"The true strength in our classroom lies in the collaboration of learners not in the knowledge of one expert.” Author unknown

**Applying the Principles of Reggio Emilia in Business**

How can we take a traditional business meeting and turn it on its head for the betterment of our companies and organizations? This paper includes an executive summary as well as detailed steps you can take within your own work environment. The work I did with my team at work was inspired by the Reggio Emilia Approach to early childhood education. I recently took a class at Loyola University School of Law called, Comparative Education Law and Policy: Early Childhood Education led by Professors Michael Kaufman and Sherry Kaufman. In it, I learned about the Reggio Emilia style of early childhood education and how it compares to the United States. Reggio Emilia is a renowned methodology that is effective at all levels of education and business. The value of Reggio is supported by research in neuro science, business development, and law. “The premise is that knowledge or learning is never done as a solitary thing. People learn together and better decisions at every level are made through a diverse learning environment.” (Michael Kaufman, 2014).

The class was nothing short of amazing. For an entire weekend, our Professors taught us using this Approach. We learned far more than we would in a typical lecture-style classroom almost without even realizing what was happening. What do I mean by that? It was fun and engaging! It felt so much more natural than a lecture, but was more effective on every level. I and my fellow classmates were ablaze with inspiration and filled with knowledge at the end. I knew at that point, I had to figure out a way to do adapt this style for use in the department I lead at work. Since then, I have done that, and now I want to share that experience with you.
My department at work is currently comprised of 6 people plus me. It includes - the supervisor of the data team; the business analyst/engineer; the communications management coordinator; the mailing coordinator; the data specialists, and me – the CRM administrator and manager of our department. We are a regular breakfast club of higher education employees – each of us brilliant in our own way, and each one critical to get the job done well.

Our department is responsible for our CRM (client relationship management) database, the management of data for all our prospective clients, and the execution of marketing plans geared toward those prospective clients. Our CRM also integrates with another system, and we facilitate and lead continual improvements to our CRM system in addition to our normal work.

Given our small team and lofty ambitions, time is often at a premium. As much emphasis as I put on gathering feedback, taking time to learn about my team members, hearing their opinions, and mixing up the way we do business…sometimes it feels like all we have time for is what I consider to be a “standard meeting.”

I define a “standard meeting” like this: there is an agenda, discussion on agenda items is opened up to the floor, some quiet pauses are left for those who want to chime in. Those who do speak up have their opinions heard. Those who don’t are encouraged to follow-up afterward, and sometimes they do. Other than that, we forge ahead with whatever the next step is for the project at hand.

My role includes these aspects – system administrator, department manager, project manager, process improvement specialist, business analyst and trainer. I often find myself in the position of genuinely seeking to gather feedback, while also keeping many initiatives moving forward at the same time. This includes coordination of priorities, workloads, budgets, and
discussions with my team, our IT department, our marketing and communications department, other departments in our company, and outside consulting firms.

Is anyone else in a similar boat? I wouldn’t be surprised! Many companies are doing more with less these days. So how can we slow down, or at least work smarter in the time we have, to tap in to the learning and teaching power of our greatest resource - our fellow employees?

The Reggio Emilia Approach is student and community-centered. For example, teachers look to students to discover the answers to their questions, and call on the community to be active participants in the education of its young children. In business, I believe this means making sure we draw out the voices of our employees in unique ways and lead them to be active, engaged participants in the progress that we make.

I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin’s quote – “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.” In business, I think this means - involve me and I care. Involve me and I am on board. Involve me and the result is better than it would have been without me because I am intelligent and my thoughts are diverse.

I recently put the principles I learned in the Comparative Education class (the previously mentioned Reggio Emilia Approach) into practice with my department. Preparation began several weeks in advance. My biggest concern before the day of our Reggio experience was how my team would respond to the unique opportunity. I wanted it to be positive and fun for them. While I knew they might feel outside their comfort zones, I also wanted to keep them coming back for more experiences like this.
Below is an executive summary to aid you in your journey. After that, I share specific details that will help you when you are ready to take these ideas and make them into reality.

