading to increasing leadership capacity of our principals, teachers and instructional coaches. So what the heck is a Critical Friend? You may be thinking this is surely an oxymoron. How can one be a critic and a friend? Let us explain.

According to the Glossary of Education Reform, "A critical friend is someone who is encouraging and supportive, but who also provides honest and often candid feedback that may be uncomfortable or difficult to hear. In short, a critical friend is someone who agrees to speak truthfully, but constructively, about weaknesses, problems, and emotionally charged issues."

Similarly, Critical Friends Groups are typically groups of 8-12 colleagues who "are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions (or protocols)." CFGs meet for at least two hours monthly and have unguarded conversation as they think about critical incidents of practice, examine student work, identify school culture issues, and challenge each other's thinking. A trained CFG Coach facilitates the group's work. The facilitator uses protocols to provide constructive feedback designed to push deep thinking. Trust is the ultimate human currency in a CFG.

In Lexington One, principals, assistant principals, and members of the Instructional Services Team have participated in Critical Friends Coach

Figure 1

Teachers	Instructional Coaches	School and District Leaders

As a TEAM, we collaboratively:
• Design clear **learning targets** to establish expectations for student understanding and enable students to monitor their progress and assess the quality of their work.
• **Assess students continually** to measure progress towards the learning targets.
• **Analyze data and adapt instruction** to address students' needs.
• Design **collaborative** opportunities for students to actively **engage** in learning.
	• We implement the seven core practices of student-centered coaching:
	  ◦ Setting goals for student learning (standards-based, engagement, and/or behavior goals)
	  ◦ Using standards-based learning targets
	  ◦ Using student evidence to co-plan instruction
	  ◦ Organizing coaching through cycles
	  ◦ Co-teaching with a focus on effective instructional practices
	  ◦ Measuring the impact of coaching on student and teacher learning
	  ◦ Partnering with the school leader
	• We use strategies to engage in reflective dialogue with teachers.
	• We develop strategies and tools for building the capacity of teams.
	• We develop strategies for creating a collaborative school culture.
		Develop capacity as a lead learner, system player and change agent.
		
		As LEAD LEARNERS, we:
		• Initiate and develop teams to build collective capacity in pedagogy.
		• Provide teams of teachers with descriptive feedback and coaching.
		• Analyze and use data to monitor student and teacher growth relative to established student growth targets.
		• Plan and facilitate effective professional learning.
		• Create a learning culture for new pedagogies (deep learning tasks, collaborative learning partnerships, and use of digital tools and resources).

training through the National School Reform Faculty. As a result, leaders are consistently using strategies to build trust, plan effective meetings, facilitate meaningful professional learning, and guide communities of learners to nurture seed ideas and examine student work, professional practice, and dilemmas. Now that leaders have a solid understanding of CFGs, the work is unfolding to extend to teacher leaders.

So, what has this work meant to us in Lexington One? Ultimately, we have grown as reflective practitioners through our work with the National School Reform Faculty and Critical Friends Groups. Trust building activities are done with purpose; shared agreements are established to serve the work at hand; a common understanding exists regarding how to give and receive feedback, protocols are selected more thoughtfully; we support team members by facilitating protocols for one another; and, we genuinely enjoy collaborating. (See Fig. 2 in next column)

Figure 2

What do Lexington One leaders have to say about Critical Friends training?

- **It was wonderful! For the first time, I was taught how to use protocols meaningfully. They are no longer protocols but ways of doing things to maximize ALL voices. (Secondary principal)**
- **I thought working through the protocols was most helpful. There have been lots of times where I've been planning PD or planning something for a faculty meeting that I've felt like the use of a protocol would help the process. Not having ever been trained on the use/variety of protocols, I was just out of luck. Not anymore! :-) (Elementary principal)**
- **Loved it. Very helpful, especially in identifying the most appropriate protocol. I believe it is a positive way to build trust and safety among your colleagues. Be more collegial than congenial. (Secondary principal)**
- **Being a new principal, it gave me wonderful ideas on how to start my school year and build culture with in my school. Most importantly it gave me a structure to hold professional development in which all involved would have a clear understanding as to "why" we are doing what we are doing. I plan on ensuring that our PD meetings this year are focused and meaningful through the use of protocols and team agreements. (New elementary principal)**
- **The protocols that were presented can be transferred to use with students to broaden their thinking. It also gave me tools to think through challenges and broaden and deepen our thinking as a leadership team and faculty. (New secondary principal)**

