From the Assistant Director's Blog

How jargon affects learning and relationships

As someone who's not working in the classroom or in school administration, I have to admit that I find education jargon overwhelming. But I suspect that may be true even for some of you who ARE working in schools, right? There's always something new, and lots of things that more experienced educators knew about from five or twenty years ago that the newer people don't know.

And even NSRF jargon like "Critical Friends Group" and "protocols" (words familiar to most readers of Connections but not necessarily to your colleagues) can be problematic for a number of reasons. (See sidebar on page 11.)

Of course, jargon is very helpful "shorthand." (Do younger people even recognize that term? And hey, that's jargon, too, since that secretarial note-taking method has not been taught since handheld audio recorders became readily available to the public).

Let me rephrase: whenever we use a term, an abbreviation, or acronym that signifies a larger concept or a plan or system, the use assumes that others who read or hear that term have the same definition of those words that we do.

When I'm driving my teenage sons around town, they're often chatting about electronic games. It sounds like a foreign language to me, but they perfectly understand one another when they use words like "wavedash," "L-cancel," and "chain grab." Even when they try to explain the game to me, there are so many layers of jargon -- related to how handheld game controllers work, strategy, scoring points, and so much more -- it takes them a long time to translate a small portion of what they know so I can understand. And it's not just teenagers. Recently I heard a friend experience the same confusion when her fifth grader was telling her about Minecraft, a computer game that's popular with elementary students to adults.

My husband, an IT professional (translation: he consults with organizations to guide them in their computer and other technology use) remarked recently that the use of jargon is a powerful tool for creating "us and them" thinking, sometimes intentionally. Those who understand all the terms easily can feel superior to anyone who gets lost in their acronyms or jargon. I don't think my teenagers are purposefully trying to make me feel stupid, but because so many "computer geeks" already are often considered inferior by those outside the profession (consider the commonly-used "geeks" reference itself), they can be especially proud of using language that non-computer folk find unintelligible, tit for tat.

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There's another point. As editor of a publication that includes a number of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) readers, I also realize that phrases such as "tit for tat" do not translate well and cause confusion. Although it's not jargon but American colloquialism, I leave the phrase here to make my point (and I will explain that the phrase means "an equivalent action taken in response to an originating action"). If your classroom, meeting, or written audience includes non-native English speakers, try to remember them and avoid words that will make them stop to try to understand. (I remember in an open training when several people were totally confused by the term "piggyback" but didn't want to interrupt the conversation so they could understand.)

In my other role as the curator of a TEDx event (TEDx = a locally organized version of the popular TED Conferences), I work hard to help speakers remove as much jargon from their talks as possible. TEDx audiences are dramatically different and more diverse than our speakers' familiar audiences at conferences or within their own industry. While a TEDx audience tends to be more educated than the general public, they also have broad knowledge in most fields and deeper knowledge in one or more fields specific to each individual. So great talks do not necessarily need to have elementary-grade vocabulary levels, but I seek a balance that treats the audience with the respect they deserve while not making too many assumptions.

Similarly, in my undergraduate journalism classes, we were taught to write to a sixth-grade vocabulary level unless the publication for which we were writing has a more specific, more highly educated readership, such as ***The Atlantic*** magazine or the ***Christian Science Monitor***.

Many of these details are logical

and perhaps much too basic for me to be telling educators. I suspect that most K-12 educators understand these ideas within the context of their classrooms But I wonder if it would be helpful, with your colleagues, to occasionally inquire about everyone's understanding of "commonly-held" jargon or acronyms within your school. Especially when you're working with dilemmas, discussing a new initiative among peers (or a topic specific to your school with new hires), it may be helpful to try a quick Affinity Map protocol or Chalk Talk to reveal similarities and differences in perspectives before beginning. It's important to make sure everyone is "on the same page*" before accidentally "leaving someone out in the cold**" because they either do not understand the jargon being used, or they have a different understanding of the definition.

And in future posts, I intend to use fewer colloquialisms, or at least to remember to explain them when I do.

(*On the same page = in agreement, and **Out in the cold = ignored or neglected)

For more on eliminating jargon, watch this 5-minute TED Talk on the topic!

"Critical Friends Group, CFG, and protocols," oh my!

First, consider the words themselves "Critical Friends Group" -- how many of you cringed at the idea of voluntarily becoming a part of a group with "critical" in the name? (And how many others of you cringed at the word "friends"?) As someone who comes to this work from a different perspective, the marketing professional inside my brain totally cringes at some of the wording choices made 20+ years ago, although I'm happy that we have the phrase trademarked, at least, and so we can define exactly what it means and try to insure that it's always used that way.

But even though we at NSRF think we've defined our terms clearly in our materials and, more importantly, in our Critical Friends Group Coaches' Trainings, we're learning that not everyone has absorbed the meaning we intend.

For instance, some people think CFG work is solely about NSRF protocol use, and some even equate the two. But our protocols are simply communications tools which can be used in many settings, and CFG work uses those tools toward much more important ends: improving adult learning and student achievement, and often, improving school culture. Of course we want everyone to use our tools with fidelity, and for our more complicated tools to be used by people with the training to use them properly. But when our protocols are used in a specific order, in a group that is dedicated toward meeting regularly to pursue learning and professional growth, that's a much bigger and more powerful proposition.

Some people apparently think that the point of being in a CFG community is to develop ease with our protocols. That's not it, either, although we do want coaches to be transparent in their facilitation so that they can eventually trade-off leading protocols with others in their group.

And of course people who've never experienced the power of a well-run CFG community have entirely different imaginings about what happens in those meetings. When you're a new coach, especially a single or one of a very small group of newly trained coaches within a school, these assumptions about the work can be challenging to overcome to get the ball running.

