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Would We, Could We, Did We Collaborate? Mutuality and Respect

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Introduction

1 In 2003 we started to write about our experience of researching and writing together. We discovered in doing so a mutuality and synergy demonstrated today by solid outcomes and a deeper friendship. Our journey has had its issues. Indeed, we have come to understand deeply the process and politics of collaboration. We started simply from a desire to become researchers, and recognised that working together was a way in which we could support each other in this mutual goal. What has surprised us is the extent to which we now participate in the process of understanding the dynamics of what collaboration means. We have been intrigued and puzzled by the synergy of our partnership. This brief article is what we would call a story of how we have come to understand the dynamic of collaboration.

Defining

2 There is considerable literature attached to collaboration that we have drawn upon in our work to date (Bond and Thompson; Dunkin; Herfnick, Messerschmitt, and Vanderick; Kyle and Mc Cutcheon; Kochen and Mullen; Lindsey; Morrison, Dobbie, and McDonald; Reamer and Bertram; Rymer; Skau; Zuckerman and Merton). Much of what we have read about collaboration rang true and confirmed our experience on many levels but it has not fully explained for us the mutuality we had experienced. The distinctions between 'additive' where researchers often work on discrete parts of the project and each contribute their part to the collated final product and 'integrative' approaches where researchers work together to develop shared understandings, often seemed to be artificial since we have found good collaboration requires both elements of addition and integration (Eisenhart and Borko).

Themes in Synergy

3 While our starting point was initially about exploring issues in our complementary disciplines within teacher education, we moved sideways to explore and research purposefully the synergy of our collaborative relationship. This resulted in the processing of our experience through the telling and writing of our story of collaboration, the analysing of that story, and the development of a framework that we thought others might find congruent:

4 Telling our story together has enabled us to take a closer look at the process and to highlight some of the issues which we believe need to be considered before embarking on collaborative research. Telling our story was one way in which we could reflect on our current research practices and demonstrably put into action improvements (Garbett and Yourn, *Collaborative Research* n.pag.).

5 The framework which we developed arose from our very first exploration of understanding our collaboration via a storytelling framework. Through McDrury and Alterio's work we were able to distance ourselves emotionally and engage with both telling and listening. We began to link our new ideas with existing knowledge and past experiences. In looking back on our collateral outcomes we are able to see how as early career researchers we have developed ways of working that may suit others. The following themes, which form the basis of our work, are included here. A fuller version can also be found in the conference paper titled "Collaborative Research: If We Had the Time to Do It All Again, Tell Me... Would We, Could We?" that we presented at the 2003 HERDSA Conference.

6 *Table 1: Collaborative research themes*

Congruent research principles	Establishment of ownership and equality in authorship	Time management and deadlines
Creating and guarding a space for collaborative work to occur within the institutional framework	Critiquing our work and removing 'selves' from the product	Respecting differences in working styles and using those to our mutual advantage
Similar conceptual world view	Intuition, empathy, and friendship developed as we collaborated	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors
Including critical friends and expert others	Collaboration has a life of its own and has spawned new projects	

7 The themes we provide in Table 1 are consistent with the literature and seem to encompass how we work together. Eisenhart and Borko, Fox and Faver, and Rymer provide useful lists and discuss the issues that could be taken into account when collaborating. There is not enough space here to detail all of these themes. However, they seem to fall into two main areas. These are the process of the work we do together and the reasons why we can work together so successfully. In regards to processes we have found that it is important that we are committed to managing the research through agreement and commitment. Whereas the reasons why we work so well seem to come from our mutual agreement of the way we view the world. This it seems is underpinned by our mutual respect of our differences and how we complement each other.

