

## **The Art of Collaboration: The Journey Across the Parking Lot**

*"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy to a friend."*  
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



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*“Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.”*

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## **I. Introduction**

As social beings created to live within community, we are given the challenging opportunity to collaborate everyday. Differences of belief, religion, culture, or politics should not intimidate us from making altruistic change in our neighborhoods, communities, and world. Throughout this paper, I will show that child-focused, nonprofit organizations need effective collaboration in order to provide greater resources, support, and success for children. Using Jubilee REACH (JR) and the Bellevue School District (BSD) as a case study of a successful collaboration, I have extracted five principles. These are principles that all nonprofit organizations should use in daily practice when working with others in order to accomplish profound change within the community: (1) focus on the commonalities, (2) understand contextualization, (3) seek unification, (4) build trusting relationships, and (5) foster leadership.

When I originally began my research into the principles of effective collaboration, I envisioned my audience being members of the Christian faith community who were severely disengaged from those outside their own congregation. However, throughout my observations of the partnership between the Bellevue School District and Jubilee REACH, I realized that I was in the wrong. By making these principles applicable only to the Christian faith community, I was continuing the dangerous cycle of ostracizing one specific group by discouraging

their engagement with others of diverse backgrounds. Collaborative altruism requires we go beyond an insular mindset to seek the benefit of communities. This is a costly endeavor that requires discomfort and humility. Solutions to the dark and destructive social problems throughout our world can only be solved through equal participation of people from different contexts and beliefs. In order to thrive, nonprofit organizations “need to look beyond the walls and find partners who can help achieve greater results and build the vital communities to meet challenges ahead” (Austin xi). Collaboration is a creative process that can only occur when every person is valued and invited to belong.

## **II. Why Collaboration Matters**

A collaborative mindset is essential to the betterment of society but also for instilling values of hope that transfer through all generations. When child-focused, nonprofit organizations do not learn to work with all partners throughout the community, the biggest victims are the children.

From an early age, we are taught a mindset that focuses on individual needs and desires over the importance of the collective community. This constructs a reality that is filled with failure and disappointment as individuals lose the ability to interact constructively with a diverse range of people. Rapid globalization over the past decade has forced an age of instant communication and satisfaction. Life becomes a competition in which one must become the “superstar” and “suppress the productivity of the rest” in order to gain power and success over others (Heffernan). If someone does not fit into what a person can comprehend because of differences, then shunning becomes the easy default. Division and strife are fostered instead of

embracing the values that each person can offer to the richness of society and community.

But what has this competitive mindset left us with? It is estimated that “anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S. affecting 40 million adults age 18 and older” and even more alarming, “anxiety disorders affect one in eight children (“Facts & Statistics”).” Today more than ever before, society is filled with people, young and old, who are suffering from constant exhaustion and stress. It has become difficult to find satisfaction and peace in all the chaos when individuals find themselves experiencing anxiety from a young age. Relationships have been sacrificed and creative altruism has disappeared from our interactions with others. Our communities need a collaborative mindset that benefits from the interactions and growth with others, and child-focused nonprofits can become great instruments of this change. Everyone must “assume responsibility for the mission and legacy of the world they are creating (McNeal 133).

### **III. Defining Collaboration**

There has been much debate among academic sources on how to clearly define *collaboration*. If you look at key, successful collaborations, such as the Bellevue School District and Jubilee REACH, greater effectiveness to serve children “comes from a partnership when two people (or groups) balance each other of the necessity to keep harmony, make each other smarter, and make each other better” (Eisner and Cohen xiii). Collaborative processes create greater fulfillment and purpose in life. Twyla Tharp credits the habit of creative collaboration as her key for success and that “collaboration is how our ancestors used to survive before

machines came along and fragmented society” (Tharp and Kornbluth 6). James Austin addresses the importance of collaborations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century saying that we can no longer believe that we will get far on our own especially with increased social responsibilities and diverse needs. He argues that the greatest collaborations have “overlapping missions and compatible views” that take time to develop and strengthen (Austin 24). Phillip Butler offers a religious perspective on collaboration as “two or more people or ministries who agree to work together to accomplish a common vision” (Butler 11).

Effective collaborations should produce “efficiency, effectiveness, inclusion, bravery, empowerment, credibility, hope, and fulfillment” (Butler 11). Keith Sawyer offers psychological evidence as to why collaboration is essential to being the most creative and effective method in life and business. He argues that it is never one single person who changes society, but there is always a group behind the genius. Collaborative strategist and author, Michael Sampson, defines collaboration more definitively as a “human behavior where people work together in a particular way towards a common outcome” (Sampson 1). This definition implies that there is a specific goal to be reached and it involves the relationship of another person to reach that goal successfully.

Collaborative processes create and achieve something great. They also require strategic balance and intentionality. Oftentimes people interchange partnership with collaboration, but the two terms are very different. Partnership involves an agreement of support but does not necessarily mean being engaged in a particular process of creating something new together. Take for example two legal

firms. The two firms can agree to be partners together, meaning that they may share resources and knowledge from time to time, but they are not necessarily trying to create something new together. Personal agendas will always have priority and when a conflict of interest occurs, a partnership would be much easier to disband. Partnerships do not take as much risk because both groups could stay at a manageable and comfortable distance. However, collaboration takes more courage to achieve. Success depends on the help of others. Collaborations are much harder to break off because intensive labor is invested together. One cannot exist effectively without the other. It also involves a high degree of creativity and thought.

Even the original root of the word collaboration supports this claim. The Latin word *collaboratus* meant to “labor together” with *labor* being defined as an “expenditure of physical or mental effort especially when difficult or compulsory” (“Collaborate”). Further more, the first use of the verb form *collaborating* was defined as “as a traitor working with an enemy occupying ones own territory, usually willingly” and currently means “to work jointly with others or together, especially in an intellectual endeavor (“Collaborate”). Not only does collaboration imply laboring with others, but more specifically it implies a complex, intellectually demanding process that has a high risk or reward. There may be situations when a partnership is more appropriate to use, but nonprofits that are aiming to achieve creative brilliance should aim for an effective collaboration.

