An Exploratory Study of Collaboration in Higher Education From Women’s Perspectives

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ABSTRACT
This descriptive, exploratory study investigated collaboration in higher education as perceived by a select group of prolific female academics, known for their collaborative work. The results indicate that these women were influenced to work in partnership in varied ways through which they each developed an ethic of collaboration. The experience of collaboration with school and university practitioners brought many benefits to these scholars, but not without sacrifice and hardship. The authors recommend that if colleges of education are serious about promoting collaborative work, these institutions must become more attuned to the difficulties involved. In addition, colleges should consider providing support mechanisms for those academics seeking to engage in joint academic ventures within their institutions and with their colleagues in the field.

We can’t just talk publicly about the good things in our collaborations—we must discuss all aspects, including the bad stuff that lies buried when we discuss our partnerships. (Research participant, April 2000)

A Call to Change
In recent years, a movement has begun to infuse collaborative cultural norms into the work of the academy (Hafernik, Messerschmitt & Vandrick, 1997; Kochan = Mullen, 2001; Mullen = Kochan, 2001). Many colleges of education have recognized the need to form strong internal and external partnerships. Teacher educators have been challenged to take leadership roles in forming collaborations through such diverse initiatives as Professional Development Schools (The Holmes Group, 1995), organizational networks with schools, teachers, school leaders, and
While the challenge to create collaborative relationships is strong, such a culture has not yet become a fully formed expression of professional practice or administrative governance in higher education (Cochran-Smith, 2000; Hafernik et al., 1997). Tenure and promotion (Mullen & Forbes, 2000; Tierney, 2001), restructuring of time and allocation of resources (Kochan, 1998), and even respect for collaborative work within the academy (Paley & Jipson, 2000) are institutional issues and human concerns that appear to be hindering the movement toward the practice of collaboration. Developing collaborative relationships means creating new structures and policies. Faculty, teachers, undergraduate and graduate students must work together to form robust communities of learning and research within and across colleges in the university, and with schools and other institutions and entities (Hamberger & Moore, 1997; Mullen & Lick, 1999).

**Collaboration in Higher Education**

Collaboration is typically defined as “a cooperative endeavor that involves common goals, coordinated efforts, and outcomes or products for which the collaborators share responsibility and credit” (Austin & Baldwin, 1991, p. 7). Although such a definition may be widely accepted, we recognize that it constitutes a static description of what is in fact a dynamic experience. In this article we explore the notion of collaboration as a multifaceted phenomenon that is “an untidy business full of uncharted territories, ambiguities, and institutional complexities” (Johnston, 1997, p. 1), and treat this concept as a critical component of educational inquiry (Paley & Jipson, 2000).

The act of collaboration is complex, as are the reasons academics engage in the practice. Some scholars form collaborative relationships to combat loneliness and isolation. Others view collaboration as a means of expanding their knowledge or abilities, or as an avenue to compensate for weakness. Still others enjoy working with one or more persons in areas of shared interest, believing that the result will be more meaningful, satisfying, and significant than what would be accomplished individually (Kochan & Mullen, 2001; Mullen & Kochan, 2001).

Despite obstacles to collaboration, many academics are remarkably successful at working with others. We, for example, are two individuals who have conducted almost all of our research in collaboration through various forms of micro-partnerships and macro-partnerships. We have also been able to turn active fieldwork with different kinds of professionals into joint scholarly publications, crediting the contributions of all key players (for example, Mullen & Lick, 1999). These players include teachers, graduate students, and colleagues, as well as schools, and community and governmental agencies.

In 1998, we began exploring the possibility of collaborating in an area of common interest. As a part of that conversation, we decided to share information about our values and expectations in a working relationship. Through this process, we found ourselves engaging in what Johnston (1999) calls “dialogue as inquiry”. The more
we shared our stories of collaboration, the more we discovered common threads, both positive and negative, in our past experiences.

We audiotaped and transcribed our conversations about personal collaborative experiences over a 2-year period, analyzing the data on an ongoing basis. Through this process, we began to better understand the nature of our relational work. Informed and inspired by our exchanges, we became intrigued about other female academics’ collaborative experiences. Using our own experiences as a foundation, we subsequently interviewed other women scholars to try to capture the essence of collaboration as an actual, vital, scholarly experience.

