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Developing a Strategic "Container" to Support Boundary Spanning and Belonging Amongst Diverse Collaborators at a Land-Grant University

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Abstract

This essay reports on engaging academic and community partners whose positionalities spanned diverse lived experiences and power structures. Using groundwork from several literatures, we reflect on developing, nurturing, repairing, and expanding a container as a critically reflective space for experimenting with new ways of being and doing. A well-curated and nurtured container creates processes and spaces where group members feel they belong; they commit to practice a shared set of agreements, and work through interpersonal and organizational conflict that will inevitably arise. The container can be an instrument for identity, organizational, and tactical boundary spanning. As a microsystem, a container can mobilize collective engagement when team members reflect diverse identities, hierarchies, and roles within the academic system and partnering communities. Theorizing the container as an opportunity structure for boundary spanning may help those advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within academic land-grant institutions, university–community collaboratives, and community-based organizations.

Keywords: boundary spanning, community-engaged scholarship, social justice movements, faculty diversity, land-grant universities

In this essay, we describe how to develop, nurture, repair, and expand a "container" as a critically reflective space for experimenting with new ways of being and doing. A *container* is defined as a group of people who develop an agreed-upon set of norms and a common purpose (Human Impact Partners, 2024). We borrow the term "container" from its use in social justice community organizing (Human Impact Partners, 2024) and in dialogic organization development (Corrigan, 2016). The idea is to hold intentional space for "innovation or collective learning to take place around complex and emergent issues, including strategic planning, social innovation, conflict resolution, and working with organizational culture" (Corrigan, 2016, p. 31). A well-curated and nurtured container creates processes and spaces where group members feel they belong; they commit to practice a shared set of agreements, and work through interpersonal and organizational conflict that will inevitably arise (Human Impact Partners, 2024). We theorize the container as an instrument for boundary spanning that may be helpful to those advancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within academic land-grant institutions, university–community collaboratives, and community-based organizations.

The ability of academic and community partners to mobilize within and across identities, organizations, and tactics may

depend on having opportunity structures (Roberts, 2009) where boundary-spanning groups can build community together and develop strategies to achieve common goals. The concept of political opportunity structures in social movements gives us insight into how social transformation has a greater chance of succeeding when a favorable configuration of power among actors exists within a system. This configuration includes alliances across hierarchies, availability of resources to mobilize action, conflict among those in power, and shared grievances during a moment of historical openness to participation in social change (Kriesi, 1995). These opportunity structures may affect social transformation through boundary spanning by facilitating the development of relationships and coalitions among diverse collaborators. We advance this scholarship by applying the metaphor of a container for intentional boundary spanning as an example of an opportunity structure that facilitates the development of relationships among diverse collaborators and communities.

The creation of the container as an opportunity structure was facilitated by student activism, historical openness to dismantling racism and systems of oppression, and funding to support DEIJ work to redress historical injustices that contextualize our institution and its relationship with surrounding communities. For context, Oregon State University (OSU) is one of the original land-grant universities, espousing public education, applied research, and public outreach and engagement within its core mission. Although a thorough accounting of OSU's racialized history is beyond the scope of this article, we cannot separate the history and mission of the land-grant institution from the context of state-sponsored Indigenous dispossession nationwide and its contemporary impacts on communities in Oregon (Nash, 2019). The Morrill Act of 1862 directed the Oregon state legislature to designate Corvallis College as Oregon's land-grant institution by receiving 90,000 acres of federal lands taken from the Klamath, Coos, Lower Umpqua, Siuslaw, and Coquille people (OSU Extension Service, 2023, para. 4). This dispossession helped to fund the OSU educational system, as well as research centers and extension services established by the Hatch and Smith-Lever Acts (Nash, 2019). Because of this history, OSU can support its present-day land-grant mission of education (with campuses established in Corvallis and OSU-Cascades in Bend), applied research (through an agricultural experiment station with eleven branch stations across Oregon), and public outreach (with faculty from OSU Extension Service working in all 36 counties across the state). In these and other ways, OSU's historical context shapes present-day university-community partnerships.

