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Title:
Play with the Slinky©: Learning to lead collaboration through a statewide training project aimed at grants for community partnerships

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KEYWORDS
collaboration, leadership, training, interpersonal communication, discourse, organizational play, storytelling

ABSTRACT
How can training develop the philosophical commitment that library staff members need to successfully lead collaborative projects? How does conversation as a training model and play as an activity shape the collaborative learning process? How do we stimulate libraries and library staff to assume leadership roles in community building? This article is a study of a statewide training process designed to create opportunities for librarians to learn to lead collaborative community projects. It highlights the content, exercises, and methods used to stimulate learning. The workshops were facilitated as models of collaboration, and play, as well as sites of conversation about collaborative philosophy and techniques.

Author
Elizabeth A. Curry currently in the doctoral program at the University of South Florida Communication Department. She is a trainer and consultant who specializes in leadership, collaboration, team development, and strategic thinking. She has worked with all types of libraries in her roles as Executive Director of SEFLIN, Marketing Manager for SOLINET, State Library consultant, and public librarian. She has been involved in community outreach, training, partnerships, and collaborative projects for over twenty-five years. Curry's research interests center on empowerment, appreciative inquiry, collegiality, compassion, and narrative interpretation.

Setting the Scene with Slinky© Play

Laughter and chatter ripple throughout the group. Excitement and a bit of confusion permeate the room when I invite workshop participants to open the boxes labeled "magic springs," a generic brand of the retro toy Slinky©. They don't need instructions on what to do, they just begin playing. Suddenly, plastic Slinkies© in bright rainbow colors are sliding back and forth from hand to hand, back and forth, back and forth as twenty librarians engage in play. The sliding plastic rings make zinging noises that become a humming sound. Different rhythms and different speeds combine to create a busy sound that fills the room. People are smiling, some with glee, some with embarrassment, a few with confusion. I walk around the U-shaped configuration of tables, chatting and also playing with my Slinky©. Back and forth it slides, zing, zing, humming.

Then I begin to refocus the group. I use the Slinky© like a clapper with quick smacks together. People look up as the rhythm changes. I smile broadly, "OK, Are we ready? I can feel your creativity surging so let me explain why you each have a Slinky©." I pause and ask again, "Are we ready?" I pause. The voices quiet and people begin to turn their attention to me. Some still play with the Slinky© but more quietly. "I have a fun exercise to start our day. It will prepare us to look at different ideas on leadership and collaboration. We are going to *think outside the box* and try to look at things from many different perspectives. There are no right or wrong answers when you are searching for innovative ideas or when you seek to understand others' ideas, not just correct or contradict them."

I pause again and look around the tables. "The activity is to make a list of the different ways a Slinky© can be used, other than as a toy. The ideas do not need to be practical or workable. They can be wacky and crazy. We are brainstorming not evaluating," I emphasize.

"No right or wrong answers. Our goal is to see how many ideas we can generate and find as many creative ideas as possible. There are only two rules. One, please number your list as you write the ideas. Two, you have fifteen minutes to complete the activity. I hope that each person can try for a minimum of twenty ideas. Any questions? Are you ready?" No one speaks but heads nod, so I give the signal to begin. People are writing, playing with the Slinky©, staring, and thinking as I walk around. I notice that two young women in blue jeans, Joanne and Becky listed on their nametags, are whispering and only Becky is writing. A woman in a peach colored pantsuit, Sylvia, holds the Slinky© up to her ear to dangle. John, a man in a blue golf shirt stands up and drops the Slinky© to the floor. Annie, a woman with short curly brown hair, throws the Slinky© out in front of her across the table. When the writing seems to slow down and participants are searching for ideas, I coach them, "Think about different rooms in your house or your daily routine."

People are sharing ideas under their breath and laughing. Someone says, "Oh, I got a good one . . . a toothbrush holder!" Voices around the tables are rising: "a coffee cup holder, a steering wheel cover, a telephone message organizer." Finally, Craig asks me, "Can we share ideas, can we work together on a list, combine our lists?"

I repeat the question in a loud voice for the whole group. I reply, " I never said you couldn't work in teams and this is session on collaboration." They laugh and form a group of three here, group of two in another corner, sharing ideas and laughing. "Time is almost up. You have two more minutes," I warn. Then I ring a bell and announce, "Time's up." As the participants look up and sigh I pause and say, "We are going to look at the task and then reflect on the process." Amid much laughter, we determine the number of ideas and share our most creative ideas. We talk about ways of assessing quantity and quality. Then I ask, "So what did

you see happening during this exercise?" They eagerly share their observations. We discuss how the first five or ten ideas come fairly quickly, but it gets harder after that---for some people. One person mentions that it is difficult not to evaluate ideas. James says that my coaching helped, and the ideas people muttered under their breath served to inspire others. The group agrees. One idea spawned another. Working together and sharing ideas, combining lists demonstrated the power of teamwork and many relevant observations about collaboration.

