



***“The challenge is learning to work with, through, and in respect of differences with a willingness to exchange and even integrate our new learning in order to create something new. It is up to us as library leaders to be models as we guide one another.”***

## **Welcome to the Multicultural Café: Shifting The Context and Creating Inclusion**

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*Welcome to the Multicultural Café. We have for you, colorful table coverings that are textiles and shawls from Mexico, Turkey, Kenya, and Japan. The music that is playing is from our brothers and sisters in the South Pacific Islands. In the middle of each table is a “talking item.” The small mosaic elephant comes from Thailand, the incense burner from India, and the antelope made of wood comes from West Ghana. In front of each seat you will see a gift from my mother to you – a writing pen and a journal. It is my family’s way to travel with me in spirit, if not in person and to help me welcome you. I hope that during this time we will remember where we came from and remember where we are going. The change in time zones often leave us disoriented and in a daze. We are gifted in this institute with a time, space, and place to discuss the beauty of our differences and the challenges we face. The challenge is how to learn to work with, through, and in respect of differences with a willingness to exchange and even integrate our new learning in order to create something new. It is up to us as library leaders to be models as we guide one another. It may not be the Western way that we rely upon. Nor the Eastern way that we seek. Nor the Southern way. Nor the Northern. It may be all or none but the way that we will discover will be a new way, created and blended from thoughts, ideas, strategies, commonalities, and differences discussed here. Our ancestors shared in joy and sorrow, adversity and in triumph. They look upon us and wish us well. They remind us to listen to the universal drum – the drum that we all share – the heartbeat that is our mother.*

*Do you hear her?*

*Do you feel her?*

*Welcome!*

*To the Multicultural Café!*

The introduction above was performed at the beginning of my session “Communicating in a Multicultural Environment” at the Thinking Outside the Borders institute of September 2005, in Springfield, Illinois, United States. Although it is in tune with the World Café methodology, I have always valued the idea of creating context in order to make multicultural people feel welcome in the library. Creating context has involved colors, music, food, storytelling, acknowledgement, and celebration. With context in place then content is more well-received. At one institute we touched on the ideas of high-context cultures and high-content cultures. We probably are all a little of both or simply at different places on the continuum. I have found that in working with multicultural groups that context is just as important as content. This article describes a number of methods to create context that is equalizing and that is generative of group conversation where every voice is heard.

### Creating a Café Space

At a café one feels relaxed. For some of us it is not a café but a neighbor’s porch. For some of us it is just under the “learning tree” where we feel the shade, hear the birdsongs, and learn from the elders. For some of us it is a bench on the plaza where we talk with each other as the woman with the beautiful *rebozo* (shawl) walks by. Humble or fancy, indoor or outdoor, metaphorical or literal, a café typically calls us to refresh ourselves, to slow down, to rest, to listen and to be listened to, to exchange the concerns and passions that we carry around for the day or a week or a month or a lifetime.

Interestingly enough, “*café*” in Spanish means coffee, as well as the color brown. How often have I been invited for “un *cafecito*” or “*café con leche*” (*a small coffee or coffee with cream*) with the meaning being - “let’s visit” or “let’s meet”.

At the Thinking Outside the Borders institutes, the planners allowed time during and between sessions for everyone to socialize and engage with one another. Still, the values, culture, and language of the United States, as host country predominated. The planners wanted to make an extra effort to create a time, space, and place in which all would be welcome and at the same time, out of their “comfort zone”. The “comfort zone” is the place, time, and space in our daily lives where we can depend on how other people will act, speak, and behave. In the “comfort zone” there are not many differences or challenges, only our assumptions based on the societal or cultural norms that we have been taught, have grown up with, or simply gotten used to.