The historical trauma (Mendez-Luck et al., 2015) resulting from Oregon's sociopolitical legacy of White supremacy presents a major challenge for recruiting and retaining faculty of color and those marginalized by intersecting systems of oppression, such as racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism, classism, and transphobia. Faculty diversity and community-engaged scholarship are interrelated (Strum et al., 2011; Watson-Thompson & Thompson, 2023). Women and faculty of color are more likely to integrate community engagement into their academic and research agendas (Corbin et al., 2021). In recognition of these challenges, the College of Health (COH) was one of seven schools and programs of public health funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in the Transforming Academia for Equity (TAE) initiative. The availability of resources provided the opportunity to assemble a guiding team to examine how historically entrenched structural racism and oppression have impacted our college's policies and culture. By attending to historical trauma, we can realize the promise of our land-grant mission to be responsive to health and wellness inequities across communities in Oregon (Burton et al., 2021).

This reflective essay is grounded in literatures describing boundary spanning from two perspectives: academic-community engagement and social movements advancing social justice. According to Weerts and Sandmann (2010), boundary spanning provides a basis for connection between those working within an organization and external partners to "process information from the environment and provide external representation to stakeholders outside the organization" (p. 634). They highlight the importance of "reciprocal relationships with community partners for mutual benefit" (p. 634). The ability to nurture equitable partnerships with communities requires the development of an internal culture of belonging (Mahar et al., 2013) and boundary-spanning leadership skills (Van Schyndel et al., 2019).

In their theoretical review of boundary spanning in social movements, Wang et al. (2018) identified three axes where spanning can occur: (1) identity boundaries, (2) organizational boundaries, and (3) tactical boundaries. First, collective identity can be constructed based on shared lived experience and holding a common objective. Spanning identities can describe the potential for solidarity among people who experience diverse forms of systemic oppression due to racism, colonialism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, and classism. Second, organizational boundaries (Aldrich & Herker, 1977) can be spanned when organizational ties result in short-term cooperation focused on events or long-term, "enduring coalitions" with partners (Wang et al., 2018). These sustainable partnerships are based on nurtured trust and can facilitate sharing knowledge and coordinating resource distribution. Third, spanning across tactical boundaries describes how "repertoires of contention" (e.g., ways of protest and transformation) are shared across movements (Wang et al., 2018). Tactical boundary spanning can characterize how academia and community partners learn from each other and how transforming academia for equity can borrow tactics from community mobilization. For example, by further developing the metaphor of the container, we are practicing tactical boundary spanning by applying repertoires of contention used in social justice movements.

As an opportunity structure, a container designed for boundary spanning may develop its composition and practices to bridge identity boundaries, organizational boundaries, and tactical boundaries. The container can serve as a *microsystem*—a manageable subset of people that reflects the composition of the broader academic system, bringing together students, faculty, administrators, extension faculty and staff, and community-based leadership. When the container is intentionally developed to support relationships among members with positions across the roles and hierarchies within and beyond the institution, it facilitates boundary spanning in the shared decision-making process.

We propose four ways that the container is a useful heuristic for developing, nurturing, repairing, and expanding engagement. First, by intentionally choosing the group composition of the container to span across identities, hierarchies, and influence, the container is developed as a *space for experimenting* with ways to rearrange and transform academia into a system that centers equitable community engagement. Second, the container is a *critically reflexive instrument* that allows us to nurture reciprocal and caring relationships within the group, which translates to reciprocity in how we engage the broader system. Third, the container should be *repairable, elastic, and refashionable* for authentic growth. Fourth, the container facilitates tactics to *expand buy-in for cocreated transformative action* from elements of the broader system reflected by group members within the container.

Developing the "Container": Group Composition and Power Dynamics

Intentionally attending to group composition and power dynamics when building the container is critical to creating a space for experimentation. In this section, we first discuss how the group composition of the container can be intentionally boundary-spanning, allowing for a diversity of viewpoints and thus new ways of engagement. Next, we discuss how the container can be leveraged to disrupt the existing power dynamics found within academic institutions, which in turn allows for boundary-spanning engagement and innovation.

