



Collaboration as a New Creative Imaginary: Teachers' Lived Experience of Co-Creation

by Patrick Howard

Abstract

Research on collaborative professionalism may be enriched by inquiries into the lived experiences of teachers. The question of what collaboration is like for teachers has not been taken up widely in the literature. The meaning of collaboration as a coming together of individuals who share, design, and co-create for purposes that are aligned with generative possibilities of producing something new, of understanding something in a novel way, and to combine perspectives, personalities, experiences and expertise, represents a new area for research. This paper presents a phenomenological analysis of teachers' lived experiences of collaboration. To ask these questions requires an orientation to the lived experience of teacher collaboration. For the purposes of this paper, two themes – collaboration and a creative imaginary, and collaboration and relationality – are described as unique structures of human experience. This research supports the conclusion that research in the field of collaborative professionalism and teacher collaboration may be significantly deepened by inquiries into concrete lived experiences of teacher collaboration.

Introduction

Collaboration as an organizing concept and a competency to be developed in K-12 education has gained currency over the past two decades. In Canada and the United States, teachers are called on to model the 21st century competencies: character, citizenship, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, and creativity and imagination (C21, 2017; Fullan, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013, 2014). In North America, teacher professional development has, for the better part of three decades, predominantly been organized around the construct of collaboration in one form or another. Professional collaboration purportedly “boosts student achievement, increases teacher retention, and enhances implementation and change” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 3). There has been a great deal of research on collegiality, communities of practice, co-operation, teacher relationships, professional learning communities,

and teaching teams, and how these collaborations take different forms with different values contributing to different agendas. Teachers' lived experiences of the collaborative process and the influence of creativity as a generative catalyst for co-creation challenges the scope of teacher collaboration research, as these ideas have not been widely examined previously.

The present paper presents a phenomenological analysis of teachers' experiences of professional collaboration. What is it like for teachers to collaborate? How might the experience of teacher collaboration be described so that it may become better understood? To ask these questions requires an orientation to the lived experience of teacher collaboration. For the purposes of this paper, two themes – *collaboration as a creative imaginary* and *collaboration and relationality* – are described as unique structures of human experience. The findings contribute to the research record on teacher collaboration, and, more

specifically, contribute knowledge about teachers' lived experience of the collaborative process, and about how collaboration understood experientially intersects with human creativity and creative capacity.

Background

The term collaboration had little uptake in educational literature until relatively recently. The word *collaborate* was freighted with negative connotations after it was first recorded in 1940 to describe "the traitorous co-operation with an occupying enemy" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2019). It was not until the 1960s that library catalogues included entries on *collaboration* to mean working together co-operatively (Roe, 2007). Today, the word *collaborate* in its various forms reflects a fundamental shift in Western thinking away from the ideal of the self-maximizing individual in favour of a collective sense of communal effort and connected intelligence. The shift towards a more collaborative culture across all aspects of society has been accelerated by information and communication technologies, social media, the drive for innovation, and enhanced modes of connecting in an increasingly globalized world.

Although the term is ubiquitous, arriving at an agreed upon definition is challenging. Roe (2007) attempts to delineate a clear definition of collaboration and draws on

the work of Schrage (1990) who proposed a definition of collaboration as a process of shared creation in which two or more individuals with complementary skills interact to create a shared understanding that neither had previously possessed or could have come to on their own; shared meaning is created about a process, a product, or an event. Moran and John-Steiner (2004) define collaboration as representing a *higher standard* compared to everyday social interactions that include working together and co-operation. Collaboration involves a blending of skills, temperaments, efforts and sometimes personalities to realize "a shared vision of something new and useful" (Moran & John-Steiner, 2004, p. 11). Commentators have worked to differentiate collaboration, its forms and processes from the more quotidian interactions associated with co-ordination, co-operation, and working together, which are often relegated to "less elaborate and less ambitious undertakings" (Pollard in Roe, 2007, p. 22). As with any human experience, attempts to demarcate what constitutes collaboration are understandably messy and, one may argue, not in fact possible.

Roe (2007), Sawyer (2008), John-Steiner (2000), Montiel-Overall (2005) and others have described collaborative structures that align with three basic classifications. The classifications attempt to differentiate collaboration in scope and depth.