**Collaborative Research Methods**

*Participant Selection*

To bring consistency to the sample, we selected individuals in higher education who matched our own backgrounds, values, commitments, and ways of working. We thus limited our interviewees to other White women in colleges of education known for engaging in collaborative research activities; for building infrastructures that depend on partnership development for their success; for working with both higher education and K-12 colleagues; and for writing with professionals of both genders. We also sought individuals who were known for fairness and equality, despite differences in institutional status, gender, and skills level. Finally, we selected academics whose published writings indicated their willingness to openly share their experiences with others.

Interviewees participating in this study represent eight different research institutions from across the United States. All participants are nationally recognized for being successful collaborators and leaders in either the field of teacher education or school leadership. All of them are known for establishing school/university partnerships and for writing collaboratively. One of them is a dean, two are full professors, one is an associate professor, and two are assistant professors. The authors are a dean and an associate professor. In effect, this participant pool is representative of all career stages (excluding part-time) within the academy.

The ideas we identified through our personal dialog (see Mullen & Kochan, 2000) were used as a basis for developing interview questions about women’s collaborative experiences. Our questions addressed four primary areas: (1) definitions, influences, and motivation; (2) types and extent of collaborative activities; (3) positive and negative aspects of collaboration; and (4) lessons learned. Additional probing questions were spontaneously used as each interview progressed. The questions framed for this study were:

1. How would you define collaboration in a metaphoric sense?
2. What personal or professional factors or experiences influenced you to engage in collaborative work?
3. What percentage of your work is collaborative?
4. What are the primary types of collaborative activities that you engage in?
5. What are the primary reasons that you engage in collaborative work?
6. What are the advantages of collaborating?
7. What are the primary benefits you accrue from these experiences?
8. Are there any disadvantages to you in engaging in collaborative work?
9. What primary lessons have you learned from your collaborative experiences?
10. Do you have additional thoughts you would like to share about your collaborative experiences?

Data Collection

One of us contacted the potential interviewees by telephone to explain the purpose of the study and the interview protocols, and to request participation. Interviewees were also informed that they had been selected because they had earned reputations as successful and authentic collaborators. The women who agreed to participate received the interview questions in advance.

Our previous dialogs suggested that some of the experiences shared in these interviews might be awkward, even painful. Thus, we conducted private personal interviews that would allow our participants to be more open, and that would enable us to provide support and empathy if needed. The interviews were held at various national conferences, in hotel rooms, or over meals in quiet surroundings.

Initially we planned for just one of us to conduct all of the interviews. We thought this strategy would lend a balance to our analysis since one of us would have a sense of the emotions and nuances of the interviewees, while the other would have a more objective reaction to the words as data. However, logistics required one of us to conduct five of the interviews and the other conducted one.

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, and all information was kept confidential and anonymous. Interviewees were informed that taping would discontinue during the session should they signal privacy. Only one participant asked that the recorder be turned off during a particular revelation. These interview parameters facilitated a level of trust that promoted candid and forthright discussions.

Data Analysis

The interview data were combined with our personal research conversations. Responses of the eight women (including the two authors) were examined question by question. We each conducted a separate analysis of the transcribed data, organized the key concepts, and then used the constant comparative method to blend common ideas into themes for data analysis purposes (Merriam, 1998). We developed a data summary sheet arranged in the order of the interview questions, with the vital information inserted. The name of the interviewee was recorded along with the position/professional role, data (responses), themes and subthemes, and powerful quotes from the interviews. We then compared the results of our analyses and together conducted an overview analysis. This joint analytic strategy helped us to understand the data more fully.

In the thematic analysis to follow, we describe the data in relation to our research
questions. We quote the more representative and also compelling feedback associated with each interview question.

**Emergent Themes of Collaborative Work**

*Metaphors of Collaboration*

The interviewees were asked to describe or define collaboration in terms of a metaphor. A consistent theme of collaboration among these women was of partnership as a marriage. Interestingly, a male academic who has written about collaboration in Professional Development Schools also used this analogy (Teitel, 1998).

