

Be not afeared, of the CC words

Months have passed since we heard Kenneth Branagh's booming voice during the Olympics opening ceremony (yes that bit before Her Majesty jumped out of the helicopter with 007 and Mr Bean did his one finger trick). But we hear him still.

I was reminded how easily we become enchanted or panicked by what joys or sorrows we dream might be there: "The isle is full of noises...sounds, and sweet airs...a thousand twangling instruments..."

Like what joys and sorrows we might imagine lie behind ... you know ... the CC words.

Thoughts of creativity, collusion, cunning, collapse not to mention magic, madness, muddle, meandering meetings and more are provoked when there is a hint of (hold your hats) *collaborative conversations*. But be not afeared. Being 'afeared' can distort the vision and confuse clear thinking.

During its now annual 'future thinking' session the Read International board grappled with the implications of significant changes in its operating environment. In what then seemed ages but now seems like double-quick time, we managed to move from denial to accepting that changes were happening (and wishing they would go away) to thinking bold and straight.

Our collective guts told us that we needed to collaborate to seek out the coincidence of interest which we knew was out there.

To respond robustly to market changes to meet our mission (we deliver education in Africa, engage young volunteers and recycle), we sensed our sustainable future could unfold by engaging

in *collaborative conversations*. And we believed too that these conversations, far from being a weak attempt to run from our fears of change, will lead to powerful partnerships with those with whom we can find common cause.

But as we started out we were nervous. We had spoken in hushed tones of what these conversations might lead to. We even dared to recognise the 'm' word (merger) among other provocations which might be on the menu of options, although not currently at the top of it.

As we embarked on this programme of conversations we decided we would not shy away from considering the full menu such as sharing projects, outsourcing organisational functions or closer collaborations. Enhancing impact and achievement of the vision for the long term is to be our only criteria.

Be not afeared of the CC words and give equal place to all delights (we'll make a stronger combined bid than we could on our own) and fears (if we start getting too close to the 'm' word will we lose our identity) and be free to explore all possible partnerships.

As we start our *collaborative conversations*, we seek to 'appreciate and value the best of what is', hold our vision of what might be, dialogue what is to be done to get there, and innovate to create what will be – an 'appreciative enquiry' into the future we wish to see.

And we do this with the audacity and energy which are at the heart of Read and which are every bit as bold as those words at that magnificent opening ceremony. ●

Martin Farrell
Chair, Read International
martin.farrell@get2thepoint.org

CREATIVITY

COLLAPSE

CUNNING

COLLABORATION