**5 Keys to Making Reggio Work at Work**

**Preparing:**

My preparation for our Reggio experience involved thinking, creating and fine tuning the agenda, taking the Comparative Education class, working with my Professor, picking up supplies, time management, and scheduling. I started preparing about 3 weeks in advance.

Every couple of days, I would spend time thinking through my goals, the approach, and the other factors at play. One afternoon, I uncharacteristically stepped away from the computer for some time to think. Being highly extroverted, I often work through planning by talking out ideas. Given that my team members primarily describe themselves as introverts, I decided to give quiet time a try.

I pulled the Play Doh from my desk drawer (yes Play Doh!), and sat in my chair. For about an hour I allowed my mind to consider various ideas while I molded the Play Doh into various shapes and rolled it around in my palms. The Play Doh calms me and helps me stay quiet. I fidgeted at first because I felt like I was not doing enough. But after a few minutes, I settled into the process, and it was wonderful! My brain was able to relax and then ideas started connecting quickly. After this thinking phase, I went back to my desk and wrote out ideas and a draft of our agenda. While this was just one of many times I worked out the details prior to our Reggio experience, it was one of the most unique approaches I tried, and I found it highly valuable.

After I thought I had finalized my agenda, I asked my Professors for help. I wanted to process these concepts with them verbally and hear their input. The call with Professor Michael
Kaufman was a huge step toward a solid agenda. Together we discussed my goal for the Reggio experience, shared ideas and relevant experiences, and came up with specific activities to do with my team. After this section, I share exactly the activities we did and how.

At that point, I revised the email I had originally planned to send to the team to give them more information about the experience in advance. While I wanted them to have time to think about the topic in advance, I didn’t want to reveal too much before our time together. I also wanted to ease their concerns by telling them up front that there would be time to honor the thinking process. See drafts of this email in the section below.

The day before our Reggio experience, I picked up supplies (small white boards, markers (both dry erase and regular), large paper, stickers, measuring tape, scissors, tape, yarn, marshmallows, spaghetti, snacks, drinks, napkins, Play Doh, Clorox, and poster boards). After that, I pored over the agenda to fine tune the timing of each step.

At that point, I had only been able to find two hours of time during which we could all come together. Once I realized there was nothing more I felt comfortable trimming from the agenda, I decided to extend the meeting time to two and a half hours. With that, we were able to stay on schedule to a tee (but we needed every minute of the two and a half hours). For your team, I’ll show you how to make it work in that time frame, but if you’re able to block out at least three hours, I think that would allow a little extra time for reflection and discussion throughout.

**Knowing Your Team:**

In my time working with this team, we have had many discussions about personality types, and I have observed the situations in which my team members are able to showcase their skills as well as those that make them feel uncomfortable. About a year ago, we participated in
The Big 5 Personality Test (http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/), and many of us have also taken the Enneagram test (http://www.eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/test.php). When we shared our results with one another, I was able to learn more about introversion. Since then, we’ve continued to explore introversion versus extroversion as one way personality plays a role in the world around us. From those discussions, I have learned to draw out responses in meetings by asking for their thoughts more specifically (for example, Sarah, what are your thoughts on that? versus Does anyone have additional thoughts?). Even more important than that, I have learned to ask for feedback and then allow time for silence in a meeting. In addition, I have also asked team members to think and share their thoughts before and after meetings.

Each of these practices has been valuable for us. About a month ago, one team member shared the link to a TED talk by Susan Cain on introversion, which I found very helpful. (http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts).

As well as I feel I am getting to know my team members, the differences between us made me nervous. I know during the Reggio experiences in my class, I had a blast! Being that I am highly extroverted, I wondered if that meant introverts would find similar experiences draining or uncomfortable. In working with Professor Kaufman, we were able to plan ways to honor thinking and reflection throughout the experience, which worked well. Again, detailed descriptions of our Reggio experience follow this section.

**Believing in your team:**

In our Reggio experience, my provocation for the team was to plan our year-end celebration. I did not share my ideas or opinions. I did not set time frames, budgets, or types of activities. Instead, I fully trusted them to work through the process without me.

