

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."

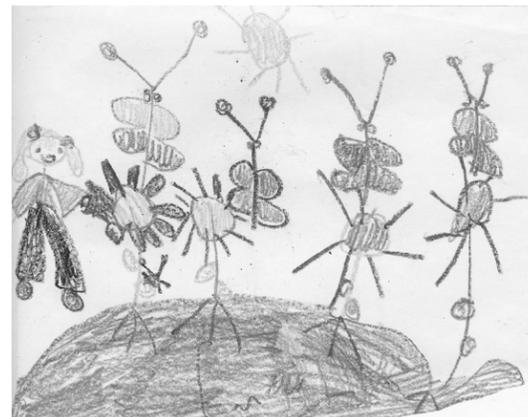
And then there's my own reflection. Last year, I had one of the most enriching experiences of my teaching career: peer coaching. Our school as a whole had just adopted *Mosaics of Thought* as a method through which to increase our students' reading comprehension skills. Using the book *Strategies That 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)

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- Daniel Baron, Co-Director NSRF