

Collaborative Art Communities

by

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Abstract

This paper seeks to define and distinguish the elements required to foster a creative collaboration. Creative collaborations are relationships that combine both personal and professional connections to develop the creative process. As an artist and a teacher collaborative practices have had a profound impact and informed my personal and professional practices. Strong collaborative relationships can have a profound impact on creative development, unfortunately, the elements needed to develop the effective relationships are misunderstood.

A process of active interviews was conducted with several artists and educators that I had identified as having participated in successful collaborations. Through the interview process I hoped to find the common features of the collaborative relationship. I hoped to find through this commonality the key to developing a creative working group.

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Introduction

Collaboration

This project is rooted in my interest in developing a working collaborative community. It is an inquiry into successful long-term artistic communities as well as a parallel exploration into successful creative teaching collaborations. Throughout my career both as a teacher and an artist, I have been fortunate to have been involved in many collaborative working and learning groups. There are many forms of collaboration and not all collaborative situations that I have been involved with have been successful. Those that have been successful have had a lasting positive impact on my life. One of the most rewarding forms of collaboration has been when I have been involved in an informal collaborative circle. A collaborative circle is the combination of a productive professional community and a personal support group. The act of problem solving, planning, and organizing with other like-minded passionate people is where I have acquired the most personal growth. This has happened whether it has been a professional community of practice, a collaborative teaching team or as an artist collective. Some of these groups only came together for a short period of time, and some of the groups have grown into lasting relationships. The intense work toward a common goal leads to significant growth in thinking, creativity, and learning. My experiences of success in these groups have made me want to learn more. Drawing from these interests, this project addresses the following research questions:

What is the value of collaboration for personal learning and the development of an individual's creativity and skills? What are the contributing factors for a successful collaborative relationship?

Throughout my career, I have participated in any art related activities that had the potential of collaboration, actively seeking out artists who would be open to connecting to

talk to about our art. In 2018, after a late-night discussion, a few of us decided we wanted to create an artist collective. We invited artists that we were familiar with, but did not have a relationship with. After months of meetings, where we struggled to find a common goal, we decided to end the formal collective. This process was valuable for me to both put theory into practice and to learn about myself in a working group. The initial collective was not successful, but the conflict and act of dismantling the formal group led to finding a collaborative circle of like-minded artists that have the trust, autonomy, shared goals, and interests that are developing into an exciting collaboration. This has also taught me that terminology is important. What I wanted was not a collective, but a collaborative endeavour.

Following the examination of my experience within this collaborative art group, I conducted interviews with several artists and artist groups who are involved in artistic collaborations. The artists that I chose to interview not only have a strong collaboration, but they are willing and excited to collaborate with other artists outside of their collaborative circle. I decided to use an interview method to create a systematic study about creative collaboration.

Through this project, I evaluated both my own attempt to establish an artist collective as well as other artistic collaborations within the Regina artistic community. I examined how the involvement in an artist working group impacts my own creativity and art production as well as the perceived impact it has had on other artists participating in a collective experience. To analyse the impact of collaboration within artist collectives, I used a mixture of my own anecdotal notes, artistic works based on my experience being involved in an art collective, and interviews with members of my community who participate in creative collaboration. I interviewed four local art groups in my community of Regina, Saskatchewan.

Regina is a medium sized government city. For a long time, it was the trend for artists to move away from Regina to a bigger city to pursue a career in the arts. As a result, the art

community in Regina is small and interconnected. The artists who chose to stay behind became a support networks for each other. Because of the scale of the community, artists are not segregated to their chosen art field and it is common for dancers, visual artists, theatre, music, and film makers to come together to create a project or support a new production or artwork. As a visual artist and a dancer, I have close ties to artists not only in visual art and dance, but also music and theatre. When I was looking for collaborative communities to interview, I did not limit my search to visual art as that limitation would be unnatural in Regina. In fact, although all of the artists I chose have strong collaborative skills, this is only a small sample of the artists who form collaborations in my community. Almost all the artists that I interviewed are familiar with each other. Many of them are friends and many have come together to collaborate on projects in the past.

As well as interviewing members of various arts collaborations, I also interviewed educators with whom I have had successful collaborations in the past. Some of the collaborations were created formally and some were created from a natural affinity. I was extremely lucky early on in my career to be placed in an innovative new school that was experimenting with what teacher collaboration could be. This experience has set the tone for my career . The experience was so positive that I have actively searched for collaborators even when it was not dictated by my administration.

It has been exciting to draw connections between the groups that I have interviewed and the research that I have done. I have painted a portrait of each of the people that I interviewed for my project. I looked to art educator Alison Shields' work, in which she turned interviews of artists' studios into paintings. She says: "Painting the artists' studios as I listened to the interviews allowed me to engage with the conversations in an embodied way, as I brought these conversations into my own studio and allowed their voices to interact with my painting practice" (Shields, 2019, p. 662). As creating artwork has always been a

necessary learning and processing strategy for me, I adapted Shields' practices for my own interviewing process. I used portraiture to reflect on and analyse the conversations that came out of the interview. There is an intimacy to portraiture that develops between the painter and their subject. It allows time to replay past conversations and memories. The act of painting a portrait gives a concentrated time wherein all the focus is on the subject. In painting my interview subjects, I had the time I needed to make connections between them. Each person has brought their own perspectives and experiences, and like pieces of fabric coming together to create a quilt, their experiences have come together to help clarify and deepen my understanding of a bigger picture.

There were several repeating themes and ideas that came up in all of the interviews that were reflected in both my personal experiences and the literature. In this paper I will discuss through examples how I understand my collaborative experiences and the value of those experiences for developing creativity and learning.

My Roots

I grew up on a farm filled with exploration and imagination. There is not a moment in my life that I do not remember using art as a way to make sense of the world around me. Although neither of my parents would consider themselves artists, we were surrounded by the arts. Both of my parents were well educated in the education field, and they are divergent thinkers. I grew up in a household that valued communication, learning, and discovery. My mother is an educational psychologist and her skills lie in communication and her ability to understand a variety of people. My brother and I were taught emotional regulation and communication skills like recognizing our emotion and using words to talk them through to resolve conflict. It was not an option in our house to stew in anger. Fights were sometimes loud and heated. But they were always quickly resolved and there was a mutual

understanding of love behind the fight. I was never afraid to tell my parents how I felt. In many ways I believe that this set the groundwork for not only my interest in collaboration, but my need for it.

My home was filled with antiques and original artwork. Both my parents valued craftsmanship and unique objects. It was a regular family outing to go to a craft fair, live theatre or the symphony. From an early age any artistic pursuits that I had were encouraged. I had all of the materials that I ever wanted, thread, stone, and paint. If I was interested in exploring an art form, my parents would help me realize my artistic adventure. Perhaps some of the reason for my parents' support is that both of my grandmothers were creative.

My maternal grandmother would send sketches and watercolours, intricately painted cookies, artistic quilts, doll clothes, and Halloween costumes. Their house was always filled with classical music, sunshine, gardening, and meticulously brushed shag carpets. Their home was warm and quiet. I always felt there was lots of room for my imagination.

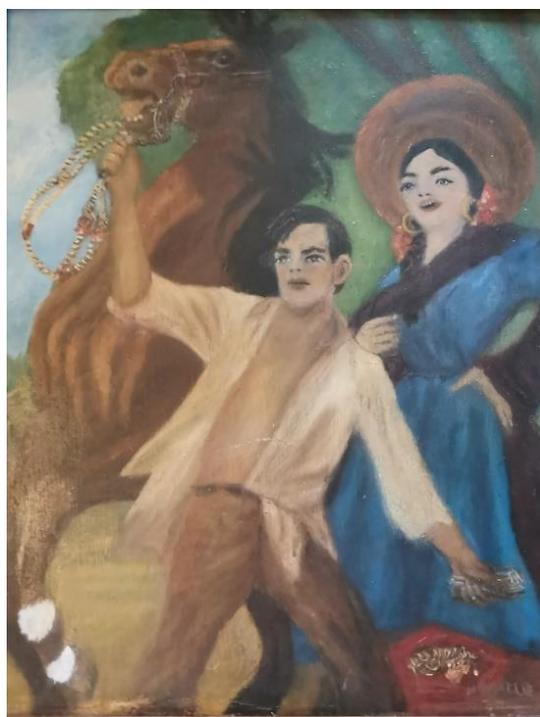


Figure 1. *Untitled painting* by Mary Dumelie, ca. 1985

My paternal grandparents' house was filled with murals, a sculpture garden, taxidermied animals and handmade dolls with painted faces. My grandmother was an artist. She painted, sculpted, and created with everything around her. Fig. 1 is an example of her oil painting. Largely being self-taught, she would experiment with techniques, and research artists for inspiration. Living in rural Saskatchewan, I think she was often misunderstood. She was an artist with every fibre of her body and her family, and her community expected her to treat it as a hobby.

As a child, we would often go to their home during holidays and for large family gatherings. My dad was the oldest of ten children and I was one of forty-eight grandchildren. I found my many aunts, uncles and cousins overwhelming. I would often hide in the mural painted basement with the taxidermied animals my grandmother had created or a quiet corner of the garden next to the wood carved mermaid that she had made. Although I knew my grandmother was an artist, it was not until my teens that I developed a relationship with her. One day, I asked to see the shed that she had turned into a museum. The tour turned into a conversation about rocks, painting, and art. It was a moment that forever impacted my life. I found in my grandmother a kindred spirit. (see figure 2) It did not matter that there was a seventy-year age difference between us. When we talked about art, we were the same age. Often, we would sit and look through images that she had collected (she had garbage bags full of pictures that she cut from the newspaper) and every time I visited, we would share paintings that we were working on and give each other feedback. When we talked my grandmother treated me like a peer. She would gossip and ask my opinion. I remember how respected and loved it made me feel. Looking back on it now, my relationship with my grandmother was probably my first experience with a creative collaborative relationship. Knowing my grandmother helped me to understand my own creativity and my own nature as an artist. The excitement I felt sharing ideas and talking about a topic that we were both so

passionate about shaped my perspectives on collaboration. I had developed taste for collaboration, and I wanted more.



Figure 2. *Mary* by Danielle Dumelie, 2019

Teaching in a Collaboration Experiment: Arcola Community School

I have been incredibly lucky in my teaching career. I have been involved with several successful teacher collaborative groups. Each group was different from the last, but it gave me the opportunity to grow professionally in a way that I don't believe would have happened on my own. Often teaching is a very isolated task. When the idea of encouraging teachers to collaborate was introduced, I remember many of my colleagues feeling upset that they would have to work with someone else. I thought the idea was exciting.

In 2008, the year that I started working full-time for Regina Public Schools, the school system opened two new schools to replace two crumbling buildings. It was decided that the design of these schools would hopefully facilitate flexible teaching with open spaces, presentation stairs, and garage doors to change the shape of the rooms. Along with a new building, they wanted to incorporate innovative and flexible teaching. In the second year of my teaching I was hired to join the middle years team at Arcola Community School. Allen Wills, the principal, and Lori Daelick, the vice-principal had spent hours interviewing and investigating teachers that they thought would work well together. They were looking for teachers who had good communications skills, had demonstrated problem solving and were capable of resolving conflicts. They wanted teachers who liked the idea of working with other people and who wanted to be part of the new school. This planning was key because it is simplistic to think that all it takes for collaboration is to put a group of people together. The fact that we were in the same stage of our career, we all expressed an interest in working with other people, and we were excited to try new ways to teach, brought us together. We were willing and excited to become a team.

