Fear, Mistrust and Misunderstanding...
(continued from page 5)

school for the last twelve years, explains her fears as to why she chooses not to use the new lounge.

“Personally, I don’t use the teachers’ lounge, but my opinion is negative because I find that at lunch I just want to talk about children. If I had a really bad day with the child I’d feel better if I could just say, you know, so-and-so drove me crazy today or didn’t do any work, and I don’t feel comfortable saying that. There are parents in there because it’s the Home and School Room. You don’t know who’s going to carry that, that’s uncomfortable. It’s also uncomfortable that in front of other teachers, that’s not going back to that child. I would avoid it. But if you say that, you’re never sure who’s there and it may not be their parent but they could be friends with . . . it’s an uncomfortable situation so I wouldn’t use it, even, and I love the Home and School folks, nothing against them, but it’s just not, I don’t feel comfortable because we [teachers] do talk about kids.”

Again, Laura disagrees how teachers venting frustrations or getting other ideas with fellow teachers can be misunderstood by the parents. The fear of generating gossip is a risk she is not willing to take. Yet, she explains her trust that other teachers will not share the information exchanged. Why are the teachers more trusted than the parents? Is it because they can sympathize and understand the practice? Laura is not the only teacher in the school with these concerns about conversation. One group of kindergarten-to-second-grade teachers had eaten in the previous teachers’ lounge. After the combined lounge was set up, they tried for a couple of weeks to eat in there. Sandy, one of the kindergarten teachers, explained at length in an interview that because there were so many parents and students coming in to buy pretzels or candy, that it was just not a space for their lunch-time conversations.

Since the change of space for the teachers’ lounge occurred, the teachers have created alternative congregation spaces for interactions and discussions about practice. Empty classrooms, offices, or the library are now used during lunch hours. Teachers have purchased small refrigerators and microwaves for several of the classrooms, in order to use those spaces for social lunch-time.

Each of the three floors in the school now has a “teacher-made” congregation space. Some teachers even refer to their classroom lunchtime space as the teachers’ lounge. Teachers separated into the different congregation spaces based on teaching level, teaching experience, and the actual age of the teacher.

Reflecting back on my ethnography and my own teaching experiences, I find myself sympathizing with the teachers. I, too, do not think that I would find myself comfortable talking about my practice or students around parents. I remember that when a parent or student would walk into our lunch-time, the conversation would shut down. My observations and experience make me ask: what is really at the root of our fear and mistrust?

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References:


Critical Pedagogy

Camilla Greene, Connecticut

I have a T-shirt from a Coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum. On it is the question: What Is Essential? This is a question asked by a number of people. I believe that in our urban high school classrooms, what is essential is not being addressed, questioned or taught. We ask the wrong questions.

We ask how we can close the achievement gap. We ask how can we get reluctant high school students to read or, at the very least, we ask how can we get the reluctant learners engaged in learning. The real question is: what does each high school student in America need to know and be able to do to live in a racially and economically divided global society? We need as educators to focus the learning of poor teens and teens of color on the dynamic realities of their lives. We need to be critical friends who engage in critical pedagogy with our urban, and I would venture, suburban youth.

At this point in my journey as an educator, facilitator, school coach, and technical assistance provider, I work in a variety of contexts. My most rewarding work is working and interacting with high school students from around the country. Whether I am working with or interacting with Matt Brown, a student at The High School for the Recording Arts in St. Paul, Minnesota, or Jermina, Ashley or Batelle, students at CEO Leadership Academy in Colorado, there are consistent practices that engage each of these students in critical and crucial ways. The educators who engage, teach, transform, support and help to develop these students and to hike them engage in critical pedagogy. It is by understanding critical pedagogy; it is by developing a critical pedagogy stance as an educator; and it is through the consistent application and practice of critical pedagogy both in and outside a classroom setting that an educator or any conscious adult is able to build across generational difference, across gender difference, across differences in life experiences to transform the lives of marginalized, disenfranchised high school students.

This encyclopedia defines critical pedagogy as a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge domination and the beliefs and practices that dominate. If educators around the country were to engage poor teens and teens of color in academic work that helps each student achieve a critical consciousness of the reality in their lives, then we would have less of a class of free-encyclopedians in learning. I put forth that our urban youth, through the messages on the streets, through messages in their music, and through the realities of their young lives, have a BS meter that tells them what we are offering them in the four walls of most of our so-called educational institutions is not worth their attention. The challenge for us is to flip the script. Instead of begging and skillin’ and drillin’ them to death, let’s engage in open and honest conversation. Start by telling and explaining to our students that the state tests, the SAT and the ACT are constructed so that they are unlikely to do well. Their challenge, should they undertake it, is to beat the odds and, with your help, achieve the markers of success set forth by the dominant culture in the game of education. But first they have to want to take on the challenge.

Caring is not enough to help urban high school students beat the odds. Beyond caring, our challenge as educators is to be conscious adults who can analyze our own belief systems and assumptions and critically analyze the purpose of teaching in our human democratic society. Once we have gotten a clear picture of the realities of public education in America, our job is then to help each student think and look critically at their lives and begin to craft their personal agenda on how each is going to define excellence, use their education to further their own development as individuals, and how each is going to use the knowledge, will and skills to strengthen his or her community. The question is not “how do we close the achievement gap?” Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right.

