Research on Diversity in Youth Literature

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Authors

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Introduction

Welcome to this polyphonous essay about collaboration in academic research and scholarship, an approach that has often been discipline-specific. In the social sciences and hard sciences, joint-authored papers are fairly commonplace—with the author order indicating level of involvement and, often, the primary investigator of the research. Seasoned and new scholars jockey for placement in this list of authors, upon which CV strength and even tenure can depend. However, in other fields, such as many humanities disciplines, it is far more common to forge one's own path and conduct research alone, leading to mostly solo-authored journal articles and monographs. No way is necessarily better than another in terms of composing scholarship; and yet it is possible that, at least in the field of children's literature studies, collective expertise might represent a new path forward, capitalizing on diverse ways of thinking, unexplored methods, and an interdisciplinary approach to theory building. But collaboration is not as easy as just picking a co-author or co-researcher, investigating a topic, and then writing. Many factors can impact this process, including differing epistemological and ontological stances, varied levels of expertise and comfort with new areas of study, vast differences in writing styles, and, of course, uneven power dynamics that can exert themselves and impede collaboration and impactful scholarship. This essay discusses the collaborative experiences of five scholars of color—two senior and three junior—and explores those experiences. We end with some recommendations on how others might seek out their own scholarly collaborations to expand the types of scholarship that can transform the field of children's literature.

First, a little background. The idea for this essay emerged from audience discussions at two different conferences following the presentations of four separate collaborative papers. At

the June 2018 Children's Literature Association Conference in San Antonio, Texas, Dr. Michelle H. Martin and J. Elizabeth Mills presented a paper entitled "'Like Raindrops on Granite': A Dialogic Analysis of *Full Cicada Moon* as Crossover Scholarship," which was later published in the inaugural issue of *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*. Scholars in the audience inquired about the genesis of this collaboration and what approach Mills and Martin took in their shared analysis and writing process. Their paper itself offered a clue to the nature of this process, since it was based on Martin's framework ("Brown Girl Dreaming"), published in *The Lion and the Unicorn*, to guide White senior scholars mentoring junior scholars of color. This essay—both the conference paper and the published essay—was intentionally written in two voices to highlight the way that Martin's and Mills's backgrounds interacted throughout the research process.

At the 2019 Biennial Congress of The International Research Society for Children's Literature (IRSCL), in Stockholm, Sweden, Dr. Karen Chandler and Breanna McDaniel presented a collaborative paper entitled, "Taking Ugly and Making Beautiful: Transforming Silence into Artivism in Renée Watson's *Piecing Me Together*," and J. Elizabeth Mills and Dr. Michelle H. Martin presented "From Solitude and Silence to Stories: Exploring Social Grief in *Long Way Down* and *We Are Okay*," as part of a panel. During the Q&A, Roxana Loza, a PhD student from the University of Texas, asked thought-provoking questions about how we four scholars collaborated on these essays, the power implications embedded in the work we did together, and how we might advise other scholars—new and seasoned—to take up similar models in humanities, a discipline that tends to reward solitary writing and publishing and discount collaborations as something less than "original work." In a separate IRSCL session on

"Multiculturalism," (a session of papers that were not submitted as a panel), Nadia Mansour and Dr. Michelle H. Martin presented "What Can Danish Multicultural Literature Learn from African American Children's and YA Literature? Literary Histories in Dialogue"—an essay that will be published in *Barnboken* and includes some of Mansour's dissertation research. They also received similar questions from scholars interested in this partnership approach.

Following these presentations, we five scholars deliberated on how we might expand this discussion as well as elaborate on our answers in these disparate sessions to share our experiences, successes, and challenges more broadly with the field. This essay is the fruit of those deliberations, meant to address these questions and more and offer our individual and collective perspectives on what it means for early-career scholars and mid- or late-career scholars to collaborate on research they present and (ideally) publish together.

It is important to note that the contributors to this essay are all scholars of color: Breanna, Karen, and Michelle are African American, Liz is Hapanese—of Japanese and European descent, and Nadia is a Danish scholar who was born in Lebanon. Breanna, Liz, and Nadia are doctoral candidates—Breanna at Cambridge University in the UK, Liz at University of Washington in Seattle, and Nadia at University of Aarhus in Denmark. Karen is an associate professor at University of Louisville in Kentucky, and Michelle is a full professor and the Beverly Cleary Professor of Children and Youth Services at University of Washington. Moreover, we have all been deliberate about choosing to write with other scholars of color. As seasoned scholars, Karen and Michelle understand how many more difficulties junior scholars of color often face as they 1) pursue a doctoral degree; 2) enter careers focused on youth; and 3) navigate the academy

without the guidance of senior scholars of color to assist in this journey. Hence, they want to amplify the voices of junior scholars by writing, presenting, and publishing with them, which also offers very public examples of how to push against academic power structures that marginalize and sometimes exclude young scholars of color and indigenous scholars. Roxana Loza is a Mexican doctoral student in the English Department at the University of Texas Austin, and we asked her to join us and guide our writing of this essay with her own questions about collaborative scholarship—thereby also bringing Roxana into a process that will become published scholarship. To add an additional layer of interdisciplinary complexity, we come from both social science and humanities departments: J. Elizabeth Mills is a social science researcher in the Information School at the University of Washington, where it is customary to have teams of four, six, even fifteen other researchers and collaborators; Dr. Michelle H. Martin is in the same department and has been principal investigator on two social science studies with J. Elizabeth Mills, though Martin's PhD is in English Studies and Composition. Breanna McDaniel is at the Centre for Research in Children's Literature at the University of Cambridge; Nadia Mansour is in the Education Department at Aarhus University; and Dr. Karen Chandler is in the English Department at University of Louisville.

