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Coalition-Building: Maybe Tomorrow?
Maybe Today!

It's Tuesday morning at Spokane Public Library. You work your way from
the car to the employee's entrance through thirty-five people clutching
shopping bags. It's the annual Friends of the Library Used Book Sale. You
can get in—they have to wait until nine. They glare. You enter rather more
quickly than usual. "Hey, Tyson! Guess what your kids were up to last
night?" It's the maintenance man. He found the patron sunflower shell
stash. You smile and move on not stopping to point out that last week,
when they spoke to the city council in support of library funding, they were
"our kids." A reference librarian shares the elevator with you. "You've got
to do something about those teachers! I've had it with kids who have to read
the same book—twenty-five of them last night alone, all looking for some
novel that went out of print in 1920." "Yes." you smile. "It's always hard
when...." "I don't want sympathy. I want action!"

In the office you reach for the phone. A call to the school is in order,
but the director stops by first. "Nice work you did on that budget justifica-
tion." You begin to bask. "Excellent work for a first draft." The glow fades.
"You will have the fleshed-out version in by five, won't you?" Oh well.
Who needs lunch? You reach for the phone again, but the first of the young
adult selection team drifts in. "I hope you don't expect to see many high
school book talks this year. I just can't seem to get in the door." "Well,
actually, there are a few other things you could try...." The collection
development coordinator leans through the doorway. "Meeting today?
Remember if you want the rest of your materials allocation for this year I'll
need your order forms by this afternoon." "We're losing money?" chorus
the rest of the staff. "But I need more D and D!" "V. C. Andrews!" "Sweet

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Valley High!” “Yes, but Nancy here has an interesting problem. How do you get invited to a school if your first contact doesn’t work?” “I told her what worked for me. She just didn’t want to listen.” “Can’t we postpone this until next month? I want to order replacements today.”

By late afternoon you can breathe a minute. The budget draft is completed. You’ve submitted your order forms. You’ve even had a minute to talk with a few young adults who stopped by. You pause. You reach for the phone. The acquisitions clerk brings back your order cards—“Incomplete.” Can’t call now. It’s time to search for missing ISBNs.

You return to your office. The mail has arrived. The phone still waits, but it’s really too late to call now. You sort through the mail. Three publisher’s catalogs—same company—all addressed to you by name. An invitation to a Planned Parenthood Open House. You’ll have to say no. It’s the same time as your shift on the reference desk. A newsletter from the regional library association announcing upcoming workshops. Today the one on time management looks especially appealing. You check the dates. You hope the people who attended last week enjoyed it. You pause to curse your place on the routing slip. Ah, at last—the latest issue of your favorite library journal. You open the cover, lean back, and freeze as you read the title of the lead article—“Better Living through Coalition-Building.” You look at the phone. You hear the voice of your library professor echoing in your memory: “Good outreach is action, not reaction.” The line on your job description comes back to haunt you: “Is responsible for interacting regularly with other youth-serving agencies in the community.” You gently pound your head against the desk top.

In reality, of course, most days are not quite so overwhelming. I do manage to find time to interact with school personnel, usually through monthly lunches, and to visit most of the youth-serving agencies in the city at least once a year. However, I am all too aware that there is much more that should be done if we are to develop a program that supports the needs and interests of Spokane’s young people as fully as they deserve. I also know that even on the most hectic of days I have choices. I would like to think that those choices are based on the library’s goals and objectives. However, I know that there are other factors at work for me, and, I suspect, for others in youth services as well. I don’t find much value in haranguing or breast-beating. Instead, I would like to step back and explore how coalition-building is supported or resisted by the profession.

Coalitions are most commonly defined as groups of agencies, organizations, or individuals with different missions but with some commonality of concerns or interests, coming together to address those areas. Coalitions may be informal—such as the once-a-month lunches in Spokane—or may be highly formalized national or even international groups—such as the Coalition for Literacy or the National Coalition Against Censorship.
Coalitions often lead to more formalized structures such as networks or cooperatives in which contracts are drawn, resources allocated, and missions modified or expanded to reflect the needs of participating agencies as well as the new organization as a whole.

