

New Perspectives on Leadership

Inspirational Innovation

Nicole Pagowsky and Justin Hoenke

In January 2011, ALA Emerging Leaders (EL) Team G (Nicole Pagowsky, Erik Bobilin, Abby Johnson, Johnathan Lu, Kate Kosturski) came together with mentors Buffy Hamilton, Justin Hoenke, and JP Porcaro to work on a project dealing with the topic of videogame collection development in libraries. The project's goal was to capture a foundation of the theory and praxis of establishing gaming collections in all types of libraries. The purpose of the ALA Emerging Leaders program is to give new librarians an opportunity to take on leadership roles and get a start with ALA and other association work. This is a situation where everyone is leading at different levels, whether within an assigned team or as a mentor. To give a multidimensional view to the experience of not just the Emerging Leaders program, but also developing leadership skills through different roles, Justin Hoenke (project mentor) and Nicole Pagowsky (project team member) chose to simultaneously interview each other. These questions were developed collaboratively so both positions of mentor and mentee could be compared.

1. What was your working/mentoring style?

Justin Hoenke: My working/mentoring style can be described as “laid back.” I’m happy to go along with the group and don’t have a strong opinion that would hold back the group from moving towards a goal. I guess I could also call myself a cheerleader. I am there to back up team members, assure them that they’re having good ideas, and just be a positive force for everyone involved. My contribution was not to dictate or figure things out for the group, but to offer that nudge that everyone needs. When small hurdles came up, I offered my sincere thoughts and assured that group that no matter what, things were going to get done and it was going to end well. And it did.

Nicole Pagowsky: This worked perfectly with our group and the nature of the project. We were basing our research on an unofficial survey of what other libraries were doing, the small amount of LIS literature out there and other research from the gaming industry, so we had to be able to be flexible in our goals. Both Justin and JP were very laid back, so that we were able to ask questions and get direction when needed, but we weren’t micromanaged. I think this gave our group the ability to be very creative in our approach (see: expanding the model MARC record to include the perspective of videogame designers, our 3D poster design, using condoms for promotional materials, and incorporating environmental scans).

2. Did these styles mesh well with each other and with the project?

JH: Part of me feels really proud of the work I did with Team G, and the other part of me wishes I could've been a bit more available. I am happy to be the person that always supports and cheerleads the team, but at the same time I wish I had challenged things a bit more by offering more unique ways of looking at or doing the project. One of the key elements for effective leadership has three parts: you not only have to listen, but you have to allow what is being talked about to happen and you have to assist in making it happen. In looking back, I did a little more listening than allowing, but I feel like the other group members made up for what I lacked.

NP: My personal work style leans more toward Type A. I like plans and goals and have a strong aversion to procrastination, but I do make a concerted effort to ensure everyone has input rather than just taking over (which can be a common occurrence with Type As if stress enters the picture). I think this made it easier for me to get along with a range of personalities and be flexible, but also hammer out what needed to be done. I'm really satisfied with how our mentors interacted with us during the project because it allowed us to take risks and make the project ours. There were some times where we felt like we didn't really know where to begin or where to go next, but that was also a positive aspect of the project that helped us be creative and also develop ideas for further research (for Phase II, which Erik Bobilin and I will be continuing with, see <http://sites.google.com/site/libraryvideogames/>).

3. What was the most and least successful?

NP: This speaks more specifically to leadership positioned within Emerging Leaders -- I think what was most successful for our group was when we made a meeting agenda and stuck with it. Although we also wanted to chat and get to know each other better (groups are assigned and often team members are meeting for the first time), sometimes our meetings would get off topic and we wouldn't accomplish everything we really needed to. Me, being Type A, wanted to have a more rigid format, so I would get antsy when we would get on tangents. Not realizing how quickly times goes by during that six months probably also added to us feeling more casual at first and a bit more stressed later on. What worked really well for us was figuring out everything that needed to be done and dividing it up, though what needed to be done would sometimes change as we learned more about our topic. As time progressed, we wound up with the format of doing our portions separately and thoroughly, and then we had time for discussions on concept, design, and a deeper look at theory during our meetings. As Justin said, he and JP really were supportive as cheerleaders, and the group had one-on-one interactions with the mentors for bouncing off ideas and sharing progress rather than formal meetings. Buffy Hamilton was one of the group's mentors as well and really helped us with getting the school library perspective and thinking about videogames in education. Jenny Levine, our Staff Liaison also shared contact information for libraries with gaming collections to contact and giving us more detail on the scope of the project. So, the mix of styles, personalities, and perspectives

from our external leaders gave our team a lot of options in how to approach the research and in designing our final product.

4. Did you feel EL allowed the project to accomplish something substantial?

JH: Yes. EL is a laid back program in a sense that while there's a system in place to encourage EL's to do quality work, at the same time it is up to the EL's working together to make something happen. What inspired the participants to make something happen? Giving Emerging Leaders a choice in the project they want to work on ensures the program that quality people are going to be doing the work that most interests them. There's nothing more exciting than diving into a project on a topic that you love, right? When the project was conceived, JP and I did our best to load up the program with the potential for the participants to get excited, get immersed, and make it happen.

NP: Not only were we able to present new research to lay a good foundation for further exploration in this area, but it has developed into a Phase II (as I mentioned above). Our project has made a difference in the field and we have really contributed something to the profession. It's exciting that our work will actually be useful to people. I think I can speak for the whole group when I say we really lucked out on the project and the way the assignment of it was designed by Justin and JP. They had the foresight to create buy-in, which is essential in leadership, whether you're an official leader or not. I think we had more "aha" moments when we figured out how to divide up the work so each person could focus on something s/he cared about most. Sometimes it can be difficult to put a group of leaders together and expect them all to lead. But leadership isn't about just being in charge and telling others what to do, it's about creating that buy-in so others support your idea to the point of not having to micromanage. Externally, our mentors were effective with this, and internally, each of us was for the most part. We had some sticky situations when there were disagreements on ideas or working styles. The group had to realize that there are all different kinds of leaders, and that good leaders are also cognizant of when to follow. The best remedy for our conflicts was open communication and rotating who lead meetings and made agendas. This contributed to buy-in as well, because when you are required to motivate others and are fully involved in planning, it creates stronger connections to the project and to the group.

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