The question is not “how do we close the achievement gap?” Underlying that question is the assumption that if urban kids scored at or above the scores of white suburban kids, everything would be all right.

Connections: the Journal of the National School Reform Faculty
Reflection on a “Protocol in Practice”

Dave Lehman, New York

During a recent CFG training, "Coaching for Equity" with a group of teachers from new small high schools throughout North Carolina, I used the Four "A"s text-based discussion protocol with chapter six — "Changing the Discourse in Schools" by Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith — from Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice (edited by Peter Hall, New York: Garland Publishing, 1997). As the "rounds" progressed from Assumptions to Agree to Argue and to Aspire, some people had selected the same passage to "Agree with" that others had selected to "Argue with."

One of the participants pointed this out during lunch, and so we returned to an extended discussion of the various places in the text where this occurred, giving the differing participants an opportunity to say what they "Agreed with" and why, and others what they would "Argue with" and why, for the same passages. This discussion produced considerably heightened awareness among the group, both about each other and about how different people bring different perspectives to the table — it clearly took us deeper.

Thus, in using the Four "A"s protocol in the future, I intend to listen carefully to the selections for Agree and Argue, and to create a space for an extended conversation focusing on those passages where different people choose the same thing about which to Agree and to Argue. I also will modify the protocol so as to have a discussion after each round of hearing from everyone on each "A," and not wait until we have heard from everyone on all 4 "A"s. Experience tells me this will lead to deeper, more meaningful conversations, and not just reporting-out.

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Online Protocols and Resources

Visit www.nsrfharmony.org for a library of over 250 downloadable protocols and activities! Click on the Resources link on the side-bar or Protocol Online from the quick links menu. In the Resources section you can also order videos, CDs, browse back issues of Connections, and read archived listserve conversations. Access is free and open to the public.

Four "A"s Text Protocol

Adapted from Judith Gray, Seattle, WA 2005

1. The group reads the text silently, highlighting it and writing notes in the margin on post-it notes in answer to the following four questions (you can also add your own "A"): • What Assumptions does the author of the text hold? • What do you Agree with in the text? • What do you want to Argue with in the text? • What parts of the text do you want to Aspire to?

2. In a round, each person identifies one assumption in the text, citing the text (with page numbers, if appropriate) as evidence.

3. Either continue in rounds or facilitate a conversation in which the group talks about the text in light of each of the remaining "A"s, taking them one at a time — what do people want to argue with, agree with, and aspire to in the text? Try to move seamlessly from one "A" to the next, giving each "A" enough time for full exploration.

4. End the session with an open discussion framed around a question such as: What does this mean for our work with students?

5. Debrief the text experience.

In addition to Dave's comments on going deeper with the Four "A"s, I would like to add my use of "Application or Action" for the fourth "A." I have found that asking folks to commit to an action with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone. adopted June 2001

We are fortunate to work in a school system that has the resources and the community support to enable us to take on these challenges. Our work is both incredibly challenging and incredibly important. I feel more strongly than ever that we are the right group of people to take on these challenges together. Let's get started.

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The mission of the National School Reform Faculty is to foster educational and social equity by empowering all people involved with schools to work collaboratively in reflective democratic communities that create and support powerful learning experiences for everyone.

The National School Reform Faculty is rooted in four beliefs:

- School people, working together, can make real and lasting improvements in their own schools;
- Teachers and administrators must help each other turn theories into practice and standards into actual student learning;
- The key to this effort is the development of a "learning community" based on public, collaborative examination of both adult and student work;
- To create this community, practitioners need high-quality training and sustained support.

We teach him or her! How do I engage each student in critical pedagogy that allows each student to see education as a practice of freedom and a place where he or she can grow intellectually, spiritually, and physically in order to help themselves and their communities thrive in an uncertain, global world.

The principal of Harambee, a successful African-centered K-8 school in Philadelphia, told me yesterday that he engages his students in "naked" math. He explained naked math as having a variety of contexts based on origins, civil rights or the practice of freedom. He provided the following example of "naked" math with this problem: Rosa Parks initiated a bus strike that meant that ten-thousand African-American people who rode the bus twice a day did not ride the bus for a year. The bus fare at that time was twenty-five cents. How much money did the bus company lose? (The success of Harambee is partially evidenced by the fact that it has received an award for making Annual Yearly Projection for each of the last two years.)

Critical pedagogy for any urban male at this time would have to center around the incident of the fifty shots fired by New York City undercover cops that resulted in the murder of Sean Bell. I would have students think critically about this incident and I would use Papoose's rap 50 Shots as text.

My friends, allies, colleagues, and others who use the CFG structures to collaborate, I challenge us to use critical pedagogy with each other and in our CFG groups. I challenge us to lose our fear and confront each other in ways that push us to be more effective and relevant to the lives of our urban high school students who are least engaged in public education. Perhaps we could begin by engaging in an ongoing, online conversation initiated by Debbie Bambino on the book Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools by Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton. If we cannot be critical with each other in our work together, then we cannot work to help end the failures of large numbers of African-American, Latino, and poor urban children in our American public high schools. Do we have the courage, will and skill?

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Critical Pedagogy (continued from page 7)