NSRF
National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

Connections

November 2015

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And more!

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

In memorium of all lives lost in times of war and terror, currently and in the past.

Building more and better bridges between 'us' and 'them'

The central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we.' — Robert Putnam

We human beings naturally divide ourselves into endless categories: in every interaction we identify (often by assuming) race, gender, culture, character, status, ethnicity, etc. When we see another human being, we classify them, and then, based on how we classify them, we decide how to treat them.

Often referred to as "othering," this activity of our minds is automatic, involuntary, and mostly outside of our conscious awareness. It might be an efficient and effective way to navigate the world. However, we all know well its dangers—nothing in this reactive process guarantees that we are correct when we put people into certain categories.

Whenever we see people that look differently than we do, speak with an accent different than our own, or express ideas that we're not used to, our perception that they are "not-us" ("them" or "other") is instantaneous.

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More insidiously, we define "ourselves" as "good" people (however we might define "good"). Human beings also have a tendency to believe that "we" are moral and that "they" (anyone that doesn't share our beliefs, appearance, etc.) are immoral or "bad." Therefore, anyone who seems "good" is a potential member of "us." We can accept strangers and different ways of acting, thinking and being as long as "we" believe them also to be morally sound. Many feelings about "us" and "them" are about our sense of right and wrong.

We tend to group people together when they:

- Share visible similarities (for example, share a similar color of skin or are all wearing the same uniforms)
- Are physically near one another (people grouped around a tour guide)
- Share a common event (people running in a marathon)
- Are in sync with one another (a marching band)
- Resist outsiders/enforce barriers (a country club)
- Share information efficiently (law enforcement professionals)

Having a strong "us/them" dynamic in the workplace creates a profound lack of trust, which can create:

- Conflict
- Stress
- Loss of productivity

- Increased sick days
- Employee turnover

It is important to note that putting people in groups is not all bad. Labeling human groupings gives us a guide to how we should behave appropriately when in that group. (For example, you would act very differently when attending a country club party with your grandmother than you would sitting with a group of your friends at a beach cookout after a long afternoon of surfing.)

Feeling a sense of "us" is vital, not just to our mental health, but our physical health as well. When we get that "we" feeling, our heart rates are lower, our stress hormones are reduced, we sleep better and think more clearly.

Conversely, feeling like we have been "othered," that we are not in the group with power or "belongingness," does the opposite. (In a worst case scenario, imagine a child so traumatized by being bullied and ostracized at school that they attempt suicide.) A sense of belonging to a larger group is vital to our health and wellbeing.

It has been known in the education world for some time that collaboration with our colleagues is one effective way to develop and hone best practices in teaching (hence the proliferation of PLCs, professional learning communities, in schools across the U.S.).

Perhaps, what we are unconsciously trying to accomplish here is to create small groups of "us"—groups whose members share a high level of trust so that we can take the risks required to improve our work.

Healthy Critical Friends Group® (CFG®) communities are intentionally created to give their members that "we" feeling. I believe this is one of the reasons why we at NSRF hear people say so often that our training is one of the best professional development opportunities they have ever had. Part of this praise is explained as learning our widely useful protocols, but a big part lies in the satisfaction that comes from belonging to a group sharing a profound love of students and education, andd a commitment to improving our practice.

Knowing the importance of this powerful sense of belonging, we purposely scaffold the activities and protocols at the beginning of our five-day training to create strong bonds between participants. (This is the "friend" part of "Critical Friends Group" work.) And, because people who are suffering from "themness" can be cured by feeling part of "us," we know — and our trainees experience — that instituting CFG communities can go a long way to improve the culture of a school.

That being said, how can we create a feeling of "we" not just within our CFG groups, but thoughout the whole school? The first step is to acknowledge that relationships within the school need improving, and that different factions within the school are working at cross purposes, rather than together. Some typical "us/them" school groups are:

- Faculty who have worked at the school for many years vs. new hires
- Tradition lovers vs. those who want to try new ways of doing things
- Elementary teachers vs. secondary teachers
- Faculty who teach "traditional" academic classes vs. faculty who teach the arts
- Administrators vs. teachers
- Teachers vs. parents
- And, in more unhealthy school cultures, we know that people are consciously grouped into "us" and "them" based on gender, race, culture, etc.

So, back to the question: How do we unite all groups so that we feel we belong to all one glorious "we"? The second step is to be committed to put in the time and energy it takes to do so.

Schools can foster the "we" feeling by:

1. **Setting Social Norms**— At the National School Reform Faculty (NSRF), we call these "Agreements" because we expect everyone who has to follow them to have a say in their creation. This can be done in a school where the faculty, the administration, other school staff and the students set these norms, sign off on them and hold each other accountable to follow them. These social norms need to be visibly posted, well-known and often referred to by all parties. Also, the consequences for breaking a norm need to be well-known, and administrated consistently and fairly.

2. **Losing the Jargon**—Anytime you have one group of people who understand the meaning of a specific acronym, initiative, concept, idea, etc., and one group that doesn't, you have created "us" (the people who know) and "them" (the people who don't). Remember, the sense of "us/them" is tied up with "good/bad" and "right/wrong" in our minds. So, knowing these definitions (or not knowing them) becomes good and right or bad and wrong, depending on which group you are in. When you are speaking to any group, to help everyone avoid the tendency to feel "otherness" when new ideas and concepts are introduced, take care to define and describe them in terms that everyone can understand rather than naming them with cryptic labels. Share information transparently. Always assume that there is someone in the group who doesn't know what you are talking about. Freely sharing information without asking them to (possibly embarrass themselves) by asking allows the not-knowers to enter the "we" group of people who understand.

3. **Developing a "Try it and See" Attitude When Introducing Something New**—When people get too excited or too angry about new ideas, initiatives, processes, etc., others may be automatically turned off. If you want previously "othered" individuals to become a part of your "we" (instituting an initiative you that you think will be good for the school, let's say) then offer a information about the initiative calmly with accompanying reasons about why you support the idea. Offer to let people research it on their own, or try it out for themselves and then follow up with them later about their reactions. Coming on too strong might feel as if you are trying to force your opinion on them, and no one wants to be forced into doing anything—even something you think would be good for the school and that they would love (such as institute CFG work!).

4. **Sharing Common Experiences**—Not just any experiences, but activities and structures that are designed to create a strong feeling of "we." These kinds of activities and protocols are featured on the first few days of NSRF's New CFG Coaches' Training. (Good thing I already told you what these acronyms and terms mean, right?) Examples are:

- **Activities where people can share personal information around a topic of interest to all participants.** For example, the Quotes Introduction Activity is one where participants share a quote around education that deeply resonates with them. (Also, see Compass Points Activity.)
- **Setting Agreements** (See #1)
- **Hopes and Fears Activity**—This activity surfaces people's hopes and fears (or concerns) about any event, topic, or initiative. Talking openly about goals or positives that can be achieved while candidly addressing concerns pull people together as a group. There's nothing like realizing that others have the same hopes and fears you do to make them feel like "We're all in it together." This process creates even more bonding when the group actively works to do something about their fears and obstacles—what kind of supports are needed so We can all get through this in the best possible way? (See also Zones of Comfort, Risk and Danger)
- **Make sure all voices are heard**—Whatever you do, provide platforms that require full participation by all participants. For groups to function well, all voices need to be heard, all talents utilized, and all successes celebrated. If you have a voice in "our" group, you automatically become one of "us." Some protocols that support equitable participation are the Microlabs, Success Analysis Protocol, and Chalk Talk Protocol.
- **Debrief, reflect and follow through**—Always have participants reflect on their shared experiences and debrief the experience together. What did we think of this experience as a group? What did we learn? What could have made this a better experience for us? What might we do next? Then, follow through by visiting the group's progress. Materials such as the Agreements and the Hopes and Fears chart are "living" documents. They are meant to change as the group or the group's circumstances change. If these documents are created and never reviewed, the resulting bonding will fall apart, allowing people to drift back into their old familiar "us/them" groups.