Creating a new space is about creating a new context. In addition to “what” we say it is important “how” we say it, share it, listen to it. In addition to saying “welcome” it is important to create welcoming surroundings. What is welcoming to me may not be as welcoming to you. My challenge was to foster discussion on cross-cultural and multicultural content and curriculum within a context that was:

- Welcoming to all
- Uncomfortable for all
- Safe for all
- Equalizing for all

Susan Schnuer, Barbara Ford, Bonnie Matheis, Joe Natale, and I spoke one day of the “third space,” the space that is neither mine nor yours but ours. It is also the space where a piece of you and a piece of me overlap, intersect, or is interdependent and that space is a shared space that is new. I was charged with facilitating such an environment during my sessions. What a challenge! This new space would:

- be welcoming of every “voice”, that is, content of what any participant might say in his or her manner, style, language, and timing
- be inviting and then accepting of all perspectives, no matter how different
- be welcoming of inquiry as a way to learn about, of and with one another in non-intrusive ways
- be encouraging and supportive of the anger, confusion, sadness or frustration that occurs when our deeply held assumptions, norms, and values are disagreed with or challenged
- be encouraging of the idea that sometimes we need to pause or “hold space” (as my good friend Perviz says) until we transcend from reacting viscerally to difference to realizing that the deep reaction is the beginning of deeper insights and learning
- remind us that we come to the table, or circle, or classroom as equals but that equality is not sameness
- model what multicultural communication could look like, be, become when it is truly inclusive and created by all who have been included

### **Three Institutes**

I was honored to participate in three of the Thinking Outside the Borders Institutes in the United States with the following sessions:

- September 2005, Springfield, Illinois, United States, “Communicating in a Multicultural Environment”
- November 2006, Allerton, Illinois, United States, “Diversity and Multiculturalism in United States Libraries” and then “Perspectives on Diversity and Multiculturalism in Libraries” with Ujala Satgoor, Deputy Director: Special Units, Library Services, University of Pretoria, South Africa
- February 2007, Phoenix, Arizona, United States , “Multiculturalism and The Power of Cultural Values from the heart...to the head...to the library...to the world...and back again”

Each of the three institutes had approximately 40 participants. Half were Americans from the state that the institute was held in (for example, Illinois and Arizona) or at one institute there were librarians from Texas, Washington, DC, Ohio, Oregon, Florida, Colorado, Pennsylvania as well, half were from other countries including Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Hungary, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Namibia, Nigeria, Philippines, United Kingdom, Jamaica, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Japan, Vietnam, Costa Rica, and Columbia.

Each institute also had observers, evaluators, and planners that were present. At times, they also participated enthusiastically; therefore, there were typically about 50 people in the room at a time. Each institute had round tables or square tables of 4-6 people at each table. I requested 4-5 easels with flip charts around the room. I also requested permanent markers of the colors dark red, dark green, black, and dark blue and plenty of tape.

## **Methods for Creating a Time, Space, and Place and Convening Groups**

This section will describe the tools and methods used throughout sessions.

- Music
- Storytelling
- Insuring Everyone's Voice: The Talking Stick or Talking Item
- Sharing Responsibility for Time: Passing the Wristwatch
- I Would Rather Write Than Speak: Journaling, Index Cards, Post-Its
- Brainstorming With Flip Charts and Without Judgments
- Communicating in Multiple Settings (dyads, small groups, large groups)
- Facilitation for Inclusiveness in Large Groups
- The World Café
- Visualization

### **Music!**

Music is often referred to as the universal language or I have heard that when bands or musicians are playing, they provide an example of how diversity of instruments and musicians can create synergy, a great new combined outcome called music. At the Multicultural Café session described in the very beginning of this article I played a CD from the South Pacific ("Putumayo Presents South Pacific Islands"). Some of the participants entered the room, after lunch, dancing a little bit, shaking their hips, and expressed a pleasant surprise that I was playing African music. Was it African? Where was it from? It sounded like "home" to a few of us. It was the sounds, the rhythm, or maybe the intonations and percussion. Whatever it was, it stirred conversation. I also played music from a woman of South Asian background ("Kiran Ahluwalia"). One of the participants told me that she was happy to hear this music, "her" music.

While preparing for my presentation at the Arizona institute I played the South Pacific music and the planners who helped me set-up and who had been working vigorously the previous night and all morning, expressed a happiness to hear music.