**Adjusting Your Role:**
As a leader in meetings, I often listen to feedback before the meeting, but ultimately present several options for the issue at hand. I usually open it up to the floor for other ideas, too, but this time, I wanted the team members to guide the process from beginning to end.

This was like asking an open-ended question rather than a leading question. When asking an open-ended question (*tell me about that…*), you never know the response you are going to get, and the result can be incredible. On the flip side, when you ask a leading question (*you would enjoy a year-end dinner at our favorite restaurant, right?*), you limit the response you will get to *yes* or *no*. With that, you risk team members going with the flow if they do not want to speak up (even if they would actually prefer something totally different). When working in a group this way, it was also important for team members to negotiate their options together without me.

When you are seeking to hear the innovative ideas of highly intelligent people like those on my team, the open-ended approach allows creativity to guide the experience. So this approach was different than a normal meeting, but an important step in honoring Reggio principles. While Reggio teachers take a student-centered approach, I wanted to take a team member-centered approach. Particularly because we were planning our team’s year-end celebration, I wanted them to be integral at every step so the celebration will be something they truly enjoy.

**Adapting:**

My role throughout our Reggio experience was to guide the process in a very limited way. I sat away from the main table most of the time and documented the experience by writing down observations, quotes from the team, taking pictures, and occasionally sharing more about Reggio when the opportunity presented itself. This is different from meetings in which I
normally play a more traditionally active role (talking, offering ideas, asking for feedback, negotiating, and keeping the meeting moving along).

But more important than this adaption was the time during the process I adapted twice within the same exercise. Toward the end of our Reggio experience, the 5 participants were talking openly about their ideas for a year-end celebration. They all had a few common themes in mind, and we were getting close to the end of our time together. At that point in our agenda, I had planned for team members to break in to two groups to negotiate through their ideas, and write them on poster boards to hang around the room. Because conversation was flowing so openly I decided on a whim to modify the next step, so I instructed the group to keep talking and writing these ideas on the posters as a group of 5. However, about 10 minutes in to that exercise I could see that most participants had shut down. One was nudging conversation out of the others and writing on posters, but most people were no longer talking. After offering options (for example, *if it’s easier to pair in to groups, that’s okay, too*), but not seeing any change, I decided to go back to the original plan. I then asked two volunteers to pair off and finish the exercise in small groups. Within minutes, the room was abuzz with laughter, conversation, artistic displays (people started molding the Play Doh I put in the center of the table and drawing on their white boards), and idea-generating again. It is okay to make small adjustments throughout, but overall try to trust the process. It has a way of working out beautifully if you let it.

**Summary:**

When you are ready to try a Reggio experience with your team, I urge you to spend time working through the 5 Keys listed above. In a busy work world, I know from experience that it can cause anxiety to spend this amount of time preparing for a 2 or 3 hour meeting, but it is well
worth it. My team has shared a lot of positive feedback with me already, and several have said that new ideas continue to pop in to their minds since our Reggio experience. This is the same thing that continues to happen to me a month after my Comparative Education class, so I consider our time together a major success! Beyond that, it is a building block for how we will continue to improve the way we do business going forward.

**Documentation of Our Reggio Experience**

In this section, you will find specific details of how I worked through each part of this process. Consider this my notebook, as I worked through the 5 Keys. Along with the preparation I did, I also share our agenda with notes about our Reggio experience.

Documentation is the method of analysis with the Reggio Emilia Approach. Rather than grading, for example, teachers document learning so it can be shared with the students, families, and the community. The classic definition of documentation is the “practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing the process and products of individual and group learning to make visible the learning for multiple audiences and stakeholders.” (Making Learning Visible research project of Harvard Project Zero [http://www.mlvpz.org/](http://www.mlvpz.org/)).

Here I will share documentation of the process I followed, as well as documentation of our team’s Reggio Experience. These will be helpful when you plan a Reggio experience at your place of work, but will also show you some examples of how documentation can be done.