### **Benefits of an Effective Collaboration:**

Effective collaborations by nonprofits will have several defining features that bring powerful impact to the environment and community within and around them.

Several of these will be addressed in detail further when identifying the principles extracted from the case study of Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District. Effective collaborations expand and nurture resources. With the rise of the nonprofit sector, it has become increasingly difficult for nonprofits to secure the necessary funding. Resources are limited and nonprofits have to be smart in how they implement these resources in child-focused programs. But with collaboration, those resources dramatically expand as various groups work together to meet needs that may arise. No single nonprofit has all the inputs necessary to implement societal change, but collaborations “provide access to far more resources than any single organization could own or buy” (qtd. in Butler 22). This also creates greater efficiency. As resources expand through collaboration, problems are solved faster as others are invited to provide expertise and knowledge.

Further more, collaborations are inclusive and invitational to bring people together under a common purpose and create stronger social bonds. This fosters a powerful connection between organizations creating change by “effectively linking people together who are committed to a common vision” (Butler 59). Collaborations empower people to recognize their unique strengths and contributions to the world. When working together, other people within the collaboration can provide encouragement and acknowledgement of value for individual talents and gifts. Strategic alliances create objectives that are clearly defined and can be accomplished (Butler 11). Like previously mentioned, collaborations are formed when groups realize that a vision of societal change can only be accomplished with others. The purpose provides a launch point for what objectives are needed



throughout the journey. Groups believe in the process of collaboration and failure is never an option. Similarly, collaborations bring a sense of hope by making possible a reality that would otherwise feel overwhelming and futile when attempted alone. The process of collaboration creates a new understanding and appreciation for other individuals or groups of people. As others are invited into the process, diverse opinions are embraced and relationships formed. Finally, collaborations produce action and results that can be measured in various ways depending on the context and situation. This action is “driven by vision” that has the ability to contribute to the greater community (28). Collaboration is a process; a process that requires everyone to play their part, just like in the case of Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District.

**Challenges to Collaboration:**

While there are many benefits to a strong collaboration, there are many challenges as well. Embracing the challenges can put a person in a stronger position to work with others because it causes one to think from another persons’ perspective and enhances creativity. It causes the collaborator to enter into another persons’ world. Just because people are different does not mean that we cannot accept or value them as human beings.

The first key challenge comes from cultural differences between collaborators. The dynamics of culture surrounds us all as “our own culture is to us like the air we breathe, while another culture is like water-and it takes special skills to be able to survive in both elements” (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 23). Culture is the “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one

group or category of people from others” (6). Much of the way that people act and make choices is influenced by some degree of their cultural background. Culture is developed over time and is not innate. The foundation of these “mental programs lie within the social environments in which one grows up and collected during ones’ life experience” (5). Culture, different from personality, refers to a set of learned behaviors common to a group of people, while personality is inherent and developed by a specific person. Some examples of culture in ordinary life would be how people greet each other. In Japan, it is customary to bow when being introduced to someone. The degree to which you bow and show eye contact depends on a persons’ position of authority or respect. Personal contact such as a handshake or hug is seen as disrespectful and intrusive. Being aware of cultural norms allows a person to suspend cultural judgment of projecting ones’ own perceptions onto another. Awareness also allows engagement to be effective and respectful when collaborating within a corporate or community project.

Another challenge with collaborations comes from contrasting beliefs in religion or morals. People develop religious views from an early age and throughout life as a way to find meaning and fulfillment in a complex world. More than “85 percent of the world’s population embraces some sort of religious belief” as a way for people to find belonging in social communities (Azar 1). Sigmund Freud believed religion to be a “malignant social force that encourages irrational thought and ritualistic behaviors” (qtd. in Azar 1). Religion is a social force that can often be hard to negotiate or compatible to work with for fear of compromise. In order to collaborate and build a trusting relationship, individuals need to be intentional

about respecting religious or non-religious backgrounds and traditions. This involves a willingness to engage with others by asking questions and practicing deep listening. People should not have to compromise a core part of personal identity and ultimately allows an experience of belonging and acceptance.

Collaboration can be challenging because of personal pride and ego. While sometimes not a bad thing, personal pride and self-admiration can be very disruptive to forming healthy relationships when projected onto others in a selfish way. Collaboration is a taxing process with many setbacks and challenges. They can often cause a person to shut down or give up because personal reputation is at stake. No individual wants to look bad or feel attacked. Similar to this is the “savior-complex.” Instead of letting accomplishments be celebrated and enjoyed by all, individuals long to be acknowledged as the hero. Leaders can especially be susceptible to this complex because much of the attention is placed on them. The problem with having a “savior-complex” is that the personal mission becomes a competition of comparing your work with others instead of joining together to meet the needs of the community. This happens far too often throughout communities as you see multiple nonprofit organizations competing to solve similar community problems. Important questions that many fail to ask are: when is it acceptable to start another organization as opposed to working with one that is already in existence? Am I causing more division instead of bringing resources together to benefit the community?

Jubilee REACH has had to ask these hard questions when looking towards the future of expanding into other school districts. Interestingly enough, there have

been several stakeholders of Jubilee that have said, “they don’t want to go into the Seattle district because this is our Bellevue thing” (Kern). One can only speculate on the complete meaning of this statement, but it shows the tension when trying to collaborate with other nonprofit organizations. This once again raises the question: should nonprofits band together to focus on one social need or should a new nonprofit be started? Every organization desires to look good and be the hero. Every organization wants to gain recognition for a new and innovative strategy implemented into a community. This can be part of the motivation to action, but collaborators need to be aware of the tension between personal validation and what is good for all.

Another challenge to collaboration is that relationships are complicated. They take a lot of understanding, patience, and forgiveness. Relationships are complex because of differing opinions and beliefs, especially as time progresses and conflicts arise. Discrepancies of vision and mission are revealed over time, as well as whether a particular collaboration is beneficial or harmful. This understanding comes from fostering personal relationships and then leads to action. There needs to be willingness to grow along this difficult journey from all people involved. This willingness should be seen not just in the leadership roles, but in the stakeholders, employees, and community at large.