I wrap up this exercise suggesting that there are times when we need creative brainstorming and times we need decision-making. Rather than look for obstacles and reasons we can't work together, I suggest they remember one phrase when they try to develop twenty possibilities for collaborative projects or activities: What will it take to make this work? I call their attention to a resource in their packet from *Collaborative Creativity: Unleashing the Power of Shared Thinking* (Ricchiuto, 1997). We've experienced diversity, shared thinking, teamwork, and creativity.

As a training model this was an icebreaker, but it was much more of an experiential exercise to involve people in discovering key concepts. It was also designed to reinforce the notion that during the workshop we will be open to new and even "wacky" ideas as we pool our resources to gain new knowledge. The fun and laughter created positive emotions that stimulated innovative thoughts (Fredrickson, 2003). In this article, I will explore notions of how play and positive emotions are useful to learning, leading, and collaboration. Play can stimulate creative ideas, free people from fear of criticism, establish safe environment to take risks, and foster a sense of community (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Linder, Roos, & Victor, 2001; Rieber, Smith, & Noah, 1998). I also will try to demonstrate Kenneth Gergen's theory that the critical stance of knowing (1) contains the conversation, (2) silences marginal voices and fragments

relationships, (3) erodes community, (4) creates social hierarchy, and (5) contributes to broad cultural organizational enfeeblement (Ludema, Cooperrider, & Barrett, 2001, p. 190-191; McNamee & Gergen, 1999). I demonstrate a more collaborative way of knowing and learning (Clinchy, 1996). I propose that collaborative communication training strategies and collaborative project development encourage conversations from multiple voices, enhance relationships, build a sense of community, promote equality, and begin to change our world one project at a time.

Introduction and Project Overview:

"Collaboration is a social imperative. Without it we can't get extraordinary things done in organizations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 242). Collaboration involves a complex array of knowledge, skills, and abilities, yet librarians without the training or background to support successful projects may be faced with organizational goals encouraging outreach to community agencies. Frequently, the collaboration is initiated by a funding source, a special project, or overture from another group. Many of these projects are very successful and grow into long-term continuing services. Some projects are fraught with difficulties or even fail because the collaborative foundation or philosophy is not sufficiently developed. I propose that we consider collaboration as a process, not just a project or an event. The project is the result of the process of building a relationship, which requires interpersonal communication. Collaborative endeavors require a high level of leadership, a way of thinking that embraces diversity, openness to possibilities, acceptance of different perspectives, and the goal of seeking commonalities.

This article is a study of a statewide training process designed to create opportunities for librarians to build on a foundational collaborative philosophy, learn collaboration

communication skills, and become leaders in community collaboration. The workshops were facilitated as models of collaboration as well as sites for discussing collaborative techniques, brainstorming ideas for projects, and questioning assumptions. The article addresses the following questions:

- How can training develop the philosophical commitment that library staff members need to successfully lead collaborative projects?
- How does conversation as a training model shape the collaborative learning process?
- How do we stimulate libraries and library staff to assume leadership roles in community building?
- How do we foster collaborative approaches to the needs of those in the community that transcend organizational boundaries?

I explore strategies related to these questions in the context of the North Carolina Powerful Partners workshops. I highlight aspects of the content, exercises, and methods, which I used to stimulate learning about leading collaboration. The staff of the State Library of North Carolina had the vision for enhancing collaborative skills and fostering community building. It was my privilege to work with them as they shared their vision with me. In a collegial environment we planned, implemented, and evaluated the project. I would particularly like to acknowledge Sandy Cooper, State Librarian; Penny Hornsby, Federal Programs Consultant; and Ron Jones, Youth Consultant at the time of this project. Ron's flexibility, sense of humor, and tireless efforts made our travel throughout North Carolina together a rewarding adventure. I also benefited greatly from Ron's keen observational skills and perceptive feedback on the

workshops. Our conversations and collaboration resulted in a special professional friendship, which helped me grow and develop.

Communication Links Leadership and Collaboration

I concur with a host of scholars who believe that both collaboration and leadership are based on communication and developing relationships. "At the heart of collaboration is trust. It's the central issue in human relationships within and outside organizations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 244). The literature on collaboration refers frequently to trust as well as respect, equity, shared power, facilitative leadership, communication, and dialogue (Angelis, 1999; April, 1999; Bennis, Spreitzer, & Cummings, 2001; Johnson, Zorn, Tam, Lamontagne, & Johnson, 2003; P. Mattessich, Monsey, & with assistance from Roy, 1997; P. W. Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Muronaga & Harada, 1999; Spreitzer & Cummings, 2001; Winer & Ray, 1994). Major examples would be the leadership work of James M. Kozues with Barry Z. Poser and Peter Senge.

Through their extensive research Kouzes and Posner have developed their five practices of leadership presented in *The Leadership Challenge*: (1) Model the Way by clarifying values, (2) Inspire Shared Vision by enlisting others, (3) Challenge the Process by experimenting and taking risks, (4) Enable Others to Act by promoting cooperative goals and sharing power, and (5) Encourage the Heart by recognizing contributions of others and creating a sense of community. (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). In each of these practices, collaborative relationships and communication are stressed. Another example is Peter Senge's learning organization and the five disciplines which have been described as leadership disciplines (April, 1999; Senge, 1990).