Then there's the word "protocol," which has its own baggage in the field of education. If you're in a school where people hear the word "protocol" and cover their ears because they've had bad experiences with protocols in the past, then you are entirely free to avoid the word. You do not need to hit people over the head with NSRF jargon, especially if you're hoping to launch CFG work! When using a protocol for the first time with a group of peers, you may introduce the idea by saying "I want to try something new with this meeting, by structuring it in a different way. Will you go along with these instructions, and then we can decide at the end if the structure helped?"

So, please, if there are any terms that we use at NSRF which do not feel entirely clear to you, or if you'd like some help with "translating" this work to peers who have not taken coaches' training with you, do not hesitate to ask. We're always fine-tuning our own language and our own work product, whether we're using a Tuning Protocol every time or not. ~ by Luci Englert McKean

NSRF
National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

Connections

2016-17, Issue 2

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And more, including details on upcoming CFG coaches' and administrators' trainings!

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

Looking ahead to 2017: a new year and a new era

Perspectives from NSRF Director and International Facilitator Michele Mattoon

"Public schools can train us for conversations across divisions of race, class, religion, and ideology. It is often in the clash of irreconcilable ideas that we can learn how to test or revise ideas, or invent new ones." — Deborah Meier, ***The Power of Their Ideas***

Here in the United States, we will soon have a president in charge that will take a very different path when it comes to education than our current president. For example, while campaigning, president-elect Donald Trump talked about eliminating the Department of Education if he were to be elected. While it's doubtful that he would be able to accomplish this in a four-year term, there is no doubt that he will strongly advocate for "school choice" in all fifty states. His choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, is a big believer in for-profit education and a champion of school vouchers. She advocates school choice with little or no oversight or regulation.

No matter what changes lie in our future, be assured that NSRF will remain true to our mission (see below).

I'm proud to say that NSRF will continue to work for all educators in the service of improving the learning experience for all our children. We work with faculty, administrators, coaches, and other staff in schools. We have trained parents and board members. We work with schools that serve early childhood through high school students, as well as those in higher education institutions. For over twenty years we have worked with public, charter, independent, faith-based, and international schools serving students that are diverse in countless ways. We look forward to continuing this practice in 2017 and beyond.

NSRF strongly believes that ALL children deserve an education of the highest quality and that we educators can continuously improve our teaching practices by working together in democratic learning communities. Public schools give students an appreciation of democratic values and help students from all walks of life understand what

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The National School Reform Faculty® empowers educators to create meaningful learning experiences ***for all,*** *by collaborating effectively in reflective,* ***democratic*** *communities that foster* ***educational equity and social justice.***
(Emphasis mine.)

we, as Americans, have in common. We believe that public schools must also equip each student with the skills to become productive members of society. Public schools serve a function that many independent and charter schools cannot. Their purpose is to serve every child in their district, no matter their family's economic status, race, culture, religion, or politics. Public schools are tasked with serving ALL children no matter how great or small their needs, gifts, or talents.

As a facilitator for NSRF, I have led trainings not only in public schools, but also for many independent and charter schools who intentionally work to make their student body diverse and to focus on equity. However, by their very nature, the student body of public schools reflect the population of their community. Inner city and rural schools do not have the power to turn away students for any reason. The longstanding mission of public education in the United States contributes to social change and progress.

Of course, not all public schools are ideal. Many public schools struggle to meet the needs of their students for a myriad of reasons. However, American citizens must not ever stop supporting public schools and lose this safety net of learning and social justice for all our children. If "school choice" means defunding public schools, how great can America really be?

A large focus of NSRF is to promote equity of voice, so all people in every Critical Friends Group community and all participants in an NSRF protocol feel welcomed and heard. We promote diversity, as it allows all members of a group to see issues with new eyes, to come up with innovative solutions, and to promote a broader overall perspective. CFG work is about building community by effectively collaborating together. This requires participants to take risks. And if people are taking risks, they must have trust in the good intentions of one another. We educators must trust that our colleagues respect us and our work, that they believe that we have all our students' best interests at heart, that we genuinely want to improve so that we can provide quality education for every single one of them. Always.

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

From the research desk

Managing student anxiety and fear in the post-election period

Resources to help address racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia

*Perspectives from NSRF National Facilitator and **Connections** Consulting Editor Dave Lehman*

Following the recent United States presidential election, school teachers, principals, and superintendents from around the country are confronting increasingly volatile and challenging school environments, having to manage everything from anxiety and fear to derogatory language and acts of blatant bias. Many students — especially immigrants, LGBTQ, Muslim, and African-Americans, particularly K-12, but even on college and university campuses — have been targeted in and out of school. (Note: To the degree that similar harassment has occurred to those supporting the president-elect, these resources also may be useful.) We at ***Connections*** wanted to highlight six resources we found particularly helpful in addressing these issues.

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

1) In less than one week, the Southern Poverty Law Center tallied over 400 incidents of "hateful intimidation and harassment," showing that millions of American now fear becoming victims of verbal and physical assault. In an article by Elizabeth Svoboda in the December issue of YES magazine (reprinted from the Greater Good Science Center of the University of California at Berkeley website), she offered eight strategies for addressing these situations we find helpful:

Educate yourself – Don't just assume you'll know what to do, seek out information online about "Overcoming bystander effect," or consider taking some real life training in intervention strategies.