Table 1: Differentiation of Collaboration

1. Co-ordination	A common practice of groups and individuals where information is exchanged, and people assist one another for increased work efficiency. Includes arranging schedules and meetings to avoid redundancies. Minimal levels of involvement by participants; efficiency is key.
2. Co-operation/Partnership	This classification is synonymous with organizational management literature. Involves greater commitment with an end product as an outcome. Participants come together to share resources, space and ideas. Confidence and trust are developed. Indicates an ethos of teamwork, co-operation and networking, with some interdependence.
3. Integration	This model is the most involved and intense. Participants take part in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation. Responsibility and conceptualization are a joint venture. Partners work closely and develop a synergy that allows them to create together. Partners expand their individual potential and create jointly what would exceed their capacity individually (Montiel-Overton, 2005).

Collaboration is one of the “6Cs” of 21st century education (C21, 2017; Fullan & Langworthy, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). It is understood as the ability to “work in teams, learn from and contribute to the learning of others, social networking skills, empathy in working with diverse others” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 22). The collaboration called for in 21st century teaching and learning best aligns with the collaborative structure of *integration* (Montiel-Overton, 2005). Collaboration is also understood as being instrumental for the purposes of “creation and use of new knowledge in the world” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 32). Teachers are expected to model collaboration for students, and these “new pedagogical capacities” (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p. 56) are developed through professional learning undertaken in an established collaborative culture. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) point out that

... we have 40 years of research showing that continued, focused collaboration produces school-wide learning Our conclusion is that developing learning cultures is the primary task, with professional development and appraisal as enablers, not drivers. Professional learning should be designed as a holistic, ongoing formative feedback cycle with continuous collaboration at its centre. (p. 57)

The language of collaboration as it relates to *student learning* is closely associated with creativity, imagination, and developing new knowledge. This type of collaboration is classified as fully “integrated” in the collaborative framework presented by Montiel-Overton (2005). Individual capacity is expanded as students create together. However, when we look closely at the language of collaboration as it relates to *teachers*, we find that this is not the case. Teacher collaboration, as it is most often explicated in the literature, does not meet the classification of integration.

Teacher Professional Collaboration

Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, and Kyndt (2015) conducted a systematic review of research on teacher collaboration. The study investigated the focus and depth of teacher collaboration as it appeared in the research. Of particular interest in the study by Vangrieken et al. is the fact that there is not a single use of any of the terms *creativity*, *co-creation*, *imagination* or *new knowledge* in the review. The focus and depth of teacher collaboration was delineated on a continuum from *superficial* to *deep-level*. However, the connection of teacher collaboration to the classification of “integration” that reflects synergy, creativity, co-creation, and increased creative capacity is non-existent in the literature.

In a recent publication, Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018) build on thirty years of research on teacher collaboration

and propose the concept “collaborative professionalism” (p. 4). Collaborative professionalism, as conceived by Hargreaves and O’Connor, “is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success” (2018, p. 4). Their definition further points to the “joint work” of collaborative professionalism as “embedded in the culture and life of the school”, and emphasises the fact that “educators actively care for and have solidarity with each other” as key to their collaborating professionally to “pursue their challenging work together” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 5). The authors outline 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism designs. The tenets conceptualize such collaboration in abstract and generalized ways. This level of abstraction is reflected in the tenth tenet, *Big Picture Thinking for All*: “In collaborative professionalism, everyone gets the big picture. They see it, live it, and create it together” (p. 7).

Collaborative professionalism and teacher collaboration research as a whole may be enriched by inquiries into concrete lived experiences of teacher collaboration and into *what it is like* to collaborate. What is the meaning of collaboration as a coming together of individuals to share, to design, to co-create for purposes that are aligned with generative possibilities for producing something new, of understanding something in a novel way, to combine perspectives, personalities, experiences and expertise for a shared purpose? What do we really mean when we say of collaboration that it is to “see it, live it, and create it together” in order to “get the big picture” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 7)? The present study is an initial attempt to address the gap that currently exists in the research literature on teacher collaboration.