We have chosen to structure this essay around the questions Roxana posed to help readers who are considering a collaborative approach to reflect on some of the positive results of writing together, some of the challenges, and what advice we might offer. Roxana will also write a response, prior to the conclusion, reflecting on how this essay has hopefully answered some of her questions and offered up new questions for future scholars to consider as collaborative research in children's literature becomes more common. A side note: throughout this essay, you

will notice that we refer to each other differently—sometimes using the title "Dr." followed by a last name; at other times we use senior scholars' first names. Different academic traditions create different routines, and to preserve the polyphony of this essay, we chose not to correct but rather to leave these references in their originally stated forms by each contributor.

Part 1: How did your respective collaborations emerge?

Karen

Breanna invited me to collaborate with her on a paper for the 2019 IRSCL congress. Thus, we knew we would focus on children's literature, but the field was open, because we have many interests. To determine a focus, we each generated a list of possible primary sources, discussed our top choices, and agreed on Renee Watson's *Piecing Me Together*, a novel about a young Black woman finding and using her voice in public and private spaces.

Breanna

The beginnings of our collaboration actually started with another example of mentorship via Dr. Michelle Martin and Dr. Kate Capshaw. Dr. Martin invited me to be on the panel with her and Dr. Capshaw at the 2019 IRSCL congress, explaining that she (Dr. Martin) was going to co-present with Liz. I'll admit that I was intimidated by the idea of presenting alongside those three inimitable scholars, especially at a large conference that I'd never attended with academics from all over the globe. In my previous interactions with Dr. Chandler, she'd always been responsive and connected, which has not been my general experience with seasoned scholars in our field, so I took a chance and asked her to present with me, knowing that her presence would

validate my participation. This was honestly my rationale, and I think it's important to note this, because neither Dr. Chandler, Dr. Martin, nor Dr. Capshaw has ever denigrated my academic contributions. However, the conditioning that I think a lot of us receive in the academy establishes hierarchies that we ingest. The result is that many of us feel our contributions are unworthy of consideration until we become more established scholars. The culture of cycling these hierarchies generation after generation makes it impossible to believe that we might be contributing to the field, unless we are connected in some way to work or people who are more prestigious. This is not to dismiss the critical and important work that makes new scholarship possible. I just want to establish that the potential for education to facilitate transformative exchanges at varying levels of expertise is often undercut by rigid hierarchies—unless, however, seasoned academics are willing to break that cycle of emotional subjugation. Dr. Chandler, Dr. Martin, and Dr. Capshaw have done this repeatedly by providing personal and professional guidance while also trusting that intergenerational collaboration can provide innovative entry points into building our field. Specifically, for our IRSCL collaboration, Dr. Chandler was not prescriptive in her approach to brainstorming our focus or corpus texts. When we started, I did not know that this was the first time she was undertaking this sort of collaboration, and I did not know that some of the strategies we used were ones of which she was previously unaware. I think this speaks to her openness, adaptability, and willingness to trust the shared process.

Liz and Michelle

Given that our disciplinary areas are different (social science and humanities), we wanted to find a common interest and build on a shared knowledge of children's literature and children's publishing. We also both had a passion for understanding the cross-cultural aspects of children's

and YA literature. When we discovered *Full Cicada Moon* at the Virginia Hamilton conference at Kent State in 2017, we knew we had found a perfect example of a mirror, window, and sliding glass door (Bishop) book for our study, one that reflected common aspects of our backgrounds as well as offered fertile ground for learning about one another's backgrounds. (Note: this was the fourth or fifth book we had considered for this paper; we're picky!) Additionally, we used Martin's framework ("Brown Girl Dreaming") to scaffold our cross-cultural dialogue about the book to foster cultural exchange through scholarly analysis. When we started working on this paper, it emerged as a conversation about how we responded differently to particular passages because of our backgrounds. This led us to create a two-columned table in which one of us would list a passage that "spoke" to us, and the other would offer parallel commentary. We were amazed at how differently we each read particular passages because of our backgrounds as African American and Hapanese, respectively. This also taught us a lot about family and cultural traditions we would otherwise not have known, and it gave us a much deeper and richer understanding of a text that felt very different after our writing about it together than it did prior to this work.

While the *Moon* paper was collaboratively conceived and written, our second paper, on *Long Way Down* and *We Are Okay*, emerged in a different way, though a similarly personal one. Liz's sudden and intimate experience of grief, paired with Michelle's own grief experience from her childhood, made these texts resonate in unique ways for each of us. Once again, the texts stimulated a literary dialogue that soon became the thesis of an interdisciplinary paper, namely to apply a social science model of grief (Jakoby) to two very distinct literary portrayals of grief. In fact, Liz had to convince Michelle to examine *We Are Okay* more closely. For Liz this was a

heartbreakingly close mirror text to her own grief experience, whereas for Michelle the language and characterization felt distanced and unsettling. At the same time, we were co-teaching *Long Way Down* in a library science class and had both fallen in love with this powerful text. As we read more about Jakoby's social model of grief, a model that admittedly sat outside of both of our disciplinary homes, we found ways to apply aspects of this complex model to both texts and began the process of building the paper, collaboratively as always. We sought to merge theories, learn on the go, and dialogically explore theory application to each literary text. A third collaborative paper, "Welcoming Black Children into Literary Wildscapes: Wildness in African American Children's Picture Books," which we presented at the 2019 Children's Literature Association Conference, emerged out of Michelle's publication of a *Horn Book* article called, "Black Kids Camp, Too . . . Don't They?" about the few books available that feature African American children having pleasurable, immersive outdoor experiences. Because Michelle grew up having these experiences through Girl Scouts, but Liz had a very urban childhood, we struggled to find common ground for writing this paper. Liz often said, "I'm trying to find myself in this research." This difficult process ultimately led to our contrasting "wildness"—immersive experiences in very rural settings—with a new category we coined, "curated wildness"—the adventures urban kids have outdoors. In all three papers, our own lives and experiences became touchstones for the literature we read, resulting in analyses that transformed us in both scholarly and personal ways.

