
Preface and Overview

Whenever I get asked *Who is a collaborative leader?* the answer is always the same: whether you're a teacher, counselor, principal, parent, policy maker, or student, *you* are a collaborative leader once you have chosen to invest your time to contribute to and benefit from the work of a group. *You* are a collaborative leader once you have chosen to invest in the success of a collaborative enterprise. And, because leadership is a proactive and interactive behavior, this answer encourages each questioner to acknowledge his or her proactive responsibility for education's collaborations. Here's the bottom line: We each share responsibility for the success of the relationships we choose to enter. We cheapen the importance of the time and energy we invest—we demean our own value—and we deny our relational partners the benefits of our perspective and expertise—if we step back, fail to engage, let mistakes happen unchecked, watch problems grow, and blame another (generally the purported “leader”) for missed opportunities or failed efforts.

This is a book for everyone who engages in relationships aimed at contributing to students' learning, teachers' teaching, and the policies and systems of support needed to help them succeed.



A few years ago, someone introduced me to an audience of educators as president of the Institute for Collaborative Learning. At the time I was heading the Institute for Collaborative *Leadership*, but it got me thinking. A collaborative leader is, in fact, a collaborative learner, and vice versa. If you're an effective collaborative leader, you learn about your partners in order to lead them, just like a good teacher learns about each student in order to teach him or her. The more we learn about others, the more collaborative, responsive, and linked to self-interests will be the work we can do with our partners.

The old adage is true: We must first understand if we hope to be understood.

So I began that speech by noting that there is a reason why everything any effective supervisor, manager, or leader needs to know is gathered in the skill pack of every excellent teacher. Excellent teachers connect instructional systems to learners, one child at a time. They not only know what must be learned, but also look at learning through the eyes of each young child they teach. And they take responsibility for their students' learning through planning, practice, tools, and partnerships. Effective collaborative leaders connect their institutional systems to the people with whom they work, one individual at a time, learning enough about the individual and the group to lead systemic change by influencing people collectively and individually. Effective collaborative leaders are clear on the goal they aim to achieve and succeed by learning to see that goal through the eyes of those they lead. And they take responsibility: They become the "institutional worry" leading their partners collectively toward their shared goals.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is dedicated to those whose careers or volunteerism make a difference in the lives of children and families. It draws largely on the author's collaborative and leadership experiences in the world of public preK–20 education; a world that begins in preschool and ends in doctoral programs and includes students, families, teachers, administrators, other school personnel, social service professionals, public policy makers, regulators, accreditors, analysts, vendors, professors, student teachers, clinical supervisors, and more. Let's call it the *preK–20 continuum*.

This is the second edition of a book that grew out of my earlier work *Collaboration Skills for Educators and Nonprofit Leaders* (1998). This one, too, is expanded and revised by the comments, observations, recommendations, and lessons offered in connection with hundreds of collaborations and leaders in schools, communities, businesses, and universities across the nation. This edition benefits, too, from more than six years of new lessons as a dean of education, dean in residence at the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and a stint as distinguished visiting scholar at George Mason University. This edition has a decidedly stronger emphasis on collaboration for *education*: collaboration that supports leaders and leadership at all levels of the preK–20 continuum.

I've written this book with short chapters to invite readers to stop, think, reflect, plan, and then get back to work. It's a practical book intended to help leaders lead, teachers teach, and intellectuals think more effectively with and about collaboration. Its management and leadership lessons are practical and

accessible; they are not drawn from presidential campaigns, sports dynasties, or dramatic corporate mergers. It's not that the concepts and skills we will discuss do not apply to these large complex operations; rather, these grand contexts are simply too distant to feel relevant for most of us who work and volunteer in the public sector. Besides, the size of institutions in which we operate has little bearing on the basic (human) relationship-management skills that collaborative leaders must master to make a difference.

Therefore, this book is geared toward the familiar workaday world of people in the big and small systems that touch the lives of children, including schools, districts, service agencies, volunteer organizations, government bureaucracies, and families.

At the heart of this book is the premise that meaningful public engagement and broadly inclusive participation in public education are virtues. Moreover, it is the responsibility of education's leaders to find ways to build and maintain mutually accountable partnerships with every adult who can contribute to the success of public education. This book is written to be a tool for such public leadership.