Because we viewed the container as a microsystem, the composition of our group was intentional in identity boundary spanning (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) by including members with varying lived experiences, from and engaging with minoritized and underserved communities as well as having diverse spheres of influence. Our team included individuals holding diverse roles within our college (students, faculty, administrators), the university (research centers, faculty senate leadership, extension leaders, student leaders), and partners working with communities (e.g., institution led by and serving people of color and Cooperative Extension). Our team also included members from both overrepresented and underrepresented communities in academic spaces, with intersectional identities across race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and ability. From different vantage points in the academic system, group members brought a rich, embodied understanding of how institutional policies affect our communities within the college, university, and state (Million, 2008). We intended for this level of boundary spanning in our spheres of influence to facilitate the implementation of recommendations de-

veloped through the project. The diversity of lived experience with systemic oppression and the inherent power differentials represented within our guiding team both facilitated and challenged our capacity for boundary spanning.

Our initial efforts as a team centered on building trust, mutual respect, and cultural humility (e.g., the idea that one will never fully comprehend another culture, that cultures complement each other, and that all cultures bring forth unique assets). However, boundary spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations (Collien, 2021), with institutional structures and constraints replicating these power relations. This dynamic "confers privileges, security, resources, and decision-making power in accordance to where one is located within the academic hierarchy" (Osei-Kofi et al., 2010, p. 334). Early on in our efforts, it became clear that focusing solely on group composition was not enough. To achieve a space for experimenting with ways to rearrange and transform academia as a system, we had to build a "container"—an opportunity structure for our collective work to grapple with power dynamics within the group.

To start the process of building our container, we established a set of community guiding principles (i.e., ground rules) that were intended to disrupt power hierarchies and encourage diverse perspectives. Applying a community mobilizing tactic adapted from *Emergent Strategy* by adrienne maree brown (2017), these guiding principles emphasized, among other things, a culture of learning, care for community and self, leading with good intentions and attending to impact, and engaging tensions while not indulging drama. The guiding principles centered on individual, interpersonal, and group processes that encouraged critical self-reflection and fun (e.g., we declared a collective love for snacks and naps). A key to boundary spanning is investing in relationships before tasks (Aungst et al., 2012). Our early time together included collaborative art projects, an exchange of affirmations, and regular round-robin check-ins (e.g., how are you practicing joy?). We checked in emotionally with each other during walk-and-talk meetings or sitting over coffee or tea. Taking time to attend to our container countered the typical sense of urgency to get to work and be productive, which can be pervasive in daily practices within higher education. To disrupt the existing power dynamics, we coupled our community guiding principles with a decision-making model based on consensus building (Dressler, 2006). Consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity—it weaves together everyone's best ideas and key concerns with a commitment to finding solutions that everyone can actively support (Seeds for Change, 2013). In practice, adopting a consensus-building model meant that decision making began with discussion among all team members. From that discussion, proposals emerged, were modified, and finally voted on. The vote included options to *Agree* ("I'm all in"), *Agree with Concerns* ("I have some concerns that have already been discussed but still support the proposal"), *Stand Aside* ("I have reservations that have already been discussed that keep me from supporting the proposal but do not want to stand in the way"), *Block* ("I have significant concerns that have been shared, and I do not feel the proposal should move forward"; Seeds for Change, 2013). For some on our team, this process meant acknowledging and relinquishing power and authority defined by academic culture, titles, and degrees. For others, this meant holding new power and voice not typically accessible to them in an institutional setting.

Efforts to build creative spaces of collaboration through the negotiation of interests, meanings, and norms allow for the unveiling of various types of boundaries and related differences in interests (Collien, 2021). Our container provided a supportive space founded on trust that allowed for boundary-spanning engagement and innovation. The creativity necessary for boundary spanning does not easily mesh with the traditional structures and power dynamics often found within academic institutions (Aungst et al., 2012). With the use of a container, we experimented with alternative ways of being and working together within an academic system to test in a small form what we wanted to see on a larger scale in our institution, communities, and society.

Nurturing the Container as an Instrument for Critical Reflection and Trauma-Informed Assessment of Institutional Climate

In this section, we describe how the container can provide the infrastructure for a trauma-informed, asset-based assessment of institutional climate. Nurturing the container in this way builds capacity to navigate

tensions that emerge during the development of a collective definition of equity and belonging and a shared understanding of how racism and systems of oppression affect how our institution engages communities. Utilizing consensus-based decision-making, with a reliance on community guidelines, team members self-reflected and articulated what experiences informed either the inclination to break with traditional research practices with a history of extraction (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021) or the desire to shift away from a deficit-based lens.