Nadia

I have experienced the lack of positive representation of minoritized cultures in children's books. My research on multicultural literature in Denmark draws from research on African

American literature and multicultural literature, which is the reason why I contacted Dr. Michelle Martin and asked if I could come study with her at the University of Washington to learn from her work on African American literature. I wanted to learn more about the struggle African American authors have encountered when entering the publishing industry and the ways in which multicultural texts have historically been incorporated into the American school curricula. During my three-month stay as a visiting doctoral scholar, we discussed many issues related to literature, power struggles, and literary histories. In this way, we found a clear and compelling common interest in diversity in children's literature across our studies in Denmark and the US, respectively. Since my research builds on American research about multicultural literature and African American literature, we thought it would be interesting to write a paper for the 2019 IRSCL conference in Stockholm, themed "Silence and Silencing in Children's Literature." We proposed the paper while we were together at UW but wrote it asynchronously while on separate continents with an eight-hour time difference—a division that presents its own challenges. In the paper, we compare aspects of the history of children's literature, criticism, and education in Denmark and the USA, discussing whether the Danish research can learn from American research and vice versa when it comes to raising the voices of silenced minority groups through children's literature.

Part 2: **What was the nature of your collaboration? How did your working styles fit together, or not?**

Karen

I came to my collaboration with Breanna not only with little experience of collaborating with another scholar but also with an aversion for collaborative work because of memories from graduate school of a renowned senior scholar's abuse of students with whom he worked. Yet I was aware that within my own department at the University of Louisville, mentoring can be a productive, satisfying experience. Graduate assistants in Composition and Rhetoric gain professional experience, with support and direction from senior scholars, by helping administer our comp program and by helping oversee the University Writing Center. It is not uncommon for scholarly articles to emerge from what originates as mentoring relationships and grows into collaborations. As a literature scholar who occasionally teaches graduate students, I feel somewhat detached from this productive loop but was eager to experiment with the process.

Breanna

Outside of academia, I worked for seven years in university student affairs and development, which is a very mentorship-focused field. So much of that work is hands-on with large groups of students and paraprofessionals building trust and staff buy-in through interpersonal exercises that are ongoing throughout the academic year. Striving is rewarded enthusiastically, and success has a very fluid definition. Pretending to have experience and knowledge, not admitting when you're wrong, can literally have life and death consequences when you're dealing with on-campus crises, so for me, getting deeper into academia with its intrigue and what seems like the deliberate obfuscation of "how-tos" (how-to network, publish, apply for jobs, apply for grants, etc.) has been a difficult transition in many ways. One-on-one collaboration with seasoned scholars, though, can build an environment in which some of the

values intrinsic to my work in student affairs can blossom and bloom, making the processes for growth in our field more transparent. It also breaks up some of the tedium of working alone.

Karen and Breanna

Our process: We started our discussion of texts in the fall of 2018 and wrote a paper proposal on the Watson novel that was part of a panel proposal. We identified key issues we might explore. We both did some drafting. Each of us commented, sometimes at great length, on each other's writing. We then drew on all this material for the proposal. Although the other prospective panelists did not necessarily comment on our work, the five prospective panelists had access to one another's emerging drafts. In different phases of the paper on *Piecing Me Together*, our work styles varied, but they were always complementary. When Karen was doing more of the drafting, Breanna asked important questions, made suggestions, and rewrote aspects of the draft. Toward the end when Breanna was producing more of the draft, Karen in turn made suggestions and edits.

Once the panel and paper were accepted, we decided to work on the paper at a conference we were both attending in June 2019. We had a brief discussion there, during which Karen took notes, which she posted in a Google Doc. We also established a schedule of biweekly phone calls that we used to develop ideas. These discussions included exploring thematic threads by examining particular passages in the novel. We worked together to frame interpretive questions, began to answer them together, and considered textual examples. After each call, one of us posted our notes about the discussion, and we both edited them. Karen engaged in freewriting early on—in June, for example, Karen did some drafting about collage, drawing on ideas culled

from art and cultural theory, as well as some passages from Watson's text. Breanna responded to some of this material, adding other examples and her own written reflections. This part of the process laid a foundation for the conference paper and allowed us to produce some material that we included in it. And overall, the discussions and drafting were fun, for Karen, at least; a welcome break from her more solitary work on a book project.

As the week of the conference approached, we scheduled writing time at the conference itself, realizing that we would both need to recover from international travel. We wrote side by side—with Breanna generating new material for one part of the paper, while Karen revised already-drafted sections, and we switched these roles. We had to abandon a plan of going into the conference week with a draft in our hands, and to use work time at the conference to create an outline that we would use for a presentation. We wanted to depart from our practice of reading a paper and try something new. Although we were both on board with this, we didn't have the time to pull it off. We were able to write a paper, just finishing it and an accompanying PowerPoint before the start of the panel. Breanna put together a visual presentation, after we discussed what we might include.

