

## USING TEXT-BASED PROTOCOLS

## THE FIVE RS

BY DANIEL BARON

*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character...*

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

**F**orty-three years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr., threw down his prepared text and delivered a speech that will never be forgotten. On that hot August day, King reminded the United States of the great promise of freedom, justice, and equality for all. He had the extraordinary gift of being able to challenge the nation to close the enormous gap between its ideals and its social injustices. Although he was holding a mirror up to reflect the nation's social inequities, he inspired hope, fueled energy, and brought diverse people together.

The achievement gap that exists between students who historically have been successful at school and those who historically have not must be closed if King's dream is to become reality. During the Civil Rights movement, it was a commonly held belief that schools provided the opportunity to "level the playing field" for children from impoverished backgrounds and that education was the key to overcoming the inequities in the greater society. Today, there is overwhelming statistical evidence that rather than leveling the playing field, schools actually accentuate the inequities and injustices of society.

A primary measure of an equitable school is moving from equity of access to equity of rigor. To accomplish this, principals must work with their faculties to uncover and interrupt the ways that our schools are replicating the social injustices in society and purposefully take action to support the success of student groups that have been historically disenfranchised.

Because the barriers to equity stem from attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors that are so common and so often reinforced that they become habit, conscious attention to equity must permeate all aspects of the school's culture. Developing the following five Rs will help school communities remove their barriers to equity and build a culture in which all students can succeed.

**Rigor.** Rigor is the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging. In rigorous schools, students are evaluated by how they apply their understanding of content in new and unique situations. There is visible evidence that the school community takes self-study seriously, using multiple data sources, surveying multiple constituencies, and learning together from interrogating student work. Staff members do more than analyze, reflect, discuss, and debate. They use collaboration as the vehicle to change their practice. They continuously look for more effective ways to engage all students in their learning.

**Relevance.** Learning becomes relevant when a school infuses the cultures of all of its students into the life of the school. Equitable schools integrate the historical contributions and historical inequities of diverse cultures into their curricula and are committed to personalized teaching and learning that ensure that students are engaged in a rigorous course of study that honors their ancestral roots and cultural histories. Equitable schools eliminate the predictive value of race, social class, sex, ethnicity, and disability and interrupt past practices that do not serve each student well.

**Relationships.** Administrators, students, staff members, parents, and community share responsibility for creat-

ing a safe, caring, ethical, and supportive learning environment. Equitable schools build time into the schedule for professional learning communities that focus on student success. The school demonstrates an understanding of the need for students, parents, and staff members to build relationships that are based upon their mutual aspirations and interests.

**Resiliency.** In school and in life, successful people have the ability to recover from misfortune, adapt, reflect, and maintain a sense of humor while staying true to their convictions. Schools have the supports necessary to ensure that all students develop these abilities as well as perseverance and courage that will help them overcome obstacles to their learning.

**Revision.** A school that has developed the culture of revision has visible evidence that all students and teachers revise their work until it is the best they are capable of. Students and teachers are actively engaged in their learning communities and give and receive feedback to improve the work of all members of the learning community.

The principal is the person who has the most power to lead the transformation of a school. The five Rs have the power to accelerate the learning of all while closing the achievement gap for the least well-served students. The United States will never close the gap between its ideals and the harsh reality of children in poverty and of color until the culture of schooling is transformed.

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## THE PROTOCOL

The Wagon Wheels protocol is a dynamic process for co-constructing meaning and action plans that center on common ideas.

**Wagon Wheels.** In this protocol, participant partners discuss five ideas that are selected by the facilitator. Participants rotate (like a wheel) during the protocol, so participants will discuss each idea with a different

partner. Ultimately, changing partners stimulates lots of generative thinking in a very short time and helps develop a team that has a common purpose.

**Facilitation.** In preparation for the protocol, place five chairs back to back at the hub of the wheel and five chairs in the outer circle facing the chairs at the hub. The facilitator should select five topics for the participants to explore.

Ask the participants to bring paper and pen and sit in the seats in the wheels. Have the facilitator share the first topic with the participants and tell them that they will have five minutes to reach a common understanding of what the topic means and then brainstorm what it would look like in action. During their discussion, the participant pairs should take notes of both their own ideas as well as their partners.

At the end of the first five minutes, ask the participants sitting on the outside of the wheel to rotate one seat to the right. After they settle down, give them the next topic, and so forth. This section of the protocol will take about half an hour.

After the participants have discussed each topic, have them pick their favorite ideas for each topic and write them down on sticky notes, writing write the topic at the top of each sticky note. Put large flip chart sheets around the room, write a topic on each sheet, and have participants post their favorite ideas on the appropriate sheet. After the meeting is over, create focus groups to further explore specific topics and to plan how to put the ideas into action.

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Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit [www.nsrffharmony.org](http://www.nsrffharmony.org).