Methodology

The present inquiry is part of a larger study titled *Re-conceptualizing Teacher Identity for the Creative Economy*. The research took place at six sites across Canada with teacher participants. Data was gathered on the teachers’ lived experiences as they developed creative practices. The teachers were trained as artists/researchers and encouraged to experiment with emerging pedagogical practices and design thinking to support innovation within their school communities and within their own professional practice. While space will not permit a full explication here of the a/r/tographic process undertaken with the teachers, it has been described elsewhere (see Howard et al., 2018).

As teachers at the research sites engaged in the creative processes of artmaking, important themes began to emerge (Howard et al., 2018). At the author’s research site, the participants chose to collaborate to design *something* that would be useful to their day to day practice. Over a period of four months, a multi-modal, multi-

media online teacher resource, designed to help other teachers use digital media in lesson planning, gradually took shape. The teachers worked closely together to develop the requisite skills to bring their design to life. The six teacher-participants responded to a call distributed widely to teaching staff through school district email. Serendipitously, the group represented generalist primary and elementary grade teachers (Kindergarten to Grade 6), two specialist secondary teachers (Technology and Music), and a former school principal who had returned recently to the middle school classroom. Four female participants and two male participants responded to the call. One teacher was at the beginning of her career; one was nearing retirement, and the others were mid-career teachers. Other than the Music teacher, none of the participants identified themselves as either art teachers or artists. The inquiry relied on primary sources of data including journal records of participants' direct and past experiences of the collaborative process.

The participant teachers' experiences with professional collaboration were described primarily through analysis of their respective lived experience descriptions (LEDs) and vignettes (Schratz, Schwartz, & Westfall-Greiter, 2013) of concrete situations in which they had worked collaboratively. LEDs in narrative form were used to define collaborative situations and to determine within each individual situation the point from which further reflection can proceed. The participants met as a group once weekly over the four-month period in which collaboration took place. In the final six weeks of the research period, interviews were conducted with each of the individual participants, with discussions and the sharing of journal entries in detail-focused open-ended conversational interviews (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nyström, 2002; Vagle, 2014; van Manen, 1997, 2016) providing opportunities for further reflection.

Data Interpretation

Phenomenological interviews, experiential lifeworld material (anecdotes, narratives), detailed notes, and audio recordings of open-ended conversations generated the empirical research data that captured pre-reflective direct experience. The data are descriptive in the sense of revealing in greater detail the authentic, experiential narrative accounts written by the respective participants. The participants shared lived experience descriptions and vignettes through written journals and conversational interviews that were audio recorded and transcribed using Atlas.ti software. Rich data emerged and were subjected to thematic analysis. The transcripts revealed thematic statements that formed the basis of more in-depth phenomenological descriptions. Both holistic and selective approaches were employed to isolate thematic statements of practical significance (van Manen, 1997, 2016).

The first step in a phenomenological inquiry is to orient

to the lived experience by questioning and focusing attentively on the nature of the phenomenon being investigated. It is regarded as essential to put aside or bracket (Giorgi, 1997; Husserl, 1913/1998; van Manen, 2016) or at least bridle (Dahlberg, 2006) pre-existing assumptions, conceptions, biases, and taken for granted perspectives in order to uncover essential aspects of the phenomenon itself – the meaning structures of experiences as they are lived *through* by bringing them to the fore. We begin inquiring into the notion of collaboration by setting aside what has been previously given or taken for granted in order to focus on the meaning of collaboration as it reveals itself in the lived experiences of the participating teachers.

Collaborative and a Creative Imaginary

I remember getting my first job with this board. I had just moved back from B.C. [British Columbia] and immediately made a connection with a Grade 2 teacher. She made me feel so welcome. We would PLC¹ just about every day after school. Really, it was mostly a time to talk, for discussion and great conversations. It was about sharing. I had experiences and ideas to bring, and, of course, she had been teaching longer than me so her contributions were many. That is why collaboration is so important – we learn from each other to create something new!

During that year our main project was creating a social studies unit that encompassed multiculturalism. I shared some things I'd done in the past when I taught out west. She was open [to] and accepting of my ideas. Now, I don't consider myself the most creative person, especially when left on my own to develop something, but working together with someone you connect with – that's a different story for me. We took great pride in building something together, just playing with ideas and developing a unit that included a day of Food Around the World. The whole school researched recipes from other countries and families cooked them. It was quite an event. I remember the joy that was felt by everyone. This was all because two teachers decided to create an inspiring experience for their students.

