Starting and Sustaining an International Teacher Collaboration: Insights and Recommendations from a SoTL Project

Lindsay J. Neill,[1] Heather Brilla-Swenson,[2] and Neil Haigh[1]

1 Auckland University of Technology
2 Stockton University

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, two higher education teachers, located respectively in the United States and Aotearoa New Zealand, collaborated in the design of curricula on the relationship between identity and food for their students. Intended to help their students develop cross-cultural knowledge and relationships, they hoped that their collaboration would also benefit their professional relationship and learning at a time when these aspects of their teaching lives were negatively impacted by COVID-19. As a contribution to the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), they undertook, with the help of a researcher colleague, an investigation of (a) factors that influenced their ability to start and sustain a successful international collaboration, and (b) its subsequent impact on their on-going relationship and learning. In this article, the rationale, purpose, and design of the study are outlined, and findings and associated theory presented and discussed. A key conclusion reflects the relationship between the hospitality 'mindset' of the teachers and their ability to conceptualize, enact and benefit from their collaboration in meaningful ways. Insights into the way SoTL can enhance teachers' ability to navigate such periods of deep uncertainty are also presented and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, Lindsay, one of this paper's authors, who is a teacher and researcher in hospitality at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in Auckland, New Zealand, decided he would like to find a way for his students to have some form of engagement with students 'outside' New Zealand. He envisaged that this might enrich their learning experiences at a time when social isolation policies constrained their opportunities to engage with one another. This goal also aligned with AUT's endorsement of a model for 'collaborative online international learning – COIL' (Rubin, 2017) which is based on the following premise:

> teachers from two cultures work together to develop a shared syllabus, emphasising experiential and collaborative student learning. The courses give new contextual meaning to the ideas and texts they explore, while providing students new venues in which to develop their cross-cultural awareness. (pp. 33-34)

A colleague with whom Lindsay shared these thoughts suggested that he contact Heather, a teacher and researcher in sociology at Stockton University in Galloway, New Jersey, in the United States. Through their initial conversations and 'checking out' of one another, they quickly realized that they shared backgrounds in the hospitality industry, had similar concerns about the impact of the pandemic on their students and were keen to explore how they might collaborate in helping their students learn from and with one another. They also recognized that they shared an interest in multiple topics, including the relationship between food and identity, seminal themes within hospitality and sociology. These topics could become a foundation for collaboratively developed curricula that would emphasize students' development of cross-cultural awareness and learning. Fortuitously, like AUT, Stockton University endorsed the COIL model. Consequently, each university was keen to provide support once they became aware of the proposed collaboration that emerged from this serendipitous contact.

Having agreed to collaborate, Heather and Lindsay developed and implemented curricula that focused on New Zealand's iconic 'ANZAC biscuit' and contrasts between U.S. and New Zealand breakfasts. Following implementation of these curricula and in anticipation of further collaboration, they reflected on the factors that had helped or hindered their successful collaboration, as well as its benefits for students and themselves. This reflection process also prompted them to consider how they might share insights they had gained with fellow teachers. With this agenda in mind, Lindsay sought guidance from a colleague (Neil), who could offer advice and support based on his experience in education research and his existing familiarity with literature on collaboration in higher education. Neil proposed that Lindsay and Heather undertake a 'retrospective' study of their collaboration as this would provide a stronger foundation for advice they might offer colleagues and also enable them to contribute to existing research on teacher collaboration in higher education settings. He observed that both of these outcomes would align with the notion of teachers engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). The origins of SoTL are, in part, found in Stenhouse's (1975) view that "teachers' work should be studied: they need to study it themselves" (p. 42). In this instance, teacher collaboration was the work to be studied.

Our article is structured in the following way. We begin by introducing Heather and Lindsay, then identify the project topic, the context and case for the study, and the research question. Following an outline of the project design, findings associated with the research question are presented and discussed with reference to the outcomes of other relevant research. Finally, the strengths and limitations of our SoTL collaboration are identified and the

implications of its outcomes for our own and our colleagues' practices and further research are explicated.

INTRODUCING HEATHER AND LINDSAY

Before embarking on this collaboration, Heather and Lindsay were strangers to one another. However, there were some existing affinities in their backgrounds. Both had substantial experience working in restaurant environments; they identified with social science disciplines, in particular sociology; they had a shared interest in the relationship between food and identity; they aligned themselves with social constructionist paradigm perspectives; and both were researchers as well as higher education teachers. The differences mainly reflected their position on a higher education career continuum. While Heather had taught for six years in the fields of social work, and food access and social policy, and was commencing a doctoral programme, Lindsay had 31 years of teaching and research experience in the fields of the sociology of food, the semiotics of gastronomy, and hospitable social enterprise. At the outset, they were, of course, unaware of possible similarities and differences in their respective teaching philosophies and practices.

