

Tip Sheet on Facilitation

Facilitation is a skill that is developed—or deepened, if you already have done it for a while—over time, and each person has a personal style. But here are a few strategies, principles, and tips to keep in mind as you facilitate meetings:

- **It's about building partnerships.** One of the main factors that determines the quality of the experience the students will have in the residency is the health of the partnership between the artist and each teacher, the artist and all the teachers as a group, and your relationship with each of them and with the group. The program manager's main responsibility is to develop these relationships.

- **Be present.** You may come into the room knowing what you think it is important to discuss, and sometimes the conversation will take off and go in a different direction than you had anticipated. Be open to this, and try to stay in touch with what you think: is this a tangent that is taking the people in the room away from the topics that are the most important? Or is this a truly useful dialogue that reveals new information, ideas, factors, thoughts, impressions or feelings the exploration of which will enhance the partnership of the people in the room and ultimately the students' experience? If it's the latter- then let the conversation flow away from the agenda until it runs its course, or until you need to redirect everyone in order to gather pertinent info or move to any imperative topics before stopping the meeting.

- **Successful facilitation has more to do with entering at the right time with the right interjections, and less to do with control.** Your job is not to control what happens in the room, but to start and end the conversation, and keep it on track, participate when you have something important to say, and keep track of time. Keeping this in mind will take some pressure off of you. When they know you are at the helm, the meeting participants can relax and focus on the discussion and not worry about how to break it to the group that they need to leave to grab a coffee and a sandwich in their only spare ten minutes of the day.

- **Prepare ahead of time.** If you prepare your materials, as well as reflect on what is important for you to say and ask, you will feel more relaxed and be able to be fully present in the room. Know the few things you absolutely NEED to bring up, or the pieces of information you absolutely need to obtain, and then if the conversation goes in a different direction and you think it's a good one, you can still interrupt when you need to in order to bring up anything imperative.

- **Don't take it personally.** If teachers seem disinterested, stressed, or otherwise put off, please keep in mind that they are likely coming from an outrageously busy day with demands on them from their principal, AP, union, the DOE, state and federal education agencies, parents of their students—and that's all before they get in the classroom and attend to the students themselves, the reason you're all there. Sometimes they are giving up their only break of the day to meet with you and the artist, so can you blame them if they seem a little dazed sometimes?

Over time, as you get to know them better and they get to know the artist better, this will fade and they will think of ArtsConnection time as a positive part of any day, even the busiest. And 99% of the time, even if they are stressed, they are still very appreciative of the artist, you, and AC—they just might not be able to show it all the time. So, don't take it personally—and remind the artist of this too if need be! It is never a commentary on the way or degree to which they value the artist, or art form. If an artist is upset about the way any school staff member acts, just remind them: "it's not about you." Encourage artists to put themselves in other people's shoes.

- **Pay attention to the details.** Part of building successful relationships is building trust, and so pay attention to being on time, bringing the right materials, confirming the meeting ahead of time, and other such details. This is concrete proof that you are reliable and acts symbolically as well.

Sample planning meeting and reflection meeting agendas follow this tip sheet. Feel free to customize them, and be sure to discuss all of this with the artist ahead of time. For more info on talking with the artist before the planning meeting, which can be really helpful, and what you should bring see page 24 in the manual.

- **Ask the right questions.** As you know, much research has gone into how to develop questions that yield good conversations and higher-order thinking; feel free to pay attention to these factors as you plan. Lots of AC staff members also have given a lot of thought to this and would probably be happy to talk with you about it. Spending a bit of time thinking through the questions you plan to ask can go a long way towards a good meeting.
- **Read.** This is a great article Rachel Watts wrote on successful facilitation further in this resource. In addition, there are lots of books around the office that explore the topic.

Facilitating Partnership, Building Community: Meetings in the Residency Framework

By Rachel Watts

WHEN MANNY ARRIVED IN MY KINDERGARTEN CLASS, he did not speak in complete sentences. He would point to things he wanted or shake his head to communicate. By the time he was in my third-grade class, he had come a long way but still had delays. When ArtsConnection storytelling-artist Ron Sopyla first met with the class, Manny chose a spot on the rug far from the storyteller's chair. He propped himself against the wall as if he wanted to disappear into it. After all, storytelling required speaking. Manny's fear showed. As the residency went on, however, something miraculous happened. With each session, Manny inched slowly toward the storyteller's chair and mouthed the words of the story.

At the end of the residency, Ron asked for volunteers to retell one of the stories he had taught the class. Manny volunteered. He sat tall and smiling in the storyteller's chair. Each word that left his lips was delivered with confidence. When he finished, the class cheered him and he beamed with delight. He had accomplished something that was virtually impossible just a year before—communicating effectively with poise in front of a large group.