On the surface, an experience such as that described here seems quotidian, an innocuous re-telling of what occurs between teachers in schools everywhere every day. Yet, the lived experience description says something very important about the phenomenon of teacher collaboration. When we look more closely, we begin to see what it was that made this experience important for

¹ PLC is an acronym for "professional learning community". It is interesting to see it used as a verb in this instance.

this teacher. Van Manen (1997) notes that a lived experience like this particularizes the abstracting tendency of theoretical discourse, and makes it possible for us to be involved pre-reflectively in the lived quality of concrete experience while, paradoxically, inviting us to adopt a reflective stance vis-à-vis the meanings embedded in the experience.

The experience narrated seems to point to collaboration as an invitation to create and to be creative. There is a tacit expectation that coming together for the express purpose of working together is pregnant with un-named possibility, as in “playing something new”. Human beings have a built-in propensity for adaptation and improvisation that may reveal itself as a *creativity* that allows us to adapt to the challenges of everyday life. Individually, we problem solve, try new ways of doing things, experiment and discover. Most often such routine experiences escape our notice. Like the development of the social studies unit by two Grade 2 teachers, often our *creative* solutions can hardly be considered original, novel, or new. But, somehow, they *feel* new, new for us. The social studies activity, the collaboration, as the teacher states, held the possibility for her to “create something new”. Instances of creativity of this kind are described by Richards (2007) as *everyday creativity* or “little c” creativity as opposed to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996) “big C” or paradigm-shifting creativity. Everyday creativity recognizes the ways we engage in creative practice by improvisation that requires using imaginative capacities that influence our day-to-day lives. The two teachers’ Grade 2 Social Studies unit is thus considered creative in a way that is *experienced* as new, as significant, and as meaningful for them. It is in this way that the “creative imaginary” (Barrett, 2012) – that is, the set of beliefs and assumptions that shape our understanding of *where* creativity occurs – can be challenged. This creative imaginary, as an understanding of how teachers understood the experience of collaboration, emerged as an important theme throughout the study. Collaboration in the professional practice setting potentially expands our understanding of creativity (and vice versa) and has implications for what it means when teachers “work together”.

Collaboration in Conversation

In the description provided by the above teacher, there is an openness to explore the unknown. “Really it was a time for talk, for great conversations. It was a time for sharing.” What is the significance of conversation and time for sharing in better understanding the experience of teacher collaboration? Gadamer (1960/1989) says that “Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding” (p. 383). There is a blurring of the individual, of holding my own views as I open myself to the other. A genuine conversation, says Gadamer, is never the one we wanted to conduct. “Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that

we become involved in it” (p. 383). So, in the collaborative conversation, we are called to give over to the possibility that the talk will lead *somewhere* – we cannot truly conduct it, or direct it. Topic leading to topic and idea to idea may be described today as *brainstorming*, but even this seems somewhat directed and contrived. The teacher simply describes “talking and conversation”. No-one knows in advance what will “come out” of a conversation. Understanding, or its failure, is like “an event that happens to us”, writes Gadamer (1960/1989, p. 383), and so too conversation, “good conversation”, can be understood as a type of everyday creativity that is generative, that contributes to the imaginary through which something that did not exist before may be revealed. “We learn from each other to create something new”, says the teacher.

Another teacher wrote in his LED,

When we think about why schools do not improve as fast as we would like them to, is it perhaps because with no prior collaboration teachers are expected to come up with some spectacular solution from the top of their heads? My experience has been (and it is certainly true of this project) that collaboration sparks much *deeper conversation* [emphasis added], more complete answers and better solutions. When we think about collaboration, teachers must take the bull by the horns and be agents of change.

Conversation, writes Gadamer, “has a spirit of its own ... and the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e. that it allows something to ‘emerge’ which henceforth exists” (1960/1989, p. 383).

