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ABSTRACT

College students involved in literacy education programs should be aware of who are involved in such programs, what the attitudes and agendas of each of the parties are, the resistance that the literacy programs might encounter, the uses of collaborative partnerships, and how to build collaborative partnerships, according to a study involving college literacy program stakeholders. Information was gathered through telephone interviews with students, administrators, and community organizers representing more than 30 college literacy education programs or literacy coalitions nationwide. Analysis of data gathered through the interviews showed that students involved in literacy education programs showed that it is necessary to determine the positions and motivations of all participants in order to protect the values held by the literacy programs. The analysis also showed that all participants bring different resources, experiences, perspectives, and benefits to a literacy program, and that recognizing and valuing these different contributions is central to understanding the nature of the program's relationship with the college and the community. Resistance to the program may be surprising to college students, but it can happen, according to the interviewees. Such resistance should be identified and dealt with. A good way to overcome resistance is to establish a collaborative partnership, according to the study. A model of a collaborative is suggested, along with action steps for setting up the partnership. (KC)

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ED 366 843

The Politics of College Literacy Programs:

Stakes, Resistance, and Collaborative Partnerships

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by: Roger Schwartz

The Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE)

August 1992

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The "Politics of College Literacy Programs" - An Introduction

Instinct warns us to be cautious of discussions concerning the "politics of. . ." *anything*. This feeling is understandable given that many articles and studies promising to lend clarity and insight to the "politics of. . ." a given issue, often succeed only in further confusing both the issue and the reader. The potential for confusion is no less a possibility with a paper modestly entitled the "Politics of College Literacy Programs."

Recognizing the impossibility of covering the entire spectrum of issues encompassed by the phrase "Politics of College Literacy Programs," this paper intends to consider a number of individual "political" questions pertinent to college literacy programs. Specifically, this paper will discuss:

- o The interests involved in a typical literacy "equation." Who are the stakeholders? What do they bring to the table? What motivates them to get involved? What does this relationship look like?

- o Resistance to college literacy programs and their work from college and community sources. Under what conditions might college literacy programs expect to be confronted with resistance and obstacles? Why?

- o Collaborative partnerships as a means for college students to avoid or to overcome resistance and obstacles to their literacy efforts. What are the elements of an effective collaborative partnership? Can a partnership really help your literacy program?

- o Building a collaborative partnership in your own community. How much planning is necessary? What is an "action plan"? How can you insure that your voice is heard?

In addition, one of the most important purposes of this paper is to encourage college students to clarify their own perspectives on literacy education. As college students involved in literacy work, we need to consider how our understanding of literacy education influences the work we do, and just as significantly, influences the way others view our effort. We need to recognize and to prepare for the fact that not everyone thinks about literacy and literacy programs in the same way we do. While each of us might believe our program embodies the "right" perspective on literacy, the failure to develop a strategy for dealing with multiple expectations and perspectives on literacy could very well jeopardize the success and survival of the programs themselves.

Why this paper was written

The impetus for this paper stems from a desire to encourage college students to consider a number of fundamental issues related to their literacy work. Specifically, this paper intends to highlight the relationships among college literacy programs, institutions, and communities; to discuss how the interests and stakes of each player affect the politics of literacy efforts as a whole; and to suggest collaborative partnerships as a constructive and positive framework for dealing with political issues within the relationships themselves. In addition, by introducing the concepts of "stakes," "resistance," and

"collaborative partnerships," in concrete terms, this paper attempts to lay the groundwork for college students to begin to think about how their literacy work relates to greater, societal and global issues.

How this paper was completed

Much of the information contained in this paper is the result of a compilation of telephone interviews with students, administrators, and community organizers representing more than thirty college literacy programs and/or literacy coalitions nationwide. The insights of the dedicated and busy people who took the time to share their experience was both enlightening and greatly appreciated. Their input has played a large role in shaping this paper.