Breanna

From the beginning, Dr. Chandler provided clear guidance on how to brainstorm effectively, build timelines, and develop our shared ideas into cohesive drafts for our abstract. She's very skillful at bringing out and distilling ideas in an organic and organized way. It wasn't until I was reviewing our emails and documents in preparing to draft the presentation that I saw how she moved us from abstract wonderings to concrete focus.

We started broad with lots of books and ideas. Picture books are really my wheelhouse, and I was looking forward to staying within that form, but Dr. Chandler pulled out themes in some of our brainstorming that took us into other genres, including YA, which lead to an exploration of our mutual interest in *Piecing Me Together*. This provided the structure for our eventual presentation. I tend to get stuck in various phases of development, writing and writing to see what works. Dr. Chandler sees connected strands and pulls them through those phases, keeping our momentum even when we weren't working consistently on the paper. I was really excited to find out that she is comfortable working within "living documents," so nothing is thrown away, and there's still a treasure trove of ideas that we keep working through. All of this took place online or on the phone. The phone conversations were really great since they provided opportunities for us to check-in personally, whereas the focus within the online mode was usually on the work. These check-ins were helpful, I think, with our process because often our personal commitments dictated our engagement level in the documents. For me, it took some pressure off to know that we valued each other's time and connection. We gave each other grace and space, making sure to be on the same page about our desired outcomes.

Liz and Michelle

Dialogue, whether written or spoken, seems to be our way of stepping through our writing process, creating a safe space where we can ask each other questions, editing what we say, depending on the response, and co-constructing a deeper knowledge of what we're studying. During our research process for *Full Cicada Moon*, since frequent individual travel often prevented us from working face-to-face, we created an online two-columned table in which we

typed questions and answers for each other as we read through the book. At times, our questions (and answers) surprised each other (check out our RDYL paper for details), but always we treated the table as a safe space, characterizing it as Woodson's grandmother's kitchen table (Woodson). We kept various tenets of Martin's framework ("Brown Girl Dreaming") in mind as we worked together on *Full Cicada Moon*. We noted places where our exchanges were dynamic and unexpected, based on questions and quotes in the text that stood out to one or both of us. We committed to listening to one another and learning from one another, remaining open and letting the work change us and our perspectives of one another and the novel. We chose individual sections of the paper to draft and then exchanged them to allow for new perspectives. We read through drafts many times to smooth out the two voices and look for a common, unified scholarly voice.

For the grief paper, we each took a text—Liz took *We Are Okay,* and Michelle took *Long Way Down*—and we both wrote out summaries of the texts and carved out sections of the social model of grief to apply to the texts. Knowing that we could not provide an exhaustive application of all aspects of the model, we felt that a deep dive into just a few of the pieces would serve as a good starting point for additional research. As with the *Moon* paper, we shared our pieces back and forth, doing much of the final writing and discussing while traveling together abroad in Denmark prior to IRSCL.

This kind of work takes time and is not without its bumps. Sometimes one of us has a clear idea of what's being said, the other doesn't, and we need some time away from the work to let our brains percolate and stew on what might feel cognitively out of reach. Other times, the work

flows, and we can sit silently next to each other and just write. With time comes a familiarity with each other's working style, a higher level of trust, and a comfort level with conducting scholarly analysis together.

It's also worth mentioning that even though Liz's doctoral training has been in social science and Michelle's in humanities, Liz's undergraduate majors were English and French, after which she worked as a Scholastic editor for eight years. Sometimes, amidst the difficulty of coming to consensus about what we want to say about a work, reaching back to that common love of language often helps us overcome the challenges of writing from disparate perspectives and backgrounds.

Nadia

Michelle and I have different working styles, which I would argue has to do with both our different scholarly knowledge and our research experience. Since Arabic is my mother tongue and Danish is my academic language, writing in English was very new to me. I learned how to write academic articles in English through my collaboration with Michelle. Working with Michelle opened my eyes and gave me ideas about how to collaborate with other scholars internationally. She encouraged me to write and to share my research in English, and this has given me an important ticket to the world. Even if I still have a lot to learn, I am not afraid of diving into new collaborations. The most important and beneficial aspect is the support and guidance Michelle has given me, trusting that my work on multicultural literature in Denmark will make a difference, and always motivating me to keep working on this issue as the first scholar in Denmark to do so, where I often feel alone on this important work. Discussing issues

of diversity, insider-outsider perspectives, own voices, safe spaces, and a lot more has not only supported me personally but also made my project much stronger and has made me better qualified for future opportunities.

Our working styles are also different when it comes to feeling pressured because of deadlines. When you are new into academia, you do not always know what is expected from you in a paper. For instance, when do you need to "kill your darlings?" (delete something you've written that you really like). I found it challenging sometimes when we could not find time to write simultaneously on the paper. We were also challenged because of the nine-hour time difference between Denmark and Seattle. To begin with, I felt insecure and worried whether we could meet the deadlines. Another challenging thing was my fear of misunderstandings in written texts. This has to do with language differences and varied literary and historical contexts between Denmark and the U.S. Misunderstandings happened a couple of times both in our conversations and in our writing. For instance, the terms "race" and "people of color" and "colored" were and are used and interpreted much differently in the two countries. But after a while, we found a common working style, where we wrote a piece and scheduled online meetings to follow up on our comments and paragraphs and discussed language and terminology.