**Preparing for the call with Professor Michael Kaufman:**

Prior to the call with my Professor, I processed (through thinking and writing) about what the subject matter (the product) could be for the time together with my department at work. I felt nervous because my team has shared with me details of their introverted personalities, situations that make them feel uncomfortable and ways to engage them in meetings, business, and life in
general. I have been learning from them and also reading, watching a TED talk, etc. to improve my leadership skills when it comes to introversion. While this activity sounded like a blast to me, I was concerned they would not enjoy it or find it uncomfortable.

My hope for the time with my team was to have fun, to share Reggio Emilia with them, to have an outcome that was created by them so that we could all enjoy it even more.

After the call with my Professor I felt so much more encouraged about it, and excited to take the next steps. Together we worked through specific ways to address my concerns and accomplish my goals (see notes below).

**Questions for my Professors:**

Q: To what extent is an element of surprise necessary to the project, and how can I balance that with the needs of introverts?

I asked this because during our class, I noticed that we were not prepared to know about all the activities we were going to do, and that element of surprise (from my view) helped shape a unique experience. However, I was worried that too many elements of surprise may make the experience uncomfortable for the introverted members of our team.

A: The element of surprise is part of the process (we don’t want to tell everyone the projects we’ll be doing in advance because it may diminish spontaneity). However, we can show that we value the thinking process during activities like think-pair-share (see details below).

Q: To what extent is the element of limitation necessary to the project?

I asked because during our class most of our projects had limiting factors that made it more challenging (for example, only limited materials to build a tower or make a paper airplane fly 30 feet). Since I was asking the group to plan a year-end celebration, I wanted to know if I needed to provide limits to increase the challenge (for example, by limiting the budget).
A: Since one of my main goals was a fun experience, and the topic at hand is also something fun (planning a party), it isn’t necessary to limit their options. Along those lines, as a co-leader in this group – there are many factors going in to this decision. What factors would those be? Have someone else on the team write those factors on the board. The team members, as reasonable people, will decide the factors. This relates back to the Key listed above (believing in your team).

Q: How much talking should I do, if any?
A: Limited talking. Let the team lead. They are intelligent, reasonable people.

Q: Should I choose someone else to document throughout the process in addition to me?
A: The team members will orally document by sharing in think-pair-share, and they can also do a white board exercise (see below).

Q: These are the key parts of Reggio Emilia that I would like to share in a short time frame – history of how it came to be – student-centered learning and its affects (students are more engaged, respecting students as valuable members of the learning process) – documentation vs. grading – anything else?

A: Those are great aspects to share. Can also share the classic definition of documentation – “practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing the process and products of individual and group learning to make visible the learning for multiple audiences or stakeholders.” Practice documentation during the goofy things – like the marshmallow challenge. Tell them how CEOs, kids, and business school students performed.

Q: How to define if our Reggio experience goes well?
A: Your product will be your year-end celebration, and the process is the team building aspects.
Notes from my discussion with Professor Michael Kaufman – Brain imaging shows how individual people learn in relationships – not individually – even someone in a solitary lab – it’s very powerful – it’s scientific. He recommended From Neurons to Neighborhoods, National Academy of Science, 2000 for more information on this research. In addition, he mentioned Learning and Relationships, David Brooks’ article in the NY Times editorial section.

At this point in our conversation, we started working through specific activities we could do. Below are my notes from this discussion and the final agenda shows what ultimately happened during our Reggio experience.

**Notes from our phone call:**

Think-Pair-Share (quietly think and reflect on this process for 10 minutes – then one person in the pair talks – the other one listens/vice versa) – then share their reflections (active listening, respecting the thinking work we’ve done). Have the listener report out what the speaker said – what they’re partner shared.

After 3 groups of 2 – do 2 groups of 3 for 3 person negotiation. By closest birthday to today one person reports out – what was the process by which you decided we should _____? This is oral documentation. Then ask if other 2 people in group if they have reflections about the process.

Give group of 3 large pieces of paper. On it, they can write, “For our year-end celebration, we will: ______, and we will spend no more than ______.” Then groups put those on the walls – then do the red dots (for voting on ideas). Each group of 3 could do several of these (good to have 10 or so and then use the dot voting).