A topic and the context and case for a related SoTL project

Heather and Lindsay decided to undertake an in-depth inquiry into *factors that accounted for their ability to start and then sustain a successful collaboration in a distinctive context*. That context included the absence of a prior professional working relationship, how the pandemic was disrupting many aspects of their teaching lives, that the collaboration occurred at a distance and that a very short timeframe was available for them to initiate their collaboration.

To help establish whether there was a compelling case for addressing this topic, a review of relevant literature was undertaken. Table 1 presents literature on the collaboration of higher education researchers and teachers that we took into account initially.

The review revealed that while there was a substantial body of research on collaboration in higher education research, there was a limited body of research on teacher collaboration in higher education settings, including collaboration at a distance. With this 'finding' in mind, we noted that teacher collaboration is a more common aspect of programme design and delivery in higher education than it is at pre-tertiary levels.

Although research on school-level teacher collaboration was much more extensive (Hargreaves, 2019) and offered relevant insights, we considered that the generalization of findings to higher education contexts could not be assumed and needed exploration.

Several other factors influenced this choice of topic. While we would have liked to take into account student perspectives on our, as well as their own, collaboration, this was not feasible given the timing of the project. We also established that there were no research ethics requirements that would preclude a focus on Heather and Lindsay's thoughts and actions and that the immediacy of the project as well as their retention of data about their collaboration (e.g., emails, meeting notes) meant they could provide trustworthy evidence, including self-reports, regarding their thoughts and actions.

We also considered our respective research paradigm positions and how they might influence our approach to investigating this topic (Haigh & Withell, 2020). Heather and Lindsay's paradigm perspectives resonated with social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966). This position led to a focus on the meanings that they drew on and constructed within the collaboration because those meanings reflected their realities. Neil's positioning was critical realism (Bhaskar, 2008). Consequently, he was interested in theorizing the attributes of Heather and Lindsay that empowered them with ways of acting that were required to start and sustain a successful collaboration. Our different worldviews enriched and added depth to our inquiry.

Table 1. Reviewed Literature

	Authors	Scholarship Type and Topics
Research Team Collaboration	Bond et al. (2021).	Literature review: Why and how academics conduct international collaboration in the field of education..
	Wöhlert (2020).	Literature review: Communication in international research teams
Teacher Collaboration	Briggs (2007).	Report – interviews: Perception of factors influencing collaborative curriculum development within academic departments.
	Creamer & Lattuca (2005)	Theories, case studies, meta-analysis, factors and contexts promoting collaboration for faculty learning.
	Donnison et al. (2009).	Report – reflection-based review: Factors influencing and benefits of a program design collaboration.
	Fitzgerald et al. (2020).	Critical incident analysis: Challenges in and support for sustaining dialogue across differences in interfaculty collaborations.
	Fraser et al. (2019).	Report – interviews/questionnaires: Identity-related considerations and concerns in interdisciplinary cross-faculty collaborations.
	Katajavuori et al. (2019).	Qualitative analysis of teacher portfolios: Forms of and contexts for collaborative practice.
	Newell & Bain (2018).	Review: Definitions, challenges, attitudes, dispositions, skills, structures facilitating collaboration.
	Newell & Bain (2020).	Report – case study, interview/questionnaire: Concepts of collaborative course design and perceptions of facilitating factors.
	Voogt et al. (2016).	Meta-analysis: Mechanisms and conditions of teacher collaboration in curriculum design.
	Willermark & Pareto (2020).	Report – case study: Boundary-related challenges and resolutions when collaborating.

Research Question

> What are the personal and external factors, and their interactions, that Heather and Lindsay perceived influenced their ability to start and sustain a successful international teaching collaboration in a period of pandemic-induced disruption, at a distance and within a short time-frame?

Several subsidiary questions were elaborated as the study was conceptualized. These provided a more nuanced agenda for data-gathering. For example,

> How did Heather and Lindsay conceptualize their working relationship?
>
> What did they set out to learn about one another when they had their first opportunities to communicate with one another?
>
> What criteria did they draw on when deciding whether or not they could collaborate successfully?
>
> What personal factors significantly influenced their ability to start and then sustain a successful collaboration?
>
> What external factors impinged on their ability to start and sustain a collaboration?
>
> What challenges arose and how did they address them?

THE DATA

To address our primary research question, we drew upon the following qualitative data sources:

a. email records that were revisited to prompt recall of thoughts and actions.
b. written responses to scripted questions concerning points of view, decisions and actions.
c. documented relevant points of view spontaneously expressed during online conversations and email exchanges during the project.
d. responses to two research-based definitions of collaboration (comparison with own concepts).
e. responses to a summary of literature of teacher collaboration (to what extent did the latter reflect their own views).

