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A Leadership Perspective on the Complexities of Collaboration

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Introduction:

The image of administrators and teachers working together as a bonded, collaborative unit, sharing and striving for common goals in current school reform efforts is certainly one of hopeful promise. However, school teams in their quest to be collaborative are challenged by many complex factors including tensions that arise from systemic expectations, contractual pressures as well as varying degrees of conflicted interpersonal relationships as a part of staff dynamics. Recent qualitative study considered the importance of the affective domain of educator experience in collaborative work (Planche, 2004; Planche 2007). As well, since collaboration is the underpinning of many reform efforts, openly acknowledging and addressing the complexities of collaboration and collaborative processes needs to be a part of moving schools forward.

This article briefly summarizes the findings of my original study (Planche, 2004) and then considers the outcomes of a second phase (Planche, 2007). The second phase of the study sought to deepen my understanding of the role of leadership in the development of collaborative work. Specifically, the following research question was addressed: *What aspects of leadership appear to be the most relevant to the development of professional environments where collaborative processes are valued?* The article concludes with comments regarding implications for collaborative leadership practice as well as considering the underlying ethics that leaders need to demonstrate and nurture as a part of building collaborative working cultures.

The challenge of becoming effective collaborators:

As several research studies have demonstrated, gains in student achievement are certainly linked to the efforts of teachers and administrators working together in highly effective and collaborative ways (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Louis et al., 1996; James & Jule, 2005). Educators must strive to understand more about the dynamics inherent in these efforts. To begin with, it is important for us to define what it means to work effectively with others in school reform efforts. There will no doubt be cultural and contextual factors as overlays to what might be deemed as 'successful collaborative practice'. However, given the fact that teaching and learning are social endeavours, one might easily assume that collaboration is an easily acquired process for educators. The term collaboration is used loosely and frequently when describing improvement efforts and processes in accountability contexts despite the fact that it is a highly valued-laden term. Much of what we expect of collaborative work is assumed, in my personal experience, as a former principal, now a school superintendent and practicing researcher. While I openly offer my own bias that collaboration is a desir-

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able means of improving schools, as an educator and an academic, the foundational questions I wrestle with are two-fold: How do we prepare and develop educators to become effective collaborators and how do systemic structures impede or assist their efforts?

To understand better how to serve and prepare educators, it is important to probe the impact of what we presently call 'collaborative work' on those who experience it. My original qualitative study in 2004 sought to probe the complexities of collaboration and collaborative processes through the perceptions elicited from individual educators. The first phase of the study involved semi-structured interviews, the analysis of perceptual data and included a sample of nine teachers and four principal participants from five different school boards in Ontario. The extension of this research, now completed through the assistance of the participation of five principals from one school board in Ontario, Canada, has sought to deepen and enrich the principal voice inherent within the study. The total number of participants now involved in this two-phased study is eighteen – nine teachers and nine principals. This small, purposeful sample does not allow for generalization but does point out various areas for continued research and further development – especially as it relates to the preparation of educators. As well, an important limitation of this research includes not addressing two very important aspects of collaboration in schools – that of collaborating with parents and with students. However, it is hoped that the findings from this research may inform a larger study with a more inclusive stakeholder group. The underlying theoretical underpinning of this study is that the concept of collaboration can best be understood using a constructivist lens. A constructivist view of learning and social experience recognizes a subjective understanding of reality and the meaning attached to it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The study's conceptual frame included considering the influence of culture, systemic structures, process and content on the collaborative phenomena, as well as the dynamic of personal and interpersonal factors affecting engagement and motivation.

Defining what we mean by collaboration:

It seems, in searching through professional literature, that even defining collaboration is a rather complex matter. Rubin suggests that collaboration is a "purposeful relationship in which all parties strategically chose to co-operate in order to accomplish a shared outcome" (2002, p. 17). This definition might suit certain kinds of collaborations and is certainly a laudable goal. However, as Little (1990) points out, collaborative effort in schools runs a gamut from casual interaction to a sense of co-labouring with deep connections and clear purpose. James and Jule (2005) define collaboration as "joint professional working" and recently reported on the components of a collaborative practice model which includes "joint working in a reflective way on a primary task". In their model, they suggest that the elements of collaboration, reflective practice and a clear focus - all need to be present to develop collaborative practitioners. Data analysis from the original study my article reports on, suggests that how we define collaboration as individuals is influenced by the experiences we have had with collaborative work and by the context and culture in which the work takes place (Planche, 2004). As expressed well by one of the participants in my 2004 study, she indicated that she was learning how to "co-labour" with her colleagues. Our experiences with collaboration appear to have a legacy effect in terms of perception and where conflictual or disorganized collaborative processes have been experienced, scepticism and mistrust appear to take root. As well, personal and professional validation between and among colleagues appears to be very important and help in the development of trusting relationships. In turn, trusting relationships are the underpinnings of moving from polite but superficial collegiality to deeper forms of collaboration.