The first year was exciting. We had the motto "We are learning" and we would call on that motto every time something didn't go to our plan. At the end of the year, I went on

maternity leave. When I came back, one of the teachers had moved into a vice-principal position in another school and he had been replaced by a first-year teacher. The dynamics shifted in the group and we had to start from scratch to build our team. It was with this new team that our collaboration really started.

The core members of our team were Ian Trail, Renee Montague, Nicole Morrow, and me. We were all new teachers, all the same age and all valued relationships with kids, parents, and colleagues. We were excited and willing to try something new. Our similarities stopped there. We had different backgrounds, different strengths, and different interests. Fortunately for us, our beliefs about education aligned, because that ended up being more important in establishing our group than any other factor.

Working in any innovative, creative situation is hard. There is a lot of vulnerability required in sharing ideas, analysing results, and pivoting to adapt when the situation changes. Every person on the team must be open to new learning and be able to see the situation from different perspectives. Along with the new school, we had the additional stress that goes along with working in a community school, a school where most of the students come from poverty and many of them were dealing with trauma. Building a community was necessary for success.

In their planning, the principal and vice principal took those factors into account. They tried to build a structure that would support us in the potentially stressful situation. We were each assigned a group of students in our home room. The students were a mix of grades 6, 7, and 8. The idea was that we would have the same students in our home class for three years. Every year we would reevaluate our class dynamics and make changes and adjustments as needed. When making adjustments we would mostly focus on student compatibility and relationships. We were also given the authority to make adjustments to the class composition during the year if we felt that it was needed. The autonomy to make our own choices and

decisions for what we felt was best for the kids helped develop both our professionalism as teachers and our commitment to our collaboration. Because our decisions mattered, we did not make decisions lightly. We would work together to discuss and plan every element of our jobs.

Although we had our home classrooms, we were teaching in a flexible environment. That meant that sometimes we would have a completely different group of students for a class or a lesson. Occasionally we would bring all of the students together, and sometimes we would combine classes and co-teach. As a result, we built relationships with every student in our middle years group. That relationship meant that we could share the decision-making and problem-solving, and the students saw all four of us as their teachers. If something wasn't working, we would work to solve it together, teachers and students. It meant that a lot of time was spent talking. That interaction was another factor that the principal and vice principal worked hard to facilitate and build into our daily lives. The two of them would spend hours every year coordinating our schedules. We would have many overlapping prep times and one hour a week set aside to have a formal meeting. In addition, our team would debrief both in the morning and after school. Through this communication, a genuine care, and love was developed between the four of us, our administration, and our students. We had time to work together to solve problems. Communication was strongly valued.

It wasn't always easy. We are four very different people. There were times that we would fight. Those fights would lead to a long conversation, often with tears, but almost always ending in laughter. Over time, we became more and more aware of how each of us deal with conflict, and we learned the best ways to approach each other. Our meetings would often go on for hours, and more times than not lead into after school activities. We drank together, took classes at the library together, signed up for workshops and conferences

together. It became a running joke to say that we were married because our lives had become so entwined.

I have developed strategies, techniques, and my own values about teaching from my time working with my Arcola team. I also learned a lot about who I am as a person, my strengths (making everyone talk about their perspectives), my weaknesses (sometimes forcing people to follow my big ideas) and what I want from a working partnership. Frequent communication allows for a deeper understanding of both the other person and your self through their eyes. That understanding is such a valuable resource.

It has been years since our collaboration has disbanded and we have all moved into different schools and positions. Although our relationship has changed, we have remained good friends. When my youngest daughter was born, Nicole made her a star blanket. Renee and I coordinated a family trip to Saskatoon where we went with our husbands and children to the museum. We have gone camping together, beaded together and held Sunday brunch or drinks a couple times a year. Although our relationship is not as intense as it once was, it remains because it was a friendship based on love and respect. Collaboration does that. The relationship is formed because of a shared goal, but the trust and respect needed to achieve the goal deepens the relationship to one of love and family. It allows for big ideas and learning to happen because everyone in the relationship feels safe enough to give themselves to the project.



Figure 3. *Allen* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

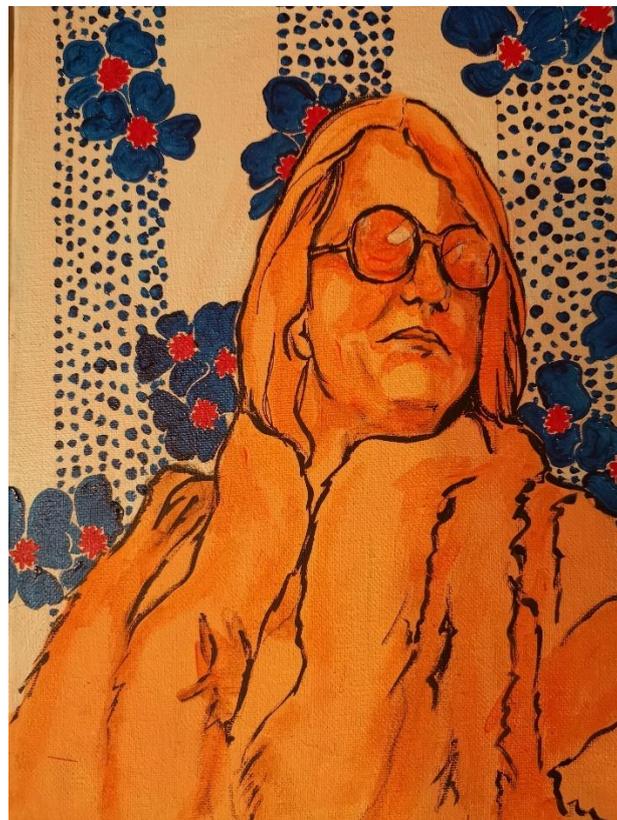


Figure 4. *Morrow* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020



Figure 5. *Ian* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020



Figure 6. *Renee* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Finding my community: Creating an Artist Collective and Gallery

Returning to school for my masters, I realized I did not have many artist connections anymore. I have many friends who are artists, but our friendships have never been focused on our art practice. Also, most of my artist friends are dancers, musicians, jewellers, and potters, not painters. I had been involved as a craft person selling some small dolls and knitted items out of a local business owned by my sister-in-law and friend Kristina Hallwas. Her business, the Junction Creative Studio is a hair salon, handmade store and a pop-up shop for art shows and creative workshops.

My time spent in the University of Victoria studio reminded me how much I have valued the relationships formed working alongside other artists side by side in the creative process. Relationships that I have not had since I finished my undergrad program.

In conversation with Kristina, in the fall of 2018, I told her about my desire to connect with other visual artists. She put the pieces together and facilitated an introduction to the artist Patrick Fernandez. Patrick had recently moved to Regina from the Philippines; he was looking for an artist community. He had already connected with Isabella Wishlow, an employee of The Junction and a visual artist and dancer. I remember feeling hopeful and nervous after my first meeting with Patrick. It wasn't easy to put myself out there and share my artwork, but I enjoyed our conversation and I was motivated to keep going.



Figure 7. *Maria Makiling* by Patrick Fernandez, 2016

Patrick had been involved in several artist collectives in the Philippines, where artist collectives are much more common practice than they are in Saskatchewan. Patrick wanted to create a collective here in Regina, mimicking his past collective experiences. Patrick sent out an invitation to several artists to attend a meeting to explore the possibility of creating a collective. Of the twelve artists that attended the meeting, eight decided to commit. Four of the eight artists were Kristina, Isabella, Patrick, and I. The other four artists were already friends and had a long-established relationship. Over the year and a half that the collective existed, the divide seemed to remain, and the group failed to coalesce.

The collective started out slowly with casual meetings where artists would meet and talk about art or the organization of art shows. Gradually the conversation turned to the need to establish values and a common goal. More and more there was a push to formalize the collective. The meetings became long and would end with a lack of clarity felt on both sides.

As we tried to develop our shared vision it became clear that we had a growing difference in priority.



Figure 8. *Reflections 1* by Isabella Wishlow, 2019



Figure 9. *Reflections 2* by Isabella Wishlow, 2019

The room that had been used as a pop-up shop was more and more becoming a regular gallery. The gallery was named *The Woods Artspace*, and as with most things that have a name, it began to take on a life of its own. Sask. Galleries approached Kristina, the

owner of the Woods Artspace about the possibility of applying to become an official gallery. Patrick and I were excited to be part of the gallery. It was exciting for the gallery we created to be recognized and it was exciting to create something completely new. We made some attempts to include the collective in the creation of the gallery, but the attempts were clumsy. Since the collective was not working as a unified entity with the rapport necessary for easy and open communication, any attempts we made to include the other members became awkward and unclear. The lines between the gallery and the collective became blurred. All of a sudden, the collective meetings were happening regularly, and would last for hours on end. I was feeling hopeful that we would begin to progress toward a collaboration. Kristina asked the collective to help shoulder the cost of the gallery space. At the same time the collective was working toward creating rules and official roles. Like a speeding train, the collective crashed and flipped off the tracks. Suddenly the city was shutting down due to Covid-19 and our collective faced an uncomfortable moment of conflict. At face value the conflict was over a disagreement on how to run an upcoming gallery show. As the conversations progressed however it became clear that it was rooted in the much deeper issue of an undeveloped trust and communication. Rather than continue the conversation the group decided to fold.

It is in moments of conflict that priorities have to be evaluated and like minds are recognized. Although the official collective has folded, I think I have finally begun to find my collaborative community. While the official collective disbanded because of lack of trust, the relationship with many of the artists has continued to exist. Truthfully, I feel very excited because this conflict has led to additional conversations with others where there is potential to form the community that I wanted to form in the first place. I didn't like the push to put in a hierarchy and formal rules, I was not interested in being part of a board of directors and that was the direction the collective was heading. I feel relief that it has ended.

Having the gallery space has meant that Patrick, Kristina, and I still have work to do but we have a shared goal. We have had regular meetings to discuss the work needed to be done, meetings that start with the jobs that need to be completed, develop into our dreams for the future, and end with laughter and good conversation. Our time together feels shared and valued. I get more satisfaction from our meetings than I ever did with our collective. I feel that we are on the same page, and I think that is the major difference.

In many ways the dust is still settling and it will probably be years before I really know how this will play out, but in the months following the collapse of the collective I have had conversations with a few artists that have left me hopeful that I have found the right people for me. They are artists that seem to see the value and purpose of art in the same way as I do. They are artists that want to build a community, create space for other artists to strengthen their practice, and have similar long-term goals. The short conversations that I have had, have left me feeling more hopeful and excited than any of the long collective meetings. Most importantly, they are all artists that I want to learn from. I appreciate their art; I feel motivated by the time I spend with them and I like the perspectives they bring.