Loves the idea of doing the marshmallow challenge – for teambuilding (1 marshmallow, 20 spaghetti sticks, 1 yard string, 1 yard tape, 18 minutes to build the tallest free-standing
structure). Then reflect on it. Write key words on a board with a dry erase as they reflect on anything (capture your words in a visual form).

Reflect on a positive team experience first to get the stage set

**Emails to the team before our Reggio experience:**

After the call, I revised the first draft of an email to my team. See those samples below.

**First Draft of Email to Team –**

Hi everyone,

In our last meeting, I mentioned a class I took this summer. I learned about the Reggio Emilia style of early childhood education. And I have been thinking about ways to incorporate some of its most fascinating aspects with you.

I will be sending more background information soon, and feel free to look it up on your own if you’re curious.

When we meet, I will share some additional feedback from my class, but the majority of our time will be spent working on a project.

To allow time for thinking about the topic in advance, please consider ideas of what would be enjoyable to you and our department for a year-end celebration. But here’s the catch!

Documentation is a key aspect of assessment in the Reggio Emilia style. Rather than grades, teachers and students document

Document that process as it happens, and bring a copy of your documentation with you.

So, if you think about it on your own, write a little paragraph about that process. For example, "At first I thought it would be fun to do the rock climbing… If you talked about…write down…"

I am working on an email (coming soon!) to follow-up about the class I took and the exercise I want to try with our team. The email will give an overview of what I learned in the calls to set the stage for this.

We’ll be spending this time to plan a year-end (or cycle-end) celebration

**Second draft of email to team –**

Hi everyone,
In our last meeting, I mentioned a class I took this summer. I promised more details, and here they are! I have set up a meeting time, and I am excited to have this time together! We have much to do, so please arrive no later than 9:30.

During our time, we will be planning our “year” end celebration. There will be time throughout to honor thinking and reflection.

In my class, I learned about the Reggio Emilia style of early childhood education and how it compares to the U.S. Reggio Emilia is a renowned methodology that is effective at all levels of education and business. The value of Reggio is supported by research in neuro science, business development, and law. The premise is that knowledge or learning is never done as a solitary thing – people learn together and better decisions at every level are made through a diverse learning environment. Even the learning of a person working alone in a lab is influenced by her community. It’s about organizational change and it’s very effective.

This methodology began in Reggio Emilia, Italy after World War II. Some of the most fascinating aspects of Reggio from my perspective are –

The history of how it came to be (I will share the story when we meet);
Student-centered learning and its affects (respecting all students as valuable members of the learning process);
Documentation as the way to assess learning (as opposed to grading, for example); and
The focus on community as an integral part of learning (sharing documentation of learning with the community as a whole, including parents, for example).

The classic definition of documentation for Reggio is - “the practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing the process and products of individual and group learning to make visible the learning for multiple audiences or stakeholders.” We will do this together on Tuesday in various ways.

I’ve shared more information in these links and attachments. I hope you take a look before our meeting.

If you have any questions for me before then, please let me know.

Sincerely,

-Sarah

**Final draft of email to my team –**

Hi everyone,
In our last meeting, I mentioned a class I took this summer. I promised more details, and here they are! I have set up a meeting time in Outlook, and I am excited to have this time together! We have much to do, so please arrive no later than 9:30.

During our time, we will be planning our “year” end celebration. There will be time throughout to honor thinking and reflection.

In my class, I learned about the Reggio Emilia style of early childhood education and how it compares to the U.S. Reggio Emilia is a renowned methodology that is effective at all levels of education and business. The value of Reggio is supported by research in neuroscience, business development, and law. The premise is that knowledge or learning is never done as a solitary thing – people learn together and better decisions at every level are made through a diverse learning environment. Even the learning of a person working alone in a lab is influenced by her community.

This methodology began in Reggio Emilia, Italy after World War II. Some of the most fascinating aspects of Reggio from my perspective are –

The history of how it came to be (I will share the story when we meet);

Student-centered learning and its affects (respecting all students as valuable members of the learning process);

Documentation as the way to assess learning (as opposed to grading, for example); and

The focus on community as an integral part of learning (sharing documentation of learning with the community as a whole, including parents, for example).