Special credit should be given to Matt Adams (Program Director, SCALE), Maria Fox (Hobart and William Smith Colleges, '91), Dr. Kevin Freer (Professor of Adult Education, Ohio State University), and the SCALE staff for their contributions, insights, and valuable feedback. Dr. Paul Jurmo (Consultant to Adult Literacy Programs, Jersey City, New Jersey), contributed much of the collaborative partnership model and structure for this paper. And finally, Dr. Bird Stasz (Director of Service Learning, Cayuga Community College), cannot be thanked enough for her brilliance, her inspiration, and her uncanny ability to identify "things" that need to be discussed.

Section I - The Literacy "Equation"

Who is Involved?

Who is involved in your literacy program? At first it seems like such a simple question. After all, you know exactly who takes part in your literacy effort. Your program, like most typical college literacy programs, probably involves college students, faculty and administrators from the institution, and learners and organizers from the community. Even considering the possibility of expansion or diversification of your program, you are confident that the same interests -- college students, the institution, and the community -- will remain at the center of your literacy "equation."

Yet at the same time, how much do you know *about* the individuals and organizations involved with your literacy program? What do they bring to the table? What do they value? Why are they interested in literacy work? What motivates them?

These are not merely rhetorical questions. Rather, they are questions that get at the heart of the relationship between your program and the partners involved with your literacy effort. Understanding the nature of your relationship with those with whom you work is an important part of protecting the long-term interests and purposes of your program. Thinking about how your program, your institution, and your community each contributes to the local literacy "equation" is a necessary and fundamental step toward ensuring success.

What are the Stakes?

College students, institutions, and communities each bring a wealth of different resources, experiences, perspectives, and benefits to a literacy "equation." Recognizing and valuing these different contributions is again central to understanding the nature of your relationship with your school and your community. Consider what each partner may potentially bring to this relationship.

The college literacy program may offer:

o College student volunteers specifically trained to meet a targeted need in the community. These volunteers are provided as a resource to the community at little or no cost, and because of their status as college students, they are flexible enough to accomodate most time schedules.

o College student volunteers who, aside from classroom help, provide community literacy efforts with good role models, peer mentors, and diverse perspectives of the world.

o A host of both tangible and intangible benefits for the institution, including: an improvement in college/community relationships; a catalyst for recruitment and admissions; increased financial resources from donations and grants; added prestige; and an affirmation of the mission statement and philosophy of the institution.

o A valuable academic and cultural experience for college students who, through experiential learning, are exposed to perspectives and voices different from their own.

o A vehicle for promoting literacy awareness both on campus and in the community.

The institution may offer:

o Financial, structural, and technical support for the literacy program. Levels of support range from a minimum of office space, a telephone, and a faculty advisor, to a maximum of an Office of Community Service, a full-fledged service coordinator, and an endowment for the program.

o Financial, structural, and technical support for the literacy program from the student government or other campus organizations.

o An acknowledgement, acceptance, and endorsement of the literacy program and its work. This includes a recognition of the educational value of the program, and often, academic credit for those students involved.

o Work-study positions for college students in the literacy program.

o An educational and financial resource for the community.

The community may offer:

- o Opportunities to develop lasting relationships with adult learners who often bring peer support and program support to the literacy effort.

- o Agencies and organizations actively involved in providing service to the community. These programs are often willing to work with college literacy programs and have their own pool of resources, volunteers, and training methods to contribute to the literacy effort.

- o Tutor training opportunities; in-service programs; instructional and technical materials; and conferences for sharing experiences and advice.

- o Training in volunteer program management.

- o Business and civic interests committed to supporting the community literacy effort through sponsorships, in-kind donations, and publicity.

These contributions to the literacy "equation" represent the foundations upon which your relationship with your partners is built. Unfortunately, few college literacy programs devote sufficient time to thinking about what these contributions look like on paper and in practice. As a result, the potential for conflicts and misunderstandings to arise over such issues as perspectives on literacy, allocation of resources, ownership of "turf," challenges to traditional "business as usual" relationships, and collaborative and organizational skills is rarely considered. This oversight can often hold severe consequences for the survival and success of college literacy programs.