Senge's disciplines stress our interrelatedness, focus on thinking of collective systems, and emphasize the importance of communication and dialogue.

From a communication perspective Kenneth Gergen also proposes that we look at the context of how we are related and interdependent in his work on relational and generative theory (Gergen, 1994, 2000, 2001). Generative theory focuses on the power of language to create alternatives, open possibilities, and offer different ways of perceiving and understanding the world. With relational responsibility the process is valued more than the product as we strive for continuous engagement and reflection. In generative theory, action and discourse are integrally linked. "Talk is how we can most effectively create change" (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. 169). We use discourse as a way of relating and creating meanings that guide our actions. Communication is transactive not representational because "people understand through communication not prior to it" (Soukup, 1992, p. 5). Communication in not simply a technique we use within the change process. Another interpretation I espouse is that conversation is the context for change. Kurt April describes the process of leading change through conversation.

> Producing intentional change, then, is a matter of deliberately creating through communication and conversation, a new reality or set of social structures. If this is the case, then the change process actually occurs within, and is driven by, conversation and communication, rather than the reverse. It is my assertion that intentional change is produced through the development of these conversations. (April, 1999, p. 231)

So in this article I pair collaboration and leadership, positioning both as communication based. Based on that premise I consider the training model, which is also based on teaching collaboration and leadership through conversation and interpersonal experiences.

Leadership

Scholars from numerous disciplines have studied leadership for hundreds of years with the main conclusion that it is a very complex and sometimes ambiguous concept. James McGregor Burns, a major figure in the field, concluded that leadership is "one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Witherspoon, 1997, p. ix). One library author found over 100 definitions of leadership, such as situational leadership, servant leadership, Emotional Intelligence, or team leadership (Riggs, 2001).

At a recent conference, Dr. Mark D. Winston from Rutgers University pointed out that there has been very limited scholarly research on library leadership although there have been many news or opinion articles in the library press. Librarians have often focused on management skills more than leadership concepts in our professional events, publications, and library education curriculums (Winston, 2004). Leadership as a topic of concern has surfaced in the face of constant changes, which have caused more and more librarians to emphasize broader political, social, and environmental trends as the starting place for planning. Effectiveness became more important than efficiency. Only 10% of ALA accredited programs offer leadership training; however, there is growing interest in the face of potential crisis of leadership in the field (Winston, 2004). Dr. Winston acknowledges that the leadership literature is interdisciplinary and particularly the prolific business literature is relevant to library and information management. He still encourages more leadership research specific to libraries and librarians.

Much of the literature agrees that leadership is important because it enhances the success of the organization in meeting its goals. However, the leadership literature incorporates a wide variety of approaches to the basis of leadership: (1) traits, (2) skills, (3) styles, (4) contingency, and (5) team or group. Often the five approaches are combined. The Center for Creative Leadership reports that the most significant success factor for a leader is building relationships.

Many leadership experts, such as Warren Bennis, Kouzes & Posner, Daniel Goleman (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002), and others, propose that self awareness is central for leaders to understand self and others. Patricia Witherspoon elaborates on the concept of leadership as self awareness and adds that leadership is a relationship building process based on communication (Witherspoon, 1997).*The Next Library Leadership: Attributes of Academic and Public Library Directors* contains a comprehensive overview of leadership traits and professional qualities which include a wide range of skills necessary for collaboration (Hernon, Powell, & Young, 2003). Leaders must be able to communicate effectively in order to achieve goals in areas, such as change, community building, visioning, political skills, strategic planning, and teamwork.

Some people talk about the changing leadership paradigm from hierarchical roles to a more collaborative interdependent approach. I enjoy Betsy Wilson's characterization that the "Lone Ranger" approach to leadership is dead. "We are beginning to recognize that collaborative leadership combines the power that is inherent in the act of leading with the greater power that comes from shared visions and actions" (Wilson, 2000, p. 698). Her vision for the next century demands that libraries collaborate in community building. More and more colleges and universities are calling for "engaged scholarship" (Boyer, 1996), PLA's planning process focuses on community needs, multi-type cooperatives see partnerships in community building as a major trend for the millennium (Bolt, 2000), and the topic has received increasing attention throughout the profession. Kathleen de la Peña McCook has exhorted all types of libraries to look beyond our institutional walls, become more active in community initiatives, and find a place at the table (McCook, 2000).

Training Powerful Partners to Collaborate

Collaborative learning has been researched and reported on various levels of education from elementary grades to college classes. John Agada from the University of Wisconsin has presented a model for incorporating collaborative skills into library and information science education. His approach is anchored in interpersonal skills with cognitive and affective modeling (Agada, 1998). I found virtually no other research literature on teaching collaboration skills to librarians. Much of what we have learned about collaboration is based on the experience with specific projects, conference presentations, and articles about those projects; however, in this article I want to begin a process of looking at collaboration and training.