The concept of oneness, as symbolized by marriage, was expressed in many ways. The women typically commented: “[Collaboration is like marriage because] marriage is something in which there are up and down periods, but there really are also very strong bonds”. One woman shared that being connected with her collaborators is “almost like breathing together despite different strengths, experiences, and abilities in order to reach a common goal”. Metaphors for collaboration as marriage, in addition to breathing together, included shared origins or dissolved tracings:

No idea I ever had came from me. And the best ones I have had were bits and pieces of a whole bunch of other people.

I do not think of collaboration as someone strategically dipping into my newspaper to use my comics section for his or her own purposes. It is collaboration to me when you can no longer say where an idea came from within a joint work because you could not really trace it back to one person or the other.

The notion of two writers as one continuous (although sometimes interrupted) self is narrated in Paley and Jipson (2000). Diamond and Mullen (1999) also pursue this theme, but with a focus on how writing jointly can make it “difficult for us sometimes to know who is ‘citing’ whom” (p. 326). They used the metaphor of being “roped together” to acknowledge their interdependence in collaborative work.

The analogy of a marriage carries with it not only wholeness, but also the tremendous effort that is involved to achieve that wholeness while maintaining one’s individuality. This relationship inevitably involves struggle, loss, and recovery, as one woman described: “Once, the principal [my collaborator] and I needed space to grieve for something we had lost but still wanted. It was like a marriage. When people go through this together they can end up stronger. Our relationship has turned around 180 degrees”. Apparently this “marriage” was saved.

Although the central notion of collaboration was that of marriage, collaboration was also defined using such other descriptors as “vision”, “dialogic”, “inquiry”, “exhilaration”, “complexity”, and “transformation”. Several individuals also saw it as a form of “brainstorming” predicated upon “a clear division of labor that can get passed back and forth”. Another metaphorical definition, somewhat unusual but based on a participant’s prior experiences, associated collaboration with “a farm
operation in which efforts must be coordinated, or else the ‘cows’ will run out of the ‘pasture’ and effort will be wasted trying to round them back up”. Finally, one interviewee defined collaboration as an experience of modeling and “building capacity so that people can examine how by working together they maximized their work and learn to deal with the notion of territory and people owning particular spaces”. These metaphors, although not specifically related to the “marriage” analogy, carry the concepts of inter-relatedness, balancing the individual and the whole, and dealing with complex relationships.

Influences, Motivation, and Involvement

Although it was difficult for the women to identify a “defining moment” leading to their involvement in collaboration, there seemed to be experiences and opportunities that moved everyone along this path. While not presented as specific events that caused them to become collaborative, influences toward collaboration appeared in tangible and subtle ways as people reflected upon their history. For example, early in her career, one American interviewee lived in varied Pacific cultures that functioned in ways that were cooperative and collaborative. Working and living there changed her ways of “knowing, being, and doing”, influencing her to seek collaborative arrangements and colleagues who valued collaborative work.

Another woman, married for 26 years, identified marriage as a possible starting point of the collaborative focus. For her, this personal arrangement has apparently sustained her life and her work: “Marriage has taught me a lot about how to collaborate—when you have to give, let the other person be first, even when you feel like you should be first, and when you go first when the other person thinks they should be first”. Another person who initially stated that she “had been collaborating all her life”, later added that “collaboration was not a part of my graduate training. I got into it when I started my first academic position” when she became involved in a “whole series of collaborative research studies”. Although one of the women could not pinpoint why she engages in collaboration, she appears to view it as a developmental process: “I’ve worked hard at learning how to become a really good collaborator”.

Some of these women believe that their propensity toward collaboration is a natural part or expression of their being. They shared such comments as:

I am a people person. I enjoy being able to dig into soul and self.

Collaborative work extends back to the early years of my life.

It’s not that women are natural-born collaborators and men are not.

Other women also reflected on the possibility that their personal desire to collaborate may be rooted in their gender and development. As one explained: “The theory on moral development [purports] that women embrace connection in their youth because that is how they derive their total identity, by connecting with the mother [which men must separate from and then reconnect to later]”.

Included among these influences were various forms of participating in colleagues’
projects and initiatives subsequent to personal invitation, as well as reading about others’ work. This insight holds promise for beginning collaborators and others committed to creating more collaborative cultures in their organization by providing opportunities and experiences that foster organizational change.