Our new superintendent, Dr. Greg Little, has established commitments and expectations for leaders in Lexington One. These commitments include growing, nurturing, and cultivating leadership and creating a culture of collaboration, both of which are supported by our work with Critical Friends Groups. An organization's success lies in the capabilities of its people. The measure of our success will be the quality of the leaders we develop to come together as critical friends and tackle challenging and dynamic issues in education. From here we will grow.

NSRF protocols in the classroom

Discussing democracy with high school students

It seems that the meaning of democracy has become more poignant for all of us since the US presidential election. I find myself in good company with my students as we seek ways to be more involved and to have more voices heard in our government. My reflections on "democracy" as a way of sharing power and giving all participants voice connect directly with how and why I value NSRF protocols and CFG work. In this article, I aim to share how a protocol helped my students discuss their ideas of democracy in a democratic way.

I am fortunate to work at a school founded on democratic principles. However, the power dynamics of any school, dictated by age and adult legal responsibilities, can be difficult to translate to a democratic ideal where all voices are represented equitably.

The tension between the responsibility of our school institution and the individual needs and desires of our students becomes substantial in our high school, where teenagers are ready and willing to take on adult roles, but are often frustrated in their attempts. Reflecting recently on these frustrations led me to create a micro version of a CFG community with some of my students. My goal was to tackle our questions about democracy (on both a grand and a small scale) as we all wrestle with how to make democracy work (both in our country and in our school).

Emily Sprowls, NSRF National Facilitator and CFG Coach at Harmony School. Emily has taught high school science in Indiana and Connecticut for 14 years. Prior to full-time teaching, she worked on curriculum development, teacher training and student assessment with various environmental non-profits in the United States and Latin America. Email her at esprowls@harmonyschool.org.

Democracy at Harmony School

Harmony School, in Bloomington, Indiana, is a small preK-12 independent school with a mission "to prepare young people to live in and contribute to a heterogeneous democratic country." One of the ways we try to accomplish this mission is to model democracy within our school. We also aim to reflect heterogeneity in our student population, with tuition determined by a sliding-scale or payment-in-kind. Students participate in regular meetings with their multi-age classes to make decisions about issues from field trip destinations to what kinds of juice to put in the vending machine. Each grade also has representation in the school-wide Solidarity committee. At the high school level, students elect members of an Advisory committee for academic and social support, and a Student Selection committee for admissions. At the faculty level, teachers use a consensus-based approach to make decisions about issues from the school calendar to allocation of school funds.

Of course, the above description is an over-simplification of messy, complex work of the living democracy at Harmony School. We all struggle with the questions of how much power teachers should have over their students, or over administration, for that matter. For example, students don't get to vote on my curriculum standards or banish all homework. But we teachers do our best to incorporate a lot of choice into our lessons, we individualize many assignments, and we use protocols in our classes to generate feedback and allow for equitable participation.

Modified Microlabs

Since the U.S. elections (both the primary and the general election), Harmony teachers and students have spent a lot more time discussing democracy than in previous years. While national politics may dominate many of the hallway conversations, there is also an underlying question of how our school can meet our mission to prepare our young citizens and future voters. I was eager to use the current teachable moment in our country's history to hear from our students how they understand and relate the political spectacle of our national democracy to our tiny "democratically run" school.