Music is relieving and can sometimes bring out the most genuine in us. It helps to create atmosphere, set the tone, set context, and for some of us it helps us to be ourselves. In an institute of this caliber you want the richest of each person's essence to emerge.

Music may be used in the following ways:

- As an introduction and part of your “welcome” to the session
- As part of the closure when you are winding down or celebrating the work accomplished
- During the breaks
- While journaling
- While working with partners

Of course your choices of music are important. Do you want lively music? Flute or piano music that encourages reflection? World music to create a global mood? It is up to you to find the music and enjoy integrating and infusing it into your program and curriculum. Music speaks to all of us and gets us talking about our favorite music, instrument, singer, violinist or the music we used to play, we want to play, and the music that we want to exchange.

## **Storytelling**

Telling our story. Telling a story. Telling the story. Telling stories. All of us our storytellers. When we piece together a memory, remember the stories of our grandmothers and grandfathers, when we pass down a folk tale, or simply tell what happened during the day or that year, we are storytellers. Some of us are quiet and some of us are expressive when we tell stories. In the introduction to this article, I demonstrate how storytelling could be integrated into a “welcome” while hopefully relaxing visitors and at the same time, provoking them into thinking about global connections. In my presentations I often share a story of myself or my ancestors in my efforts to reach out and remind us of both the differences and commonalities in our cultures, our upbringings, and our worldviews.

The importance of “storytelling” came to my attention as a children’s librarian who observed Ms. Starr LaTronica (Youth Services/Outreach Coordinator, Four County Library System, Vestal, New York) at work. We visited a children’s classroom to discuss our library’s summer reading program. The children were restless, uninterested and not listening.

Ms. LaTronica began to tell a story – a story from Haiti. I witnessed the transformation of the room’s environment from chaotic to tranquil. The children quieted, became interested, engaged, and curious. I saw one little boy push his desk closer to her. From that day on, I was determined to learn how to tell stories, especially because I worked in a neighborhood where the children were not regular readers. It served as a wonderful tool for welcoming children and leading them to books.

With storytelling we can all practice listening, experience being read to, recited to, and we can feel the rhythm and cadence of a storyteller’s voice. This is also music. The language of the stories transports us to another world of the past, of the present, of the future, of imagination.

## **Insuring Everyone's Voice: The Talking Stick or Talking Item**

I did not use a stick in my presentations but rather “talking items”. These were small tokens or gifts given to me over the years that I felt were given with generosity and would therefore, add to the Thinking Outside the Borders environment.

When you have the talking item in your hand, then you may speak without interruption for a period of time. It is your “turn” to speak, share, and express passion, dissent, opinions, agreements, and concerns. The full group listens to you, be it at a table, within in a circle, or in a classroom, for as long as the person has the item. This method is a way to insure inclusion and that everyone present is heard.

This exercise can serve as a relief to those that need and want the given time. The dynamics of group conversation may include:

- People who are very comfortable speaking in groups without formal structure
- People who feel very uncomfortable speaking in groups without formal structure
- People who have a lot to say and frequently, without hesitation
- People who speak less but when they speak it is worth waiting for
- People who are so anxious to speak they forget to listen and often interrupt others or finish their sentences for them so they can have their turn to speak
- People who will not continue what they are saying or say “please, let me finish my thought” if they are interrupted
- People who have varied fluencies with the host language
- People who have varied fluencies with the visitors’ languages
- Any of us may be challenged when speaking about something complex or emotional in languages that are not the home or native language
- Any of us may be challenged when speaking about differences, even in the home language

Sometimes people get a little nervous as their “turn” comes around. They may get impatient or find themselves drifting as they “wait their turn.” Others listen with intent, focus, and are happy to hear people that they had not heard from before. In each scenario, each participant is requested to stretch out of their comfort zone in order to practice contributing to the group in new way.

The talking item may be passed from person to person around the table or circle or the person with the talking item in hand may pass it to the person of choice. People that are given the talking item could be sitting anywhere but the most important thing is for the whole group to insure that everyone in the group has had time with the talking item.