Themes found in the literature:

Several important themes are found in the literature regarding the complex concept of collaboration. In what has been called as more authentic collaboration, notions of parity and reciprocity are present (Crow, 1998). In these deeper forms of collaboration, Crow suggests, all parties involved have some power and resources at their disposal and believe that they are receiving benefits for their collaborative efforts. Collaboration is often cited as an important element of reculturing schools (Cocklin & Davis, 1966; Fullan, 1996; Hargreaves, 1995). New teachers being integrated into an existing culture of collaborative practice or isolationist practice will experience the culture's paradigm of 'the way things are done around here'. The role collaboration is deemed to play as a part of building educator capacity is another recurrent theme (e.g. Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Harris, 2001; James & Jule, 2005). As well, in a growing stream of literature, collaboration has been suggested as both a means and a natural outcome of professional learning communities (e.g. Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Kruse & Seashore Louis, 1999). Indeed, as Begley points out, collaboration and dialogue are two important meta-strategies integral to the development of community and leadership plays an essential role in supporting and directing this work (2003, p. 100).

The literature also speaks to the tensions within collaborative work such as the challenges of change versus the maintenance of existing school cultures and notions of professional interdependence versus norms of professional autonomy (Pounder, 1998; Achinstein, 2002). Collaborative work is often perceived as adding 'more work' rather than adding value or making work easier. Leonard suggests that skilled leadership is integral to the development of stronger forms of collaboration (1999). Collaborative structures, Leonard points out, while helpful, are insufficient for reaching the goal of authentic collaboration. A collaborative culture must be actively created and seek to integrate a sense of shared vision and shared development (p. 102).

The integration of divergent views is a part of building a sense of shared purpose. Collaborative work may involve building consensus but may also involve conflict as collaborators offer each other diverse views and opinions (Achinstein, 2002). Collegiality is often assumed but may also be a guise, especially if work is directed by school administration without much opportunity for input by those considered as 'collaborators'. Telford (1996) suggests that collaboration is a critical element of transformational leadership. Transformational leadership, as offered by Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach (1999) is a catalyst for deeper forms of change. As well, collaborative leaders tend to be emotionally intelligent, persuasive, conscientious and resilient (Day, Harris & Hatfield, 1999). In short, effective collaborative leaders are often perceived as highly skilled in many different ways.

Analysis of perceptual data:

The following table acts as an organizer for the original study's recurrent themes and offers short samples of reflections (Planche, 2004). A semi-structured interview guide was used to illicit perceptions from the nine teachers and four principals involved in the first phase of the study. Reflections and perceptions of the original study's participants underscore factors that appear to enable and factors that appear to detract and inhibit deeper forms of collaboration. Principal and teacher voice has been combined in this analysis.

Complexities of Collaboration:

Perceived Enablers and Catalysts of Collaborative Endeavour:

A legacy of dynamic interactions which includes:

- Energizing experiences are motivators
- Collaborators as co-investigators
- Capitalizing on personal interest
- Touching the heart as well as the mind
- Clear parameters for collective work

The involvement of Flexible leadership:

- Warm, inviting administrators who are visible and supportive
- Leaders as guides who facilitate
- Leaders who provide mentoring support
- Leaders who get the right people to do the right jobs
- Use of humour to reduce stress
- Understanding adult learning styles
- Promotion of distributed leadership

Includes Intentionality

- Professional development opportunities that build in time for reflection and problem solving
- Use of student data as a focal point – begins more effective processes
- Finding ways to reduce pressure
- Developing shared goals
- Integrated, job-embedded, collaborative structures
- Developing a "bank of goodwill"
- Balancing pressure and support