Remember, we can influence and change how we perceive other groups of humans. Our categories for people are always in flux, depending on ever-changing circumstance, context, experience, and knowledge. As a result, it might be more accurate to think of groups as processes, not stagnant things. Although we have all been born with brains "hard-wired" to automatically groups others into a myriad of categories, we are not obligated to adhere to those categories. Our history has proven that human beings can imagine great, powerful and positive groups of "us." None of us can (or should) stop this automatic activity of our brains, but we can choose to take time to be aware of what's happening and make decisions accordingly about our actions.

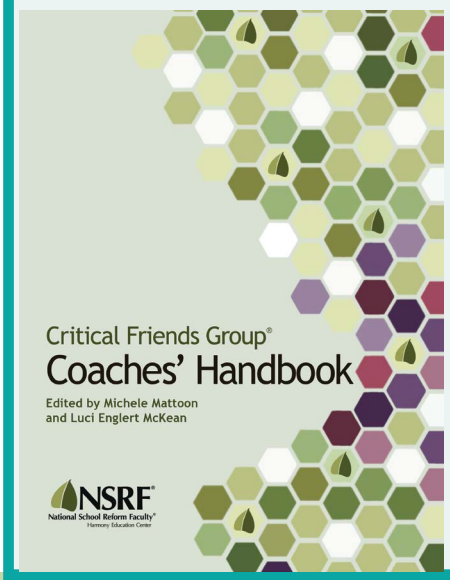
Are you ready to:

- sharpen your facilitation skills,
- improve your practice,
- build collaboration and trust among your colleagues, and
- help your organization improve student achievement?

Isn't it time for YOU to become certified as a Critical Friends Group® Coach?

Check out these options!

Individuals and very small groups can 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 great depths and different perspectives to the work you'll bring to the training, helping you find new solutions and support.



If you have 10-15 (or more) of your colleagues to train, we can save you money by bringing an NSRF National Facilitator to you with on-site trainings. Contact us soon — our summer is booking up!

These trainings will also be among the first to use the brand-new Critical Friends Group Coaches' Handbook!

Rave reviews from participants about NSRF 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 facilitating them 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

Two early spring training options begin with three days in the Midwest:

Bloomington, IN, Feb. 8-10 $815*

St. Louis Area, Feb. 29-March 2 $815*

*(*Each group decides when to return for the last two days.)*

Or, this summer, you may choose one of these five-consecutive-day open trainings, one on each coast and one in the middle:
(More open trainings possibly coming soon: check the website!)

Wildwood: Los Angeles, CA, June 20-24 $850

***New opportunity** in the Greater Boston Area, June 20-24 $875*

Bloomington, IN, July 11-15, $815

"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

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

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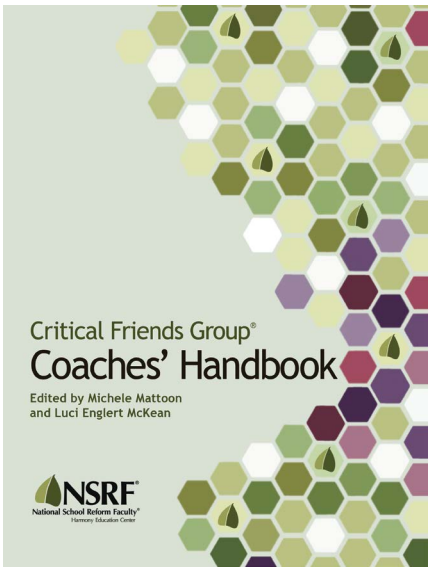
NSRF protocols and activities work effectively outside CFG meetings and even in settings completely outside schools

The next two articles in this issue highlight stories from two individuals using their experience as CFG coaches to dramatically support people in settings beyond CFG meetings and classrooms. Other ways we know our protocols may be used effectively include:

- Democratically organizing a year's worth of meeting agendas for a board of directors for a non-profit organization
- Quickly "taking the temperature" of any group based on their responses to an example text, and then (using other protocols) setting up a series of "next steps" to bring the group to where it wants to go
- Facilitating a public meeting around a complicated question that they anticipated would include heated debate
- Effectively revealing new perspectives to help solve or eliminate complex dilemmas in businesses or otheer settings

HERE AT LAST!

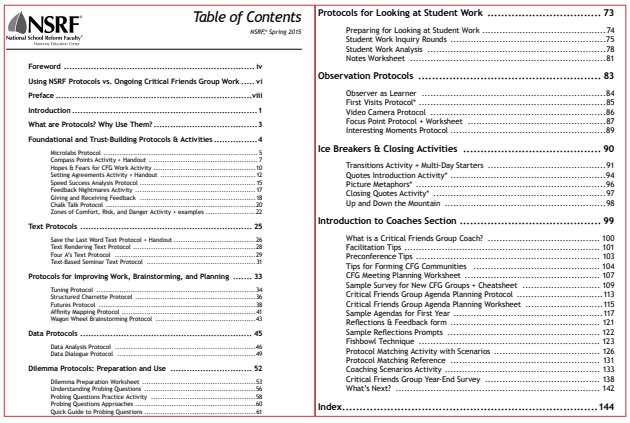


The long-anticipated, Critical Friends Group® Coaches' Handbook will be ready to ship in early December!

• 140+ pages chock-full of protocols and activities you will use in CFG meetings, in your classrooms, and beyond.

• Includes 40+ pages in a section to help new coaches get their groups off the ground, and help more experienced coaches understand how to do CFG work with much more finesse and effectiveness!

• Table-of-contents organized by protocol topic or use, with a detailed index, and multiple references for matching protocols to pieces of work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NSRF-certified CFG coaches* may purchase the book for $35

** Because we use this Handbook in our Coaches' Trainings, and because it includes special information specifically for coaches' use, it is not intended for general audiences or for those who have not been trained.*

Click here to pre-order your copy. Orders will not be shipped until early December.

Using and adapting NSRF protocols and activities to help facilitate healthcare support groups

By Hetlena Johnson, CFG Coach in South Carolina

Everyone is vulnerable. And everyone, in some small way, has aspects of themselves or thoughts and feelings that they aren't inclined to make public. For vulnerable people living with a chronic disease, attending a support group forr the first time can be one of the most intimidating and paralyzing experiences they can imagine.

Many people think of support groups as places to confess their feelings. In a sense, that is what you are supposed to do, without feeling judgment aimed at you for those feelings. As a National Lupus Foundation of America Lupus Support Group Facilitator, I know that our groups have other intentions and goals beyond mere confessionals, but I am adamant about ensuring that everyone who attends one of our meetings leaves feeling as though they have shared something. This sharing can be verbal or physical. For some, it can be as quiet as a smile or simple nod of the head, and for others, it's a heartfelt, tearful expression of feelings they can't express anywhere else. I believe it's imperative that any support group leader be experienced in facilitation and pay attention to all members in the group: to recognize and anticipate the range of support that each individual needs to feel safe, comforted, and empowered.

Lupus is not a very cooperative disease. An autoimmune disease, lupus makes a body's immune system go haywire. Instead of fending off bad cells, it attacks healthy cells and tissues. The illness has a reputation to cause inflammation and attack any, if not all parts of the body, including joints, kidneys, skin, and blood cells. No part of the body is invulnerable to attack.

A diagnosis of lupus can be very perplexing. It can take from six months to about three years before a physician will definitively diagnose someone with lupus. Although more than 1.5 million Americans and 5 million world-wide are reportedly diagnosed with this autoimmune disease, many people are still unaware of its existence. As a result of this lack of awareness, many newly diagnosed patients and their loved ones attend lupus support meetings in order to try to find steady ground beneath their feet.

Lupus support groups provide an opportunity for those dealing with this chronic inflammatory illness to release stress and recognize that they are not alone. Because of the meetings' goal of creating community, I treasure my NSRF training. I couldn't wait to take what I learned in CFG Coaches' Training and share it within our lupus support groups.