Section II - Resistance and Obstacles to College Literacy Programs

Resistance - An Overview

Not all college literacy programs are destined to encounter resistance to their literacy work. In fact, many programs may never be confronted by these issues. Recognizing this, the purpose of outlining and discussing the causes and dynamics of resistance to college literacy programs is *not* to frighten college students away from literacy work. In contrast, the purpose of bringing to light the notion of resistance is to make programs aware that: the potential for resistance to their work exists; programs must gain an understanding of the causes and nature of potential resistance; and programs must take steps to prepare for potential resistance. In addition, discussing ways of knowing when to expect resistance is a step toward developing a strategy to prevent or to overcome resistance.

Can It Really Happen?

For many college literacy students, the idea of resistance to their program or to their literacy work is hard to conceive. How can *anyone* be opposed to volunteerism, community service, or literacy? And indeed, thinking about college literacy programs in the general context of volunteerism, community service, and literacy, such disbelief is understandable.

Yet, while we know that almost everyone supports volunteerism, community service, and literacy as worthy ideals, this agreement often comes to an end when individuals and organizations take steps toward turning these ideals into action. Not everyone will have the same understanding of what volunteerism, community service, and literacy mean, nor will they have the same ideas as to how each can best be realized in practice. At the heart of these differences may lie more fundamental disagreements concerning how literacy work and community service are related to greater social issues, and what college student volunteers should be trying to achieve through their literacy work.

It is crucial for college literacy programs to recognize that literacy work often brings together groups that possess different ideas and perspectives on literacy and organizing for literacy work. You also need to understand that these differences may result in resistance or obstacles to your work.

Identifying Resistance

Resistance to college literacy programs and their work manifests itself in a number of implicit and explicit ways. In the case of institutional resistance, programs may experience a marked decline or unwillingness on the part of the college to offer essential financial, structural, and technical support. Additionally, the institution may withhold or withdraw its official endorsement of the program and, in turn, refuse to offer academic credit for those students involved in the program. In extreme cases, the college may even use its economic leverage to dissuade community organizers and agencies from working with the college literacy program. Common to much institutional resistance is the pervasive sense that the college simply does not value the literacy program and its work.

In the same vein, college literacy programs may find members of the community reluctant to work with them. Local agencies and organizations may be unwilling to "share" their learners, resources, and "turf" with college volunteers. Business and civic interests may oppose college literacy efforts which utilize methods of instuction and curricula different from more local and traditional ones. Learners themselves may resist working with college volunteers who have a perspective and a voice different from those they are already familiar with.

In general, college literacy programs should remember that institutional and community resistance is often complex and unclear. While many programs quickly become aware of the fact that they are experiencing resistance, rarely do they learn of the specific reasons causing the resistance. As a result, college literacy programs must not only be conscious of the potential for resistance to their work, but they must also be aware of when to expect such resistance to occur.

Resistance - When To Expect It

While some resistance experienced by college literacy programs should invariably be attributed to localized problems and personality conflicts, by no means can the general question of resistance to college literacy programs be explained away in the same manner. Indeed, there are common situations in which college literacy programs may *generally* expect to encounter resistance or obstacles to their work:

"Pushing the edges of the envelope"

College literacy programs which raise questions about the status quo should expect to experience resistance to their work. These programs engage in literacy work which provides people with a greater opportunity to ask critical questions in the public sphere. Learners begin to take an active and public interest in the social, political, economic, and cultural issues which affect their own lives. In these literacy projects, learners are organized around important personal concerns such as tenants' rights, voter registration, workplace issues, and healthcare. As a result, traditional relationships and power structures in the community can be altered, and community interests uncomfortable with, or fearful of, this change may act to resist or obstruct the stimulus for the change in order to "protect" their own interests.