Any training in leadership or collaboration skills must balance the conceptual and philosophical foundations with the practical skills, while providing opportunities for dialogue, self-reflection, and assessment. With adult learners, a variety of techniques and learning styles must be incorporated into any program. Learning to lead, communicate, and build collaborative relationships is a "life long" endeavor. A holistic approach to personal development of leadership is a process, not a quick fix (Doh, 2003). Training includes modeling, coaching, feedback, experiential activities, personal assessments, and a safe place to experiment, explore, and take risks. Participants need to have motivation, the capacity for strategic thinking, basic communication skills, emotional intelligence, an orientation toward on-going learning, and the desire to lead (Doh, 2003).

Powerful Partners Project

The Powerful Partners project sponsored by the State Library of North Carolina consisted of several phases starting with a series workshops offered in multiple locations throughout the

state for librarians and media specialists, broadly defined as the Leadership and Partnership Basics for Collaboration. Applicants submitted brief proposals for mini-grants to fund attendance at these training sessions. Attendance was required for participants to qualify for phase two, Advanced Collaboration Workshops covering grant project development with a team of librarians and community members working together. Attendance at these training sessions was required before submitting a grant proposal for funds allocated specifically for collaborative projects. Grant funding was linked to the learning objectives of the training sessions, and the criteria included collaboration success factors covered during the training. From 1999 to 2001 almost $400,000 was allocated to this project, and from 2001 to 2004 almost $500,000 was budgeted.

The Powerful Partnerships project supported the LSTA (Library Services and Technology Act) Plan of the State Library of North Carolina. The State Library's strategic plan for services called for leadership from libraries and librarians in every North Carolina Community in order to accomplish the following goals: (1) Children and teens benefit from the combined resources and efforts of a community focused on education and the healthy development of youth; (2) Children and teens in North Carolina access a full range of ideas and information; (3) Children and teens in North Carolina receive programs and services that stimulate their imagination, curiosity, and growth; and (4) Children and teens in North Carolina interact with adults who foster and guide their development as readers and learners. The major outcome we anticipated was that: Children and teens receive services strengthened by collaboration of agencies in their community.

The first workshop focused on leadership and collaboration by addressing topics, such as the difference between leading, controlling, and facilitating; types of authority and power; styles

of influence and persuasion; levels of commitment in building collaboration; and the steps in building partnership relationships. The second stage of training was a two-day work session where librarians could not attend unless accompanied by one or two community partners. This was a work session where collaborative teams drafted a plan and outlined a grant proposal for a collaborative project. The sessions were models of collaboration as the group addressed needs statements for clientele not institutions, barriers to collaboration, success factors, group development, communication, recognition, and grant guidelines. This article is an overview of the process and the workshops. The North Carolina project focused on collaborative projects for youth and the leadership of public and school librarians; however, the process and training have applications for all types of libraries. In the following sections, I discuss the Leadership and Partnership Basic workshop and then the Advanced Collaboration Workshop. The final part of this article is a conclusion reflecting and summarizing the project lessons.

Leadership and Partnering Workshop

Before participants attended the workshops they received a Homework and Sneak Peek packet with a self assessment inventory, several articles about collaboration, and material on persuasion and influence (Conger, 1998; Covey, 1992; Kriegel & Brandt, 1996; Ricchiuto, 1997). When participants read materials in advance, the time during the training sessions can be spent on interactive activities and discussion more than lecturing for content. These advance packets also tend to help reluctant participants feel more comfortable. The Homework and Sneak Peek materials maximize the impact of the training, encourage reflexivity, and reinforce application of the concepts.

I could summarize my approach to training with one of my handouts, a mini-poster of the Chinese proverb says: “Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I might remember. Involve me

and I'll understand." The Slinky© exercise I described in the beginning of this article set the tone for the day. Next, I outlined the purpose, process, and anticipated payoffs of the workshop, including my expectations for a highly interactive, creative, fun day. (Note that the following description does not correlate to exact times in the workshop and the break times are not addressed. I frequently engaged participants in activities that called for them to move around the room. We had a casual atmosphere with formal and informal breaks.)

The guiding vision was posted on flip chart paper in colorful lettering in several places, "With leadership from libraries and librarians in every North Carolina community children and teens learn to read, love to learn and have access to the world." These three phases *learn to read, love to learn and access the world* were our touchstones throughout the first training phase and the later advanced session. In my overview I acknowledged that we had a great deal to cover– enough for four or five days. The major topics were: Leadership styles, Change Readiness, Power and Authority, Styles of Influence and Levels of Cooperation, and resources available on Team Building. I stressed that the agenda, time, and topics would be adapted to their needs. In a sense, I offered the participants shared control of the day. I invited their collaboration and acknowledged the greater sense of purpose.

Interviews following the completion of the project noted that I frequently used the word "share," and I framed the day as a partnership among the participants and myself. Modeling collaborative learning as well as discussing it is critical to this type of training. I asked participants to contribute ideas and then rank a list of group behaviors called recipe for successful groups. Then we created a chart with everyone's top four priorities. Our discussion was a model of how people have different expectations when groups form and there is a need to clarify what group members think is important overall. I presented participants with a tool to

help them remember that different people saw things differently, a kaleidoscope (often called a prism or *dragon's eyes)*. This was the first of our Memory Anchors, something I use to reinforce concepts and act as reminders after the participant return back home. As a follow-up, I invited participants to individually complete a worksheet on their expectations for the day, what they wanted to get out of the session, and what they might contribute. Sharing comments was optional. The worksheet was to remind people to assume personal responsibility for their individual goals and needs. However, the discussion was useful to me as a facilitator and underscored the collaborative possibilities for shaping the session.