Be the first to speak – when you speak out addressing a social injustice happening in front of you, it helps others to join you

Practice being conspicuous – to defend someone who's being threatened, you have to be willing to heed your own conscience, and resisting social pressure takes serious guts

Ask for help when you need it – if the danger level seems too high for you to act alone, call the police or fire department or others nearby to help you rather than doing nothing

Find a heroic role model – don't confine your role model to someone from the history books; look to the selfless people in your own circle of friends and acquaintances

Make connections with people different from you – interacting with a wide range of people on a human level can help ensure future injustices never come to be; if someone makes a bigoted remark, calling that person out – telling them you won't stand for it – may be the highest form of love you can demonstrate

Ask people what they really need – when attackers are targeting people of a particular skin color or creed, you have a responsibility to intervene

Press the mental pause button – when you are in a hurry to get somewhere, or when multiple people are watching a dire situation unfold, you may be less likely to help; this "bystander effect" is rotted in our human ten-

dency to assume someone else will act; instead, pause, take a moment to reflect before acting mindlessly or making an impulsive decision

YES magazine is a valuable source of examples of ways people are responding positively to various social justice issues.

TEACHING TOLERANCE
A PROJECT OF THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER

2) Teaching Tolerance is a periodical and a website, and a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center mentioned above. In an article by Maureen Costello entitled "Administrators, Are You Ready?" from 14 November 2016, she offers these suggestions to school administrators:

Set the tone – many principals and superintendents have sent letters to parent/caregivers and/or staff with a message affirming the school or district's values, setting expectations about inclusion and respect, explaining their vision for the school community. Tthe author has a link to such a letter from Boston's school superintendent Tommy Chang. Another sample letter from the "What Kids Can Do" website offers a similar example letter from principal Alex Bergren of Princess Anne Middle School in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Take care of the wounded – as mentioned above, many students are profoundly upset and worried – e.g. am I going to be sent back to Mexico?; are we all going to be put in a concentration camp like the Japanese-Americans? – let your school community know that you have a plan and the necessary resources to provide for the needs of these students

Double-down on anti-bullying strategies – encourage everyone in the school community to be aware of bullying, harassment and bias in all their current forms, remind them of the school's written policy (hopefully you have one!), and set the expectation that your staff be ready to act, to be an ally, not a bystander

Encourage courage – it's particularly important that staff and students know that you expect them to speak up when they see or hear something that denigrates any member of the school community

Be ready for a crisis – the news and social media are overflowing with posts about ugly bias incidents – and even hate crimes – in our schools; when an incident happens you may not have time to learn how to manage it; you need to be prepared. We encourage you to download their free 44-page manual, Responding to Hate and Bias at School. The document is divided into 3 sections – before a crisis occurs, when there's a crisis, and after the worst is over

3) Teaching a People's History is a Zinn Education Project (named after the historian, Howard Zinn) which offers a number of "Lessons and Resources" for "Teaching After the Election of Trump." These are organized into the following 10 categories of different teacher materials about historical events relevant to today's situation, involving role play activities, articles, books, posters, films, and pictures:

Strides Against All Odds – "Southern Tenant Farmers' Union: Black and White Unite?;" "Warriors Don't Cry: Connecting History, Literature, and Our Lives;" " 'What We Want, What We Believe': Teaching with the Black Panthers' Ten Point Program;" "Women in Labor History;" "Pump Up the Blowouts: Reflections on the 40th Anniversary of the Chicano/a School Blowouts;" "When We Fight We Win!: Twenty-First-Century Social Movements and the Activists That Are Transforming Our World"

Roll Back Racial and Economic Progress – "Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)," Burned Out of Homes and History: Unearthing the Silenced Voices of the Tulsa Race Riot;" "Ethnic Studies Banned in Tucson;" Why We Should Teach About the FBI's War on the Civil Right Movement"

"Divide and Conquer" Politics – "The Color Line;" "It's a Mystery – White Workers Against Black Workers;" " The Draft Riot Mystery"

Environment – "Don't Take Our Voices Away': A Role Play on the indigenous Peoples' Global Summit on Climate Change;" " Dirty Oil and Shovel-Ready Jobs: A Role Play on Tar Sands and the Keystone XL Pipeline;" "A People's Curriculum for the Earth: Teaching Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis"

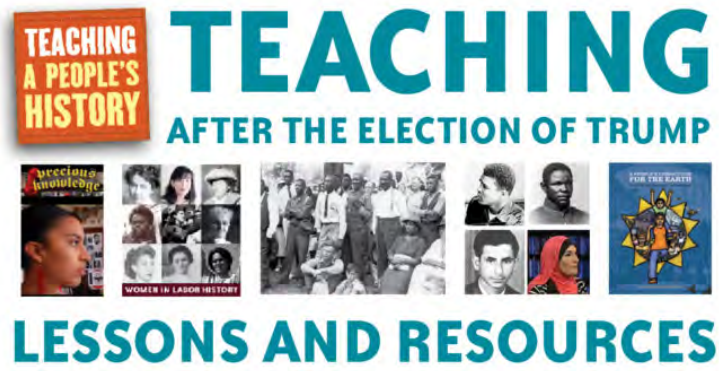
Civil Liberties – "The Voting rights Act: Ten Things You Should Know;" "Learning About the Unfairgrounds: A 4th Grade Teacher Introduces Her Students to Executive Order 9066"

Immigration – "The Line Between Us: Teaching About the Border and Mexican Immigration

Economic Inequality – "Who Made the New Deal?"