From the earliest days of youth services in American libraries, examples of coalition-building can be found. As early as 1896, when Anne Carroll Moore became head of the Children’s Library at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, the pattern was set. She worked intensively with settlement houses in the area in order to introduce children of the poor to the library despite restrictive policies and protectionist practices of the time. Her work continued through the 1920s at New York Public Library where she is credited with bringing thousands of children into the library, in no small part due to the cooperative relationships she developed with local agencies (Braverman, 1979, pp. 16-72).

In 1906, New York Public Library set another early example of pioneering school-public library interaction. A position was established just to work with schools. Branch libraries were surveyed, resources relegated, staff evaluated, and programs planned to address school-related needs. Through the 1950s this program intensified and expanded to include vocational and parochial schools and also began to include other agencies concerned with youth (Braverman, 1979, pp. 79-113).

In Cleveland, too, the pattern of coalition-building was established early. By the 1940s Jean Roos, administrator of work with youth at Cleveland Public Library, was active on at least twenty youth committees in the area. As at New York Public Library, the connection with local schools was strong, with the public library being responsible for providing school library services in the late 1800s and early 1900s. By the 1920s, the Board of Education had assumed responsibility for providing the quarters for school libraries and for materials that directly related to the curriculum, but the public library shared the cost of salaries and provided support materials, a model of joint planning that continued in one form or another through 1970 (Braverman 1979, pp. 116-177).

Such models are not solitary exceptions or remnants of a bygone era. Indeed, the profession itself has called for and continues to call for coalition-building as part of every library’s youth services program. “Young Adult Services in the Public Library” (Public Library Association, American Library Association [ALA], in 1960) and “Standards for Children’s Services” (1964) both call for cooperation with schools and other youth-concerned agencies. The first states, “the young adult librarian should maintain contacts with all community agencies serving teenagers and young adults” (Public Library Association, 1960). It goes on to recommend that if a forum for interaction does not exist, the library would do well to take the lead in establishing such a forum. “Standards for
Children's Services in Public Libraries" echoes this recommendation in its Service Objective number 6: "To serve as a social force in the community together with other agencies concerned with the child's welfare" (Public Library Association, 1964). It further advises that this responsibility be extended to the state and national levels as well.

At the state level, an examination of guidelines for youth services in libraries, from those states that have such guidelines, reveals that the call for coalition-building is strong:

—From Illinois—"Communication and cooperation with schools and other community agencies serving children should be encouraged and supported" (Illinois Library Association, 1978).

—From Nebraska—"The local library must take advantage of the support available from the library system and the state library agency as well as cooperating with school media centers and other community agencies, groups and organizations in planning programs for young people" (Nebraska Library Commission, 1984).

—From New York—"Cooperation with other local agencies serving youth and close working relationships with schools are essential for the public library to maintain community awareness. Working with community agencies can help the children's librarian provide better service to children....The children's librarian should establish cooperative relationships with other libraries in the community" (New York Library Association, 1984).

—From Ohio—"Cooperation with schools, school media centers and community social service agencies concerned with the welfare of children is encouraged. A sharing and blending of skills, personnel and ideas will benefit all involved" (Ohio Library Association, 1984).

—From Vermont—"The public library should serve as a social force in the community by cooperating with other agencies concerned with the child's welfare....Libraries should cooperate with other agencies in the community to plan and carry out library-related programs for children. This means the library going into the community as well as groups coming into the library....There is a need for continuous communication between the public library and schools, nursery schools and day care centers in order that all children benefit from the services the public library can provide....A library has the civic responsibility to cooperate with social agencies and institutions involved with education, enrichment and well-being of children in the community" (Vermont Department of Libraries, 1979).

