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## What Collaboration Means to Me: Playing Well With Others

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## *What Collaboration Means to Me* Playing Well with Others

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My love of literature, and the great fun I had sharing that love with young people, their parents and caregivers, prompted my entry into librarianship. Even as the state librarian in Oregon I view nearly everything I do through the lens of a youth services librarian where the first rule has always been that sharing between colleagues is absolutely required in order to succeed.

My earliest work in youth services took place at the Albany Public Library. Many of the youth serving agencies in the city were concerned about students having release time on Wednesday afternoon, several times a year. Kids inundated us at these times, so we decided to create a bit of structure to benefit both the kids and the service agencies. We got school buses from the school district to take the kids to the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and finally to the library for a movie and popcorn where their parents would pick them up. This program didn't make those days any less hectic but it did provide the kids something interesting to do and provided our agencies with the opportunity to interact with kids who might otherwise never have darkened our door.

Several years later I became the youth services outreach librarian for the King County (WA) Library System. It would have been completely fair to include the word "collaborative" in my job title. In my work with childcare facilities and family home childcare, I worked not only with the providers but also with a number of agencies that interacted regularly with those providers for licensing and other support. Again, we were

working toward a common goal, making sure the kids in their care had access to quality children's literature and literacy building activities.

Coming back to Oregon as the youth services consultant for the state library in 1996 brought me to an even new level of collaboration, and I have had experience with all sides of collaboration in my 22 years as a librarian; in other words, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Working at the state library is interesting in that we are both a state agency as well as a library. The library work we do is for primarily three audiences: Oregonians with print disabilities, state agency staff, and staff of local libraries of all kinds. Some of our collaborations are mostly serendipitous while others can be mandated. Both kinds can be successful. I have also learned that if a collaboration or partnership is not achieving the desired results it is best to let it go, not unlike a bad personal relationship.

In 2012 I became the state librarian. I had been out of the direct library service business for many years but this position gives me an opportunity to have an influence on a broader playing field. And I do approach that opportunity just like I did my first youth services librarian position, maintaining that sharing is absolutely essential for success.

The mission of the state library is "providing leadership and resources to continue growing vibrant library services for Oregonians with print disabilities, the Legislature and state government, and all Oregonians through local li-



braries.” All of what we do focuses on our mission and the [Oregon Library Association \(OLA\)](#) is one of our most important allies in that work. I am an ex-officio member of the OLA Executive Board, an active member in the association, and have membership in all the divisions of the organization. Staff at the state library are actively engaged in the work of the association from our youth services consultant who works with the Children’s Services Division and OYAN, to our representatives on the Public Library Division Board and the Oregon Association of School Libraries. OLA has received Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding for a variety of projects and our most high profile is the Oregon School Library Information System (OSLIS), which provides a portal to online databases and information literacy lessons to all K-12 students in Oregon. The collaboration has not been without bumps and we have adapted as challenges have arisen, the hallmark of a successful collaboration.

The libraries of Oregon State University (OSU), our land grant university with a mission to serve the citizens of Oregon, have been another valuable partner who proves the rule of “stronger together.” In Oregon nearly 10% of our population does not have tax supported public library service. In order to make state library resources paid for with federal funding (LSTA) available to those Oregonians, we partnered with OSU libraries to create [Libraries of Oregon](#), a portal to online databases and local library finder.

In addition to our library collaborations, of which I have just mentioned a few, we collaborate with other state agencies and organizations. The State Archives, State of Oregon Law Library and the state library are partners in the Reference Coordinating Council, created in 2015. Our task is to coordinate the delivery of library, information and reference services provided by these institutions, to clarify their roles, and to promote collaboration and reduce duplication of effort. The same legislation that created the

Council also assigned the State Library the task of consolidating purchasing of online subscription databases for state agencies, a project that will further decrease redundancies.

There are two projects in particular that highlight the success of the Oregon State Library. The first was a project called “Mother Goose Asks Why?” which was a science-themed children’s book and activity curriculum for preschoolers and their parents. This was a collaboration across many venues, which included children’s librarians, early learning specialists from both public libraries and the department of education, a private non-profit in Vermont and families with young children. After a group of us were trained at the national level, we trained local librarians across the state. That project started in 1998 and as I search, “Mother Goose Asks Why?” online today I see a variety of libraries in Oregon who still offer programs based on the original training.

The second project was a collaboration between the State Library, Commission on Children and Families, Department of Education, and Portland State University Center for Career Development. This project began in the late nineties when early brain development research provided us with greater insight into the brain development of infants and children. These organizations worked together to provide training to a wide variety of early learning specialists on how to incorporate early brain development research into our programming. Since that training started, the research has continued to illuminate the mystery and magic of early brain development and the collaboration laid the groundwork in Oregon for a number of organizations to institute practices that are research based.

This has been great fun to reflect on collaborations and to close with two of my favorite examples outlining the groundwork for all my subsequent collaborative work. In the end, playing



well with others opens doors and achieves the missions we set for ourselves.