I recruited volunteers from across the high school to participate in a protocol on what democracy means to them. I gathered a group of eight students in our staff lounge for an afternoon and created a micro-scale Critical Friends Group among them. In our two-hour timeframe, we established Group Agreements, ran a modified Microlabs Protocol, debriefed and – of course – had snacks. Participants ranged from 9th-11th grades and included representatives from the various school governance committees, as well as students that had transferred from other schools.

To modify the Microlabs protocol to be more like a group discussion, I did not subdivide the small group into triads. Students shared their responses to the entire group, with the option to pass and a maximum of one minute per response. Most students did not need an entire minute to share the thoughts and ideas they had written during the silent reflection steps. While I was sure to allow a few moments of silence after each person shared, I did not follow the protocol guideline of preserving an entire minute for each student. This could work for a group of up to ten participants. A key aspect to the front-loading of the protocol was to invite students to share only when it was their turn, but to write down all their thoughts, as well as their questions and comments for each other in the small notebooks I provided.

To generate the questions for the different rounds, I followed advice of the Microlabs Example Questions and asked the students first to define the topic, then to describe their experiences with the topic, and last, to share their ideas and suggestions for the future. Because I wanted the participants to reflect on democracy at both the national level, and at the level of our own school, I expanded the protocol to four rounds with four questions. What follows are the questions and my notes of the students' responses.

What does democracy mean to you?

- **Democracy is a type of government in which no one person can overrule.**
- **In a democracy even the lower class can challenge decisions if they engage.**
- **In our country democracy doesn't work, but at our school democracy is 'power to the people.'**
- **Democracy allows people that are closest to the issues have the power to change them, so it can be a practical way to deal with issues.**
- **Democracy means people's choice.**
- **Democracy gives people power to have what they want.**

What roles do schools play in a democracy?

- **Schools should teach ways to be involved in democratic government.**
- **In a working democracy people can choose not to be involved, and**

to trust their peers to represent them and make decisions.

- Schools are pools of unfairness. Schools are set up for poor people to go to poor schools and rich people to go to rich schools, so the poor are not as well educated, so it's harder for them to get into politics. We can't have rich people fixing problems for the poor.
- The educational system is messed up. There are things I didn't know that I didn't know!
- Schools need to teach civics, both how a democracy works and how to participate.
- Everybody should know what's on the United States citizenship exam!
- If you don't know what rights you have, you're not educated enough.
- Maybe there is a conspiracy… I saw a YouTube video about how out of control things would be if teenagers knew their rights!

What works about Harmony School's democracy?

- One thing that works at Harmony is that students have a voice in hiring teachers.
- For example, this afternoon we discussed how to spend extra money from the budget.
- In one of my classes, we list the topics people suggest to discuss and vote on the list.
- Harmony is good at showing people how to care.
- A few years ago there was a sense that the voting system was unfair and we changed the percentages needed for majority.
- This reminds me of the national election where it matters who shows up.
- Harmony is good at including a wide range of age groups to get involved and voice their opinions.
- Our Student Solidarity committee is the only democratic group that I think works and is fair.

What doesn't?

- What doesn't work is that people vote for their friends, and not for somebody that would be good at the job. Voting becomes about popularity and that's frustrating to have an unqualified candidate.
- Some of our rules are confusing and dumb, which is similar to a larger working democracy.
- Our voting system is misrepresentative and statistically flawed when the votes are split among many issues.
- The popularity issue is magnified by being a small school.
- What doesn't work is how problems are handled. There are not enough consequences to stop the same problems from happening over and over.
- Our school doesn't teach how to follow through on issues.
- Some of the same problems happen over and over again (like people talking in class or stealing food from the kitchen) and reminders during our meetings are not enough.

How can our school be more democratic?

- We could change the voting system by ranking candidates or issues.
- We could have different voting processes for different issues or items.
- We need to figure out how to navigate the messiness of democracy. The rules were made by people and can be re-written!

Participants' debrief

- This conversation felt really democratic!
- I liked how there was time for everyone to share and nobody interrupted to argue.
- I was glad to talk about how problems have been handled.
- I liked having the notebook and the time to respond and write, rather than making random comments.

