

**National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) New York
Facilitator Portfolio
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Introduction

I came to the United States of America 13 years ago (March 5th, 1990). I was teaching mathematics in Russia and (of course!) became the teacher of mathematics in American High School. Ever since, I attended many workshops, trainings, college classes... I was always amazed how organized and knowledgeable some presenters were. Several years later I was asked to share my experience of using manipulatives in the Math classroom on a staff development day. I was very enthusiastic about my future presentation. It was MY! opportunity to *Teach Teachers*. I worked very hard on the preparation of the lecture. I prepared manipulatives for every topic of the math curriculum: monomials, probability, solving linear equations, transformations, angles, triangles, parallel lines, calculators, and so on and so far. The day came! A lot of teachers (34) signed up for this session. Many participants were looking forward to *sharing* how to make math more fun. And here was my first big mistake: I *lectured* participants for almost two hours! Now I can imagine how bored they were. I guess, I modeled what NOT TO DO in the classroom. I had a long way to learn and knew that it will help me in teaching students in the classroom as well. *LESS IS MORE!!!* Now I know it.

Two-and-a-half years ago I joined the UFT Teacher Center. I was assigned to the Teacher Center at Long Island City High School. One of many responsibilities was to help new teachers in all means possible. Where should I start? What do I say? How do I answer all questions? What if I don't know the answer? But I was not alone. All new teacher center members were given help, support, and training every other Saturday starting September. As overwhelming as these trainings were, I had a lot of great ideas and wanted to share these ideas with my new colleagues at LIC HS right away. Maureen Ciano became my field liaison at the same time when I joined the Teacher Center. Her help and support could not be stressed and appreciated enough. I also was involved in all kinds of professional development.

Building Democratic Community with Voice and Respect for All.

- Works to develop trust with and within the group
- Always does team-building in context
- Sets standards/norms without fail
- Talks less / listens more
- Creates open environment
- Ensure all voices are heard
- Regularly builds in habit of reflection
- Is respectful of existing community and group

2002-2003 school year at Long Island City High School started with over 30 new teachers in various departments. On the very first day of school (before students came)

I, with support of our union representative called all new teachers for a meeting in the school library. I introduced myself and explained about the UFT Teacher Center mission and my role in it. Together we agreed on the day of our weekly meetings (every Monday from 4:00pm to 6:00pm) and developed the agenda for the first day. They had many questions on classroom management and lesson planning. How do I meet all their needs to effect students' success?

17 new teachers showed-up on the first Monday meeting. We used the hopes and fears protocol. We carefully recorded all hopes and fears. It helped me a lot to plan our future meetings: search for appropriate standards, activities, lesson plan format, and much more. I've learned to listen more and talk less. All participants were very happy with the process and ideas and activities that we shared. Sharing is the best way to learn. The following Monday 24 teachers came to our meeting (the word of mouth). And the Monday after, 29 new colleagues came to participate in after school professional development. I was extremely open about my goals for the sessions and feel that our common work helped to establish a great atmosphere of trust in our community. At some sessions we discussed Best Practices and how they were implemented in the classroom to meet students' needs. For this activity teachers worked in pairs. I made sure that no two teachers teach the same subject. I thought it would help everybody to "think outside the box". We had the time limit: one teacher speaks for 3 min. (no questions asked) and the second teacher listens. Then for two minutes the listener may ask questions. The speaker responds. After the discussion pairs switch roles. Then we shared in larger group. This meeting helped all new teachers to enrich their practices and adopt (implement) new ideas in their own classrooms. During other session we discussed how to deal with "critical" situations: lateness, cutting, no home-works, pass to the bathroom, low test/quiz grades, etc. We used the "Popcorn Activity" to share the common trouble. Then in "go around" activity teachers came up with suggestions for each specific "trouble". Everybody was happy to know that they were not alone in experiencing the lateness, cutting, no homework... It was great to hear "What would you do if...?" And the most important, it was great to hear "When this happened in my class, I did the following...". I made one more extremely important discovery: we learned to listen to each other, take turns to speak. The atmosphere of respect within this group could not be stressed enough.

Agendas for every session were centered around specific common concerns and needs of the teachers and the specific strategy and structure we would use to address these needs. All participants were provided equal opportunities to participate and be heard. We worked in small groups (I used the "Matching Post Cards" activity to form the groups of three or four) as well as large group. Some sessions (for example: "How to plan a good lesson?") I would form the smaller groups by subject areas. And than in larger group we would share the commonalties: creative life related openers, interdisciplinary motivational activities, etc. At some sessions I used the "Count-off" activity to form the smaller groups. (Teachers would count from one to five. All "ones" would form a group; all "twos" would form a group, and so on). I used these different methods in building small groups because of several reasons.

- 1). I model how teachers could form the groups in their classrooms.
- 2). I wanted teachers to work with different partners every time we met.
- 3). In short time people would get to know most of their colleagues.

Every session all participants had chances to reflect verbally and/or in writing as to what was accomplished and, more importantly, how these experiences could be applied directly in their classrooms.

I used evaluation forms every Monday to assess participants' needs for the next meeting. Every meeting we started by sharing their own feedback from the previous meeting in order to connect our last session with the current session.

I greatly enjoy facilitating these sessions and watching teachers from various departments come together to share their needs, hopes, fears, success, and professional growth.