College literacy programs which challenge the status quo usually possess strong student leadership. The active and empowered role of students in such leadership positions often creates added resistance to college literacy programs and their work. In this case, student leaders might be perceived by college administrators and members of the community as being "troublemakers." Student leaders are blamed for upsetting the existing balance of power on campus and in the community, and in turn, must often contend with institutional and community pressure directed specifically at them.

In challenging the status quo, college literacy programs encourage people to think critically about their assumptions and ideas concerning literacy, illiteracy, and the issues related to literacy education. Pushing people to question their own perspectives is a difficult and uncomfortable process, a process which may provoke resistance. Some college administrators and community agencies resent college literacy programs because they view the programs as an implicit criticism of their own work. Indeed, the idea that college students and their literacy programs have valuable contributions to make to the adult basic education and literacy education fields is one rejected by numerous academics and literacy practitioners.

At the heart of the conflict between college literacy programs which challenge the status quo and the college and community interests which resist them can lie a fundamental difference in their perspectives on literacy education. For college literacy programs committed to challenging the status quo, literacy education is inextricably tied to social, political, economic, and cultural factors. Improved literacy skills are understood as a means for learners to become empowered and to have a voice in decisions which affect their lives. In the broader context, college literacy programs challenging the status quo are dedicated to seeing their work in literacy education result in

greater social justice. Clearly, these programs are engaged in work for social transformation.

This "social transformation" perspective stands in marked contrast to the perspective adopted by those resisting the challenge of college literacy programs to the status quo. For many college and community interests, the purpose of literacy education is to ensure the improvement of "basic skills". In this case, literacy work is perceived as being apolitical and value free; its end should be to help learners improve their reading and writing skills, and to promote a better educated and more efficient population.

The significant differences between these two perspectives on literacy education almost guarantees that college literacy programs engaged in actively challenging the status quo will encounter some type of resistance. It is important to note however, that college students hold no monopoly over the "social transformation" perspective. Indeed, it is quite possible that conflict and resistance stemming from differences in perspective may result in a situation where college students favoring an "apolitical" approach to literacy meet resistance from community programs engaged in social action literacy work. In either case, the fact remains that differences in perspectives on literacy education are often responsible for the resistance and obstacles which college literacy programs encounter.

Environment

College literacy programs working in an environment which is not conducive to the goals of the program should expect to experience resistance to their work. In this case, it is helpful to consider college literacy programs as organic entities which grow much like gardens do. Starting a literacy program is like planting a seed; for the program to prosper and to reach its full potential, the environment in which it is planted needs to be a nuturing one. Programs created in an environment hostile or indifferent to their survival will have a difficult time thriving.

The idea of "natural" resistance to college literacy programs makes sense if we recognize that certain characteristics of the environment we work in are beyond our control. For example, if the community has no population in need of literacy education, the chances of a college literacy program surviving are slim. In the same vein, if the community literacy need is already being sufficiently met, the chances of the literacy program surviving are again limited. Other factors may also play a role in offering "natural" resistance to the growth of the program, including: a long-standing antagonistic relationship between the college and the community; a previous history of disasterous community service efforts by college students; a general disinterest on the part of college students themselves; and an extreme class, race, or cultural division between college students and the community which proves impossible to overcome. As frustrating as it is, the environment in which college literacy programs are created and nurtured often helps determine whether or not the programs prosper and survive.

Collaboration and Organizational Skills

Leaders of college literacy programs who lack fundamental collaborative, organizational, and negotiation skills should expect to encounter resistance to their work. The source of this resistance lies in the fact that college students lacking these skills will have a difficult time working with institutional and community partners. In addition, unless college literacy programs are able to administrate and organize their own programs, including tasks such as time and resource management, recruitment, training, internal evaluation, and reflection, they will be in no position to ask others to work with them. Programs that do not know how to communicate, cooperate, organize and negotiate are not well conceived programs, and accordingly, college and community interests will resist working with such programs.