Changing leadership paradigms was the next module. I introduced the differences in more hierarchical leadership styles and the move to more collaborative leadership styles. We looked at levels of controlling and facilitating, moving from telling to asking or inviting solutions (Rees, 1991). Controlling might be more library focused and facilitating can become more client centered. In small groups we tried a few examples of ways to change a controlling statement to a facilitating statement. Instead of proposing the library solution, the exercise starts at identifying community needs. Instead of defining a partner as a funder or supporter, the exercise asks partners for ideas and commitment to working together for the community. The strategy of asking and inviting more than telling was also a skill I tried to model in my training.

Change is another major topic related to collaboration. We used a self-assessment exercise so participants could look at their change readiness skills. Using colored dots we charted individual scores to represent the overall group in a graph. People worried a bit about if their scores were good or bad which was an opportunity to reinforce self awareness and awareness of others. Each person looked at the chart and wrote three sentences about the group. Our discussion was based on these descriptions and observations on process. The group

discussed things such as whether being highly resourceful could sometimes be a drawback, the generally low tolerance for ambiguity, along with the perception of ourselves as adaptable. There were no "right" answers, we could more engage more readily in a rich, thought provoking discussion.

The exercise also was another demonstration of diversity in groups. We moved to exploring how we are influenced and can influence others. Our approach was based on persuasion or influence as mutual learning processes and collaborative communication, not win lose negotiations. Persuasion can galvanize change and forge solutions through conversation and dialogue (Conger, 1998). Each person wrote his or her own description or definition of power, authority, and influence on three postnotes. Then in small groups they rearranged ideas into similarities and differences. Discussion of small group reports touched on both positional power and expert power as authority, relational power, and charisma used to influence others, and issues of whether power was good or bad (Covey, 1992). This exercise led into exploring styles of influence, ways we are influenced, and thinking of what might influence others. Another self-assessment led to using examples for each style of influence: assertion, expertise, political skills, preparation, presentation, and client centered. As we tried different approaches and discussed the results, we concluded that it was difficult to stay open to options and not try to advocate for your own ideas. We talked about the shades of difference in manipulation, negotiation, persuasion, and collaboration. We also realized how often people use a combination of influence styles with community collaboration because groups are diverse. An important note was that the assessments, styles, and categories were used as springboards for discussion and reflection not as labels.

After lunch and door prizes, we used the story of *Stone Soup* (Brown, 1975) as a framework for discussing collaboration. Participants shared comments, such as: "The villagers were afraid to share because they had limited resources." "The soldiers didn't force farmers to share, they invited them to learn how to make soup from just water and a stone." "The soldiers inspired the farmers with a vision of soup fit for a king." "Alone villagers had little but together they made something great." "People followed the early risk takers." "At the end they had a relationship so they celebrated together." The question "Was it ethical for the soldiers to trick people into collaboration?" spurred a lively discussion of whether it was indeed trickery. At that point, I saw the workshop group willing to question each other's assumptions and pursue a lively discussion geared toward understanding. It was a moment of meaning for me as I experienced the power of using a story to spur discussion and the sense that the workshop participants were becoming a collaborative learning group. Our Memory Anchors were polished stones that served as reminders that collaborative projects are like stone soup. The story was our springboard to definitions and levels of collaboration, *Building Blocks of Interdependence* as we moved from categories of interaction: Networking and Communication to Cooperation, then Coordination and finally Collaboration. Based on the following definitions we played, "Is it Collaboration Yet?" by looking at projects and comparing structure, authority, communication, funding, and resources involved.

> Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships that exist without any commonly defined mission, structure, or planning effort. Information is shared as needed, and authority is retained by each organization so there is virtually no risk. Resources are as separate as are rewards.
>
> Coordination is characterized by more formal relationships and understanding compatible missions. Some planning and division of roles are required, and communication channels are established. Authority still rests with individual organizations, but there is some increased risk to all participants. Resources are available to participants and rewards are mutually acknowledged.

> Collaboration is a mutually and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals . . . . .Collaboration connotes a more durable and pervasive relationship. Collaborations bring previously separated organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well defined communication channels operating on many levels. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure. Risks are much greater because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation. Resources are pooled or jointly secured and products are shared. (P. W. Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, p. 39)

As we concluded our session, I briefly introduced steps to partnership relationships, success factors, a teambuilding resource material, and a planning worksheet, all of which would be the basis for the next steps in the project. Phase Two involved mini-grant proposals to fund a team of librarians and community partners to travel to the Advanced Collaboration Workshop, a grant and project development session.

