

CHAPTER 4

TEN DAYS OF PREPARATIONS

I was fortunate to work with the team of Bradshaw, Corcoran, and Nugent on the August 2012 WEDJ PD program for the mix of returning and new staff. After brainstorming what we needed to kick off a great school year, I also asked them to take on different teacher-leader roles. Ms. Corcoran accepted the role of PD Coordinator while Ms. Bradshaw agreed to take the lead on Language Arts/English and Ms. Nugent the coordination of Mathematics PK-8.

The goals for staff development included team building and bringing clarity to academic and operational expectations. We decided to organize the PD days in a ‘conference’ format, mixing elements of fun, safety and academic planning. We placed everyone in one of six Broadway play teams to set the tone for some low-key competitive activities, integrated within the program. The team from Chorus Line did manage to squeak through a win when we totaled the points at the end of the week. The schedule presented in [Figure 3](#) was etched out as our initial plans for the 2012 ‘*Arts to the Core*’ Conference.

In a perfect world, everything listed would have been followed minute by minute, however, we did have to add and combine some of the activities to provide as much time as we could for the teachers to prepare their rooms for Day 1. The painters and cleaners were everywhere trying to get spaces ready after summer camp. They worked the week before PD, but there were still many rooms to be serviced – so most of our sessions happened in the multipurpose room. After most staff members went home at 4pm on the first PD day, the office team of Belton, Evans, Lawson and Morgan turned up the heat to fill dozens of milk crates with supplies bound for each classroom and office space. I joined in for a short time and discovered the joy and genuine care this important team put into our school. We dropped rulers, staplers, pens, erasers, index cards, and what seemed like a lifetime supply of paper clips, into each crate. Not only was the office staff willing to go the ‘extra mile,’ they brought it with robust laughter and ‘TLC’ (tender loving care). WEDJ was in good hands.

When the staff arrived on day 2 they were thrilled to see the halls lined with classroom ‘supply kits.’ What else stood out for me, apart from distributing and responding to questions about the schedules, was the very pregnant, Ms. Miles, presenting a highly interactive workshop on differentiation. She had everyone up on our feet in a large circle, and with her warm, animated and confident commands, she was able to keep our group tuning in to dozens of ways we can teach kids. Everyone enjoyed her simulation workshop. Miles had been an exceptional classroom teacher before she began adding multiple master’s degrees to her vitae. I could see that

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<p>DAY 1 8:30 Registration 9:00 Mission/Respect Agreement (The Commitment) 9:30 Picture of Professionalism activity 10:15 Break 10:30 HR/Employee Handbook 12:00 Lunch 1:00 Establishing Professional Norms 3:00 Classroom Preparations</p>	<p>DAY 5 8:30 Dancing with the Stars (ice breaker) 9:00 Reporting to Parents 10:00 Parent/Teacher Interviews 10:30 Teacher Performance Reviews 12:00 Lunch 1:00 Classroom Preparations</p>
<p>DAY 2 8:30 Distribute classroom supply kits 9:00 Debrief/Merry-Go-Round ice breaker 9:30 Schedule Rationale/Intent/Leadership support 10:00 Scheduling Breakout 11:00 Lunch 12:00 Differentiation (Ms. Miles) 2:00 Model Classrooms Scavenger Hunt</p>	<p>DAY 6 9:00 Multiple Intelligences 9:45 Special Education process/program</p>
<p>DAY 3 Classroom Preparations</p>	<p>DAY 7 8:30 Teacher Learning Styles (4 corners) 9:00 Safety/Supervision/Procedures 12:00 Lunch 1:00 Discipline and Classroom Management 3:30 Peer Teaching</p>
<p>DAY 4 8:30 Common Core: Arts to the Core Presentation 9:30 ANET (Grades 2-8 interim testing) 11:00 Pacing Guides 12:00 Lunch w/materials table 1:00 Arts Program and Leadership 2:00 Meet guest Arts teachers 3:00 Classroom Preparations</p>	<p>DAY 8 Learning Environment 3:00 Visit classrooms and post positive comments</p>
	<p>DAY 9 8:30 How to Evaluate Students/Teachers 9:00 Assessment for Learning 9:30 Pair work (grade/subject partners) 10:30 Classroom preparations 12:00 Lunch 1:00 CPR</p>
	<p>DAY 10 8:30 Pie Plates Compliments 9:00 Classrooms Preparations 2:30pm WEDJ Academy Awards</p>

Figure 3. 2012 Arts to the core conference program

she would be a teaching asset beyond the conventional shadowing or small group/individual ‘pull outs’ so common in special education operations today.