Muslims – A Peoples History of Muslims in the United States"

Press – "News for all the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media"



Teaching About U.S. Presidents – "The Election of 1860 Role Play;" Missing from Presidents' Day: The People They Enslaved;" "Andrew Jackson Revisited"

TEACHING FOR CHANGE
Building Social Justice Starting in the Classroom

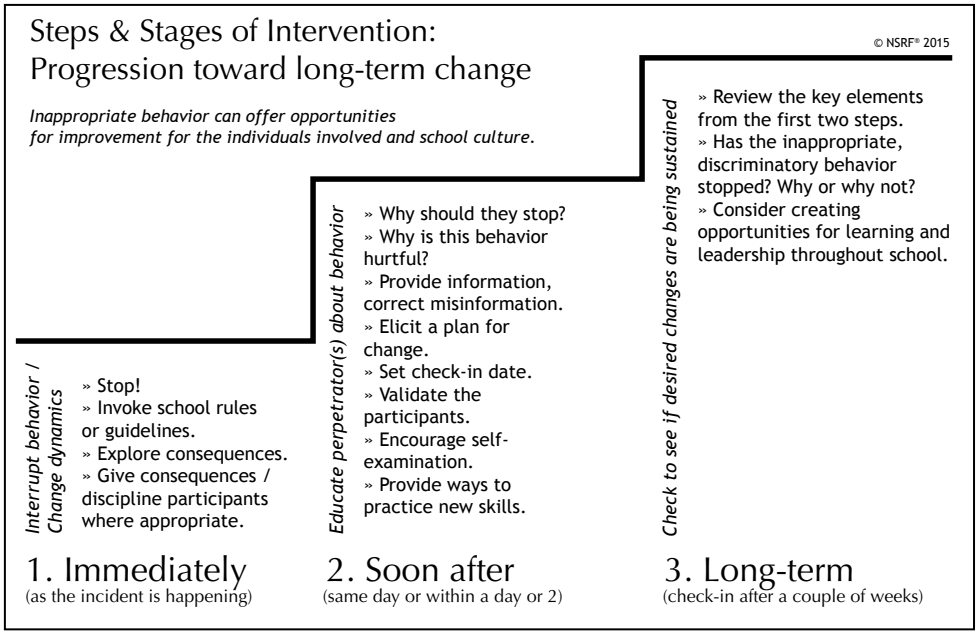
4) Teaching for Change: Building Social Justice Starting in the Classroom has a wonderful new resource for working with Hispanic parent/caregivers – "Post-Election, School Collaborates with Parents to Create Safe Space." The morning after the election, Principal Alethea Bustillo of the Bruce-Monroe at Parkview Elementary School - a Teaching for Change partner school in the Washington D.C. public school system serving mostly Latino/a and African American families in one of D.C.'s most racially and economically diverse neighborhoods – arrived to a school full of distraught staff and worried students. The next evening Bustillo and key staff met for the monthly Parent-Principal Chit Chat, and with facilitation from Teaching for Change followed this agenda:

- Welcome
- Ice Breaker – community-building activity
- Principal and school announcements
- Parent reactions to the election — On note cards, parents wrote their feelings, concerns, and hopes following the election, and/or any thoughts on how the school can be supportive to their family; these note cards were then put in a pile on chart paper in the middle of the circle in which they were sitting; the responses were mixed up and staff began reading them aloud in English and Spanish.
- Student reactions to the election — On separate note cards, parents shared what they would like the school to know about how their children were reacting following the election: there was not time to read all of these, so Principal Bustillo asked if she could share these at the next staff meeting.
- Parent responses, then students responses were read out loud.
- Principal response
- Student affirmations — parents wrote positive notes and words of affirmations for students (to be displayed); one by one the parents stood in the center of the circle and spoke their words of affirmation to the children.
- Closing

5) Project Look Sharp is a media literacy initiative of Ithaca College and provides free lesson plans, media materials, and support for the effective integration of media literacy with critical thinking into classroom curricula at all education levels, including integration with the new common core standards. The following are units from their larger kits that address the current post-election issues:

This link includes resources involving teacher's guides, articles, posters, video clips, etc. dealing with President-Elect Trump's Policies, including "Concerning National Security," "Appealing for Racial Justice," and regarding the Trump Fear Factor, "Campaigning Leading to Fear"

And this link offers these 5 units – "Unit 4: Black Freedom/Civil Rights," "Unit 5: Women's Liberation," "Unit 6: Immigration Rights," "Unit 7: Gay Liberation," and "Unit 8: Prison Justice"



6) Recently I've written a series of activities to use with school staff in "Addressing Inequities" within their school settings. Part of this is an "Interventions Handout" which is comprised of a simple graphic of "Steps and Stages of Intervention: Progression toward long-term change." I include this here as it is aimed at providing a simple tool for school staff — whether teachers, aides, principal, or others — to use in the classroom, hallway, cafeteria, auditorium, school events, etc. **The most important thing is that students know that racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, or any other form of bias or prejudice, is not acceptable, won't be tolerated, and will be addressed.**

Are you ready to:

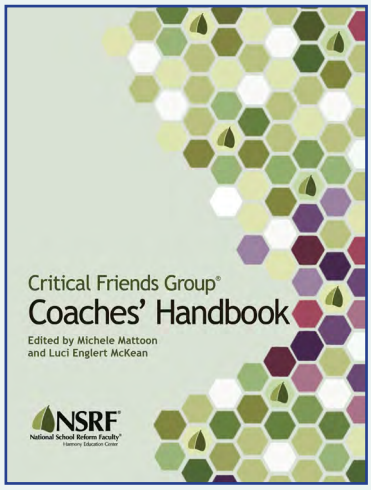
- sharpen your facilitation skills,
- improve your practice,
- build collaboration and trust among your colleagues,
- work on your own professional dilemmas and pieces of work, and
- help your organization improve student achievement?

Certified Critical Friends Group® coaches facilitate and support their peers and students through CFG work.