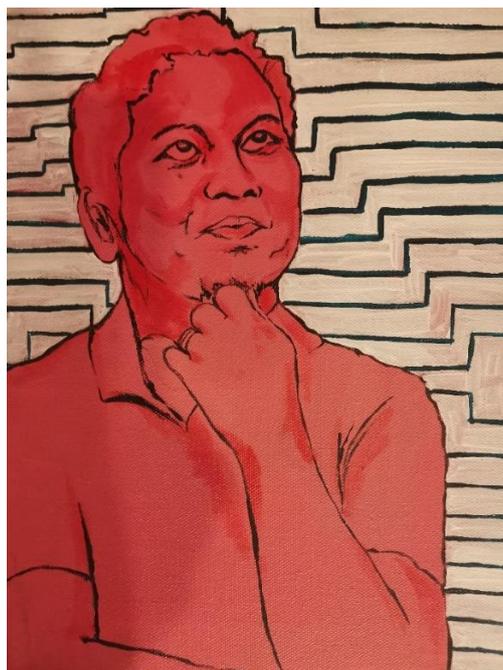


Figure 10. *Patrick* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020



Figure 11. *Kristina* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

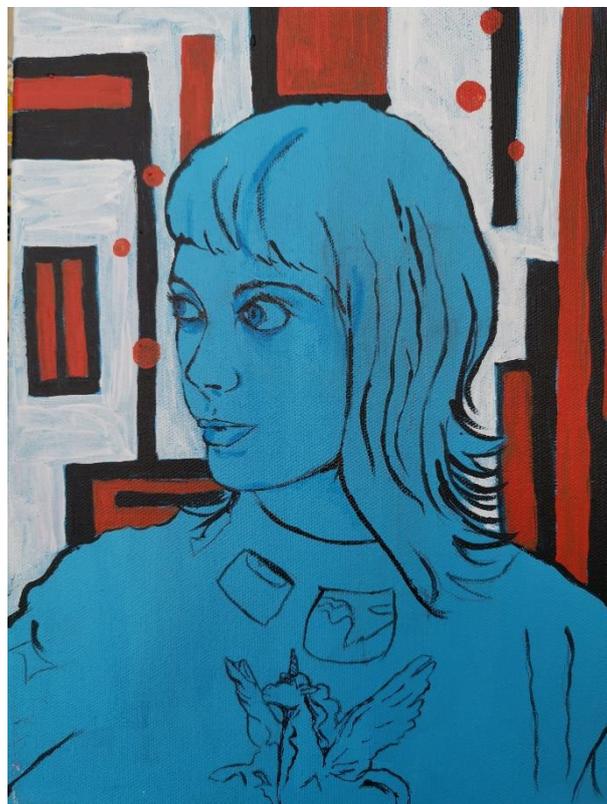


Figure 12. *Isabella* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Contextualization:

Defining collaboration

Collaboration is the magic that happens in the moments between the work. It's the conversations that take place at the end of the workday, the dreaming that happens sitting around the table with food and drink. It is choosing to work together because there is a shared excitement and passion that creates energy and motivation to do the hard work of being creative. Finding a collaborative circle of people can act as a compass to direct collaborators through the onslaught of ideas, self-doubt and uncertainty that can happen in the creative process. The support of other like-minded individuals who see the world the same way, who find value and excitement in the same ideas, who challenge and encourage each other allows a person to push their career further than they would ever be able on their own.

Unfortunately, cooperation is often mislabelled as collaboration. It was early in my teaching career that I learned that collaboration was a term used to describe any situation in which people came together to work on anything. Completing a project together? Collaboration. Sharing a workspace? Collaboration. Talking to someone in the hallway? Collaboration. In both education and the arts, I have heard this term applied to many situations. I have worked in schools where the teachers had desks that were placed next to each other. Proximity was the only thing that connected them. However if asked, both would say they collaborated. I have been to a gallery show where the artist asked the participants to colour a sheet of paper and place it in a vessel. This act of colouring a paper at the artist's request was referred to by the artist as collaboration. In his influential book *Art Worlds*, sociologist Howard Becker (2008) argued that every step of the creative process could be considered a collaboration, from the production of materials right up to the point the audience views the work. He states:

Think of all the activities that must be carried out for a symphony orchestra to give a concert, for instance, instruments must have been invented, manufactured, and maintained, a notation must have been devised and music composed using that notation, people must have learned to play the notated notes on the instruments, times and places for rehearsal must have been provided, ads for the concert must have been placed, publicity must have been arranged and tickets sold, and an audience capable of listening to and in some way understanding and responding to the performance must have been recruited. (p. 2)

While I don't disagree that the creative process requires people to work together all along the process, I disagree with this definition of collaboration. It is too broad and doesn't take into account the relationship that has to exist in order to truly collaborate. In contrast, and on the other side of the spectrum, the belief that collaboration is always the intertwined act of artists and communities coming together to paint a mural, or two musicians sitting down at the same piano to write a new song is much too narrow of a description. This, however, is often the first thing that comes to mind when collaboration is mentioned. In the article co-written by researchers out of the University of Colorado, *Beyond Binary Choices: Integrating Individual and Social Creativity*, this form of collaboration is described as co-creation.

To support both the individual and the social aspects of creativity, as well as the interplay between them, co-creation may take on different forms, such as (1) serial: creating something (perhaps in isolation) that is then brought into social venue so that others can build upon it (either in the social context or in isolation); (2) parallel: separately creating elements that are then brought together and combined into something new; (3) simultaneous: jointly creating something at the same time. (Fischer, Giaccardi, Eden, Sugimoto, & Ye, 2005, p. 485)

I believe the term co-creation is too general to explain the depth of the collaborative process. The idea of co-creation can be part of the collaboration process but if it becomes the focus of the relationship it does not make room for personal expression and growth. This form of collaboration is what we often assign students in school. Typically, when students are placed in a group not of their choosing, some students are left feeling like they are doing all the work. This can be caused by the expectations, skill level, and size of the group. Too often one individual takes on more of the task, or the trust that is needed to be truly creative is not there. When that happens, it is still possible for the project to be successful, but often the collaborative relationship ends there. Researchers Lauren E. Coursey, Paul B. Paulus, and Jaren B. Kentworthy explain the ineffectuality that externally created groups can have on creativity and the stress they can create for participants.

Social loafing and evaluation apprehension may also be contributing factors to comparatively poor group performance. Performance in groups is typically not equally distributed, with one or two people often dominating the discussion. Other group members may “free ride” on the efforts of active members because they do not perceive their efforts to be needed. (Coursey, Paulus, & Kenworthy, 2018)

When students experience these unequal groupings, they are often left with the understanding that this is collaboration. It doesn't feel good to be the one responsible for all of the work, it also doesn't feel good to have no role in a project. Unfortunately for students, many adults have also grown up with the understanding that group work is collaboration, and those misconceptions are part of the reason that real collaboration is rare. Arts educators are well suited to teaching the skills needed to collaborate. One of the most effective ways to teach this is through modelling the process and using the arts to facilitate the development of relationships. Both arts educators Jeff Adams and Vivian Loh write about the role the arts, and in turn artist teachers have in creating the right

environment for collaboration. Adams (2015) states: “The merits of collaborative learning through the arts are immediately obvious: many of the arts physically lend themselves to shared contributions and joint productions” (p. 280). I agree, and in addition believe if the teacher creates the right environment, all of the arts have the potential to teach students the skills needed to creatively collaborate. When students are working together rather than competing, the students are able to develop an “understanding and empathy toward one another...It is the responsibility of the teacher to cultivate an environment that supports the reciprocation of care in the art classroom” (Loh, 2015, pp. 15,16). Like in adult collaboration, student collaboration is built off trust and a shared agency.

These short-term co-creation collaborations in the classroom can be beneficial so long as they have certain characteristics. To illustrate this, I reflect on two artist classroom collaborations in which I participated in the role of a teacher with my students. The first example was with the art group *Mammalian Diving Reflex* (<https://mammalian.ca>). This group partnered with a local theatre and performative art company called *Curtain Razors* (<https://www.curtainrazors.com>). The focus of the project was to see what happens when you teach children a set of skills and trust them to become the experts. The project that my class participated in was called *Eat The Street*. The artistic director of Curtain Razors, Michele Sereda came into my classroom to introduce the project to the students. Right from the moment that she walked into the classroom, Sereda treated the students with a welcoming and warm respect. She called them in close to have a conversation as she explained the project. Sereda treated the students and me, their teacher, as fellow artists.

After the initial meeting, the artists team Mammalian Diving Reflex from Toronto came into the class to teach the students about performance art, and the artistic team took the time to build an understanding and trust with the students. The students had the opportunity to learn from a local chef about the proper way to taste food and experience a restaurant. The

students were then assigned two restaurants each to review. For both meals, the students were to be the experts, the food critics. The participating restaurants had agreed to let the students experience their restaurant and were prepared for the project beforehand. As the teacher, I accompanied all of the students and the artists to the meals. The biggest role that I had to play was to trust the students to be the expert. It meant that I could not be the one to direct them how to act. I, along with the other adults in the situation, had to let the students guide their actions and trust them to take their job seriously.

This was an in-depth project that lasted two weeks and the results were better than I could have ever anticipated. Before the project had started, my class did not get along. They did not like each other, often fighting and name calling. After the project they saw each other as valuable and as people. Even though the project was a short-term co-creation, the artists moving on after the project, the impact was long lasting for everyone involved. It was a shared experience that valued trust above everything else. The relationship that developed between the students in my classroom carried on for years after the project. Trust had been established, and as a result a creative community was made. Finnish researchers, Anneli Etelapelto and Jaana Lahti (2008), focus on learning, professional identity, and collaboration. They explain the importance of trust in collaboration:

Trust consists of a respect for another person's different perspectives, an expectation of good will, and confidence in the other's ability to contribute to the common purpose. Such trust is the foundation for the kind of collaboration that allows the development of true sharing, openly negotiated conflict, and long-term relationship, even when uncertainties and risk are present. (p. 228)

There were many risks present in the project and it was brought up in conversation amongst the adults how hard it was to not interfere with the students' behaviour and trust them to know how to behave. The trust we gave was repaid in trust from the students.

I contrast this with a separate experience that I had at a different school. Although there were many similarities to the first project, by the end of the school year it had been almost forgotten. Like the first situation, a local performance art company, *Common Wheel* (<https://commonweal.ca>) facilitated a project where they brought in the artist group *Jumblied Theatre* (<http://www.jumbliedtheatre.org/jumblied/>) for a project called Four Lands. For this project the artist group held all of the control. It was their project, Common Wheel connected them to local schools, and they were present at the project, the students were asked to be artists in the project, and as the teacher, I invited them into the school. Unfortunately, in a lot of ways, that is where our participation ended. The artists were in complete control through the whole process. They reorganized the space in the school. They had a very curated set of materials and colours for the students to use with explicit instructions about what to make, and the content for the artwork. The theatre group guided the students through the process step by step, starting with storytelling, then guided ideation on a theme, and finally the creation of the sculptural pieces. Although the students had some input, there was little to no risk involved, and there was not a mutual investment of time or risk.

After the project, the students were then asked to visit a curated art show after the experience. The students had fun as participants, but it had little impact on their life or their view of the world. After the project was over my class went back to our regular routine and relationships without much of a change.

