

a month earlier at the NCLR national office in Washington, D.C., assisted us with the facilitation and organization of the learning communities. Our agenda emerged from the work of the institute and, through the use of activities and protocols, provided a context for profound connections and reflections.

The NSRF and the Center for Community Educational Excellence will continue to work together to support all members of the NCLR family in teaching with the mind and heart, as a means of empowering Latino children everywhere. ■

CES Northwest...
(continued from page 7)

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-day ATLAS protocol. I used my laptop constantly each day, and found that the most efficient way for me to collect the data was to simply script the behaviors of the facilitators. I tried to be as objective and descriptive as possible, keeping my interpretations out of the scripting. I included direct quotes whenever possible, and kept some track of start and end times of the various activities. My note taking evolved into a four-column table format:

- Description
- Warm Feedback

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•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” rounds 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 with organizing information later if I had tried doing it using handwritten notes.

• One thing that I began to reflect upon about 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 so much of herself 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 CFG work in our area may be restricting the creative input of the very talented facilitators with whom I work regularly.
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. ■

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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...

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 Kleibold 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 high school hostage. The reminders of Columbine were hard to take, as were a number of other 911 calls by teachers and school personnel, but in the end it was Michael Moore's consistent questioning about our society's predilection for violence and the exposure of the media's saturation coverage of

crime that sent me reeling. Moore takes an on-camera walkabout with Barry Glassner, sociologist and author of *A Culture of Fear*, who contends that we are being fed a constant diet of fear in general



and a fear of “others,” especially African American males in particular. Throughout

tion 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

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 decima-

think the implications for our struggles to build community and social equity are clear and 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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NSRF Mission Statement

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.

CONNECTIONS

is a journal of the National School Reform Faculty. Published three times per year by the Harmony School Education Center, it provides a forum for CFG coaches and other reflective educators to share their practice.

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If you have any feedback or are interested in contributing to *Connections* contact us at 812/330.2702, kkelly@harmonyschool.org, dbambino@earthlink.net

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 production and performance of a multi-media tumbling

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 individual teachers.

Margaret Taylor teaches one of the school's seven combined kindergarten/first grade classes. She has held 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 skills as facilitator of a group of K/1 teachers. We had decided that we needed some leadership that would help us all meet mutual goals and all feel heard. The training focused me and taught me skills that ultimately guided me to being a facilitator, not a leader. Discussing and agreeing on a set of ground rules allowed everyone to feel part of the group and those guidelines became a concrete document we could all refer to. As I learned more from the training, it became clear that the "structure" of the group, having an agenda, listening to each other and making group decisions was moving us forward. The



protocols became useful in looking at children's work. In time, CFG work has filtered into professional evaluations and Critical Friends Groups with particular curriculum purposes. I am now finding that CFG work applies in 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."

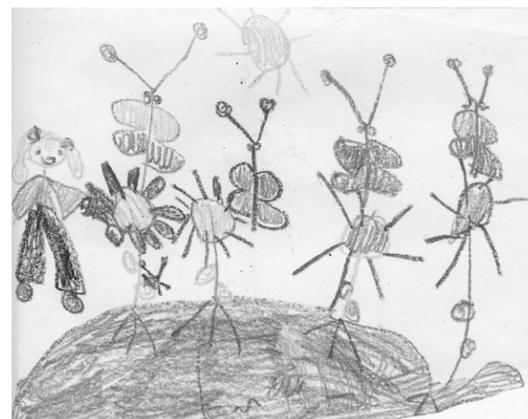
And then there's my own reflection. Last year, I had one of the most enriching experiences of my teaching career: peer coaching. Our school as a whole had just adopted *Mosaics of Thought* as a method through which to increase our students' reading comprehension skills. Using the book *Strategies That Work* as a guide, every teacher in the building set out to incorporate this approach into our reading instruction. Sherrie Greeley, the Reading Specialist spear-heading the initiative, was looking for an opportunity to see firsthand how this would work in the classroom. I was looking for a peer coaching experience; professional collaboration; a chance to really examine my teaching practice.

Sherrie and I designed this experience as our method of evaluation for the year, so there was an added layer of accountability. She and I met every Monday while the students were at recess, to plan our two peer coach-

ing 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 immediately afterward to debrief while the students were at lunch. Each teaching session was videotaped. We took turns in the roles of observer and teacher. The observer would take notes, but it was also very instructive (and often amusing) to watch the video.

Each Monday during our planning session, we would review the debrief discussion notes to incorporate what we had learned about the children's learning. The planning was dynamic and student-centered. The actual teaching of the lesson became a "meta-teaching" experience because we were looking through the lens of a learner. Sherrie and I both felt this was 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



By Samantha, age 5

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? ■

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When I accepted the invitation to travel to Seattle last June to take on the role of "Process Observer" for the CES NW Critical Friends Groups Coaches Seminar, I really didn't understand fully what I had agreed to do.

It turned out that I had stumbled into one of the most profound learning opportunities of my experience with CFG work. The role of Process Observer, a relatively new form of Peer Observation, went far beyond my expectations. Not only did I observe and report my observations to the Seattle facilitators; I also learned a great deal about giving feedback, about maintaining objectivity by basing interpretations on the data observed, 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 our entire seminar and look 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 warm and centered on the focus questions the group had provided.

Starting on the second day, John continued to work with the Beginning Coaches team for the duration of their four-day seminar, while I worked with the Continuing Coaches Seminar, which started its three-day session on Wednesday. At the end of each day, both teams debriefed for an hour among themselves, after which we each provided 15-20 minutes of warm feedback, cool feedback, and questions for the facilitators to think about. They met at 7:00 each morning to incorporate any changes or new ideas based on the previous days' debrief. Our roles, at the request of the members of the facilitation teams, evolved into something like a "coach of coaches" role. During the course of the next few days, we met with each of the individual facilitators at least once to give feedback on specific aspects of their facilitation, directed by their individual focus questions.

Learning – Some Anticipated and Some Surprising

When I agreed to spend four days in Seattle, I certainly anticipated learning some new approaches that I might be able to incorporate into the Coaches Seminars that I coordinate for the UCLA School Management Program in Southern California. I also expected that I would improve my skills at providing feedback. Those goals were certainly met – and then some!

I honed my skills at giving "edible feedback" – feedback that is nourishing (it helps the recipient to grow) and is easy to swallow (the recipient doesn't have to fight to take it in). I learned on Day One the value of sticking with warm feedback until the recipient actu-

ally asks for cool feedback and probing questions. The trust that we began to develop once the facilitation team heard positive feedback – backed up by (continued on page 18)

Donations Sought For NSRF Scholarships

In 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 attending our gatherings, but to earmark every dollar obtained through this solicitation to support 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