**Stages of Collaboration:**

As James Austin cites in his book *The Collaboration Challenge*, there are three stages that any collaborative relationship must pass through: the philanthropic, transactional, and integrative stages (Austin 19). Each of these stages takes

significant amount time. The philanthropic stage involves the agreement on the necessity of the project and the formation of relationships that are necessary for collaborations. This is the stage where the most meetings take place and a purpose of vision is clarified and accepted by all. However, the quickest way to damage collaboration is to call a meeting too early (Butler 21). There needs to be significant preparation before meetings occur so that all members are respected and invited into the process. In the case of Jubilee and the BSD, meetings began as relational networking from within the church community at Bellevue Presbyterian and then grew to involve those who were aware of Jubilee's mission and willingness to help. Each person was able to articulate clearly the purpose of the collaboration process: that families and students were not able to access significant resources within the community. Each side is also able to see how they benefit from the project. Jubilee was able to engage the people of the community and the school was better able to reach their students. Both sides had values that overlapped and created a common vision.

The next phase is the transactional phase of putting vision into action. Each side is recognized for their strengths and invited to action together. Jubilee began the process of implementing a community center that was open to all people in the Bellevue community. The BSD contributed to advertising and letting families know that the community center was an available resource and engagement grew as relationships developed between organizations.

As a collaboration of trust grows over time, the last phase naturally begins to form: the integrative stage. Jubilee and the BSD complimented each other in

bringing creative change to their immediate community. As more needs developed, the BSD was able to go to Jubilee and ask for more help in the form of an after-school and sports program that directly worked with the students on campus. Key partners in the collaboration could not succeed without the integration of the other partner. As collaborations develop the integrative stage should be a natural and complimenting process in order to be successful.

Collaborating is a process; a process that requires everyone to play their part, just like in the case of Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District. The next section details the story and inspiration behind the necessary, collaborative principles found throughout this paper.

#### **IV. Setting the Stage: A Case Study of Collaboration**

Many are surprised to discover that Jubilee REACH (JR), located in Bellevue, Washington, is a Christian, nonprofit organization that has been able to collaborate successfully for the past ten years with the public Bellevue School District (BSD). Their partnership has produced astounding results of meeting the diverse needs of the families and students throughout the Bellevue area. Many would think that such a partnership could never, or maybe even, should never exist because of religious affiliations. Yet the principal of one particular school said, “I can’t image Odle Middle School without Jubilee REACH in all its’ forms and manifestations. I would shout their praises from the mountaintops if I could” (McDowell). How have these organizations been able to overcome their differences in order to work so effectively together?

The story begins in November 2005, when a group of people from the BSD met to discuss the growing demands and needs of their public schools. Since 2000, Bellevue has been one of the fastest growing and most diverse areas in the entire country. The population has grown 11.4 percent with “minorities comprising a staggering 98 percent of that growth” (Han 14). As of 2010, “there are more than 80 languages spoken by students in the BSD and about 34 percent of the BSD students speak a first language other than English” (15). There were a lot of needs to be met and very few resources within the schools to meet those needs.

In addition to the growing racial and cultural diversity in Bellevue, the District was beginning to see a rise of socio-economic diversity as well. In one particular school, Lake Hills Elementary, there were growing problems of poverty, hunger, homelessness, and domestic violence” (Han 4). Seventy percent of the student population at that one school qualified for free or reduced-price meals (4). This is a shocking statistic considering the reputation of Bellevue as an affluent and wealthy area. The BSD knew that these were problems that they alone did not have the capacity to address and they had to call on outside sources to help.

Around the same time that these meetings were taking place and only a couple miles down the road, Pastor Scott Dudley at Bellevue Presbyterian Church challenged his congregation to action by finding ways to serve the community. He coined the phrase “turning outward through acts of service to show the real Jesus.” (Brewer). One of the members of the church happened to also be the president of the BSD at the time and came forward with the idea of having a “service day” where people from the Bellevue community would go to a local school and spend the day

cleaning and doing whatever needed to be done. At first “it wasn’t easy to arrange because the school district was hesitant, but they persevered and two hundred people showed up to work all day to clean the school and the principal and staff were amazed at the amount of work and transformation that was accomplished” (Brewer). That opened the door to other service days that eventually got more churches throughout the area involved to help their nearby schools.

In November 2005, a group of leaders from Lake Hills Elementary and the newly formed Jubilee REACH met in a building across the parking lot from the school. The initial meeting had detailed notes of addressing the needs of that particular school community and the possibilities that could be achieved if they worked together. Jean Vrbka, a counselor at Lake Hills Elementary and one of the original members of those meetings, stated: “Everything started from the beginning so well because barriers were being broken down to build recognition and trust” (Vrbka). This led to bettering the community by “taking the hand of the family” and creating “a comfortable place to bring people in” (Christie). From the very beginning, all agendas of what Jubilee REACH wanted to achieve as an organization were set aside to meet the communities’ needs. Hence, the meaning for the acronym of REACH: Relationships. Education. Assistance. Community. And Hospitality.

The first major need addressed at the meeting was that students at the elementary school were being dropped off early in the morning because their parents needed to go to work. The Lake Hills staff would show up to find a group of kids sitting in the cold with no supervision or anything to do. The second need was similar in that parents had no options for what to do with their children after school.



One mother of six kids who worked as a nurse's aid did not have options for what to do with her kids after school or if they needed to be absent from school. There were after-school programs such as the Boy and Girls Club and the YMCA, but they could only accept a certain amount of kids and transportation and cost were an issue. Clearly the need to have community leaders work together to create hopeful solutions was necessary; and so their collaboration began with listening.