METHODOLOGY, DATA GATHERING, METHODS

Our collaboration merged qualitative survey and narrative inquiry methodologies. The former involved the use of written open-ended questions (primary and follow-up), which Neil, with reflexive input from Heather and Lindsay, scripted. Neil compiled transcripts of written responses from Heather and Lindsay that were subsequently verified and/or elaborated on by the pair. Examples of scripted questions are noted in Table 2.

Narrative accounts/commentary were also gathered from several Zoom conversations. These prompted ongoing discussions on Heather and Lindsay's experiences that were also documented.

Table 2. Examples of Scripted Questions
What period of time elapsed between your first encounter – and your decision to collaborate – and the beginning of your discussion and decision-making about a collaborative learning and teaching venture?
How and how often did you communicate during this period?
What did you communicate about at this time?
What did you hope/want to learn about Heather/Lindsay during the first opportunities you had to communicate with one another?
What did you do, to learn these things about Heather/Lindsay?
What criteria can you recall drawing on when deciding whether or not you could collaborate successfully with Heather/Lindsay in a learning and teaching project?
How quickly and easily did you make the decision to collaborate – and why?
Would you describe your process of working together as a collaboration – because?
You told me that your approach to working together/collaborating during this project has been, and continues to be, influenced by certain ideas and ways of behaving/acting – associated with the concept of hospitality. What are those ideas and ways of acting?

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND THEORISING

We applied Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework of analysis, interpretation and subsequent theorizing for qualitative data analysis, as noted in Table 3.

Table 3. Miles and Huberman's (1994) Framework of Interpretation, and Theorizing
1. Identifying and analysing relevant text and recording interpretations.
2. Looking for and recording patterns discerned in interpretations.
3. Generating original theoretical constructs and propositions and/or relationships with existing theory.
4. Considering the transferability of findings/theory to other contexts.

Steps one and two

Neil applied the first two steps to the written data/accounts associated with the inquiry questions. That analysis involved comparative/content analysis to discern distinctive and differing points of view/meanings. Heather and Lindsay then reviewed Neil's summary of his analysis and interpretation and, as appropriate, confirmed, corrected and elaborated upon it.

Step three and four

Drawing on this agreed analysis, Heather and Lindsay constructed their personal theories about factors that had influenced their ability to start and sustain a successful collaboration. They represented their theory as graphic models with complementary text. Subsequently, they exchanged their theories and constructed a further model that synthesized their most salient shared views. Then, they contrasted their findings and associated theory with those from the literature, asking whether they confirmed, added to, elaborated, or challenged them – or provided insights into the context specificity and or generalizability generalization of existing findings/theories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our COIL inspired findings arising from the key themes associated with the main and subsidiary research questions and associated data analyses are presented and discussed in this section.

(i) The nature of the working relationship

When Lindsay and Heather reviewed a research-based definition of collaboration (Newell and Bain, 2018), they concluded that their working relationship aligned with the concept.

> two or more agents, autonomous and voluntary, engage in agreed processes of interaction, share or come to an understanding of a problem domain, share decision-making, towards a common goal or mutual benefit. (p. 17)

They also spontaneously observed that their concept of collaboration was influenced by their longstanding involvement in hospitality work and the associated view that the notion of hospitality was interrelated with the concept of collaboration. When elaborating on this relationship, they identified several shared aspects of being hospitable and engaging in collaboration. For example,

> [The] Need to agree on a common goal from the outset to guide actions … without a common goal, you are working at cross-purposes, and it causes chaos and 'poor service'. (H)
>
> Keeping your commitments is important because 'dropping the ball' means the entire process breaks down. (H)
>
> Communication is so important. … You need to be able to say "This is what I need to accomplish my mission" and be humble in the service of the customer. (H)
>
> Unconditional giving – not expecting anything in return. (L)
>
> Making the unknown known – My other was our students. (L)
>
> Recognizing need before they need it. (L)
>
> It's about the other, not you. (L)
>
> *Asking what you think … creation/collaboration is about the creating the same dish … NOT the people. Same for me with this project ….simply replace dish with project.* (L)

The significance of these understandings was reflected in Lindsay's early query – was Heather a 'hospitable personality'? With this in mind, he observed, *"That was our click point … I saw that in Heather and I hope she did in me."* Ultimately, both emphasized that their shared 'hospitality mindset' was an essential foundation for their successful collaboration. This perspective implied that their views about collaboration were influenced by considerations of hospitality, as well as experience of collaboration when engaged in hospitality-related work. In effect, their concept of collaboration was coloured by their common professional background. A parallel perspective is offered by Shulman (2005), who identified ways of learning and teaching that are distinctive to certain professional education contexts (e.g., legal education, engineering education, hospitality education). He termed these contrasting approaches 'signature pedagogies'. The relevance of signature pedagogies within hospitality education has been recognized (e.g., Scott & Stahlbrand, 2021) and this research extends the relevance of contextually distinctive orientations and approaches to another aspect of hospitality/teaching work. This is a significant contribution and may be a fruitful area for further research within other COIL inspired initiatives. The latter may include the relationship between the hospitality personality (Leung & Law, 2010) and collaboration concepts practices and COIL. Heather and Lindsay also proposed that their tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty facilitated their collaboration. Again, they associated this attribute with their hospitality background and mindset – and, in turn, the entrepreneurial interests and endeavors that are often associated with hospitality careers. They linked a theory of entrepreneurship with this view (Schaper & Volery, 2004). Ambiguity and uncertainty are inherent in both hospitality environments and collaboration 'start-ups'.

