solid observable evidence – laid a solid foundation for more challenging feedback later in the week. The fact that the feedback was always tied to the questions the facilitators themselves had posed was key to the success of the debrief sessions. There were never any ‘gotchas’. This trust building process was not given short shrift, and its value should not be underestimated.

After all, most of the facilitators had never met John or me prior to this seminar week together.

I was surprised to learn how absolutely crucial the use of concrete observations was to the overall process. As I look back on the experience, I liken the whole observation process to a four-column table format:

| My Questions | Connection to Focus Questions | During the course of the day, I only typed in the description column. (This was the equivalent of round one of an ATLAS protocol – “What do you see, literally?”) Later each day, I would add warm feedback, my questions, and finally the connections to the facilitators’ focus questions. (This information was similar to “Interpreting the Work” and “Implications for Practice” round in an ATLAS protocol.) It was this note-taking process that provided the concrete and specific feedback that the facilitators seemed to appreciate. It enabled me to provide feedback that was nonjudgmental, because all interpretations were tied directly to the scripted activities – the raw data – and were not simply my opinions, based on my own experiences and preferences. I have to mention the importance of having some facility with the laptop in this role as process observer. John and I each had about 7 pages of computer-generated notes daily. These we e-mailed to the facilitators at the end of the week. I am sure I could not have kept the pace with scribing and writing organizing information later if I had tried doing it using handwritten notes.

One thing that I began to reflect upon myself as a facilitator: I began to wonder if I am as inclusive of other facilitators as I like to think I am. As I watched the facilitators working together and becoming smoother in their interactions over the course of the days, I came to wonder about the role I play when working with co-facilitators. I watched the lead facilitator, who has given several guest presentations in helping to provide a strong foundation for the learning community work at CES NW, as she sought to share the leadership with others. I wondered how comfortable I really am with sharing the leadership, and I wondered how much my personal investment in the outcomes of C2E work in our area may be restricted to the tune of 20% of the facilitators’ time dedicated to this effort. I began to think about such a flagrant degree. In fact, I didn’t, but I did know that I’ve been feeling less secure lately, what with all the child kidnappings and the sniper attacks. Yet it never really occurred to me that my fears were being manipulated to such a flagrant degree. In fact, I was even wondering if I was feeling more vulnerable because I was getting older...

But recently I went to the movies and I got a new lens on the whole fear issue... I was feeling a little anxious going in because I knew the film, Bowling for Columbine, might not be easy to watch, but I really wanted to see what Michael Moore had to say about gun violence in general and school violence in particular. It turns out that the title of the film is based on the bowling class that Klebold and Harris attended at Littleton High. The two young men actually attended their first period bowling class in the early hours that fatal morning when they took their lives.

I learned a great deal from this experience, and I appreciate the way Jill Hudson and the seminar facilitators of CES NW “walked the talk” of making their work public.

Did you know that while violent crime has declined steadily to the tune of 20% in recent years media coverage of these crimes has increased by 600%? I didn’t, but I did know that I’ve been feeling less secure lately, what with all the child kidnappings and the sniper attacks. Yet it never really occurred to me that my fears were being manipulated to such a flagrant degree. In fact, I was even wondering if I was feeling more vulnerable because I was getting older...

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NSRF Mission Statement

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

Bowling for Columbine

A Film Review – Debbie Bambino, Pennsylvania

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The film Michael Moore keeps returning to the question of why we’re so afraid as white people and whether our fears have resulted in our essentially violent national culture. He even goes so far as to offer an original, animated portrayal of our nation’s history as one based on fear, from the arrival of the Pilgrims, through the decimation of Native Americans and on down to the formation of the NRA and KKK during Reconstruction. He follows his thinking through history, up to, and including, white flight to the suburbs and a near hysterical frenzy of gun purchases all designed to keep “them” out of our homes and communities.

Moore’s not so tongue-in-cheek examination of racial fear and its manipulation by the powers that be was driven home in the movie and was underscored by his recent remarks as a guest on Oprah. He basically said that as long as we’re consumed with fears of each other, we’re sidetracked from a focus on the real problems that affect us all, problems like under-funded schools, unemployment and the threat of world war, to name just a few. I’m encouraging all my colleagues, friends and family to see this film and I’m reading Glassner’s The Culture of Fear: I think the implications for our struggles to build community and social equity are fearful. I’m hoping that the power of this film’s message will open some hearts and minds that fear has paralyzed until now.