Impacted by inclusive working environments and strong personal connections

- A sense of equity as partners and colleagues
- A sense of camaraderie
- Sharing of expertise
- Opportunities for meaningful input
- Choice – working with people who want to work
- Colleagues who are open to new ideas and sharing
- Relational trust is evident and reassuring
- Being able to vent in safe arenas
- Belief structure that collaboration is key to student success

Supported by skilled collaborators

- Being able to put others at ease
- Strong communication skills
- Being able to clarify purpose and focus
- Sharing ideas and critical listening
- Able to build on the ideas of others
- Sharing constructive criticisms
- Able to paraphrase, summarize, and reflect
- Reframing and refocusing conversations
- Able to follow through and complete tasks
- Able to mediate as needed

Perceived Detractors and Inhibitors of Collaborative Endeavour:

A legacy of unsatisfying past experiences which includes:

- Frequent staff turnover
- Lack of consultation and time to work together
- Unrealistic expectations of collaborators
- A sense that things are hidden
- Build of resentments from less than positive experiences
- Meetings that are considered a waste of time
- *Lack of common ground for teachers working together*
- Lack of skilled collaborators, unable to clarify purposes/tasks

Involves leadership which appears ineffective:

- Ineffective dualism of an administrator role
- The principal as "hammer"
- New expectations perceived as one more thing to do
- Collaboration perceived as disguised expectations or coercive
- Building capacity seen as invasive
- Forced collaboration driven by compliance, not committance
- Poor communication skills
- Leadership that is not visible or supportive

Imposing cultures and structures

- Strong norms of isolationism and teacher autonomy
- Unnecessary formality
- Limited pockets of collaboration
- Differing understandings about collaborative work
- Political pressures
- Prevailing assumptions and values
- Data driven criteria is disadvantaging to struggling teachers
- Structure inhibits teacher leadership
- Collaboration seen as "make work" rather than "less work"
- Tension between "espoused" beliefs and collaboration

Comprised by tenuous interpersonal relationships

- Lack of relational trust and discretion among team members
- Active and passive resistance
- Interpersonal conflicts
- Negative attitudes
- Lack of regard for personal opinion
- Hesitant collaborators
- Emotional response evoking anxiety
- Mild apprehension to fear or retribution
- Caution, nervousness, mental and emotional fatigue
- Feeling exposed or less than competent
- Work life seeping into personal life
- Feeling unbalanced personally and professionally
- Change threatening one's sense of competency
- Scepticism
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Range of emotional barriers amongst collaborators
- Lack of good will in the collective

In summary, the table outlines in point form, the contrasts and tensions that participants in the first phase of the study spoke about in their experiences with collaborative work. While dynamic interactions, flexible leadership, clear intentionality, inclusion, strong personal connections and experience with skilled collaborators were all catalysts to developing positive perceptions and increased motivation to engage as collaborators, unsatisfying experiences, ineffective leadership, imposing cultures and structures and tenuous interpersonal relationships contributed to negative perceptions and became significant detractors to deeper forms of engagement and motivation. In the second phase of this study (Planche, 2007), the role of culture could be explored in greater depth as all five principal participants work within the same school board— in contrast to the first phase where five different school boards were involved. In this second phase, participants were gleaned through a professional network and with the permission of the Board's research department. The primary research question for the second phase was: *What aspects of leadership appear to be the most relevant to the development of professional environments where collaborative processes are valued?* Principal participants ranged in experience – spanning five to ten years in the role. Again, a semi-structured interview guide was used to begin the conversations which quickly became less structured as participants spoke quite candidly and with fair detail regarding their perceptions of present and past collaborative efforts. In general terms, all five participants spoke about the culture of the board involving specific challenges including hiring processes as well as the contractual understandings of how and when staff might be approached to work together in intentional and collaborative ways.

The participants involved all spoke about the role of relational trust in moving teachers forward and of leadership as a process of influence, especially with restrictive formal opportunities to structure collaborative work. Similarly, to the first phase of the study, for these five participants it appears that deep engagement in collaborative work involved elements of personal choice, stimulating interaction with others and the assistance of supportive structures. In the analysis of the data of the second phase of this study, several key themes were recurrent:

Developing a culture of risk-taking is an important underpinning of collaborative effort:

The principals involved in this second phase all saw the development of a working culture where questions could be asked freely, where risks in learning could be taken and valued as being very important to collaborative growth. As two principals expressed clearly:

First, I think it is important that people realize that it is okay to ask questions. You don't have to know everything. Nobody thinks that you do!