Various leaders throughout the community decided to work together to raise money to start a community center located across the parking lot from Lake Hills Elementary. The center was meant to "be a hub center for the community and a place for all to feel comfortable and welcomed" (Christie). From the beginning, the Jubilee REACH organization was portrayed "not as a program but as a service to love, listen and learn" (Christie). Every service that came out of the REACH center was specialized for the direct needs of the families that walked through the door. The Executive Director of Jubilee, Brent Christie, joked that "every time Jean came walking across the street, a new program would be starting" (Vrbka). The BSD began to recommend Jubilee as a partner resource for families that were in need as Jubilee continued to put time and resources into relationship building with the community around them. The needs of before-and-after school programs at Lake Hills were met by using the Jubilee center as a place for kids to come in the morning and have supervision and get breakfast. Volunteers would then walk the students over to the school before their first period class began. The results were immediate and other schools in BSD started to take notice.

In 2010, the collaboration between Jubilee and the school district took

another huge step. Jubilee was invited to attend a meeting with the staff at Highland Middle School to discuss how to help with serious problems going on within their middle school. Many realized that in order to make monumental and sustainable change in the lives of people in the Highland community, work had to start directly with the children. Various factors were causing students to disengage from their education and school staff did not have the adequate resources or time to give to these students during school hours. Other needs were for after-school supervision and a sports program that would provide safety, mentorship, tutoring, and support. If the school could win over the kids then the families would eventually feel more comfortable to join in the process. It would take a lot of time but with the collaboration of Jubilee they could “start small, do well, and let the program grow through quality” (Brewer).

Immediately, Jubilee began an “adaptive leadership model that adapted to what the school wanted over time” starting from the ground up (Christie). A site coach was assigned to the school and built a team of trusted volunteers to serve by listening and learning (Brewer). Jubilee understood that this partnership was only possible through invitation and support of the district and school administrators. It was a “collaborative caring community” to meet the social-emotional needs of the youth and the outcome of success were more important than creating heroes that held different agendas (Christie). The diversity of the school community demanded strong collaborative support.

Within a couple years, Highland Middle School began to see drastic improvements in student behavior and grades. Other middle schools around the

district began to hear about the Jubilee programs being implemented and the positive results. By 2011, all of the middle schools in the BSD had a Jubilee REACH team on their campus. The growing process was not easy and many administrators were extremely hesitant for understandable reasons. Eric McDowell, the principal at Odle Middle School, admitted to being hesitant for an after-school program because so many other organizations had failed to offer true supervision and results. But after learning about Jubilee's successful sports program in other schools, he was convinced to give them a chance. From the first day "the kids loved them and ever since then, it has morphed into where we don't even really think of them as a sports program anymore but as part of the culture of the school" (McDowell).

The collaboration between the BSD and Jubilee is transforming the Bellevue community for the better. It has taken time, but other schools around the state are taking notice. In 2013, the International City and County Management Association nominated Jubilee for excellence in "showcasing the great collaboration between Jubilee and the City of Bellevue to cities and counties nationally and internationally as a model for improving the quality of life for residents through more innovative, efficient and effective services" (Jubilee REACH). In 2014, the Washington Education Association awarded Jubilee REACH "Community Partner of the Year" for meeting community and humanitarian needs. Many other city leaders throughout the state have requested to tour Jubilee to see how they can incorporate similar practices into their communities. For Bellevue, the school district is planning to extend the Jubilee REACH model into every school. In the fall of 2015, Jubilee began their pilot program of working in the Bellevue high schools.

There are thousands of people within the Bellevue community who took part in this specific collaboration, but it started with the clarity of purpose from two separate nonprofit organizations. The key is setting aside differences to realize a common vision for the community and letting that vision be the inspiration for every step, even if it takes being a servant rather than a hero. The story of Jubilee and the BSD conveys various principles of what an effective and meaningful collaboration should possess. For several months, I was given the opportunity to observe and collect data on the effectiveness of this particular collaboration process. Here are four principles that I derived from the collaboration between Jubilee and the BSD. This story is not a single story. Collaboration can be done by any nonprofit that wants to make their communities a better place for the present and future.

#### **V. Principle One: Focus on the Commonalities of Purpose**

If any collaboration between nonprofits is going to be successful the commonalities of purpose need to be clearly defined and communicated. Author Simon Sinek coined a powerful phrase that is the core to establishing an effective team or collaboration: “people don’t buy WHAT you do, they buy WHY you do it” (*Start with Why* Sinek 41). At the core of the relationship between Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District was a focus on defining the purpose. That specific purpose was to listen and meet the needs of the students and families in the Bellevue community. Sinek believes that at the center of human psychology and interaction is a deep sense of understanding why people do what they do. People who have an influential impact on the world make choices from the inside out. Clarity of purpose creates a binding force of action that is influential and invitational

to others. It creates a sense of hope and empowerment that welcomes others with similar passions into a creative experience. The organizations that are able to make significant change in their communities are who understand their purpose, and articulate it so well that their actions become influential and inspiring. Others are drawn in “not because they are swayed but because they are inspired” and find a “sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with external incentive or benefit” (6). Jubilee had a distinct advantage in defining their purpose because of their willingness to listen and invite others into accomplishing their vision together.

Societal changes can only be accomplished in collaboration with others. As social creatures, humans have a deep desire to belong, feel safe, and connect with others around us. This feeling is “not rational but it is a constant that exists across all people in all cultures” (*Start with Why* Sinek 53). The limbic system of the brain is responsible for “the controls necessary for self-preservation, emotional stimuli, motivation and reinforcing behaviors” or as some put it the “feeling and reacting part of the brain” (Swensen). This is the part of the brain that determines our why which explains how it is hard to rationalize certain feelings or give an answer as to why something makes sense. As Donald B. Calne said, “the essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions” (qtd. in Joyaux 236). Emotions can play a large role in our interactions with others.

Instead of focusing on the similarities of purpose, organizations often allow fear to stop them from collaborating with others. Fear does not inspire creative thinking and action. Some of those fears may include: the fear of the unknown, fear

of failure or disappointment, fear of pain, fear of loneliness. Hofstede identifies fears of uncertainty avoidance and xenophobia that can limit the success of collaboration. Uncertainty avoidance is “the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous situations” (Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 191). Xenophobia is the fear of what is different. Both can often times be held without recognition. As I started on my journey in graduate school, one of the most challenging lessons I wrestled with was that the opposite of love is not hate, but fear. We sometimes allow fear to control us and make decisions even when it is irrational. The BSD could have let the fear of working with a Christian organization stop them from collaborating. Instead they chose to focus on the commonalities of their purposes.