Because most team members were trained primarily as researchers, our perspective was to develop an evidence-based action plan drawing on stories of oppression to transform our college. We had developed a sampling frame, initial categories of inquiry, and interview questions when several of us on the team who were students and faculty of color voiced concerns that a traditional research approach that extracts stories of oppression was inappropriate. Below, we describe our journey to collectively understand the need for an asset-based approach to this work as we integrated the various embodied knowledges from members of our guiding team.

Using the container as an instrument for critical reflection, we identified three primary concerns as well as a solution. First, we found ourselves wondering, although seeking evidence to legitimize action is a common practice in public health, was it our task to prove that racism and systemic oppression existed in academia? We heard the voices of many team members who had previously participated in surveys, interviews, and group discussions about their personal experiences with both racism and systemic oppression. Some expressed concern about the lack of action that resulted from previous climate surveys, underscoring that asking again would be "retraumatizing" and "taxing."

Second, we wrestled with the ways that traditional (e.g., deficit-focused) approaches to inquiry could threaten the trustworthiness of our data as well as harm participants. For example, because our college is housed in a predominantly White institution, with very few faculty of color, responses to direct questions about experiences with racism and oppression in the workplace could have been traced to individuals, increasing their vulnerability and risk. Creswell and Poth (2018) agreed:

> To study one's own workplace, for example, raises questions about whether good data can be collected when the act of data collection may introduce a power imbalance between the researcher and the individuals being studied . . . researchers can jeopardize their jobs if they report unfavorable data or if participants disclose private information that might negatively influence the organization or workplace. (p. 154)

Therefore, the initial sampling frame that focused on faculty and students of color and posed questions eliciting stories of oppression would not only increase the risk for those experiencing oppression but would also produce untrustworthy data. The container provided a brave space for guiding team members to voice concerns about the way climate assessments had been previously sampled and conducted.

Third, the primary focus on trauma would unintentionally corroborate deficit-based narratives of people of color, minoritized, and underserved communities (Jacob et al., 2021), whereas the opposite is revealed in their collective strength to navigate systemic oppression. Rather than taking the traditional approach that unduly increases identity strain (Brown et al., 2020; Fox Tree, & Vaid, 2022; Vargas et al., 2022) and cultural load (Jimenez et al., 2019) by asking people of color to recount their trauma, we chose to adopt appreciative inquiry: an asset-based approach that would start by highlighting the richness of people's contributions to advancing health equity and cultural pride.

Appreciative inquiry (*Introductory Guide to Appreciative Inquiry*, 2023) aims to *discover* "what gives life" to a system, *dream* about "what might be," *design* "what should be," and work toward a *destiny* of building "what can be." Through interviews (n = 30) and a Qualtrics survey (n = 100), we asked about meanings of, experiences with, and institutional factors that enable equity and belonging. Our asset-based questions are outlined in Table 1 and synthesized findings in Table 2. Apart from the synthesized information provided in Table 2, we do not include excerpts from those data because they were collected for internal purposes only and did

Table 1. Asset-Based Questions Focused on Equity and Belonging

Belonging	• What does belonging mean to you within the college? • Describe a moment when you felt like you belonged as a member of the college community.
Equity	• What does equity mean to you? • Describe a time when you felt equity mattered in the college. • What conditions or attributes made it possible for equity to matter in that instance? • How have you applied equity in your work in the college? • What contributions have you made to promote equity?
Closing	• Are there any future actions you would like to see from the college? • Is there anything else you would like to add?

Table 2. Meanings of Equity and Belonging in Our College

Equity	Belonging
Fairness and justice as central to all aspects of our work	Mattering; being seen and valued; having a voice; treated as a contributing member
Community partnerships based in reciprocity; systems that nurture relationships and collaboration	Being included in projects; invited to collaborate in scholarship and teaching; being offered professional development opportunities
Accessibility and affordability	Mentoring; finding a community of care, support system
Transparency and accountability	Mutual respect, finding shared humanity
Redressing historic and current harm, especially in relationship with Indigenous communities and communities of color	Holding space with people who share identities, lived experience, and/or goals; affinity groups
Self-determination; multiple ways of being and knowing	Joy, having fun together, laughter, humor

not require review by an institutional review board.

