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Using a recent CFG training, “Coaching for Equity” with a group of 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 Multicultural 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 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 a deeper, more meaningful conversations, and not just reporting-out.

Dave Lehman can be contacted at davelehman@mac.com

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”s):
   • 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, have each person identify 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 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 a deeper, more meaningful conversations, and not just reporting-out.

Dave Lehman can be contacted at davelehman@mac.com

Online Protocols and Resources

Visit www.msrharmony.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 listen conversations. Access is free and open to the public.

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.

You can reach David at david_summergrad@brookline.k12.ma.us

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.

adopted June 2001

Critical Pedagogy

(continued from page 7)

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?

Camilla Greene can be reached at camillagreene@worldnet.att.net