Articulating the *why* is not easy. Many people have an easy time going from *what* they do to *why* because it is easier to go from the “clearest thing to the fuzziest thing” (*Start with Why* Sinek 39). When I asked an employee at Jubilee REACH what JR does, she answered: “We partner with the BSD to work with all kids, but concentrate on the at-risk students who may not graduate. We work with the students throughout the day, we tutor and mentor, and after-school we offer programs from sports to clubs” (Kern). It is easy to list the programs and services that Jubilee provides but it is harder to answer why they provide them. Although the BSD and Jubilee have different mission statements, the underlying purpose of serving and loving the children to help them succeed is the shared goal. The mission statement of the BSD is “to provide all students with an exemplary college preparatory education so they can succeed in college, career and life” (Our Mission).

The mission of Jubilee is, “to build community by providing access and transforming lives through loving, serving and listening to all people (Core Values).

The collaboration of the BSD and Jubilee is successful because it is built on a clear understanding of purpose. Nonprofit organizations must identify commonalities of purpose in order to provide greater resources, support and success for community development and altruistic change.

## **VI. Principle Two: Contextualization**

In order to be successful at collaboration in a globalized world, nonprofit organizations must learn to be adaptable in any situation and context. This is another challenging aspect of working with others, but when done right the benefits change communities for the better. As previously mentioned, the Bellevue School District, (like most school districts in America) is experiencing a high degree of diversity in their student body population. Diversity is not detrimental, but it can cause more demand on teachers and administrators who are trying to accommodate and serve every student and family. The work of the BSD and Jubilee had to be highly contextualized in order to serve the needs of their specific school community.

*Contextualization* is defined as “to place in a context” with *context* meaning “the situation in which something happens; the group of conditions that exist where and when something happens” (“Contextualization”). Robyn Eversole argues that contextualization is important in community development because “not only is local knowledge an important ingredient in generating new solutions, but innovation emerges when different kinds of knowledge come together” (Eversole 100).

Collaborations often get creative inspiration from the people that they surround

themselves with. The BSD knew that they could not create sustainable solutions by themselves and those working with Jubilee knew that it would take much more than just monetary resources. It would take the involvement of the whole community and collaboration would need to be adaptable to the specific context of each school and student.

There are several factors that influence context such as religion, culture, socio-economic background, gender, location, community, family, and friends. These all affect collective groups just as much as the individual, especially the individual students that Jubilee and the BSD are serving. This makes the collaborative work of Jubilee and the BSD even harder because there are so many different contexts to take into consideration. Collaborative services must take into account all of these cultural and individual factors that help foster greater understanding and acceptance. Understanding builds a solid foundation for an empowering and supportive relationship and creates sustainable programs that can apply to various situations.

In the beginning, Jubilee was asked to help meet the needs of a very specific school. Over time, as Jubilee was invited into other schools, they had to be willing to adapt to a new school environment. Jubilee's services were adaptable to each school. Each site that I visited throughout my research had different structural programs tailored to the environment of the school. For example, at Highland Middle School the after-school services were designed as a "STEAM" program with specific events that the students must register for. In comparison, at Odle Middle School the after-school program is a "drop-in center" where all students are invited to come and do



homework or play games. Each program “was set up and built to partner with schools and be a part of the culture of the school” (McDowell). Intentionally, Jubilee was designed to be in a position of service, “to listen to what we needed, and were immediately ready to change when things weren’t going well” (McDowell). Brent Christie, the Executive Director of Jubilee, stresses this point everyday by saying, “Jubilee is not a program but a service to love, listen and learn. It is about the people and an invitation to belong” (Christie). There is not one specific formula that anyone can plug in and expect results to happen. Contextualization is a process that does not have an agenda and “adapts to what the school wants over time” as resources and time allow (Christie).

Knowledge of contextualization is necessary for collaborative projects to effectively develop over time. It allows for all people of diverse backgrounds to be included and understood within community. This understanding helps to set a firm foundation in the next principle of seeking unification through relationship building.

### **VII. Principle Three: Unification**

The case study of Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District is a superb example of creating unification even when there may be polarizing differences. Unification is not the same thing as conversion or conforming, rather it draws out strengths that bring systemic and noticeable changes within organizations and the community. Nonprofit organizations must walk across the proverbial parking lot and begin a relationship with others that starts a journey of unification in order to be successful in collaboration.

Unification is a multi-faceted and complex process that may look different

depending on the context. There may be instances when groups have been hurt or wronged by each other at some point. In order to begin a process of unity, a form of reconciliation may have to occur. For example, one principal in the school district admitted to being hesitant about working with Jubilee because “I’ve had volunteers from Youth for Christ who have come in and ended up inviting kids to come to youth group with them. You can’t do that at a public school” (McDowell). Even though this was a different Christian organization, that instance of betrayal caused hesitation for future work to be done together. Jubilee had to gain trust again through action. Over time, Jubilee was able to achieve just that: “We didn’t have an after school program for at least a year because I was so done with it. And then with the way they ran their sports and their focus being on the kids, they convinced me to go ahead and give it a try” (McDowell). From day one, Jubilee earned trust by proving to never “blink at the line” by pushing religious affiliations. Their theory “is that you eventually want to figure out that they are a church-based group from somewhere, on your own time” (McDowell).

In order for the collaborative process to be successful between Jubilee and the BSD, forgiveness had to occur. John Paul Lederach refers to this forgiveness as a “dynamic, adaptive process aimed at building and healing” or “a process of change and redefining of relationships” (Bloomfield, Lederach 842, 847). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. defined this reconciliation as a “coming together again” that is a “catalyst creating the atmosphere necessary for a fresh start free from the mental blocks that impede new relationships” (qtd. in Ogbozor 1). These definitions point to a process of healing that led to unification between Jubilee and the BSD and created hopeful

solutions for future collaborating.