In many respects, this "logistical" resistance to college literacy programs is understandable. College students seeking to work with institutional and community interests often need to convince them that college students can indeed be reliable and valuable partners. The best way to accomplish this is for college students to demonstrate their basic abilities to communicate, negotiate, and cooperate. While mastering these basic organizational skills seems like a simple task, many college literacy programs neglect to do so, and as such, help to create resistance and obstacles to their own work.

Section III - The Collaborative Partnership

Why a Collaborative Partnership?

At first glance, suggesting that a college literacy program establish a collaborative partnership as a means to prevent or to overcome resistance and obstacles may seem a bit puzzling. Why go to the bother and take the risk of trying to cooperate with college administrators and local literacy organizations which might very well question or resist your ideas for a literacy project? Given the potential for conflicts to arise over such issues as perspectives on literacy, allocation of resources, ownership of "turf," and challenges to traditional "business as usual" relationships, the notion of forming a collaborative partnership among your project, your institution, and groups in your community might appear to be a risky one.

Despite these apparent risks, a well-conceived and negotiated collaborative partnership can indeed be a way for college literacy programs to prevent or to overcome resistance and obstacles. Consider the nature of an effective collaboration. Collaborative partnerships:

o Foster communication among the interests involved in the literacy "equation." The interest groups involved in the program clarify their beliefs, ideas, visions, and perspectives on literacy. They also discuss what they expect a literacy effort to achieve. Differences in perspective and expectations are discussed, as are areas of "common ground." Importantly, everyone is offered the opportunity to reassess their own views and to learn from the views of others. As a whole, the

partnership can then reach an agreement on its goals, objectives, expectations, and plan of action.

o Foster a spirit of cooperation instead of competition. Through clarification of goals and responsibilities, an effective partnership maximizes the use of limited resources, channels effort and energy into necessary, not redundant, activities, and continually improves the effort through feedback from a diverse pool of interests.

o Foster a structure which can support the services you hope to provide. A solid partnership can free you from worrying about where you will get the resources you will need to do the work you want to do.

By putting principles of communication, negotiation, cooperation, and respect into action, the collaborative partnership, by its very nature, eliminates the roots of most conflicts. Within the framework of a partnership, members of the collaborative effort resolve issues of perspective, resources, "turf," and expectations, as *part* of constructing the partnership itself. Differences of opinion are identified and confronted at the outset of the collaborative effort; they are not left unresolved and free to later undermine the project.

Clearly, the potential value of a collaborative partnership as a means for avoiding or preventing resistance or obstacles is great. As part of a collaborative effort, your program will be familiar with the beliefs, ideas, visions, and perspectives of the administrators and community interests you wish to work with, right from the start. This knowledge allows you to consider the potential impact that others have on your program, and to plan accordingly. As a result, your program is not only aware of the possible sources for future conflict, but it can also actively take steps to prevent or to prepare for any potential resistance or obstacles. In the simplest sense, collaborative partnerships provide college literacy programs with a great opportunity to do preventative "trouble-shooting" at the beginning of their literacy efforts.

For students working in college literacy programs currently struggling with resistance or obstacles to their work, the idea of a collaborative partnership is of no less value. Indeed, the very act of reaching out to conflicting interests in the community and proposing the creation of a collaborative partnership may be all that it takes to bring everyone to the table. From there, the issues causing conflict and resistance can be brought into the open and discussed. Hopefully, a solution for your problems can be negotiated.

If you are unsuccessful in negotiating an end to the problems confronting your program, remember that at least your effort to create a collaborative partnership has served to highlight the major areas of difference between you and the administrative and/or community interests you are trying to work with. Decide on which issues you will and will not compromise, and decide whether you might invite *other* administrative and/or community interests to help you create a collaborative partnership. Use your partnership to help you overcome the remaining resistance to your literacy work.