Another important element in motivating collaborative efforts was a sense of responsibility to transform the cultures of schools and universities. Typical comments were:

I involve my students in partnering with others because of my concern about preparing my undergraduate students to work collaboratively in schools.

There was bad history between the university and the schools, and I am working to overcome that.

Additionally, one woman described her involvement as helping to create a “personal vision” of “what the world should be like and what I hope the teaching profession would be like ideally”. For another, collaboration “gets at the heart of some important things we want to do to make a difference”.

Although most respondents noted experiences that promoted their collaboration, the intensity and longevity of collaborative work makes the notion of a starting point seem elusive, even artificial. As we analyzed the data, the answer became circular—a “chicken and egg” phenomenon. We were therefore not able to determine whether opportunity and experiences influenced collaboration, or if the desire to collaborate resulted in opportunities to do so.

Whatever the initiating cause or the motivating influences, collaboration carries a deep connection with learning, engagement, and commitment for these women, associated with their identity and development as relational beings. In *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) discuss the issue of “separate and connected knowing”. Considering issues related to motivation, influences, and involvement, the female academics we interviewed can be characterized as “connected knowers” who conduct themselves from a “premise of connection”, rather than from the expectations of authorities.

*Engagement Levels and Types of Collaborative Work*

Most of our interviewees worked with a variety of partners both in the K-12 and higher education environments. Their collaborations included conducting joint research, co-authoring publications, developing partnership relationships between institutions and disciplines, and working collaboratively with their departmental colleagues. Such collaborative efforts included individuals within their own institutions or geographical areas, as well as scholars from different states and countries. Our participants were active members of learning networks, professional development schools, and varied types of writing groups. The breadth of their collaborative work was surprising, and the dimensions and purposes were wide-ranging. These collaborative efforts were overlapping, and so no effort was made in the data analysis
to determine whether there were differences in how these women perceived collaboration based upon types of partnerships.

The amount of collaborative effort in the participants’ professional lives cannot be quantified. During the interviews, none of the women responded with actual facts or figures when asked how much of their work they would consider to be collaborative. Typical comments were: “I would say all of it is” and “I have a hard time putting a percentage on it”. They all covertly resisted the compartmentalized, reductive nature of this question in favor of developmental and holistic perspectives. As one woman shared: “I have really learned how to craft maintaining myself as an individual while maintaining my individual agenda within a collaborative structure”.

This particular academic does not perceive herself as an individual with independent interests living separately from others, but rather as a self that ultimately “accomplishes something larger than what I can do on my own”. She values work that is conducted collaboratively. While this researcher does benefit from working independently from time to time—“theorizing things out of my own experience and reflections”—she viewed this effort as ultimately supportive of the communal enterprise: “Most knowledge is built on connection. It’s a fallacy to think otherwise. We are building in the social sciences upon the knowledge bases that others have given us, but it doesn’t get framed that way. Instead, it gets framed much more as an individual activity”. Learning alone in the academy is an illusory stance, as far as this participant is concerned. She believes that all autonomous work, including her own, is an outgrowth of the interdependence that underlies our shared work as educators.

**Advantages of Collaborating**

We invited respondents to share the advantages of collaboration and the benefits they gained from their relationships. Because responses to these two areas overlapped, we reported them together. Reflecting on advantages and benefits, individuals highlighted the affective gains expressed as the emotionally fulfilling aspect of collaborative work. Typically, these women shared: “I wasn’t really prepared for how emotional it can be to collaborate. A partner can lift you up when you need a lift”. Another reinforced this message: “There is a benefit in the support you get from one another”.

These women collectively viewed collaboration as learning at many complex levels, and as ambiguous work. Typical comments included:

- I like collaborating because then I’m learning. I benefit by coming to better understand how things work and how people work. I like the complexity of it. I like the ambiguity of it. I like the people part of it. And I like the messiness of it.
- Collaboration pushes my thinking. It’s never boring.

Also, someone else spoke about collaboration within the school–university context, believing there is benefit “for those learning to teach because they can do so much better when there is that partnership support. Everybody benefits from collaboration in Professional Development Schools”.