First and foremost, this is a book for educational leaders (in school districts and nonprofit and government agencies), staff members and volunteers, university faculty, teachers, and students preparing for any of these positions. It is a book for board members and policy makers who shape the contexts—and can model collaboration—for all these professionals. It is a practical conversation about what it takes to form and focus the collaborative relationships necessary to accomplish important public missions, particularly education. It is a book about building villages.

This is a good time to be thinking about collaborative leadership and preK–20 education. Big changes are in the wind nationally and in states and districts across the nation: the kinds of changes that public intellectuals demand and that no one public leader, organization, or sector can make on its own; changes that call on leaders to reach beyond their own borders to build sustained and broad-based support; changes that can best emerge from strong and coherent systems that build clarity, trust, aligned visions, passionate commitment, and shared resources through collaboration.

The mood across America is increasingly collaborative. The first decade of the 21st century has been littered with political divisiveness, partisanship, and an international image of aggressiveness. Our options are either isolation or bridge-building; polarized encampments or collaboration. We know that, increasingly, there is very little any one nation, group, institution, or individual can accomplish on its own. One way or another, we connect; we build relationships. And just as teaching has progressed from a craft and an art to a profession, we know that we can study and learn *how to build and manage relationships*—the definition of collaboration—better and better.

So, although this is a good time to be reading this book, be warned: This is more a book of *polemics, concerns, theories, and models* than it is a book of *answers*. The purpose of this book, first and foremost, is to cause people to think about collaboration—not necessarily to instruct them how to do it. In causing people to think about it, my hope is people will do it more often, aim to do it better and with more intentionality, and, in so doing, look for and propel research and formal exploration by scholars and professionals that might contribute to a "science of collaboration" for learning and leadership. Mental models, dimensions, and phases of collaboration are introduced in this book in order to

- encourage and contribute to this research and exploration by giving professionals and scholars starting points for their further reflection and study and
- support reflective practitioners, teachers, and professors with rudimentary tools to help them do and teach collaborative leadership, because there is so little out there to support this right now.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHILDREN

Because *relationships* are at the core of collaboration, an easy case can be made that the most important public context for *doing* collaboration is in and around our public schools. PreK–12 education is, for every child, a *place* and a *time* connected by a jumble of *relationships*. Relationships that transform and are shaped by preexisting relationships with parents and family. Relationships that inaugurate, propel, or stymie future relationships with teachers, mentors, and instructional systems. Relationships that introduce, threaten, reward, energize, and elucidate the joys and challenges of friendships. Relationships with collectives, cliques, teams, clubs, and partners. Relationships that, at their best, prepare youngsters for their civic duty of improving communities by working well, playing well, and living well with others.

Building relationships between children and the institutions associated with schooling and learning is the most important and overlooked function of formal education. The quality of that relationship—how good each child feels about his or her relationship with the institutions and individuals associated with learning at the preschool and early elementary levels—shapes the academic self-concept, the formation of learning skills, and the educational goals of students. As students progress through their school systems, this relationship affects dropout rates, individual career goals, and augurs each young adult's commitment to pursue the further schooling needed to make high career goals realistic.

Building relationships between schools and the public and community institutions that surround them is essential for the effectiveness and continued viability of both schools *and* communities. It is reasonable to expect that the leadership for initiating, building, and maintaining these relationships should come from education professionals. These are the people we trust and train to facilitate our children's growth into learned and learning young adults. However, there are also wonderful examples in which this leadership has stepped forward out of political and nonprofit positions.

A common phrase in education literature is "teacher as leader." This book will expand the conventional domain of school leaders (teachers, principals, and others) beyond the four walls of their classrooms or the borders of their school campuses to that of community advocate and coalitional leader. Such leaders build collaborative relationships involving community organizations, social service agencies, government offices, political officials, philanthropies, businesses, parents, other school personnel, and children in order to meet the needs of children and families, serve the schools' instructional agenda, and, in so doing, improve the quality of life for the entire community. Leaders of this type—in schools, nonprofits, and communities—are rare. But we know they're out there . . . and we need more of them.

Teachers, school administrators, volunteers, and nonprofit managers in youth-serving organizations and students preparing for any of these roles will find the discussion and lessons of this book most immediately relevant. College deans, university presidents, philanthropists, and government policy makers are in the best positions to carry this discussion forward so as to elevate collaboration as a priority of public leadership, integrate it into the training and certification of institutional leaders, and support the research and development that this emerging field logically deserves.

