



CONNECTED ARTS NETWORKS QUARTERLY SESSION, NO.7

FACILITATION SKILLS & EQUITABLE PROTOCOLS

The **Connected Arts Networks (CAN)** project establishes national virtual Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for educators in dance, music, theatre, visual and media arts. CAN aims to build a sustainable model of professional learning for arts educators in public schools to strengthen their leadership skills and build their capacity to address social-emotional learning and equity, diversity, and inclusion in their arts instruction. Find out more about the project and our partners [here](#).

CAN arts educators are exploring facilitation as a leadership skill and engaging in conversations on how to leverage facilitation and educational protocols to ignite deeper engagement in arts instruction. The Center for Leadership and Educational Equity ([CLFE](#)) defines protocols as “structured processes to support focused and productive conversations, build collective understanding, and drive school improvement.” CAN believes that thoughtful use of protocols is crucial for building resilient and equitable classrooms and professional learning communities.

In this Tip Sheet, current CAN Teacher Leaders offer personal anecdotes about their classrooms and how they are facilitating environments where every student is encouraged to share their unique voice and perspective. We hope you use this resource to integrate protocols into your curriculum, and to personalize techniques to fit your teaching style and artistic discipline.



How can you leverage facilitation and equitable protocols to ignite deeper engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving in your arts classroom?



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Alexa Wynschenk-Ring (she/her/hers)

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Educational
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Alexa Wynschenk-Ring has been a theatre educator for 9 years. Since receiving her BA in English Teaching and Theatre at the University of New Hampshire, she has been passionate about education and social justice. She pursued her master's degree in applied theatre at Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, England. She had the opportunity to facilitate body image theatre workshops for teenagers and adults. Alexa is passionate about ED&I and SEL; she also serves on her school's equity site team and facilitates her own equity group at school. Alexa believes all human beings should have access to theatre. She is ecstatic to be a member of the CAN team, as it has completely transformed her practice as a theatre teacher.

Community: How do you build community through facilitation?

Facilitating can be nerve-racking, as people in the group typically think the facilitator is the expert. I love using the term "Activator," which I learned from CAN. A leader can help activate the conversation and ensure a safe and brave space. When approaching a meeting as an activator, I know my job is to create an engaging and participatory atmosphere. Community is built through that when the activator ensures every member of the group has a voice and norms are put in place for the difficult conversations. When folks meet together in discomfort, trust is built.

Action Research: What is a protocol you use in the classroom that has contributed to the improvement of your teaching practice?

I love icebreakers and warm-ups in class. Typically, theatre warm-up games are very group oriented and serve as an ensemble-building activity. Ensembles have a shared goal, and that allows everyone to play together on one team. I also love having students move around the room to music and when the music stops, they pair up and answer a get-to-know-you question I've asked. They continue to do this until they've paired with everyone.

Impact: Name a facilitation strategy you use regularly. How does using it lead to highly engaging lessons with students and/or meetings with teachers?

I love a check-in and check-out with meetings and classes. Every single day, all six of my classes do a check-in question. Many people don't realize that students can go to school and not speak in front of their teacher once. Check-in questions provide students with an opportunity to be heard and valued, and it also allows them to get to know and trust one another.

Resources: What are the top educational resources on facilitation and equitable protocols that you would recommend to colleagues?

- *Engagement by Design: Creating Learning Environments Where Students Thrive* by Douglas Fisher. I think it's fantastic for SEL and working on student-teacher relationships.
- *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework For Culturally And Historically Responsive Literacy* by Gholdy Muhammad. CAN was able to attend a meeting with her, and she has brilliant ways of looking at students as geniuses.
- *Courageous Discomfort: How To Have Important, Brave, Life-Changing Conversations About Race And Racism* by Rosalind Wiseman

Reflection: What are your next steps to grow in your facilitation skills as a leader?

I am excited to lead and learn through practice. Sometimes I get my words jumbled when speaking in front of peers, rather than students. It can be intimidating because everyone is an expert in their own ways. I'm excited to learn from others and grow as a leader and organizer.



What are your favorite opening and closing activities or rituals? How do they help you create a welcoming and inclusive environment with students or peer teachers?



Jessica Lucas (she/her/hers)
Director of Dance; Dance Educator
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Jessica Lucas is a dance director of a high school dance program with more than 20 years of dance experience in ballet, jazz, modern, contemporary, lyrical, tap, and hip-hop. Originally from Erie, PA, she has danced professionally within the United States and internationally. She received her bachelor's degree in dance from Slippery Rock University, where she was involved in performance, choreography, dance team, and the dance honorary. Jessica has coached and choreographed for numerous schools, studios, and organizations. She is an active member in the dance industry, specifically in dance education, through NDEO, PaDEO, IDEO, and the CAN Teacher Leadership Program. She continues to share her passion for dance education through curriculum and program development, as a local and national dance judge, and as a dance director in a local high school system to create future artists.