Because the process was so guided and curated there was not any room for autonomy or exploration. We were merely tools for the artists. The trust and respect that existed in the Eat the Street project had not been established and no dialogue was generated. Lahti and Eteläpelto (2008) address this problem:

Successful collaboration in collective learning settings has often been described as involving the same processes as creative collaborations. In both activities, new

options are presented and elaborated in a wide-ranging critical dialogue. Through dialogical interaction, new conceptions are collectively constructed.” (p. 226).

Without the dialogues and trust the collaboration only becomes cooperation. From this process, I learned that for a project to be collaborative both parties must contribute an equal amount of risk and trust.

Part of the issue with the misuse of the term collaboration is that often what people refer to as collaboration is in fact cooperation. It is my view that cooperation is a short-term relationship. It is individuals or organizations coming together to complete a project. In the book *Educational Learning and Development: Building and Enhancing Capacity* educational researcher Margaret Baguley (2014) discusses the limits to cooperation: “Partners in a cooperative venture share information only about the subject at hand” (p. 31). In a lot of ways, the cooperative relationship is limited. The difference between cooperation and collaboration is the intense relationship experienced between collaborators. Collaborations are a much more long-lasting relationship than a cooperation. Baguley (2003) goes on to write: “Collaboration is viewed as a more durable and pervasive relationship” (p.31). I genuinely believe that statement to be true; when the relationship is made of trust and respect its impacts on the individual will endure.

Collaboration in the Arts

I believe humans are social in nature, and because of this most forms of collaboration have value. However, collaboration is not easy and there are several requirements that must be in place for collaboration to be successful. It is not uncommon to hear someone say, I like collaboration if it is with the right people. For collaboration to be successful the participants have to be willing to listen and share in equal parts. A high level of trust must develop, and values must align. As adults, our childhood learnings often follow us into our professional

lives. If an individual has never had the opportunity to collaborate successfully, naturally, they are less likely to understand its value. As someone who grew up with many collaborative experiences early in life, I love to collaborate with others. I thrive on the conversations and responsibility I feel toward other individuals. It took me a long time to realize that not everyone has the skills or interest needed to partake in a collaboration. True collaboration takes an ability to trust in someone else and allow for a loss of control. For many creatives it is not an easy ask to share control with another individual.

For collaboration to work, a common goal, and common core values are especially important. Collaborative circles are relationships where both professional and personal relationships intersect. A collaborative relationship cannot end at a professional level, it should extend into a genuine interest in each other's lives. It is not enough to just work together. Just working together is cooperation. It is the deeper, equally invested relationship that develops from true collaboration that has a lasting impact. When I have been involved in collaborative relationships, my collaborator is someone that I would also call a friend. Many of our best ideas would come from the conversations that we had after the workday was done. It is within those conversations where crazy ideas and dreams are spoken that the most innovative and interesting projects were started. The collaborative group becomes your extended family. Psycholinguist Vera John-Steiner (2001/2006) an expert on creative collaboration explains that, "To achieve such bonding, partners need to learn to listen carefully to each other, to hear their words echoed through those of the collaborator, and to hear the words of the other with special attentiveness born of joint purpose" (p.190). Communication is key to a successful collaboration. However, working closely with other people is not easy. Every member of the collaboration must be committed and excited about working together. Every member must have an equal stake in the group. Members of the group must value working together with other people, and it might sound obvious, but they

must like each other. Collaborative communities are intense, connected relationships, often stretching over multiple years. For the relationship to be beneficial it takes hours of working together, and after the work is done the individuals should want to socialize.

John-Steiner (2001/2006) likens the relationship building to physical fitness.

She states that:

Becoming emotionally fit for the rigors of collaboration requires increasing one's capacity for and abilities to offer empathy, support, trust, and hard-headed, constructive criticism. It also means strengthening one's endurance when faced with self-doubt, rejection, and feelings of vulnerability... Living in each other's mind requires trust and confidence. (p. 190)

To develop a relationship that is personal and connected, the members of the collaborative community must spend a lot of time getting to know each other. The line between professional and personal is blurred, and that blurry line is where the energy and excitement are created. Learning to communicate is key to developing a productive and collaborative circle. Within that learning comes the need to resolve conflicts. Sometimes the conflicts can be minor or major but the act of resolving conflict and finding the connection at the end only strengthens the collaborative circles communication and trust (Farell, 2004; John-Steiner, 2001/2006). I have been lucky to experience collaboration many times and the result was almost always positive, but there were days with all of my collaborators where we had to work through frustration, hurt feelings, or anger. Those days, however, were minor in the long-term, overshadowed by the laughter and energy of new ideas. For me, those conflicts led to a better understanding of my collaborator and myself. For me, I experienced collaborative groups that John-Steiner would describe as: "... highly interactive, at times argumentative, and...sustained by shared vision of historically and culturally constructed human possibilities" (John-Steiner, 2001/2006, p. 204).

As collaborators work together, they learn their collaborators' skills and ways of thinking and learning. They learn new ways to work and solve problems from each other. Through this acquisition of skills and ideas all members of the collaboration become stronger and more versed. John-Steiner (2001/2006) describes this process:

In collaborative endeavours, mutual appropriation is a result of sustained engagement during which partners hear, struggle with, and reach for each other's thoughts and ideas. This is not only a cognitive process. It is a good example of both intellectual and emotional appropriation. (p. 199)

Communication is not limited to verbal conversations and it is not just theories and ideas that are gained, but ways of thinking. For the dancer, communication might also involve the understanding of how each of the collaborators move; for the painter it might be gaining an understanding of the intent behind each brush stroke. Collaboration is understanding each other, but also pushing each other to go further, think deeper. Working in any creative field can be a vulnerable and lonely act. Sociologist Michael P. Farrell suggests that: "Creative work is deviant, in that, in form or content, it does not conform to established traditions in a field" (Farrell, 2003, p. 14). The support of like-minded peers can give the artists the push that they require to trust their instincts, take risks, and try new things. Farrell continues on to write:

While working alone, a member may be tempted to try something new, something even forbidden by authorities in the field; but alone, the person does not follow through on the impulse. When the impulse is validated by other members of a circle, the conflicted member is more likely to act. An outrageous work for one member of the group becomes a dare for the next member to match. A wild idea thrown out in the midst of an argument may be picked up and incorporated into the emerging group vision. Like

delinquents, the members say and do things together that none would ever have done alone. (p. 16)

The gestalt of this type of relationship takes time to develop, and results from several factors. Although it often begins with a mutual like and respect, it is over time that the relationship develops enough trust for the people in the relationship to take on the risks and encouragement needed to make an impact. John-Steiner states the benefits of the relationship: “A long-term collaboration can be a mirror for each partner: a chance to understand one’s habits, styles, working methods, and beliefs through comparison and contrast with one’s collaborator” (John-Steiner, 2001/ 2006, p. 189). There is no better way to understand your own strengths and weaknesses as when you are working closely with a group of people.

Creative circles are formed by individuals that have a similar goal or vision. The group can benefit from a variety of personalities and styles. According to Ken Robinson an educator focusing on creativity research and the author of the book *The Element: How finding your passion changes everything* (2009), creative circles bring together the essential features of a creative mind:

Creative teams are dynamic. Diversity of talents is important, but not enough. Different ways of thinking can be an obstacle to creativity. Creative teams find ways of using their differences as strengths, not weaknesses. They have a process through which their strengths are complementary and compensate for each other's weaknesses too. They are able to challenge each other as equals, and to take criticism as an incentive to raise their game. (204)

For a collaboration to be successful, members must have similar values, and a trust in each other and the process. Because of this, collaborative circles are often made up of groups of individuals that are of a similar age and points in their career. The individuals will have a lot to talk about. It is the conversations that lead to enhanced creative output and support.

Although it is possible to develop the collaborative circles at any point in a person's life, most of the groups are formed during transition periods, often in their twenties and thirties when they are establishing new careers and professional identities. (Farrell, 2003) Though, it is worth noting that age is not as important a determining factor as the transition period in a person's life. Collaborative circles are often formed when the individuals are not finding what they want in pre-existing situations (Farrell, 2001; John-Steiner, 2001/2006). In my opinion, whether or not the individuals participate in projects together, or they just meet to discuss dreams or ideas, it is the establishment of the like-minded support group that can lead to rich collaboration. Much of the valuable work is done in the idea stage of the collaboration through motivating and pushing each other to do more than they would otherwise do on their own and being part of a creative circle can be wonderfully intense. For the collaboration to be productive, commitment from all of the members in the group is required. If that mutual relationship can be achieved the participants can benefit by an established support system and the development of new skills. The members of the group become comfortable to bounce new ideas, get feedback on work, solve problems, and develop projects together. As John-Steiner (2001/2006) states

In the course of intense partnerships new skills are acquired. The partners may develop previously unknown aspects of themselves through motivated joint participation. The collaboration context provides mutual zone of proximal development where participants can increase their repertory of cognitive and emotional expression. (John-Steiner, 2001/2006, p. 187)

I believe that collaboration allows the collaborators to find their best selves. Through the act of collaboration, we can gain a better understanding of our own strengths and learn the skills from our collaborators to strengthen our weaknesses.

Artist Interviews

As discussed earlier, my failed artist collective left me curious what the successful artist groups in my community have in common. I hoped through listening to the stories of the successful collaborations, I could see a common theme that I could use to create my own groups in the future. Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, and Tere Vaden art researchers and authors of the book *Artistic Research Methodology: Narrative, Power and the Public* (2004) discuss the importance of interviews in developing better understanding of the research subject.

The starting point is the realization that we do live and love, hate and care in a reality that is plural. It is not one but many. As its situated versions are articulated, in connection to its past, present and future, they are taking place, giving content to their chosen concept, symbol, act or image in and through the social imagination of a particular structural space. (p. 41)

I hoped by looking at the point of view of several individuals, I could develop a better understanding of my own experiences. I chose four art collaborations that have an active positive presence in my community and asked them if they would be willing to participate in an interview.

Following the advice of researchers James A. Holstein and Jaber F. Gubrium (1995), I developed my questions to facilitate an active interview process. An active interview allows the participants to take the lead in the conversation and the researcher adapts their questions to allow for a natural conversational flow. Though I had past interactions with most of the artists that I interviewed, nevertheless began my interview with an overview of why I was doing research and some information about my topic. My introduction consisted of a brief definition of the type of collaboration I was interested in and a short story about my own

experience with collaboration. This introduction allowed me to set the tone of the interview without having to interfere in the participant's storytelling too often (Holstein & Gubrium., 1995). Once I finished my introduction, I guided the conversation with a set of questions that I would alter slightly as the interview required. The questions I used to guide my interviews were:

- Can you tell me a little about your art practice?
- Tell me about your experiences with collaboration?
- Why do you choose to collaborate?
- Are there any downsides to collaboration?
- What do you feel you have gained through collaboration? (this last question was rarely asked because most of the participants answered this several times in the interview)

In his 1998 book *Tricks of the Trade*, Howard S. Becker discusses the importance of talking to a variety of sources to develop a better understanding of a subject. To illustrate this point, he quoted sociologist Everett C. Hughes as saying “ I don’t know anything that someone in that group doesn’t know but, since I know what they all know, I know more than any one of them.” (Becker, 1998, p. 99). This quote seemed to sum up my experiences with the interview process. As I spoke to the variety of participants, listened to a collection of their stories, and took the time to paint their portraits, I began to see patterns and repetitions of themes. How exciting to see that unique experiences had so many similarities. I began to recognize the same patterns in my own successful collaboration experiences.