The Grade 2 teacher admits that “... I don’t really consider myself the most creative person, especially left on my own ... but working together with people you connect with, that’s a different story for me.” To be creative has long been considered an individual trait. And the popular notion of creative people each being singularly possessed geniuses manifesting invention, innovation and the highest ideals of art and music from within themselves is a powerful cultural trope. The teacher also situates creativity *within herself* and questions her innate talent and ability. But the teacher also describes “working together”, “building something together”, “developing ... together”. Thinking about how creativity emerges in a collaborative encounter is a relatively new area of study, but we can look to music, musicology, the fine arts, literature and science for examples of how creative collaboration can be described (Barrett, 2012, 2016; John-Steiner, 2000; Roe, 2007). To this point, creative collaboration has been described as a “marriage of insufficiencies” (Sealeman as cited in Barrett, 2016, p. 476), as each contributor brings a varied profile of skills, knowledge and expertise to the project.

Ideally, these are complementary. John-Steiner (2000) describes the collaborative process as one of “mutual appropriation … because in collaborative work we learn from each other by teaching what we know” (p. 3). John-Steiner’s work focuses on creative partnerships and co-operative teams, famous collaborations of creative people in the arts, music and science, and her research “is motivated by a desire to understand the psychological nature of collaborations” (2000, p. 4). The dynamics of mutuality revealed in the work, emphasises John-Steiner, “are not restricted to artists and scientists, but are relevant to people in every walk of life” (p. 3).

Collaboration in Connection

This past work on creative collaboration is important, but, in some respects, it falls short of helping us to understand the meaning of our everyday experiences of collaborating with others. What is it like to “learn from each other to create something new”, as the Grade 2 teacher describes it? What is in “working with someone you *connect with*” in order to be more creative? What does it mean to connect with another in this way? Again, Gadamer (1960/1989) and his concept of the *horizon*, that starts with our lifeworld and the pre-reflective, may help us understand the type of creative connection. Two teachers come together to collaborate and in doing so provide uniquely different life histories, personalities and temperaments to play off each other. They are equally disparate contributors provided with a collaborative space, and something may emerge that exceeds the potential of either contributor to create alone. How does this happen?

Gadamer maintains that our horizon consists of our tacit, anticipatory and subjective interpretations that aid us in making sense of that which lies at the limit of our lifeworld’s understanding. Our horizon is our range of vision that can be seen from a particular vantage point. We draw on what is within our field of understanding to anticipate and project what we cannot see. Different horizons correspond to their different pre-judgments and produce the lifeworld. We are limited by our horizons; yet, at the same time, we can still glimpse these limits and understand such a limit as a possible entrance to further understanding. The door that acts as a barrier, acts as a limit. It divides and demarcates; however, it also draws us to what cannot be seen on the other side. The door belongs to what is on this side. And yet, it also belongs to what exists on the other side.

Our horizons, the cultural orientations and biases that orient us, point toward what is not ours, that which to us is unknown. The limitations of the horizon represent an open possibility in as much representing a delineation, an outline or a boundary. It is not just a closed door, but also an invitation to our understanding. Horizons may be closed by limitations of culture, history or circumstance; however, horizons cannot be truly closed, for “to have

a horizon means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 302).

Gadamer describes a *fusion of horizons* as a making of that which belongs to the other our own. We do not overtake another, nor are we subsumed into another’s understanding. Gadamer writes of the fusion this way,

[The fusion of horizons does not consist in] subordinating another person to our own standards; rather, it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of the “horizon” suggests itself because it expresses a superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have. (1960/1989, p. 304)

The teacher describes “connecting” with another in the space of creative collaboration. To connect in this instance seems to mean bringing the alterity of the other before us in a manner that puts us in the position of the other. In contact with another in the spirit of understanding, conversation, and working together, our fixed ideas, views and opinions shift and expand through being tested by encountering other horizons. In so doing, our horizons shift and change; the horizon that we always already possess moves as we move by bringing ourselves into new situations, to “imagine the other situation” and what Gadamer (1960/1989) calls “transposing ourselves” (p. 307). Again, this is not to say that we give up or yield ourselves, but to acknowledge that our present horizon cannot be formed without the past, so that something new can be formed as a “fusion of horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (p. 307). One horizon is not subsumed by another or assimilated into another, and yet a tension exists and is recognized. Out of this tension, “the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either explicitly foregrounded from the other” (p. 306).