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better express all his wonderful ideas in the different subject areas.

In the past three years we have tried everything, from looking at student work to placing dilemmas on the table. This year, we are organizing an integrated arts show that will involve all of us, working with three different grade levels, in the performance of a multi-media tumbler show. Our goal is to develop a rubric that will guide us from start to finish, one that will ultimately help us to look carefully at our teaching and at our students’ work.

The result of our work is simple: Focusing our energy on the goal of teaching and student learning has strengthened us as a group and as individuals.

Mary Beth takes the role of grade-level team leader for several years. She writes: “One of the reasons I wanted to join the CFG training was to improve my teaching and student learning has been a professional learning community that has helped us all meet mutual goals and all teachers. We had decided that we would organize an integrated arts show that would guide us from start to finish, a truly beneficial experience. We learned a lot about our own teaching strengths and areas where we need growth.

The students were fascinated by this process, and we were deliberately transparent about what we were doing together. It may sound corny but the students loved that they were teaching us how to teach better.

And isn’t better teaching really what this work is all about?

When I am now finding that CFG work applies to the following lessons for the week. We met very briefly immediately before each lesson to pose a focus for the observation, then we had the lesson and met imme-

In time, CFG work has filtered into professional evaluations and Critical Friends Groups.

Groups with particular curriculum purposes. I am now finding that CFG work applies to the following courses I am taking: The Looking at Student Work protocols have direct application to my work with Schools Attuned. Our CFG work has also moved our Science Curriculum along.

And then there’s my own reflection. Last year, I had one of the most enriching experiences of my teaching career: peer coaching. One of the people I had just adopted Moussing of Theorist as a method through which to increase our students’ reading comprehension skills. Using the book Strategies That Work as a guide, every teacher in the building set out to incorporate this approach into our reading instruction. Sherrie Greene, the Reading Specialist spear-heading the initiative, was looking for an oppor-

specific aspects of their facilitation, and about myself as a facilitator.

Overview of the Sessions

When John D’Anieri and I arrived in Seattle to act as process observers, we had relatively little definition of our actual role. Jill Hudson, in an e-mail a few days before we arrived, defined the task as:

• Basically, we are looking for you to see us as a facilitator and learn to see if we are really getting across the following ideas: improving student learning; a professional learning community, inquiry, reflection, Coalition of Essential Schools’ 10 Common Principles, collaboration tools, and tools for looking at evidence of practice.

When John and I met the other members of the seminar facilitation team, they refined their feedback needs by providing the following focus questions:

• How do we meet the different levels of learners in our seminar?
• How are the transitions between exercises? Are they smooth? Connected? Do they make sense?
• Timing and Pace: Does it feel rushed? Does one activity need more time than another? Are all activities necessary? Should anything be cut?

What is the balance between beliefs, functions, and structures? We used the Observer as Learner protocol that first day, and we agreed that the feedback at the end of the day would be mostly written and centered on the focus questions the group had pro-

Donations Sought For NSRF Scholarships

I n the spirit of equity, NSRF is seeking tax-deductible contributions in order to make our work accessible regardless of a person’s ability to pay. It is not our intent to provide funds for all those who otherwise would not be able to attend our institutes.

During the first five years of our existence at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, many of the costs associated with attendance at conferences and coaches’ seminars—including registration, food, transportation, and lodging—were covered by the generosity of the late Walter Annenberg. That level of funding is no longer available. Please consider sending a tax-deductible contribution to: NSRF Scholarship Fund, P.O. Box 1787, Bloomington, IN 47402

“Every year NSRF becomes more deeply rooted in the practice of creating democratic learning communities made up of reflective practitioners who support each other’s growth and practice. We are not a fad. We are a way that is purposeful, productive, and effective.”

- Daniel Baron, Co-Director NSRF

Ces Northwest Cfg Seminar Observation

Debbi Laidley, California

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