The dynamics of lupus support groups lead me to use the Connections Activity originally (and now Transitions). I use it to the max! Before I became a CFG coach, as a Lupus Support Group Facilitator, I'd sometimes just leave the forum "open" for people to share as they wish. By simply giving permission for everyone to speak without any structure or suggestions, the "open" method often increased stress rather than eased it, causing the group to remain silent longer than I had hoped. The longer the silence continued, the more stress it created. When I learned to use an NSRF activity with specific instructions and guidelines, the meetings began with much more sharing, and everyone showed signs of relief throughout the meeting … and lively, free conversation after the protocols end.

Sharing openly is especially therapeutic for those who are newly diagnosed (within 1-2 years) with lupus. Whether they need to vent openly about medicine, doctors, or pain, someone always speaks out within the time allotted. Sparks begin to fly. I do believe that the Connections and Transitions activity really allows

Photos from Johnson's Lupus Support Group meeting are all used with permission of meeting participants.

the support group members to connect and benefit from the experience and knowledge of others in attendance. When they express their frustration and pain, they're met with true empathy—not just sympathy, which can be isolating.

In contrast with Critical Friends Group meetings, in which a known set of people attend a meeting every few weeks, support group meetings can be challenging to facilitate because we never know who's in the room and what circumstances and feelings they'll be expressing. A facilitator must be on guard and use their skills to "feel out" the emotional stability of the group. For more solemn groups, I often use a variation of the NSRF Feedback Nightmares activity after we open the meeting.

I call my version of the Feedback Nightmares activity "Lupus Nightmares" or "Medical Nightmares." (See pages 10-11.) I believe that this is an essential exercise for lupus support groups, especially for those newly diagnosed. The activity encompasses the very meaning of why they came in the first place – to talk about how awful they felt when a physician confirmed that they had lupus, and their fears for the future.

Because the meeting I facilitate is usually just a half a dozen people or fewer, I describe how the protocol will work and direct each person to relay a short snippet of their individual story to the whole group. Most patients will talk about the progression of symptoms that what forced them to go to the doctor, and they'll speak of the moment a diagnosis of lupus was confirmed. In each story, the attendee emotionally conveys their struggle and typically deep-rooted feelings about the diagnosis. I'd often hear about a physician's poor bedside manner or detached approach when delivering this life-changing diagnosis to this person.

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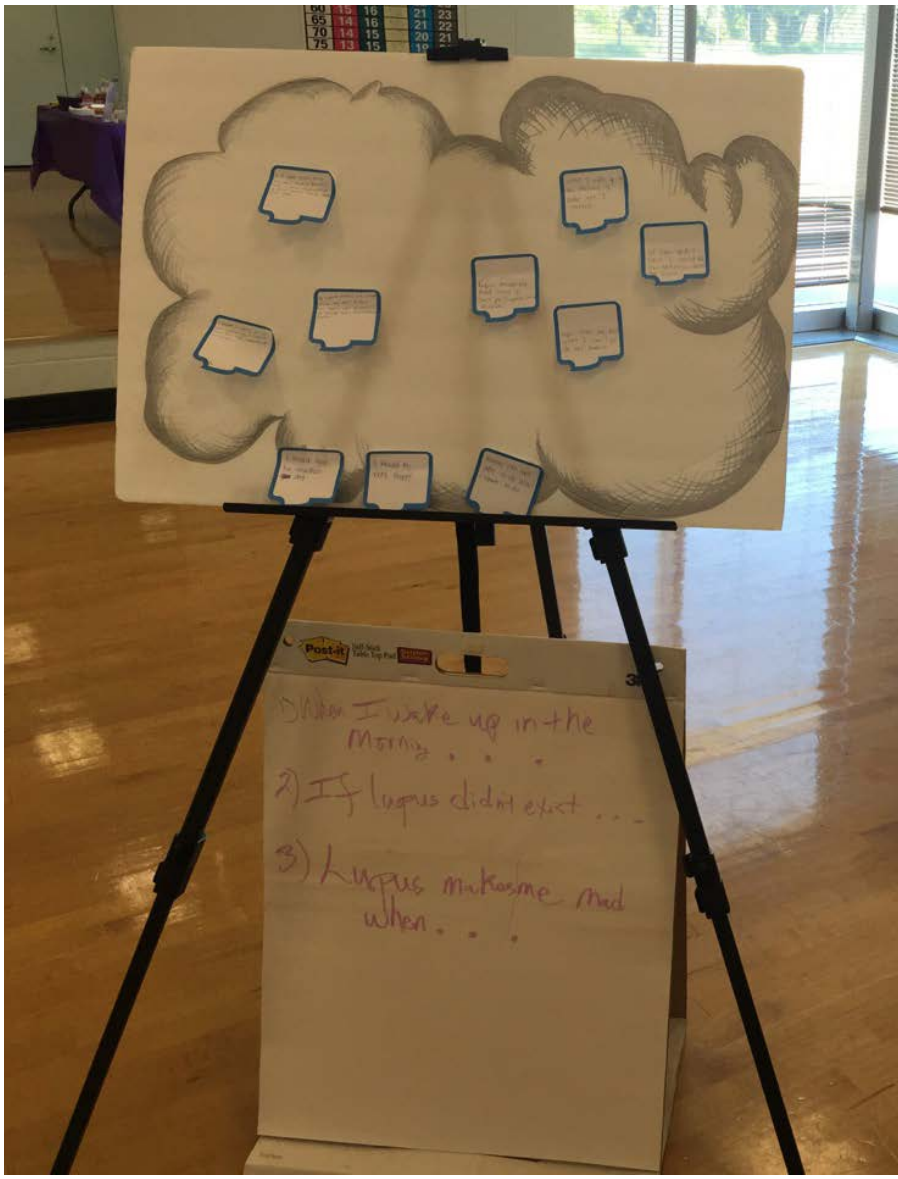
Photo Credit: Kina Nicole Photography

As you can imagine, to a new lupus patient and their family, sharing out these feelings (these "nightmares") within a trusted group of fellow patients can be quite therapeutic. After the group sharing, I invite everyone to silently reflect for a few moments on the power of the experience we just shared.

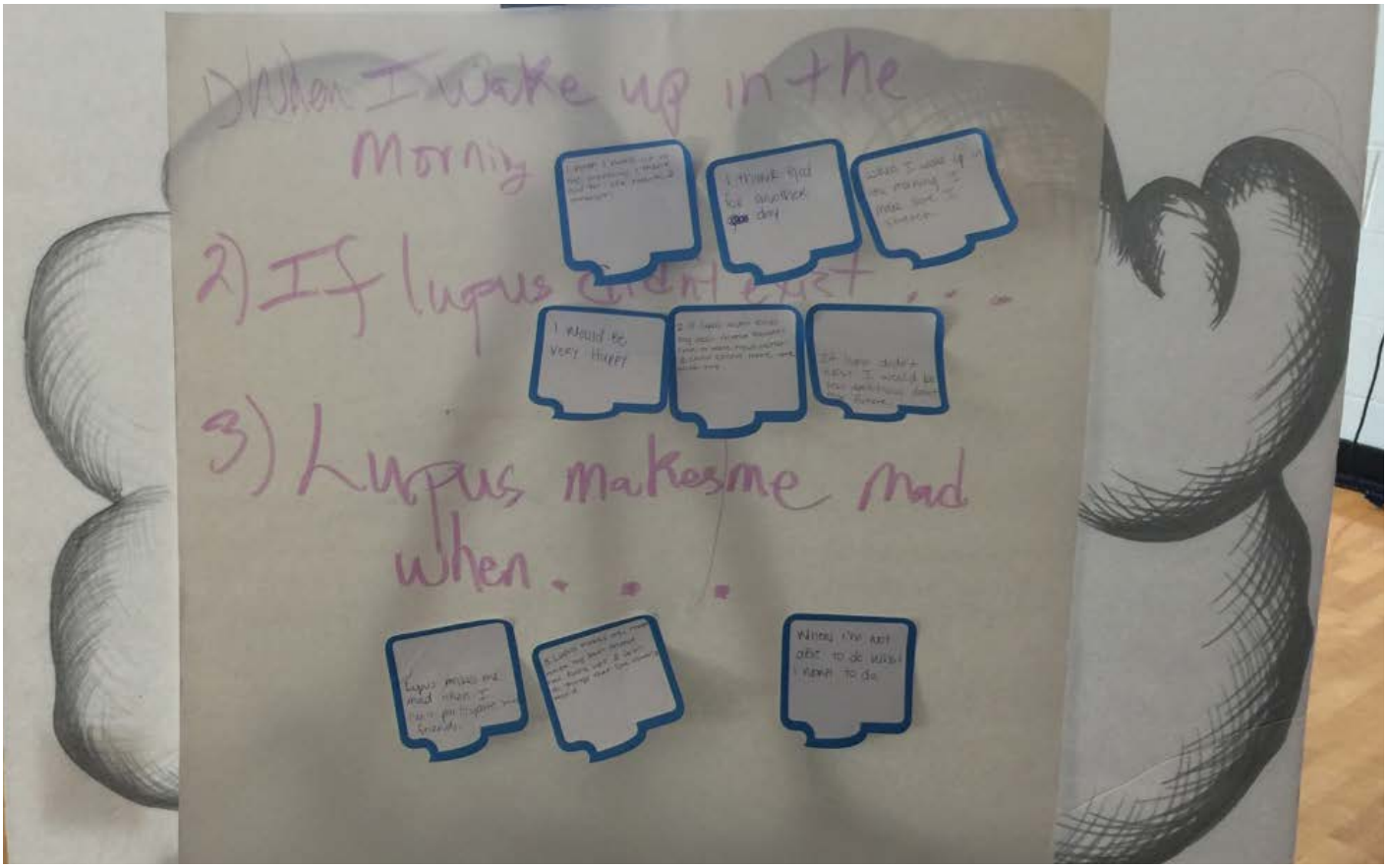
The Lupus Nightmares Activity and the Transitions opening takes up most of the 60- to 90-minute meeting time, but I consistently receive positive feedback about how positive the experience has been for the participants. (See pages 10-11 for protocol.)