The 1985 American Library Association President's Program theme was "Forging Coalitions for the Public Good." Three of the eight recommendations in "Alliance for Excellence: Librarians Respond to A Nation at Risk" are based on intertype library cooperation. Federal funding in the
form of Library Services and Construction Act Title III grants have been allocated just to support interlibrary cooperation. The literature contains many examples of coalition-building, and most of these include a strong call for others to begin or increase their commitment.

Coalition-building is firmly rooted in our professional traditions. Its value is reflected in virtually every document describing youth services from the state or national perspective. Calls for action appear regularly in library literature. Then coalition-building must be an established part of every youth services librarian's work. Yet my experiences in Spokane lead me to believe differently. A 1986 survey conducted in Washington State also indicates that coalition-building is not as widespread as we might assume. Of the sixty-six responding children's and young adult librarians, only twenty-six or 39 percent met with other youth services librarians in their areas to discuss issues and coordinate activities and programs with any regularity at all. Sixty percent had not interacted with other youth services librarians outside their own systems at all during the last year. This disparity between professional expectations and actual experiences demands further consideration. Each of us must ask ourselves: How do I feel about the importance of coalition-building in my work? Is it a high priority? Am I doing as much as I should? Am I doing as much as I would like? Do I enjoy the coalition-building I do? What do I feel are the major obstacles to doing more?

In a 1986 survey, thirty-one children's and young adult services specialists representing twenty-one states were asked similar questions. Some interesting perceptions were revealed. While the majority viewed coalition-building as the third highest priority of their youth services program (following collection development and reference/reader's guidance), 26 percent admitted that they were doing only "so-so" and 42 percent saw themselves as doing "not much of anything" in terms of achieving success (see Appendix 1). It should be noted that, while this perception may seem rather grim, collective assessment of success in outreach is even lower. However, that is another story. For our purposes the pattern is clear. My concerns are not unique. A significant portion of youth services librarians see themselves as doing almost all they should in such in-house, patron-responsive functions as collection development, reader's guidance, and reference, but when they move into more proactive functions such as outreach, programming, and coalition-building, our perceptions of success take a decided dip. We know what we should be doing, but we don't do it. A number of respondents chose to add explanations for low success citing lack of administrative support, uncooperative staff, difficulty of planning for activities outside the library, lack of time, or lack of money. I have no doubt that all these factors play a very large part. They do for me. However, two other factors must also be considered—i.e.,
perhaps the success level is not in our administrative support but in ourselves.

Even Ferber, a library consultant and specialist in human resource development, lists the following as necessary for effective coalition-building:

*Interpersonal Communication*, including contacting (establishing rapport), active listening (attentiveness, clarifying, paraphrasing), appropriate *nonverbals* (eye contact, body language).

*Negotiation*, including data gathering, strategizing, probing, blocking attacks, building on others' ideas, acknowledging, constructively criticizing.

*Group Process Facilitation*, including maintenance of group cohesion, getting the task done.


*Networking Skills*, including initiating contacts, convening groups, acting as liaison.

*Problem-Solving*, including brainstorming, problem identification and analysis, action planning.

*Organizational Savvy*, including knowledge of power and influence in the organization through theory, data gathering and analysis.

*A Healthy Self Image*, including good internal sense of worth, appropriate dress and appearance. (Ferber, personal communication, August 13, 1986)

All of these areas—even the last—can be strengthened through training, yet few are included in most library school course offerings. An examination of course listings from fifty-four ALA-accredited master’s degree programs revealed that only four offer courses that might support students in the development of any of these skills. Clearly there is a conflict between professional expectations and professional training—at least at the master's degree level. Lack of training cannot help but contribute to the lack of confidence which must impact both our perceived and actual success as coalition builders. We see ourselves as doing very well in the areas most commonly included in library coursework—e.g., collection development and reference/reader’s guidance. Respectively, 35 percent and 25 percent felt: “We are doing all we should,” and 64 percent and 44 percent gave themselves at least an above-average rating in these areas. However, coalition-building, one of the areas that depends on the kind of skills Ferber describes, was rated as highly successful by only 16 percent of the respondents and moderately successful by an additional 16 percent.