The experience changed Manny. He became more self-assured in his manipulation of the spoken word. This new love for the spoken word translated into a developing thirst for good stories. In reading and writing workshops, Manny started to read more independently and his writing contained more detail and a wider range of ideas. Manny was becoming a literate person right in front of my eyes.

Ron's presence and his gift for storytelling allowed this development in Manny that I had been unable to spark. Through the arts, Manny improved his receptive and expressive language skills, and subsequently enhanced his literacy development.

—Tashon McKeithan, third-grade teacher

Rachel Watts is currently the director of the Marin Youth Center in San Rafael California. She previously worked at ArtsConnection as a program manager and research associate.

Classroom-teacher Tashon McKeithan and teaching-artist Ron Sopyla formed a partnership that allowed Manny to gain new skills and confidence. Yet many relationships between teacher and artist never approach this kind of success. Teachers have an understanding of the social, developmental, and educational issues that challenge their students, while artists like Ron typically have vast expertise in their art form, acquired through years of experience. But artists' language can seem foreign to teachers, and teachers' language can seem unintelligible to artists. Without effective communication between teacher and artist, a partnership like Tashon's and Ron's is far from guaranteed.

When this partnership is successful, teacher and artist both comment on feeling respected as professionals. And, most important, student learning benefits. But to initiate such collaboration, arts organizations must do more than simply put artists and teachers in the same room and hope that a meaningful relationship will magically develop.

ArtsConnection has found that sending program staff into schools to facilitate encounters between teachers and artists increases the likelihood that they will connect in meaningful ways. Through a series of planning meetings and reflection meetings that span a residency, the facilitator helps teachers understand the artists' processes and goals for the residency. Similarly, he or she helps artists understand teacher language, curriculum requirements, and pedagogy.

Facilitators have played a role in allowing for a clear, unobstructed flow of communication between teacher and artist. For example, in one meeting teachers talked about "scaffolding a lesson" and the artist mentioned "intentionality in dance," each assuming that the other knew what these phrases meant.¹ The facilitator translated,

¹ Scaffolding is defined by Jerome Bruner as "a process of 'setting up' the situation to make the child's entry easy and successful and then gradually pulling back and handing the role to the child as he becomes skilled enough to manage it." (1983). *Child's Talk*. New York: Norton). Intentionality in dance refers to movement with a clear physical, emotional, and dramatic intention; intentionality is necessary to create dance.

EFFECTIVE FACILITATION

A facilitator can use the following strategies to prepare for and conduct planning meetings that systematically address student learning in the arts.

Before a Planning Meeting

- Touch base with the artist, teachers, and a contact at the school
- Communicate logistical information
- Identify conditions unique to each meeting that may affect facilitation
- Identify facilitation goals based on those conditions.
- Plan a reflective moment (art activity, reflection on a word or recollection)

During a Planning Meeting

- Establish residency and meeting context
- Make affirmations and eye contact, remember names
- Encourage participation
- Help the group establish ground rules, such as meeting structure and participant roles
- Help the group share goals for the residency
- Ask participants to share some of their prior arts experiences
- Summarize and restate key concepts in order to ensure understanding by all participants
- Take notes
- Provide closure: review what has been said and help participants explore possible next steps

Between Planning Meetings

- Observe workshops
- Seek feedback from the artist, teachers, and perhaps an administrative contact at the school

defining the terms to help group members better understand each.

Not all organizations and programs are set up to add facilitation to their efforts. Before implementing facilitators, organizations might explore the following questions:

- What goals and expectations do we have for our work?
- What conditions affect the work that we do?
- Have we experienced a successful partnership in our work before? Why was it successful? What were the participants doing?
- How can a facilitator help raise such a partnership to a new level?
- What opportunities do we have for people to talk to each other about their work?

- Address any concerns or issues
- Type up notes from the previous planning meeting and possibly share them with participants in the next planning meeting
- Identify key themes from notes for use in the reflection meeting

During a Reflection Meeting

- Ask the group for possible agenda items
- Share possible themes from planning meetings, workshops, and feedback given between meetings
- Remind the group to stay focused on student learning in the art form
- Use the artist as a resource for aiding conversation about the art form
- Explore goals: Are they being addressed? If not, how should they be? Should goals be refined?
- Connect comments with original goals
- Ask one question at a time
- Consider when to lead and when to hold back (and when to let go)
- Identify differences in perspectives so that they may be explored more fully
- Identify clarifying or probing questions
- Ask a question and then allow time for participants to explore the answer. Do not immediately fill a silence with your own answer or a rewording of the question
- Turn comments into neutral questions
- Provide closure to the meeting

After a Reflection Meeting

- Write up the notes and share them with all parties
- Identify themes for the next meeting
- Are there staff people, teachers, parents, artists, or consultants who are especially good at building working relationships among people? What can we learn from them? How can we use their skills to help us in our work?

