



From the Editor

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Struggling Together: Collaboration as Ethical Practice

This current issue features articles that address—among other topics—the subject of collaboration as ethical practice. As a result, I have been thinking a lot about what collaboration can do and also, when we might choose not to collaborate.

The joys of collaboration open up new vistas of understanding. Collaboration invites diversity of perspectives as the authors in this issue attest.

However, collaboration is also used in indiscriminant, even misleading ways. “We just need to collaborate” should be an invitation, but sometimes it is instead a phrase designed to control the input of others. It can be the default admonition that is only a surface level suggestion for joint opportunity; in those cases, “We just need to collaborate” stymies meaningful engagement around difficult matters by suggesting we should all go along, and get along, lest we be labeled a trouble maker. “We just need to collaborate” under these circumstances refuses to adequately address a host of interaction variables including, but not limited to, differentials in power, particularities of narratives, value-base distinctions, and unequal access to information. In fact, we may need to confront one another to ask for an honest assessment of a situation before we can consider collaborating. But to do so takes courage, and requires risking that our affairs can withstand such scrutiny.

Collaboration is an important feature of strong relationships and vital to the possibility of making collective impact. However, the rush to collaboration can come with a high price. In the name of efficiency—something collaboration is not often linked with in the first place—some people will urge collaboration when what they really want (but will not say) is compliance. For collaboration to take root, full access to and participation by all in an initiative is necessary, not submission, acquiescence or passive obedience.

That is, for collaboration to deliver on its hopeful process and products, we need to create spaces where partners are willing to struggle together. I see struggling together as an ethical endeavor that signals a profound desire to interact, even when it may be difficult, when we may hold opposing positions, or when I have to reveal to you more than I want to because of what you need. Struggling together may be uncomfortable, but it is that discomfort that paves the way for necessary questions that in turn press us to (better) articulate our values and reasons for the work we do.

Collaboration as struggling together is harder than the collaborative episodes where everyone says, “yes...let’s do it.” Yet struggling together is probably the most common feature of navigating successful campus-community partnerships that can transform teaching, learning, research, and community action.

In the past two years I have served as editor for this journal, there have been a number of times when our reviewers raised their eyebrows as they considered the merits of submitted manuscripts. They struggled with me and thus with various authors to consider a number of questions. What constitutes the ethical requirements of research and publication in different disciplines and traditions? How is informed consent adequately managed to consider how, when, and in what ways student and community partner names should be included in academic writing? How can assurances of participant confidentiality and anonymity that are often a requirement for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, also provide space and acclamation for research participant names to be featured? When is leaving out participant names and organizational affiliations an error of omission that can raise troubling questions and jeopardize relationships? Who deserves credit for an article and the research that informs it? How else is credit assigned and does the format of the research presentation (article, report, public meeting) suggest recognition of some participants and not others?

With these important conversations, feedback, suggestions, and questions for clarification, I have seen that the human impulse to collaborate is strong, even when we start in positions that are not just seemingly different, but are in fact different. That impulse to collaborate—and struggle together—is what allows us to hear the concerns, ideas, and suggestions of others. The result of those encounters is never guaranteed, and the outcome may be different than we or they imagined, but more often than not the result is a stronger, even when it is provisional. Collaboration, in this spirit, genuinely engages the positions held by all involved with good reasons and a desire to continue working toward a point all can accept. I am very happy to report that our editorial team of board members and reviewers has willingly and boldly experienced that.

In this spring 2014 issue of *Partnerships*, collaboration is neither unproblematic, nor simple within the research and case studies discussed. Instead, collaboration is revealed to be complicated, nuanced, and rich with insights. In this issue, you will read of the dynamics of collaboration in cases ranging from a Girl Scout Cookie College training program to international immersion experiences in Haiti. The student-teacher relationship in service-learning endeavors is another location for contestation with regard to collaboration as are the campus-community partnerships that we pursue across expanses of time where new people must find a way to join the original collaborators.

This issue is the last for editorial assistant Sarah Hollingsworth who leaves North Carolina this summer to enter a doctoral program in Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University. Her contributions to this journal have been invaluable.

Finally, we want to welcome a new (and first) sponsor for our journal, NobleHour. Their financial support allows us to continue providing an important publishing outlet, without a subscription fee, for scholars working to advance new knowledge, current issues, and critical perspectives surrounding

campus-community partnerships. In the spirit of open-access publishing, we seek to feature articles, book reviews, and essays with as broad a reach as possible, without monetary encumbrances. So thank you NobleHour for supporting this research forum that continues to allow us to struggle with collaborations in service-learning and community engagement pedagogy, research, theory, and assessment. If you or your organization is interested in becoming a sponsor, learn more at <http://www.elon.edu/e-web/org/nccc/pubRes-partnerships.xhtml> or contact Leslie Garvin, North Carolina Campus Compact Associate Director, at lgarvin@elon.edu.

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