

August 2011

CONNECTIONS

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM FACULTY



National
School
Reform
Faculty

www.nsrffharmony.org

Welcome to the new format of Connections! In this edition, you will notice offerings in these new categories:

- "From our Members"—A story from a new CFG coach, fresh from his 5-day training session
- A Book Review
- An Abstract of an "Article of Interest", as well as an article about an artist with a unique collaboration technique of this own.
- The first question for "Ask the Director"
- Upcoming Events
- Training Opportunities

We would like to hear from you—our experts in the field who do the work everyday! Please contact us at nsrf@nsrfharmony.org if you:

- have a question about any aspect of NSRF
- would like to write up an experience you had as a coach, facilitator or member of a CFG Group
- wrote an article you would like to share
- created a new protocol

Thanks and enjoy the rest of your summer,

Michele Mattoon
NSRF Director

BOOK REVIEW: WHY DON'T STUDENTS LIKE SCHOOL? BY DANIEL WILLINGHAM

"A COGNITIVE SCIENTIST ANSWERS QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THE MIND WORKS AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE CLASSROOM."

REVIEW BY DAVE LEHMAN, CONNECTIONS EDITOR, NATIONAL FACILITATOR

Check out our new

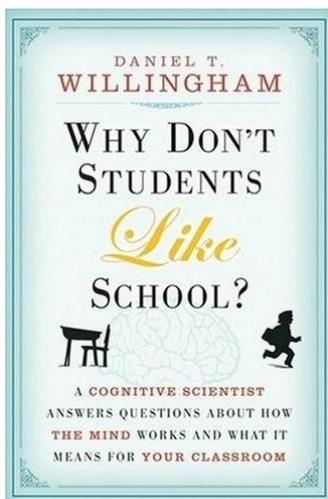
[FaceBook page](#) to make sure you are up to date on all NSRF events! We also posted photos from the New CFG Coaches training this month!

[Register](#) for your spot for the first three days of a New Coaches training October 10-12!

Inside this Issue:

- ❖ Book Review: Why don't Students Like School? Pages 1-4
- ❖ Ask The Director Pages 4-5
- ❖ Article: Efficient and Collegial Modes of Communication Pages 5-6
- ❖ Critical Friendship Circles: The Cultural Challenges of Cool Feedback Pages 6-7
- ❖ A Friend of the NSRF: Joe LaMantia – Collaborative Artist Pages 7-8
- ❖ Recent Photos Page 9

Daniel Willingham is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville and writes the “Ask the Cognitive Scientist” column for the *American Educator*, the journal of AFT (American Federation of Teachers). [Why Don't Students Like School](#) is an excellent resource for the classroom teacher involving nine “principles” that are “...so fundamental to the mind's operation that they do not change as circumstances change [e.g. the laboratory or classroom]” and have direct implications for classroom practices. Referring to the brain as three pounds of a mass of cells similar to oatmeal, Willingham uses illustrations and examples from classroom teachers along with a clever sense of humor.



The first eight principles are about the “minds of students” and include statements that

may seem obvious to the experienced teacher, such as:

- *Principle #1 – “People are naturally curious, but they are not naturally good thinkers.”*
- *Principle #2 – “Factual knowledge precedes skill.”*
- *Principle #5 – “Proficiency requires practice.”*
- *Principle #7 – “Children are more alike than different in terms of learning.”*

Willingham then includes descriptors of the “required knowledge about students,” in the form of key questions, and the “most important classroom implication” with various examples and an expanded discussion for each of these in the first eight chapters. For example, for Principle #4, “We understand things in the context of things we already know” [prior knowledge], Willingham describes the “required knowledge” with the question, “What do students already know that will be a toehold on understanding this new material?”. He goes on to “classroom implications” with “Always make deep knowledge your goal, spoken and unspoken, but recognize that shallow knowledge will come first.” In the “Conclusion” chapter, he offers these in a summary table, noting that these nine

principles were selected based on the following four criteria:

- 1) each of these is true all of the time, whether in the laboratory or the classroom, and alone or in a group; they’re always applicable;
- 2) each is based on a great deal of research and data, not just on one or two studies;
- 3) ignoring any one of these principles can have a sizable negative impact on student learning; and
- 4) they all had to be clear as to what someone would know to do with the principle.

You may also discover things about which you will be challenged to think differently. For example Willingham’s critique of Howard Gardner’s “multiple intelligences” in chapter 7, “How Should I Adjust My Teaching for Different Types of Learners?,” which he begins with the Seventh Principle, “Children are more alike than different in terms of how they think and learn.” Here he offers the observation and caution that “Teachers interact with each student differently, just as they interact with friends differently; but teachers should be aware that, as far as scientists have been able to determine, there are not categorically different types of learners.” (such as Gardner’s supposed eight intelligences). After discussing

this thoroughly, he provides four specific suggestions for the classroom teacher, and concludes this chapter with the following sage advice:

*“If you felt nagging guilt that you have not evaluated each of your students to assess their cognitive style, or if you think you know what their styles are and have not adjusted your teaching to them – don’t worry about it. There is no reason to think that doing so will help. And if you were thinking of buying a book or inviting someone in for a professional development session on one of these topics, I advise you to save your money.”***

In the ninth chapter, “What About My Mind?” [the mind of the teacher], Willingham focuses on the teacher with the Ninth Principle, “Teaching, like any complex cognitive skill, must be practiced to be improved.” He then goes on to describe what I believe is one of the most valuable parts of the book; his method for teachers to give and get feedback about their teaching. This is a five-step process that requires teachers to work with a buddy, a teacher colleague with whom one can seek and give feedback on each other’s teaching. He also notes the

following essential caution and how to address it:

“...you should recognize that working on your teaching will be a threat to your ego. Teaching is very personal, so taking a close look at it (and inviting one or more other people to do the same) is scary. It’s a good idea not to shrug off that concern (“I can take it!”), but instead to put measures in place to deal with it.”

He then goes on to describe his five steps with a useful discussion of each:

- *“Step 1: Identify Another Teacher (or Two) with Whom You Would Like to Work*
- *Step 2: Tape Yourself and Watch the Tapes Alone*
- *Step 3: With Your Partner, Watch Tapes of Other Teachers*
- *Step 4 : With Your Partner, Watch and Comment on Each Other’s Tapes*
- *Step 5: Bring It Back to the Classroom and Follow Up”*

Willingham puts these steps into three key elements or components of practice: getting useful feedback from colleagues, trying out other classroom practices that can improve one’s teaching, and “consciously trying to improve your teaching,” (noting that this latter component may seem obvious but is more

difficult than it sounds). And here he offers specific suggestions, then concludes this crucial chapter with three “smaller steps”: keeping a diary, starting a discussion group with fellow teachers [perhaps a “PLC,” professional learning community or “CFG”!], and observing, observing, observing. This includes not only teachers in classrooms, but youngsters (in

“...you should recognize that working on your teaching will be a threat to your ego...”

the age group one teaches), in other places- the park, the food court at the mall, on the athletic field, on stage, etc. He points out:

“You’ll notice more subtle cues about social interactions, aspects of personality, and how students think. Allow yourself the time and space simply to observe, and you will see remarkable things.”

Daniel Willingham is not only a highly knowledgeable psychology professor and cognitive scientist, but also a parent (a father of a special needs child). He brings his

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

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.