Difficulties

8 In the introduction we alluded to the difficulties of collaborating and here we acknowledge these do exist. For example ownership of the research is not always fully discussed and is a potential area of enormous conflict (Linsey; Smallman). We have mostly agreed that any outcomes or products would be co-authored. This, however, is problematic since authorship is described in the literature as being either hierarchical or alphabetical. What if there is acknowledged equal authorship? We struggle with the alphabetical resolution as the same person would always be second author and institutional and political measurement often delegates the second author as having a lesser role. Initially to address this issue we decided to include a statement acknowledging joint equal authorship and then began to reverse name order on alternate publications. This has been mostly well handled. We decided to focus on considering what we produced together was worth more than the 'point' or kudos associated with being 'first'. However, this has not always been easy for us as the research agenda is highly politicised. We note in a paper currently in review that Kochan and Mullen replace the usual 'and' with '=' to suggest a "new inquiry relationship symbolising genuinely equal authorship" (166). We are yet to find out whether this will be agreeable to the editorial review team of the journal. We do the same with this paper.

9 We know that strategically, it is not just a matter of alternating our names as the academic context is not that simple. We know that the quality of the actual output and intended audience also needs consideration. We have both strategically taken first authorship in places where it would matter most for us as individuals. This has been negotiated as straight forwardly as:

10 Shall we just do the swapsie thing...there are two articles...I'd prefer the (Higher Education) one as it will look better for me rather than the (ECE) one. (E-mail communication 22 Aug. 2003)

11 The immediate reply was:

12 If you want first authorship on that one—fine. I'll get the (ECE) one although I can see that it is quite nice to diversify and not get pigeonholed. But not so bad to be thinking that you might get a name somewhere! (E-mail communication 22 Aug. 2003)

13 As this short exchange indicates, authorship is often not discussed fully and our friendship and common courtesy means that one of us accepts second place. We

would like to be resistant to the politics that surround the practice of allocating authorship but in reality, and by necessity, it continues to be source of tension. We have tried to be honest and open in dealing with this issue between ourselves.

14 We are now working in different countries and increasingly reliant on electronic means to communicate. Our ineptness with this medium has complicated our previously easy conversations and informal visits to one another's work spaces. We have become reliant on blunt e-mail messages although they are always tempered with some snippet of personal news. For example:

15 How was the weekend? We were incredibly social and pranced off to lunches and afternoon teas. ...I am a bit too flat out to do anymore on our stuff until Friday, is that OK? (E-mail communication 9 Sep. 2003)

16 I meant to ring you on the weekend but the timing never seemed right. I was sure you would be out partying all night and sleeping in when I was up... Now, business...I would really like to know what the current status is of our papers. I have completely lost track so you need to fill in the details very slowly for me (E-mail communication 10 Aug. 2004)

17 We both resort to phone calls once in a while to have 'real time' conversations. We have both enjoyed synchronised e-mail messages although neither of us can type as fast as we talk and the delay between sending and receiving a response is tiresome. Because of differing time zones, work commitments, and differing life styles, this is not always practicable and often the delay stretches to days. Face to face, many issues are dealt with if and when they arise. In written form, our words tend to haunt us. The following exchange, culled from our e-mail conversations, alludes to some misinterpretation which has since been deleted.

18 I am feeling terribly conscious now that you might be feeling a bit pissed off about something that I have written that I wouldn't have said. I actually cut and deleted quite a bit of the last e-mail because I didn't think it would read very well. (E-mail communication 15 Feb. 2004)

19 The reply assuaged any guilt:

20 Hey you...I am not pissed off about anything you have said or done...nothing...I have been a bit quiet on my front but mainly as I have felt so guilty about doing nothing regarding our research (E-mail communication 16 Feb. 2004)

21 However, this highlights the sensitivity needed to communicate effectively through the written word. It also demonstrates the craft necessary in fashioning what is hoped to be an appropriate tone. There is no doubt that our friendship, empathy, and willingness more than often defines how we understand our mutuality and frame communication.

An Ending

22 The focus for this discussion has been to provide a brief look into our collaboration and go in some part to explain the synergistic relationship of mutuality for our outcomes and our deepening professional and personal regard. We have also included some detail of the difficulties associated with authorship and even now, after some years of working in this manner, our inability to discuss this properly. We are currently working on different continents and, recognising that distance is our enemy, we are seeking new ways of working together as we recognise the value in our work with each other. We agree with the statement by Kochan and Mullen that it is possible for an 'ethic' of collaboration to be developed where we as women are creating our own "value system, which honours collaboration that helps keep us afloat during difficult times" (161). It is an ongoing negotiation and the story it seems, for us, is yet to find its end.

Our Work Together

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