

National School Reform Faculty (NSRF) New York Facilitator Portfolio

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Background

In September 2002, my colleague, JoAnn Hauptman, and I were asked by the director of the Teacher Center to develop and present literacy training to the high school professional developers of the UFT Teacher Center. We were told there would be five full day sessions to plan. My colleague and I were pretty confident that this was something we could handle. Both she and I were practiced presenters with a solid background in current concepts of improving adolescent literacy. In the past three years, we had conducted high school literacy summer institutes for teachers in New York City. Between the two of us we had over 50 years of teaching ELA and 11 years of working as Teacher Center staff – developing professional development activities in one high school geared to the needs of that school. (This includes new teacher support, lesson planning, classroom management, cooperative learning, math strategies, brain research applications to the classroom, literacy across content area, action planning, rubrics and assessment study groups, department meetings, staff development days, etc.) We were pretty good presenters. We just hadn't presented to the full high school Teacher Center corp. So when we were asked to construct four full day sessions presenting current ideas in adolescent literacy, we were very enthusiastic. Our focus was going to be literacy and stick to that. That was our forte. Other concerns, (the fact that there were many newer members to our organization), were someone else's problems – or so we thought. To give ourselves some credit, we were aware that since we had so many new members to our staff, we needed for people to get to know one another. Teacher Center high school staffers work in isolated environments, being the singletons in a school. So these internal professional development days were an opportunity for people to get to know one another and learn the culture of the organization. However, to be honest, our focus was to get the information out to our staff and then discuss. However, for the first two sessions, we

continually mixed people around so that colleagues could get to know one another and develop discussions around the work.

This first session, which was informational, seemed to run pretty smoothly. During the second session, our planning broke down, with errors in handouts, discussions other than literacy being called for, and requests/demands for more time to process the information. Other disgruntled voices were heard, with new and some older members voicing their needs: “This is so much information.” “This is nothing new.” “This is only the research.” “How do we do our documentation?” “How can we talk about this when teachers are being beaten up.?” They were not happy and neither was I. In the following days I attended the NSRF Training Institute with Alan Dichter and learned that I had to facilitate more and train less. Luckily, even though I found out I was extremely “North” in my group working style, I learned some understanding of group dynamics, group needs and protocols with which to tap into to facilitate the understanding of improving adolescent literacy. While my colleague, JoAnn, was not a member of the training institute and is more “North” than I am, she was eager to improve our sessions and embraced the concepts of the NSRF.

Building Democratic Community with Voice and Respect for All
Surfacing and Managing Controversy and Paradox
Developing a Facilitator Tool Box

Using Authentic Public Learning for Equitable Outcomes

In preparing for the November 8th Teacher Center High School Literacy Professional Development Day, I needed to change the format from the previous sessions. Feedback had revealed discontent among the more senior members and inability to process the new information at the session from the newer members. The group of 50 staff developers ranged in 15 years of service to one month. Trying to meet the needs of all, within the context of training in literacy, presented a challenge. I consulted with Teacher Center high school field liaisons, who are in a noted position of leadership to give input in the design of the day’s agenda and to conduct some **Norm Setting** and develop **Hopes and Fears** with the group. I had learned from the previous

two sessions, that neither my colleague nor I should solely be the ones to facilitate these professional sessions. (Though I was told by my director to limit the facilitation by others.) The **Norm Setting** took a different direction, (we were not all on the same page), and it took greater portion of the morning sessions than we had planned. This was out of my control. (One of the liaisons planned a very lengthy presentation and hadn't informed us of his time frame.) Strangely, I felt more comfortable with the lack of control because I felt more confident that the protocols I had learned would help. The session already felt different.

In order to build respect for the existing community, my colleague and I decided to use the expertise within the group and in advance asked, (through e-mail), more senior members to act as facilitators to work with the newer members. In this way, the session would not rely on my colleague and myself to continue to present and train others and limit controversy. All facilitators were emailed one week before the session asking them if they would like to facilitate. When all replied in the positive, a letter was sent along with copies of the two protocols they were asked to facilitate. (Artifact #1) This gave the senior staff time to question and prepare for the Professional Development Day. (All of the senior members had worked with protocols before and felt comfortable with them.) We wanted to honor and respect their role in the professional organization. Not attending to this need in the previous two sessions led to anger and controversy. With this better understanding, my colleague and I developed each group with a senior facilitator, middle level and new members. In addition, all of the high school Teacher Center staffers were emailed to prepare and bring in student work for sharing. The two protocols used were the **Descriptive Consultancy Protocol** and the **CAC Protocol**. Since the session would last all day, there was time to accomplish both. The reason we chose the **Descriptive Consultancy Protocol** was to enable the newer members to consult with the senior staff in dealing with the literacy issues at their respective schools. In this way we tried to establish trust within the small groups, allow for all voices to be heard while respecting the expertise of the senior staff. In addition, to hear how others might solve a problem helped to build the values of the Teacher Center practice. It also allayed fears in allowing all members to understand that everyone is dealing with conflict, discomfort, and dissatisfaction no matter the seniority of the staffer. In tapping into the reaction of the