In one institute we used the items in the middle of each round table. They were the little elephant and the incense burner described in the very introduction of this article.

Depending on the question or what is being shared, a participant might want to speak in their home language in order to express themselves accurately. Of course, you may have someone else who will help to translate. You will need a little more time with the talking item in this case. If there is no translator, then the group must trust that the person spoke from the heart because it is her/his native language.

At another institute for another university we spontaneously created a circle at the end of the final day in order to share closing thoughts and what everyone would take back home. I took off and used a bracelet from East Africa that was given to me by a good friend. If your talking circle is spontaneous, you are sure to find an item in the room that can be shared and passed around. The talking stick can be used to share introductions or to share closing thoughts. The group may also have a question that they want to address such as:

- “What has changed for you since coming to this institute?”
- “What will you create when you return home?”
- “What concerns do you have as a librarian?”
- “What do the words ‘international leader’ mean to you?”

Time is always limited in any institute or conference setting. I like to use the next method to help a group monitor the time.

### **Sharing Responsibility for Time: Passing the Wristwatch**

I learned this technique long ago from Shakti Butler and Michael Bell (who have worked on transformational leadership, cross-cultural work and social justice) and it is a way for the whole group to share responsibility for keeping time. You may accompany the talking stick method with also passing a wristwatch. The wrist-watch is used for timekeeping and given to the person that has just held the talking item and has finished their time.

For example, Perviz may be to my left. She has the wristwatch. I have the talking item and I am given 5 minutes to speak. I begin speaking. Perviz tells me or nudges me when I have 1 minute left and then she gives me the wristwatch when my 5 minutes are up. I may end my talk before my 5 minutes is up and ask her for the wristwatch or I may take the full 5 minutes, however, when she passes me the wristwatch, I must stop talking and begin to monitor the time of the other colleague sitting on the other side of me.

Sometimes when someone ends sooner than the allotted time they will offer up their “unused” time (for example, an extra 1 or 2 minutes) to the next person so he or she increases their total to 6 or 7 minutes. and that person will want the extra time and sometimes not. Typically there is laughter and smiles in the room as we acknowledge our differences - some of us being people of few words and others of us who enjoy speaking a lot and often!

### **I Would Rather Write Than Speak: Journaling, Index Cards, and Post-its**

Writing is another way of expression and especially in an international environment any participant will welcome an opportunity to write in their home or native language.

## Journaling

- creates a space within a space to reflect on an issue, idea, or a question
- allows time to express one's self without interruptions or censorship and with creativity using script, diagrams, and drawings
- allows time to clarify or collect your thoughts before sharing them with a partner or small or large group
- offers a reminder to take a few minutes a day to journal or reflect when we are back home in our libraries

Even 3 minutes of your own peaceful time can make one feel rich in a 24 hour day. Imagine 5 minutes and then 15 minutes to write your thoughts and unload them onto paper or perhaps it is onto your laptop. Of course, the journaling period must be timed and limited. It offers to library leaders, as well, an example of taking time in the day to regroup through writing.

Rather than having a journal participants may be given index cards to write down questions or thoughts during the day. When a speaker addresses a large group most people who feel comfortable speaking aloud will address the speaker directly. For those that are not as comfortable speaking directly with the speaker, they can submit an index card to the facilitator. The facilitator may collect index cards and read the comments or questions aloud to the speaker. The opportunity to write in the home/native language is sometimes welcomed if someone feels more comfortable writing then speaking. Or the participants may want to write their questions down in their home language for themselves and then be better prepared to translate it orally when they speak up directly.

Post-its are also used to write down answers, opinions, votes. They were used in the Pamoja exercise described in this publication and were used in an exercise in the November, 2007 session with Ujala Satgoor. In the latter, we asked participants to write down "What behaviors annoy you or make you uncomfortable?" and "What behaviors do you find welcoming?" and to post their post-its on a large easel. Later on, we read them aloud but no one really knew whose was whose. The emphasis was on the content at that point and not on who said what. The content was sensitive and we wanted honesty, so the opportunity to write honest answers was useful.