(ii) Personal factors that facilitated starting and sustaining a collaboration

Valuing getting to know one another

> [W]e recognized the need to get to know one another and be open to varied ideas. Consequently, open conversations peppered our online meetings and video exchanges. … As an outcome of these conversations and eventual decision-making, we developed, albeit without conscious consideration at that time, a shared strategic vision for a learning and teaching collaboration (Heather and Lindsay, reflection notes).

This statement affirms Heather's and Lindsay's concern to get to know one another as a preface to determining whether they could successfully pursue a teaching collaboration and then facilitate their on-going collaboration. However, the timeframe available for them to fulfil this agenda was very limited given the need to fit prospective learning programmes to their institutional timeframes. Only five weeks were available for them to complete this agenda. The period in which they undertook the first two steps entailed about three weeks and involved a mix of email and Zoom communication and, for Heather, some internet searching. Lindsay initiated the first encounter via an email. By the time they had communicated three times over a two-week period, a mutual understanding that they would move forward with a teaching collaboration had been established. Reflection on the events that occurred during this period has prompted the notion that the getting-to-know-you process and conclusion about a prospective collaboration was akin to 'speed dating'. We are therefore interested to note that 'speed-dating' processes have been widely used to facilitate the start of new research and other interdisciplinary collaborations and there is associated supporting literature (e.g., Muurlink & Matas, 2011). The notion of dating was also drawn on by Weiss et al. (2015), who investigated the views of a group of higher education teachers concerning the phases they perceived were involved in their establishing an effective collaboration. The first 'getting-to-know-one-another' phase was characterized by the participants as the "Blind Date" and involved the mutual sizing-up of one another and wondering about the feasibility of a relationship; sharing experiences, philosophies and individual goals; and experiencing excitement about working with a colleague, creating a professional working relationship, and sharing responsibilities.

The second phase, which we labeled "pushing Through" included challenges as members worked toward developing an effective partnership within the social context that enabled the collaboration to unfold. The final phase, identified as "Authentic Partnership" was characterized by the participants working together effectively and believing in the ability to question one another openly while still maintaining a shared grasp of the goals of the course. (pp. 93-94)

While Heather stated that these phases coincided with her reality, Lindsay observed in relation to the second and third phases that

> we did not have a great amount of time to size up one another or dwell on challenges, frustrations and tensions. Consequently, with our let's do it approach and consideration for the other. … these two steps, in particular were not important to me.

A similar framework is offered by Kezar (2005) who reviewed models of collaboration development with respect to their perspectives on driving forces that underpin collaboration, stages of development in collaborations, the place of formal and informal processes and the importance of initial conditions. She proposed a model that identifies relationship as the key driving force; differentiates *courtship, engagement, and commitment* as stages; emphasizes the informal processes of sense-making and learning about one another; and regards initial condition as of minor importance given the need to constantly renegotiate and construct a collaboration. This model coincides with views that Heather and Lindsay expressed.

Two factors appeared to help ensure that Lindsay's and Heather's 'speed dating' was productive. First, their familiarity with decision-making under pressure. As Heather observed, collaboration in hospitality contexts requires an *"Understanding that we need to move quickly to accomplish the goal, making quick decisions to overcome obstacles"*. Second, as noted above, they both recognized that key opportunities to learn about one another and determine whether they could collaboratively pursue a shared teaching goal were present in the initial conversations that they chose to engage in during this start-up period. Their view about the place and significance of conversation in establishing a new professional relationship aligns with Haigh's observation that,

> Everyday experience confirms that the form of talk that we usually engage in initially when we encounter strangers and wish to get acquainted with them is conversation. (Haigh, 2010, p. 11)

Haigh cited Svennevig's (2002) proposal that "getting acquainted" talk typically involves self-presentation, initiation of topics and the establishment of common contexts" (p. 11) and that based on the outcomes of these moves, "participants in the conversation then decide whether they can, or want to, establish an interpersonal relationship that will promote solidarity (mutual rights and obligations), familiarity (mutual knowledge of personal background) and mutual affect (emotional commitment)" (p. 11).