Through the survey and interviews, participants reported positive experiences—collaborative moments when they belonged and mattered and instances where equity was central to engagement—and voiced ideas for future actions. We also learned about tensions that left some feeling isolated and unseen. Using appreciative inquiry shifted power dynamics by taking a relational approach to open conversations and making space for participants to tell their stories in the way they chose. Our thematic analysis of the survey and interview responses then informed a set of provocative propositions, statements that "bridge the best of 'what is' with participants' intuition of 'what might be'" (Center for Appreciative Inquiry, 2024, para. 9; see also *Introductory Guide to Appreciative Inquiry*, 2023). These statements framed our plans for institutional transformation. This approach honored alternative ways of listening, learning, and knowing. This honoring was not possible without the reciprocal and caring relationships formed within the group and the use of the con-

tainer as a critically reflexive instrument to hold our boundary-spanning space.

Repairing a Ruptured Container to Achieve Authentic Growth

Because our conceptualization of the container necessarily includes members who span identity and organizational boundaries, the container is vulnerable to challenges associated with power imbalances. The sustainability of a well-nurtured container requires the anticipation of tension and conflict. Repairing a ruptured container involves incorporating processes that guide conflict resolution and attend to power imbalances inherent in academic hierarchies. In this section, we describe scenarios where strategies to repair a ruptured container were utilized. Using the container as a support allowed our group to address conflict, ultimately leading to authentic growth.

Although we intentionally created a community of care (Scully, 2021), challenges to the integrity of our container required us to work collaboratively to repair and refashion it. For example, in our second group retreat, the external consultant facilitating our discussion tasked us with an activity intended to identify partners in our college across a continuum of solidarity and allyship. The proposed activity for identifying collaborators in our college who may be more resistant to implementing new equity-based programs generated contention in our group and tested the integrity of our container. During this process, a White team member with institutional power perceived that the activity was not well articulated, causing them to feel uncomfortable engaging in the activity. Although the individual shared their discomfort with the consultant in a side conversation, the consultant continued with the activity. Power differentials that mapped onto the traditional academic hierarchy within our group revealed themselves when a person of color with less institutional power, who believed they were following the instructions given in the activity, was impacted by what they perceived as disapproval by the White individual with more institutional power and subsequently experienced a trauma response. The rupture of our container reverberated through the group, straining the sense of trust we had worked hard to develop.

In this case, negotiating a solution largely fell on the two team members who were involved in the conflict. In a situation when individuals have disproportionate power and privilege, more facilitation support from the outside consultant and other team members with institutional power would have better facilitated the healing process. Rebuilding required the individual with more power to understand and attend to the impact of their actions, and it required all of us to remember and reinforce the primary purpose of the group's work—to address inequitable power dynamics and institutional practices to transform academia.

The example above illustrates how unintentional fallout from hierarchy and inequitable power distribution must be considered in ongoing boundary-spanning interactions to avoid undermining the goals of the process. Boundary-spanning processes and boundary spanners themselves are entangled in societal power relations, with obstacles to learning and collaboration related to racism, classism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, and intersecting systems of oppression often remaining invisible (Collien, 2021).

Having team members whose boundaries spanned power hierarchies and elements of lived experience led us to ask, Who among us has the privilege of being comfortable while crossing boundaries for community-engaged work? For some team members who have experienced and embodied oppression within academia firsthand, further discussions about how to transform it felt "taxing" and somatically uncomfortable, yet a sense of urgency to change systemic problems drove them to continue engaging. The embodiment of discomfort was not optional for those with lived experiences of oppression and racism (Johnson, 2015). For others, the lack of lived experience with intersectional marginalization granted them the privilege of choosing when to engage in discomfort (Boovy & Osei-Kofi, 2022; Cabrera, 2017; Johnson, 2015). Looking back, as we sat together in that space during the retreat, we witnessed visible differences in the embodied experiences across our diverse team. Reflecting on those differences pushed us to lean into learning together about the importance of genuine, intentional allyship from members of the dominant group and to begin considering how to build those capacities.

The rupture and repair of the container was an experiment into how we can transform existing systems and dynamics and grow through them. As a group, we revisited and added to our community guiding prin-

ciples to grow stronger through experience. Within this moment of repair, the container as a microsystem illustrated what a more equitable system may look like. In future boundary-spanning work, it may be beneficial to craft structures and strategies to address conflict within the container from the beginning of the team-building process. Although boundaries are constantly negotiated in the context of politics and power (Collien, 2021), conflict does not need to be inherently deal-breaking. Using the container as a support to address conflict as it arises may allow us to institutionalize new ways of interacting, generating a capacity for equity-based boundary spanning.