A Collaborative Partnership Model

What follows is a model for planning, building, and maintaining an effective collaborative partnership. This model emphasizes communication, negotiation, cooperation, and respect - all elements of an effective collaborative effort. In addition, the model is designed so that college students can feel confident that their ideas, beliefs, visions, and perspectives will be valued, rather than sacrificed, within the partnership.

While this model does suggest steps for you to consider, keep in mind that the model is an open-ended one. To be successful, you will need to adapt it to the realities of your own program and local community.

Planning, Building, and Maintaining an Effective, Collaborative Partnership: A 10-Step Process for College Literacy Programs

Step I: Do Your Homework

One of the keys to planning, building, and maintaining an effective, collaborative partnership is to develop an understanding of what the ideas of collaboration and partnership are really all about. Fortunately, this process does not require reinventing the wheel, but rather that college literacy programs learn from what others already know. Along these lines, you can:

- Study materials, publications, and handbooks on collaboration and partnerships.

- Talk to individuals and organizations with collaborative experience. For example, student organizers, college and university administrators, local community agencies, civic leaders, and Education/Adult Basic Education Departments are great resources for information on collaboration and partnerships. Indeed, many of these people may want to contribute to your partnership.

- Study models of existing partnerships or collaborative efforts in your own community. Hunger clean-ups are one example of local, collaborative partnerships.

- Get advice on developing collaborative and partnership-building skills. Very often, it is the extra attention to such basic skills as communication, negotiation, time-management, and human relations that makes successful partnerships happen.

By "doing your homework" and learning about collaboration and partnership *before* you start building a network, the foundation for an effective collaborative partnership can be built right from the beginning.

Step II: Clarify Your Own Goals and Perspectives

Often, college literacy programs are in such a hurry to jump into a local literacy effort, they neglect to think about their own stakes in the equation. Careful thought should be given to questions concerning why you want to do literacy work, the type of commitment you are willing to make, your perspective on literacy, and your ability to assess and meet community needs.

Arriving at a clear understanding of *your* own goals, expectations, strengths, limitations, and ideas on literacy education is an essential first step toward constructing an effective partnership.

To help figure out where you and your program are coming from, write out your answers to the following questions:

Personal Motivations:

o Why am I getting involved in literacy work? What do I hope to achieve? Think about these questions from both a local and a global perspective.

Community Needs:

o What are the needs I am responding to? How do I know what those needs are? Can I help meet these needs? How can I be sure that my assessment is accurate?

Perspectives:

o What are the causes of "illiteracy"? What is my perspective on literacy education? What perspectives do others hold? Is it possible to work with others who might not have the same perspective I do?

Resources:

o What resources do I have available to me? What is my prior experience with literacy education? Are there others I can work with? What materials are at my disposal (funds, office, computer, fax, telephone, etc.)? Make a list of all the resources available to you. Compare this list against your anticipated needs.

Limitations:

o What limitations do my potential partners and I have? Time? Money? Equipment? Lack of prior experience? Compare your answers to your resources list.

Essential Ingredients:

o What are the essential ingredients of a solid literacy effort? What are the vital elements of a solid collaborative partnership? What activities will I undertake? Who will be responsible for what? Start thinking about what you want your partnership to look like.

Your answers to these questions should serve as a framework for your collaborative effort. A successful partnership should reflect the ideas and beliefs held by you and your partners. If your own needs are not considered in the construction of the partnership, chances are you will find little rewarding about the collaboration.

In addition, use your answers to these questions as a benchmark for evaluating the partnership. As time progresses, ask yourself and your partners whether the partnership is still committed to meeting the needs, beliefs, and goals you envisioned at the beginning. If not, how will you respond? Will you need to revise your goals, activities, and/or relationship in light of your experience?

Step III: Clarify Your Partners' Goals and Perspectives

Meet with the groups with whom you wish to collaborate and ask them to answer the same questions. Compare their responses with your own. Use the process to air differences, clarify resources and limitations, identify common ground, and pinpoint needs.