Michelle

To Nadia's commentary about our challenges related to working together trans-nationally, I want to add a word about deadlines, which she mentions above. Although I value deadlines, I don't mind asking for extensions when I need them. Nadia was nervous about asking, but I asked for three reasons: 1) *Barnboken* had asked for our submission, not for the

issue for which we had submitted but another issue; 2) I had contributed a co-written chapter to the book of one of the *Barnboken* editors a few years ago (so I suspected she knew that article would be in pretty good shape by the time we submitted it); and 3) I also knew that because Nadia's work is ground-breaking research, *Barnboken* would really benefit from publishing it. I asked for an extension. They granted it. We were also well over the word limit; I asked if we could turn it in at its current length, figuring that Covid-19 might have contributed to the journal not getting all of the papers they were expecting. They also granted this. Ask for leniency where it is warranted, and because editors would always rather *have* your work than *not* have your work to consider for publication, sometimes, communicating with editors or publishers and asking for what you need is much preferable to falling into despair about what you can't do in the time frame you're expected to do it. I offer this advice as a seasoned scholar who has been and will continue to be on both ends of the editorial process.

Part 3: How have you negotiated the power dynamics that inevitably accompany writing together in academia? And what have you learned through working together?

Karen

Because of my observations from graduate school, I approached my collaboration with Breanna with some concern about the power differentials. I knew it is necessary for the more seasoned member of the partnership to exercise restraint so as to ensure open, productive dialogue. Although obvious on paper and in theory, in practice, I found on some occasions that holding my tongue was difficult. I neither want to discount my expertise and experience as a scholar nor use them to silence someone else. Maintaining a balance between asserting my own

perspective, being receptive and supportive of Breanna's, and navigating the logistical challenge of co-writing all proved challenging, so it was important to remain committed to the process and have confidence in both myself and Breanna.

One exchange really underscored how important it was to hold myself in check so that we could have real dialogue that supported exploring and developing ideas and questions. Breanna mentioned, somewhat tangentially to our analysis of Watson's novel, that she had recently re-read Richard Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing." I responded with a complaint about what I see as the severe limitations of much of Wright's fiction. Ever gracious, Breanna acknowledged my point, saying she'd have to read more of the fiction. Yet our discussion of Wright ended. I realized that I had failed to listen to Breanna and follow up to ask what she'd thought of "Blueprint." My non sequitur, and the force with which I expressed it, would have been fine in a different discussion, but it shut down an exchange on Wright which would have given me insight into Breanna's take on the essay and which might have brought his aesthetic into play as we thought about the novel's theory of art and community. This instance helped me realize how important it is not only to recognize tensions in our working relationship but also to communicate about our differences.

Breanna

I remember that situation differently. Dr. Chandler provided me with historical context for her response to Wright's work. We were also privileging Black feminist epistemologies throughout much of the paper, so the focus on Wright was super tangential, and she was again ensuring that we stayed connected in our critique. She wasn't pushy about her interpretation and

usage of Wright, and it provided me with more material to engage with for my dissertation later on. Also, about a month later, Dr. Chandler contacted me to apologize for the interaction and to share that she'd been inspired to be more contemplative about that particular contribution from Wright after our conversation. I explained that no apology was necessary. I reiterated that Dr. Chandler was incredibly gracious in entertaining my aside, and then I shared the lessons I took from our exchange in Sweden and how it was playing out in my work. This particular incident taught me so much. It's helped me tighten up my tendency to wander in my writing and focus. It showed me how to open my perspective and reminded me of how critical it is to engage varied contexts in our criticism. I still use Wright, but I am more cognizant about "how" and "why" I include his contributions. I didn't feel shut down, and in fact I felt even more heard and seen after Dr. Chandler followed up later because it showed that she'd seriously considered my points, though they were different from hers. Dr. Chandler showed me that "how" and "why" questions can lead to more effective communication. It honestly was a beautiful reflection of the whole process.

Also, in the beginning I was really worried about saying something silly in conversation with this scholar whom I deeply admired, so it was a relief to me that she had vision to direct us. What was really lovely was how much space she held for me, which helped me get more comfortable in our collaboration; I felt like I was just moving into opportunities she left open for me to contribute in a significant way. She defined generosity in collaboration.

Michelle

To the experience raised by Karen and Breanna above, I would add that as seasoned scholars, we value recognizing individual expertise even when the dynamic is between seasoned and early career scholars. We give these new scholars the space and the power to rewrite and correct the work of a more experienced scholar and facilitate the learning for both parties in the process. In this way, we are trying to break down the misconception that a seasoned scholar always knows more than an early career scholar and in so doing, create a safe space for mistakes, iteration, revision, and the emergence of new ideas.

Liz

What I have gained from my collaboration with Michelle is guidance, mentorship, and the confidence to write and do research in a field that is no longer my home field. I majored in English and French in undergrad but am now getting my doctorate in a social science field. So when Michelle and I began writing together, I needed some scaffolding and guidance to remind me what it meant to analyze a text critically. I also learned what it's like to write with someone new; I had been writing mainly with one other peer scholar for most of my academic career. It's good to try writing with different people so that you can learn different styles and voices and approaches to scholarship, approaches that may inform your own. I have also broadened my understanding of research in the humanities field, in which research can look different than it does in the social science field.