In summary, writing allows for a different form of expression that allows the group to be inclusive. Some of us do not enjoy writing and this portion of a session may be uncomfortable. This is good to acknowledge. I have been in sessions where someone chooses not to write but just sits quietly during the allotted time.

## **Brainstorming with Flip Charts and Without Judgements**

Brainstorming allows for the expression of first ideas, questions, responses, and concerns. When they are documented by scribes then the ideas are visualized and can be viewed by the whole group as the results of collective energy and input. How easy can brainstorming exercises be? Are they old-fashioned? Maybe so, however, I find the act of hearing, acknowledging, writing, making sure I heard correctly and understood correctly, posting up thoughts, and finally viewing them all around the room - is a multi-sensory communication experience that helps to bring the group together.



Those of us who have participated in workshops are familiar with them, however, brainstorming exercises require attention to inclusivity, especially with a multicultural audience. Typically a brainstorming group requires a number of scribes, sometimes called recorders. You need:

- Recorders/scribes
- Easels with flip charts (strong easels and flip charts that have “sticky glue” behind make it easy to post up)
- Dark markers/felt pens (to be seen from far away)

The facilitator’s role is to insure that all have a chance to contribute their thought – unedited, un-judged, and uninterrupted. Facilitation will be addressed more thoroughly in the following section of this article but it is important for a facilitator of an international group to take note of who has spoken and who hasn’t or if people are unedited, un-judged and uninterrupted. The facilitator also works with the recorder to get the words down on paper as legibly as possible. The recorder should not change what is said for convenience. If the recorder needs or wants to shorten what is written, the recorder must ask permission of the contributor and/or ask if what she has written conveyed the speaker’s meaning accurately. Sometimes participants will say “Yes!” or they will say “No, not really . . .What I meant was...” The purpose of such detail is to, yet again, make sure that people are able to use their voice, in their manner and style and with their own language – be it the home/native language or the host language.

Once again, these notations are appropriate for attempting a truly inclusive brainstorming session, in which everyone is heard in their own voice and style. It is often in this environment where each person’s most powerful sentiments emerge and can catalyze a turning point for the session to move from “typical” to “in-depth” conversation related to international issues and relations. If someone is shut down with their idea or begins to feel edited – then the kernels of authenticity and meaning are lost.

Some of the brainstorming exercises in the institutes included:

1. Name the diverse cultural groups in your country and in your workforce
2. Please share a value that you obtained from your family

### **Communicating in Multiple Settings: Dyads, Small Groups and Large Groups**

It is important to have multiple settings for participants to practice communication in ways that they are familiar with and ways that are totally different.

#### Dyads – two people

Dyads allow for exchanging more details of complex situations because there are only two people. Often these partnerships set a tone for the rest of the institute. Peer-to-peer conversations can often establish relationships and even lead to making change. Using dyads is an excellent way to practice listening. If your dyad is allowed 15 minutes then one participant has 5 minutes to speak, to tell, or to describe while the other listens. Then the other speaks for 5 minutes, while the other participant listens. You may use the added

minutes to practice free-flow (unstructured) question and dialogue, but it is up to both participants to speak and listen and check in with the other, to see that they have felt as if they have been able to speak and if they felt listened to. You learn to practice with one another.

Typically participants are given an assignment, a question, or an issue to discuss. It could be as simple as

1. Talk about the educational values that shaped your world view
2. Describe one issue at your library that concerns you and that you would like to change, if you could
3. Describe the diversity of cultures represented in your workforce and/or the clientele that you serve
4. Talk about the challenges of serving multicultural populations and the strategies you have used

#### Triads - three people

When we are in groups of three, we become more than two opinions and two contributions. We move from the potential partnership of two to a group, maybe a “team”, a tribe, of three that is not too big, nor too small. There are more opportunities to practice speaking and listening, as well as having an extra person to volunteer to record or report anything out to the larger group. There is also more room for difference of opinion.