Initially, we tried to set up model primary, elementary and middle school classrooms, so staff would have some new ideas when creating their own learning environments. Ms. Corcoran had volunteered to organize her grade 3 classroom, in advance, but I recall how frustrating it was for her to clean up what was a terrible mess left behind, by what seemed like years of neglect. The cupboards were the worst I had ever seen in my lifetime. I stayed one night and worked for hours, scraping tiles, removing evidence of rodent-made habitats amongst scrap paper, rags and paint. Working in such conditions would make anyone second-guess his or her commitment to this charter school.

Early on in the PD planning stages Ms. Bradshaw and Ms. Nugent indicated their dissatisfaction with the cookie cutter classroom expectations set forth in the *America’s Choice* (AC) curriculum. They noted that everyone’s bulletin boards had to be the same in each room and when AC officials came to monitor the implementation of the program, they used measuring tapes to make sure they were equal distant from the floor, and that tables and chairs were arranged in designated formations. Given WEDJ was a school with a mission steeped in creativity, we decided that we would

no longer be guided by such a commercial program, that coincidentally did not appear to contribute to improving test scores either.

On the fourth PD day, the staff was introduced to ANET (the standardized testing practice program) that would test chunks of materials at four different times in the school year, prior to the DC-CAS test. Their chunking choices basically pre-determined the pacing guides, without input from teachers. The intent of using ANET was to provide outside testing to see how our student achievement compared with other schools on the eastern seaboard, using the same items. Initially, I was supportive of the ANET process, so the data could inform our decisions about curriculum and revision of teacher's planning for learning. Given the school had invested over \$25,000 in this resource, I was committed to using the data for school improvement.

The same day, we planned to formally greet our arts 'guest teachers' from the Kirov Ballet, the National Philharmonic and the Shakespeare Theatre Company. Most of the guest instructors could not come to our professional development days, but we had hoped the team of 12 would be on hand to connect with the staff and be oriented to the school. Three team members from the National Philharmonic joined in some of our sessions and worked hard to coordinate their rooms during the designated PD time. Mr. Harris did a great job of welcoming the arts group members into the fold during the PD conference and throughout the fall. The next day Harris opened our PD with a fun icebreaker – the 'Dancing with the Stars' activity. It seemed like everyone was getting into the swing of things! The discussions and workshops that followed, focused on student and staff performance. We discussed the important role of parents, and the '*sunshine call*' expectation, where homeroom teachers were to contact parents by phone once a month.

We also spent a considerable amount of time outlining the staff performance process. I informed the instructional staff that I would use this tool, and so would their mentors. Teachers would also have a chance to assess themselves. Teachers were observed three times throughout the school year with a final performance review that took into consideration their capacity to prepare students for future college success, to develop quality curriculum and instructional experiences, to form positive and professional relationships with students, staff and families, and to integrate and support the arts.

Ms. Miles returned to the spotlight on Day 6 to clarify the role and duties of the special education team and on Day 7, Mr. Carter set the tone for safety, supervision, and discipline at WEDJ. He shared practical advice about classroom management. When Mr. Carter spoke, you could hear a pin drop. I made it clear to everyone that I couldn't be more pleased with such a capable and committed 'second in command.'

Probably one of my clearest memories of our first professional development conference was the CPR training. The instructors, Ms. Lawson brought in, were phenomenal. They used our Broadway musical teams to create a fun competitive atmosphere. The cheering and the sound of laughter coming through the walls to my

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office, still resonate for me today. In all my years of coordinating PD, I have never heard such enthusiasm about CPR!

After a few weeks of getting to know the team, our final icebreaker, the 'Pie Plate Compliment Task' proved to be a highly moving and meaningful activity. Everyone was instructed to tape a pie plate to each other's backs. Then we had 15 minutes to write compliments on as many pie plates as possible. I still have mine today. I keep it posted in my office as a reminder of my time at WEDJ.

To close out our PD 'Arts to the Core Conference,' I pulled the entire staff together for a fun 'academy awards-type' ceremony. I distributed over 65 banana and zucchini awards, revealing something I'd discovered about each staff member in the past three weeks. The preparation for such a mini celebration was quite humorous. After I cleared out the banana stand at Trader Joes, I turned my sights to the zucchini section. Thank goodness, they were packed in small pickle-like packets of 6. It was certainly amusing at the check-out counter! I was sure this was something the staff had not experienced before, but I wanted to let them know I wasn't afraid of taking risks and that I did appreciate their cooperation and support to make the conference a success. They received their awards like good sports, but more importantly cheered on their teammates.

It was disappointing that John Goldman, in his Executive Director role, was unable to attend the professional development sessions to welcome the staff, especially the new teachers to the school. The WEDJ team would have appreciated some words of encouragement from the school leader. As well, the team could have been recognized and supported by members of the Board of Trustees, but they were not present to reinforce the importance of getting off to a great start. In spite of making preparations for school, in isolation of key school leaders, and despite the fact that not all of our teaching positions were filled three days before the start of classes, there was a genuine sense of enthusiasm amongst the staff that prevailed through to Day 1 and beyond.