Expanding Our Container and Broadening Our Engagement to Mobilize Buy-In for Cocreated, Transformative Action

Working within the container can facilitate the engagement of collaborators external to the container, the development of tactics for engagement, and the sustainability of partnerships with community organizations. In this section, we provide three examples of how our container facilitated buy-in: (1) utilizing tactics from popular education models to work across institutions, (2) intentionally expanding the container to include leadership from community-based organizations, and (3) utilizing the impact of the container to mobilize buy-in and interest to join a community centered on expanding boundaries.

Utilizing Tactics From Popular Education Models to Work Across Institutions

One way that organizational and tactical boundary spanning (Wang et al., 2018) can occur is by working across academic systems with DEIJ teams at different universities (i.e., container-to-container learning). Working across institutions allows learning about how others are navigating social and political contexts, as well as strategies they have used to engage and mobilize action with their networks. Because they are on a similar journey but have an outsider perspective, teams at peer institutions can provide valuable feedback on internal processes. The group dynamics that developed from our use of the container allowed us to more effectively work across academic systems and engage in peer learning.

Using Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 1992), we experienced container-to-container learning and tactical boundary spanning, which allowed for new learnings and reflections through imaginative play and solidarity. Theatre of the Oppressed is a popular education method developed by Brazilian Augosto Boal in which communities develop scripts about collective problems, identifying their settings, key actors, conflict, and resolution. Boal wrote, "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (p. xxxi). As practiced, Theatre of the Oppressed is performed before community members to present critical problems related to inclusion/exclusion in societal systems. The process includes performing the skits several times: (1) The skits are first performed as written; (2) then, the skit is performed a second time, and the audience is prompted that (a) any audience member may stop the performance at any time (by shouting "Freeze") and (b) the person who freezes the performance can propose an alternative to the scene as initially performed; the community member can provide verbal instructions to the actors, or the community member can "tap in" and join the performers to show the alternative as the skit progresses.

The situation our guiding team brought to the peer-learning workshop is described in "original scenario" in Table 3.

Theatre of the Oppressed allowed us to experiment with different ways of engaging our college leadership. This example highlights the utility of the container in two ways. First, by sharing with containers at peer institutions and using imaginative roleplay to develop strategy, we learned the importance of engaging the college leadership in solidarity as a full team, rather than continuing the top-down approach of relaying messages between college leadership and students as previously practiced. Second, having a container that included collaborators from various components of our academic system facilitated this type of engagement. The fact that we were such a diverse group of boundary spanners created accountability and transparency and made us stronger when presenting our ideas before the college leadership. Everyone—students, administrators, faculty, and extension specialists—having a seat at the table facilitated synchronous engagement among constituencies.

Table 3. Modifying Engagement Through Theatre of the Oppressed

Original scenario

Players: Two faculty members leading TAE, students calling for change, college leadership team (e.g., Dean/Associate Deans)

1. Students remind the faculty members leading the TAE team that nothing has changed after they wrote letters demanding action in response to the murder of George Floyd and the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the students called for mandatory training of all faculty.
2. The two faculty members schedule a visit to the college leadership team *to relay* student concerns and demands.
3. In meeting with the two faculty members, college leadership asks questions about "evidence-based and high-quality trainings," but is unable to commit to requiring existing trainings for leadership. There is talk of forming a subcommittee to consider the request.
4. The TAE leaders report back to the students and face further frustration at the lack of action.

Scenario With Solidarity Driving Engagement

Players: Members of the TAE guiding team in solidarity, including students, faculty, administrators, college leadership team

1. College leadership team invites TAE leaders (who were the original two faculty members from original script) to present draft action plan during their regular ongoing meetings.
2. The two faculty members bring the situation to the whole TAE team (container) and to peer teams from other universities working through similar issues.
3. TAE team together decides that rather than having two members relay the message from the entire guiding team to the college leadership team, *the message is stronger when delivered together in solidarity*.
4. TAE team schedules meeting with the entire team, invites college leadership to attend with the entire team (container).