The classic definition of documentation for Reggio is - “the practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing the process and products of individual and group learning to make visible the learning for multiple audiences or stakeholders.” We will do this together on Tuesday in various ways.

I hope you will take a little time before our meeting to learn more about Reggio Emilia. If you have any questions for me before then, please let me know.
Sincerely,

-Sarah

Agenda:

A week before - send brief email highlighting Reggio Emilia. Include a heads up that we’ll be planning our year-end celebration, and there will be time throughout to honor thinking and reflection

The day of – bring supplies (small white boards, markers (both dry erase and regular), large paper, stickers, measuring tape, scissors, tape, yarn, marshmallows, spaghetti, snacks/coffee, Play Doh for me and everyone to use, if they want), Clorox wipes (for marshmallows), poster boards.

Agenda (I did not share this with the team) -

(1) 9:30-9:45 Intro (welcome, background, time frames for today) (15 minutes)

(a) The history of how it came to be (I will share the story when we meet);
(b) Student-centered learning and its affects (respecting all students as valuable members of the learning process);
(c) Documentation as the way to assess learning (as opposed to grading, for example); and
(d) The focus on community as an integral part of learning (sharing documentation of learning with the community as a whole, including parents, for example), *and that’s what I’ll do here today (so we can reflect later and share with others)!
(e) The classic definition of documentation for Reggio is - “the practice of observing, recording, interpreting, and sharing the process and products of individual and group learning to make visible the learning for multiple audiences or stakeholders.” We will do this together on Tuesday in various ways.

(2) 9:45-10:05 Think about a positive team interaction (think-pair-share) (5 minutes to think-10 minutes to pair-10 minutes to share with the group) (20 minutes)

(3) 10:05-10:35 Marshmallow Challenge (30 minutes total)

(1 minute for instructions)
(18 minutes for exercise)

Reflections (*As you go, write key words on a board with a dry erase as they reflect on anything (capture your words in a visual form)

(Share those words and discuss – 10 minutes)

(4) 10:35-10:40 My provocation for you is how we will celebrate the end of a good year.

(5) 10:40-11:05 Think-Pair-Share (quietly think and reflect on this provocation for 5 minutes – then one person in the pair talks – the other one listens/vice versa – 10 minutes) – then share their reflections with the group (active listening, respecting the thinking work we’ve done).

Have the listener report out what the speaker said – what they’re partner shared – (10 minutes). (25 minutes total).

**Example of adaptation during the experience** – after the first think-pair-share, one team member mentioned that it she didn’t feel she could listen well because she was so worried about re-telling the other person’s story accurately. Others seemed to agree. So this time, I modified the approach and told them they would re-tell their own stories to the larger group after this exercise.

(6) 11:05-11:30 Next, mix up the groups! And give the groups large paper. On it they should write – For our year-end celebration, we will: ______, with details for example, and we will spend no more than ______. Each group of 3 should make several of these (good to have 10 or so and then use the dot voting). (25 minutes).

**This step relates back to my reflections about Adaptation in the 5 Keys section.** This is the step that I modified on a whim (based on their interactions at the time), but then decided to go back to the original plan, which proved successful.
(7) 11:30-11:45 Then groups tape those posters on the wall. Then each person gets 2 red dots (we used mini Post It notes). We will see the visual representation of what the group wants. Then see if the group agrees that’s a consensus (for example maybe a few dots on another paper were really important to someone).

(8) 11:45-12 Reflection and wrap-up.

Documentation from our Reggio Experience:

Here I will share quotations, photos, and observations from steps in the agenda (above).

(1) Intro – this part was a little stressful for me because I did not get much feedback (no comments were made, for example). But people seemed engaged and intrigued. I called attention to the focused balance of today’s process for introverts. The group (excluding me) was made up of four self-described introverts, and 1 self-described extrovert.

(2) First think-pair-share (about a positive team experience) –

   a. Think – observing the introverts, they seemed to appreciate and welcome the quiet time to think. Some closed their eyes. Some wrote on the small white boards or in notebooks.

   b. Pair – a little laughter to get started. Some discussion about who should go first. A lot of hand gestures from the speakers. Full attention from listeners.