CFG participants may be familiar with "the parking lot" as a tool for recording thoughts and resources during a meeting; Johnson revised the concept slightly and posts items in "the lupus fog."

Another important NSRF tool that's been remarkably helpful is the use of the Parking Lot, both for people who're disinclined to speak aloud in meetings and for those who don't want to speak too much or too often. I was absolutely ecstatic when Dave Nelson, the NSRF National Facilitator who led my training, introduced this tool. Dave had set up a poster with a black background and yellow cut strips to resemble a literal parking lot. I loved it! The parking lot allows individuals to share sticky notes with questions, ideas, resources, or thoughts that we would address later in the meeting, without interrupting whoever was speaking or whatever we were doing at the time the question or idea arose.

One of the symptoms of having lupus is that you can easily forget things, so the permission and structure of writing down short notes for later reference is remarkably useful. A term used by those in the lupus community is



"The lupus fog" now with sticky notes organized around specific questions proposed by the facilitator.

"lupus fog." I thought that fog imagery would be especially accurate and useful in this context, so I had a friend draw a cloud on a poster board to represent fog in the parking lot for our meetings. Group members would pick up a few sticky notes when signing in and use them to write down things that were on their mind, before and throughout the meeting, sometimes answering a specific prompt. This was such a success with our participants that I expect our "foggy parking lot" will always be used in upcoming meetings!

In conclusion, the following NSRF protocols and activities have moved my lupus support group meetings from plain to powerful:

1. ***Connections*** and ***Transitions*** In CFG meetings, you want to do this once everyone is present, but it's a little harder with community organizations. I recommend starting this activity first thing after you settle in a seat after setting up the room. It gives others who are just arriving time to adjust.

2. ***Parking Lot***. Allow the group's regular "driving speed and direction" to continue uninterrupted by creating a "parking lot" where participants can post ideas that might otherwise take the flow or content of the meeting "off track." Bonus points if your poster image is personalized to the makeup of the group or team you will be working with.

3. ***Feedback Nightmares*** (translated by me into Medical/Lupus Nightmares, see next page). Most people attending support groups come with many "nightmare" experiences around their disease and their experience within the health care system. They also often have a deep fear of possible future decline, pain, or additional diagnoses. They fear the worst. Being able to share their medical treatments and experiences with other patients helps shift the negative feelings from worries to concern and care.

Purpose: To address patients' fears and concerns around being diagnosed

For more information about lupus, I recommend ***Diary of a Mad Lupus Patient: Shortness of Breath*** *by J. H. Johnson.*

DO YOU HAVE EXAMPLES OF PROTOCOLS OR ARTICLES YOU'VE ADAPTED OR USED WITH GREAT SUCCESS? TELL US!

We're always looking for great articles for upcoming issues of ***Connections***. As in successful CFG communities, diverse voices and perspectives best help us improve student achievement and adult learning! Email luci@nsrfharmony.org with your ideas!

National School Reform Faculty
Harmony Education Center

Lupus Nightmares Activity

Medical Nightmares Activity
By Hetlena Johnson for the NSRF, 2015

Facilitation Difficulty: 3 of 5 | 50 min. | 4-10 people | No preconference

with lupus. To collaboratively share experiences, understanding, tips for coping, and living with lupus.

Notes: During the pair share, if someone does not want to participate, suggest they act as "a cloud in the room" observing and listening, and adding their perspectives when moved to do so. If you use the "cloud" option, ask those participants for their feelings at the end of the protocol. Because many patients can get angry and really start to talk negatively about the doctors and the experience, I usually gauge when I need to take a little control of the discussions before they get too expressive. I've begun suggesting some norms or agreements at the start of meetings, but still, emotions run high in these medical support groups. I have had a few interruptions where someone wanted to know the name of the doctor or medicine that was problematic for the speaker. This is usually when I take on a more facilitative role during the feedback and chart that information, or make a note on the parking lot for later reference. If members start expressing a specific physician's or center's name, use judgment in recording this on the projector/board. Everyone's experiences are different! Near the end of a support group meeting, because of the heaviness of the emotions, I usually use the pause and reflect method for debriefing the group.

Preparation: Use agendas, projector and technology to set up a statement about what lupus is. If desired, facilitator can prepare notecards or strips that have the definition of lupus to handout to the participants. Consider using a poster size picture or a projection of the body on which to chart symptoms of the disease.

1. **Set up:** (2 min.) Welcome the group. Explain the importance of confidentiality to the group and ask for everyone to commit to that confidentiality. Set up the activity something like this: *"I will ask everyone to remember a time when they experienced a 'lupus nightmare,' a time when what was happening to them felt like a nightmare come true. Then you will be sharing that experience with a partner. Human nature is to compare your problems constantly with that of others and judge yourself or them accordingly. By sharing without judgment, every participant can feel the freedom and relief of 'telling somebody' that can result. After we share, we'll all reflect on this experience."*

2. **Reflect:** (3 min.) Ask participants to sit back in their chairs, close their eyes, breathe in through the nose, and slowly exhale through the mouth. Ask participants to "*Remember when you experienced the nightmare-phase of getting diagnosed. What symptoms lead you to go to the doctor? What did you hear and experience negatively that lead up to the diagnosis? How did you feel as you were going through this process of being diagnosed? If you are a family member of the patient, what feelings have you experienced through this process?*" Ask participants to open their eyes and write down on sticky notes a few words that describe how they felt. Give participants a hint, such as "*How did you feel when your doctor gave you your diagnosis, or told you that you may only have a few months or years to live?*"

3. **Pair share:** (10 min.) Pair participants with people they don't know in the group, if possible. Direct participants to share their lupus or medical nightmare with their partner. Participants should record a reminder of their partner's story by jotting down some key words in their notes. After five minutes, prompt participants to switch to the other participant.

4. **Group share options:** (15 min.) Version 1. Going around the room, each participant reads off the words they used to describe their reflection. If necessary, the participant can use more than one word.

   Version 2. Handing around a ball or stuffed animal to signify which person should speak, each participant tells their nightmare in turn. If they feel a little shy, they can just read off the words they used to express how they felt. If necessary, the facilitator will write the feeling words on the board (or use the projector).

   Version 3. Going around the room, in pairs, one participant tells his partner's story in brief. The speaker uses their notes to remind them of what the other person said. Then swap partners, and the other person speaks about the first.