(Check out training options here and on the next page)

Individuals and very small groups should select one of our "open" training options across the country. In one of these groups, you'll collaborate with a broad variety of educators from all sorts of educational organizations throughout the world. The range of participants bring greater depth and different perspectives to the work you'll bring to the training, helping you find new solutions and support.

If you have 10 or more colleagues to train, we can save you money by bringing an NSRF National Facilitator to you with on-site trainings. To get a jump-start on cultural change in your school or district and want to train a "critical mass" of CFG coaches at once, contact us soon — our summer booking already.



NSRF trainings now use the updated, member-only protocols in the Critical Friends Group Coaches' Handbook! This book is only available within a CFG coaches' training, or may be purchased by NSRF-certified CFG coaches (must provide documentation of certification).

Rave reviews from participants about CFG coaches' training:

"Best PD EVER!"

~ A new coach in North Carolina

"I'd been using NSRF protocols for years and even wrote about them in grad school, but ***I had no idea how well they worked*** *until I learned the nuances of protocol facilitation in training."*

~ A CFG Coach in Connecticut

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

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

~ A new coach in Michigan

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*(*open to any individual or small group)*

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To enroll or learn more, click through to the NSRF Upcoming Events page or call 812-330-2702.

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Protocols in the classroom

The Power of Agreements

by CFG Coach and NSRF National Facilitator in Wisconsin. Missy Bousley mbousley@southerndoor.k12.wi.us

NSRF National Facilitator and CFG Coach Missy Bousley has been the district reading specialist, title I coordinator and instructional coach at Southern Door County School District in Brussels, Wisconsin for the past ten years. She loves the impact she has on students and staff in grades K-12. She can be reached at mbousley@southerndoor.k12.wi.us.

Last summer our school offered a two-week English credit recovery class for eligible high schoolers. In collaboration with a high school certified English teacher, I was able to bring my CFG knowledge to this course to model new strategies, building trust with students who needed to feel success. We had an opportunity to create a special environment focused on engagement and respect. Rather than using the Setting Agreements activity, we chose to use an Affinity Mapping Protocol to accomplish the same function.

Students were asked to reflect on the question, "In order for you to be fully successful in this course, what do you need both as a student and as a learner?" The students responded openly and honestly, resulting in the agreements listed in the sidebar.

The chosen agreements did not surprise the adults in the room but the students' powerful reaction to this opportunity was a bit of a surprise. Notably, when later in the course each student submitted their "Advice to a Teacher," many reflected the value in having created agreements. The honesty with which they wrote continues to astound me: one student wrote, "Give the students a voice. Make agreements in the classroom so everyone in the room can feel comfortable.... If you make mutual agreements that everyone agrees on, there would be less classroom disturbances, more peaceful work environment, less arguments, and more things will be accomplished. Many students don't get a say in their classes because the teachers already have a bunch of rules for that class. And students hate that."

This student concurred, "Another piece of advice for teachers is student voice. Yes, teachers are head of the classroom and make sure rules are being enforced and students are properly learning. Still the students should be allowed to help make agreements (rules) that everyone can agree on. ...Students would overall be more successful in the classroom."

A third student added, "Within this class we made agreements that I liked rather than getting a list of rules the teacher sets. Agreements let the student be heard, but the teacher can still set some of the basics and eliminate the agreements that are far-fetched. Allowing a student to have their own choice makes them want to learn rather than them not doing the work for something the teacher assigned."

Another student wrote, "One thing that ALL teachers should consider is doing agreements. The agreements are way better than doing rules. Kids do not follow rules but if all the teachers made agreements the kids would follow them because there are consequences and kids will feel that they have a say in what the agreements are and they will likely follow them."

After this summer course, a second year English Language Arts teacher shared, "When Missy introduced the agreements idea for our Workshop II class, I was excited. This protocol added structure to the kind of best practice I learned in college. When talking about classroom management and expectations, the ideal goal was for our students to play an internal role in this process; this would give students authentic ownership of their classroom and the behaviors in it. The agreements protocol allowed my students to come by these things naturally, without leading the discussion in a way that makes students feel as if there are right and wrong answers. I will use this protocol in the future with new classes as the new standard for establishing classroom environment and expectations."

I learned that using agreements with high schoolers will create the same shift that typically happens on day three of Critical Friends Group Coaches' Training — the point at which everyone "gets it" not just intellectually but emotionally. Trust does not simply arise by accident in any group, whether it's a classroom or adults learning within professional development. Setting agreements is one key to building trust, driving engagement and mutual respect. When a CFG coach or a classroom teacher provides structure that creates shared ownership and trust, high schoolers, like adults, can and will "show up" ready to tackle their work effectively.

- Consider appropriate sound level for each activity
- Respect each other's thoughts and opinions--be school-appropriate
- Complete all tasks constructively
- Be attentive
- High school expectations not college
- Silence is golden while reading
- Be on time, start on time, end on time
- Clean up your space
- Equity exists

