From discourse to dialogue
Open Shelf podcast
Conversation between Kasey (Mallen Whalley) and Richard Reid: Transcript
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Kasey (Mallen) Whalley (K.M.W.)
Hi Richard, how are you?

Richard Reid (R.R.)
I'm good, how are you Kasey?

K.M.W.
I'm very good. I just wanted to say thank you for agreeing to talk us to about teamwork. I wanted to start with, with the type of teams that you've been on, just to give some sort of context for why we are talking about teams. So what are some of the teams that you've been, either currently working on, or you have worked on before. I know that you've done a little bit of committee work too.

R.R.
I've been one of the lucky people that has really been able to be fortunate to work on amazing teams and I think the end result, in the goals of those teams, have been really, really powerful. Teams that I've been on, of course, so our OLA Board is definitely a team and what is amazing about that is it's a diverse group of people that are coming from so many different library worlds but for that common good of what we know libraries are and, and how we can make an impact. So that's a really fantastic team that I get to be a part of. It's a learning curve for me and many of our new board members but the teamwork and camaraderie that is taking place at when we're making decisions on behalf of the whole membership is really, really powerful and exciting.

I'm going to gush a little bit next, I hope that's okay. I work with a fantastic team in my day job. So I work with the Durham District School Board and I'm currently the library consultant and I look after 100+ schools but the team I work with is just amazing. That team is called Innovative Education and we all have little portfolios within that team but it's a true illustration the idea and the definition of teamwork. So we all work together for that common goal and we're just unison. We can finish each other's quotes. We can finish each other's sentences and we're doing that for the betterment of innovation. That's something that really proud of and will always want to talk about.

The third team that I've been involved with, both as a planner and also a chair, has been the OLA Super Conference Planning Team. And for many of you listening, and reading Open Shelf, you've been to Super Conference, it's a massive event that really provides our membership with fantastic professional learning opportunities. But that just doesn't happen overnight. Team members from every division of OLA work so hard, have that collective spirit and mindset to

make that event amazing for our 6,000 people, and I think, that attend every year, and I think for me, between my amazing work team, and that Super Conference team, and now Board, I'm just in this sweet spot, ah working with fantastic people who have a vision, who have a goal, and want to make things happen for great reasons. So it's fantastic to be on those teams and in, in the Board's case, it's just a joy to be able to lead that group through OLA's strategic plan and mission. So I'm a really great spot with teams.

K.M.W.
You did say something in two of the examples, and I would assume for the third, is that there's this idea like a common (yeah, Richard) goal we need in a team or leading a team. Does that have to be set at the beginning of the team or is it something that grows with the team?

R.R.
For me, I think we, and the teams I've been involved with, we have a certain idea where we want to go. The goals may not be 100% set in stone. We have that idea, we develop where we think we want to go and we work together, we do our research, we have those great meetings, we can have conversations, sometimes they get a little bit courageous because we want our point of view shared, and the retooling, the rejigging, those brilliant ideas that come out with just conversations that occur, I think can lead us to sort of that common good. But I don't you always have to that perfect goal set. I think you need a vision statement or an idea and then you can move forward and the collective power and energy and ideas can, you know, merge together and organically grow to be successful.

So when it comes to the Board, we have those strategic priorities that we've set, or previous boards have set, and of course we want to make sure that those goals are reached. So I think it's a combination of both and it also depends on the team and the world that you're in. I think you need sort of a balance between those high priority goals and the organic process of just working with people.

K.M.W.
I know from doing my MI at University of Toronto, when we did group projects, it really was the goal of like, this is our assignments, "This is what we need to accomplish," but at the same time this organic sort of, "Okay what do we need to do next to achieve that final goal?" or "How can this goal change in a way that's best to the people in the team?" and I think that it applies to a lot of different teams, not just necessarily professional, but if you're on a volunteer team (Richard, right) or working in a smaller team or a larger team. I do have some questions about working through those formative stages of a team. There are usually like five standard stages of team development and the first two are storming and forming. So you're just trying to kinda getting to know everybody, you're just sort of get things together. Is it good to have those kind of struggles at the beginning or do you think it's just better to have everybody on the same page at the same time and move forward?