An additional factor that may influence confidence levels in coalition-building is the nature of the organizations with which we interact. Of the forty-one groups with which the ALA’s Young Adult Services Division and Association for Library Service to Children have established contact, 37 percent represent human services professions that include interpersonal and organizational skills as part of their training. Not only do we lack the skills we need to operate with full effectiveness in coalition-building, but
Coalition-Building

we also often interact with people who are extremely skilled in just those areas.

Lack of training can be corrected. We can seek out training experiences that will enrich our library education. We can work with local, state, regional, and national groups that support continuing education. We can encourage library schools to offer courses that respond to our needs for behavioral as well as cognitive knowledge.

The second factor that may influence effectiveness as coalition-builders is not a matter of training but of inclination. Comments included in the survey responses suggested a number of reasons why coalition-building was less than successful. However I know that I have used some or all of those reasons to justify not doing things I didn’t want to do, and I have managed to do things I really felt were important despite some or occasionally all the factors mentioned by survey respondents. In that typical hectic day described earlier, I made choices to respond to administrative deadlines, to take time to talk with kids, and to open mail. I chose to accept my floorwork schedule as nonnegotiable. I made these decisions and by doing so did not respond to other possibilities including two that would have directly supported coalition-building. Something in me resisted making those actions top priority. It might well have been an almost subconscious response to system goals, but it also might have been personal inclination.

Personal preference—yours and mine—can and does enter into our decision-making processes. It is vital that we know ourselves well enough to detect this influence. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a tool that can be helpful in just this area. Based on Jung’s theory of psychological types, it measures perception and judgment—the way we look at things and the way we go about making decisions based on what is perceived. It is, of course, only an indication of tendencies. However, we usually develop more skill with those processes we prefer. We may have a preference for using the right or left hand, but we can and do use either or both when needed. The four areas of preference measured in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, then, are:

1. perception directed toward the outer world of people and things (called Extraversion or E) or toward the inner world of theories and ideas (Introversion or I);
2. perception based on known facts and the directly observable (called Sensing or S) or on possibilities and relationships (Intuition or N);
3. judgment based on analysis and logic (called Thinking or T) or on personal values (Feeling or F);
4. judgment in a planned, orderly way (called Judging or J) or in a flexible, spontaneous way (Perceptive or P) (Myers & McCaulley, 1985, pp. 1-5, 11-29).
While all these factors certainly influence how we approach coalition-building, the first, which considers our preference for perceiving through interaction with people and things rather than through theories and ideas, seems most significant in determining any personal resistance we may have. Myers-Briggs surveyed hundreds of people in a variety of careers and, based on 267 librarians, found a marked preference for introversion—more than 60 percent (Myers & McCaulley, 1985, pp. 244-92). However, since I have heard many of my colleagues express on more than one occasion that youth services specialists may well be more people-oriented than librarians as a whole, I decided to explore this further.

Twelve youth services specialists at Spokane Public Library agreed to take the Myers-Briggs instrument and share the results. Each of us reacted differently to the experience. Most were curious and gained appreciation for ourselves and our colleagues through the process. For some the experience was a real revelation personally as well as professionally. Comments ranged from: "No wonder I get so tired on school visit days!" to "I can't believe it! I finally know why I'm different from the people around me. And it's not because there is something wrong with me!" Now we often describe our actions in terms of the results, as in "Get Marshall to explain this. You're sounding too 'N' for me." We are coming to cherish differences and to capitalize on them.