Coach's debrief

Just like many of my Critical Friends Group meetings with my colleagues, this protocol raised more questions for me that it answered! But it also inspired some great ideas and a very rich discussion among the students. I will admit that in coaching my students, it is even harder for me to maintain my facilitator role and not interrupt to participate. It was very tempting to play "teacher" by asking students to elaborate on their answers, but that would have changed the conversation entirely and focused it on what I was interested in discussing, rather than what they had to discuss. While a few kids passed on one or two rounds, they all were very engaged and used their little notebooks to record their thoughts. In fact, they were so engaged that they all ignored the cookies and popcorn till our meeting was over!

Since our meeting, I have had the opportunity to follow up with the participants and hear some elaboration of their thinking, and to encourage them to take steps towards their suggestions for improvement. I am also excited discuss my notes with my own CFG group of Harmony colleagues and to hear their interpretations and ideas for improving the democratic process in our school, and for fulfilling our mission to prepare our students for participation in our governmental democratic process.

Closing

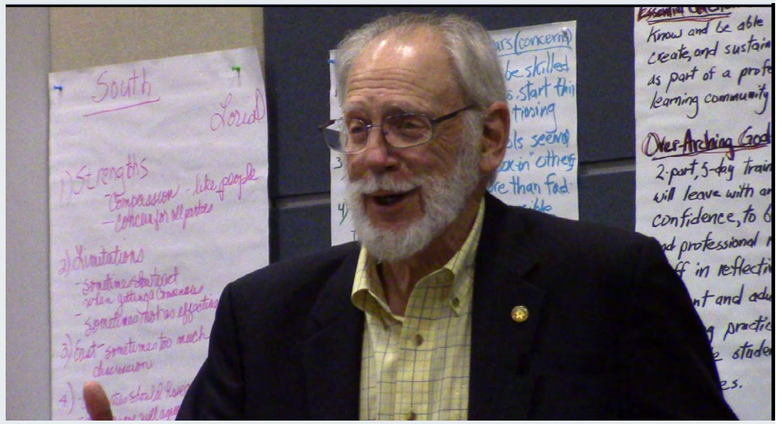
It is both inspiring and humbling to reflect on the ideals and reality of democracy with our next generation of voters. The issues faced by teenagers in a school democracy resonate so strongly with those we face as a democratic nation. As evidenced by the students' comments, those parallels and connections are certainly not lost on them.

It is both inspiring and humbling to reflect on the ideals and reality of democracy with our next generation of voters. The issues faced by teenagers in a school democracy resonate so strongly with those we face as a democratic nation.

As I work on ways to increase my own participation in our national democracy, I am reminded of the importance and value of the work we already do in our classrooms and schools. I find myself even more motivated to use protocols to foster democratic processes and equitable discussions in our little school. The structures and agreements that make CFG communities and protocols work also help us practice democracy. I share my experience and reflections in the hopes that all of us can continue to build our democracy using the tools of NSRF and CFG work, and that you might also share your experiences, too.

Good luck, Dave!

It is with a sad heart that we at the NSRF must say our goodbyes and express our best wishes to Dr. Dave Lehman upon his "retirement" from our organization. This will be Dave's last issue as the contributing editor of ***Connections***.



Dave Lehman on the job as an NSRF National Facilitator

You may not know that Dave has a long history with the NSRF. His school, The Alternative Community School (now called the Lehman Alternative Community School) in Ithaca, NY, was one of the first schools to receive the five-day CFG training. Dave was the founding principal of that school and he gladly supported his teachers in doing the work they all found so valuable. In 2001 he took the five-day CFG Coaches' training himself and became a certified CFG coach. Not long after his retirement from the school, Dave became a National Facilitator for us. From there, he was asked to become the interim director for NSRF during our transition time in 2008, until he handed over the director's baton to Michele Mattoon a year or so later.