A NOTE TO GRANT MAKERS

Grant makers, too, whether they are in family foundations, corporations, and government agencies, have two overarching reasons for reading this book.

First, most people don't think about how important the relationships are that grant makers grow and manage with their applicants and recipients. I hope this book helps grant makers reflect upon and strengthen these ties.

Second, most grant makers encourage collaboration; many even call for it in their funding guidelines. By strategically reflecting on the stages of building, managing, and evaluating collaboration during grant-making decisions, grant makers can improve the transformational impact of their

grants. Taking the time to reflect on the reasons, components, stages, skills, and challenges of collaboration will improve grant makers' ability to build and support collaborative solutions to the problems they aim to tackle. I encourage grant makers to reflect on how collaboration can help improve the impact of their grant making (not in the ideal, but in very specific and measurable ways) and to consider their roles not only as funders of collaborations but also as *partners* whose contributions to their grantees can help leverage effective and accountable collaborative problem solving. Please kick back and enjoy this book. I offer it as a catalyst for reflection.

A NOTE ON WRITING A BOOK

The last edition of this book was written in the earliest shadows of passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA). At that point, the Act's implications were unclear; its impact was unformed; public sentiment was grounded only in partisan predispositions, as there was, as yet, no evidence on which to base opinions. So it didn't show up in the book. During the shelf-life of that volume, I was encouraged to integrate the multitudinous implications of this federal law into discussions of collaborative leadership in the next edition. But books are funny things; their shelf lives are truncated by their means of production. In other words, even the most contemporary academic books are written months before they are sent into production and are in production months before they hit the shelves. In the span of time between the author's thought and readers' eyeballs, seismic shifts in national and global realities can occur.

This author had the chance to apply final pen strokes to this edition just moments after the election of Barack Obama, making these reflections even more timely. His election is a heartening endorsement of the power of collaborative leadership. The vision and principles in this book should resonate with leaders who represent or emulate this new administration and, as time passes, should guide those who may need to be reminded that collaborative governance is predicated upon leaders' ability to build and manage authentic relationships, one at a time.

Writing this at a time when we know no more than that we are at a pivotal moment in American political history: Is it safe to assume that NCLB is or is not an ongoing reality? Perhaps this is why Socrates employed metaphors and allegories.

A QUICK GUIDE FOR THE READER

This short volume has six parts:

- We start right out, in Chapter 1, with operational definitions for our work in collaboration.
- Chapters 2 and 3 look at the context, reasons, and complexities of collaboration from a number of perspectives, broadly addressing why the study and reflective practice of collaboration is important (i.e., answering the question *Why?*).
- Chapters 3 and 4 explore what collaboration looks like (*What?*).
- Chapters 5 and 6 offer several perspectives on the relationship of collaboration and education (*Where?*).
- Chapters 7 and 8 provide mental models and tips to make it easier for each of us to understand, discuss, and do collaboration. This includes Constellations of Relationships, Collaboration's Life Cycle, and the Dimensions of Collaborative Leadership (*How?*).
- Chapter 9 singles out a few nuggets of advice for those readers looking for pithy guidance *right away!*
- Finally, the appendices introduce tools for those of you ambitious enough to take the next steps: (a) a planning and diagnostic tool for the process and systems of collaboration (based on Collaboration's Life Cycle); (b) a guide for teachers, curriculum developers, and researchers addressing the teachable, learnable, and researchable knowledge, skills, and dispositions of collaborative leaders (based on the Dimensions of Collaborative Leadership); and (c) a conceptual description of what a "school of collaborative excellence" might achieve . . . if we put our minds to it.

DEAR READER . . .

Can we do this together?

This book continues a dialog that should get some of us thinking about how to become better collaborative leaders. It should get other readers to think about how we might contribute to research that may advance the knowledge base for effective collaborative leadership. And, I hope, it gets all of us thinking about how to expand the scope of our vision, skills, and institutional resources so that building and contributing to successful collaborations becomes a routine part of how we do business. You and I are collaborators in this conversation!

The words, advice, and teachings of hundreds of colleagues, friends, students, and teachers have shaped the thoughts that fill this book. Don't let the fact that my name appears all by itself on the title page fool you. This work has more authors than I can count! Please join the conversation.

If this book succeeds in generating questions, comments, cases, and suggestions from you and other readers, then we will all benefit from the discussion that results. Not only do I look forward to responding to your communications, but I also promise that subsequent volumes will be stronger and more helpful as a result.

Thanks.

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