

professional experience to this book along with a personal deep understanding of children and youth and the complexities of learning and teaching. I find myself referring back to sections of this book frequently, seeking to grasp even more deeply the wisdom contained therein. I recommend it most highly to

teachers of children and youth of all ages and backgrounds.

\* You might want to read his Fall 2006 "Ask the Cognitive Scientist" column in the American Educator, entitled "'Brain-Based' Learning: More Fiction than Fact" for his critique of the current rage of selling teachers products

based on what he considers highly questionable references to supposed research in neuroscience.

Questions/Comments? Email [davelehman@mac.com](mailto:davelehman@mac.com)

## ASK THE DIRECTOR



Dear NSRF,

Money is tight these days, and we are really trying to get more bang out of our professional development buck. In addition, it's very hard to ask our teachers to leave their classrooms (or give up their vacation time) for more than a couple of days. We are very interested in CFG training and in light of these constraints, are wondering, 'Can you train our staff to be CFG coaches in less than 5 days?'

Director: In short--no. I believe the whole 5 days of New Coaches Critical Friends Group Training is, well, critical. We will set up a training session with any school for any number of days, but we do make it clear that unless it's five days of training, it is not a New Coaches Training and that participants will not be CFG coaches at the end of their experience. Very briefly, my agendas tend to be set up in this manner:

- The first day is used to lay a foundation of safety and trust. Participants learn what a protocol is and experience a few to get the feel of the structure. We spend time discussing and experiencing the importance of reflection and debriefing.
- The second day really begins to get at the crux of CFGs. We have activities such as the Zones of Safety, Risk and Danger and How to Give and Receive Feedback. We jump in with protocols designed to examine and give feedback on adult and student work. We talk about why equity is an important part of our work. Participants begin to practice facilitation.
- The third day is what I call "The Day of Dilemmas". We have everyone bring in a professional dilemma and run through protocols, such as Consultancy and Issaquah. Other protocols are also introduced.

- The fourth day—practice, practice, practice. This is an entire day of participants presenting, facilitating and participating in protocols.
- The fifth day features planning. How are you going to introduce, create and sustain CFGs at your school?

During those five days, we all go through a great learning journey together. Bonds are formed, skills are learned and the excitement of possibilities takes over the group. Without any one of these days, I believe that journey would falter through lack of preparation, acquisition of skills and vital insights about our profession, our students, ourselves.

What do you think? I invite all coaches and facilitators to respond to this question and email it to us at [nsrf@nsrfharmony.org](mailto:nsrf@nsrfharmony.org). We'll feature some of your answers in the next "Connections". Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director, [Michele@nsrfharmony.org](mailto:Michele@nsrfharmony.org)

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## "EFFICIENT AND COLLEGIAL MODES OF COMMUNICATION"

BY NED IDE, ENGLISH TEACHER AND COORDINATOR OF FACULTY DEVELOPMENT TEAMS, THE HILL SCHOOL, POTTSTOWN PA

About two hours into what would be five days and thirty hours of Critical Friends training, I felt a lingering fear – if we didn't get off on the right foot, this was going to be a long walk. Indeed, the stakes were high. We had literally just finished the academic year. We all teach at the same private, secondary, residential school where we all also live. We were excused from two days of faculty meetings to participate in on-site Critical Friends training; we were *not* excused from family time, end-of-year advisee letters and academic comments. I felt the tension. We liked the idea a lot in February. June sounded like 2018.

By the third hour, we stood together in a quickly constructed "danger zone" on my classroom floor. Michele, our coach, had created a series of concentric circles out of masking tape. We dipped our professional and personal toes in and out of various scenarios that had the potential to cause anxiety or fear within each of us. In one 20 minute session, I learned more about friends and colleagues with whom I had worked than I had in a decade. Fears allayed. The tension melted away; we rolled up our sleeves for a week of enriching, meaningful professional development.

In this training, simple protocols like "danger zones" (it

likely has a less threatening title, but I cannot remember) translate into efficient, collegial modes of communication. The early protocols - essentially day one - reconnect teachers as human beings. By sharing fears and celebrating good professional work, teachers are reminded that we are in the ultimate human endeavor. Through modeling, Critical Friends coaching trains teachers to listen. Constructive listening, in my opinion, is the hallmark of efficient, collegial modes of communication. Ground rules called *agreements* reminded us that if we were each responsible for the collective good of the order.