Steve "Roc" Bonchek, executive director and co-founder of Harmony says, "Because of my 30-year relationship with Dave I knew he was the perfect person to take over the director role for NSRF when the position opened up in 2008. Based on observing Dave for all those years I knew his thoughtfulness, calm yet strong demeanor, and leadership qualities with colleagues and students were a perfect match for guiding NSRF into its next stage of development. NSRF would not be the strong organization it is today if it was not for Dave. I am forever grateful for Dave's indispensable contributions to NSRF. On a personal level, Dave has provided me with advice and friendship in all sorts of situations. I look forward to continuing to spend time with Dave and his wife Judy for many years to come on new adventures."

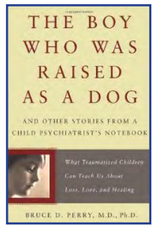
Michele originally met Dave during an NSRF conference. She says, "Dave immediately impressed me as a thoughtful, warm, and caring human being—one that I wanted to connect and collaborate with, as well as learn from. Dave's deep love of learning is apparent to anyone who gets to know him. He strongly believes that every human being on the earth deserves a quality education and, as such, is an untiring advocate for equity, creating activities and protocols to promote equity among professionals and in the classroom."

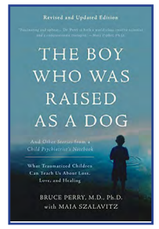
Recently, Dave decided to spend the next phase of his life devoting himself to writing a book and engaging more deeply in political action. We will miss his wise presence at NSRF but understand that the world will be a better place as he connects with many others through these new avenues for his good work. We wish you all the best, Dave, and from the bottom of our hearts, thank you for all your support.

Be well and carry on, Dave!
With warm regards from the NSRF
and Harmony Education Center

Book review by Dave Lehman

The Boy who was Raised as a Dog





The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog and Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love, and Healing
by Bruce Perry and Maia Szalavitz, Basic Books, 2006

Why a review of a child psychiatrist's book for ***Connections***, a journal for educators? Because the ten case studies which Dr. Bruce Perry has chosen to share--although disturbing, some might even say, bizarre--just may be encountered in your school. I suggest that his approach to healing these young people offers valuable insights for all of us to heed, particularly when, as he notes, our child welfare system, social workers, and foster parents are typically overworked and under-trained.

The lead author is an American psychiatrist, currently the Senior Fellow of the ChildTrauma Academy in Houston, Texas and an adjunct professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. Previously he was chief of psychiatry at Texas Children's Hospital, and vice-chairman for research in the department of psychiatry at the Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston, Texas. In a brief "Author's Note" with which he begins this book, Dr. Perry informs readers:

"The sad reality is that these stories are but a tiny percentage of the many we could have told. Over the last ten years our clinical group at the ChildTrauma Academy has treated more than a hundred children who have witnessed the murder of a parent. We have worked with hundreds of children who endured severe early neglect in institutions or at the hands of their parents or guardians."

In the Introduction to ***The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog***, Dr. Perry first notes the overall situation facing children and young people who have experienced horrendous abuse. For example, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) was diagnosed and introduced only recently into psychiatry in 1980. Today it is believed to affect at least 7% of all Americans with an impact that is far greater in children than in adults. While not all children fortunately will ever experience any of these events, approximately 40% of American children will experience at least one traumatizing event by the age of 18, including the death of a sibling or parent, ongoing physical abuse and/or neglect, sexual abuse, a serious accident, natural disaster, domestic violence, or other violent crime. Dr. Perry ends his Introduction noting –

***"The core lessons these children have taught me** are relevant for us all.... In order to appreciate how children heal we need to understand how they learn to love, how they cope with challenge, how stress affects them. And by recognizing the destructive impact that violence and threat can have on the capacity to love and work, we can come to better understand ourselves and to nurture the people in our lives, especially the children."*