Unification involves embracing others. Truly embracing other groups who may be different is the only way that the world can live in harmony despite cultural and religious differences. Miroslav Volf calls this “the will to give ourselves to others and welcome them, to readjust our identities to make space for them” (Volf 29).

Unification leads to discovery of truth and greater purpose in life and community.

Volf writes:

This is the framework of the search for truth and justice because unless you will to embrace and be reconciled to the other, you will not find what is truth and what is justice. For you can always interpret somebody’s outwardly generous action as covertly violent action-as a bouquet of flowers in which a dagger is hidden. You have to want to see the other’s goodness in order actually to perceive it. (qtd. in Wright 4)

Unification can only occur when relationships are formed through respect. Cynthia Moe-Lobeda further explains this embrace in the form of neighborly love. This call to love comes from the Biblical command of “love your neighbor as yourself” as well as the ancient virtuous intention to “treat others as you would like to be treated.” It is a love that goes beyond emotion and into action and “transforms and create a new world situation” (Moe-Lobeda 170). Unification is formed because all are seen as important and necessary for community to flourish. John Lewis refers to every person as a “force of light” that add depth and meaning to life and the community around us. People who choose to embrace “show others that it is possible to shine radiantly even in the darkest night. They remember that they are stars also meant to

light up the world” (Lewis 171). Unification is a process that one courageously chooses to embark on because “the things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us” (Groody 2).

Jubilee and the BSD began this unification process by choosing to literally walk across the parking lot to embrace each other and begin a relationship that brought aid to the students at Lake Hills Elementary. Jubilee and the BSD proved that differences of faith, culture, and opinion do not have to stop collaboration between organizations from occurring. In fact, nonprofits that do not choose to embark on a process of unity with other community partners and resources may be severely missing out on an opportunity for greater change and community development. There is a reason why people choose to unite even in difficult circumstances. It is the same reason that we fight for justice. Every individual has a “force of light” to bring into the world and deserves an equal chance to shine that light (Lewis 171).

#### **VIII. Principle Four: Relationship Building and Trust**

In order for unification to occur within the collaboration between Jubilee and the Bellevue School District, relationship building was driven by trust and a belief in a unified mission. Respectful, loving relationships are central to any collaborative endeavor. Throughout my research, the importance of healthy relationships was mentioned most frequently.

Dale Carnegie is one of the most well known authors on how to gain success in life through healthy relationships. In *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Carnegie realized that success comes from having healthy and empowering

relationships with the people around you. Just like collaborations, relationships are difficult, especially when there are differences of opinion. But ultimately “everyone craves to feel important, appreciated and heard” (Carnegie 50). Everyone wants to feel that they are part of something bigger.

Another famous book on relationships is Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl asks the crucial question of what brings fulfillment and purpose even when life can be dark. Even in the most depressing of situations, Frankl observed that the ones who were able to survive were the ones who “maintained a sense of control over the situation by choosing a hopeful attitude” and found meaning by “experiencing reality by interacting authentically with the environment and others” (Frankl 5). Relationships stress the importance of finding great meaning and fulfillment in life.

In building a healthy relationship, actions often convey greater meaning than words, especially in situations where there might be conflicting opinions or beliefs. Tom Brewer, the Director of Community Relations for Jubilee, coined the phrase: “show and tell” with the *show* being the most important piece of any relationship building process:

The problem in America is that we don’t do that much *show* we just do the *tell*. Some tell it this way and that way. All the tellers are in competition with who can tell it with fire and wisdom. Everyone has their way to tell it and they end up arguing with each other. (Brewer)

This perfectly illustrates the problem that most relationships in a collaborative endeavor can have: they end up wanting to tell each other things more than doing

them. Eventually the telling can lead to countless meetings of talking rather than actually serving together in the community and creating change. It would be like having a friendship with someone but only talking on the phone. Friendships develop into something deeper when you experience life together. This also leads to opportunities for growth and understanding on a different level. Take for example this illustration:

There was a man who really had a passion to start a church. Instead of running around and telling people to be apart of his church and the reasons why they should, he started to do things in the community and inviting, not forcing or guilt-tripping, people to action with him. He discovered that as they were doing things together, they related to one another and things started to fall into place. After a while a nucleus started of people who enjoyed doing things together and people who didn't get along or didn't want to join self-selected and left the group. (Brewer)

Healthy relationships are strengthened through action. It was the willingness of Jubilee and the BSD to act together that built the trust for further engagement and collaboration. It provided the common ground for future meetings that would take place to address what could be accomplish together. The quickest way to earn credibility and trust in a relationship is to show it. To show that you are committed to the purpose and mission of what the collaboration can accomplish.

The second part to a strong relationship is communication. It takes effort to make sure that boundaries are communicated clearly from the beginning. Both sides must be invited into equal conversation as well. People will not feel comfortable

talking about needs until an environment of trust is built. This takes vulnerability. I had the opportunity to sit-in on one of the first meetings between the site coaches of Jubilee and a teacher at a new school site. It was interesting to see how the conversation developed. The first step by the Jubilee staff was to recognize the opportunity of getting to work together for similar cause. Immediately the commonalities were addressed making the communication more relatable and comfortable while also recognizing the importance of that specific teacher and her expertise. As Brené Brown said “the ability to feel connected is- neurobiological that’s how we’re wired- it’s why we’re here” (Brown, “Power of Vulnerability”).

The second step taken by Jubilee was to listen. Effective communication is mostly about being able to listen. As Carl Rogers said “man’s inability to communicate is a result of his failure to listen effectively.” This is so important to Jubilee that it is part of their mission statement. To *listen*, learn and love. Listening opens up the possibility for understanding in a new way and is the first step for being able to learn about another person and ultimately embrace them in relationship. It turns the relationship to be more about the other person. Listening is a critical part to forming any relationship or effective collaboration.