These academics identified the experience of developing ideas through a shared synergistic process as a major advantage of working with others. The value of becoming energized and even re-invented in the presence of another through giving ideas meaning was strongly conveyed:

It’s enriching to bounce ideas off someone else and to hear your idea elaborated on by your collaborator who has come up with some interesting take on it, which stimulates your new ideas and an overall building process of each other’s ideas.

We had been getting to know each other as collaborators, but only in a superficial way, when we decided to collaborate on writing a chapter by using a creative method. We wrote a scene and sent it to the next person who responded until we ended up with a passionate piece full of who we are, a process that doubled our feeling about one another.

In many diverse ways, the participants acknowledged that collaboration made them feel valued, excited, and challenged, pushing their thinking and ideas into new directions. As one interviewee summed it up, “There is benefit in just having the support because this kind of work is suspect by some people and places”.

Collaboration is also advantageous because it allows these women to function in ways they consider comfortable:

Collaborating has helped me to know how to work with others and to learn from them.

I am the kind of person who sometimes will see step 10 of a project, but I desperately need people who can do steps 8 and 9.

Collaborating means that I don’t have to see things from a top-down perspective.

Valuing collaboration, the women reported that they continue to resist operating in hierarchical and isolationist ways. Specifically, it was out of the necessity to meet their need to connect that these female academics had developed alternative models for interpersonal approaches to their work.

Disadvantages of Collaboration

The advantages of collaboration outweighed the disadvantages for our research participants. Still, all of us have been involved in situations when collaboration turned sour. The data from this study suggest that the problem may be that “we don’t live in, and probably never will live in, institutions that can be called collaborative”. Therefore, those who collaborate will “always have to live in two worlds—one that rejects collaboration as a model for shared work and credit and one that glorifies it through the literature, as though it’s a solution for everything”.

Our participants agreed that collaboration “takes a lot of patience” and that it works only for those who are “very relational and who have the capacity to work with other people”. The women have created their own value system, which honors collaboration that helps keep them afloat during difficult times.
Many problems and difficulties have arisen for these women as a result of poor communication or even miscommunication between collaborators. Some described how tasks that did not get completed were a reflection of misunderstandings of roles or tasks. Others spoke of having difficulties in communicating with one another when problems did arise. One woman recalled a time when a colleague spread tales about her, causing her much grief. Describing this situation of “great despair”, she related having “cried a lot because she had been devoted to PDS work, and the collaborative relationship of the PDS wasn’t working”. She continued, “I was upset because the deep convictions that I had held about doing this work had been called into serious doubt”. Others spoke about not knowing how to broach the topic of name order in their collaborative authorship, so they simply let another have first place, even when they believed they deserved this credit.

Different interpretations of what it means to collaborate can also create conflict. Some respondents had experienced the frustration of collaborating with people whose working styles differed from their own. Most spoke about others who failed to make what they considered to be appropriate contributions to the joint effort, seemingly without recognizing their insufficient contribution.

In addition, conflicts arose when one person tried to take credit for another’s work. Less frequent but nonetheless apparent, conflict resulted when collaborators used the shared work for credit as a single author in another publication. One interviewee told a story of discovering that a long-term collaborator had used, verbatim, a major portion of their joint publication in a separate text, mailing her a complementary copy with a note of appreciation for their friendship. Several individuals claimed to have written the bulk of an article only to have a co-author, a senior professor, assume first authorship without any discussion before writing began or after it was completed. One individual illustrated a challenging situation where her trust was violated upon discovering her collaborator was “a snake”. She added: “You can get really hurt because you feel like you have been open and sharing, and giving your all, only to discover the other person is using your information or is taking it as totally theirs”.

When stories were told of doing all or most of the work on a project without receiving due credit, issues of power and status were evident. Most if not all of the women would probably agree with the sentiment expressed by one interviewee: “An underlying gender issue is at work within female–male relationships—women are socialized to do more collaborative work and to do more when they are collaborating, typically with a male of higher academic status”. When discussing times they felt exploited, all of the interviewees used powerfully emotive phrases such as “being abused”, “having a cloud of darkness descend upon me”, and “feeling a sense of powerlessness”.