There is also that permission to fail. I try to make that clear to my staff all the time. I'm always washing that over them...

Participation within a culture that is focussed on adult learning as well as student learning also appears to require good communication skills. Participants suggested the need for good listening skills, respectful and reflective dialogues along with a certain maturity level not to personalize professional disagreements. These principals reported a distinct sense of isolation as there was limited time to network with colleagues who were working towards very similar goals:

We are sitting in our offices doing it alone...we all have to complete our school improvement plans for our next SO visit... and we are completing them along...we actually have no time during our principal's meetings as a working session...we talk about it but when push comes to shove we still sit in our offices and do our work.

It would appear that the development of a culture of risk-taking for principals and vice principals is as important as a culture of risk-taking for teaching staff as letting go of traditional notions of power involves a level of risk-taking as well. Resistors on staff played an important role in terms of offering important information:

Listen to your resistors because they are the ones who are going to tell you ...listen and talk.

We have to be perceptive and understand where people are...

Developing shared understandings and beliefs is an important part of engaging staff:

As expressed by one participant, tapping into understandings that life-long learning was valued amongst staff became a useful way to begin dialogues about improvement issues and helped to develop a sense of urgency:

I think all teachers are life long learners and that is a part of it (engagement).

Knowing there is always something new, something to learn, especially from someone else.

It is not fair to blame the kids. We are the teachers. We are the professionals.

Appealing to a sense of purpose was noted by all the participants. In particular, encouraging an ethic of care was expressed several times as well as the role of leaders to model for others:

*...I am trying to get to their heart, to what they are really here for. To feel like they have a purpose in life...if we all have something of a common purpose and we all belong to one another and work together on that, I think we can get there.
...What would you want for your child, if your child was in your class?*

The role of the school leader as a key communicator and as a steward of collaborative effort was clearly expressed. The influence of leadership appears to be an important part of building consensus towards a shared purpose. Aligning beliefs with actions is the challenge for principals. The lines between moral purpose and manipulation are not always clear with calls for “mandated improvement”:

I think sometimes there is a sense of forced collaboration...where people are being asked to collaborate on something they haven't had input into in the first place.

System/Board support is critical in order to develop the collaborative skill sets of staff:

While the participants spoke about creative uses of in-school time and the supports they, as principals, provide their staff in order to encourage collaborative dialogue, all noted that tangible supports are needed in order to move improvement processes forward at a more defined pace. Contractual decisions and hiring practices were referenced often. Principals in this study do appear to find different ways to give teachers the gift of time to dialogue but clearly articulate the need for systemic support and more flexibility than the present cultural realities allow. In-school, job embedded professional development was seen as most effective. Calls for innovative supports such as demonstration classrooms were also mentioned. Several participants referenced a kind of “creative non-compliance” that evolves as a coping mechanism:

We still do it, until support tells you, “you may not”. I don't see why we can't do a little bit of something. (PD at staff meetings)

It's the time. Really that is the main thing. It is so hard because your schedule is so fixed.

The need for specific skill building was cited, particularly in the area of helping teachers and principals better understand how to use data to drive instruction and improvement processes. As one principal expressed, staff “need some training, some development and some hand-holding” regarding data driven exploration and decision making. Another principal suggested that a focus on data assists them from moving teachers from “what is good for me” to “what do the kids need?”.

The need to develop facilitation, mediation and conflict resolution skills were also noted as areas for professional growth for school leaders. One participant spoke of the similarities between the challenges of becoming a good mentor and the challenges of developing strong collaborative skill sets. Very specific facilitation, listening and communication skills appear to move intentions into useful actions.

Affirming and valuing each other as professionals is critical to developing relational trust and motivation in collaborative work.

While all five participants referenced the need for strong relationships in schools, several spoke specifically of understanding “where the staff” is, in terms of levels of apprehension and comfort levels with change. Feeling judged becomes an inhibitor while working within a collaborative culture may be enabling and move people forward. A “tell” disguised under a “collaborative banner” develops resentment and frustration. As one participant said so well, “leaders need to watch for pressure points”. They are the “gatekeepers” of the pace of change as well as the “weavers” who try to introduce new ideas into the mix of school life at opportune times. The more politicized the teaching/learning environment becomes it seems, the more inhibitions appear to increase. An antidote to tensions within the staff appears to be the impact of the behaviour modelled by the leader in the school. Treating each staff member with an equitable amount of respect appears to be highly valued. Participants also spoke about the varying needs of staff – at different stages of their career and with different experiences to add to the staff dynamic. Differentiated support is important for all concerned, including school leaders.