By codifying the elements of facilitation and the strategies that correspond to them, we hope to help novice facilitators avoid a common pitfall illustrated by my own experience when I first started facilitating. Because I worried about not knowing enough about art or education to lead a discussion on student learning in the arts, I entered meetings with a list of preset questions. The result was that sessions focused almost entirely on logistical issues rather than on curriculum content and student learning. We thus encourage facilitators to keep a more open

ELEMENTS OF FACILITATION

Over the course of a residency, discussion in planning and reflection meetings often initially focuses on logistics, and then shifts to centering on student learning in the arts and sometimes even to the aesthetic qualities of an art form itself.

We have identified four elements of facilitation, specified in the table below, to encourage such a shift:²

Facilitating Logistics

Definition: Establish a context for the work. Provide information about the artist and the program. Share meeting and workshop schedules.

Facilitator's Goals: Help participants understand the residency process and provide a venue for communication between teacher and artist.

Facilitator's Actions: Take the lead, negotiate logistics, and ensure that all participants understand the context of the program.

Facilitating Learning

Definition: Build awareness of student learning in an art form and of its connections with learning and development in other disciplines.

Facilitator's Goals: Help participants learn from each other as a group. Help the group define what and how students are learning in the arts residency.

Facilitator's Actions: Ask clarifying questions to help participants describe student learning and understand the language of each other's professions.

Facilitating Reflection

Definition: Encourage teachers and artists to rethink their teaching practices and explore the extension of the arts into the classroom.

Facilitator's Goals: Help participants identify a line of inquiry that is informed by student work in the art form and related to teaching practice.

Facilitator's Actions: Try to connect all comments to specific examples from the residency. Turn comments into questions that may inform teaching practice.

Facilitating Aesthetic Understanding

Definition: Connect descriptive observations of students with the nature and language of the art form. Develop literacy in the art form by articulating its practice and pedagogy.

Facilitator's Goals: Help participants identify skills, strategies, and knowledge in their arts experiences. Help them to understand key terms and concepts of the art form and their relationship to student learning and development.

Facilitator's Actions: Ask participants to share students' surprising observations. Help participants find words to describe the aesthetic elements of the art form.

agenda and to deliberately address the more advanced levels of facilitation whenever possible.

Here are several sample questions a facilitator can ask to encourage teachers and artists to explore student learning and aesthetic development:

- What have you noticed so far about your students in the workshops?
- Have you observed students using tools or strategies from the residency in the classroom?
- How are the workshops addressing the themes we identified in our previous meeting?

Professional Development for Facilitators

Since the inception of facilitated meetings, ArtsConnection has helped program staff members complement their experiences at school meetings. We do this through professional development sessions that give them the

²We first encountered the concept of facilitating logistics and learning in Steve Seidel's work, *24 Hours: An evidence process for improving teaching and learning* available at Project Zero's Web site, <http://pzweb.harvard.edu/Research/Evidence.htm>. Though the definitions are different, Seidel's work helped us identify a way to classify facilitation.

opportunity to share their expertise with each other and to hone their facilitation skills. Moreover, we ask artists and teachers to do the same. By acknowledging each other's expertise as practitioners, we engender the kind of trust and collegiality that allow us to examine our practice as arts administrators.

In order to train facilitators, we have adapted several protocols used with teachers and artists, such as:

- Reflection on a key word
- Video description process [See Batton, chapter 6]
- Reflection study, adapted from lesson study [See Nicoll, chapter 2]

Creating a staff of effective facilitators requires time and financial commitments from the arts

organization. But the rewards of a successful collaboration between a teacher and an artist—children's learning in the arts—repay the initial investment many times over. As Tashon McKeithan writes of her student, "I am unsure whether Manny would have made as much progress without the arts-residency experience. For Manny, there was something thrilling and alluring about the arts that provided the connection to literacy that he desperately needed." ■

Resources:

David Allen and Tina Blythe. 2004. *The Facilitator's Book of Questions: Tools for Looking Together at Student and Teacher Work*. New York: Teachers College Press and the National Staff Development Council.

Kevin McCarthy, Elizabeth Ondaatje, Laura Zakaras, and Arthur Brooks. 2004. *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.