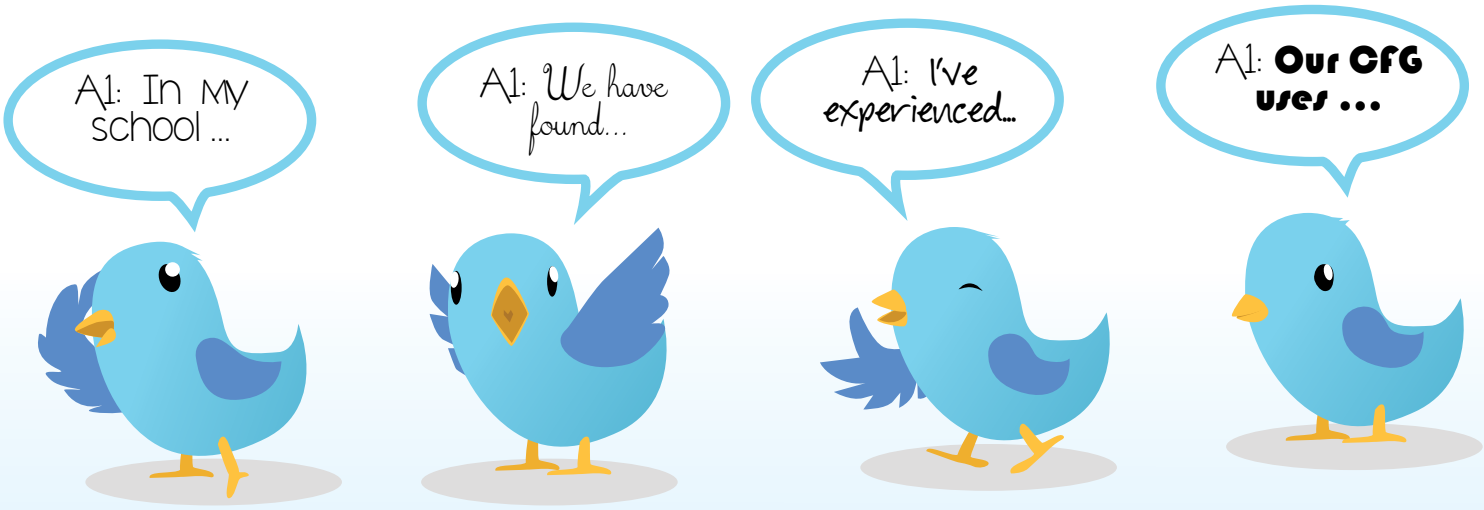
Tweet with us!

Follow @TheNSRF on Twitter Set an alarm Jan 4, 9pm EST

Watch for #CFGchat Led by NSRF National Facilitator Dr. Kevin Mabie

Think about **Creating Shared Voice**

Q1: What elements of a collaborative discussion are most important in generating shared voice?
Q2: When closed-mindedness exists, what actions can make collaborative discussion possible?
Q3: Is there a person in your school who values all voices? How does he or she make this obvious?
Q4: What is your favorite CFG Protocol for generating shared voice? Why?



New collaboration tool available for purchase via NSRF website

Collaborative Cue Cards assist participants engaged in CFG work with several key skills, adding to the efficiency and effectiveness of the NSRF protocols. The color-coded cards are intended for CFG school facilitators/coaches to use and reuse in meetings. Each card provides easily accessible descriptions and multiple stems for creating clarifying and probing questions, paraphrasing, and warm and cool feedback. Designed and tested for several years by NSRF International Facilitator Dave Nelson, these durable, 8.5" x 5.5" plastic cards are available in packets of 12 or 15, packaged in two variations of carrying cases.

Collaborative Cue Cards, 12-pack $33
Collaborative Cue Cards, 15-pack $36
Collaborative Cue Cards, 15-pack Deluxe Case $44.50

From the Assistant Director's Blog

How jargon affects learning and relationships

As someone who's not working in the classroom or in school administration, I have to admit that I find education jargon overwhelming. But I suspect that may be true even for some of you who ARE working in schools, right? There's always something new, and lots of things that more experienced educators knew about from five or twenty years ago that the newer people don't know.

And even NSRF jargon like "Critical Friends Group" and "protocols" (words familiar to most readers of Connections but not necessarily to your colleagues) can be problematic for a number of reasons. (See sidebar on page 11.)

Of course, jargon is very helpful "shorthand." (Do younger people even recognize that term? And hey, that's jargon, too, since that secretarial note-taking method has not been taught since handheld audio recorders became readily available to the public).

Let me rephrase: whenever we use a term, an abbreviation, or acronym that signifies a larger concept or a plan or system, the use assumes that others who read or hear that term have the same definition of those words that we do.

When I'm driving my teenage sons around town, they're often chatting about electronic games. It sounds like a foreign language to me, but they perfectly understand one another when they use words like "wavedash," "L-cancel," and "chain grab." Even when they try to explain the game to me, there are so many layers of jargon -- related to how handheld game controllers work, strategy, scoring points, and so much more -- it takes them a long time to translate a small portion of what they know so I can understand. And it's not just teenagers. Recently I heard a friend experience the same confusion when her fifth grader was telling her about Minecraft, a computer game that's popular with elementary students to adults.

My husband, an IT professional (translation: he consults with organizations to guide them in their computer and other technology use) remarked recently that the use of jargon is a powerful tool for creating "us and them" thinking, sometimes intentionally. Those who understand all the terms easily can feel superior to anyone who gets lost in their acronyms or jargon. I don't think my teenagers are purposefully trying to make me feel stupid, but because so many "computer geeks" already are often considered inferior by those outside the profession (consider the commonly-used "geeks" reference itself), they can be especially proud of using language that non-computer folk find unintelligible, tit for tat.

Luci Englert McKean is the Assistant Director of the NSRF, Managing Editor of Connections, an NSRF National Facilitator, and CFG Coach. Prior to joining NSRF, she curated three TEDxBloomington conferences and had a full career in marketing and copywriting. Email her at luci@nsrfharmony.org.

There's another point. As editor of a publication that includes a number of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) readers, I also realize that phrases such as "tit for tat" do not translate well and cause confusion. Although it's not jargon but American colloquialism, I leave the phrase here to make my point (and I will explain that the phrase means "an equivalent action taken in response to an originating action"). If your classroom, meeting, or written audience includes non-native English speakers, try to remember them and avoid words that will make them stop to try to understand. (I remember in an open training when several people were totally confused by the term "piggyback" but didn't want to interrupt the conversation so they could understand.)

