Pedro Bermúdez, Florida

Connections: a Journal of the National School Reform Faculty

I n an article that appeared in the September 1988 edition of Phi Delta Kappan, Dr. 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 Black and Hispanic child continues to disproportionate—on a rate that is three times higher than that of White children. In addition to the persistency of poverty, the main determinant to raising achieve—south stands 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 constitu—sity-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 conduct applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy at the national level.

Together, NSF began an inspiring partnership with NCLR’s Center for Community Educational Excellence (C2E2). The primary mission of C2E2 is to build education collaboration, 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 (NTFDI) on August 3-5, 1995. The institute 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 NSF.

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

Curriculum and Instruction: Teaching with the Heart

These sessions involved helping par—ticipants understand that good teaching is about meaningful learning, 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 NTFDI emphasized that good teachers know themselves and their students well enough to create interdependent, respectful classroom learning com—munities. 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 of 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 ses—sion that addressed issues of equity, diverse, 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. Bladina 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 ses—sions, which served as a context for collaboration around issues of teaching and learning. NCLR staff invited their teachers who had attended a two-day training held... (continued on page 18)

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Research • Data • Evidence

A s 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 CFC-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. We have done research, collected data and are interested in your work, and you have not already done so, please contact us at:

gthomspangrove@earthlink.net

gthomspangrove@earthlink.net

Gene Thompson-Grove, Daniel Baron and Steve Bonchek, the three co—directors of NSF, will take turns reporting out to us in Connections. Contact Gene Thompson-Grove at gthomspangrove@earthlink.net

Contact Daniel Baron at dbaron@bloomington.in.us

Contact Steve Bonchek at harmony@indiana.edu

Director’s Report

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La Raza

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