It is important to keep in mind that partnerships often bring together groups that possess different beliefs, value systems, perspectives on literacy, and cultural backgrounds. These differences mean that you can not assume that everyone thinks about literacy and collaboration in the same ways you do.

Be aware of these differences as you negotiate and develop the framework for your partnership. It is vital to clarify perspectives and expectations and to reach a common ground during the initial planning stage, as well as periodically through the life of the program. Do not feel compelled to sacrifice your vision of literacy education for "the sake of the partnership." Likewise, do not expect unresolved differences to automatically disappear or to "work themselves out" later in the process. It is often unresolved philosophical or methodological differences which tear otherwise "successful" partnerships apart. Reaching an understanding on these differences is critical to the future of the partnership.

Step IV: Gain Support from the Community

Formalize support for your partnership by creating a "steering committee" or an advisory board that will lend both focus and credibility to your partnership effort. Aside from representatives of the groups involved in the partnership, recruit learners and representatives from other key community organizations which have an interest in community literacy development to sit on your advisory board. In addition, make sure to include administration and/or faculty representation on the board if your college or university is not already involved as an active voice in the partnership effort.

By encouraging and receiving community input, your partnership gains the experience and insight of individuals and organizations that work with the community. Also, community representation on the advisory board goes a long way toward insuring significant involvement and support for your partnership by the community as a whole. In the same vein, college or university representation on the board can add a wealth of experience, resources, and credibility to your partnership.

Again, be aware that not everyone you recruit for your advisory board will have the same ideas about literacy and partnerships as you do. As with the groups represented in the partnership, you should negotiate expectations, perspectives, and commitments with the members of the advisory board. Have them answer the same questions that you and your partners considered earlier in the process. Discuss differences of opinion directly and candidly.

Feel confident that your advisory board must not consist of representatives from *every* organization in the community. Recruit individuals and organizations that you will feel comfortable working with. Do not feel obliged to invite a representative to join the board "just because." Weigh the pros and cons of recruiting individuals and organizations to join your partnership. For

example, if your college or university has a terrible relationship with the local community, consider whether inviting high-level college administrators threatens the potential success of the partnership in the community.

Even after negotiation, some fundamental differences of opinion may remain. If so, consider whether or not such differences endanger the very fabric of the partnership, or if these differences are ones you can "live with" Are your goals being challenged or compromised? Is your perspective on literacy being devalued or dismissed? Are your partners' goals and perspectives in jeopardy? The community's needs? If you are uncomfortable with the philosophy, perspective, or direction of the advisory board, raise the issue. Clearly, your partnership will have problems being effective if members of the advisory board have competing goals and visions for the partnership.

Step V: Prepare an Action Plan

Once the purpose, framework, and advisory board for your collaborative partnership have been negotiated, the next step is to design a one year plan for translating the vision of the partnership into effective community action. The "action plan" should serve as an overall strategy for implementing whatever objectives and activities are to be tackled in the coming year.

With your partners, clarify what "common ground" -- activities, issues -- you will focus on. What activities are feasible? Who will be responsible to do what, and when?

The "action plan" should include the following:

Objectives:

o What the partnership hopes to achieve over the next year. Be sure your objectives are realistic and specific, not overly ambitious. It is better to trim your expectations than to put your partnership in a situation where it will be unable to meet its commitments.

Timeline:

o What the partnership hopes to accomplish by when. Prepare a timeline of activities for the entire year. Include preparations on your timeline. Again, be realistic and specific with your time estimates. Give yourself comfortable and well-considered time frames for activities.

Responsibilities:

o Who is responsible for what activity. Make certain that everyone is aware of his/her responsibilities for the year, and that it is clear what the partnership hopes to achieve with each activity. Do not let anyone "get in over their heads" by taking on too many responsibilities. Learning to say "no" is a hard but important skill.