Michelle

I spent fourteen years teaching in English Departments (two at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas and twelve at Clemson University in South Carolina) before moving into a

Library and Information Science department (University of South Carolina—USC). That was a major paradigm shift for me, and during my five years at USC, I conducted my first social science research project and wrote my first collaborative paper with Clayton Copeland, my postdoc for eighteen months. Hence, when I moved to UW in 2016, I had had *only* that experience with collaborative writing or researching, and I was definitely the weak link in that first collaboration. As soon as I had accepted the position at UW, Liz and her research partner, Katie Campana (then an advanced UW doctoral student, now an assistant professor at Kent State) asked me to be the PI on a grant they wanted to apply for. That planning grant as well as the subsequent funded three-year grant we are currently working on has been a high learning curve for me, and it is a good way to be reminded to stay humble because this is not the field in which I was trained. It's easy to be intimidated by the social science theory I don't know, the library language that I sometimes don't understand, and IRBs that speak a completely different language than English! Both in an effort to keep some balance for myself after changing disciplines so drastically, and to ensure that I was providing some academic experiences for Liz that are more familiar to me that I also knew no one else in the iSchool could give her, I wanted her to participate in some Humanities-based research, and the most sensible way to do that was to write pieces together. We have to laugh sometimes because as a senior scholar I'm learning how to write *with* someone else, while Liz, who is writing her dissertation, is learning to write *without* anyone else—both of which throws us out of our typical comfort zones. Both processes can be hard, emotionally taxing, and frustrating, but it's important to address power dynamics throughout and communicate about them—even in this paper. We use "track changes" or "reviewing" mode a lot when we write together because sometimes it feels aggressive to change someone else's words; shifting into "suggesting" mode ensures that the original remains, and

raising questions instead of making changes can often get us through passages that are difficult to agree upon and write together. Despite all of this, it has been incredibly rewarding (and fun!) to undertake this writing process several times with Liz, and because of it, I'm sure we know each other a lot better and also have a better idea of how to negotiate uneven power dynamics with other collaborators in the future. It's also true that when we present together at social science conferences where Liz feels more at home, I lean on her (and Katie) more, and when we present at humanities conferences, Liz leans on me more. I think in this way, we have developed a lot of mutual respect for who we are in our respective fields.

Nadia

When there is a different level of experience between scholars, the "working environment" and power relationship are very important to deal with from the beginning. I, as a junior researcher, am new to the field of academic writing (and specifically in English), and Dr. Michelle, as a senior researcher, has a lot of writing and research experience. Respect and honesty are key in a collaboration like this, not to mention acknowledging our different backgrounds and experiences and being honest about the dynamics between us. From a student's perspective, I felt safe and encouraged to work with and lean on the work and experience of a senior scholar. I felt confident asking many questions in a "safe zone," not being afraid to show weakness or strength.

Michelle

I think our challenges of balance are related to: 1) the fact that Nadia was extracting from her dissertation, so deciding how much to include was difficult; and 2) the fact that we were

including *both* what Danish children's literature and education can learn from African American children's literature *and* what African American children's literature and education can learn from that in Denmark. We are still not certain we have struck a good balance, but the *Barnboken* editors will let us know. It's also worth mentioning that when you write with an international scholar who is just starting to write academically in the language in which you're writing, you should be prepared to spend time on language to make sure that the writing accurately reflects what the scholar means to say and also to make sure what is written will be understood well in the country where it will be published.

Part 4: What advice do you have for others who want to begin to write, present and publish collaboratively?

Liz & Michelle

- Listen to your writing partner and consider their analysis, perspectives, and suggestions. They might be different from your own, but they might also lead to a stronger, richer analysis.
- Commit to many drafts and having the other person edit and rewrite your text. Read through the draft many times to smooth out the two voices and aspire for a common, unified scholarly voice. This often requires putting your ego in your pocket and being willing to learn things—even things you don't think you need to learn.
- Once you loosen your grip on your own writing voice, a new shared voice can emerge through the writing. This resembles what Leo and Diane Dillon, author/illustrator husband/wife team, have said of their work: "We came to the concept of the 'third artist,'

which was the combination of the two of us doing something that neither one of us could do separately," Diane says. "We would look at a piece after we finished it, and it'd be impossible for us to figure out who did what" (Marcel). Writing well together is a little like that.

- Find what works for you. Maybe it's writing together and exchanging drafts right away, maybe it's writing separately and then swapping sections for rewrites, but give each other the space to write how *you* are comfortable writing, and talk about the process if the process is stressing you out. Try a number of different methods until you find what works best and keeps the draft moving forward. Writing in a collaborative platform like Google Docs makes this easy.
- Allow yourself to be surprised by the process. You may learn completely new information about each other and about the work you're analyzing by studying it together. And that's great.
- Also, be patient with one another. Sometimes concepts and topics come together smoothly; sometimes they're more complex or require additional thought and reflection for one or both scholars. Take the time you need to thoroughly think through the work you're doing so that both parties feel on board, heard, ready, and prepared to write and analyze together.
- Once you have a respectable draft, have an outsider read it for consistency because they might see things the writing partners are too close to see.
- Finally, we recommend setting regularly scheduled "standing" meetings with your team; they really do impose intermediate deadlines, increase accountability, and ensure you're making gradual progress over time. When you work alone, you don't know this, and you

might never have thought of scheduling a weekly meeting with one or two other people (or a team) except for things like committee work that's often mandated from above by university of department policy.