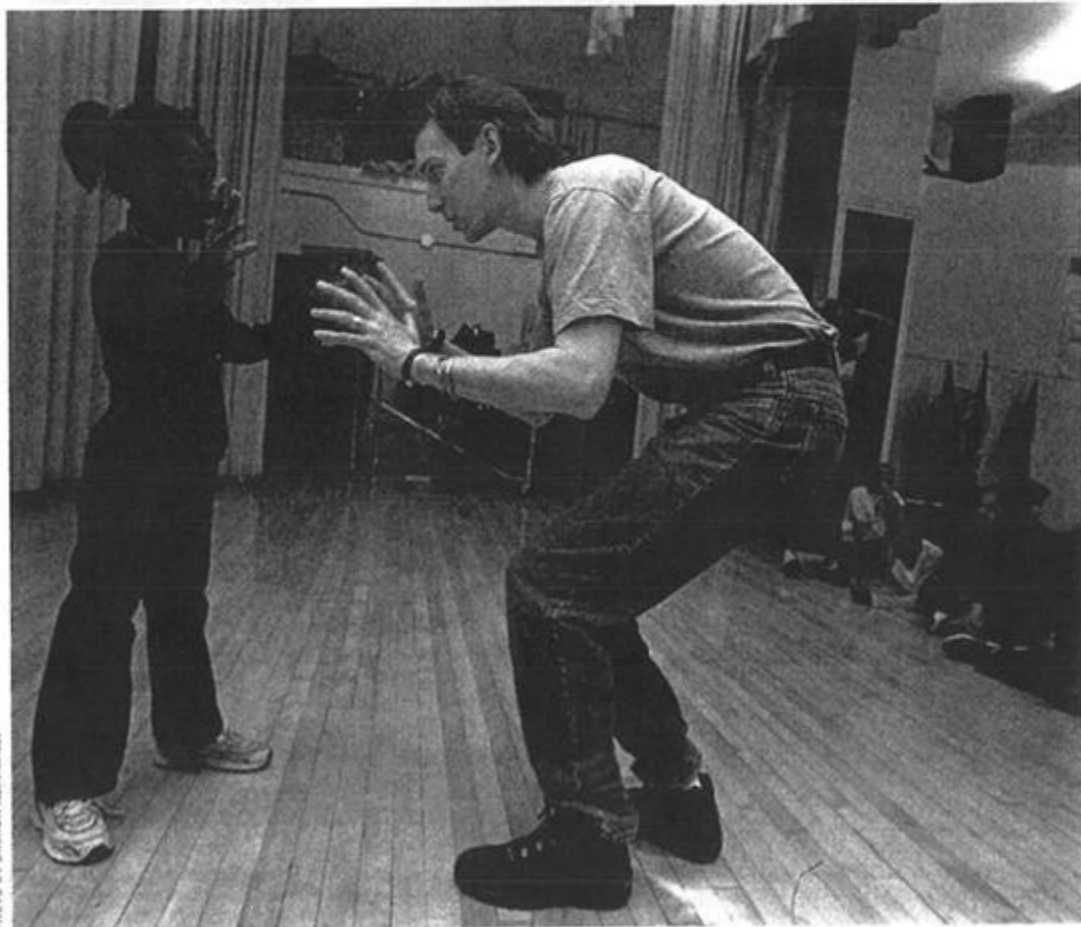


PHOTO BY BRENDA KENNEALLY

Larry Grimm coaches a student in a drama workshop at PS 276k.

Notice, Describe & Ask:

This protocol was defined in the Bridges program but has been a key part of our work in schools in supporting students to work and think like artists. It can also be translated into our work as facilitators & program managers as well.

<https://teachwithartsconnection.org/bridges/notice-describe-ask/>

What is Notice, Describe & Ask?

Through Notice, Describe and Ask we talk about student, TA, and Teachers' work in rich detail, but without judgment. As we engage everyone in conversation, we help them discover their own voice, while building their language and observation skills.

Notice

Take time to learn about teachers or artists by observing, before speaking. Notice habitual responses and let them go. Then, notice artistic choices.

Describe

Describe specifically, enthusiastically, and without judgment, no matter where someone is in their process. Call attention to varied choices.

Ask

Ask open-ended questions, allowing them to speak as artists. Listen closely & repeat their words to show you understand.

Provides information artists need to develop their work

Describing expression specifically helps students see their choices with greater clarity. When artists hear their own work described, they get ideas of what to do next. Hearing their peers' work described gives them new ideas, opening a wider palette of choices to explore.

Feel valued and seen

The practice of close observation allows the facilitator to slow down, let go of assumptions and judgment, and see what's really there.

When someone looks closely at a your choices and describes with specificity, it is deeply affirming- more so than "good job."

Builds reflection skills

NDA helps artists consider the specifics of their work, and models the questions artists ask themselves to move work forward.