In my other role as the curator of a TEDx event (TEDx = a locally organized version of the popular TED Conferences), I work hard to help speakers remove as much jargon from their talks as possible. TEDx audiences are dramatically different and more diverse than our speakers' familiar audiences at conferences or within their own industry. While a TEDx audience tends to be more educated than the general public, they also have broad knowledge in most fields and deeper knowledge in one or more fields specific to each individual. So great talks do not necessarily need to have elementary-grade vocabulary levels, but I seek a balance that treats the audience with the respect they deserve while not making too many assumptions.

Similarly, in my undergraduate journalism classes, we were taught to write to a sixth-grade vocabulary level unless the publication for which we were writing has a more specific, more highly educated readership, such as ***The Atlantic*** magazine or the ***Christian Science Monitor***.

Many of these details are logical

and perhaps much too basic for me to be telling educators. I suspect that most K-12 educators understand these ideas within the context of their classrooms But I wonder if it would be helpful, with your colleagues, to occasionally inquire about everyone's understanding of "commonly-held" jargon or acronyms within your school. Especially when you're working with dilemmas, discussing a new initiative among peers (or a topic specific to your school with new hires), it may be helpful to try a quick Affinity Map protocol or Chalk Talk to reveal similarities and differences in perspectives before beginning. It's important to make sure everyone is "on the same page*" before accidentally "leaving someone out in the cold**" because they either do not understand the jargon being used, or they have a different understanding of the definition.

And in future posts, I intend to use fewer colloquialisms, or at least to remember to explain them when I do.

(*On the same page = in agreement, and **Out in the cold = ignored or neglected)

For more on eliminating jargon, watch this 5-minute TED Talk on the topic!

"Critical Friends Group, CFG, and protocols," oh my!

First, consider the words themselves "Critical Friends Group" -- how many of you cringed at the idea of voluntarily becoming a part of a group with "critical" in the name? (And how many others of you cringed at the word "friends"?) As someone who comes to this work from a different perspective, the marketing professional inside my brain totally cringes at some of the wording choices made 20+ years ago, although I'm happy that we have the phrase trademarked, at least, and so we can define exactly what it means and try to insure that it's always used that way.

But even though we at NSRF think we've defined our terms clearly in our materials and, more importantly, in our Critical Friends Group Coaches' Trainings, we're learning that not everyone has absorbed the meaning we intend.

For instance, some people think CFG work is solely about NSRF protocol use, and some even equate the two. But our protocols are simply communications tools which can be used in many settings, and CFG work uses those tools toward much more important ends: improving adult learning and student achievement, and often, improving school culture. Of course we want everyone to use our tools with fidelity, and for our more complicated tools to be used by people with the training to use them properly. But when our protocols are used in a specific order, in a group that is dedicated toward meeting regularly to pursue learning and professional growth, that's a much bigger and more powerful proposition.

Some people apparently think that the point of being in a CFG community is to develop ease with our protocols. That's not it, either, although we do want coaches to be transparent in their facilitation so that they can eventually trade-off leading protocols with others in their group.

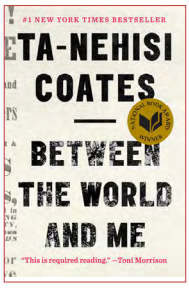
And of course people who've never experienced the power of a well-run CFG community have entirely different imaginings about what happens in those meetings. When you're a new coach, especially a single or one of a very small group of newly trained coaches within a school, these assumptions about the work can be challenging to overcome to get the ball running.

Then there's the word "protocol," which has its own baggage in the field of education. If you're in a school where people hear the word "protocol" and cover their ears because they've had bad experiences with protocols in the past, then you are entirely free to avoid the word. You do not need to hit people over the head with NSRF jargon, especially if you're hoping to launch CFG work! When using a protocol for the first time with a group of peers, you may introduce the idea by saying "I want to try something new with this meeting, by structuring it in a different way. Will you go along with these instructions, and then we can decide at the end if the structure helped?"

So, please, if there are any terms that we use at NSRF which do not feel entirely clear to you, or if you'd like some help with "translating" this work to peers who have not taken coaches' training with you, do not hesitate to ask. We're always fine-tuning our own language and our own work product, whether we're using a Tuning Protocol every time or not. ~ by Luci Englert McKean

Book review by Dave Lehman

Between the World and Me



Between The World and Me
by Ta-Nehisi Coates
New York: Random House, 2015

Editor's note: Links to Amazon have been replaced with links to Smile.Amazon.com, which donates a portion of your purchases to a non-profit organization you select. If you have not already set up your Amazon Smile account and would like to support the NSRF, please select Harmony School Corporation, the parent company of the NSRF. Purchases through Smile are not more expensive than other Amazon purchases, but the pennies donated by Amazon to our organization for each of your purchases eventually add up! Every time you purchase through Smile.Amazon, no matter what you buy, your beneficiary earns a few pennies. Thank you.

Earlier photo of Coates and his son, from the book.

Ta-Nehisi Coates is a national correspondent for ***The Atlantic*** and the author of the memoir ***The Beautiful Struggle.*** He lives in New York City with his wife and son. ***Between the World and Me*** is a letter to his adolescent son, answering these questions:

What is it like to inhabit a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history and free ourselves from its burden?