It is important to note that the 'speed-dating' processes Heather and Lindsay engaged in played out somewhat differently.

> Heather: "*I started to think about his background in food anthropology and how he teaches his course. I read his syllabus to understand what he was teaching, and it was fascinating. I went to the AUT website to learn more about Lindsay's previous work. I planned out my research on his academic background and I tried to read into every email he sent me to understand him better so that we could work together.*"

Heather attributed her approach to her being *"a naturally curious person"* alongside her initial feeling of insecurity given her relative inexperience as a higher education teacher: *"I am realizing that I was insecure and was making up for it by creating structure and gathering as much information as I could."*

> Lindsay: *"Heather told me (about herself). I don't think I asked. As I recall, I my focus was are you keen, what do you think, how can WE make this work. I cannot remember long or short conversations about me or Heather. … I didn't look for meaning in what Heather wrote to me – it was about being spontaneous."*

However, Lindsay was attentive, albeit unconsciously, to cues about aspects of Heather's personality, in particular her relative enthusiasm. *"I'd push personality … I was driven by Heather's enthusiasm … anything else could be twisted around the corner to make it work."* He also acknowledged that he was conscious of wanting to positively influence Heather's perception of himself, in the interest of establishing a productive longer-term relationship. *"I was conscious of trying to nurture someone who responded positively to an idea … not annoy them. So, I was upbeat, positive and I hope enthusiastic in my emails to H."* He also noted that he had assumed on the basis of his colleague's suggestion that he make contact with Heather that there was overlap in programmes they taught.

Having criteria for making a decision and commitment to collaborate

Success factors for effective collaboration that Newell and Bain (2018) identified in a review of related literature included the need "to choose or make a commitment to collaborate, which involves a degree of consciousness and personal responsibility for the effectiveness of their contribution to collaborative process" (p. 33). We were interested therefore in understanding the criteria that Heather and Lindsay took into account when considering the feasibility of a collaboration and their commitment to it. The criteria they referred to explicitly included: (a) the fit of possible new curricula with their existing curricula and their students' current experiences, interests and knowledge; (b) whether they would have access to technology requirements, as well as their own technology capabilities given the necessary on-line delivery of curricula; and (c) the feasibility of accommodating a novel programme within their respective institutional semester timelines. Both did not refer to having deliberately considered the extent to which they shared views about education, learning and teaching or the match between their personalities. Mutual consideration of education, learning and teaching philosophies, and the extent to which they are shared, has been identified in several studies as having a beneficial influence on the construction of new collaborations. For example, Gillard and Kemmis (1984) concluded that the success of teaching collaborations was more likely if the participants held shared views about "the nature of the field and about pedagogy appropriate to it" (p. 78).

However, for Heather and Lindsay the trait of enthusiasm in relation to the prospective participation in a collaboration emerged as a key criterion.

> Heather: *"If we were both enthusiastic, I trusted that we could make it work."*

> Lindsay: *"I didn't have any thoughts like 'Does she understand, is she on board?' We shared enthusiasm and I think we both realises that within our hospitality connection."*

We noted that there is a substantial body of research on teacher enthusiasm, including regarding its conceptualization and relationship with student learning (e.g., Keller et al., 2016). Keller et al. defined enthusiasm as "the conjoined occurrence of positive affective experiences, that is, teaching-related enjoyment, and the behavioral expression of these experiences, that is (mostly

nonverbal), behaviors of expressiveness" (p. 9). This distinction between the experienced as well as expressed aspect of enthusiasm is relevant, as Heather and Lindsay both commented on both their personal feeling of enthusiasm and perception of its expression in the other. Absent from this literature is consideration of the relationship between teacher enthusiasm and a teacher's engagement with other teachers, including in collaborations.

The decision to collaborate was sealed when they agreed to develop a proposal Heather tentatively offered for a collaborative project. Underpinning this decision was shared recognition that someone would need to take the lead in proposing an option and, in turn, the other person would need to be open to carefully considering it. Lindsay observed that he took the lead when they first made contact and then Heather took the same role when they began to consider the form of a collaborative project. And, at this point, Lindsay considered that their relationship *"turned into a collaboration of equals"* and the design process proceeded quickly via email exchanges.

Sharing personality traits

While they did not explicitly consider their respective personality traits when weighing up whether collaboration was feasible, while reflecting on their collaboration they recognized retrospectively that they shared a number of traits that were influential and beneficial for their collaboration. These were recorded in their shared model and referred to in other commentary. Traits identified included their readiness to scan for, recognize and seek out new opportunities; tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; curiosity and wonder being curious and wonderous about each another and each other's students; openness to challenging new quests; and being prepared to apply intuition about what will work when making decisions.

While Heather and Lindsay referred to the negative impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic had on their professional and personal lives, they both indicated they had a disposition to look out for and recognize new opportunities in the midst of challenging and disruptive times.