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5. **Receiving feedback:** (5 min.) Refer to the feelings charted on the poster (or projector) and notice what was shared. Discuss common and different experiences and feelings.

6. **Debrief and reflect:** (10 min.) By this time the atmosphere of the group can vary from somber to humor-filled. Use your best judgment in debriefing this activity—silent reflection, written, or open forum. Let the group compare and see that everyone has a nightmare experience that can relate. Let the group point out the good and bad of the feedback gathered.

   - *How do you feel about being diagnosed with lupus?*
   - *Was it difficult to control your anger about being diagnosed? Why or why not?*
   - *What do you feel was the "real" nightmare in your experience?*
   - *Is it difficult for you to write/share your experience? How do you feel about sharing your experience with others in the group today?*
   - *Can you find anything positive from your experience?*

7. **Collect:** (1 min.) At the end of the exercise, gather the sticky notes and place them on the wall nearest the exit. Say something like "*We invite you to leave these feelings in the room instead of carrying them with you any longer. The feelings were natural and appropriate to the time and situation, but now you can move forward in your actions and your feelings.*"

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A bookmark from the National School Reform Faculty:

The key to helpful feedback isn't expertise, it's thoughtfulness around the question.

(quote from a participant in a recent CFG coaches' training)

Using NSRF protocols when leading a committee to complete a high-stakes, quick-deadline project

Terry Daugherty uses Setting Agreements, data protocols, Affinity Mapping, Tuning, and other CFG tools to help a committee with a tough job

Have you ever participated in a committee that met repeatedly but accomplished very little? What a contrast with CFG meetings, right?

If you're a CFG coach, I have some pleasant news for you if you haven't already thought of it: your protocol matching skills can be truly mission-saving when you're tasked with leading a committee. Let me tell you about my experience a few years back, when the large school corporation I worked for asked me to lead a committee that would build three years of calendars for the district.

The committee consisted of thirty people — central office administrators, building principals, teachers, parents, students, and community members, some unofficially representing the local university. As you might guess, everyone had a position to defend and came to the meetings with their own agendas to promote. In addition, the superintendent defined parameters she expected the calendars to incorporate — and told us that she expected us to be finished creating the calendar in just sixty days!

Given that deadline and the variety of strangers who needed to work together effectively and quickly, I immediately started thinking about the tools I knew would help in team-building, trust-building, and effective collaboration.

Prepping for the first meeting

My CFG work informed me that a diverse group is most helpful in solving complex problems, and that groups of like-minded people can sometimes reinforce their own opinions rather than incorporate or collaborate with differing perspectives to find a solution. So, in preparing for our first meeting, I assigned seats, sorting everyone by role and geographic location. At each meeting, each table included one administrator, one teacher, one parent, etc., also making sure no table had too many people from a single school.

By setting up our first meeting so that every table brought together people with different points of view rather than the same background, participants didn't have a choice but to hear others' perspectives. If I'd let like-minded friends and colleagues sit together, each table would have been "preaching to the choir" and thus wouldn't have made any progress. This seating arrangement literally put them in a position to immediately begin hearing and, I hoped, considering the others' perspectives as well as their biases.

I also appointed one person at each table to facilitate (mostly keeping track of time and being prepared to take notes and/or share out with the larger group), and announced that at each meeting, the facilitation role would rotate.

First meeting: Agreements

Once the committee members were seated and the superintendent introduced them to their objectives, I introduced them to the idea of Setting Agreements and suggested we start with three basic group norms:

- *Treat all with respect*
- *Speak only for yourself (unless you clearly tell us differently)*
- *Keep an open mind*

The committee ended up adding three more:

- *What is said in the room stays in the room*
- *Assume positive intent*

- *What is best for ALL students comes first*

The last agreement turned out to be most important of all, as I will explain later.

Second meeting: Data

Before our second meeting, everyone spent time reading research on school calendars. At the meeting, we studied the calendars of ten surrounding school districts using a Data Analysis Protocol. This protocol gave the group a single structure to make sense from a lot of school calendar information. Following the protocol, participants asked themselves:

- *What do you see?*
- *What do you not see?*
- *What implications does this have for our work?*

Third meeting: Affinity Mapping

Next, members exposed their perspective on the largest areas of concern by doing an Affinity Mapping Protocol. After areas of concerns were identified and listed, the committee members moved into the hard work of prioritizing group concerns.

At last began the work of using all of our research and the results of our protocols to begin actually creating different calendars to meet student needs. This work brought out many heated discussions, as many participants still held onto parts of their original personal agendas. Seeing that the group wasn't progressing, I redirected everyone to our Group Agreements to see if the members still valued them. By taking "extra" time to backtrack and ask the committee to check in, they were able to confirm their commitments again. This "digression" helped the discussions move forward more efficiently and effectively. Once again, my experience as a CFG Coach saved the day.

That imperative last agreement

The agreement to "keep students first" filtered many of the discussions. Rather than being over-influenced by any other constituency, this commitment helped everyone work toward calendars that worked for students primarily. Of course there were still disagreements about exactly what constituted "students first," and decisions to be made. I used these moments to give all committee members a chance to speak their thoughts. Following my CFG coaching experience, even when we were not working within a protocol, I tracked individuals' participation and made sure to invite the quiet members of the committee to speak. As had often been the case within my CFG meetings, this was where new points of thought came out.

Fourth meeting: Tuning

Once the committee committed several dates to the calendar, I introduced a Tuning Protocol to fine-tune the calendars, identifying what aspects the committee members thought were important and attempting to fix the problems that needed correcting. Again, I was thankful for my coaching experience, which made the prospect of so many potential problems being revealed became manageable and productive instead.

When coaching a Critical Friend Group, you practice matching protocols with problems that the group encounters. The same occurred with this process.

In the end, the final calendar may not have included what every committee member felt they personally needed, but everyone felt satisfied with the calendar, feeling it would be best for all students.

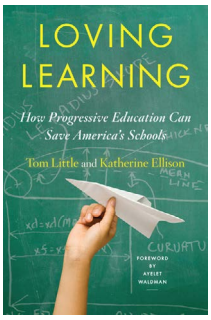
Three years after this committee completed its mission, committee members still speak to each other, a not-small accomplishment in itself! Further, I've noticed that many of these people are serving on committees together again, including me. I'm happy with how my CFG coaching skills and protocol selection skills served me during that committee, and that makes me confident to participate in committees now and in the future. Of course, if I could LEAD all the committees in order to ENSURE they used protocols.... Wait, did I type that out loud?

Terry Daugherty spent 43 years in the Monroe County (Indiana) Community School Corporation as a science teacher and coordinator for instructional technology. He became certified as a NSRF National Facilitator in 2007, because he recognized that Critical Friends Group work was the most significant practice toward improving student learning he had ever experienced. He is currently a STEM consultant for Center Grove Community School Corporation. He may be reached at tdaugher2001@gmail.com.

Book review

Principles governing progressive schools can be useful for all educators

Review by Dave Lehman, Connections Executive Editor



Loving Learning: How Progressive Education Can Save America's Schools
by Tom Little and Katherine Ellison
New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2015

Tom Little co-founded the Progressive Education Network (PEN) in 2005. He was first a teacher, then head of school, at Oakland, California's Park Day School spanning thirty-eight years. He died from cancer in April, 2013, just after finishing this book with Katherine Ellison. The book is based not only on Little's experiences at Park Day, but his year-long tour throughout the country of 43 public and private progressive schools.

Loving Learning is an excellent summary and overview of the history and current status of progressive education, including the founding of the Progressive Education Association (PEA) in 1919 with its seven founding principles:

1. *Freedom to Develop Naturally*
2. *Interest, the Motive of all Work*
3. *The Teacher a Guide, not a Task-Master*
4. *Scientific Study of Pupil Development*
5. *Greater Attention to all that Affects the Child's Physical Development*
6. *Co-operation Between School and Home to Meet the Needs of Child-Life*
7. *The Progressive School, a Leader in Educational Movements*

The PEA dissolved in 1955, just three years after the death of John Dewey, a major influence — if not THE major influence — on progressive education.

