

2008 UF COE Writing Contest Entry

(This is one of 27 entries submitted in the College's recent writing contest on the topic of "What's Good in Education?". Visit the [writing contest home page](#) for links to other entries, including the winning one.)

WHAT'S GOOD IN EDUCATION?

Critical Friends Groups impact teaching

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My interest in Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) stems from my first meeting of the National School Reform Faculty in December. I attended as a learner with no knowledge of Critical Friends nor the work that they do. I chose to be placed in a group of educators who possessed a range of CFG and NSRF knowledge and experience so that I could make the best use of this time and learn from the group.

I went with an open mind and the intention of learning something new, yet not knowing what I would learn nor the impact this group would have on me. From this gathering of extraordinary people, I learned that a CFG is a safe learning place where educators meet and put themselves, their practices, and their own work and the work of their students out there, making it public, with the desire to expound on and improve their teaching with the best interest of their students and student learning in mind.

As I watched these women work on their schools' dilemmas, their students' work, their own work, I was in awe of their determination, thoughtfulness, reflectiveness and consideration for each other and the task on the table. The focus and respect was remarkable-bringing about change on so many levels. I wasn't sure what I could or would do with this new and transforming way of work, but I knew that I needed to share it and see what the effect of this process would be on my school community.

There are many published articles about Critical Friends Groups, CFGs, in circulation; all current articles and research supports the positive effects that CFGs have on school culture and climate. Critical Friends Groups do deliberate and reflective work around dilemmas and student work samples. These groups meet to examine and discuss the ways in which to inform instruction and reform education, thus being the best place to direct my energy and passion.

Upon my return from the NSRF meeting, I asked several of my colleagues to join me for our first Critical Friend's Group work session. It was a positive experience with my intern, specialists, and teachers from across grade levels learning about the mission of the National School Reform Faculty, the work of Critical Friends Groups, and then using a protocol to study the work of a struggling writing student. All feedback was positive and everyone left feeling like a learner, a collaborator, a problem solver, and perhaps most importantly, we all left with a feeling of "this is what's good in education today."

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