Curtain Razors

Curtain Razors is a theatre and performing arts company in Regina. The company was originally created and run by its founder Michele Sereda along with a board of directors

who worked to create and facilitate performance art in Regina. Often Curtain Razors would partner with different organizations, such as, schools, reserves, and community centres. It is through one of these partnerships that I was introduced to the company. My Grade 6/7/8 class was invited to participate in an art project, Eat the Street, in which my students were invited to become food critics, eating at restaurants and presenting awards to the winning restaurants at a final ceremony.

In February 2014, Michele Sereda, along with three other artists were killed in a car crash on their way to work with children on the Piopot First Nations school. Her death shocked the community. Michele Sereda had impacted many people. After Michele's death, her long-time good friend Joey Tremblay stepped into the role of Artistic Director to carry on Michele's legacy. Since that time, Curtain Razors has undergone many changes. Most notable is its change from a hierarchical leadership model to lateral leadership. Curtain Razors is now run by six artist associates and the small board of directors. All six of the artists have very unique practices, but they come together to support each other. I have attended many of the projects that Curtain Razors have created over the years. Their performances are engaging and thought provoking, often questioning issues around race, sexuality and different world views.

I spoke to two of the artist associates Jayden Pfeifer and Kris Alvarez. I have known both of the artists for a number of years and I saw the growth in their art practice after they had become involved in Curtain Razors. The interviews took place at two different meetings. I went into these interviews seeking to understand. In my first interview, Kris explained why being part of a small non-hierarchical collective was so important to her. In my second interview, Jayden spoke to how this non-hierarchical, lateral leadership collective worked. The following is an abridged compilation of the two interviews.

Danielle- You have formed a lateral collaborative group in Curtain Razors. How did you come together?

Kris- ... How did we come together? It was very organic. It was natural in the sense of how you make friendships and relationships with people that inspire you by their art, by people who you just like, with whom you get along, and you have a certain similar view of how you look at the art world or the world through art. ... We're all Saskatchewan artists who either grew up into art here or were very much informed by art here and I think that also glues us.

Danielle- What made you choose to be part of the collective.

A dinosaur of a place like Globe Theatre gets a lot of resources and funding. That casts a big shadow over independent theatre. And so, joining together felt very much the suitable way for us to approach making art. We all have projects that we do and we support each other, and *sometimes* we do projects together if the need is there... And then it's timing, we were all at that place where we were looking for something like that. Whether it's in response to not wanting to work in a hierarchy that a place like Globe Theatre has, or whether it's just the timing of what we want to focus on process-based work not product. That's a big part of Curtain Razors. We really want to bring our voices instead of doing other people's work. We want to have a Saskatchewan identity to the work that we're making.

Jayden- What I think is interesting is what the structure of Curtain Razors is now. It's actually a fascinating collaborative structure we've created for an arts organization. The way that most theatre arts organizations work is that you have an artistic director

and they set up the vision for the company and then they're your leader and you follow them... What we decided to do was, we've created another version of collaboration. We've created a lateral leadership model where every member of the associates are all co-artistic directors, or rather there isn't an artistic director. There's just six associate artists and we manage the artistic vision for the company as a group... It's collaboration, but it's not on an artistic front. It's on a visioning or process front. It has allowed us to ask to each other what projects do you want to do as an artist? What do you feel passionate about? ... We imagine all of those things as completely equal and it's the company's job to make sure all of them get realized. The collaboration is less hands-on other people's artistic vision and more, how can we collaborate on making sure everybody gets what they need? So, we offer ourselves up as support collaborators... [We] see ourselves outside of our own practices in service to someone's idea because we take it as an agreement at the beginning that we love each other, we support each other's work, we want to see each other's work realized... I really feel supported. I really feel like my collaborators have my back, which makes it a really robust collaboration without having to necessarily give over your idea to someone else. I'm not looking for you (*my collaborators*) to change my idea, I'm looking for you to help me see it and then ask questions such as: How can we support you? How can we help you? Do you need a conversation? Do you need a visit or coffee? Do you need me to help you write a timeline for your Grant?... Independent art often feels like you're in a bit of a silo and outside of organizations. I prefer to operate this way. It is sort of like an organizational way of supporting independent art.

In my separate conversations with Kris and Jayden, both made several mentions about the importance they placed in keeping control over their ideas. Even when they chose to work directly with someone else, they felt that they had an equal voice with their collaborators. In their collaboration no one is the leader, or rather the leader changes based off who is heading the project. The individual artist retains control over their own work, and their collaborators are there to offer support and ideas. The collaboration's value lies more in the support network it offers than in any final product.

When I look at my own experiences working with other people, any attempt at a hierarchy was uncomfortable. Not only was it uncomfortable, but I saw it as an impediment to good collaboration. I see the structure that Curtain Razors has implemented as proof that it is possible, and can even be successful to have a leadership structure that doesn't focus on one person taking the lead, but all members having equal say and importance. It offers every member autonomy and a shared responsibility in ensuring everyone's success.

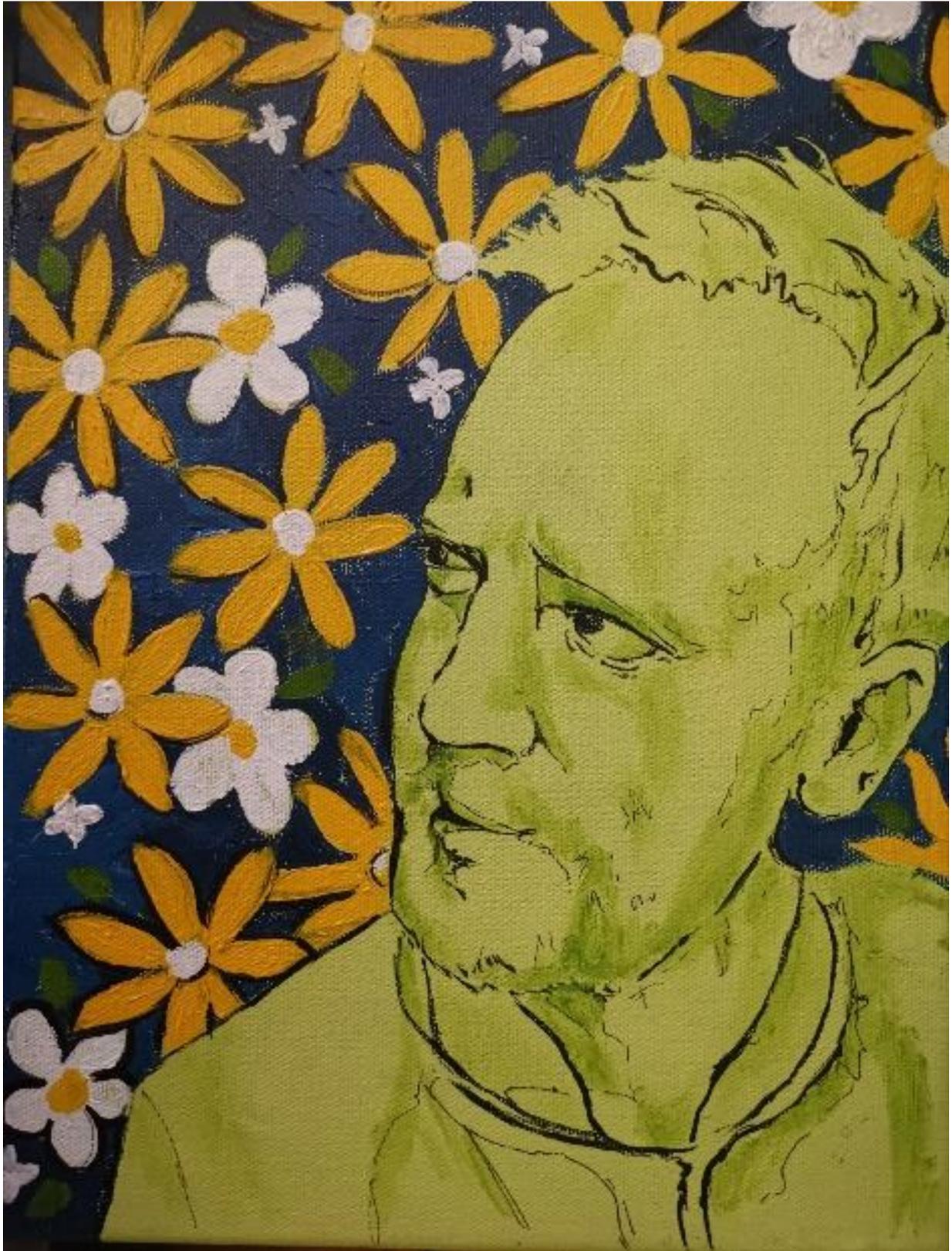


Figure 13. *Jayden* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020



Figure 14. *Kris* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Vibes YQR

Vibes YQR is a hip-hop dance group based in Regina. The group provides both performance and education. They offer regular free dance classes, organizing dances in Wascana Park. The group comes together to create a community for those who genuinely love hip hop, and street dance. Much of the hip hop that is taught in Saskatchewan dance schools focuses on a distilled version of the common music video dance moves. They are lacking the history of the dance movement, the education about where the moves are coming from and the culture that surrounds the dance. There is a diversity to the styles and genres of hip hop, and Vibes endeavours to provide opportunities to educate people about hip hop and create a space for dancers who are passionate about their craft. I was interested in interviewing Vibes YQR because they are a diverse group of dancers that often share their skills and knowledge with the Regina community. From an outsider, the group appears to be supportive and passionate about their craft.



Figure 15. *Vibes YQR at Cathedral Arts Fair* Photo by Heidi Atter, 2019

In our interview, the founder, Eddy Alvaro described how the collective emerged through an unexpected meeting and developed through their unique philosophy and grew as a network of dancers who shared the same philosophy. The following is an abridged transcript of my interview with Vibes YQR founder Eddy Alvaro.

Danielle- Could you tell me a little bit about your organization and how you work together?.

Eddy- ... The biggest thing was the awareness piece. Because we had a lot of talent in the city, we wanted to provide something where people can learn. One of the biggest issues was that, and it's still an issue that goes on across Canada, and I think even the world, is that the hip-hop that is being taught in (dance) studios is an interpreted hip-hop that strays away from the roots of what actual hip hop is. A lot of the people who are teaching it don't even know where their moves had originated from, or what they came from, so we grew into versifying the different styles. So, that was our goal, to diversify what you're going to be learning in this street dance / hip hop world. We had poppers, we had lockers, we had afrobeat, we had freestylers, we had breaking, and animation, all these different styles that we really wanted to bring attention to.

