

## Educator Spotlight

Interview with PS 110 Principal Anna Cano Amato, participant at CELF's Summer Institute in Greenpoint

By Matthew Auster

***What was your awareness of sustainability issues / Efs before the institute? Does your school already implement any of the concepts discussed?***

We currently have a sustainability coordinator at our school as required – she cares passionately about making our school more green. Our current efforts include recycling, collecting organics in the lunchroom for composting, and we are working towards reducing electricity use in the future. In the past we have led “clusters” centered around ecology and related issues.



Principal Cano Amato (center in red) with PS 110 team

***What prompted your desire to participate?***

The history of Greenpoint contributed heavily to my desire to participate in the institute, and I believe the same can be said for many of my teachers. With all the pollution here previously and the current rapid development taking place, we felt it was our job as educators to help the community learn about sustainability and bring what we learned back to them.

***What were your expectations going into the institute?***

Going into the institute, I was mostly looking to gain a framework for infusing sustainability into our curriculum, which I definitely got along with much more. I was really happy about the hands on approach as led by CELF (Alan and Aimee) – I felt it really helped the teachers engage with the material. There were many deep conversations about the subject matter and what we were working on, and everyone's comments were heard and appreciated by the group and the facilitators. Rather than lecture at the participants, Alan and Aimee's approach led to a sense of collaboration among the group, and it kept the institute feeling fresh.

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***What are some things that surprised you about the institute itself or Efs – things that you hadn't thought of? What was the most useful thing you took away from the institute?***

I hadn't thought about how we could truly incorporate sustainability issues, for example, recycling, into the curriculum instead of viewing them as a separate project. I realize now that it is important not just for us to recycle, but to look at the quality of how well we recycle – integrating it more into our school culture and taking a full systems approach.

***Are CELf's methods effective in teaching EfS? What makes the summer institute a unique learning experience?***

I think CELf's approach is extremely effective at teaching EfS. The institute implemented a very balanced curriculum, the guest speakers and activities planned were great. Aimee and Alan have an excellent teaching style, which instead of being top down really allows them to function as facilitators of learning. CELf was extremely attentive to our individual school's needs, realizing that we all have different backgrounds as well. I was so glad that, as a principal, I was able to attend with my staff and was given sufficient time to coordinate with them. It allowed us to make sure we were all on the same page. Aimee and Alan really listened to any questions or concerns we had and addressed them quickly – often by the next day. The format of being able to leave questions about the material at the end of each session and have them addressed by the facilitators the next morning really not only cleared up any confusion about the content, but helped us distill everything we were thinking about into a concrete direction to move in. It helped call attention to the big picture of EfS.

***How did you feel the experience helped you as an educator / how will it help student learning? How does it benefit the school culture or enable the school to connect with the greater community?***

I think a huge takeaway is that we be more cognizant of our role in the community and the impact that we can have, the teachers and especially the students. I think it is extremely important that we convey to the students that they have opportunities for engagement within their community (with place-based learning) especially being located in Greenpoint – and using the techniques learned at the institute will make this easier to illustrate to them.

***How will you take new steps in your school to implement what you learned? Do you think the students will be excited to learn about sustainability?***

I do think they will be motivated. Students now are far more aware of these issues today than previous generations. At my school, we follow the seven habits of highly effective people – and by forming a “green team” or club the students will be presented with an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, which is one of the seven habits.

***Knowing what you do now, do you think others in your school / community will be interested in participating in a future institute or learning about EfS?***

The institute helped to frame a working knowledge of sustainability issues with the vocabulary involved, helped create a commonality of language. It truly illustrated the big ideas without getting too caught up in the minutiae. Realizing that educating about sustainability doesn't need to be revolutionary, but is just refining the framework that already exists within our schools – I think that was a breakthrough. Once we bring the information we learned here back to our school I'm sure many more will be eager to learn about EfS. Especially as we continue our development through the eco-schools program over the next few years.

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