Community: How do you build community through facilitation?

Building community through facilitation entails creating an atmosphere fostering collaboration, communication, and belonging. For students, strategies include team-building activities, setting expectations collectively, and using feedback loops. Teachers benefit from Professional Learning Communities, regular meetings for professional development, and inclusive decision-making processes. Ground rules emphasizing respect and active listening contribute to a positive environment. Encouraging diverse perspectives and creating safe spaces further strengthen the sense of community. Overall, building community is an ongoing process that involves adaptability, inclusivity, and a commitment to continuous improvement, both within student groups and among teachers.

Action Research: What is a protocol you use in the classroom that has contributed to the improvement of your teaching practice?

I have successfully implemented various protocols from CLEE's site in my dance studio, with "Chalk Talk" being particularly effective. This silent, text-based collaborative activity encourages participants to share ideas without verbal communication on a shared surface. It promotes reflection, inclusivity, and depth of thinking, allowing all voices to contribute. Participants write thoughts, questions, or insights, building upon each other's contributions. Chalk Talk fosters a contemplative and inclusive learning environment, offering a visual representation of collective ideas. Its asynchronous nature supports group discussions, idea generation, and the cultivation of diverse perspectives, enhancing the overall learning experience in the dance studio.

Impact: Name a facilitation strategy you use regularly. How does using it lead to highly engaging lessons with students and/or meetings with teachers?

Regularly employing the "Fishbowl Discussion" strategy enhances engagement in both student lessons and teacher meetings. In classrooms, the approach promotes active participation, critical thinking, and diverse perspectives. Students actively engage in discussions, fostering communication skills and metacognition. For teachers, the method becomes a valuable tool for professional development, allowing the observation and sharing of effective facilitation techniques. The rotation aspect promotes

collaboration, enabling educators to learn from one another's expertise. The Fishbowl Discussion consistently leads to highly engaging and interactive sessions, creating a dynamic learning environment for both students and teachers.

Resources: What are the top educational resources on facilitation and equitable protocols that you would recommend to colleagues?

- [Learning for Justice](#) and [Edutopia](#) offer resources on equity in dance classrooms.
- The [National Dance Education Organization](#) provides webinars on inclusive teaching, as well as the Dance Education Literature and Research descriptive index ([DELRdi](#)), a database for dance research.
- [Dance/USA](#) offers tools for equity, diversity, and inclusion in dance. Follow social media handles for real-time insights. These resources empower dance educators to create inclusive environments, address bias, and foster equitable practices, ensuring a diverse and enriching dance education experience.

Reflection: What are your next steps to grow in your facilitation skills as a leader?

Remembering that growth is a continuous process, and embracing a mindset of curiosity and adaptability, I will be exploring and incorporating new facilitation techniques to keep my approach dynamic and responsive to the needs of my students and fellow teachers, experimenting with different approaches and learning from both successes and challenges, and continuing to engage in mentorship relationships to gain insights from experienced facilitators and learn from their experiences.





Chay Ross (she/her/hers)

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Chay Ross is a multifaceted artist, educator, and conference presenter hailing from the inland cities of South Bay and South Central Los Angeles, California. Armed with a Bachelor of Arts in Art Education from California State University Los Angeles, she elevated her academic journey with a Master of Arts in Education and a California Single-Subject Clear Teaching Certification in Visual Arts. As a congressionally acknowledged National Teacher Leader with the National Art Education Association's Connected Arts Networks (CAN), Chay currently serves as an Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Commissioner for the California Art Education Association (CAEA), visual and performing arts facilitator, instructional lead, and an Adobe for Education Teacher Innovator. With more than 18 years of experience in education, she is currently in her 12th year at Alliance Cindy & Bill Simon Technology Academy High School, having taught an array of courses, including introduction to art, commercial art, digital design, yearbook publication, and Advanced Placement Art & Design, with a strong emphasis on social-emotional development; equity, diversity, and inclusion; literacy and technology skills; culture and identity; and contemporary social issues. In her leisure time, she enjoys creating jewelry, Zen doodling, exploring controversial podcasts, analyzing select hip-hop music, and quad skating.

Community: How do you build community through facilitation?

I foster community through facilitation by prioritizing open communication, creating a safe space, and encouraging collaboration. Our community circle sessions establish clear expectations while covering diverse topics, contributing to a positive atmosphere. Acknowledging students' achievements, from awards to personal growth, is a regular practice, fostering a culture of celebration and personal connections in our classroom. A round of applause is encouraged, shaping our collective identity. As a guide and listener, my role builds trust, enabling students to thrive in a supportive, engaging learning community.

Action Research: What is a protocol you use in the classroom that has contributed to the improvement of your teaching practice?

