

August 2011

CONNECTIONS

NATIONAL SCHOOL REFORM FACULTY



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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

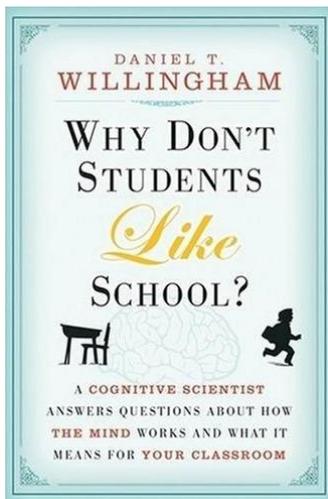
[FaceBook page](#) to make sure you are up to date on all NSRF events! We also posted photos from the New CFG Coaches training this month!

[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
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- ❖ 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.

- 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. We'll feature some of your answers in the next "Connections". Michele Mattoon, NSRF Director, Michele@nsrfharmony.org

"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.

The irony at a school like ours – traditional, communal, and prescriptive – is that we *assume* peer-to-peer professional development. Yet, we are likely more isolated *from* one another precisely because we live, work, and play *with* one another. Our professional modes of communication can be circumvented by the time and lifestyle constraints inherent in boarding school cultures. Inviting NSRF and Critical Friends to the school represented an acknowledgement of a cultural paradox in all boarding schools that alienates its faculty members from professional intimacy. Boarding school faculty can easily fall into this trap. At The Hill School, we had acknowledged this dilemma four years ago, but we floundered with an approach to breaking down barriers and building up professional alliances. Critical Friends training has likely given us the template we were only able to previously intuit. By day three of the training, seven

us knew that the responsibility of creating a culture of peer-assisted professional development would be ours. Michele would be leaving in two days. We braced ourselves for some culminating protocols on day four – we knew we'd have to make a plan for our future on day five.

Moving and looking forward are two very different realities. With the help of Critical Friends training, our team looked at the start of the school year in September as the jumping off point for a pilot program of volunteers. Critical Friends teams at The Hill School will be comprised of volunteers. Next, we looked closely at how to spend the “coin of the realm” – time. Again, it's probable that time issues are similar in nature at all boarding schools. This is where moving forward takes on new meaning. We are planning to ask for “imbedded,” scheduled academic and co-curricular time to meet in teams of 8-12 for a

total of twenty-five hours over the course of the year. We plan to host a luncheon during the first week of faculty meetings that will help us gauge interest. From there, we'll follow an action plan we created on day five, replete with a list of concerns and agreements. We expect, now, that with an actionable plan, time and willing “friends”, that professional development is no longer an assumption.

Armed with a menu of protocols and the empiricism of their efficacy, our small team is prepared to spread the collegiality and communication NSRF and Critical Friends coaches so deftly instill during training. There will be danger zones. We're getting better at navigating them.

Questions/Comments?
Email NIde@thehill.org

**ARTICLE EXCERPT:
“CRITICAL
FRIENDSHIP
CIRCLES: THE
CULTURAL
CHALLENGE OF**

**COOL FEEDBACK.” BY
PHYLLIS WACHOB**

Phyllis Wachob is an Assistant Professor at the American University in Cairo who teaches in the MA TESOL program. Her interests are in the field of Teaching Methodology, Curriculum

Development, Critical Pedagogy, Motivation and Community Based Learning. She has published in the TESOL Quarterly, TESL Reporter and is the Chief Editor of the online AUC TESOL Journal.

Critical Friendship Groups (CFGs) or circles (CFCs) are groups of critical friends who meet for feedback on practice. Typically a protocol is used to minimize confusion and conflict and maximize time use and useful focused feedback. Although the concept of Critical Friendship has a history of over 30 years in the field of education, the idea of critical Friends (CFs) is not as widespread in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). A longitudinal grounded theory study that uses reflective essays, focus groups, and transcripts of CFC meetings as data was carried out at an

American university in Egypt using 95 participants in an MATESOL program. Four important theoretical categories were revealed: cultural intolerance to open negativity, fear and/or rejection of giving or receiving cool feedback, uncertainty about and neglect of the use of protocols and appropriate language as well as usefulness in terms of personal and professional growth.

The first important issue for the success of CFCs in this non-Western cultural context was metacognitive understanding of the differences in cultural orientation towards cool and challenging feedback. Teachers needed to understand their own cultural orientations, those of their

fellow teachers and how this affected their fears, usages of protocols and ultimate goals. The second important issue was training in language use. Second language users needed guidance with protocols and what pragmatic use of language was needed for successful CFC meetings. While almost all participants in the research project agreed on the usefulness of CFCs, many found immense challenges due to culture, especially in the phase of cool feedback.