To end the day, I touched on the importance of evaluation and feedback, modeling a plus-delta exercise and explaining it to participants. The full agenda with fast paced exercises, a fun and relaxed environment, Memory Anchors, prizes, and lunch were all mentioned as pluses. Suggestions for enhancements and minor changes focused on logistics and preliminary information. We acknowledged that the Powerful Partners project/process was in the process of being developed so there was some ambiguity, which caused some discomfort. We also added another closing ritual where everyone gets the last word. Sometimes I called the exercise sharing our *Light Bulb Moments*. During this time we went around the room and each person had the opportunity to make a comment. This was a time when people often shared the thoughts that have been especially meaningful for their personal/professional development.

Advanced Collaborative Project Planning Workshop: Creating a Road Map

Only people who had completed the first workshop were eligible to apply for funding to bring partners to the second workshop. In order to qualify for funding of a community project, librarians had to bring one or two partners to the workshop to work as a team. Public librarians, school media specialists, directors and youth specialists brought partners, such as representatives from the Boys and Girls Club, County Health Department, Migrant Education Program, Museum of Life and Science, County Hispanic Services Department, Community College, churches of various faiths, Chamber of Commerce, Resource and Referral Center, Education Foundation, County Volunteer Services, and Children's Theater. The room set-up for this day and half session was different than the U-shape of the introductory workshop. We put tables in a chevron shape, to facilitate teamwork and group discussions. Based on preliminary project statements, two teams with similar projects were grouped at each table. Major learning goals for this day and a half workshop were: (1) to understand collaboration stages and success factors and (2) design a collaborative project that would be the basis for submitting a grant proposal that met the criteria for LSTA and the North Carolina Powerful Partners project. So this was a grant writing and project planning workshop as well as a collaboration training. The half-day was designed to allow participants to share ideas on collaboration and community needs. The second full day was structured as a work session to write the grant proposal.

We started the half-day with some humor by giving each person some money–play money in the form of a tablet. This reinforced that announcement that everyone could receive funding if they followed the guidelines carefully and specifically addressed the collaboration factors in those guidelines. The grants were not competitive except in terms of meeting guidelines. My introductory remarks stressed that we were all working together and teams

would help each other with feedback at the same time as they drafted their individual proposals. Participants' knowledge ranged from no grant writing experience to many years of successful grant writing, so I acknowledged the expertise of the group by asking people to tell us a bit about their experience. I sincerely invited those with experience to add their ideas to any information I provided. I also encouraged people to meet each other during breaks. I positioned networking as a critical leadership and collaboration skill, the act of finding resources and possibilities. Throughout the day people reported on their contacts, their new social capital. So we modeled and practiced the skill.

Each person received a memory anchor, a stress ball in the shape of a globe to remind us that in the process of focusing on grant guidelines our work was to change the world one project at a time. After reviewing the state vision and goals posted on the walls again, I asked members of each group to discuss their community needs and develop a statement according to the guidelines from the grant:

- Identifies the specific inadequacies of the service/program in terms of the target audience's needs/problems, not the partner's
- Relates to a community need identified by the collaboration team and is a solution designed by the team
- Demonstrates that needs to be addressed by the project are not currently being met or are being met inadequately
- Is supported by statistical evidence that demonstrates and documents the gap between the current situation and the desired change
- Explains why and how the target group was chosen is of reasonable dimension
- Makes a compelling case
- Is jargon-free, interesting to read and as brief as possible (State Library of North Carolina, 2000-2001)

The challenge was not to feature the name of the organization or the solution in the needs statement designed to focus on the community. Posting each group's statement around the room gave us a sense of purpose and commitment. However, we also agreed as a group that the

original needs statements would be reviewed and revised at the end of the second day. This demonstrated project development as a non-linear process based on collaborative conversations.

As a group we reviewed definitions of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration (P. Mattessich et al., 1997). Next, the teams developed lists and shared stories about what were obstacles to collaboration and what promoted successful collaboration. The general discussion showed how the obstacles and success factors mirrored each other and the stories helped the group get acquainted. We used a worksheet, based on the 19 success factors identified by Mattessich and Monsey and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, for each person to rank the five factors they thought that were most important. We charted the results with colored dots and discussed how this model could be used in the planning process (Appendix 1).

The 19 factors in six categories were included in the grant guidelines stating that in order to be funded the application must demonstrate a plan to address the factors. It is interesting to note that there was a distinct difference in rankings at different workshop locations around the state. In one area the factor with the most votes (almost unanimous) was "political and social climate." In another area political climate ranked low but "open and frequent communication" was selected by most of the participants. "Concrete attainable goals" was also highly ranked. The category of "skilled convener" or facilitator was rarely ranked as a top priority. One reply to that was that they rarely had funds for outside facilitators. Other participants offered suggestions for ways to get skilled facilitators, which resulted in a brief exercise to demonstrate the concept of "What would it take? To conclude the half-day portion of the workshop, participants were given a grant writing handbook and a copy of *Collaboration handbook: Creating, sustaining and enjoying the journey* (Winer & Ray, 1994). We used blue cards and yellow cards as evaluation for the session: yellow for anything that worked well for people and blue for any changes they

wanted to suggest. Later, we met for dinner and informal entertainment by the fire as a way to continue our conversations and community building.

