



PHILADELPHIA  
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LEADERS

# Teachers Motivating Teachers at FACTS

## Improving Practice through Teamwork

Every August Philadelphia teachers head back to their classrooms, rested and ready to tackle the challenges of the coming year. They decorate their classrooms, analyze their student lists, and plan for a year full of learning, opportunities and fun for students. In the back of each teacher's mind, however, is also the toolbox of strategies that will be needed to overcome the obstacles that students may arrive with on their first day of school. At Folk Arts-Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS), the teachers work together to refine this toolbox, especially as it relates to their students' literacy skills.

Noga Newberg, a 13-year teacher, understands the impact of this collaborative leadership style. “A contributing factor for FACTS’ success,” she said, “is the ability for teachers to work collaboratively to reach common goals related to student achievement and success.”

FACTS was founded in 2005 in order to meet the needs of Philadelphia’s growing immigrant and refugee communities. FACTS serves 480 students in Kindergarten through 8th grade. 77% of FACTS students come from low-income families and the majority of the students speak a language other than English at home.

To address the needs of their students, FACTS’ teachers and administration adopted the innovative Reading and Writing Workshops for Language Arts instruction based on the Columbia University Teachers College Reading and Writing Project (TCRWP) model. When TCRWP added new methods for teaching reading and writing in 2014, those same teachers knew they would require increased support to implement them with fidelity. “Teachers expressed a need for more opportunities to collaborate in a deeper study of the content of these new Units of Study,” Newberg said.

Along with their principal, a team of teachers, looking for opportunities to expand their implementation skills and teacher practice, developed a proposal that they submitted to the Philadelphia Academy of School Leaders (School Leaders) for a Teacher-Leader Collaborative Grant (TLCG). In 2016, led by Newberg, the team was awarded a one-year grant to address a school-specific challenge to student learning.

Teachers set to work on their project immediately, which, Newberg said, was “focused on a cohort of teachers setting goals for themselves related to the reading or writing workshop.” This cohort of literacy teachers videotaped their lessons, reviewed their own videos individually, analyzed the video with a partner and then received individual support from an independent literacy coach. This approach, according to Newberg, fit with the culture of the school. FACTS “is a school that fosters reflection and goal setting for students and teachers. It is a collaborative school in its nature,” she explained. “Teachers really appreciated the opportunity to view their teaching and find ways to improve upon their skills with the support of the collaborative, reflective team process we used.”

Newberg stressed that the “project’s goal, as I see it, was to build a culture of reflective practices. It was to better our teaching instruction by watching our practice. I loved getting a chance to hear how teachers across grade levels were learning about themselves and their students by watching their videos and then reflecting on that practice.”

### **Lessons Learned and Shared**

Even students are sharing in the collaborative culture that exists among FACTS’ teachers.

“I know that students that I worked with appreciated the goal setting that I did for myself and then with my students. In fact, a majority of my students noted to me that setting goals in the classroom was one of the best things we did all year. They felt that through goal setting, they were able to work towards meeting those goals and progress as readers in the classroom,” Newberg said.

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After the successful implementation of their 2016-2017 grant project, the team at FACTS applied for and received a second Teacher-Leader Collaborative Grant to take on a new challenge that they've identified. This time, Newberg chose to have a co-lead - Jill Benowitz. "I am a collaborative person and I don't like to lead projects completely on my own. I don't think it's effective to have a singular leader," Newberg explained.

For their next project, FACTS will, "collaborate more systematically with other schools to develop our literacy program, with an intensive focus on middle school. As a small school, we would like the opportunity to discuss challenges, share best practices, and share resources with other educators in Philadelphia through scheduled workshops and mini-conferences where teachers present and brainstorm solutions to challenges they face," she said.

"We hope to use this year to gather teachers from at least three other schools to share ideas about challenges and successes [that arise from] implementing the workshop approach," Newberg noted. "I'm really looking forward to creating a community of learners in Philadelphia whose focus is on supporting the implementation of such a rigorous and responsive curriculum." ●