> Lindsay: *"Covid has pressured everyone (globally) … yet we transcended that and created opportunity within 'disaster'. … In the best of times learning is often taken for granted. In the worst of times, learning can take on new meaning by opening up channels of communication and peer learning that come as welcome points of difference as we snuggle in our relative Covid bubbles."*

> Heather: *"I needed something to plan and to look forward to. I needed to feel like I was giving my students a reason to want to turn their cameras on. I wanted them to have a way to connect the new vocabulary of sociology theory with experiences; their own and now those of college students on the other side of the world. Instead of massaging existing material this project meant that I could co-create something new with my students and my new COIL colleague."*

Ambiguity and uncertainty are inherent in all learning and teaching situations and were inevitable in the opening phases of Heather and Lindsay's collaboration, given their initial status as strangers. The context of the pandemic also magnified the place of these conditions which have been widely cited in literature on the impact of the pandemic on teachers (e.g., Jung et al., 2021). Again, while we could not locate literature on uncertainty in the context of teacher collaborations, teacher uncertainty has been subject to research (e.g., Helsing, 2007) and is clearly relevant to this context.

Similarly, while not noted in the teacher collaboration literature that we reviewed, the place of curiosity and wonder in teaching practice has been investigated by others. Most of this research focuses on the contagious effect that a teacher's curiosity may have on their students' curiosity. For example, Thomas (2018) proposed that curiosity was a "central motivating force" (para. 1) in teaching practice and facilitated curiosity in students. Thomas (2018) also considered the distinction between curiosity and wonder that Heather and Lindsay linked. In this instance, Thomas (2018) cited Opdal (2001), who referred to wonder as a state in which "one is struck by the strangeness or peculiarity of the things met" (p. 331), adding that wonder "always points to something beyond the accepted rules. Because of this, the feeling of being overwhelmed, or the experience of humbleness and even awe could accompany it" (p. 331). Certainly, the pandemic learning and teaching environment was strange, peculiar and beyond the accepted rules, and curiosity and wonder were required to understand and respond to it effectively.

Heather and Lindsay recognized that some of their actions were initiated sub-consciously rather than consciously: that they read and responded to situations using intuition. This was apparent when they read a summary of research on teacher collaboration that was a foundation for their project. They acknowledged that while they had not referred to some factors that were reported in literature as having a positive impact on collaboration, they retrospectively considered them relevant. This implied that some of the knowledge that they drew upon constituted 'taken-for-granted' or implicit/tacit working knowledge that was accessed using intuition. This perspective coincides with views about the attributes of an expert practitioner, as described by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) and summarized by J. Edwards (personal communication October 9 2023):

- When things are proceeding normally, experts don't solve problems and don't make decisions; they do what normally works.
- Use intuition and deep understanding. They cannot always provide convincing, rational explanations for their 'know how'. Often have difficulty recognising what their own expertise constitutes and in articulating it to others.

Both Lindsay and Heather had opportunities to build expertise through the experience of work in hospitality environments that were demanding – and demanded collaboration. The place of implicit theories of teacher collaboration and the associated use of intuition have not been explored in research on teacher collaboration and create an exciting realm of future research.

Communicating thoughtfully and competently

Wöhlert (2020) contended that, within a collaboration,

> communication does not only serve as a structure and tool for information exchange, discussion of … goals and content, or the coordination of collaborative tasks. It also forms the basis for social interaction, formation of a collaborative … team, the establishment of functioning relationships … trust building, and the creation of a commonly shared project reality. (p. 161)

As already noted, Heather and Lindsay emphasized the significance of their relationship establishing and building conversations,

and concurred with Thompson (2009, as cited in Wöhlert, 2020), who contended that this social dimension of the communication process forms the crucial "glue that helps to unite the team" (p. 284). At the same time, and key to their COIL relationship, they acknowledged the place of other forms of dialogue and associated communication activities that were required for their collaborative design, implementation and review of curricula. Thus, they referred to offering and exchanging ideas, seeking and offering feedback, and proactively editing and adapting ideas in response to each other's feedback. For example, Lindsay noted that

> some of this was pretty basic – However collaboration was key to the whole process, "What do you think of this … would this work?" … I think I can remember us reflecting at different times about 'fit' and "Ohh my students will like that" "What time should my students contact yours?" After deciding 'what to do' we did it then ran by each other … before the students engagement … it was a pretty quick process and … a very positive process. We really concentrated on what was possible … and didn't go through a list of impossibilities. … It was "Let's do this."

