Abstract. If the reforms currently transforming public education are to be sustained, it is commonly believed that they must be founded in new conceptions of schooling. Compelling among them is the recurrent edict that teachers and other educators must learn to work together in ways previously considered to be discretionary and, consequently, largely a matter of personal and professional preference. Notwithstanding its rising recognition as an essential ingredient of successful schools, collaborative practice remains an erratic and elusive enterprise that is fraught with uncertainty. The authors of this chapter use the literature and their own research experiences to explore how and why the wide scale establishment and nurturance of so-called professional learning communities may continue to evade realization. Despite habitual rhetoric to the contrary, a fundamental problem may be a lack of evidence that there is strong and manifested valuing of teacher collaborative practice as an integral component of schools as morally-bound communities.

The conception of professional collaboration has become a common parlance (DiPardo, 1997; Friend & Cook, 1996, 2000; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Telford, 1996) of perceived effective schooling. In fact, for some, the infusion of teacher collaborative practices is considered to have had an immense and unprecedented impact in the field of education. Advocates of such “joint work” (Little, 1982) claim that it is an important key to the development of so-called professional learning communities where moral interpersonal relationships, collective learning, empowerment, growth, and self-efficacy are the mainstays of school life. Indeed, the very word community, as derived from the Latin word communis meaning common or sharing (Welch, 1998, p. 26), is habitually used in references to collaboration.

Pugach and Johnson (1995) advance that collaborative schools are more likely to become “communities of learners” in which all participants would contribute to their own and each others’ growth (p. 12). Louis, Marks, and Kruse (1994) identified collaboration as one of five important elements of practice in a professional community. Sergiovanni (1996) is persuasive in his endorsement of the school as community metaphor, as opposed to the school as an organization. He defines community as a “collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together bound to a set of shared ideas and ideals” (p. 48). Thinking of schools as communities, Sergiovanni asserts, changes the interpersonal relationships of its members from the individualistic to the collective, and helps to create a school culture where people are morally bound to collective goals. The practice of collaboration, then, is seen as an important key to the development of schools as moral communities.

Those less enamoured with the idea of teacher collaborative practice being elemental to school success tend to view it as yet another touted remedy to the persisting problems and challenges associated with schooling -- an antidote for a
systemic condition that defies solution. Resisting the urge to dismiss such a disparaging perspective out-of-hand may lead one to further consider the commonly-noted barriers to teacher collaboration and to look beyond the rhetoric and the reverie. The authors of this chapter attempt to clarify understandings of collaboration and its potentialities and limitations in transforming schools from organized hierarchies to moral communities. Accordingly, the ensuing discussion is comprised of four parts:

1. a discussion of the major trends undergirding the collaborative thrust embedded in reconceptualizing schools as moral communities;
2. an overview of collaboration in terms of its various definitions, and its challenges and benefits for establishing schools as moral communities;
3. a presentation of research findings examining perceptions of school collaboration;
4. a discussion or implications for theory, research, and practice pertaining to the collaborative dimension of schools as moral communities.

THE COLLABORATIVE THRUST OF SCHOOLS AS MORAL COMMUNITIES: MAJOR TRENDS

Increasingly, school administrators and teachers are encouraged to challenge traditional ways of thinking about schools as organizations. Historically, schools have been metaphorically conceptualized as knowledge-producing factories, with teachers being the producers and students being the product. Consequently, schools have been fashioned to reflect and perpetuate cultures of individualism, competitiveness, and isolation. This organizational fragmentation pre-empts the creation of new school cultures which reflect a more covenantal dimension of schools as moral communities. Schools modelled on the qualities of community values supplant contractually-based precepts, and foster cultures of collaboration grounded in strong moral ties. The increased interest in collaboration (Friend & Cook, 1996, 2000; Jordan, 1999) is rooted in changes in thinking about what makes an organization effective and what constitutes leadership.

The foundation of current collaborative practice may be examined by applying lenses of organization and leadership theories. Traditionally, organization theory rooted in business and industry attributed the power of leadership to those assuming formal roles legitimated by hierarchical structures. For example, classical theorists, representing Taylor’s (1916/1996) “principles of scientific management”, Weber’s (1922/1996) characteristics of the “ideal bureaucracy”, and Fayol’s (1916/1996) “general principles of management”, relied heavily upon hierarchy, one-way command structure, top-down decision-making, compartmentalization of units, and specialization of responsibilities and tasks. In later years, in response to the changing and complex needs of contemporary society, recognition of the value of collaboration for achieving organizational goals grew (Friend & Cook, 2000, p. 14). Scepticism emerged surrounding organizational and leadership practices perceived to deny the importance of human resources, community building and collaboration. For example, some students of organizational behaviour began to turn their attention to the importance of participative decision making (Follet,