We began the second day by discussing the results of the yellow and blue cards and worked out a few minor changes to the room arrangement based on feedback. The collaboration factors exercise from the previous day served as a guide for various topics within the workshop outline. These were also reflected in the grant proposal guidelines. The teams challenged themselves to identify other partners, clarify decision-making, list the resources that partners could provide and outline joint agreements, and develop a communication plan. We very specifically covered each section of the grant guidelines including goals, objectives, and action plans. The interaction came as groups shared and consulted with each other. One more experienced group perhaps contributed more than others, and not all participants were deeply interested in all the projects. However, my job as facilitator was to draw connections to key points that would impact everyone. I used humorous stories to illustrate some points and lists to clarify some information.

As a way to experientially illustrate the complexities of collaboration partners, the positives and potential difficulties, we played Nerf ball. We stood and formed two large circles or teams. After practice throwing one ball around the circle for partners to catch, six additional balls were introduced. This exercise and processing by participants brought out a variety of issues in team building and collaboration. For example: "Was there one leader or did we all have responsibility to coach each other, communicate with each other? Did we pay attention to the success of other participants or only watch our own ball? Did we have fun and accomplish the task? What do you do when someone drops the ball?" In addition, the exercise provided the change of pace we needed to continue drafting the grant proposals.

Evaluation is a key section of the grant proposal and the collaborative process. In addition to an evaluation plan tied to project objectives, we discussed adding components that evaluated team development. We reviewed several examples of tools that could be used to solicit feedback from team members on criteria such as meeting facilitation, focus, and communication. Another example led team members to evaluate aspects of development such as group cohesiveness, level of interpersonal support, acceptance of diversity, and satisfaction with participation (Kormanski & Mozenter, 1987, p. 233). A third aspect of evaluation was celebration, which involved recognition of the group's accomplishments and individual contributions. We concluded our workshop by practicing creative ways to acknowledge and thank others. I placed a variety of objects on a table such as: a flashlight, ABC book, glass star, hammer, candle, toy yo-yo, brass plated Number 1, smile mug, silk flowers, and toy microphones. Each person or group selected an item that they would use as a recognition symbol, Memory Anchor or award.

At the end of the day, the groups gave sample presentations. One group sang a humorous song. One group gave a more formal presentation with the candle and an award about lighting the way to the future. Another group used the parable of the boy who saved starfish on the beach. We shared silly presentations, clever recognitions, and touching moments. At that point, an evaluation seemed almost anticlimactic, but I invited the group to give feedback in a plus delta exercise and pointed to it as a model. Initially, there were many positives and almost no improvements suggested. When I told a story of how my family always looks for what would make a gourmet meal "just a little bit better," the group proceeded to discuss their ideas for enhancing the workshop. Several people mentioned that they understood the constraints or why something was done, but they thought it could have been done differently. I think my sincere

openness and request for feedback, even if the ideas were minor suggestions, made a difference. One comment was that we acted on suggestions from the first day. I saw the changes in the room arrangement as minor, but to the participants it signified the collaborative environment. The last form of evaluation was to ask people to think about how they would rate their participation and were if they satisfied.

Conclusion

The goal of the Powerful Partners project and the training was to stimulate libraries and library staff to assume leadership roles in community building and to foster collaborative approaches to the needs of those in the community that transcend organizational boundaries. This article was my attempt to reflect on ways that training could be used to develop the philosophical commitment library staff members need to lead collaborative projects successfully. I explored how conversation can be used in training to shape a collaborative learning process. The modeling of collaborative behaviors during the workshops was also a critical aspect of the learning process.

Did the youth and teens in North Carolina learn to read, love to learn, and gain access the world? Did libraries and librarians in North Carolina provide leadership so that the combined resources and efforts of a community focused on education and the healthy development of youth? The major outcome we anticipated was that: Children and teens receive services strengthened by collaboration of agencies in their community. One measure of success could be that in the first year, twelve of seventeen proposals for community projects were funded because they addressed the nineteen collaboration success factors. Libraries invested the time to develop projects with their partners so that almost $300,000 was distributed to community projects.

Twelve community teams received funding through the leadership of the library to be part of changing our world one project at a time. This article is about the training, but I recognize that further study of the actual projects would provide more data on the benefits to the participants, libraries, and communities.

I propose that collaborative communication training strategies and collaborative project development encouraged conversations from multiple voices, built a sense of community, and promoted equality. I want to emphasize that the exercises and techniques are not enough to create the collaborative learning environment. I tried in this article to show how a facilitator trusts the process and shares control as well as responsibility. The boundaries between facilitator and participants blur at times. Suspending judgment and promoting acceptance of diverse points of view are critical. You can take a risk if you are not focused on being right or wrong.

