



Advice from a New York Facilitator

Meet JoAnn

JoAnn Murphy-Genter works at the Mid-Hudson Teacher Center in New York as a teacher on assignment. The Teacher Center serves 60 districts and offers a variety of professional development opportunities for over 13,000 teachers. JoAnn has been a Teacher on Assignment here for four years. Prior to that, she was a special education and technology teacher. JoAnn has extensive experience with the Intel® Teach Program, as a facilitator and participant in face-to-face, online, and hybrid courses. JoAnn has facilitated the Intel® Teacher Elements Project-Based Approaches course four times.

Course Formats

The structure of each of the Project-Based Approaches courses that JoAnn has facilitated has varied. One of the school districts dictated the course format based on their grant and offered a hybrid course. Participants met for five hours face-to-face on three Saturdays, and did five hours of online work between sessions. The face-to-face sessions were held in a computer lab and the course was hosted on the district's Moodle site. About twenty educators participated, which included a few administrators. Because this course was supported by a district grant, teachers signed up and received a stipend.

JoAnn also delivered Project-Based Approaches face-to-face for K-12 teachers in one district. The intention was a fifteen-hour course but it ended up being longer because of the quality of the discussion. This course was offered on three Saturdays in a computer lab. The format of the course was a mix between the group working together on the course, small group discussion, and some individual work. JoAnn put the facilitation questions in a Google doc to help participants easily access them.

"I know the course is designed to be online, but this delivery was really successful for a few reasons. The participants were committed to the course because it was voluntary. Also, they have little opportunity to communicate between teaching levels so it was really exciting to see kindergarten teachers working with high school teachers. The conversations were very in-depth," explains JoAnn.

A more typical delivery model is an initial two hours of face-to-face for an orientation to the Intel Teach Elements course format and navigation, and an introduction to the

Moodle environment. Moodle provides a place for participants to engage in discussions; post Action Plans; and share resources.

In each of the courses, JoAnn included some supplementary materials and tools, including a few project-based learning videos from Edutopia*; the use of social bookmarking for sharing Web sites and developing projects; and Google Docs for posting Action Plans.

Results

"I really hoped that teachers would put their learning to use in the classroom, instead of just designing projects, actually doing them," explains JoAnn. To help meet this goal, she encourages teachers to focus on a unit that they already teach or are planning to teach.

Some people really take off with ideas! Overall, JoAnn has been quite pleased with the results and the feedback from her courses. One project stands out for her.

After taking the course in the spring, an eighth grade science teacher had her students design a mountain bike trail the following fall. The students met with experts, visited sites, studied topographic maps, and developed proposals for a mountain bike trail to a panel. "I got to be in the panel and was quite impressed with the work the students had done, especially since this was the teacher's first attempt at a project," shares JoAnn.

Challenges

With a mix of K-12 teachers and a variety of technology expertise, JoAnn was expecting more challenges in her facilitations. However, she found that grade level didn't really matter — the teachers enjoyed working together and benefitted from others who had different experiences. She found that project-based learning is a bit more challenging for secondary teachers who find it hard to envision how it will work so they appreciate that many of the course examples are from middle and high school.

Like most teacher constraints, time is always the issue. "Fifteen hours, seems manageable. But, it often ends up being closer to 20 hours, which is hard for teacher," explains JoAnn. It's also hard to keep everyone on track and make sure they are doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Advice

JoAnn encourages facilitators to become familiar with the content so they can plan for what's coming up, ask questions, and anticipate issues. She also tends not to show participants too much in advance, but goes slowly and takes it step by step so they don't get overwhelmed.