

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...
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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



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-

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

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

In an article that appeared in the September 1988 edition of Phi Delta Kappan, Mano Singham, Associate Director of the University Center for Innovations in Teaching and Education, Case Western Reserve University, reminded us of an early warning system used by coal miners to detect the presence of deadly fumes in their working environment. The system was quite simple: miners went into the mine with a canary in a cage. If the air in the mine killed the canary, it would soon kill the miners.

Singham uses this metaphor to suggest that the persistent achievement gap between students of color and White students may really be a sign of “fundamental problems with the way education is delivered to all students.”

As a group, Black and Hispanic children continue to be disproportionately poor—a rate that is three times higher than that of White children. In addition to the persistence of poverty, the main deterrent to raising achievement stems from low expectations and a lack of academic rigor in the classroom.

A recent report by CNN indicates that Hispanics have a dropout rate of 21%. Among Blacks and Whites, the numbers were 12% and 7% respectively.

One of the premier organizations fervently struggling to close the achievement gap is the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). Founded in 1968, NCLR is the largest constituency-based national Latino civil rights organization. NCLR is a private, non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to cultivate support and strengthen its affiliates and conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy at the national level.

This summer, NSRF began an inspiring partnership with NCLR’s Center for Community Educational Excellence (C2E2). The primary mission of C2E2 is to build education collaboratives, to strengthen the quality of education for Hispanic students, and to

more effectively involve Hispanic families in the education of their children.

C2E2 held its first annual New Teacher Professional Development Institute (NTPDI) on August 5-9, in San Antonio, Texas. This venture brought together 43 new teachers from affiliate and grantee schools throughout the nation for a week of cohesive, intensive work. The institute focused on four areas: curriculum and instruction, classroom climate, the Latino learner, and learning communities.

Its design sprang from a truly collaborative effort by a passionate, dynamic and committed staff, school-based instructors, and the NSRF.

The NTPDI was a “24/7” event immersed in the multi-layered issues of classroom practice and curriculum. Sessions began at 8:00 a.m. and usually lasted until 9:00 p.m. with facilitator debriefings that usually concluded at 11:00 p.m.

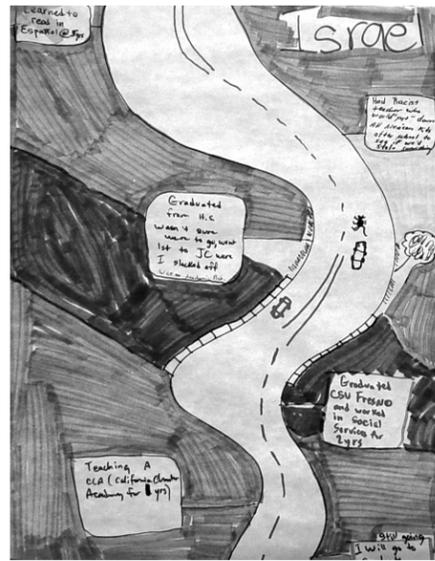
Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching with the Head

These sessions involved helping participants understand that good teaching is about love, commitment, setting clear, measurable and purposeful expectations, and knowing how to craft instruction that will make students successful.

Participants explored ways to establish where students were headed, how they could “hook” them into meaningful learning through exploration, rehearsing complex performances, and challenging demonstrations of content mastery.

Classroom Climate: Teaching with the Heart

This component of the NTPDI emphasized that good teachers know themselves and their students well enough to create interdependent, respectful classroom learning communities. Participants examined their own life journeys and reflected on how these had shaped their perception



of students and their expectations of student “behavior” in the classroom. All participants developed philosophies for classroom climate to be used as a catalyst for the work they would begin back at their schools.

Knowing Students Well: Latino Learners

Each day began with a Wake-Up session that addressed issues of equity, diversity, and racism and explored characteristics of Latino learners from various scholarly perspectives. Presenters included: Monica Palacio and Ruth Rubio of the National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI), Dr. Blandina Cardenas, Dean of the School of Education and Human Development, University of Texas-San Antonio, Dr. Sonia Nieto, Professor of Education, University of Massachusetts, Dr. Marta Sanchez, Professor of Education, Pepperdine University, and Elva Traviño, author of *Barefoot Heart: Stories of a Migrant Child*.