Surfacing and Managing Controversy and Paradox; Valuing Dissidence

- Values and uses awareness of group development
- Begins to be transparent with group
- Uses standards/norms for dealing with discomfort
- Occasionally addresses conflict
- Uses structures and protocols to deal with difference and dissidence

One paradox I found myself facing is that during some of the sessions my new teachers would constantly complain how slow and unprepared our students are: "My students can not read. My students can not write. My students can not add, subtract, or multiply." When visiting some classes I hear students say: "This teacher can not teach..."

From the very beginning of our sessions I made it clear to my new teachers that we are working together to develop methods and strategies to meet the needs of our students. On our first meeting I asked the participants to fill out the questionnaire to prioritize their needs (see attached). We developed the long-term plan (see attached) and agreed that we will be flexible if and when other emergency needs occurred. I used the "Go Around" strategy to find out the strengths of every teacher. As the session progressed my teachers were more and more opened. Great ideas lead to more great ideas. I had to set-up the time limit. This evening we worked way more than two hours. Nobody wanted to leave; everybody had something to say. What do I do? And I said: "How about, you write down your ideas in your lesson plan, try (test) them in class, and we will discuss the success of your strategies next time we meet". It worked. And I realized that the agendas for each session should be more carefully structured. LESS IS MORE!

By raising the standards we have to support their building knowledge and capacity. We used "Looking at Students' Work" protocol. Together we came up with a lot of classroom activities that were based on students' prior knowledge. We discussed how to motivate our students by:

- Capture student interest in the subject matter
- Highlight the relevance of the subject matter
- Help students maintain expectations for success
- Design the lesson to maintain interest and promote student success
- Express interest in the content and project enthusiasm
- Provide feedback and rewards for performance
- Create a comfortable learning environment
- LESS IS MORE!

I stressed that we were working together to seek ways to enhance our students' learning. I believe that I am successful. My participants (new teachers) actively participate in open, meaningful discussion and sharing. I am very pleased with the feedback from our sessions (see attached).

Developing a Facilitator Tool Box

- Begins to use protocols to look at student and professionals' work
- Emphasizes giving and getting descriptive feedback
- Routinely addresses the tension between individual and group needs
- Designs agendas with input
- Adjusts time as needed

Last year the Department of Second Languages in my school got the approval for project C.A.P. I was asked to facilitate after school professional development for teachers who teach bi-lingual and/or ESL classes. I was very active in engaging teachers from various departments to come and share their ideas. This time my participants were not only new teachers. Prior to the first scheduled meeting I asked few of our experienced teachers to share the use of structures and strategies and their application in classes (with students whose first language was not English). I gave those teachers an agenda of the upcoming session. I asked for their input. It was not an easy task. I wanted to talk. I scheduled a series of meetings. I had few expert teachers meet in small group to develop agendas and discuss protocols to be used at our sessions with the whole group. We used the "Brainstorming" activity (see attached) to come up with the best activities for our meetings with the large group. Feedback/evaluation sheets were used after every session to plan our next meetings.

As happy as I was working with this group of teachers, I believe that I could have done much more. I still did not ask the teachers for feedback as to what strategies they had actually adopted and how the strategies were used in their classrooms. I never asked what strategies they decided not to use and why. I could probably work closer with some newer teachers directly in their classrooms to facilitate their professional growth. We planed five more meetings to the end of this school year and I still hope to "catch-up".

I WILL!

Using Authentic Public Learning for Equitable Outcomes

- Keeps equity and student achievement in the forefront
- Uses a research base, e.g. Guskey's levels for assessment of Professional Development:
 1. Participant Satisfaction
 2. Participant Learning
 3. Participant Application
 4. Measurable Outcomes

As I said before I joined the Teacher Center two-and-a-half years ago. My main focus was to facilitate professional development of the new teachers. I strongly believe that I could not share my experience if I do not try new strategies and methods in MY classroom. At the end of September (of my first year as a TC staff) I walked in the Math department in my school and asked math teachers who would let me teach one of their classes. They did not believe that I was very serious about it. One

teacher (Jenisha Thompson) said, “OK. You can take my class.” Together we looked at all five of her classes and I decided to co-teach her weakest (based on the records) group of students. Together with Jenisha we looked at students’ work from the beginning of September. We realized that we would have to work very hard to bring the math scores of those students up. And the work had begun. Everything I learned at my TC trainings I would share with Jenisha. We would include a lot of new strategies and techniques in our lesson plans: literacy, writing in the math classroom, manipulatives, real life problems and situations, audio and visual devices, in-class/home projects, small group work, large group discussions, discovery... I had to learn not to give the answers to the problems right away. This was the hardest part for me. At the same time we had to keep in mind that LESS IS MORE and KISS (keep it simple...) It worked! 63% of our students passed the class. The hard work was rewarded.

Later that year I was involved in writing Instructional Resource Guide for Mathematics Teachers (see attached). I used most of the things that I tried in class. It is easier to share the practical experience than theoretical knowledge. I worked on the Guide with the group of high school teachers. It was a wonderful experience. All our ideas and arguments/discussions I would bring back to my class and “try”. Some lessons worked well some did not. We had to change and modify accordingly. But I realized that whatever works for me does not necessarily work for other teachers and visa versa. Last summer our math team presented one of the chapters of the Guide to the math teachers in the Summer Institute. The feedback was: “Give us more!” Once again the hard work was rewarded.

In conclusion, I think that I am on the right track in facilitating the professional growth of many educators in my school and many other schools throughout the city. Although I feel that there are still a lot of things for me to learn. I strongly believe that all teachers have to learn how to facilitate and not lecture, which was my very big mistake at the beginning of my career as a teacher.