The well established norm of privacy amongst teachers perhaps masking a lack of confidence amongst some staff was referenced several times. In particular, leaders need to assess the dynamics within an entrenched staff and be attune to levels of discomfort.

*Teachers can be very private people, in their own room, their own classroom.
I think maybe they are nervous about sharing, feeling a little intimidated...*

*Am I good enough, can I contribute enough, will my ideas be accepted...
that kind of thing...the judgement aspect would be worrisome for some people.*

One participant coined the role of leadership as needing to have a “light hand” when dealing with considerable apprehension. Trust building takes time and patience is needed. School leaders also need confidence themselves as they work with others in intentional ways.

There is that quiet self-assurance with yourself that allows you to be present for that other person and bring them along...if the uncertainty or anxiety (of the principal) interferes, that is not going to help the protégé.

Implications for collaborative leadership practice:

While qualitative analysis of perceptual data has distinct limitations, the over all themes elicited from this two-phased research suggest the need to better examine the preparatory skills teachers and administrators require for professional collaborative work as well as the structural supports that systemic leadership must consider developing for effective collaborative processes. Time to work together is an obvious structure which most educators say is in too short supply. As well, in the second study, the notion of time being given to teachers as a sign of respect was voiced many times, while in contrast, mandating time together as a foundation of collaborative work was seen as a source of resentment and mistrust. The structure of collaborative work may well provide an outline, a time, a place and the parameters for working together. The content of the collaborative work provides a focus while the form of the work may encompass issues of flexibility and choice. It appears that trust, however, is the element of social capital that cements the relationships inherent in the collaborative. As Mitchell and Sackney suggested, “without trust people divert their energy into self-protection and away from learning” (2000, p. 49).

Pre-service programs as well as new teacher programs, for example, need to set the stage for enhanced professionalism by embedding discussions in group and course work regarding the underpinnings of a trusting school culture. As well, intentionally exploring how schools cultures become ‘stuck’ or negative very early in educator careers with experiential development programs may better equip educators to overcome such barriers. Embedding notions of personal and professional responsibility regarding collaborative skill building throughout the stages of educator development stands out as very important.

While many skills appear to be assumed and related to basic perceptions of professionalism in education, the lack of certain skills often result in disappointing collaborative efforts and can result in a considerable human and systemic cost. Interpersonal rapport is an obvious advantage when working with others. Specific communication skills are also vital. For example, the ability to facilitate critical conversations was highlighted in this study as an important collaborative capacity. Teacher leaders and administrative leaders who are not able to engage others in compelling and critical conversation were often seen as ineffective. School improvement processes need critical communicators working together to become fully engaged in critical thinking and purposeful co-labouring. Reflective conversations which are able to engage collaborators need to be structured with care and guided with skilful facilitation. The integration of strongly developed interpersonal skills as well as skills of effective communication and reflection is a complex order. However, these skills can be enhanced by intentional learning experiences and sufficient practice. It is rather a simplistic view that the personality or innate communication skills of educators will suffice and can be generalized for a population of professionals working in schools. Drawing out the reflective ideas others have to express in conversation involves complex skills. Even more complex is moving participants involved in reflective conversations to initiating purposeful and appropriate actions. Inherent in the skill sets being considered is the ability to clarify purpose or focus, to share ideas and listen critically to the ideas of others. Building on the ideas of others, sharing constructive criticism, paraphrasing understandings, reframing and refocusing discussions so that constructive actions result involve well honed skills and the confidence to engage deeply with colleagues. The depth of these skills reminds us that collaborative work is a complex process which includes the interplay of personal and professional value orientations as well. There are issues of compliance, responsibility, commitment and self-interest in the mix which all impact the degree of educator engagement and as well as providing potential tension points.

Our collective challenge is to help all educators understand their role as agents of change in school improvement processes and that includes challenging the status quo in working relationships. This challenge also serves to remind us of the impact of entrenched cultures where patterns of behaviour become deeply embedded and individual growth can be easily stifled. As Leonard (2002) points out, it is only when teachers are themselves heavily engaged in learning, that the compelling argument for sustained student improvement may be approached. The value of continuous learning for all is a foundational piece of a learning culture where collaboration flourishes.