In the frontspiece, "fraught history" is described as *"the idea of 'race,' a falsehood that damages us all but falls most heavily on the bodies of black women and men — bodies exploited through slavery and segregation, and, today, threatened, locked up, and murdered out of all proportion."* This is a provocative, deeply personal, autobiography, in which Coates continually refers to the "Dream," with a capital "D;" the American Dream of the white middle class which he experiences as out of reach for a Black man like himself as well as his son. On the back cover of this New York Times Best Seller and National Book Award Winner, the African-American author, Toni Morrison says,

"The language of ***Between the World and Me****, like Coates's journey, is visceral, eloquent, and beautifully redemptive. And its examination of the hazards and hopes of black male life is as profound as it is revelatory. This is required reading."*

Indeed this is required reading, particularly for us educators.

In the first half of his book, Coates takes us back to his own childhood experiences, growing up in the inner-city of Baltimore, Maryland. *"To be black in the Baltimore of my youth was to be naked before the elements of the world, before all the guns, fists, knives, crack, rape, and disease."* He continues — remember he's writing to his young son — *"And now, in your time, the law has become an excuse for stopping and frisking you, which is to say, for furthering the assault on your body."* Coates has a great deal to say about schools and education, revealing:

"The streets were not my only problem. If the streets shackled my right leg, the schools shackled my left. Fail to comprehend the streets and you gave up your body now. But fail to comprehend the schools and you gave up your body later.... the laws of the schools were aimed at something distant and vague. What did it mean to, as our elders told us, 'grow up and be somebody.' And what precisely did this have to do with an education rendered as rote discipline? .... When our elders presented school to us, they did not present it as a place of high learning but as a means of escape from death and penal warehousing. Fully

60 percent of all young black men who drop out of high school will go to jail. This should disgrace the country. ….Schools did not reveal truths, they concealed them."

Coates tells us of his deep appreciations attending Howard University, which he calls "The Mecca," virtually living at Moorland library, consuming everything he can find on African-American history. He begins writing, becomes a journalist, falls in love, and at 24 he and his wife have a child, yet never married. *"Your mother and I knew too many people who'd married and abandoned each other for less. The truth of us was always that you were our ring."* They name the child Samori after Samori Toure who struggled against French colonizers for the right to his own black body, later dying in captivity.

Coates drops out of school, but continues writing. Then he has a traumatic experience when a friend from Howard University is gunned-down by a Prince George's County policeman who mistakes him for a known drug dealer. Coates was angry that the policeman was not charged with murder [the sought-for suspect was 5'4" and 250 lbs, while Coates' friend was 6'4" and 211 lbs.]. Coates returns to this story often in the rest of the book. Perhaps its because he wants his son to

"…. understand, no matter the point of our talk, that I didn't always have things, but I had people – I always had people. I had a mother and father who I would match against any other. I had a brother who looked out for me all through college. I had The Mecca that directed me. I had friends who would leap in front of a bus for me."

Coates concludes this powerful little book with the following major concerns, well demonstrating his gift of writing:

"Once the Dream's parameters were caged by technology and the limits of horsepower and wind. But the Dreamers have improved themselves, and the damming of seas for voltage, the extraction of coal, the transmuting of oil into food, have enabled an expansion in plunder with no known precedent. And this revolution has freed the Dreamers to plunder not just the bodies of humans but the body of the Earth itself…. Something more awful than all our African ancestors is rising with the seas. The two phenomena are known to each other. It was the cotton that passed through our chained hands that inaugurated this age. It is the flight from us that sent them sprawling into the subdivided woods. And the methods of transport through these new subdivisions, across the sprawl, is the automobile, the noose around the neck of the earth, and ultimately the Dreamers themselves.

"I do not believe that we can stop them, Samori, because they must ultimately stop themselves. And I urge you to struggle. Struggle for the memory of your ancestors. Struggle for wisdom. Struggle for the warmth of The Mecca. Struggle for your grandmother and grandfather, for your name. But do not struggle for the Dreamers. Hope for them."

So perhaps, the Dreamers just might "stop themselves" and the destruction of the environment, and join with all people, all humanity, regardless of the falsehood of race, to live out another Dream, the Dream of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

More current photo of Coates and his son, from the book.

Editor's note: I asked Dave to review this book after I listened to the audiobook, read by the author. I savored this book even as it broke my heart over and over again, and also bought the Kindle version to re-read more carefully. Although I had to pause often to allow myself time to absorb the author's reality, I could not stop reading the book for long. I have been recommending it to all of my friends. ~ Luci

LINKS

Add NSRF/Harmony School Corporation as your beneficiary at http://smile.Amazon.com

Purchase Between The World and Me, available in hardback, paperback, large print, Kindle, Audible, and audiobook CD formats: Via Amazon Smile

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

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

Shout-out to researchers

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

Now and then, we hear from someone seeking published research on the efficacy of Critical Friends Group work, or the use of protocols in the classrooms. We're happy to share research we have on file, but realize that most of it is rather dated. We expect some of you can point us to fresher research.

If you know of any studies we should know about, too, please contact luci@nsrfharmony.org. Thanks so much!

Earn a year's membership AND see YOUR ideas, research, and work in Connections!

We're always interested in improving this publication.

Article submissions must be directly related to Critical Friends Group work and/or NSRF protocols, or reviews of organizations or media that closely align with the NSRF mission. We welcome submissions discussing protocol use in classrooms and in other settings in and outside of CFG community meetings, including non-education settings. If you're unsure whether the idea you have for an article meets this guideline, email luci@nsrfharmony.org describing what you'd like to write about, and we can discuss it. Article length vary from a few hundred words to two or three thousand.

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http://www.twitter.com/TheNSRF (Watch for our upcoming #CFGchat conversations!)

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

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