Professional Learning Communities: Working Together

During the week, we designed and facilitated Nightly Learning Team sessions, which served as a context for collaboration around issues of teaching and learning. NCLR staffers who had attended a two-day training held

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the foundation for building the kind of trust in each other that allows us to take risks, to say what we really believe, and to challenge each other’s assumptions. We also use these practices in our organizational work, and in so doing, continually work to create a more honest, open, and collaborative culture in our national organization as well.

We believe that no one in a school community should be anonymous—that all should be known well. Furthermore, we believe that everyone’s work should be public—even transparent. We value multiple perspectives, and we know the power of feedback as we strive to improve our practice. Our ability to learn from each other, and to be accountable to and for each other, depends on us de-privatizing our practice. We ask this of our leaders and colleagues in NSRF as well. We can’t work together to close the achievement gap if we allow ourselves to stay isolated from one another, and we can’t work for those students who are not learning if they remain invisible to us. Most importantly, we can’t benefit from our collective wisdom if we allow ourselves to remain anonymous to one another.

We believe that there is an enormous amount of untapped expertise in our schools, and that it is important to view all of the people in a school’s

community—adults and students alike—as having important knowledge that must be brought to the table. Furthermore, not only do we believe that everyone has worthwhile knowledge and expertise, we also value each other as learners. Not all school reform organizations view educators in this way, preferring to think that people in schools don’t know enough and can’t learn if left to their own devices, and thus need scripts, didactic models of professional development, and ‘training’ that is ‘delivered’ by outside experts.

In NSRF, we trust educators to shape their own professional development in collaboration with each other, and we trust that we will know when we need to call in outside resources. We believe that if we are going to effectively adapt our practice to meet the needs of all our students without lowering standards, we can’t do it alone. Instead, the ‘answers’ lie in the collective knowing of the people who are closest to the students. We believe that powerful learning is reciprocal in nature, and we try to live by this tenet in all facets of NSRF’s organizational and program work as well.

Finally, we believe that the values and beliefs we hold should extend to all aspects of our work. It is not a coincidence that all of the beliefs I have discussed above are described not

only in terms of our work in schools, but also in terms of our own organizational practices. This has its roots, I think, in an early organizational decision that all NSRF facilitators would be people who did the work they taught others to do. This has meant, through the years, that the majority of NSRF’s facilitators come from schools and districts that are part of NSRF, and that NSRF staff coach CFGs as part of their work. That practice has continued to this day.

Some years ago, Carl Glickman, who was on our Advisory Committee when we were still at Annenberg, asked us during a strategic planning meeting, “Will you work in the mainstream, or will you be the people who say otherwise?” It seems that, as an organization, we have evolved to the point where we are both—part of the mainstream, as my educational journals will attest to, while continuing to be the ones “who say otherwise.” ■

Gene Thompson-Grove, Daniel Baron and Steve Bonchek, the three co-directors of NSRF, will take turns reporting out to us in Connections. Contact Gene Thompson-Grove at gthompsongrove@earthlink.net Contact Daniel Baron at dbaron@bloomington.in.us Contact Steve Bonchek at harmony@indiana.edu

Research • Data • Evidence

As the National School Reform Faculty develops a research agenda we are actively soliciting research that you have done around your work. In an effort not to recreate the wheel we would like to study what research has already been done, make better use of that, and then determine what future studies might be useful to inform our practice. We suspect that there is a wealth of data about the effects of CFGs and CFG-related activities in our schools within the cover of dissertations, filed away as class papers on hard drives, or stacked in milk crates next to desks. Some of you have contacted us. We hope more of you will. If you have done research, collected data, or have documented evidence about your work, and you have not already done so, please contact us at nsrf@harmonyschool.org ■