The third step by Jubilee was to ask good questions. Important questions to ask when establishing relationships are: What are my limitations or boundaries? What is something that I can and cannot do in order to build greater trust in this collaboration? This can be heavily dependent on the context that someone is working in and involves a fresh lens of seeing things from a different perspective. In the conversation with the teacher, some of the questions that came up were: “What

are our limitations as far as working with students in the classroom? Who is in charge of discipline issues” (Willcuts)? These questions set expectations and defined roles. They also asked more meaningful questions such as: “What are your goals? How can we support you in those goals? What kind of coffee do you like” (Willcuts)? Both types of questions are meaningful for establishing a trusting relationship and show thoughtfulness while remaining professional. They build connection while attempting to accomplish a mission together. If expectations and boundaries are not defined, then a collaborative endeavor will be doomed to failure.

Trust is another crucial element of a healthy relationship. It proves that you are in a healthy place of being able to surrender yourself to the vulnerability of those around you. Charles Feltman defines trust as “choosing to make something important to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else” (qtd. in Brown, “Anatomy of Trust”). Like the process of collaborating, trust is an intentional choice that we make on a daily basis. But where does trust come from? John Gottman argues that “trust is built in the smallest of moments” and that each person has “opportunities to build trust or betrayal. To choose to connect when we have the chance” and not walk away because walking the other direction can often times be the easy choice (qtd. in Brown, “Anatomy of Trust”). These are seemingly insignificant moments that can be easy to miss or overlook in daily life.

Collaborators must not miss opportunities of small, seemingly insignificant moments to build trust. Jubilee builds trust by intentionally asking questions that are meaningful to those they interact with. Questions like: How is your day going? How are your kids doing? These small questions make a big difference. Those are



the moments that build trust.

Researcher Brené Brown has identified several elements that break down the biology of trust. These are imperative to effective relationship building and relate to the case study of Jubilee and the BSD. She uses the acronym *B.R.A.V.I.N.G.* as her model. *B* stands for having *boundaries* that are clear and both parties are expected to hold to them. *R* stands for *reliability*. This is the reliability that both are going to follow through with what they say they are going to do, not one time only, but repeatedly. Brown also adds that this involves “being clear on your limitations so that you aren’t in the position of over committing and going back on your word” (Brown, “Anatomy of Trust”). This is crucial for collaborating because it is easy to get caught up in the mission and over commit in what you want to accomplish. *A* stands for *accountability* in that when one person makes a mistake, it is understood that they will confess it, apologize, and then make amends that it will not happen again. There will be times in collaborating with others that mistakes will be made. This is actually a healthy part of the process and can lead to greater personal growth, but you must be willing to admit to those mistakes to the other person and ask for grace in the process.

In a world where sharing information is too easy, *V (Vault)* is probably the hardest element to practice in daily life. Both sides must be confident that each partner will stay consistent in keeping things private that are meant to be private. It is not the job of outsiders to share information through a second or third party because that is where miscommunication will cause collaborators to lose trust in each other. *I* stands for *integrity*. Brown defines integrity as “encouragement, having

courage over what is comfortable, doing what's right over what is easy, and not just talking, but practicing" (Brown, "Anatomy of Trust"). Imagine the strength of collaborations that place this definition of integrity at the center of relationships. Tom Brewer alluded to this in his analogy of missions as "show and tell." *Non-judgment* is the next element that offers a safe place for people to come as they are and not feel judged or scared to share their feelings and emotions. This is when people gain the courage to ask others for help like in the case of BSD going to Jubilee with a need. It took a lot of courage for the BSD staff to reach out to a religiously affiliated organization and not be afraid of certain stereotypes. Finally, *G* stands for *generosity*, or what I would refer to as grace. This is assuming the best of the person you are working with knowing that communication will be open and honest. Grace does not hold a record of bitterness towards the other when they make a mistake. Having these elements of trust will ensure that the collaboration will be lasting and effective.

Relationships are developed over a long period of time. But of all the principles observed in forming an effective collaboration, relationships can be the most rewarding part. It was encouraging to hear that many of the people who started the partnership process between Jubilee and the BSD still feel comfortable talking and reaching out to each other. With a strong, unified belief in the purpose, constant communication that involves listening and asking good questions, and following Brown's elements of trust, an effective collaboration between nonprofits can be fostered with healthy relationships at the center.

## **IX. Principle Five: Collaborative Leadership**

In order for collaborations to happen between organizations, every person involved has to make a conscious choice to take on some form of personal leadership. Every person has the capability and responsibility to be a leader. This can be in different contexts, from a leader of self, a family, peer groups, a small work team or large business or corporation. Leadership forces a person “to assume responsibility for the mission and legacy of the world they are creating” (McNeal 133). One business partner of Jubilee describes this as the “pay now or pay later” mentality (Kern). Either make the leadership choice to invest in the children of the Bellevue community now, or wait until it is too late and try to undo the damage caused by inaction. Leadership is accepting the responsibility to serve others and realizing that your choices affect the community.

There has been a lot of research done over the past decade on defining characteristics of how to be a good leader. But as mentioned in the contextualization principle, one leadership program does not fit every situation. There are many different styles of leadership, but the leader who is able to collaborate well will inspire change and invite more people to action. Daniel Goleman argued that a good leader is not just someone who can make good business decisions and manage others well, but they have a high degree of emotional intelligence. Emotionally intelligent leaders are exceptional at a combination of “self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills” (Goleman 3). Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, argues that the best leaders are those who very often do not get the credit. They are “individuals who blends extreme personal humility with intense

professional will” (Collins 21). Daniel Harkavy defines leadership as “taking followers on a journey that enables them to experience and accomplish more as a results of the coaching and vision you bring to them” (Harkavy 5). Leadership is different from managing people. John Kotter argues, “managers promote stability while leaders press for change and only organizations that embrace both, can survive” (Kotter 1). Leadership is a journey of personal development and a vital piece to an effective collaboration.