small group facilitators, by circulating from one group to another, the responses were very positive. The members of the staff were engaged in thoughtful discussion, and seemed to value each other's contributions. They felt they learned how to facilitate a group better and felt much more satisfaction in the session. Validation!! People needed to feel validated in order for any new learning to go on.

In preparing to utilize the **CAC** protocol, we had asked the staff to work with teachers using some of the literacy strategies we had introduced at the previous two training sessions. Each member was to bring in five copies of student work that had been the result of some literacy strategy. In this way all were prepared to share their work. and learn from each other. While not all participants had time to share their student work., the goals of introducing looking at student work protocols, team building in the context of the literacy work, and developing further uses of student work protocol were met.

The feedback sheets allowed us to see that through the practice of giving voice to all and giving respect and leadership to those already expert in the organization led to a much better professional development session. (Artifact #2) The needs of most of the members were met as were our needs as trainers/facilitators to help the new ideas to be processed. We used a feedback sheet that gave us a hard look at our process as presenters and facilitators. (Artifact #3)

In developing a **Response to Feedback**, I realized that the toolbox of NSRF facilitating strategies made the session much more powerful and decreased the controversy and discontent. (Artifact # 4)

In the final session in December, we began with a tweaking of **Hopes and Dreams**. "What are your expectations for this session?" We wanted to extend value to any dissidence that came up and felt compelled to address it. As the expectations were elicited, my colleague and I felt more confident that our facilitator's tool box would help us look at our professional work in a more effective way. We designed the agenda in consultation with others (Artifact #5) and requested other members to facilitate a portion of the afternoon session. We did not want to be seen as the only Teacher Center

members to present ideas and invited a colleague to share with us the text based protocol she preferred to use. (Artifact #6)

After we modeled another literacy strategy, this time the discussion seems more equitable, less contentious, and I was more transparent in facilitating the ideas, with all their flaws. We continued to use the same senior staff members as facilitators, and reconfigured the groups making sure that new connections were being made. The environment was more trusting and many voices were heard, new and veteran staff.

After a break, we set up a **Silent Conversation** wall with the title “ Literacy in the High Schools – the Role of the Teacher Center”. There was a slow start, but within minutes the wall was covered with ideas, comments and connections. This activity enabled staff to reflect together in a powerful, visual modality. One senior staff members said, “ I really like this activity.”

We then continued with **Looking at Student Work** (the same CAC protocol as the last session). The staff again brought some sample of student work that was a result of their sessions with a teacher using some literacy strategy. The group plunged into discussion and sharing. There was a familiarity and value of the protocol and a building value of each other as a contributor to learning. The tension was gone and the group worked in a cohesive fashion.

At the end of the day, we returned to the initial expectations and the group found that we had met them all. I felt relieved and pleased at the satisfaction of the staff. Though we hadn't met all the points of the agenda, my colleague and I adjusted the plan, dropped activities, and continued on to meet the needs of the members.

I learned so much through this process. I have become more sensitive to the nuances of presentation/facilitation with those who do this all the time – Teacher Center staff. Giving voice to controversy, and cool feedback is a challenge and a growth experience, and I feel more willing and capable to engage in and manage this kind of discussion. I feel that there will always be this paradox with training and facilitation. One has to be very careful to fulfill both, and I still find this to be a tricky process.

Nevertheless, I have moved on to other groups to try the training/facilitation process. On a staff development day, I worked with the ESL and English Departments to share their thinking and best practices. This time I adapted two protocols **Reflection Feedback and Looking at Student Work** (Artifacts # 7, #8, #9, #10), so that all members could share their work. It was difficult to facilitate so many groups at once and keeping them on the time frame of each, turned me into the Ogre of Time, (complete with dirty looks from some participants). The result was the very positive. Teachers felt that the protocols helped set the stage for the most professional discussions they had all year. They felt validated. Teachers felt good about their work and learned from each other. Those who felt initially that protocols were unnecessary, took a complete turn around.

It is clear to me that using protocols with teachers and students moves the discussion and learning forward. They create a safety net and provide the opportunity for equity in discussion. In our school system, this doesn't happen too often. I will continue to create opportunities for teachers to be professional.