Resources:

o What resources the partnership will need for the year. Draw up a list of the resources needed by the partnership to insure the successful completion of the year's planned activities. Will you need office or meeting space? Telephones? Computers? Stationery? Photocopying? Of these, what do you have? What do you need? Develop a strategy for

getting the resources your partnership needs to accomplish the "action plan."

Maintenance:

o How the partnership will keep the "action plan" focused. Agree upon "action plan" over the course of the year. This might entail regular meetings in which partners consider "how are we doing?" and "what do we need to do to continually improve our services?"

Feel free to make your "action plan" as detailed and extensive as you wish, but make sure it is as realistic, specific, and clear as possible, so you can avoid wasting time and resources.

Step VI: Implement the Action Plan

The partnership should now take the "action plan" and put it into play.

At this point agree who will coordinate the execution of the "action plan." The partnership needs to have someone (or some people) who will oversee the implementation of the year's program, and be the partnership's "official" contact and community liaison.

In practice, the partnership "coordinator" is responsible for keeping the ball rolling and helping the partnership fulfill its "action plan." This responsibility could include communication with leaders of specific activities, reminding partners of deadlines, staying aware of resources, and relaying concerns to partners or to the advisory board. The specific responsibilities of the partnership "coordinator" can be negotiated by your own partnership.

With respect to the community, the "coordinator" serves as the partnership's liaison to the local population. Having a single individual (or a very small team) act in this capacity benefits both the partnership and the community. For the partnership, it enables members to concentrate on their own specific tasks while someone else covers relations with "outsiders." For the community, it provides a single (or few) representative(s) of the partnership to whom community concerns or resources can be addressed.

Step VII: Monitor Progress

Create a strategy for using internal evaluation to improve the performance of the partnership. The coordinator can collect feedback from the population being served about program strengths and limitations. Partners can meet regularly to share feedback and reflect critically on the project. Consider the following questions: What's working in the partnership? What's not? Is this what we expected from a collaborative partnership? How can we strengthen the project?

Step VIII: Conduct a Close-Out Evaluation

Evaluate the project at the end of the year to clarify what your partnership has achieved. Have you achieved the goals of the "action plan"? How have learners' lives been affected? How has participating in the project impacted upon your own life? What are the implications of the partnership's work in

the local community? What are the implications for the greater literacy movement? How in the future might such an effort be improved?

Be sure to arrange a meeting which allows all partners to think about what they have personally learned from the collaborative effort.

Step IX: Recognize What You Have Achieved

Devote time to celebrating and publicizing the successes of the collaborative partnership. To show recognition for everyone's work, the partnership could throw a party, hold an awards ceremony, issue press releases, invite in local journalists or journalism students, or write an article for publication documenting the activities and results of your collaborative effort. Do not feel guilty about proudly advertising your success. Make sure that those who have supported your efforts with time or money - or might do so in the future - know what you've achieved.

In addition, if you believe that your model of a collaborative partnership could be of benefit to others, do not hesitate to share your experience or insight with interested parties. It is important, however, to stress that your collaborative partnership was only successful given the specific environment and culture of your own local community. Make certain others understand that you are not offering your experience as the universal model for collaborative partnerships.

Step X: Planning the Future

Decide what is next for your collaborative partnership. Will the partnership end? Will it continue? If so, in what form? With what members? With what goals?

Talk with your partners. Are there other community needs your collaborative effort wants to tackle? Return to Step V and develop another "action plan." Keep in mind the elements of a successful "action plan" - realistic vision, specificity, clarity, commitment, and continuous improvement.

Final Thoughts

Varying stakes, expecatational differences, alternate assupmptions and a wide range of goals act as ingredients for political conflict. However, awareness of political relationships takes the bite out of the problems that often arises from them. Awareness and preventative medicine can be the cure for these political problems. Partnerships and action plans are just such cures. Honesty and communication within such plans supply the literacy provider with powerful tools to overcome the politics of literacy.