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

Here is a brief overview of a sample of 5 of the 10 case studies described in detail in this book. What I found particularly useful are Dr. Perry's discussions of his own thinking, his reasoning and unique approaches to healing these individual young people, beginning with deep listening, and often with the littlest children, simply getting down on the floor and quietly coloring. (1) Tina – Dr. Perry changes the names of each of these children – was sexually abused from the age of 4 to age 6 by the 16-year-old brother of her babysitter. (2) Leon, was 16 and in a maximum-security prison for having sadistically murdered two teenage girls, and then raped their dead bodies. He was diagnosed a "classic sociopath" with ASPD (Antisocial Personality Disorder), with Autism, and suffered from early childhood parental neglect. Here Dr. Perry was called upon to determine Leon's mental capacity to know what he had done in order to determine an appropriate sentence. (3) Three-year-old Sandy was being called by an attorney from the Public Guardian's office in Cook County, Illinois to testify about the murder of her mother. This case led Dr. Perry into a deeper understanding of the effects of trauma on the brain, particularly "sensitization," "tolerance," and "dissociation." (4) A fourth case involved 21 children, specifically those who were released and survived the Waco, Texas Branch Davidian compound and their cult leader David Koresh. Readers may recall this tragic situation in February of 1993 involving the FBI and BATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms) and firearms violations. This experience led Dr. Perry to form one of his major conclusions about healing traumatized children:

***"Relationships matter:** the currency for systemic change was trust, and trust comes through forming healthy working relationships.... The seeds of a new way of working with traumatized children were sown in the ashes of Waco."*

For those of us who are teachers and/or administrators working in schools, whether public or private, alternative, charter, STEM, or whatever, relationships are indeed key, and creating the conditions in which every child, every student, has at least one meaningful relationship with a caring adult is absolutely essential. As Dr. Perry puts it – "People, not programs, change people." (5) The fifth case is about Jason, who is 7 yet socially still a toddler. Dr. Perry presents this case to illustrate the importance of peers in the healing process, stating, *"while we realized that ongoing relationships are critical to healing, we hadn't yet fully understood **how important peer relationships, are**, especially as children get older."*

> *"People, not programs, change people."*

In his closing chapter, "Healing Communities," Dr. Perry notes the dramatic changes that have occurred in the caring for our children, particularly in this country. For example, countless generations of humans initially lived in small groups of 40 to 150 people, most of whom were closely related to each other and lived in community. As late as the 1500s the average European family consisted of about 20 people whose lives were intimately connected on a daily basis. By the mid-18th century this number was 10 living in close proximity, and by 1960 the number in this country was 5! By 2000, the average size of a household was less than 4, and 26% of Americans live alone. Other changes he notes include – in 1905 only 1% suffered depression, by 1955 it increased to 6%, and in 1955 teen depressions have increased by a factor of 10! Dr. Perry states, "The disconnect between what we need in order to be mentally healthy and what the modern world offers can also be seen in the constant unease felt by parents – about the internet, the media, drugs, violent predators, pedophiles, economic inequality, and above all, the values of our culture that shape our responses to these issues."

I'll close this brief review, by first urging all of you readers who work in schools to read this book, and secondly, quoting this summary from Dr. Perry in the closing chapter –

*".... my experience as well a the research suggests that the most important healing experiences in the lives of traumatized children do not occur in therapy itself. Trauma and our responses to it cannot be understood outside the context of human relationships. Whether people survived an earthquake or have been repeatedly sexually abused, what matters most is how those experiences affect their relationships – to their loved ones, to themselves, and to the world. **The most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections. This is especially true for children.** Being harmed by the people who are supposed to love you, being abandoned by them, being robbed of the one-to-one relationships that allow you to feel safe and valued to become humane – these are profoundly destructive experiences. Because humans are inescapably social beings, the worst catastrophes that can befall us inevitably involve relational loss.*

*"As a result, recovery from trauma and neglect is also all about relationships – rebuilding trust, regaining confidence, returning to a sense of security and reconnecting to love. Of course, medications can help relieve symptoms and talking to a therapist can be incredibly useful. But **healing and recovery are impossible** – even with the best medications and therapy in the world – **without lasting, caring connections to other."***

That's a message which all educators and all parent/caregivers I think need to hear in this day and age of an over emphasis on academic learning, the common core, and the loss of time for our children and youth to play, to be creative, to simply sit quietly, to turn off the TV, put away the "smart" phones, and to even dare to touch each other, to give hugs, and simply listen!