However, in combination, a clear and somewhat frightening picture emerged. Of the twelve specialists who took the instrument, 75 percent scored in the I range, 75 percent in the N range, and 75 percent in the F range with an equal division between P and J. At Spokane Public Library, according to the Myers-Briggs results, youth services staff is more concerned with possibilities and relationships than with facts. We base decisions more on personal values than on impersonal analysis and logic. We feel more comfortable in the inner world of theories and ideas than in the outer world of people and things, even more so than librarians in general. No wonder we have such difficulty in coalition-building. Activities based on interaction and dependent on active pursual of contacts are not our preferred styles. Myers-Briggs characterizes the I personality by predicting that such people would find work with theories and ideas energizing and work with people and things enervating. However, this insight allows us to do something about it. We can consciously put more energy into those activities we know are not typical of our preferred style. We can acknowledge and turn to those that operate from different styles for strength and support. We can seek out training opportunities that build skills and increase confidence in areas that are not our most preferred. We can continue to explore our own interests, values, and skills so that we will be as aware as possible of the factors that influence our work.
In summary, coalition-building has been a long-standing tradition in library service to youth. It is included as a priority in virtually every set of state and national guidelines. Calls for action are frequent in national forums. Yet our perceptions of success in this area are surprisingly low. Two factors that might affect this have been examined: lack of training in interpersonal and organizational skills; and personality qualities of individual librarians that resist proactive, people-based activities. Yet neither of these factors is insurmountable. Instead, I recommend that as individuals and as a profession we:

— seek out training experiences in interpersonal and organizational skills to supplement library school education;
— actively work for continuing education experiences at the local, state, and national levels that enhance these skills;
— work for more responsive library school curricula;
— reconsider recruitment of library school students;
— encourage library systems to provide for human resource development training and support; and
— accept the challenge of self-knowledge and learn to value the differences in attitudes, values, and skills of our colleagues.

More research is necessary in both issues discussed in this presentation. My inquiries were limited and basic, but the tendencies uncovered have significance for current and projected training and exploration. Who we are as real or potential coalition-builders is not solely determined by who we claim to be in policies and guidelines. We are also formed by our training and by our own natures. In Spokane we have begun to learn more about who we are and how we act and interact in order to increase our effectiveness at work. We have made a commitment to continue this exploration. However we must all commit as individuals and as a profession to honest consideration of how differences in skills and personalities impact our actions. When this happens, I predict the next survey that comes our way will be marked: “We are doing all we should.”
APPENDIX
Summary of a 1986 Survey of Youth Services Managers

August 18, 1986

Dear Colleague,

In preparing a presentation for the upcoming Allerton Institute I am looking into youth services managers' attitudes toward delivery of service. This is nothing scientific at this point. I am curious only about general trends that might exist. Please take a minute to mark the following scales and send me your responses by August 31. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed for your use. Remember I'm looking for your impressions as to how well your system is doing. All responses will be kept confidential. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

Christy Tyson
Spokane Public Library

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<th></th>
<th>high</th>
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<th>low</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Our system gives collection development for youth</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Our system gives reader's guidance/reference to youth</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Our system gives in-house programming to youth</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>4. Our system gives coalition-building with other youth-serving agencies</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Our system gives outreach to youth (booktalks, school visits, etc.)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. In the area of COALITION-BUILDING,</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>We are doing all we should.</td>
<td>so-so</td>
<td>We aren't doing much of anything.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. In the area of COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT,</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. In the area of IN-HOUSE PROGRAMMING,</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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9. In the area of OUTREACH,

| 10% | 23% | / 23% | 6% | 39% |

10. In the area of REFERENCE/READER’S GUIDANCE,

| 25% | 19% | / 34% | 3% | 19% |

50 surveys sent to 25 different states
31 responses from 21 different states
NOTES


Public Library Association, Committee on Standards for Work with Young Adults. (1960). *Young adult services in the public library*. Pamphlet, American Library Association, Chicago.


ADDITIONAL READING


Notes on Coalitions


Notes on Interpersonal and Organizational Exploration