Little defines progressive education as follows: "Progressive education prepares students for active participation in a democratic society, in the context of a child-centered environment, and with an enduring commitment to social justice." Beginning in the late 1700s with European educators such as the Romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his book ***Emile, or On Education***, Little draws on the rich history of progressive education. His overview also includes the German Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel who created the term "kindergarten" ("garden of children"), and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi who challenged the Swiss emphasis on rote instruction.

Then in America, the Cook County Normal School outside Chicago was founded by Colonel Francis W. Parker, whom Dewey hailed as the "Father of Progressive Education." Little also reminds us of others, perhaps less well-known, including powerful women in the heyday of progressive education from the early 1900s to the 1940s: Marietta Johnson, founder of the School of Organic Education in Fairhope, Alabama; Caroline Pratt, founder of the City and Country School in New York City; Agnes Hocking, co-founder of the Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Lucy Sprague Mitchell, founder of the Bank Street School for Children, in Manhattan. Little's book also features Carleton W. Washburne, one of Dewey's most dedicated disciples and the celebrated superintendent of schools in Winnetka, Illinois. In 1930, Washburne, along with one of his principals, investigated educational innovations in Japan, China, India, Turkey, and Russia, compiling his research into the book, ***Remakers of Mankind***, which Little has picked up as the title of Chapter 1 in ***Loving Learning***.

Based on his review of the history of progressive educators and the numerous pioneers of the movement, Little enumerates his own "six core strategies," noting they are still in "robust practice" at progressive schools today:

1. *Attention to children's emotions as well as their intellects;*
2. *Reliance on students' interests to guide their learning;*
3. *Curtailment or outright bans on testing, grading, and ranking;*
4. *Involvement of students in real-world endeavors, ranging from going on field trips to managing a farm;*
5. *The study of topics in an integrated way, from a variety of different disciplines; and, not least;*
6. *Support for children to develop a sense of social justice and become active participants in America's democracy.*

Little uses these six core strategies as chapter titles in ***Loving Learning***. He said the list "floods his mind with vivid memories, forming a 'pedagogy of joy.'" Each of those chapters begins with a personal account or story of some learning experience from his own Park Day School. For ex-

ample, Chapter 2, "The Rug: Teaching to the 'Whole Child'" begins with this story:

"A dozen six- and seven-year-olds sprawl on the ten-by-ten foot forest green rug in Susan Erb's first-grade classroom at Park Day School. Half of them manage to hold still, but the others are constantly moving. They rock back and forth, play with their hair, bump into each other, and, gasping with impatience, wave their hands to get Susan's attention..

On the floor between the students and the teacher lie two plastic hoops, each no bigger than a child's head. One is labeled 'Needs' and the other 'Wants.' There is also a pile of blue index cards, each written with a single word or phrase, including: 'Air,' 'Clean water,' 'Clothes,' 'Dogs,' 'Toys,' 'House,' and 'Love.' Taking turns, the students pick up cards and decide whether to put them in one hoop or the other.

Guided by Susan, whose cheerful charisma seems as fresh as it was on the day I first watched her teach nearly forty years ago, the students are learning about several things at once. Most obviously they're figuring out the difference between needs and wants - with lively ancillary discussions about whether people always die from lack of shelter, how much easier it is for animals to bite you if you don't have clothes, and how many days someone can live without food …."

Expanding on these stories, Little provides a nuanced discussion of each of his core strategies. In this case, the importance of social-emotional learning and the huge significance of strong relationships between students and their teacher is implied in the first strategy, "Attention to children's emotions as well as their intellects."

Little devotes chapter eight, "The Petition: Promoting Social Justice," to his sixth strategy, "Support for children to develop a sense of social justice and become active participants in America's democracy." Little points out:

"In many ways, the progressive tradition of encouraging social agency and awareness in students has never been more important than it is today. Despite unprecedented new challenges to young people's futures — from dramatically changing job market to the growing risk of climate change — political apathy is rising among youth who by various reports are overwhelmed by the magnitude of these problems and skeptical that our current political leaders are seriously trying to address them…. Studies have found that young people are becoming less empathetic and more interested in getting rich….. At Park Day, one of our most important priorities is that ***our students feel a sense of agency, that they can make a difference in the world and have a duty to try.*** *" [emphasis mine]*

He goes on to make the connection with John Dewey who "championed a strong role for schools in awakening students' social consciousness and activism….. [and] believed that industrialization had awarded great wealth to a small group of people, rather than benefiting all of society, while he dismissed the two major political practices as 'the errand boys of big business." This analysis unfortunately sounds all too familiar in our era of the "1%!" Little provides a call for students to become actively engaged in addressing issues of social justice and inequities, much like that called for in the tenth principle of the Coalition of Essential schools:

"… our students feel a sense of agency, that they can make a difference in the world and have a duty to try."

"Democracy and Equity – The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school [meaning teachers as well as students.] The school should honor diversity and build on the strength of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity."

Here we're also reminded of the book by Ted and Nancy Sizer, ***The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract***.

In keeping with the book's sub-title, ***How Progressive Education Can Save America's Schools***, Little closes the book with the future. He's concerned about the continual need for progressive private schools to charge tuition, particularly given their intent to have a diverse student population, economically, racially, and otherwise. Little reiterates efforts at Park Day and other private progressive schools to create a truly effective sliding scale tuition. Referring again to the Progressive Education Association's seventh founding principle, "The Progressive School a Leader in Educational Movements," he notes, "the goal is to make it bigger;" "restoring pride in the 'P-word.'" [This strikes a familiar chord with me as the founding principal of a progressive public school, the Lehman Alternative Community School, and the thirteenth of our goals – "To act as a resource and forum for sharing our educational experiences within our District and beyond."] Little calls for collaboration among a host of advocacy organizations who are all working for progressive reforms, including the Coalition of Essential Schools, Educators for Social Responsibility, Teachers 4 Social Justice, the Forum for Education and Democracy, and the Center for Educational Renewal. One collaborative goal that he notes would serve all of them/us well would be a new "Eight-Year Study" (the original study was commissioned by the Progressive Education Association in the 1940s), researching how progressive schools are currently serving their students.

Loving Learning ends with two pictures from his Park Day School and a half-page description of how the school received and responded to the news of Tom Little's death, including this brief tribute from one of the students:

"You made many changes in the world.

You taught us many things.

You were helpful and kind.

I am glad you lived a happy life. Thank you."

Strategies for addressing issues involving our digital devices

In the past year several books as well as articles from a wide range of news media — from the ***New York Times*** and ***Wall Street Journal*** to the ***Utne Reader***, ***Scientific American***, and ***Phi Delta Kappan*** — have raised a number of concerns about our increasing use and dependence on our smart phones, iPads, laptops, tablets, e-readers, and computers. These concerns are raised in relationship not only to teachers and educators, but to other professionals, including doctors, airplane pilots, architects, and engineers, as well as parents and caregivers of young people.

There also are critical issues regarding the materials used in the manufacture of our digital devices, particularly the rare earth metals, and the environmental dangers involved not only in their production, but in the health risks of the laborers mining these substances. [I will not go into environmental issues here, but for a discussion of these and recommendations on recycling your electronic hardware, I suggest you visit the "Sustainable Materials Management" section of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) website at http://www.epa.gov/smm/electronics/index.htm.]

In this article I will review and summarize key research and focus on what can be done, including concrete suggestions and recommendations for teachers and parent/caregivers, and for all of us, as we work our way through this new age. And let me make it clear at the outset — I am a user of these devices. I'm typing this on my laptop, and have a cell phone which I use not only for phone calls, but for directions on how to find a particular store, to send a text message to a family member, to contact colleagues at NSRF and participants in my CFG communities. I'm seeking to understand the issues involved, to find a balance in my use of these devices personally and professionally in the hope that my findings may be of use to you readers as well.