Introducing a presentation protocol significantly improved my teaching methods. Inspired by my college professor's approach—encompassing presenting, class critique, and teacher feedback—I integrated this system for my high school students. I enhanced it by specifying criteria, including attire, introductions, adherence to time limits, use of complete sentences and academic vocabulary, and assessment of active listening and contributions to discussions. Regularly implementing this protocol throughout the school year, I observed students taking ownership of their learning by actively engaging in the process and demonstrating significant progress.

Impact: Name a facilitation strategy you use regularly. How does using it lead to highly engaging lessons with students and/or meetings with teachers?

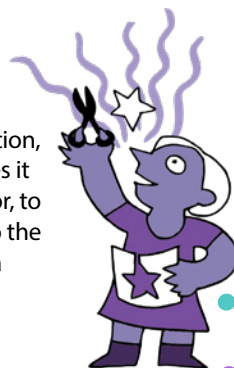
My favorite facilitation strategy is unquestionably brainstorming, which offers numerous benefits to my lessons, including active participation, diverse perspectives, collaboration, creativity, innovation, and increased confidence. Not only does it activate prior knowledge, but it also enables me, as a facilitator, to assess what scholars comprehend. This smooth transition into the lesson's content is complemented by an art activity, creating a dynamic and engaging learning experience.

Resources: What are the top educational resources on facilitation and equitable protocols that you would recommend to colleagues?

- "The Power of Protocols for Equity" by Zaretta Hammond:
<https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/the-power-of-protocol-s-for-equity>
- "Using Protocols for Equity" by Jeanie Phillips:
<https://tiie.w3.uvm.edu/blog/using-protocols-for-equity>
Using Protocols for Equity by Jeanie Phillips (article):
<https://tiie.w3.uvm.edu/blog/using-protocols-for-equity/>
- NAEE ED&I Hub: <https://www.naea-edi.org/>

Reflection: What are your next steps to grow in your facilitation skills as a leader?

Reflecting on my classroom facilitation, I'm currently undergoing Teacher Leader training with Connected Arts Networks and I'm applying it at my school, district, state, as well as nationally. To transition, I'll actively pursue professional development in leadership and facilitation, drawing insights from mentorship. Engaging in action research, I'll refine strategies for continuous improvement. Developing advocacy skills, I'll actively participate in community-building initiatives, connecting with stakeholders. These steps, shaped by my classroom facilitation experience, aim to empower me to lead and inspire colleagues in broader educational contexts.





Enoch Robbins (he/him/his)

Music Teacher

W. B. Sweeney Elementary—Windham Public Schools
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Enoch Robbins is currently a K–5 music teacher at W. B. Sweeney Elementary School in Willimantic, CT. He teaches general music, choir, orchestra, and modern band. In addition to teaching, he plans professional development for his colleagues and coordinates district-wide collaboration. His background is in wind ensemble and church choir. He has also worked with a variety of performing artists from different backgrounds to study various musical traditions, such as Hindustani vocal music and Afro-Peruvian festejo. Enoch received his Bachelor of Music in Music Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and his Master of Arts in Curriculum from Appalachian State University. Currently, he is enrolled in Boston University's doctoral music education program. Within the Connected Arts Network, he is most excited for the chance to work with other passionate professionals to decenter Western classical music and expand the scope of music education. He hopes to create a professional development framework that will help teachers to understand their own musical and cultural backgrounds affect their teaching and to deconstruct their biases.

Community: How do you build community through facilitation?

I believe in honesty and radical authenticity. With kids and adults, I am always open with my mental and emotional state, and I invite them to do the same with me. When you ask me, "How are you?," I tell the truth. Along with this, I emphasize the importance of bringing "today's best," recognizing that some days are hard, and people carry a lot with them into any class or meeting.

Action Research: What is a protocol you use in the classroom that has contributed to the improvement of your teaching practice?

I have a protocol in place: When students bring me serious concerns or significant issues during class, we table them and talk privately so they can have my full attention, rather than splitting my focus with an entire class.

Impact: Name a facilitation strategy you use regularly. How does using it lead to highly engaging lessons with students and/or meetings with teachers?

Especially when working with fellow teachers, listening and summarizing is key. It takes practice, but I often break groups up to discuss important issues or PLC plans so everyone gets more speaking time. During these groups, I circulate, listen, and take notes on common themes or significant differences of opinions.

Resources: What are the top educational resources on facilitation and equitable protocols that you would recommend to colleagues?

- The School Reform Initiative's List of Protocols: <https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/protocols>
- *Culturally Responsive Teaching in Music Education* by Constance L. McKoy and Vicki R. Lind is an invigorating read full of eye-opening ideas.
- *Motivating Students to Learn* by Jere E. Brophy has been instrumental in my own teaching.

Reflection: What are your next steps to grow in your facilitation skills as a leader?

Personally, I need to work on my communication skills. Often, I will find answers or solutions to problems or questions outside of meeting times but fail to share with the whole group.



What are your next steps to grow in your facilitation skills as a leader? Who can you ask to support you in your professional growth?