Positive emotions and play were important to the communication and the collaborative relationships during the workshops. How do we develop creative, flexible problem solvers? Research shows that when people experience positive emotions they expand their thinking and become more creative and flexible (Fredrickson, 2003). People are also more likely to be open to new information. Positive emotions lead to the discovery of novel ideas, pursuit of innovative actions, and development of stronger social bonds. People with positive experiences are less likely to become stuck on their own point of view or come to premature closure on issues being considered. This contributes to working within a collaborative philosophy. Research on the value of *serious play* has proposed that play can lead to intense personal commitment and involvement, particularly in creative environments (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Linder et al., 2001; Rieber et al., 1998). Play can act to free people from self-criticism and a critical stance toward others. I hope that my descriptions of the serious play in the Powerful Partnership workshops

communicated the sense of commitment, involvement, and empowerment that participants experienced when we found serious play in our activities.

Throughout the workshops I shared stories of my experiences in a humorous way. I used personal stories and traditional tales as a type of collaborative literacy, engagement in the literature that reinforces both the concepts and the ability to discuss these concepts in a collaborative environment (Wood, Roser, & Martinez, 2001). I often described times when I did something "wrong"–but I stressed that it was a learning experience. I have told people my personal stories such as Questioning the Authority of the Library Sign Police, The Day a Rule Closed the Auditorium, Asking a Partner to Marry You on the First Date, Being Invited to Collaborate But Our Name Isn't on the Program. My stories encourage others to share their stories and we can inductively learn from those stories. We remember those stories and share those stories in a way we don't share lists, rules, and policies (Bochner, 1994; Browning, 1992; Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 1996, 2000; Finlay & Hogan, 1995; Simmons, 2001). In this article I began with the Slinky© story. I'll close with a vignette from the time after the last workshop concluded, the time when people often come to chat informally with the facilitator.

Portrait of Facilitator

The sounds of animated conversations, shuffling papers, packing of notebooks, and farewells have died down. I hear flip chart paper being pulled from the walls and wadded up, refreshments being cleaned up, and AV equipment being packed. As I chat with several of the last participants, I see Tim out of the corner of my eye. He is waiting to talk to me individually and he doesn't move into the group around me. Tim, a dark haired young man in his late twenties wearing jeans and a plaid button down shirt, had not spoken much during the beginning

of the day. He frequently had his eyes down writing, taking notes. He would laugh readily at times and he listened to his partners, two full figured women who were perhaps old enough to be his mother. Tim surprised me at the end of the workshop by organizing his team to sing a song to demonstrate a recognition plan for their project. The team was so funny that the other participants gave them a wild round of applause. Finally I edged over to him as the other participants left. I smiled broadly and leaned on the edge of the table to relieve the deep ache in my feet. He said, "This day was much better than I thought." I laughed. He continued, "This morning when you said there was no right or wrong, I thought you were a little whacked, but now I get it."

I replied, "I am a bit zany at times, but I think it helps make the day fun. And as I explained fun helps people to see things differently. I'm glad it worked out OK for you. It seemed like your team has a solid project proposal, to say nothing of your fabulous song!"

"Thanks, you know the Nerf ball game really got me thinking about how groups work together–or don't work so well. It was my favorite." Tim could see Ron packing up the equipment; everyone else was gone. "I just wanted to tell you that I don't usually talk much at workshops. I doodle and draw–but I listen. Today, you made it really comfortable, and I feel good about my team–and our project. I wanted to give you something for a thank you." Tim handed me a small sketch on one of the blue index cards, an abstract line drawing of a woman's face with intricate designs framing her face like hair. "It's a portrait of you," he said shyly and then smiled. "You said we should thank people, acknowledge them, so I am." "His brown eyes were wide and his eyebrows were arched with anticipation.

"Oh, I love it!" I exclaimed immediately with sincerity. "You won't believe this but I collect drawings portraits of me that my artist friends and family have done over the years. This

one will be really special." I smiled broadly with real surprise and appreciation. I think to myself how he has internalized our discussion and how hard the recognition process can be for some people. I feel a sense of satisfaction that the day was a safe place to experiment and learn.

I framed that sketch and it still hangs in my hallway. Each time I glance at it, I remember the Powerful Partners project, the collaborative spirit of effective workshops, the impact of conversations, the power of play and the relationships that develop as we form our learning communities.

Appendix 1

COLLABORATION SUCCESS FACTORS

RANKING	YOU	GROUP
ENVIRONMENT		
1. History of collaboration or cooperation in community		
2. Collaborative group seen as leader in community		
3. Favorable political, social climate		
MEMBERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS		
4. Mutual respect, understanding & trust		
5. Appropriate cross section of members		
6. Members see collaboration in their self interest		
7. Ability to compromise		
PROCESS-STRUCTURE		
8. Members share a stake in the process and outcome		
9. Multiple layers of decision making		
10. Flexibility		
11. Development of clear roles		
12. Adaptability		
COMMUNICATION		
13. Open and Frequent communication		
14. Established formal & informal links		
PURPOSE		
15. Concrete, attainable goals & objectives		
16. Shared vision		
17. Unique purpose		
RESOURCES		
18. Sufficient funds		
19. Skilled convener		

Adapted from: Collaboration: What Makes It Work by Mattessich & Monsey, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992.

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