#### Small groups (from 4 - 8)

With a group this size it is best to try “free flow” or unstructured conversation. The group needs to observe if one or two people dominate the conversation either because they are comfortable speaking, or are “taking the lead” and/or the rest of the group is deferring to them, therefore, abdicating their own responsibility for contributing. A facilitator can encourage the group to experiment with the “talking stick” as well.

When the collective is insuring that everyone has had a chance at expressing their voice, then there is success. The context of the group sharing is almost more important than the content.

#### Large groups

Large groups require facilitation and a timekeeper in order to foster inclusiveness. Always think about room-set up and how you want the room. Is it conducive for conversation? The variables are the comfort level and experience of the facilitator. If the group is of 50 participants or larger it may be best to have more than one facilitator.

- a) Group up to 50

The facilitator needs eyes all around her head. This means that as you listen you must be sure to acknowledge people in the front, in the back, to your left, to your right, that have indicated an interest in speaking. Ask the participants to offer their names and how they want to be addressed. Always try to “name” people according to how they would like to be named. If this is not possible, then identify them in a respectful way when you call upon them.

The facilitator needs to move around the room, acknowledging, encouraging, allowing people to finish and nudging them to wrap up so that someone else can speak, and finally steering people to address the group rather than the facilitator herself. The facilitator is often asked to repeat the question and should. If she cannot, then the facilitator must ask the speaker to repeat their question or comment. The facilitator is also a timekeeper (unless you have another timekeeper). Regardless the facilitator must steer towards closure, wrap-up, summary, and/or any conclusive remarks.

b) Group up to 100 or more

It is best to have two facilitators. One facilitator can do this if they are experienced and feel comfortable. Having a microphone that is in the middle of the room for people to walk up to or a mobile microphone that the facilitator(s) can bring to the speakers are always helpful. Acknowledge people that are waiting to speak, listen to the speaker, help them come to a close if necessary, be ready to acknowledge the next person who is waiting and the next person, keep people on topic and, on course with some allowance for tangents and stories. It is an art and skill but simply practicing it often is helpful. It is important to ask:

- Who did we want in the room?
- Did we hear from who we wanted in the room?
- Has every voice been heard?
- Has this group conversation been inclusive?

You may also remember:

1. Acknowledge who wants to speak.
2. Listen.
3. Thank them for sharing.
4. Go to the next person and acknowledge the ones who are waiting their turn.
5. Encourage all to listen and have their presence given to the speaker and not the facilitator.
6. Be mindful of time or ask for a timekeeper.

Facilitating for inclusive dialogue requires physical energy but it is well worth it. You often will witness an increased energy and synergy in the room.

### **The World Café – Shaping Our Futures as Conversations that Matter**

The World Café created by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs is an excellent methodology of group development and discussion of meaningful questions, the gathering of one another's wisdom, and the creation of new ideas, and strategies, while inviting and integrating differences. Experimentation is encouraged with this method and this is certainly in line with the Thinking Outside the Borders principles which encourage flexibility. The World Café method is being used world wide and plenty of information is accessible at The World

Café Web site. The book (*The World Café: Shaping our Futures through Conversation that Matters* by Juanita Brown with David Isaacs and *The World Café Community*, Berrett-Koeler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 2005) is available at the time of this writing in Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese, German, and Chinese. You will find online information in multiple languages as well. It is fun to pour over the site and read from community blogs, learn about events, join an online community, review and join the directory. You may also sign up for a free newsletter. Link to “Hosting Guides” at the World Café Web site and there you will find great guidelines for hosting a café. It is an excellent resource and walks you through your preparations and implementations.

In summary, a host creates context by having small round tables (as if in a café) that have café decorations. The tables have a container for colored pens and markers for participants to write on flip chart paper or large pieces of paper that are on each table for writing, drawing, diagramming, and any other creative expressions. A question or series of questions are posed and people discuss one of them at their table. A table host is selected. When the round of discussion is finished then participants move to another table to address another question or the same question. A table host remains and briefs the new group of some of the previous discussion. The new group can view some of the writings and drawings on the table and perhaps connect ideas and generate new thoughts as a result. After participants have moved for 2 or 3 rounds, they return to the whole group.