Where Vibes is now, it's a collective. It's a network ... This is wild how it grew, and so now the goal is just to maintain that education of real hip hop. ... That has been the mission to explore and educate and learn and, just get back to that foundation because we feel like it's that foundation and those fundamentals that are really missing in modern hip hop... For me it has this network now of a variety of dancers that can all access Vibes as a platform because it is made up of a variety of dancers. And it's

awesome to see that some of our followers are heavy into ballet, and jazz, and tap, and whatever else. And you want to see this dance community, especially in Saskatchewan and Regina blossom and really come together. So, Vibes has now just been a Speaker's Corner for any dancer who wants to say something and to stay true to that foundation.

Danielle- Why do you choose to work with other people? What are the benefits of collaborating with others?

Eddy- So, collaboration has been an interesting thing, and I've been on both sides of it. Like me personally, I'm not a fan of networking events, especially in the marketing world. I think it's just a big schmooze fest... but you don't have to work with everybody right? You want to work with the right people and the best collaboration is when the benefit is equally on both sides. No one is gaining more or less than the other. And I've had that happen. I've had to say no to a few collaborations where I just didn't see where they fit with Vibes. That's when it starts to feel like I get a bad taste in my mouth. But in in other cases where it did work as a benefit for both, then it was super fun.

Danielle- How have you found the members of your crew? Have you had to seek them out?

Eddy- Everything is organic and I'm a big believer in that kind of organic chemistry. I keep saying Vibes, but I really trust the vibes that I get from people, especially in the dance world there are a lot of people who are just cutthroat and in it for themselves.

There are other people who are down to learn and down to collaborate and you can kind of just get that sense of who they are. But everything so far has been beautiful and organic. It's kind of like this mutual respect kind of thing. I don't even know how to describe it other than just like you're on the same wave.

Danielle- So going away from Vibes a little bit. Have you ever had any other situations where you've collaborated with others? Not necessarily on a project, but where you are building ideas with other people or working together in a shared environment.

Eddy- I don't have an instant moment that comes into mind on top of my head but it reminds me of group projects, you know, dreading group projects, especially in school and you're like, 'oh no I'm partnering with this person.' But you know, I think for any type of collaboration you really need to get a read of what type of person you're dealing with and every member of the group should acknowledge themselves as well. Like if I know that I'm a big talker, I might give a fair warning right off the bat like, 'you know, I talk a lot, so tell me to shut up if I'm going too far or whatever,' but I don't think I've had many instances just because I think that I know myself enough. I know where I can step on and work that way but if I feel strongly about something that I'll obviously have my input it's an interesting power play in group projects and collaborations. So as long as those positions are known, then there's not too many shocks in the pot kind of thing.

Danielle- What type of people do find that you work best with?

Eddy- With people who are in it for the message or the purpose. I'm always a person for purpose. There needs to be a thing that's something that's above all of us, that is going to leave a legacy, something that's going to benefit someone else. Like when they look at the history books and they'd be like, 'oh this event was so dope because it led to this.' Not an event that was so dope and people got paid. I want something to leave a good legacy behind.

I want to put out there: Be open to collaboration, but make sure you know who you're working with and you have to get a good read of them, especially in a networking event where it's a forced interaction. I would say trust your gut because it will save you financially and mentally by doing your own research and making sure they are the right connections with people. You've got to recognize what the angle is and it can paint that picture together. Yes. It seems to me consistently that if it's the passion behind it, if it's the idea that the people are excited about, then the collaboration works.

The theme that I kept noticing in the interview with Eddy is the importance of having a shared goal. Vibes YQR is an organization whose main purpose is to educate people about an often misunderstood topic. The need to be authentic, and to build a community for people who are passionate about dance, and hip-hop in particular, has brought together like-minded individuals who give their time and energy for free. A shared excitement or passion for a topic is a powerful way to bring people together. Although a goal might not be as specific, or as clear as the goal for Vibes YQR, I see this as an example of like minds coming together. I think a collaboration does require a shared passion or excitement to keep participants interested. I would be interested to learn how often the passion for the topic develops because

of the collaboration. I would suspect that a person's interest could turn into a passion by connecting with other people who also feel an interest.



Figure 16. *Eddy* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Night Witch Collective

The Night Witch Collective is a group of visual artists who are all creating artwork that is a little punk rock, pulling in magic, fables, and even a little taxidermy into their artworks. All of the artists have their own individual art practice and come together to offer support as well as organize an alternative craft market. I was interested in talking to the group as I found it was much rarer for visual artists to come together to collaborate, especially in a way that seemed to support the artist's individual practice. I spoke to the artist Jess Richter, and this is an abridged transcript of our conversation.

Danielle- Can you tell me about the Night Witch Collective?

Jess- There are four of us that are the core (of the collective) and we're the organizers of everything. We provide alternative sales venues for artists and craftspeople that perhaps have a more alternative style. When I say alternative, I mean it very much like the musical style of alternative, like Punk or Goth. The kind of thing where the work is really good, but the market is a little bit more niche. So, what we try to do is provide an alternative venue for creators like us. We try to figure out that niche market and advertise to them. So, we've become an alternative craft market and we run three or four markets a year.



Figure 17. *Winter Wheat* by Jess Richter, 2020

Danielle- How did you come together as a group?

I just finished my graduate degree and I think it's pretty common once you finish your graduate degree that you just have no idea what you're doing anymore because you've been in this very close circle for such a long time. I had such a strong community and when I finished grad school, all my friends from school moved back to their home provinces. I was looking to figure out something where I could create a community again and feel like a part of things. I missed having my community a lot. So, I approached my friend Beth. Getting together for a drink is a great way to form a thing. So, we got very drunk at my house and wrote a Manifesto that we signed in blood. That is a thing that happened. After we sobered up, we were like, okay who else do we want to ask? And one of the things I'm a really big believer in is a

collective won't be successful if you don't at least like the people you're working with. So we approached our friend Karli (and) Karli knew Connie (and she does taxidermy) and we thought she would be perfect for us. And that was how it all started. It was just having an idea and really deciding that this was a thing we wanted to do, to create opportunities for ourselves.

Danielle- So you talked about needing to be friends with the people that you're working with. So what is your dynamic working with each other? If you're having a meeting or you're planning something how does that play out? Do you have a leader in the group?

Jess- I don't know if I would say we really have a leader per se. I think we're all pretty good at checking in and now that we've established a yearly schedule we're pretty good at all being like 'Oh, hey, it's time.' I would say we all bring different strengths to it. We don't want it to become a thing to stress about and so we really try to keep it very collaborative, very open. One thing we set up right away that I think is really important is [we all] get Veto power. That's really helped keep the vibe of the sales good. We just try to keep things as friendly as possible.

Danielle- Do you think that this collaboration has impacted your art practice?

Jess- Yeah. I would definitely say so. When I first started out, I was very bad at sales. I would definitely say I lost money in the first few ones that we did because I didn't really know what I was doing, and I didn't know how to do things. As well, I'd say the quality of my work has gone up. My craftsmanship has gone up, as well as knowing

how much work to put into something. I have come to realize that you have to be true to yourself and not try to do what anyone else is doing and I think that's really clichéd advice but it is just the way it is. You can't be successful if you're constantly trying to imitate people.

Danielle- Working with your group, have you ever found that you've had a conflict or any downsides to working with others?

Jess- Yeah, I can definitely think of one particular sale where I had a project I was working on and everyone was really busy. It fell onto one person, who got stuck doing all the promotion. It was really rough on them and really frustrating for them. We definitely had to have an apology chat and be like listen, 'I'm sorry I dropped the ball.' That was one time where we definitely had conflict, or had to figure out how to deal with that in a positive way. So yeah, conflict happens in any group and I think it's just being honest about it and not sitting on it. It's important for creating that group.

It's really interesting because when it comes to my own practice, I'm a bit of a control freak. But last year I did a project in an abandoned house where I did have to collaborate with people. It was my vision, but I couldn't do it by myself. And so I had a mentor and I learned how to work with a mentor. My dad would have a lot of good feedback on how things should look. My dad's quite creative, same with my mom. My mom was helping along with my partner, and then I had a couple of the Night Witches come out and help paint. And it was really interesting in that, suddenly, I was working collaboratively, and I never had expected to. It left me with the taste of wanting to work more collaboratively in the future. I do want to work more

collaboratively on a project with someone else where it's not just all my vision and see how that goes because I haven't done that yet. So that's kind of like my collaborative experience thus far and it's been nice. I would never have thought of myself as a collaborative person, but I was surprised that I am. Its' addicting isn't it? Artists can kind of be selfish dick heads. It's like working collaboratively kind of just stops you from being that way sometimes, I think.

Danielle- I'm not surprised by this, but through my inquiries there's been a running theme that you have to have trust, and people that you want to spend time with outside of the project.

Jess- Yeah, I think that's exactly right, trust is the right word for it. You need to trust the people you're working with. I feel like bitterness can be a bad reason to start any creative collaboration. I think those motivations make-or-break collaboration whatever it is.

The theme that stood out for me in Jess's interview was the importance of liking the people who you work with, paired with open and respectful communication. A collective should be a group of people who like each other coming together to offer support and community in the art world. The connection to others creates the energy for the artists to keep going. I have learned with my own experiences that if there is not a personal connection the cooperation will not develop into collaboration. I see that theme echoed in this interview. Personal relationships are not a thing to discount or take lightly when trying to form a collaboration.



Figure 18. *Jess* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Fadadance

Fadadance is a Contemporary dance company and school. Creating contemporary dance on their own terms, Fadadance redefines what contemporary dance and dance education looks like in Saskatchewan. It is a collaboration between three dancers, Misty Wensel, Heather Cameron, and Fran Gilboy. Fadadance includes the professional troupe (Heather, Fran, and Misty) as well as a youth company and a school that ranges from age three to adult. As a dance school, they offer classes geared toward both masculine and feminine dancers from age three to any age and ability adult. They actively work to ensure they create a community where everyone feels involved and valued.

The three founders, Fran, Misty, and Heather started their relationship on the dance floor. Inspired by the rave culture, they began to perform. The performances led to an interest in contemporary dance. When they couldn't find someone to teach them they created their own school. The result is a multigenerational inclusive art community that seems to grow larger year after year. As a member of the Fadadance school, I see the strength of their collaboration first-hand and I am also familiar with their individual practices. I was curious to find out what makes their relationship successful. I spoke to Heather, Fran, and Misty in a conversation over Zoom. Below is an annotated transcript of our conversation.



Figure 19. *House of Three* photo by Shawn Fulton and Elias Williams

Danielle- Have you ever worked with other people along the way or has it kept to the three of you?

Heather- I think we love working with people along the way, we do it quite a bit. The constant is that it's the three of us, but throughout our trajectory, we've worked with others. Every time we make a piece it's like a new experiment. What are the new conditions that we're given? What are the restrictions, or what are the boundaries, or what is the new platform? And a lot of that often has to do with who are we going to be playing with this time?

Fran- The three of us created and did a lot of our own work in the beginning, and it felt like we were obviously influenced by a lot of stuff and then we got into this realm of doing tons and tons of collaboration, with the other artists on some of our main projects and then last year we're like: 'We're just kind of just craving it just being the three of us again.' Just want to get insular and also see where we have grown from all of those collaborations. What have we learned, what have we picked up along the way, how have we grown as artists. And I think there is this way that we're very community driven and very open and there is something kind of exciting about drawing back in and bringing our little shell around us. Also, I think it's very worthwhile to get a little bit insular like that again so that we can regroup, refit, get a kind of solidity again. I think that's been a little craving that we've been having lately. It has been years of collaborating now and curiosity to see what's come out of that.