The fusion is understood as this “higher universality” that is irreducible to either’s particularity, but in their meeting opens up and even generates new ideas, new events, new approaches at the borders between the self and other. The point of connection is a new in-between space where we see ourselves in the other and the other sees herself in us. The point is dynamic, since time, place and context change, so that it becomes an encounter of dialogical impermanence, of creativity, and of new possibility. It is in this way, perhaps, that the essential *relationality of the collaborative experience* begins to assert itself. In connecting with others in the reciprocity of relationship, horizons open toward responsive understanding, requiring being aware of the openness or the vulnerability to the sense that something in our own life is dependent on someone else’s

responses and respons-ability. We turn now to viewing collaboration as a crafting of our own and others' dependencies inside a web of interconnected individuals.

Creative Trust

Collaboration, which derives from the Latin verb *collaborare* “to work with”, is in essence a relational phenomenon. It is not surprising, then, that, when asked to recount a lived experience of what it is like to collaborate, a fundamental quality of human relations would inevitably emerge. This is especially so when the experience being described is open to unpredictable possibility and fraught with the unknown. The theme of trust surfaced as an important one for many teachers as it relates to their experiences of collaboration with their colleagues. Researchers in teacher collaboration have noted the importance of creating an atmosphere of mutual trust among teachers (Berry, Daughtrey, & Wieder, 2009; Cheng & Ko, 2009; Fulton & Britton, 2011). However, outside of saying that trust is fundamental in the collaborative process, the *experience of trust* in the collaborative relationship has not been fully described.

Trust as Phenomenological Ground

Trust is essential for human co-existence, and yet it is precarious. It points to the precariousness of human existence. Phenomena of trust reveal what is essential about our relations with others and the world we inhabit together. A self is *relational in being what it is* in relation to others and the world shared with others. Welz (2010) asserts that “We are not simply relational. Being relational becomes a question of being ourselves in the relation” (p. 17). In trusting, we are ourselves in question. Whether the relation to the other is a trusting relation depends on whether *we* trust. Of course, it also depends on whether the other trusts us. Do we show ourselves to be trustworthy? Trust is a dual experiential phenomenon. Welz (2010) says, “The self as relational is ‘open’ towards that to which it relates. As relational, one is outside oneself . . . Yet, we are not simply outside ourselves. Rather, this is how we are ourselves; we *are* in relation to others” (p. 17).

A teacher describes the experience of trust in the collaborative process this way:

The music department at any school typically consists of just one person: the music teacher . . . The PD² music teachers do on a regular basis is also very individualized; practising their instruments, studying scores, and practising conducting gestures are just a few examples.

Engaging in collaborative PD (especially in a

² PD is an acronym for professional development.

creative context) can be like a breath of fresh air that inspires, motivates, and recharges teachers' batteries. Each summer I attend a four to five day conducting symposium, most frequently the University of Toronto's Wind Conducting Symposium. The wealth of knowledge shared by clinicians is invaluable; however, the knowledge shared from teacher to teacher and the potentially lifelong connections formed are equally beneficial.

To stand in front of your peers and express your creative ideas takes a lot of courage. To stand in front of your peers, express your creative ideas through movement and gesture (no words), and trust that your peers will follow you in a collaborative music making experience takes a LOT of trust . . . You have to be able to count on them in the moment . . . it's difficult to explain.

What does it mean to say, “a collaborative music making experience takes a lot of trust”? What kind of trust is called for? What is it like to “count on” someone in a collaborative relation?

Utley (2014) develops the notion that trust is phenomenologically basic and central to human experience: “a ground of trust” (p. 196) is the *something beyond* what Merleau-Ponty described as our precarious existence always mediated by intertwined relationships in multiple directions. Utley contends that Merleau-Ponty does not explain “what he meant by this affective state that can be experienced as both anxiety and courage. It is presented for us as a state in which these parts are, at the same time, one and the same thing” (2014, p. 196). Utley proposes using the notion of trust to describe this intertwining of *courage and anxiety* as more than a mixture of the two, but rather something beyond “but simultaneous with these singularly conceived states, and yet as being able to be known as two states” (2014, p. 197).

The music teacher describes her lived experience of the courage it took to stand and express “creative ideas through movement and gesture (no words) . . .”. The anxiety and courage inherent in the experience are “one and the same thing” (Utley, 2014, p. 197) and form a chiasmic relationship. The two experiences of anxiety and courage have aspects that can only be understood in the sense that they relate to each other. In the experience they are unified, but as two dimensions of the same experience they are different from each other. The teacher recounts “to stand in front”, “to share”, “to express” in the moment of the collaborative opening-of-oneself-to-others. There is great risk involved in the moment, a vulnerability in the presence of peers, of collaborators as co-creators (Howard et al., 2018).