Karen and Breanna

- Stay connected, remain on task, and be respectful. How did we achieve this? Through our frequent sharing of drafts and willingness to have each other take seriously and comment on even very preliminary writing. Karen, for instance, contributed freewriting at times, not polished drafts. But we worked from there, which means we both were accepting of the material generated, exercising patience in reading still-to-be developed and substantiated ideas. As a practice of developing and recording thought, free-writing requires withholding judgment, at least before figuring out what ideas are most relevant to the current project and thus in need of more attention and interrogation. This process involved intellectual humility and openness that helped reinforce our trust in each other and our confidence that we could create something together. Sharing developing ideas can be scary, but it can also be exciting and enriching.
- Continue to work together to find new avenues for your work. Although we have both published on Watson's *Piecing Me Together*, we would like to return to our project and develop it into an article, not only because we enjoyed working together but also because we love the novel and the ways it promotes community and creativity. The novel inspired us, and we felt a shared responsibility to honor it.
- Be upfront about goals for your project and also possible obstacles.

- Keep an open and generous spirit! That means leaving space for leadership to exist differently at the various stages of development and execution. Stay flexible with the use of technologies, those that are new and others that are more established.
- Check-in with yourself about your shared process and be honest about your strengths and areas for improvement
- Take physical and mental notes of what you're learning about how you work best with your partner.

Michelle and Nadia

- Find a clear and compelling common interest to write about—in our case it was diversity in children's literature across our studies in Denmark and the US.
- Respect different scholarly and literary traditions even if they seem really hard to understand or accept. Approach various views on culture and identity from very specific, context-based analyses, which demand that this collaboration have both junior and senior scholar voices present.
- Entering a new field of study requires hours of discussions and dialogues that happen prior to the decision of writing together. Find what unites your studies and still keep in mind that it is a cross-national and a cross-scholarly collaboration that influences the framework and the dialogue of the collaboration.
- "Listen louder" (*lytte højere*) and reflect upon new ideas, perspectives, and traditions before taking a stance. "Listen louder" is used here as a metaphor to emphasize the importance of listening. Entering a new field requires patience with building up one's ability to see from a different perspective than one's own, especially since the society and

political situation in two countries can be so different. Take on a new "language" of academic writing as well, one that mirrors respect and acceptance of diversity issues in the U.S. Appreciating diversity through children's literature and reading studies about the benefits of multicultural literature in the US has informed Nadia's study in Denmark, especially her literature review of African American literature and multicultural literature. (No research has been conducted yet in Denmark on these subjects, which made this collaboration even more important!)

Response from Roxana

I was so happy to hear about this *RDYL* collaboration and eager to get on board with a project that I hope will open up a field-wide conversation about collaborative efforts in children's and YA literature. The emphasis on mentorship between seasoned and early career scholars, and the fact that the fruitful collaborations discussed above involved women of color, made this project particularly exciting and useful for me. Like Breanna, sometimes I struggle to find "how-to's." So I am constantly on the lookout for practical information that demystifies various aspects of academia; this peek behind the curtain of these three successful collaborative projects gives our interdisciplinary children's literature community honest insights into the challenges and satisfactions of working together.

I attended the "Breaking Silences, Claiming Representation" panel at IRSCL's 2019 Stockholm congress and was struck by the rapport between the two sets of collaborators. I had seen co-presenters a couple of times before at conferences, but only between peers. Here I saw,

for the first time, established scholars literally sharing the same intellectual space with graduate students, in partnerships that seemed to have successfully achieved equal footing within the two projects. As a graduate student instructor, I seek to disrupt the power differentials within my classroom to empower my students to shape their own learning and each other's, but always end up dissatisfied with my attempts as the rigid structure of the university setting does not allow for a genuine exchange of ideas without hierarchical frameworks getting in the way. The expertise hierarchy is magnified significantly between grad students and faculty, so I posed a couple of questions during the panel's Q&A portion because I was curious to know how they had handled the power differential issue.

Their brief comments at the conference are fleshed out above with many helpful specifics about what it means to work together across expertise levels, disciplines, and cultural backgrounds. Dr. Chandler explicitly mentions her concerns going into her collaboration with Breanna, including the power dynamics, the difficulty of actually exercising the restraint she thought necessary in order to give Breanna space within their collaboration, and a concrete example of a time that a firm stance on a topic shut down an opportunity to engage with Breanna's thoughts. Their different perspectives on what each perceived to be the effect of their exchange about Richard Wright's work is an excellent example of how even a "failure" to engage with an idea directly can yield positive outcomes in a collaboration between junior and senior faculty. Most importantly, the benefit is not only for the graduate student. Dr. Chandler cared enough about making space for Breanna to be self-reflective and proactively sought to minimize the harm by bringing it up and apologizing (!), which in turn gave Breanna the opportunity to explain what she had learned from the experience. Too often, there is little room

for humility in academia, but I think it is a necessary characteristic to successfully develop the kind of liberatory work we hope can change the academy. Of course, existing racial and gender power structures make the incorporation of humility into work by women of color scholars a risky undertaking as their expertise already faces so many challenges from colleagues and students.

Liz and Dr. Martin's various collaborations, in humanities and social science projects, reveal a working relationship that is firmly based on mutual respect and a desire to learn from each other. It is evident that they have established a comfortable work rhythm, but without pretending it was effortless. Their flow has evolved from several projects and figuring out what helps them resolve differing perspectives. I was especially struck by their two-column strategy for identifying what parts of a text "speak" to each of them and responding to a flagged passage with their own commentary. This method allows them to delve into what resonated with each through a conversation with a trusted interlocutor. I loved seeing scholarship emerge from resonances that were at times deeply personal for them and realizing that personal engagement with a text can be achieved as a team without losing the force of the individual response. Dr. Martin's work with Nadia provides a look earlier in the life of a collaborative relationship. Their work is fascinating in its international scope and models how dialogue across language, cultural, and academic contexts can enrich scholarship in our field. It would be great to see more international collaborations such as theirs that tease out the nuances of "translating" frameworks from one cultural, academic context to another effectively. The proliferation of this type of joint scholarship can also help to de-center American and British children's literature and can also

help us realize more intimately how one-sided these interactions are despite our best efforts, as English proficiency is an expectation for international scholarship in children's literature.