In commentary, Heather and Lindsay emphasized that their communication was intended to be open, honest, direct, and efficient. The latter reflected the necessity of making decisions about whether and how to proceed in a very limited timeframe. Additionally, it was founded on their shared wish to allow one another *"space"* and opportunities to *"lead, … be attentive [and] open to our varied ideas."* They endeavored to avoid *"grandstanding"* and *"power pressure"* in favor of being *"aware of each other's needs – in a constructive way."* The latter involved consideration of *"Would this work? … What was possible [and] If it's fun for us then it's fun for them [our students]."* Ultimately, such affinities brought mutual feelings of ease to their communication and decision making, and they did not encounter significant differences that they needed to confront and negotiate.

Their references to such communication acts are echoed in the general literature on collaboration as well as the reviewed studies on higher education teacher collaboration. For example, within a list of factors identified as facilitating successful collaborations, Newell and Bain (2020) included the following:

> Each team member –
>
> - mutually negotiates shared meanings of the task and activity they are engaged in
> - applies their interpersonal skills such as listening with integrity, providing constructive feedback, clarifying for meaning and building solutions;
> - feels safe and confident sharing their knowledge and skill with each other. (p. 753)

Confronting challenges

The context for the project was an environment characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty and disruption brought about by COVID. Heather and Lindsay recognized that this posed a fundamental challenge to the ways in which they enacted their everyday professional practice.

> Lindsay: *"As a lecturer, with a hospitality background, who focusses on student-centred learning experiences, COVID impacted me in profound ways. COVID changed my thoughts and practice on effective lecture delivery. Because of COVID, my student communications were indirect, mediated by technology including Teams, recorded 'live' lectures, and email. Technology, not personality, direct contact, and knowledge dominated lecture delivery in distanced and depersonalized ways. Compounding that were the limitations of face-to-face encounters. These were possible, but they were obscured for me by social distancing and the need to wear surgical-style facemasks. Those necessities compromised my ability to communicate effectively."*
>
> Heather: *"In planning for my fall course, we were supposed to be returning to 'normality via Zoom'. The new normal? I tend to teach with my face and hands, and I was very concerned about keeping my students engaged on the computer. We weren't permitted to require cameras be turned on and the idea of lecturing to 35 black screens with students' names on them was making me dread the fall. How could I make sociology interesting to 35 non-majors?"*

Heather and Lindsay identified further external factors that posed challenges to their collaboration, including language/terminology differences; national/institutional differences in structures, norms, regulations, processes and practices; technology-related challenges; the constraints of communication at a distance and particular communication modes (e.g., email vs Zoom calls) and time difference considerations. For example,

> Heather: "*New Zealand has a different structure and vocabulary for Higher Education and I had to think quickly and listen closely when we 'spoke' so that I could understand his context. I am appreciating understanding the different ways that cultures approach higher ed."*
>
> Lindsay: *"If we could have spoken live we would have been able to ask follow-up questions or brainstorm more freely. Email is such a static way to communicate, there is no way to follow a tangent that often leads to a better way to do something or deeper understanding of the other person."*

Such challenges are widely recognized in the literature we reviewed and are key to COIL'S emphasis on technology (Rubin, 2017).

Other internal challenges highlighted in the shared model include views about relative status (*"I think he is a professor and I am not"*), colleagues' perspectives (*"Am I acting above my level in the eyes of others? How will my colleagues 'see' my initiative? Am I at risk of a backlash from peers?"*), and personal capacity to deliver, and to exercise agency within their own institution (*"Am I good enough?"*). While such identity-related concerns have been investigated (see the review by van Lankveld et al., 2017), we have not located considerations of these concerns in the context of higher education teacher collaborations.

While the nature of these challenges is relevant, of more import were the attributes and capabilities of Heather and Lindsay that enabled them to respond effectively to the challenges – and which are captured succinctly in Heather's observation that *"our hospitality backgrounds and related mindsets make us well-suited to be flexible, proactive and to find a way over any challenge."* From Lindsay's perspective, that mindset included a 'can-do' attitude: *"Heather had the Kiwi can-do attitude. It resonated immediately."*

A summary model

As we delved into the factors that might account for Heather's and Lindsay's successful collaboration, we gained appreciation of the complexity of the phenomena involved. And, as acknowledged above, the nature of expertise means it is likely that many of the

constituents of their apparent expertise remained out of sight. At best, we have been able to construct a partial representation of what came to the surface and seemed most salient from their perspectives. The following model (Figure 1) is an attempt to capture what we found.