Comments from team members included –

“ I love to solve problems.”

“Even though it wasn’t my job, I pitched in to do it.”

“There was celebrating and remembering and those were positive experiences.”

“The leadership council at church varies in age, which is great because we can come together to make important decisions. Everyone’s opinion is valued.”
“On a wilderness trip to Minnesota, we were all in it together. The whole team was impacted by our actions. We started out with some people not knowing anything about nature, but all of a sudden that was the life that was before us.”

c. Share (I asked the person with the closest birthday to go first) –
   “It’s nice to share these stories.”
   “It’s clear that teamwork is a part of our lives generally.”

Observation – when I shared some of the quotes I documented during the Pairing stage, the group seemed to enjoy hearing those (they smiled and laughed with pride).

(3) The Marshmallow Challenge –

The teams spent 3 or 4 minutes talking and planning.

“I wouldn’t have thought of that.”

“Maybe we want to…”

“Should I put some in the corner?” “Yeah let’s try it.”

“I don’t know what this string is for.”

“Oh!” with laughter.

“Is this a competition?”

Ten minutes in, there were maybe a couple spaghetti sticks adhering to the surface of the table. I gave an 8 minute warning at that point. They were creating very inventive designs!

I also gave a four minute warning.

There as lots of laughter. I heard:

“There’s no way this thing’s going to stand on its own!”
“We should go taller!”

“What if from now on we…?”

In the end, there were two amazing designs that measured 37” and 18”. After the exercise, team members immediately started pulling out their phones to take pictures. They were very proud of what they created. One said, “I’m going to Instagram this.” Both teams decided to pose for group pictures – smiling brightly.

Reflection –

“We spent a lot of time planning. Had we just jumped in, we may have had a better outcome.”

“We felt pressured to use all materials. Had we abandoned that, it may have gone better.”

“We had different ideas, and that helped.”

“This was more fun than the last one (think-pair-share) because I didn’t feel pressure to remember the other person’s story accurately.”

“This was more thinking through doing/talking without pressure to have the most brilliant idea. Just do it and see how it goes.”

(4) My provocation was short and simple: how will we celebrate the end of this year?
(5) Think-pair-share (but this time I adapted sharing, based on their feedback, to say they could share their own stories back with the larger group).

a. Think – gave extra time for thinking because some people were still actively writing ideas.

b. Pair – things I heard –

“A day to celebrate accomplishments.”
“A day with no meetings – just time to relax.”
“An architectural boat cruise, but that might be too expensive.”
“Offsite – a picnic or something.”
“Leave work at work.”
“Like a retreat.”
“Acknowledging/honoring the changes that have happened in our department.”
“What have you done in the past to celebrate?”
“It’s like you’re celebrating the end of a cycle, but coming up with new stories during the celebration.”

c. Share – I heard –

“Dinner with visual results and time to celebrate individual accomplishments.”
“Time to get away with no work activities – just breathe.”
“Eat and/or tours of the city.”
“Low cost ideas like a BBQ at the beach, but getting away is important.”
“We’ll have to balance the use of personal time if we do nights or weekends.”

(6) Started with open discussion, then I asked them to split up in to two groups to encourage more participation. I heard –
“Maybe we could share our appreciation of other departments since that’s what we want.”

“We could create something artistic together as a team that could be on display to remind us of this celebration.”

(7) Posters on the walls with various ideas (which will be used to vote). The group had some questions about how to start. We also discussed common themes (food, getting away). After a while they had posters to hang on the wall.

And then they voted. They had a lot of trouble deciding because all the ideas were so great! I couldn’t help but encourage them that I will be very likely to incorporate all of these throughout the year.
(8) At the end of this step, we had not come to a finalized plan, but were closing in on common themes. Many of the ideas tied in nicely together, so we think we will have a day or two that incorporates various aspects. I asked the team to decide how they would proceed with the planning. I gave them a couple of days to think and discuss, and then I will ask for their next steps. The planning and coordination will be in their hands, and I cannot wait to see what our year-end celebration will be!