LINKS

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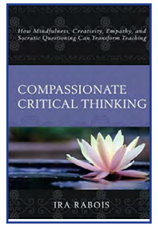
Second book review by Dave Lehman

Compassionate Critical Thinking



Compassionate Critical Thinking: How Mindfulness, Creativity, Empathy, and Socratic Questioning Can Transform Teaching by Ira Rabois
Rowan and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2016

In the beginning of this book, various people were asked by the publisher to review this book and offered their comments. I'll share mine here as Rabois was a fellow teacher at the Lehman Alternative Community School in Ithaca, New York –

"Ira Rabois – a 21st century renaissance man – has taught karate, philosophy, psychology, English, Social Studies, and drama to secondary school students for over three decades. Drawing on this wealth of experience – and using illustrative vignettes of his students' voices – he takes us on a journey, showing how he has combined mindfulness meditation creativity, empathy, and Socratic questioning to engage young people in a rich, collaborative learning process he calls ***Compassionate Critical Thinking****."*

In the preface, Rabois offers the following summarizing description – "Compassionate critical thinking is reason deepened by empathy and by valuing the welfare of the countless others who inhabit the world with us." He then describes in greater detail the purpose of the book:

"The purpose of this book is to show you how to run your intentions and goals into a classroom culture of compassionate critical thinking. It is intended for anyone who seeks ways to become more compassionate on a personal level and on a professional level to integrate mindfulness into your classroom regardless of subject area. It demonstrates how a teacher who uses compassionate critical thinking can transform student learning. Mindfulness can help students feel at home in your course, feel more comfortable with you as a teacher and with other students. It can help you motivate students and engage the critical thinking process.

Over the years, this instructional method was applied across a variety of subject areas – English, philosophy, history, drama, karate, and psychology classes. It was developed in a school where teachers were given space to create a curriculum that fit the specific educational needs and interests of students."

Ira Rabois in his home office. Photo courtesy Kathy Norris, from the author's website.

The book includes 24 sample "lessons" and is divided into five chapters, each ending with footnotes to the references used: chapter 1) guides the practice – teaching, benefits, and application of mindfulness; 2) is about knowing yourself and how your brain and emotions structure experience; 3) the emotions of anger, suffering, fear, joy, anxiety, worry, and greed, and how they are constructed; 4) compassion, empathy, and love, and how they are constructed; and 5) spells out the natural process of compassionate critical thinking - *"building on the previous four chapters that illustrate the process in classroom vignettes, it includes discussions on dialectical questioning, the nature of truth, as well as how mindfulness develops a quiet, self-aware mind that makes effective self-reflection possible."* Thus, it is really a "how-to" book full of tips directed to the teacher with sample discussions from students throughout.

In the opening chapter, "Begin with Mindfulness," Rabois notes the importance of how the classroom is physically set-up with artwork, quotes written on the chalkboard, tables and chairs arranged in a hollow square, rectangle, or circle so students can see each other, with calming music playing in the background [he suggests flute music and lists several artists in his footnotes]. He then provides journals for students to write their own personal reflections throughout the upcoming classes, and asks students to answer the following questions – *"What do you want to learn from this class? What are your questions? List things you want me to know about you so I can better help you learn."* Rabois follows this beginning to the initial class meeting. (Following a simplified method of the NSRF Setting Agreements Activity) Rabois discusses with the class these key questions about how the class will be run: *"Can you agree to not tell anyone outside this class that x said y? You can share the material, but no naming; everyone agree? Secondly, you must do the work. I will always show up ready to learn and teach. You need to do whatever you can."*

