

## Collaboration in Creative Design Practice: An (Un)braided Approach

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Keywords: design process, collaboration, braided model, design knowledge

This concept paper represents Phase 1 of a multi-phase creative research project. The goal of this first phase is to address the complexities of collaboration within design scholarship. There are numerous design process models (Bye, 2010; Labat & Sokolowski, 1999; Lamb & Kallal; Parsons & Campbell, 2004) and there is research on the co-design process where the user is a participant (Morris & Ashdown, 2018; Park et al., 2014; Watkins & Dunne, 2015). Team design approaches have also been studied in a classroom environment. However, there are few design process models that address creative collaborations intended to define and model the process of interweaving two or more designers' history, expertise, processes and/or methods. A barrier has always been that designers rely on tacit and localized knowledge, challenging the conversion of that knowledge to something transferable and explicit. Suib, et.al (2020) argue to sustain and conserve knowledge it must be transferable. This certainly applies when sharing insights among collaborators. According to Niedderer (2007, p.5), "the inclusion of tacit knowledge seems essential for success," and is associated with the expertise of the researchers. To get to this understanding requires significant team assessment at the front end of a project, as well as during the studio processes. This research team assembled with the goal of utilizing and building upon the Braided Model put forth by Tortorice, Davelaar, and Cobb (2016). Method braiding is designed to help researchers to integrate or 'braid' their methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation both simultaneously and sequentially (Watson, 2022). The team met bi-weekly for a year, working through analyzing the braided approach to collaborative design. The team determined that they needed to unbraid the structure to better understand the strands of knowledge, both tacit and explicit, which were intertwined to create the model.

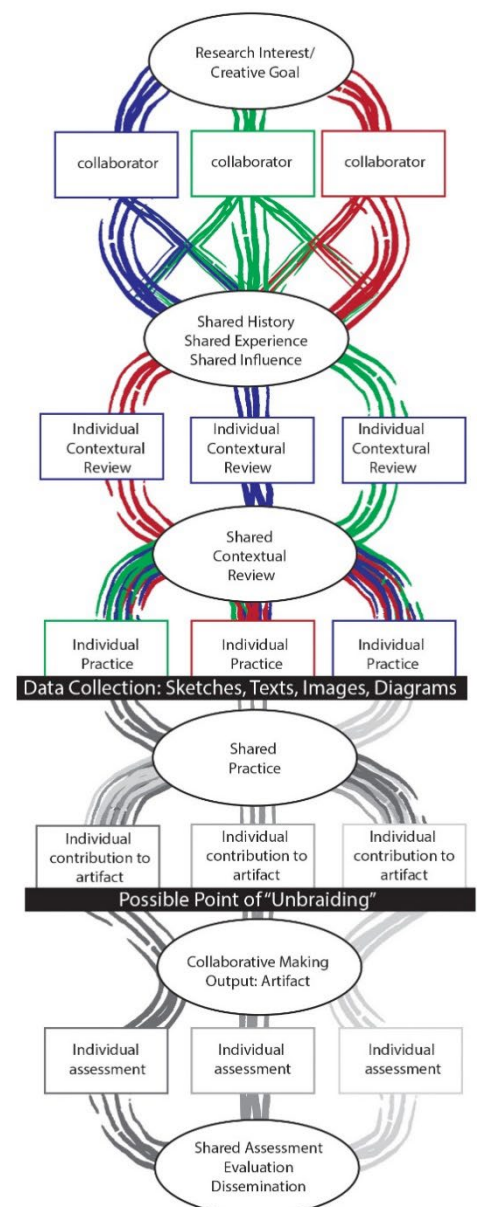
The first stage was to form a team. Two members of the team had recently collaborated on a design project together and discussed the goal of creating an updated version of the braided model. They mutually agreed that an additional team member would be beneficial and sought the third member for her extensive experience with design collaborations, including a previous collaboration with one of the team. The team met via zoom to discuss the goals of the project and determined how they could best analyze the braided model approach. As the discussions began, they utilized the first steps of the braided model to gain better insight into how it might be directly applied to creative design scholarship that includes practice led/studio work.

Initially, the designers each examined their individual histories, both professional and personal. It became clear that it was important for the team to know various aspects of an individual in terms of how that will affect their work outcomes. This included details about research interest and areas of expertise, family life, and time as an available resource. The

designers all conducted individual contextual reviews of design practice and collaboration. Not surprisingly each team member unknowingly focused on different areas of concentration. For example, one team member analyzed a series of published design models while another focused on defining contribution vs. collaboration. Through the individual reviews it was possible to create a shared context. Through this sharing, the team understood that each member has their own personal thesaurus, a complex wealth of knowledge built through lived experiences. As a result, each designer brought their own context/insight to the design work, although a sense of that tacit knowledge was still elusive. The word insight is used rather than inspiration, as it captures a wider array of knowledge and experiences that affect the designer's process and outcomes.

In the next step, the designers tasked the team to individually delineate their design process for both design collaboration and for individual design. Each team member shared the steps they took for an illustrative design process, a process that often moved in unplanned directions. When compared, it was understood that the design project could start in a variety of ways from prescribed goals as part of an ongoing body of research, through commissioned work, to material discoveries. Sharing how each designer approached their design process was an important step for collaboration as it helped each gain a better understanding of how a design challenge might be approached. It was also clear that when the design process is studio centered it is seldom linear, nor is there always a clear problem statement. Rather, some designers "construct it from their own contexts, experiences, capabilities and resources, manipulating it during almost the whole process" (Bravo & Bohemia, 2021, p. 5). This potentially required a new approach to the braided model.

After creating the shared contextual review, the team began to speculate how they would continue the process of developing a collaboration model. One of the team members put together a model (Figure 1) that built upon the previously proposed braided model. The new model kept the braided structure but included notes which delineated the processes/ conversations/ discoveries that occurred at each step up to this point. The lower half is speculative in that it will be evaluated after the design and studio process. The colors red, green, and blue were used to show three different team members and represent the strands of knowledge that each team member contributed. Additionally, the braiding of information and knowledge building is depicted through the intertwining of the strands. It is postulated that the model may not capture the messy complexities of the



collaborative studio process, especially as it enters a stage where “materialness” and the tactile nature of an apparel/ textile design is central. It is understood that the model may change at that point, as the material will be what expresses meaning for the individual designers. The challenge will be to unify the strands into a whole. The purpose of this research presentation is to share the knowledge gained from creating a design model at the early stages, and to gain feedback from other design scholars. The design team is currently working on development of an object that, through the studio practice, will help to finalize a braided or unbraided form of the model. As well, the researchers have created an open source living document and bibliography of design resources which we will provide access to and encourage design researchers to utilize, share and contribute to this resource.

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