Heather- You know, I wonder if we traced the life cycle of our dancing if it starts with the three of us working on something on our own independently and then we would go through a series of collaborations, and then we bring it back. Like *House of Three*, where we really brought it back to the three of us again, and then again we peter off and go into these collaborations and now probably we are at another moment where we're at that junction and we want to come back to our foundation. It's sort of like a reboot or a regroup.

Fran- We give each other the time and space to delve into our personal things a little bit because it only makes us better, richer, and more interesting, and then you put all those things together and mush it up and it's a whole new thing, you know? Yeah, not

always doing everything all together is super important I do remember a point where I was like: 'Where are my people?' I was like, oh! how will this too inform us when we come together? Because as individual artists, we have an individual art practice that gets attention, you know, but in that time there was quite a bit of space and attention to our individual practice. And it might have been *House of Three* that came after that

Heather- We needed to regroup.

Danielle- What do you think some of the benefits of working together are, whether it's within the three of you or with other people? Why do you choose to do it?

Misty- Whether that's in the studio, the bigger community of Fadadance, or the collaboration of the three of us, and I think that's what draws people to Fadadance, is that we all have a part in it, It belongs to all of us. And so that also really fuels me to do the work, not only as an artist creating as a collaborative three or as an independent, but also as a teacher, as a creator, it's really fulfilling to feel that that kind of cross pollination and people being really committed for lack of a better word, you know, part of it.

Heather- I like cross pollination. It seems a really natural way to work. I'm almost like, why would you work any other way? I know there's many reasons, but for us, or for me anyways, it feels like the most natural way to work, and even if you're being really logistical about it there's all these things that make sense. Like you have three minds instead of one, you have three bodies already, so you don't need to source out

other dancers or things like that. You have all these three individuals that each have their own skill set and can bring that to the table, you know, so already you might have someone with a great musical or musicality skill set and someone with a good visual skill set and someone with construction skill set. And actually those shift, those aren't even specific people and necessarily all the time, but it's just so rich when you're bringing all of that into one space. And I guess it doesn't always work. Actually, it's pretty rare that it can work, but it does work for us and that's because it's magical.

Danielle- Why do you think it works for you? What do you think you have? Because you're right, It doesn't always work.

Fran- It's a dash of magic and a whole lot of hard work. I would never discount the hard work it is, because it's a relationship. Like honest to God when I'm considering my future life I consider Heather and Misty equally with my partner and my child. We're so intertwined it's like a marriage, we've joked that we're sister wives, but there really is that aspect of things because we're friends as well as collaborators. ... we've worked through hardship a lot together and it's not easy. Because we are humans and we have feelings and we have egos. That's actually one thing I love about the art part is it keeps my ego in check, my attachments, my ideas in check because there are these other ideas... I feel like collaboration feeds what I want in life.

Reviewing the interview with Misty, Fran, and Heather, I found that there were several key themes. The most important being the importance of a collaboration to shift and adapt to the collaborators needs. At times, the collaboration might be

working directly together on a project, at other times it might be a support role for personal practice. Their collaboration functions as a home, a place for them to return and recharge their creativity. All of them mentioned the feeling of trust, hard work, and shared value placed on their relationship. Every member has a feeling of belonging and they feel they are part of the group.

I see this collaboration as a good example of combining the most important factors to maintain a longstanding and productive collaboration. The collaborators in Fadadance have a mutual respect, trust, and interests, but they allow room for individualism and connections with people outside of their small circle. The fact that the collaboration can be flexible to fit their needs of the moment but maintain the importance and intensity over a long length of time is rooted in mutual love and respect. For a collaboration to work all the members have to see value and enjoy putting in the time and work that it requires to maintain the relationship.



Figure 20. *Heather* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020



Figure 21. *Fran* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

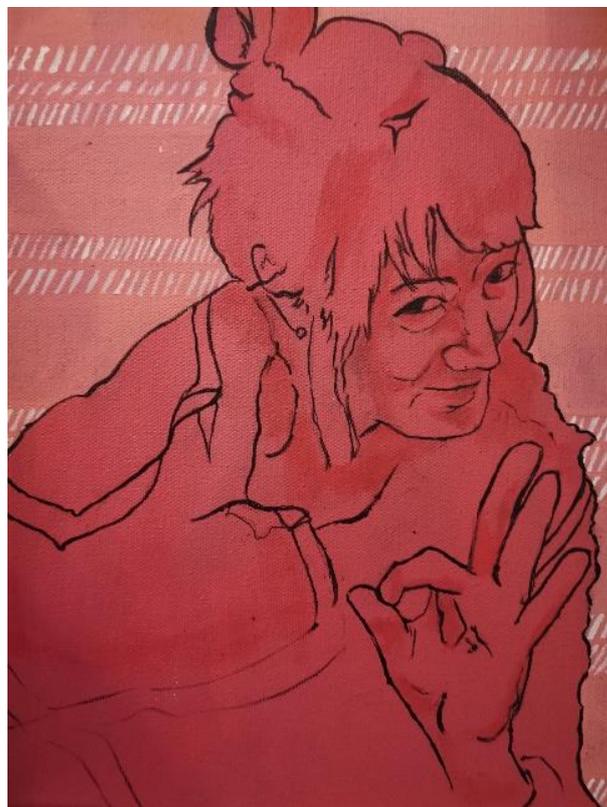


Figure 22. *Misty* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Teaching Collaboration

As teacher I looked back at the extensive collaborations that I have been a part of over the years. Simply put, I was in the right place at the right time. I have had the unique experience of participating in innovative teaching experiences that were focused on collaborative teaching. Because collaboration is a shared story, I interviewed many of my teaching collaborators and I include their voices and experiences.

Mike

I have had many successful collaborations, My collaboration with Mike Schmalenberg in 2018 was unique in the sense that I knew instantly that he was someone with whom I wanted to collaborate. The feeling was mutual. In addition to teaching, Mike is a talented professional singer, songwriter, and musician. We have similar world views, and we connected in our values and interests around art and education. We became teaching partners, but we would also choose to participate in many of the same extracurricular projects, like the school musical production. Outside of work we developed a friendship that extended to our families, our children are friends too.

Danielle- You are both a teacher and a musician, can you tell me about your experiences with collaboration?

Mike- In all honesty, when it came to the profession of teaching, while I had people who were willing to answer questions or people to talk things out, last year with you and I was the first time in a workplace that I was truly engaged in what I would call a true collaboration... where we could build stuff and we'd snowball off each other's ideas and something would come into fruition. But I also I think I'm the type of

person who likes to hold onto my own ideas, especially when it comes to something as precious to me as my music. I find it hard sometimes to collaborate with people. I think that's definitely a part of who I am which just made it that much more interesting and exciting last year.

Danielle- What do you think the some of the factors that contributed to our success working together?

Mike- It feels like a lot of the other times it the partnerships came out of necessity, or from proximity. Whereas you and I seem to have just hit it off right when from the first time we met. Having that foundation in place when it came to us going to work with each other I think trust was a big pillar. We had a similar thought process and similar views on things. When we worked together, even if I wasn't quite sure where the endpoint was, I was like, 'okay, I trust that this will go somewhere.' I also trust that if either one of us has an idea that we push for and it tanks, we would tweak it or we would be like, 'Well that didn't work we'll figure it out.' It is the ability to reassess things if they don't work, then be able to admit that it wasn't the best idea. The fact that we could laugh about a lot of things. When we were trying to create a lesson (sometimes to our detriment) that we'd be laughing about ten other things in between kept us in a good creative headspace. We weren't sitting there with 'Here's the outcomes and we need to make sure of this, this and this, and that's the only thing we're talking about.' Instead we were like, 'Here's an idea,' we jump off topic and when we came back in our brains aren't so laser focused on this thing that I feel like it'd be allowed for true creativity to come out of it.

I think that's a huge aspect of it is when there's a communal goal, but it's not so serious that you think of it as life or death. That's what kills collaboration, if one person has (and I think that's what kills my things sometimes with music) too much of a goal of this is exactly what this needs to be or to sound like any ideas will be shot down because that's taking us off course, and I don't like that. Whereas if it's here's our general area we want to land, now let's all work towards it. It's way easier to get true collaboration.

Because so many of our interests and past experiences overlapped it was almost effortless for the two of us to establish a collaboration. But after reflecting on our conversation, the thing that stood out for me was how rare it is to meet someone and allow yourself to be vulnerable enough to tell them that you like the way they think and think that you should work together. That honesty was established very early in our relationship. As a result, the collaboration that often takes years to develop was developed in a short period of time. This relationship was also unique in the sense that we learned how to approach each other with uncomfortable topics early on. As I was looking at the research and conducting my interviews it became clear to me how unique our understanding of each other as collaborators was so early in our relationship.



Figure 23. *Mike* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Aaron

Aaron Warner and I became teaching partners the year after I left my team at Arcola. On the surface we have somewhat different styles of teaching. Aaron is passionate about technology and makerspace teaching. I am passionate about relationship building and art. Although we had different ways of approaching things, we were on the same page. We found our common ground in our desire to challenge the traditional teaching practices.



Figure 24. *Zombies a collaboration*, by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Danielle- What are the benefits of collaboration?

Aaron- Something I value about myself is I'm consistently trying to reframe school and that's harder for some than it is for others. I think that's what I enjoy most about the time we collaborated together, I find that trying to change that structure is fun. I think every collaboration is going to have their strong points. There are the places where you completely jive and then the place where you deviate. Something that was always easy for you and I is that if one of us was like, 'Oh we should do this tomorrow,' it would always be like 'Yeah, let's do it tomorrow.' Maybe the flexibility was not always the best thing, but it made for a lot of opportunity. I think too that some of that comes from building trust. I think we were able to flow with that a lot better near the end of our time together. But I think that the one thing that we had in common from the beginning was wanting to do something big like wanting to try something different.

I think it gives you an opportunity to push yourself out of your comfort zone and also just outside of your head space. I would like to use our relationship as an example. Over and over again I learned so much in just the way in which you would teach with an artistic lens. You bring an element of art into your planning and who you are. I start with technology. Whereas you always had that science and art and you brought such a cool lens. That's something that I've taken with me. I really valued the importance of making it hands-on but you brought in a different element of that, which I always thought was cool. There is a lot to gain and learn especially if you're open to just seeing and then recognizing those things.

Danielle- And I took with me the value of incorporating technology and games into my teaching.

Danielle- Can you tell me some of the challenges that you have faced with collaboration?

Aaron- There's an issue around when you're put into a collaborative situation, and the expectation is collaboration, but there is no direction or support from the administration around what that looks like. I think it's really challenging, not impossible, but certainly challenging when there isn't the directive, coming from the top in terms of, facilitating the process of figuring out how you're going to collaborate.