Wachob, P. (2011). Critical Friendship Circles: the cultural challenge of cool feedback. *Professional Development in Education*, 37:3, 353-372.

Questions/Comments? Email pwachob@aucegypt.edu

A FRIEND OF THE NSRF: “COLLABORATIVE ART, EMPOWERING EDUCATION” By Laura Bryant about Collaborative Artist Joe LaMantia, Bloomington IN

Visual artists work in all kinds of media. Community artist Joe LaMantia uses many media in his

work, too, but his primary medium by far is people.

“My artistic vision is about the process,” says LaMantia, who has been leading collaborative, community-based public art projects since 1993. Over the last two decades, he has worked on more than 100 school-based projects, primarily in Indiana.

LaMantia's method is holistic and all-inclusive. Unlike artists who may come to a project with preconceived designs to be executed, LaMantia starts by meeting with students, parents, and school personnel to gather ideas and inspiration. When he's collected a range of ideas, he designs the project with the aid of a core group representing the school community. “The end result is a creative process that empowers each individual with a sense of being part of the work of art,” he says.

Through pitch-in lunches, community suppers, class meetings, and other conversations, LaMantia's projects proceed from design to creation to installation. The end results are unusual public art works uniquely related to a school's history, students, or curriculum. For example:

The Villagers' Bell Tower at Glens Valley Elementary School, Indianapolis IN.

This 32-foot tower pays homage to the original school and bell tower created by villagers in the Glens Valley area during the 1800s. The open, four-sided tower features 80 flat bells, showcasing student paintings on both sides that reflect specific learning and curriculum themes. The poles of the tower are recycled utility poles donated and put in place by Indianapolis Power & Light Company (IPL).



“Aristicat” at Fairview

Elementary. Fairview, in Bloomington, Indiana, recently adopted the Artful Learning model, a national school reform model orchestrated by the Leonard Bernstein Center. Appropriately, LaMantia led the creation of an artful, all-steel Fairview wildcat mascot. Through

community planning sessions facilitated by LaMantia, the concept of the cat sculpture was inspired by several students drawings and created in part from pieces of the original 1950s-era Fairview building. Aristicat's eyes are lights from the old entry area, its nose comes from the door to the old coal room, and its mouth is cut from the fire escape slide. All of the school's students painted distinctive spots on the cat with their handprints.

LaMantia, whose own children attended Fairview, notes that the project was truly a school-community collaboration involving more than 30 businesses, school staff, and other community members who donated time, materials, equipment, and expertise.

Tag!, at the the Twin Lakes Recreation Center. Working together, LaMantia and students from Edgewood High School in Ellettsville, Indiana, filled the large façade of Bloomington's Twin Lakes Recreation Center with art. The students implemented their designs by applying colored vinyl to large pieces of flexible magnetic material. The final 6 ft. x 7 ft. designs were attached to the front of the center, arranged around the metal façade's central hexagonal window. The

artwork featured a mathematical compass, a double helix, and a pencil. "Each piece is a symbolic representation of subject matter important to the students involved," LaMantia says. Creating the artwork also taught the students a lot about the process of design, according to LaMantia. "The students had to revise and retool to get things to work," he says. "This project taught a lot about things such as the use of scale and negative space."

LaMantia notes that his school projects function as centers of learning, attracting ideas from different disciplines and subject areas "like scraps of metal drawn to a magnet." For example, he says, math is often used when creating public art projects. "By approaching the project from a variety of disciplines and subject areas, the students become aware of the connective nature of learning," he says.

For a collaborative community artist like Joe LaMantia, making connections is the key to true art. "To me, it's all about the experience, it's all about the stories and the discoveries that the people involved make over the course of a project. They start looking at life differently, and I think transformation is what we're all

about as human beings.”

In the end, he says, “how public art comes to be is as important as what it is.”

To learn more about Joe LaMantia and his work, visit www.lamantiastudio.com

or contact LaMantia at joe@lamantiastudio.com or (812) 320-9138



LaMantia working on “Aristicat” with a Fairfield Elementary Student



“Aristicat” at Fairview Elementary Bloomington, Indiana

“...the concept of the cat sculpture was inspired by several students drawings and created in part from pieces of the original 1950s-era Fairview building...”



Attendees of the Open New CFG Coaches training July 11-15th participate in the text and Issaquah protocols.