**Lessons Gleaned and Learned**

Participants were prompted to share lessons learned that could assist individuals embarking on collaborative work relationships and arrangements. Apparent from the data is the notion that trusting relationships take time and energy to build. Those
involved must be willing to share with and learn from one another, and to establish expectations for work allocation as well as to develop ethical boundaries of work produced jointly.

Another closely-related aspect in trust-building is being selective about one’s choice of partner. As one individual advised: “Find someone you can share the ups and downs with that goes beyond the actual work you are focused on”. In addition, respondents cautioned that should boundaries be crossed by a collaborator, the person feeling hurt, offended, or violated must decide whether to confront the issue and continue working with the person, or to leave the relationship itself. For example, when one author fraudulently used joint work as his own, the interviewee confronted the situation but withdrew feeling unresolved remorse. In another case where three people were involved, one of the individuals confronted the issue of mistrust among them but the researchers were able to work through the problem. The experience of confronting their personal issues in this context proved emotional, draining, and difficult. However, the open and honest struggle resulted in an outcome that paved the way for a commitment to work together more honestly as a team. An obvious implication of this scenario involves the importance of establishing ground rules early that all collaborators consent to.

Most respondents warned that collaborators must realize that disappointments may be inevitable. Collaborative relationships are especially intense forms of engagement not only with inquiry, but also with self and other. Typically, these women advised that it is better to confront the core issues arising from such experiences and work toward a mutual understanding than to settle for unresolved conflict. One individual sent a warning that was somewhat contradictory: “You shouldn’t trust anyone fully, which is really not what you want to do because that negates the possibilities of complete collaboration”. Drawing an analogy to love and betrayal, she continued, “Collaboration can be compared to when people fall in love, so to speak, and you care deeply about that person, only they betray you”. The lesson learned here seems to be “that you never quite trust the same way again. Trust yourself to fall in love the same way, but then if you don’t keep yourself open to that possibility you never fully experience it again”.

Continuing, this woman’s advice for those beginning the work of collaboration is to closely observe actions: “If discrepancies exist between the espoused behaviors and those acted out it’s always the acted out behaviors that are considered more real” (original emphasis). An example given was the troubling gap between the values a professor might espouse about equality in collaboration with a graduate student and contradictory (power) messages sent. Another individual put it this way: “You have to understand that despair is a part of any deep relationship, or of the work itself. Be prepared for people’s feelings because collaboration is emotional work that is intense and messy”.

One critical lesson these female academics have collectively learned is that institutions cannot mandate collaboration and expect such relationships to succeed. This perspective resonates in the context of formal mentoring arrangements for faculty in higher education. Similarly, the literature indicates that informal mentoring relationships built upon shared research interests and interpersonal chemistry
hold promise for change, not mandated expectations (Mullen & Forbes, 2000). One woman compared top-down expectations of collaboration with a forced marriage, where one’s personal power to make a choice is subverted. Novice collaborators might be wise to resist or at least closely monitor any collaborative opportunities that are institutionalized or forced, as support at the grassroots level seems essential.

Another lesson learned from this study is that collaborators need to commit to inquiry focused on “the same center of problems” aimed at making a difference. One woman noted: “This is a model of changing yourself in order that things around you can change, which is how we ought to be operating. This is different from being concerned with provoking a group outside ourselves but with provoking ourselves instead”. The value of collaboration for inspiring self-study and other change practices could go a long way to “saving” new faculty from directing blame at others, especially when one’s own perspectives or working styles may need reconsideration.

Importantly, collaboration requires a strong capacity to tolerate the chaotic elements in one’s work and environment, and to see the creative potential of these elements. Articulating this ambiguity, one person shared: “I like the messiness of it, because I think that’s what classrooms are, what teaching is, and what relationships are, and so I’m drawn to those situations where you find that kind of complexity”. We infer from the women’s comments the probability that who fare well as collaborators are either drawn to or tolerant of the challenges inherent in the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of work that mirrors life itself.

**Implications for Colleges of Education**

The female academics in this study defined collaboration primarily as a kind of marriage, one that has very strong bonds as well as “up and down periods” influenced by external forces. Although these women could not identify a defining moment when they began to engage in collaboration, most of them identified some influence or experience that had initially motivated them to take this path in their professional life.