Now that I've gone through this a few times. Take time at the beginning of the collaboration to discuss what's really important to you. What do you value in yourself as a teacher, what are you proud of and what do you want to make this? I think it's important that it gets it out there. I think that collaboration is a good idea, but there needs to be many structures in place. Common prep is important. This will be the second year I have no common prep with my teaching partner. And so that means two things: We don't have time, we don't have opportunity to actually sit down and prep or collaborate, but it also means that invariably our schedules are so off that anytime that I could bring my class with hers she's on break, you know prep. I think there are some things that need to be twisted and changed and I think there needs to be a strong

desire and willingness to try to be flexible from all parts. Not just at the teaching level.

In my time teaching with Aaron, I learned to incorporate technology and game-based challenges into my classroom. I became more comfortable using programs like twitter and google with my students. Aaron learned to incorporate creative experiences and artistic learning into his teaching. Together we pushed each other to create opportunities and experiences for students. As our relationship developed trust, we learned how our differences complemented each other. We encouraged each other more and more to experiment and play with what education in our classes could look like. I gained confidence in myself to try new strategies. Our shared knowledge made both of us stronger. In Aarons frustration about the lack of structure and direction he has received from his administration and the school board, I think that is often the piece that is missing. Because many do not have a clear understanding of collaboration, they do not have the skills necessary and resources necessary to implement collaboration into the school environment. For collaboration to work the collaborators have to have an affinity for each other, believe that collaboration will benefit them, and they need the time and autonomy to make real decisions. The administration have to trust their teachers as professionals, allow for input on group dynamics, and give the teachers time to build a relationship. As a minimum the teachers require similar class configurations and coordinated schedules that allow for shared planning time.



Figure 25. *Aaron* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Nicole and Nysa

Nicole Putz and Nysa Ochitwa have been teaching partners for a few years. In addition to being teachers, Nicole is a geologist and Nysa is a musician and artist. They share a passion about outdoor education, community, and teaching kids to be good citizens. Although they teach the same grade, their teacher collaboration was not mandated, they chose to work together because of their shared values and pedagogy.

Danielle- How did how did the collaboration between you start? Why do you choose to collaborate?

Nysa- We realized that a lot of our values aligned in real life, but then also how we were teaching and the things we were focusing on within our classrooms.

Nicole- It's rooted in friendship, and trust, and the feeling that somebody has your back and is there to support you and your ideas in the workplace.

Nysa- When we started bringing big groups of kids together, we realized the sorts of things that we could accomplish through that, and that it made our lives easier. I think it made our experiences teaching more enjoyable, having the support of another person. I think your reach is far greater because all of the skills that I have, I can give to her class, and all the skills she has, she can give to my class. They just get more of both of you instead of not enough of one of you.

Nysa- I think it's easier to find ways to do things too. I think we both like to do things differently all the time and are always coming up with ideas.

Nicole- There's more ways to figure out how to do things we want to do because we have varying skill sets. I think it makes my life easier, my work life and my personal life. I know that in my younger years I was a teacher who would never call in sick because of the pressure of taking that day to call in sick, but then reality is as you get older and you have children, you realize your limits and you need to sometimes take a sick day. I know that having somebody that has my students' best interests in heart and mind and can support me. That's a huge load off. It makes it easier to have a work-life balance.

Danielle- *Do you ever find that you create opportunities for your students to collaborate in the classroom?*

Nicole- I think we give opportunities for kids to collaborate and I think one thing that really occurred to me in the first year that we were team teaching is that I think it's really important for kids to see a functioning collaborative partnership. It occurred to me that first year that we team taught how much we figure things out in front of the kids and how many conversations we have in front of them where we talk through our processes of figuring things out. A lot of kids may not see those sorts of relationships at home and may not have that opportunity if their teachers weren't cooperating. They get to see that working relationship and how we work together to figure things out because we adapt what we're doing all the time, the kids will come up with something and we try to figure out a way to do it. I think that's a cool thing about collaborating or being in the same classroom is that kids get to witness that happening.

There are a couple of key points from Nicole and Nysa's interview I think are worth highlighting. They came together over shared interests and values, but they also feel they are stronger together because of their differences. The other key point I want to highlight is that although my other interviews often alluded to this, Nicole's mention of work life balance highlights one of the key benefits of collaboration. When you are working with someone else that you trust, you don't have to be responsible to shoulder the burden of work alone. The last key point from this interview is the understanding of positive relationships that visible problem solving that students can learn from collaborative teachers.



Figure 26. Nysa by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

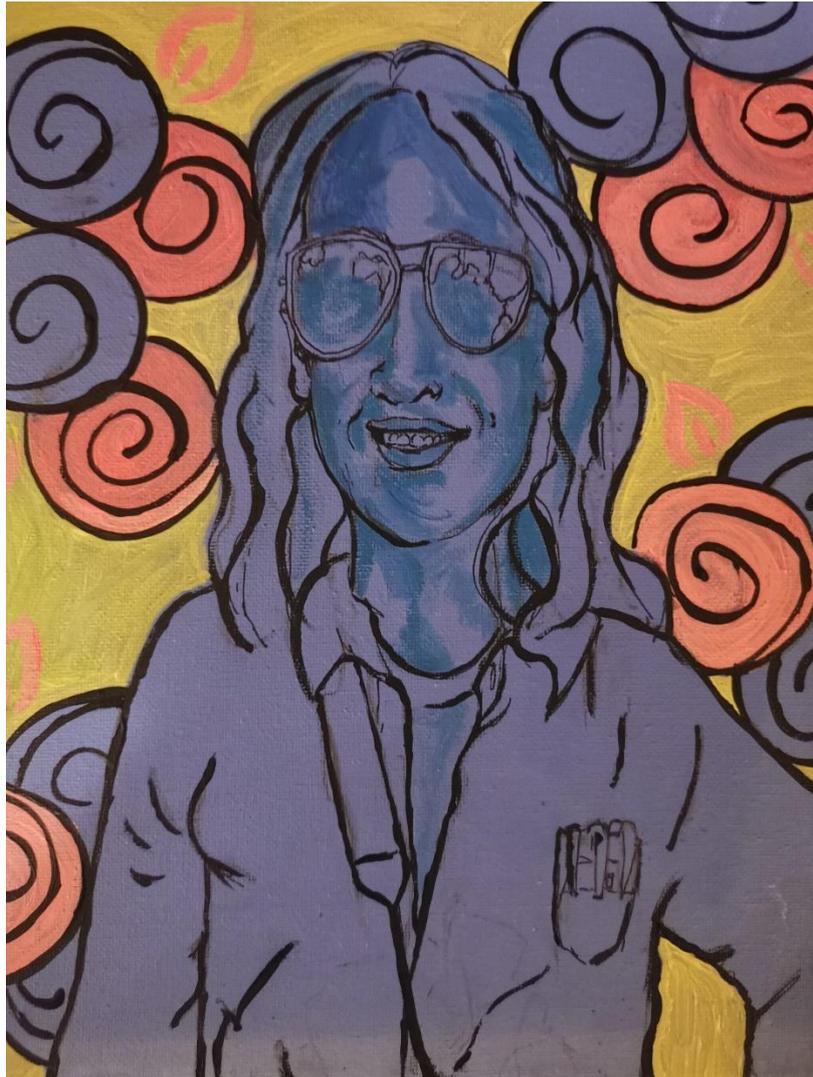


Figure 27. *Nicole* by Danielle Dumelie, 2020

Reflection

Going into this project I knew collaboration was a concept that I valued. But it wasn't until I started to conduct interviews and I heard the topic from different perspectives that I realized how much collaboration had impacted my own life. Saying yes to opportunities to work with other people that I like, and respect has led me on many adventures. Adventures that I would never experience had I decided to work on my own.

All the people I interviewed talked about the concept of respect and trust being vital for the success of the collaborative relationship. Equally important was the feeling of mutual

contributions and a sharing of responsibility. All the interviewees mentioned a relationship akin to family developing between themselves and their collaborators.

When you find gestalt in a relationship, and enjoy the process, you look for ways to continue to work together. I have said yes to taking on projects that I would never consider on my own all because I want to work with the people involved in the project. I was once a living statue/pedestal dancer because Heather, Fran, and Misty of Fadadance asked me to participate. I said yes without even knowing what would be involved. I knew who would be involved. I knew that I trusted the three that were organizing it and I knew that I wanted to work with Kris, Kristina and the other three artists who were also asked. When I arrived at the venue, I learned that the reason every one of us said yes was because we all wanted to work together. Had I been asked to do the project on my own I would have turned it down and written it off as ridiculous. This event was a success because every person involved believed in each other and took it seriously.



Figure 28. *Backstage Living Statues* photo by Danielle Dumelie, 2019

I would consider myself a self-motivated person, with many ideas, and interests. Collaboration is the catalyst that turns my ideas into reality. Like a fuel that moves me forward, it pushes me to achieve more than I would ever do on my own. I use the example of my running habits. I love to run, but when I am on my own, I have to convince myself to get out of the house. Once I do start my run, I am usually tired and return home in half an hour. When I run with someone else it is easy for me to leave the house, and I can run as long as the other person lasts. When I run with someone else, I run half-marathons. For me that is the power of collaboration, the shared experience can move you further than you would ever achieve on your own, and the work just feels easier when done with someone else. In a lot of ways creative activities are much like exercise. They both require training, commitment, and working past self doubt.

Collaboration feels like a natural way to work. Only upon reflection did I begin to realize that the skills needed to develop a successful and rich working relationship were skills that were valued and taught to me from a young age. I don't think that it is as intuitive as I first thought. Like with any skill, it only looks and feels natural after years of practice. My parents actively taught my brother and I communications skills. These skills were complemented by my heavy involvement in the sport of synchronized swimming, a sport where the team is judged on how in tune and in synch the members are with each other. It taught me that success from concerted effort, is an exhilarating thing when you have shared the work with other people. I brought those beliefs and experiences with me into my teaching.

I realize now how much of this project mimics my teaching pedagogy. In the classroom I believe the first and most important thing that needs to be established is a shared trust and respect so that students will be willing to take risks in their learning. I teach students how to share their ideas, ask questions, and solve conflict so they have the skills to work with

other people. Communication and collaboration heavily factor into the learning environment that I create. I also believe that it is important to allow students embodied ways to learn, ensuring that I find ways to make their learning visible and tangible. This concept was represented in the portraits that I painted. Painting, drawing, and dance have always been an important way for me to process information. As a teacher I recognize that students will learn best if they can express their learning in different ways. I have found that the process of working through this project has solidified these beliefs.

Through this process I have answered many of my questions, but like with any good inquiry, many of my answers led to more questions. All of the people that I interviewed had experiences in positive collaboration. I think it would be interesting to talk to people who don't like to collaborate. Have they ever experienced a positive collaborative circle? So many of the people I interviewed had such a similar experience with collaboration, I fear that I am only seeing one side. I am an extrovert and I feel energised by social interactions. Has this character trait contributed to my success in collaborative endeavours? Do certain personality types enjoy and benefit more from collaboration than others?

For me, collaboration is a positive experience and I find it hard to understand why so many of my colleagues are resistant to collaboration, or even spoke of their own experiences as negative. Because we live in such individualistic society, does the myth of the lone genius lead to a fear of sharing and working with others? Does the vulnerability of collaboration go against the dominant world view? In a lot of ways, I believe that collaboration defines the way a person views the world. If we allow collaboration to define us, we are open to growth and understanding.

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