At the Thinking Outside the Borders institutes the World Café method was used twice.

In Phoenix, Arizona (2007), Stephanie Gerding (of the Arizona State Library at the time) used the following questions during her session:

- What will Thinking Outside the Borders mean to your library and your community?
- What will you do differently?
- How will you share ideas?
- Describe changes that will happen.
- Share your thoughts, feelings, and dreams.

Stephanie had espresso cups on her tables and small bowls of candy and a small vase of flowers. Her café was very inviting.

At Springfield, Illinois (2005) I asked the question:

- What characteristics and values are needed to be an effective leader in a global, multicultural environment?

I implemented the café method a little differently as described in the performance introduction of this article. Each table had a different textile and I incorporated the use of “talking items” as well.

When the group came back together I recorded their thoughts on effective global leadership. After a few minutes Mr. Edwin Qobose of Botswana offered a word of value. The word was “Botho,” “I am because we are.” He explained that when someone walks into the room we see the “whole” of the person. The person who has “botho” can be effective as a multicultural

leader. Then, another participant, Mr. Mandla Ntombela shared the value of “ubuntu” from South Africa. “I am a person through other human beings.” It was at this moment that I knew we had crossed traditional borders of speaking about global leadership. The World Café method helped us to transcend and get to that place.

## **Visualization**

An example of a visualization exercise is described in the article by Ujala Satgoor and myself in this publication. Visualization is a powerful method that combines resting of the mind, reflection, and imagination. When we are working internationally and discussing many of our country’s issues we also remember, the wars, the natural disasters, the genocide, the poverty, and the conflicts. When we imagine what it would take to make changes or when we remember who has been able to transcend cultural, national, and/or linguistic borders in order to make change in the world, we increase our capacity for inspiration, hope, and skill.


In the visualization exercise described in the article “A Space, A Place and a Time: Locating One’s Self In A Multicultural World,” Ms. Satgoor and I encouraged participants to stop everything, to put their papers down and to imagine the globe, the world, the earth spinning. As Mother Earth spun in their minds, the participants were asked to think of the issues and events throughout the globe, perhaps in the Middle East or perhaps in the Caribbean. They were asked to scan, in their minds, the Americas and the great continent of Asia. What lands were left out? What other lands, countries, regions were of concern to them? What specific events and issues were of concern? They were allowed to “name aloud” these regions or these issues, if they liked. After a silent pause, the participants were then asked to think about who has been able to make change in spite of deeply held values, traumatic events, and relentless issues.

The answers to this question can be very moving. Many of the names offered in the institute were recognizable worldwide, however, we learned of people and leaders in many countries that we knew nothing about before. We also learned that the word “leader” can have negative connotations in some countries and in certain contexts. When we shared in this visualization exercise we knew that cross-cultural learning was truly occurring.

In this exercise, participants were also asked what the specific characteristics of each leader were. Many universal characteristics were shared such as: having vision, being able to persuade, being fair etc. After using this visualization exercise over the years I have also heard the following values shared: acceptance, forgiveness, creativity, imagination, sacrifice, and selflessness.

## **Conclusion**

How we come together is so important. On the surface it is a joy for all of us, across nations, to come together and gather around our shared interest: libraries and library services. However, if we dare to share our differences and to delve into the areas of dialogue where we can gain deeper understanding and insights about one another and one another’s situation , we expand our mental borders and begin to think outside of them. Collectively we are able to practice this type of inclusive dialogue and create a new way to be, work, “become” together. We see and create new possibilities when we hear every voice. Learning how to convene groups, gatherings, and people in an equitable and inclusive way will enhance your global leadership skills.



I express gratitude to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the Illinois State Library for creating these spaces, places, and times, to practice stretching, expanding, crossing, and transcending borders of every kind.

May our ancestors always be connected.