It has been proposed that women exhibit the ability to model a collaborative and inclusive style, and to re-invent traditional hierarchical cultures (Banks, 2000; Grogan, 1996). We suggest that this viewpoint, although partially grounded in research, should be re-examined, for it fails to recognize the many hardships these women have had to endure and resolve. In terms of women as “natural collaborators”, this study suggests that a caveat is needed that acknowledges these complex and elusive difficulties of collaborative endeavors (for example, Belenky et al., 1986). This study indicates that rather than being a “natural” activity, these women’s collaborative relationships have been proactively shaped and “painstakingly created”. These collaborators, like the authors, have experienced a “roller coaster ride” (Kochan, 2000) with “ups and downs”, thrills and fears, exhilarating heights, and sharp turns and dips.

The problems and benefits associated with collaboration have powerful implications for colleges of education that are seeking to create external partnerships and
new internal cultures in which cooperation replaces or operates alongside of competition. Based on the results of this study, and the emerging literature, it may be imperative that institutions of higher education create systems of support for those engaged in collaborative work (Mullen & Forbes, 2000).

A few guidelines from our reflections on the findings follow, which academies and faculty interested in fostering collaboration may wish to consider and to build upon.

(i) Facilitate the creation of working groups where seasoned collaborators and those new to the collaborative enterprise can meet regularly to share, problem-solve, and learn from one another. These or other sessions can foster research perspectives on collaboration that include articles and presentations on the topic. Mini-grants or travel allowances, or similar rewards, could be used to foster these types of activities.

(ii) Conduct seminars on the issue of collaboration including problems and benefits, possible courses of action, and proposals for ethical guidelines for conduct. Relevant research information and case scenarios should be made available on these topics as well as speakers who are successful collaborators.

(iii) Implement a mentoring system that builds on the research findings (i.e., the value of interpersonal chemistry and non-mandated arrangements) and the needs of the particular academic culture to assist those interested in pursuing collaborative work toward re-culturing the institution.

(iv) Conduct classes or courses on collaboration for undergraduate and graduate students. This intervention could highlight experiences and activities for being prepared to undertake partnership work and the creation of cooperative cultures in schools and universities. It would be imperative that students have the opportunity to practice collaborative work in a safe environment that views difficulties as a learning experience rather than as a failure.

(v) Enable collaboration to become a visible part of the internal culture by honoring different types of partnerships as well as those who engage in relational work, and by using symbols and establishing traditions that celebrate these goals.

**Extending the Conversation on Collaboration**

Our respondents’ statements of relational work communicate an image worth recognizing of those who collaborate as not simply bound “to acquire a marketable skill, but to acquire a dignified, empowering identity…” (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 56). It is our hope that our findings, our insights, and our proposed guidelines will provide some new perspectives on the difficulty and complexity of collaborating in higher education. We encourage others to pursue this type of work more mindfully and with a clearer picture of the pitfalls they might encounter and the benefits they might receive.

More extensive and fine-grained research on collaboration from the perspective of those involved is needed. More comprehensive and longitudinal studies of a larger group of female collaborators focusing on their personal and professional issues, and
on viable approaches to supporting collaborative work within universities, would be instructive. Studies of collaboration involving school–university (and other) inter-agency partnerships, team-based research projects and joint publishing, and co-teaching would be of significant value. An investigation into unique features of such experiences relative to gender, ethnicity, and institutional status would yield additional insight.

Collaboration enriches personal and organizational life on the whole. However, those engaged in intensely relational work must be prepared for the pitfalls and trials involved. Many of us have needed support to overcome obstacles; it was toward this end we chose to conduct this study. Our article has offered some suggestions for colleges of education to consider whether the goal is to create new cultural norms and environments. Individuals should also be able to find merit in our suggestions for their academic development. We hope our results will play a part in elevating collaboration to a central rather than a peripheral feature in our workplaces.

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**Note**

We are equal authors on this paper. As equal collaborators, we have replaced the traditional “&” symbol with “/H11005” between our names in this publication to suggest a new inquiry relationship symbolizing genuinely equal authorship. For an explanation of the equal symbol and other alternative co-authoring systems, please see MULLEN, C.A. = KOCHAN, F.K. (2001). Issues of collaborative authorship in higher education. *The Educational Forum, 65*(2), 128–135.

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