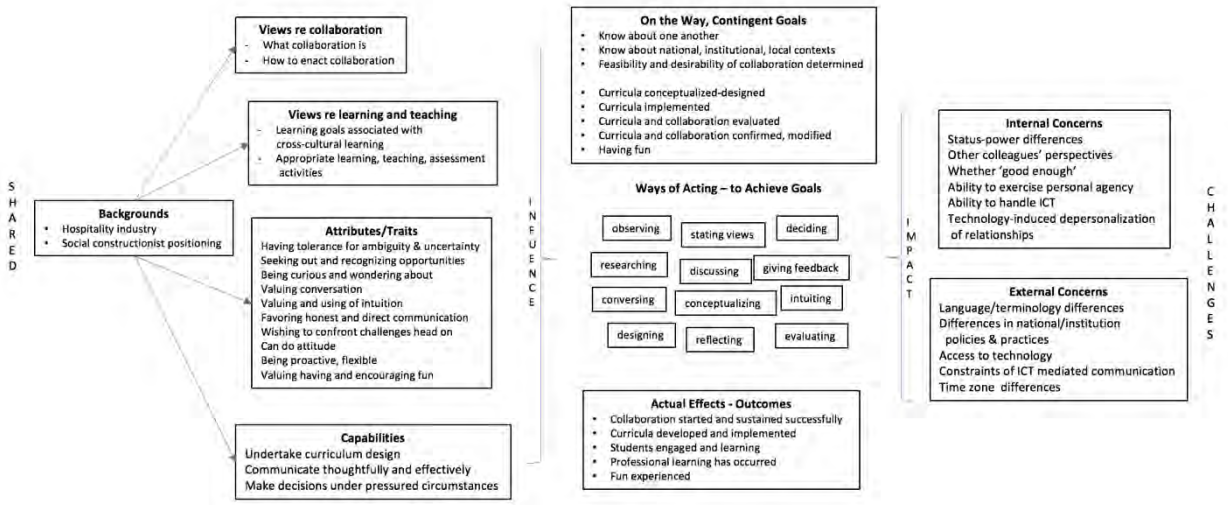

Figure 1. A conceptual model of our collaboration

CONCLUSION

Research factors that influence the capacity of higher education teachers to establish and sustain successful collaborations is limited in extent and scope, and we did not locate close precedents for this project. In this instance, the research focused on two teachers who (a) were situated in universities in different countries, (b) encountered one another serendipitously and were strangers to one another, (c) were unable to communicate face-to-face, and (d) had a very short timeframe in which to determine whether collaboration was feasible and then to collaborate in a teaching venture. Given the encouragement of similar initiatives under the aegis of COIL, the research is timely.

With respect to the rigour of this project, we have adopted the view that this criterion is fulfilled when it can be deemed 'trustworthy' and four associated criteria are met: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). To help fulfill these criteria, we used appropriate and well-recognized research methods, including iterative questioning, to generate thick data; made checks on data completeness and interpretations; and provided background information to allow our readers' assessment of the generalizability of our findings to their own contexts. Simultaneously, we recognized that our research has limitations. In particular, as our research was conceived post-collaboration, some potential data sources (including students, and records of Zoom conversations) and data-gathering opportunities were not available and our data gathering relied predominantly on recall.

When Heather and Lindsay considered the implications of the research outcomes for collaborations they may have with other teachers in the future, they recognized that fortuitously they had shared views and practices that meant they 'clicked' from the outset and that while they would maintain most of these views and practices when initiating or joining new collaborations, some may need to be adapted if such affinities were absent. Research on collaboration has highlighted tensions that may arise and need to be negotiated when differences are evident. For example, Fitzgerald et al. (2023) identified challenges associated with different paradigms of knowledge, sustaining dialogue within a shared vision, and problem solving in the face of uncertainty – and emphasized "the importance of initiating and sustaining a dialogue across differences" (p. 13) and of recognizing differences as potential enablers as well as obstacles to collaborative work. Obviously, differences may help ensure that complementary capabilities are available.

More generally, Heather and Lindsay valued the opportunity to 'make explicit' views about collaboration that had been implicit or taken for granted, and that they drew on intuitively. The knowledge that surfaced could be deemed 'personal practical knowledge' as it was largely founded on experiences that they had been thoughtful about and expressed in their accounts of events and actions (Clandinin, 1985). This outcome has made it easier for them to reflect critically on their everyday practice, to be more thoughtful when planning and navigating further collaborations – and to talk with other teachers about collaboration.

A further benefit of the project has been the opportunity to uncover some of the complexity of 'what's involved' in a teacher collaboration and the outcomes (as represented in the summary model) heighten the case for more research. There is much unfinished business. Complexity theory can provide a helpful lens for this research.

Reflecting the exploratory nature of the project and findings that we consider contributions to current scholarship, there are several aspects of teacher collaboration that we believe merit further research. These include the influence of professional roles and work contexts on concepts of collaboration and its enactment; implicit theories of collaboration; how expertise is manifested, including through intuition; forms of dialogue that facilitate teachers getting to know one another and what it may be helpful to know; and personal attributes or dispositions that may help teachers address tensions and challenges that may arise during collaborations.

CONTACT

Lindsay J. Neill <lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz>
Heather Brilla-Swenson
Neil Haigh

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