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The Interpersonal Collaboration

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The Interpersonal Collaboration

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In libraryland, we have a habit of talking about “the library” when we really mean “librarians” or “library workers.” By doing so, we negate our own agency in creating the services, spaces, and collections that make the library what it is and a valued entity within any given community. In writing about what we do, we are often afraid to use the first person to describe our work and accomplishments. This is partially due to (what we feel is an outmoded) sense that there should never be an “I” or “we” in scholarly writing, but it seems to us to be part of a larger tendency to assign or ascribe to a collective endeavor what individuals accomplish by meeting together.

We read a lot of articles about collaboration annually, and even when it is not made explicit, it is quite clear that individuals working together make collaboration happen. It seems obvious to us, both from our own experience and from reading and hearing about others’ experiences, that a personal connection makes innovation not just possible but often better. This often comes from folks who have interacted personally in a conference room, a classroom, at a town meeting, or at a social event. When people get to know each other they create opportunities to learn and become familiar with experiences beyond their personal reference. These close personal connections generate trust, and trust enables collaboration that results in projects beyond the scope of any individual.

As editors, we manage this journal from afar (one of us is in Denver, Colorado and the other in Portland, Oregon), and we mostly work by email and Google Drive. We appreciate the value of tools that allow this sort of collaboration and generally, this works well. But we are most creative when we meet in person - by phone or in person - and can bounce ideas off of each other and catch nuances that are often missed via electronic correspondence. We recognize that everyone serving on the editorial board leads busy lives and we try to find the balance between our mostly online, remote work and finding space and time to meet in-person. The times we have managed to get members of our editorial board together have led to great ideas for articles, for developments in our editorial practice, for authors, and even for special editions.

In today’s world of webinars, virtual meetings, and conference calling, it seems easy to meet with one another and commit to work across great distances. But those technologies work better if there are also chances for participants to meet in person and work through concerns and issues together even for short durations. There is an energy and cohesion which occurs in face-to-face meetings that just is not replicated in the online environment in quite the same way.



Emery & Levine-Clark: The Interpersonal Collaboration

The authors who created the collaborations and wrote the articles in this issue are the epitome of interpersonal collaboration. All these projects involve personal connections, with partners in the library, across campus, within their communities, or in a consortium. These connections enable librarians and their co-collaborators to understand each others' needs and develop projects that work better for everyone. And regular in-person meetings allow participants to grow and learn together. For collaboration to truly work, there must be an interpersonal connection.