Trust, Utley argues, as phenomenologically basic, is understood as the state experienced when a certain equilibrium is achieved where anxiety and courage exist in a balance that does not cancel out either state. Rather, in the fulcrum, the teacher is able to contribute, to perform, express, share, and co-create. The courage and anxiety are nested within each other in the moment, the pre-reflective lived instance of acting; the ground of trust aligns with our expectations and we are unaware of its existence. At other times, the vulnerabilities and risks delineate the anxiety and courage demanded of us (Howard et al., 2018). And yet, we most often get on with it and summon up the enthusiasm and optimism required. Without this existential balancing act between courage and anxiety, creating the phenomenological ground of trust, we would be paralyzed in the face of anxiety. But, most often, we are not paralyzed. Both states can thus be seen as constitutive in our everyday experience, affording us the ability to move through the fundamental precariousness of life.

Trust as Counting on Others

In the lived experience description above, the teacher writes that trust means “your peers will follow you in a collaborative music making experience”. She adds that “You have to be able to count on them in the moment ... it’s difficult to explain”. Another teacher wrote of an experience of collaboration:

My local family of schools’ collaborative PD day had finally arrived. There would be approximately 15–17 Phys. Ed. teachers meeting to discuss our [teaching] programs and to create new curriculum units to help meet the new PE outcomes.

I awoke in the morning with a sense of excitement but also a sense of nervousness. I was excited to see some colleagues (I knew 3–4 teachers within the group) and to share some ideas and strategies, but I was nervous as well. I was suddenly going to reveal how I ran my PE program in front of other PE specialists. Were they going to judge me? Would they disagree with how I ran certain parts of my program? Would the high school teachers (I teach junior high) suggest that the kids entering high school PE were not as prepared as they should be? It takes a lot to put yourself and your program out there for everyone to analyze.

... It seemed that everyone shared a sense of nervousness about revealing how they do things. The rotating sessions were filled with support and encouragement. We felt like a team; like people could really count on each other in important ways. We all knew we were in this together ...

The idea of counting on others in the collaborative process emerges as another important theme. How do we count on others in such instances? What does it mean to say that others *count on us*? To count on others means to depend on them, to expect or, again, to trust that they will act or respond in a certain way. The idiom to “count on” is not related to the other meaning of the word *count*, which is to calculate or enumerate. To “count on”, in the sense the teachers are using it, comes from the old French *conte*, which derives from the Latin *comes*, which originally meant “companion”. “It was a compound noun formed from the prefix *com* – ‘with’ and *ire*, ‘go’, and so its underlying etymological meaning is ‘one who goes with another’” (Ayto, 1990, p. 140). The deep relationality that imbues this casual and everyday idiom – *to count on* – and as reflected in the teachers’ lived experience descriptions of anxiety and courage, speaks to our social beings as humans, and to our sense that other agents are at once a particularly salient source of risk for us. Yet others provide the possibility of overcoming an isolating selfhood, for together, “when we go together”, we can do what neither of us can do alone.

... I am on my way to a theatre training conference, and I am excited and incredibly nervous. I am overly organized on this occasion. I have brought with me everything I could conceivably require for the day, even though my hotel room is only four blocks away. For a girl who wholeheartedly pushes collaboration for a living, I sure am nervous at the prospect of engaging in this very thing. I don’t know for certain, but I assume that a large part of the course will include collaboration with theatre educators I have never met. I feel vulnerable at the thought of sharing this part of myself with people I don’t know. I start to wonder whether I’ll “measure up”, and question if I am perhaps a bit out of my league.

... The experience was an incredibly powerful lesson on the importance of collaboration, on trusting and depending on one another, on really counting on your fellow performers and learners, on the transformative power of process theatre, and the value of the arts in the curriculum.

I returned to my [own] students energized and inspired. It served as a helpful reminder to me that collaboration with one’s peers can feel frightening, if the proper foundation is not yet in place.

