Sarah Komendat

Out-of-class Facilitation Self-Evaluation

July 16, 2010

This self-evaluation is about my out-of-class facilitation experience. Overall, this experience was fun and relieving, but also nerve wrecking. I enjoyed myself and felt relieved because this out-of-class experience I involved my family and it was my second time going through the CPS process outside of class. My family made me feel comfortable and it was assuring to know that my cousin’s problem is real. My first out-of-class facilitation was in front of my peers and I did not feel as willing to make mistakes. Even though this was my second experience at home with CPS and an unknowledgeable resource group, I still felt my nerves rumbling since it was just me on stage with no one to answer my questions about the process. In the end, even though I was anxious, I was happy to have the opportunity and comfort of my family to learn the process by stumbling though on my own.

My client Emily is a fourteen year old girl about to enter high school. The problem she wanted to work on was, “How to lose weight?” Information about the background of Emily’s problem is listed in the Task Appraisal Report. Due to scheduling issues, I had a 45 minute client meeting with Emily the day of the facilitation, about four hours prior to the meeting. During this time I taught her a lot about the process rules, roles, and day’s agenda. The interview and facilitation took place in my home garage. There were five resource members ranging from ages 14-57 all with different connections to Emily, with one acting as a process buddy when needed. I had a table set up and was lucky to clear some space in order to have a large white wall to put flipchart paper.

During the client interview I had a wealth of explaining to do involving CPS vocabulary. Since my client was of a younger age, she did not understand words like: divergent, convergent, affirmative, deliberate, etc. I was glad that she was asking questions when she did not understand something. When asking interview questions, I used Firestein’s client interview questions in his *Facilitation* book. My client was very responsive and seemed to feel comfortable telling me about her issue, it being very personal. I felt that I set up a good climate for this personal conversation. Once the interview was completed, I took some time to get my flipchart paper ready. I created poster sheets with rules, roles, and agenda. I then made a process plan sheet for the resource group to understand my client’s background. I then created a sheet to be ready for a Paired Comparison Analysis as well as a sheet ready for Word Dance. I organized the seats around the table so that Emily’s seat was in the middle and made sure everyone had sticky notes. I placed the toys and some snacks in the middle of the table. Lastly, I made sure I had extra flipchart paper and tape ready.

As we approached the start of the CPS process, my family all ate dinner together and we settled in together (getting off-topic conversation out of the way). My client appeared to be calm, especially after I explained some confidentiality rules to her and the resource group. I did mention to her that I would have to mention some of what was said during the facilitation in this report for reflection purposes and she understood. When the resource group settled in, I went over the day’s agenda, the roles of the CPS process, and the rules of divergent and convergent thinking. Some of the resource group had questions about the logistics of my project and any confusion was answered. Once everyone, especially my client, looked ready to move on, we did a warm-up. I used the problem, “What might be all the ways I can get a hippo out of my bathtub?” My process buddy set the timer and in three minutes the resource group generated about thirty ideas while also learning the rules of Stick-em’ Up Brainstorming. I had to clarify the rule about “write it, say it, hand it up” twice, but by the end of the warm-up the resource group understood the technique.

Next, I went over my client’s background data and the problem. I gave the resource group some time to ask my client questions, for which there were a few. Once my client looked comfortable, we jumped into exploring ideas by brainstorming to solve the problem, “What might be all the ways I can lose weight?” In three minutes, the resource group generated about forty ideas. My client wanted some more ideas so I decided to use Word Dance. I had the group generate ten words to replace the word “weight”. My client selected the word “inches” as the replacement and the new problem statement became, “What might be all the ways I can lose inches?” In two more minutes the resource group generated about twenty more ideas.

After we finished generating ideas, I had my client come up to place dots on the ideas she found most intriguing. Together, we then clustered the ideas and restated them, ending up with four clusters. I took the restatements of the four clusters and put them into a Paired Comparison Analysis chart. My client then prioritized the ideas. She was shocked at which ideas were most important to her, causing her to do some reflection. I was happy to initiate this level of reflective thinking in her and found using the PCA tool very valuable.

Lastly, we created a plan of action. I brought the resource group back from break so they could pay attention to Emily’s plan and serve as witnesses for future success. Emily outlined her top priorities as short- and mid- term goals and put her last priorities as mid- to long-term goals. She also added some specific ideas from within the clusters. Some of the resource group ended up being involved in the goals, so I was glad to bring them into being part of this process so that they are more accountable. To finish the session, I had my client sign the plan of action and we packed all of the idea sheets up for her to take home.

This facilitation process taught me a lot about using CPS. I was able to see outsiders find the process useful to them. One of the resource group members works in a business that does similar projects and she said that she will probably take some of the CPS ideas and tools to work with her. My client found the process very valuable. She was excited to go home and stick all of the flipchart paper up on her bedroom wall as motivation. This level of “take away” from my client and resource group (none had ever seen the process before) taught me that the CPS process is truly worth the time and money people invest in terms of outcome. I also learned more about myself as a facilitator. After taking the leadership class, CRS 635, I gained great confidence in my abilities involving intuition. During this facilitation, I was able to really practice and use my intuition skills. I made sure to read my client’s expression before going on to new tools and activities to make sure she was comfortable. I also attribute positive gain in using intuition to the use of the Thinking Skills Model instead of the Plain Language Model. I have learned to pay attention more to the affective skills of CPS.

Another thing I have learned involves the materials I bring to the CPS session. I brought several Koosh balls, Slinkys, and snacks, but my resource group seemed to want more. Next time I run a facilitation I will bring more toys, but will think about who is in my resource group first and bring toys I know they will enjoy.

I have also learned that age does not matter when using the CPS process. From time to time during the facilitation, my four year old nephew would come around and chime in with an idea to solve the problem. Even at that young of an age he was able to understand what we were doing when diverging and he put conscious effort towards suspending judgment. Also in terms of age, I realized the great possibilities for teaching CPS to school age children. I hope that by teaching my two, fourteen year old cousins some CPS tools during the facilitation will make them want to carry on the tools into their own other social life and school problems. CPS training should be available and preferably mandatory for students grade 1-12, with extra emphasis on problem solving in the middle / high school grades. This may help with bullying and other social issues.

Overall, this out-of-class facilitation experience was vital to my learning how to facilitate CPS sessions. I learn best by implementing, so there was a lot for me to take away from this experience. I felt comfortable, learned a lot, and know more about what to do during CPS sessions in the future.