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

Information about information

I'll start with some basic information about "information" from the latest book by Daniel Levitin, ***The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload***. Levitin is a professor of psychology and behavioral neuroscience at McGill University. Information scientists have quantified the incredible growth and expansion of information available to us today:

"In 20ll, Americans took in five times as much information every day as they did in 1986 — the equivalent of 175 newspapers. During our leisure time, not counting work, each of us processes 34 gigabytes of 100,000 words every day. The world's 21,272 television stations produce 85,000 hours of original programming every day as we watch an average of 5 hours of television each day, the equivalent of 20 gigabytes of audio-video images. That's not counting YouTube, which uploads 6,000 hours of video every hour. And computer gaming? It consumes more bytes than all other media put together, including DVDs, TV, books, magazines, and the Internet… Each of us has the equivalent of over half a million books stored on our computers, not to mention all the information stored in our cell phones or the magnetic stripe on the back of our credit cards. We have created a world with 300 exabytes (300,000,000.000,000,000,000 pieces) of human-made information."

This is but one of several references reinforcing the subtitle of Levitin's book, that we are in an "age of information overload." The overload is compounded by the limited processing capacity of our conscious mind; estimated at 120 bits per second, the bandwidth or speed limit for "the traffic of information we can pay conscious attention to at any one time." Since we need to process 60 bits per second to understand one person speaking to us, we can effectively really understand only two people speaking to us at one time. Additional recent research at Stanford University also indicates people can't actually "multi-task," or do more than one task at a time. Rather we engage in "task switching," doing one thing, then switching to another, and thereby may lose up to 40% efficiency at the work we're doing.

Issues in other professions

Before focusing particularly on education, teaching and learning, here briefly are examples of how problems related to over-dependence on digital devices are being addressed in some other professions.

Nicholas Carr (writer-in-residence at the University of California, Berkeley, and an executive editor of the Harvard Business Review), in his book, ***The Glass Cage: Automation and Us***, refers to the cockpit of commercial airliners as the "glass cage." After describing various airline accidents attributed to over-reliance on autopilot (planes being flown by computer rather than under the control of human pilots), Carr refers to research indicat-

ing the critical importance of pilots' regularly practicing in flight simulators and flying their planes manually, disconnected from the auto-pilot.

Regarding the medical profession, recent research studies have shown that primary-care physicians who had adopted computerized diagnostic systems felt "the software was impoverishing their understanding of patients, diminishing their ability to make informed decisions around diagnosis and treatment.'" Such studies caution doctors about becoming overly constricted when "screen-driven" by computers' prompts, rather than the narrative input from the patient to make informed decisions regarding diagnosis and treatment. They found that "medical software is no replacement for basic history-taking, examination skills, and critical thinking."

Many architects increasingly rely on "computerized tomography design" (or CADs) rather than paper and pencil, manual skills. In a study done at the University of Miami, "modern computer systems can translate sets of dimensions into precise 3-D renderings with incredible speed, but they also breed 'more banal, lazy, and uneventful designs that are void of intellect, imagination and emotion.'" Thus, increasingly architects are returning in part to their sketch pads to imagine creative new possibilities in addition to the information from CADs.

How about the rest of us?

An article in the December 2013 issue of ***Scientific American*** by two Psychology Professors at Harvard University, "How Google Is Changing Your Brain," summarizes findings as follows: "With nearly ubiquitous online access, many people may first perform a smartphone search rather than calling a friend. Being online all the time changes the subjective sense of self as borders between personal memories and information distributed across the Internet start to blur."

In ***Virtually You: The Internet and the Fracturing of the Self***, Elias Aboujaoude, (Director of the Impulse Control Disorders Clinic at Stanford University), says, "More and more, life is resembling the chat room; we're paying a price in terms of our cognitive life because of this virtual lifestyle." An article in the 6 June 2010 issue of the New York Times referencing Aboujaoude's and others' research, "An Ugly Toll of Technology: Impatience and Forgetfulness," the concern is raised that "excessive use of the Internet, cellphones and other technologies can cause us to become more impatient, impulsive, forgetful and even more narcissistic," leading to "Internet dependence" and even "addiction."

Then there is the ***Scientific American*** interview with Michael Harris, author of ***The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We've Lost in a World of Constant Connection***, in which he suggests that modern technology, especially the smartphone, has taken certain kinds of "absence" from our lives, and eliminated our time for solitude and daydreaming, filling even short moments of quiet with interruptions and distractions.

Several others' research agrees that our brains need "down time," where we are disconnected from all technology, and recommends strongly that we take a week or a month off from all technology to experience life more directly, the outdoors, our free-roaming creativity, and imagination. Such "down time" seems particularly crucial for those adolescents who have become compulsive cellphone users, resulting in the inhibition of their deep thought, causing anxiety, a false sense of urgency, loss of focus, and poor decision-making.

Now, for education, teaching, and learning

Here's a quote from Angela Walmsley, Associate Dean at Northeastern University-Seattle in Seattle, Washington, from in an article entitled, "Unplug the Kids," in the March 2014 issue of the educational journal, ***Phi Delta Kappan*** Does any of the following sound familiar to you as a teacher and/or parent/caregiver?

"My elementary-aged children would rather stay inside and watch TV or play on the IPad than go outside and run around, play catch, or ride a bike. My middle school child could play Minecraft for six hours without stopping to eat, and my friends' middle school children prefer to text each other from next door or even the next room to talking face-to-face. My neighbors' high school children don't leave their bedrooms at night or weekends because they can FaceTime or text their friends while doing homework or playing video games."

Looking first at teaching reading, and then writing, I turn to Maryanne Wolf, professor of child development at Tufts University and director of the Center for Reading and Language Research. In Wolf's recent book, ***Proust and the Squid: The History and Science of the Reading Brain***, she calls for educators to "balance technology and 'deep reading' to create bi-literate children," where every child has not only a repertoire of digital skills, but also, over time, develops the "deep reading skills" of an expert reader. This deep reading involves progressing from reading that involves getting new information off the page to "adding background knowledge to inference and analogy, induction and deduction, perspective, and critical analysis,"… go(ing) ever deeper into our own insights, (where) we sometimes reach epiphanies beyond any information from the author."

Similar concerns about what is happening to young people and their reading abilities in the digital age are raised by extensive research in an article in the 11 April 2013 issue of ***Scientific American***, "The Reading Brain in the Digital Age: The Science of Paper versus Screen."

"In the U.S., e-books currently make up between 15 and 20 percent of all trade book sales….Even so, evidence from laboratory experiments, polls and consumer reports indicates that modern screens and e-readers fail to adequately recreate certain tactile experiences of reading on paper that many people miss and, more importantly, prevent people from navigating long texts in an intuitive and satisfying way. In turn, such navigational difficulties may subtly inhibit reading comprehension. Compared with paper,

screens may also drain more of our mental resources while we are reading and make it a little harder to remember what we read when we are done."

Wolf explains further and cautions, "With a digital device instead of their imaginative imaging, they just push a button and see a scene. I don't want that from the start. I want to evoke their own imagination, their own thought."

Briefly, then, regarding writing, although the Common Core Standards only call for the teaching of legible writing in kindergarten and first grade, with the shift then to developing keyboard skills, new research from a number of universities (including College de France in Paris, Indiana University, the University of Washington, and UCLA) call this standard into question.

In a recent article summarizing this research in the 2 June 2014 issue of ***The New York Times***, "new evidence suggests that the links between handwriting and broader educational development run deep. Children not only learn to read more quickly when they first learn to write by hand, but they also remain better able to generate ideas and retain information."

Similarly, looking at academic writing, Mike Schmoker (well known educational writer, speaker, consultant, and author of such books as ***Results Now*** and ***FOCUS: Elevating the Essentials to Radically Improve Student Learning***) states, "Every study of writing indicates that students write very little and receive even less instruction in academic, argumentative writing despite the immense effect such writing has on intellectual development and readiness for post-secondary studies." And here Schmoker is particularly concerned about closing the "income gap," addressing the learning gap between the rich and poor.