Risk taking to improve professional practice in a collective way appears to be hinged on developing a foundation of relational trust within a school culture. As Bryk and Schneider suggested, trust as a substantive property of the social organization of effective schools needs to be examined in a critical fashion (2002). Reina and Reina suggest that a transforming trust is synergistic and self-generating (1999). In short, trust as a foundational component of school reform needs much more examination.

Abdalla (2005) suggested, school is the space in which teachers construct the meaning of their profession through the way they face daily challenges. Those challenges are met as individuals as well as members of a school staff. However, developing a sense of shared leadership can transform working relationships and has a bonding effect. Durrant (2003) found in her study that teachers, who were supported in exercising leadership, began to build capacity in their schools in intentional and conscious ways, developing more collaborative ways of working together and using student evidence of learning in examining their own practice in a critical fashion.

While quite frequently, the literature speaks of the need to distribute leadership in school improvement efforts, there is a tension that evolves regarding compliance and commitment issues in schools when improvement initiatives are announced and quickly implemented. Given issues of control and the power structures within school bureaucracies one must question how many

so-called “collaborative initiatives” are driven more by issues of role expectation rather than issues of common vision and purpose – both at the formal leader or principal and teacher levels. Role expectations are inherent to the duties that are fulfilled by educators as employees and members of organizations while commitment, engagement and motivation to collaborate may then be more authentically linked to a shared sense of purpose.

At a recent professional development opportunity, I heard a consulting professor suggest that effective collaborators have developed three essential skills sets – interpersonal, communication and critical thinking skills (Barry Bennett, 2006). This suggestion leads to two important questions: What kind of experiences do educators need to develop these three kinds of skills in an integrated fashion? What kind of experiences will foster trust and the belief that teacher collaborative endeavour makes a positive difference for students and their achievement? These are important questions at the heart of improving schools and I suggest that the intentional and collaborative analysis of specific teaching and learning processes offers the foundational piece to impact significant change. This, of course, speaks to the deprivatization of the classroom as educators share evidence of student learning and teacher challenge within safe arenas. In order to develop such working environments, Langer, Colton and Goff conclude that “a collaborative culture of trust and openness is crucial to the productive analysis of student work” (2003, p. 46). Critical inquiry into learning is in itself a leadership practice as it assumes responsibility, analysis and actions that impact learning.

Transformation of practice appears related to the transformation of relationships within schools. Involving teachers as partners in the way in which structures, forms and content of collaborative work are organized; sustained and evaluated is an example of distributed leadership model that may create deeper, critical and more authentic learning conversations. Being able to clearly articulate a vision and steer the course remains critical work (Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). To serve students, we need teachers and administrators working together to become instructional mediators – mediating the mandates of political and system agendas with the immediate and pressing social, emotional, and academic needs of students. To mediate, we must develop cultures of authentic collaborative inquiry sustained by a sense of moral purpose. Inquiry must lead to purposeful action and informed risk-taking to serve students in beneficial ways. As Lambert suggested, “being together is not in and of itself a basis for success in schools” (2003, p. 21). Skilled collaborative practice involves a clear understanding of the quality of student work that we seek, the standards of practice that we must employ and how to facilitate conversations and actions to get the outcomes we seek. We need purposeful efforts driven by an ethic of care and responsibility to serve our students and each other well. Empowerment is linked to a critical ‘unpacking’ of our individual beliefs and values about working together. As Slater (2004) suggested, collaborators in school reform efforts often wrestle with issues of collaborative diversity, conflict, mutual respect, a lack of time and the ongoing need for hard work. Perceptions impact attitudes, motivation and how we develop personal and professional values. In effect, perceptions become our reality.

Finally, we must strive to better understand the role of ethics and moral purpose in our collaborative work as educators if we are truly to make a lasting difference in the lives of our students. As Starratt (2004) points out, “moral leadership cannot stand above the human condition” (p. 145). It is an essential and hopeful part of the human condition. Moral leadership, as Starratt outlines, involves the development and dynamic interplay of the virtues of responsibility, presence and authenticity (p. 109). Educational environments where educators actively seek to be responsible for and present with students and colleagues alike through purposeful and authentic collaborative effort, allow us to be stretched as professionals and as moral beings. To improve our schools, a leadership perspective on the complexities of collaboration must keep a moral compass and a servant mindset at the helm.

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