In this lived experience description, *to count on* seems to be something more than a mere expectation that people will act or respond as we hope. In this type of creative collaboration, the teacher describes the fellow

collaborators as becoming embedded in her plans, and the success of the plan is dependent on what she expects to come to pass. In this sense, the *counting on* creates a dependence: “The experience was an incredibly powerful lesson on the importance of collaboration, on trusting and depending on one another, on really counting on your fellow performers and learners …”. And yet, this dependence does not simply go one way in the collaborative relationship. We each know that others understand how our success depends on what they will do. It is in this way that we can count on others to respond to our counting on them. We trust others and they respond to that trust in recognizing their own dependency.

However, as we know full well, a trust such as this can be misplaced. Jones (2010) writes, “When trust is mutual, we become a genuine ‘we’, a pair (or more) of agents in cahoots with each other … we come to count on the other responding to our dependency in the pursuit of a joint project” (p. 76). The Physical Education teacher above writes:

I quickly realized that nobody was there to judge me … . The rotating sessions were filled with support and encouragement. We felt like a team; like people could really count on each other in important ways. We all knew we were in this together …

The phenomenological ground of trust, of mutual dependency or interdependence, seeks equilibrium in anxiety and courage, balancing the perception of risk. Trust is implicated in our way of being. As the above teacher describes, it creates the special feel of our existence. But this sense of balance can be disrupted and keenly experienced as a rift or rupture. Trust is betrayed when it is misplaced.

As we were nearing completion of our project, it became apparent those working on it had different ideas about the final product … related to this, one member of the group was balancing this project and home responsibilities that made it difficult to complete their promised contributions … . The delay was a source of stress and concern for the rest of the group. I think all group members should be able to count on one another to carry out their parts …

A break or a rift in trust disrupts the equilibrium of

the phenomenological ground of trust and something shifts. Løgstrup (1971) characterizes trust as both the basic social feature of our lives and a personal attitude toward the new. The “new” of which Løgstrup writes connects with possibility, a sense of hopeful generativity which results in making us vulnerable when the expected possibility is not realized or is thwarted. Vulnerability and hope are both aspects of trust. Løgstrup writes,

Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person surrenders something of himself to the other person either by trusting him or [by] asking him for his trust. (p. 19)

Trust is not a decision, but a matter of courage to share with others, daring to share responsibility, daring to open oneself to vulnerability, to understanding, and to interpretation.

Conclusion

Re-conceptualizing teachers’ identities as collaborators requires going beyond the efforts of conceptualizing to thinking deeply about the lived experience of teachers as they engage with students and each other in the practical everyday-ness of their professional, and also personal, lives. Understanding what it means for teachers to collaborate, and for a teacher to *be* a collaborator, is important. As we have seen, the concept of collaboration and providing opportunities for teachers to grow both personally and professionally by working together to become “more knowledgeable about how to shift from cultures of individualism to cultures of collaboration” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018, p. 8) is growing in importance. However, undertaking such work calls for something else: a phenomenological sensitivity to the concerns of professional teaching practice and the personal and social practices of everyday life. The research presented here has attempted to employ a phenomenology of practice approach (van Manen, 2016) to deepen our understanding of teachers’ experiences of the collaborative process, and of how collaboration, understood experientially, intersects with human generativity to present a new creative imaginary as a complex dynamic of nuanced and multifaceted human relationality. It is in this way that phenomenological research may contribute to the field of teacher collaboration by inquiring into the lived meaning of creating together as a human experience deeply connected to the personal and professional lives of teachers.

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Currently Associate Professor of Education at Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada, Dr Patrick Howard developed his interest in the intersections between issues of sustainability and education during a more than twenty-year high school teaching career in coastal communities on the island of Newfoundland, Canada.

Dr Howard's research and writing have been dedicated to exploring how our defining human abilities, creativity, language and imagination, as products of nature, are mediums by which we may grow in our relationships with the living places we inhabit. A common theme of his work is how teaching and learning can deepen the human-nonhuman interrelationship to provide a vital, dynamic vision of education based on life values. His research has been published widely in both national and international journals.

Dr Howard is a founding member of the Environmental and Sustainability Education in Teacher Education Standing Committee of the Canadian Network of Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM). He is also an Associate Editor of the open access journal *Phenomenology & Practice*.

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