Expressing similar concerns related to the "racial achievement gap," where lower reading and writing development are increasingly evident among students of color, particularly given the contributing seductive role of digital media, Professor Ellen Wartella at Northwestern University did a comprehensive study, entitled, "Children, Media and Race: Media Use Among White, Black, Hispanic and Asian American Children." She found these youth, ages 8 to 18, consume an average of 13 hours of media content a day, almost 4 ½ hours more than their White counterparts. Additionally, students of color are especially avid adopters of new media, spending about 90 minutes more each day than White youth using their cell phones, iPods and other mobile devices to watch TV and videos, play games, and listen to music. Thus, Schmoker states:

"We may never overcome the effects of poverty on education outcomes. And we must continue to fight for enlightened economic policies that maximize general prosperity and reduce poverty. But make no mistake: We will prepare historic proportions of students for college, careers, and citizenship when we commit to ***massive increases in the amount of purposeful, close reading, discussion and writing*** *they do in school, from the earliest grades and in every discipline." [emphasis mine]*

Using digital devices effectively in education

In closing, I want to return to Daniel Levitin and his key point implied in the book's title, the "organized mind." We need to use as many external resources as possible to help us deal with all this information overload:

"The brain organizes information in its own idiosyncratic way, a way that has served us very well. But in an age of information overload, not to mention decision overload, we need systems outside our heads to help us. Categories can off-load a lot of difficult work of the brain into the environment…. Calendars, smartphones, and address books are also brain extenders, externalizing onto paper or into computer chips myriad details that we no longer have to keep in our heads. Historically the ultimate brain extenders were books, keeping track of centuries' worth of collected knowledge that we can access when we need it. Perhaps they still are."

Reading that passage, I was reminded to consider how many decisions every educator must make on the spot in a single class period!

Levitin also mentions the surprising number of people in all kinds of professions who use 3x5 index cards to help organize their lives! Personally, I use them all the time, carrying several in my pocket for jotting down notes to remember, things to buy, people to contact, calls to make!

Returning to Angela Walmsley, she answers her own question, "What happens to our society as the virtual world becomes the default mode of communication in the real world? In order to become democratic engaged citizens, children need a balance of face-to-face time and interactions in conjunction with our virtual world."

Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends the following "tips" for parents/caregivers:

1) Avoid TV and other entertainment media for children under age two.

2) Monitor your child's media use.

3) Limit entertainment media to one or two hours per day for all children.

4) Make sure that entertainment is of high quality.

5) Create "screen-free zones" at home including no TVs in bedrooms.

6) Turn TV off during meal times.

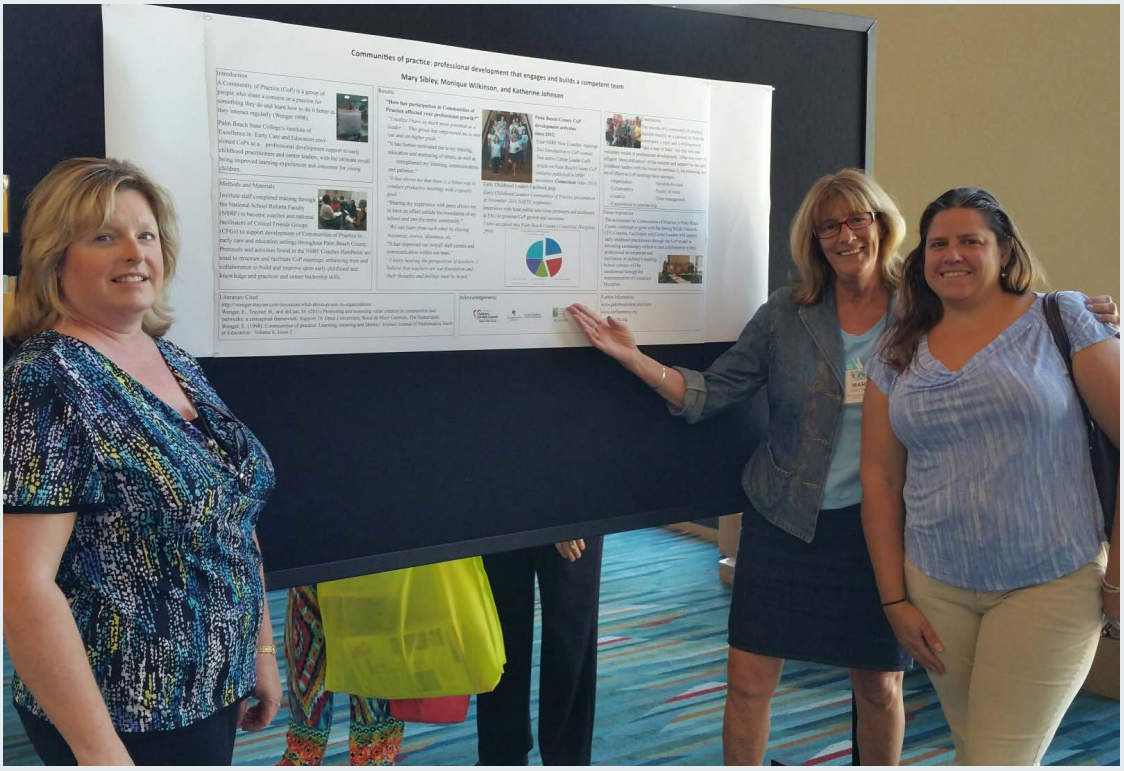
7) Teach children using non-electronic formats such as books, newspaper, and board games.

8) Encourage outdoor play, reading, hobbies and using one's imagination.

Digital devices aren't going away. How do we use them without ill effects?

Clearly, computers and all sorts of digital devices add considerable benefit to our lives, yet we should be conscious about our use and its cost.

Please email us to let us know your thoughts on addressing issues of technology and the role of our digital devices in education.



From left: Monique Wilkinson, Mary Sibley, and Katie Johnson, all CFG Coaches in Florida. Wilkinson and Johnson are also NSRF National Facilitators.

The Palm Beach County Early Childhood Leaders Community of Practice initiative was presented in a poster session at the First 1000 Days Summit in West Palm Beach, FL. The poster detailed the purpose and progress of the initiative to promote early childhood leadership and program improvement as a best practice in supporting child and family well-being in the first three years of life. Sibley presented the research.

For more information on this conference, see their website or click the names above to email the presenters.

"Hope is being able to see there is light despite all of the darkness." ~ Desmond Tutu

"If you want to end the war,
then instead of sending guns, send books.
Instead of sending tanks, send pens.
Instead of sending soldiers, send teachers."

~ Malala Yousafzai (17 year-old Nobel Peace Laureate)

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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?

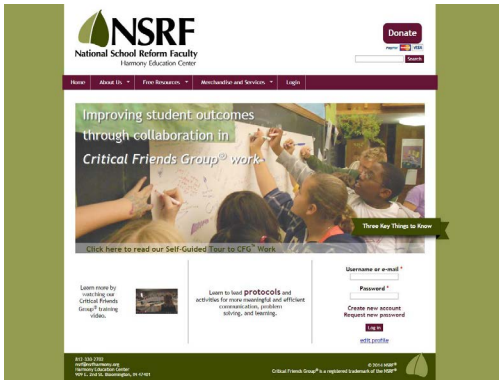
Now and then, we hear from someone seeking published research on the efficacy of Critical Friends Group® work, or the use of protocols in the classrooms. We're happy to share research we have on file, but realize that it's a bit dated. We expect some of you can point us to fresher research. If you know of any studies we should know about, too, please contact luci@nsrfharmony.org. Thanks so much!

Shout-out to EVERYONE!

What do you think? How are we doing with the new design and content of Connections, and with the new website?

We're working hard to eliminate bugs and add all current members and member-coaches to the new website. We really want to hear feedback from you, whether you have warm or cool feedback to share ... especially if you're having a problem finding something you need!

Please send comments of any variety to luci@nsrfharmony.org. We appreciate it!



Want to write for Connections?

Submit your ideas to luci@nsrfharmony.org and let's talk. Authors of published articles receive one free year's subscription to NSRF.

MANY WAYS TO STAY IN TOUCH

http://www.fb.com/NationalSchoolReformFaculty

http://www.twitter.com/TheNSRF (We don't tweet much but we love being tweeted about!

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

http://www.NSRFHarmony.org and nsrf@nsrfharmony.org

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