Ibarra and Hansen define collaborative leadership as “the capacity to engage people and groups outside of one’s formal control and inspire them to work toward common goals- despite differences in convictions, cultural values, and operating norms” (Ibarra, Hansen 5). When done well, collaborative leadership has several empowering qualities. Organizations expand their connections and resources, diversify talent, and create cultures of teamwork and acceptance (5). When teams have diverse opinions, the results, often times, tend to be more creative and produce more effective results that foster a stronger community. In a globalized world, leaders have to be able to unite all people of different backgrounds despite differences. Attached in the Appendix is a chart developed by Ibarra and Hansen comparing the three most common styles of leadership found within organizations today. The chart highlights the importance of a having a collaborative leadership style in order to create accountability of “performance on achieving shared goals”(see Appendix qtd. in Ibarra, Hansen 6). Collaborative leadership values the strengths of all people.

Collaboration is in need of “strong leadership that believes in collaboration on both sides, the what *can be* possible and the what *is* possible” (Vrbka). In order for collaboration to work, there needs to be both the dreamer and the doer. Brent Christie at Jubilee, was the dreamer who created vision in order to get people motivated to action. Judy Buckmaster at the BSD, was the manager who made sure that things were implemented effectively. Brent used Martin Luther King’s *I Have a Dream* speech as an example, “Dr. King did not go up and give the ‘I have a *plan* speech’ but the ‘I have a *dream* speech’” (Christie). Imagine the different reactions that would have come from hearing Dr. King speak about implementing a plan: “We need to do this and then this and then this” versus hearing a wise man convey the purpose and dream (Christie). This vision sparks a process of change that lead to a collaborative plan of action. Leading back to the first principle found within the case study: “people don’t buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it” (*Start with Why* Sinek 41). Great leaders are good at balancing the dream with adaptive action. Leadership inspires people to go above and beyond what they are asked to do because they are motivated by the success it brings to the entire group and not just the individual.

Another important element of effective leadership is the ability to foster a culture of safety and learning that allows for a creative collaboration to flourish. Alessandro Carlucci, CEO of Brazil’s Natura Cosméticos, refers to this as the “engagement process” used to create trusting cultures. Carlucci’s company has been consistently ranked highly because of this collaborative leadership strategy. Collaborative leaders “embark on a personal journey” that leads to a very counter-cultural, holistic style of leadership. This involves “talking about a persons’ life

history with their families and integrating all the different roles of a human being” (qtd. in Ibarra, Hansen 8). Imagine the possibilities if all leaders approached engagement in this way. The culture that many find themselves working in, tend to only encourage individual achievement and positive business numbers. These numbers do not take into consideration the value of each person, thus creating a culture of fear rather than creativity. Leaders often can become victims to this fear as well because their personal reputation is at risk. But when a leader chooses to create a culture of service, coaching, and freedom, success is greater. Collaborative leadership “is about helping people to work together in a way that enables them to accomplish something greater than they would alone” (Harkavy 48).

The BSD and Jubilee recognize this importance everyday especially when working with children. It takes passionate and dedicated people to commit to a child’s life. Finding the right people to take part in the creative process allows people to be “self motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and a part of creating something great” (Collins 42). This emphasizes the need to engage all people on a personal journey of leadership. Jubilee always does their best to find people that fit this mission and vision: people who are willing to listen, serve, and learn. Currently, Jubilee “receives about 15-18 volunteer applications in a given week but only a couple are from religious connections. The rest are from Volunteermatch.com and other advertising websites” (Brewer). Jubilee invites any person who is passionate about serving and loving children. It is not about fitting people into a category of religious inclusion, but of finding the similarities of mission.

Collaborative leadership produces more effective and creative change that impacts the immediate community and beyond. As in the case study with Jubilee and the BSD, nonprofits must utilize leadership elements of coaching, servant-hood, valuing diversity, and expressing clear vision to inspire invitational action.

## **X. Conclusion**

Collaboration is necessary to provide greater resources and effectiveness for communities, but especially to support the children. While these principles are drawn from a specific case study between two child-focused, nonprofits, these are principles that are applicable to any individual, group, nonprofit, or business that long to see positive, systemic and social changes within their communities.

Throughout my research of the comprehensive case study of Jubilee REACH and the Bellevue School District, there are five principles that can be intentionally implemented when partnering with others successfully. Nonprofit organizations must: 1) Embrace the commonalities of the cause to create vision and purpose. 2) Use contextualization to bring greater understanding of diversity. 3) Utilize the courageous work of unification that draws people together in love despite differences. 4) Create a solid foundation of trust that is essential for relationship building and fostering community. 5) Cultivate collaborative leadership by creating environments of dreamers, creators, and coaches.

Collaborations are necessary to have a productive, fulfilling life in community with others. It requires bravery and intentionality that is driven by understanding and love towards others. Differences of religion, belief, culture, and opinion should not stop an organization or individual from embarking on a collaborative endeavor

together. The journey may be a long and exhaustive process at times, but we are designed to find fulfillment and purpose within relational community; take the collaborative journey across the parking lot.



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**XII. Appendix**

Leadership Style	Command and Control	Consensus	<b>Collaborative*</b>
Organizational Structure	Hierarchy	Matrix or small group	<b>Dispersed, cross organizational network</b>
Who has the relevant info?	Senior Management	Formally designated members or representatives of the relevant geographies and disciplines	<b>Employees at all levels and locations and a variety of external stakeholders</b>
Who has the authority to make the final decisions?	The people at the top of the organization have clear authority	All parties have equal authority	<b>The people leading collaborations have clear authority</b>
What is the basis for accountability and control?	Financial results against plan	Many performance indicators, by function or geography	<b>Performance on achieving shared goals</b>
Where does it work best?	Works well within a defined hierarchy; works poorly for complex organizations and when innovation is important	Works in small teams; works poorly when speed is important	<b>Works well for diverse groups and cross-unit and cross-company work and when innovation and creativity are critical</b>

Source: Ibarra, Herminia, and Morten T. Hansen. "Are You a Collaborative Leader?"

*Harvard Business Review* (2011): 1-7. *Harvard Business Review*. Web. 26 Feb. 2016.