I particularly appreciate Dr. Martin and Dr. Chandler's wish to "amplify the voices of junior scholars" (page # TK). When this wish is genuine, as the above testimony from their collaborators indicates, it can be hugely beneficial for us as we begin our careers as academics. After my first year as an M.A. student, I submitted an essay for publication in *Voices of Resistance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chican@ Children's Literature,* edited by Laura Alamillo, Larissa M. Mercado-López, and Cristina Herrera, with the help of Dr. Tanya González. I was incredibly lucky in Tanya's mentorship as she clearly outlined the choices I had and offered her help if I wished to pursue this particular opportunity. Working on the revisions throughout that summer, I learned to hone my ideas through Tanya's extensive commentary and questions. Tanya's willingness to co-author the article enabled me to publish much earlier than I would have been able to do on my own and helped strengthen my application to PhD programs the following year. We mostly worked asynchronously with regular video calls to discuss our progress and deadlines. As the three collaborations above demonstrate, there is no "correct" way to work together. Liz, Breanna, Nadia, Dr. Chandler, and Dr. Martin encourage collaborators to find what works for them. They all experimented with various means of communication and drafting methods that accommodated their other commitments, both personal and professional. The one consistent factor in these different joint efforts is that they all established communication expectations from the beginning that respected each other's time and work style. A final thought about what I learned from hearing about their process: both the junior and senior scholars were invested in each other beyond the professional sphere. Their conversations were

about the work, but not *just* about the work. They created space for personal engagement with each other that will last far beyond the publication of these essays.

Early in the process of mapping out this collaboration, I spoke to Liz and shared my questions and concerns regarding work between junior and senior scholars. I am grateful for the answers in this piece and optimistic that this kind of work can be immensely beneficial for our field. However, there are some questions that remain unanswered, and I hope we can discuss them in the future. In particular, I am interested in discussing whether it is even "ethical" to ask for help. I am thinking of the heavy service load on women and POC within mostly white spaces so it is an important consideration for us as graduate students. Dr. James Cox is a leading proponent in the English Department and UT Austin in general of effective mentorship and mentoring best practices. I discussed this issue with him, and he acknowledged the difficulty of coming up with a satisfactory answer, but he did offer the recommendation that these requests be made to full professors as junior faculty have promotion requirements to meet.

There are additional questions that I feel are important for our community to reflect on to create an intellectual community that values collaboration, that equips junior scholars with the tools to succeed, and protects us from the abuses of power we all know are rampant in academia. These questions include:

- How do you approach a potential mentor?
- How do you acknowledge power differentials in a mentorship? Should the person in the "lower" position be the initiator? If the more senior person initiates, then the graduate

student might feel pressure to accept in order to avoid offending someone on their committee or someone with some power in their department.

- How do you plan for a "no" because the person is heavily committed to other projects or service appointments?
- What should we make of the devaluation of collaborations and collaborative research in literature job markets?

I look forward to future conversations, whether in print or in conference sessions or elsewhere, in which we can discuss and debate these points and, in so doing, encourage future collaborations between junior and senior scholars.

Conclusion

Polyphony: n. The style of simultaneously combining a number of parts, each forming an individual melody and harmonizing with each other. We six scholars—early career and seasoned alike—embarked on a holistic composition with a single goal: to write about our experiences academically collaborating with one another, collaboratively. Our individual experiences provided at times wholly unique melodies that diverged and converged; at other times these melodies were harmonic and even monophonic in their similarities. At the risk of overdoing the musical metaphors, this piece soon became a fugue, in which we built upon each other's themes and revelations with our own stories, adding depth to the overall composition. It is our sincere hope that you will find this work informative, insightful, and, perhaps, resonant with your own experiences. Most of all, we hope that you will find inspiration, in these stanzas and phrases, to go and build your own collaborative compositions and fill this field with a chorus of new voices!

Listen Louder

Differences abound in the
lives, minds, words of
youth literature scholars across
systematically constructed lines of nation, rank, age, race, discipline.
Today these lines line our streets
with words of strife, struggle, and pain:

Listen louder…listen deeper…listen well.

We seek to:
uncover and unpack the stories
that expand children's minds;
amplify those whom the canon
sought to silence,
stifle behind generations of indifference.
Sometimes when our differences intersect,
the crossroads exhort us to:

Listen louder…listen deeper…listen well.

What if

one voice joins another, listens;

What if

one life connects with another, listens;

and then—together—we construct

Radical Collaborative Scholarship?

Note:

We offer this poetic addendum to our article in the form of the Bop—invented by Afaa Michael Weaver while he was attending a summer retreat of the African American poetry organization, Cave Canem (Bop). A type of poetic argument, the Bop features three stanzas—the first presents the problem and is followed by a repeated line or refrain; the second stanza expands or explores the problem and is, too, followed by the refrain. The third stanza offers a solution, or if a solution cannot be found, it recognizes that failure as part of its content. We encourage you to explore this form further, and we humbly hope that our offering might be worthy of the form.

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