R.R.
I think that when you have some storm-type weather or issues or ideas that might not jive with one another, eventually those ideas can help achieve final sort of end project. We don't always

2

have to get along with each other's ideas but I think we can learn from other's ideas and perspectives to then sort of shape where we want to go. I'm not an expert in all areas of libraries. Some of my ideas and values about library collection, for example, might be exactly the same as someone from a public library or an academic setting. So I think we need to have those moments of conversation, be it courageous or uncomfortable, and then help those shape where we want to go. So, yeah I think that's a totally valid point in the process. Obviously we don't want it to be too stormy all the time.

K.M.W.
No, no we don't like a lot of storms (Richard, no) but I think, saying "This is what works for me but not necessarily for you in your team," also I think it leads to really great collaboration.

R.R.
When we have multiple voices and we recognize the strength of others' voice and other people, their process, we are definitely going to have a more exciting, a more well planned, a well-oiled machine with whatever we're doing. So that discourse that can occur, used properly, can be exciting and I think move us towards a positive goal within whatever team we're on. In my world, within the Durham District School Board, we talk about collaboration a lot, be it with collaboration face-to-face or virtually like we are right now or even looking at the way our environments are set up physically, valuing collaboration and then coupling that voices of groups of people in my work world but also within so much else of what I do, is that those are keys to making success and achievement.

K.M.W.
You were saying, like discourse and conversations and having multiple voices, that's really important when it comes to not just the storming but team members who, who you're having trouble communicating with, the big step forward is that sort of focus on collaboration, you know how can we together reach our goals and how can we have conversations where all have our voices heard. It's so important, it absolutely fosters a really solid foundation for (Richard, I agree) for whatever the goal is.

K.M.W.
From the sound of it, some of your teams have been very disperse. How do you find that technology plays a role in that, if it does?

R.R.
The reality is we're not always going to have a team that perfectly jives together and we've all had that experience. And it can be uncomfortable. I hope that I always tyy to use that as a learning experience, to best see how others ideas, philosophies, viewpoints do fit into our work collectively to reach that goal, whatever it may be. I think that we need to have some of those conversations and those ideas from other points of view because we can't all just be on the same page at the same time without some work.

I think it definitely, be it small aspects of technology, like using an online tool or a mobile app like Slack communicate those urgent, quick needs or those ideas as they come to you know in

the morning when you're having your coffee. Just from an equity, access, is important. We work, especially within the library world, in a diverse geographical way. Not everybody is based in Toronto or the GTA so we need to sort of investment in those technologies when working in teams so that the team can be effective, that all members can feel part of it. Technology plays a big role in the team that we work on within Super Conference, not so much our Board, we try to do that face-to-face, but even within the world I work in my school district, we are geographically dispersed through a pretty large area, so we try to make sure that our professional learning or our small mentoring meetings or our library meetings, we try to do our best so that we can offer face-to-face but also the ability to call in or Google Hangouts. I think that meetings and teamwork need to happen in a face-to-face environment to really sort of build a community.

But when that's not possible, I'd say definitely run with technology. Technology has a great place to sort of smooth, streamline the process but also make sure that our teams are accessible by everyone. And I think that a lot of us likely live in the world of email box or calendaring overload, where we're getting hundreds of emails a day. And sometimes that process for me, and this might be very personal so some others might not really agree, but for me that ability for it to be that casual aspect that you might have on a team project. You know, you're sitting at your cubicle, at your meeting table, and you're like, "Ah hah, I've got something, let's share it," and you can kind of throw it out there. Of course, we need those agendas and emails and formal you know documents, but yeah the informality of a Slack message or a Skype type thing can be pretty powerful.

K.M.W.
Final question is, if you had one piece of advice for people who working in teams or struggling in teams, what would your piece of advice be?

R.R.
So you're in a team and it's going great, just always celebrate what you're doing. Sometimes we can lose touch with the amazing work we do especially in the library community. We know we are impacting so many people, I think we need to celebrate that work we do in teams. And we try to do that really in all the groups I'm involved with and I think that says a lot to the people involved ah but it also says about the work. And the struggling piece, I think communication is the key. It, it sounds a little cliché, we always talk about that. Once you have dialogue, keep that dialogue open for the end goal.