For each class session there are selected readings - photocopied sections from a variety of books from leading authors dealing with compassion, critical thinking, and mindfulness – and each class includes six basic types of practice:

"1) ***Mindfulness as open, receptive awareness:*** *settling and noticing breath (e.g. deep or shallow, long or short) and sensation (e.g. hot, cold, tense, relaxed), feeling (e.g. like, dislike, no preference), thoughts and images, and what you establish and discern is true.*

2) ***Concentration:*** *focusing exclusively and pointedly on one object, for example, on the point where air enters the nose, or on an image, or counting breaths.*

3) ***Visualization:*** *progressive relaxation and imaginative journeying (e.g. to a time in history or a place where you feel safe).*

4) ***Inquiry:*** *after settling the body and mind, introduce a word or topic for the students to explore (e.g. courage, freedom, love, or power).*

5) ***Compassion and empathy;*** *for example, visualizing caring for and understanding the emotions of another person. This allows you to view others and the world more clearly and from different perspectives.*

6) ***Group dialogue and questioning:*** *use conversation as an opportunity to practice mindfulness with others as well as to increase attention and develop insight."*

The classes begin with a mindfulness meditation practice to use with students, including sample prompts, questions, suggestions for teachers, and "text boxes" with samples of the actual discussion and comments of students in dialogue with the teacher. They all begin with an invitation to students to sit comfortably, to close their eyes fully or partially, and tune into their breathing. For the sixth part of the class session – group dialogue and questioning – there are suggested directions to teachers with sample questions to ask students. For example, for "Lesson Nine: The Emotion Areas of the Brain and How to Pay Attention," Part of the directions to the teacher that Rabois offers include these –

"The topics for today are the emotional areas of the brain, attention, and mindfulness. Ask students: 'Does emotion influence how you look at something: And if so, how?' That is the central question.

"Name different ways you can be attentive or look at someone or something?" 'Think of the difference between a pitcher looking at a batter, a child looking at his mother, or a person looking spaced out.'

"Listen for student responses.

"Mindfulness is the education of attention. There are actually three aspects of attention:

What you attend to.

How you attend. *This is about the quality of attention.*

The intensity of attention. *High intensity with excitement and engagement or low intensity with disinterest and boredom.'"*

The last classroom session is Lesson Twenty-Four: The Role of Self-Reflection in Compassionate Critical Thinking, and includes a writing meditation using the technique of "proprioceptive writing."

"Proprio means 'your own,' ception is 'sensing yourself in space and time.' In this case, you use writing to sense your inner orientation. Play music in the background to set off this moment 'as a time and place in which to establish intimacy with yourself.' The teachers of this technique recommend Bach and other Baroque music [and a lighted candle], as research indicates it assists thinking…. The object of the exercise is write what you hear and listen to your mind speak. Don't force anything. If you think there is something you 'should' be writing – put the "should" on the page. Treat anything said or felt as material to record."

Rabois ends this amazing little book with a two-page conclusion from which I offer the following summarizing quotes [bold are my own for emphasis] –

*"****One gift*** *that a teacher brings to students (and vice versa) is the mere fact of companionship; you live the school year together…. You become* ***family*** *for a time. What kind of family will you be? What kind of person will you be as a teacher?…. The more you use mindfulness, the better you hear what students have to say, the better they hear you.* ***Feeling*** *is not secondary to academics but* ***at the heart*** *of it…. The class is a* ***refuge*** *for students and an example of what is possible in life…. The process of compassionate critical thinking is critical thinking, questioning, and solving problems with added benefits. It is a process that integrates how to live and accept yourself and all aspects of your life…. You teach students not only what the world is but how to break out of conditioned limits and realize what is possible.* ***Now that is a fulfilling life."***

LINKS

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NSRF is a non-profit, professional development initiative focusing on increasing student achievement through a particular type of professional learning community called Critical Friends Group communities. NSRF trains and certifies educators as CFG coaches, teaching protocols and activities to facilitate meaningful and efficient communication, problem solving, and learning.

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