Intentionally Expanding Our Container to Include Leadership From a Community-Based Organization

Organizational boundary spanning can also be practiced when the container intentionally includes leadership from community-based organizations (CBOs) who work with minoritized and underserved communities. As a team, we hoped to chip away at the harm produced by centuries of racism, colonialism, and exploitation (Clinical and Translational Science Awards Consortium, 2011) to move toward the realization of our land-grant mission (i.e., a university for all communities in Oregon through education, research, and outreach). By including and compensating the executive director of Casa Latinos Unidos, a local CBO serving Latino/e communities, we practiced developing the type of equitable systems of engagement that is critical to our land-grant mission. Although guiding team membership was limited to one CBO leader, their inclusion intentionally reflected community partnerships as an important component of the container as a microsystem. Having a voice within that microsystem, the community partner shared in decision making, which was integral to building mutually beneficial relationships. We recognized that building relationships with each CBO that is engaged should be multifaceted and sustainable. Therefore, relationships should be deepened with each CBO that is engaged by the container to avoid developing shallow relationships that may become exploitative.

Expanding our container allowed for facilitating community-partner boundary-spanning roles in the university, cultivating a reciprocal relationship (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Specifically, the relationship with the CBO represented within our container extended beyond participation in TAE. We collaborated with them writing several grants and in service-learning programs that would inspire youth to transform society. For example, the Youth en Acción program, funded through a grant from the Oregon Health

Authority Youth Advisory Council, increased capacity among minoritized and underserved high school youth using youth participatory action research (YPAR) approaches such as photovoice. Through our partnership with this CBO, we have expanded our work with other external partners, such as the Oregon School-Based Health Alliance (OSBHA). The new partnership with the OSBHA led to bringing the "Joining Our Youth (JOY): School-Based Health Services Conference" to the OSU, which bridges academia with communities.

Utilizing the Impact of the Container to Mobilize Buy-In and Interest to Join a Community Centered on Expanding Boundaries

The container supports bidirectional boundary spanning, generating opportunities for conversation between those working within and outside the container. Two opportunities to expand the container arose as new collaborators were attracted by our impact, and as we became aware of the need for collaborators from across university campuses. First, a colleague reached into our container seeking feedback for a project to include DEIJ efforts in the promotion and tenure process. This faculty member lacked lived experience and confidence to serve as an ally, but held institutional power, sought support, and became a member of our team. The faculty member was positioned to advocate for improving the language in the faculty handbook on the inclusion of DEIJ work in promotion and tenure. Our container buoyed their role as an ally to advocate for stronger university DEI policies. Consequently, the container enabled us to form new impactful partnerships and cocreate resources that will support faculty engagement in DEIJ. Second, a colleague with expertise in developing a culture of belonging from the OSU-Cascades campus expressed interest in expanding engagement in their community partnerships and in distinct but proximal contexts.

In expanding the boundaries of the container by adding two new members, we confronted the challenge of integrating new members into a team that had already invested time to develop its culture, formed bonds, and grown together. Still, the container provided a framework to encourage mobilization and expansion, providing a set of guiding norms and processes that allowed for a feasible bar for entry while maintaining a high standard of conduct within the group. As the container shifts and expands in boundaries, the nature of the work evolves. The container keeps us centered, even as the team and its work change and evolve.

Conclusion

In summary, we reflect on the application of the container for intentional boundary spanning as a useful tool for DEIJ teams organizing in solidarity toward equity and justice. We conceptualized the container as a microsystem that reflected the components of the larger academic system. Drawing on the literature describing boundary spanning in social movements, Table 4 summarizes how our container provided an opportunity structure (Roberts, 2009) for boundary spanning along identity, organizational, and tactical axes (Wang et al., 2018). To hold the complexity of our diverse experiences, our team utilized a container to build community and develop strategies to achieve common goals. The container was a space to which we could belong, reflecting research that indicates the importance of groundedness for belonging (Mahar et al., 2013). The examples in this essay provide opportunities for professional growth and lessons learned about the intricacies of boundary spanning in practice. The tactical strategies presented were essential for boundary-spanning wellness, well-being, and career sustainability.

A container can be used to mobilize buy-in and expand boundaries to broaden engagement opportunities. The container facilitated an environment for equitable engagement through relationship building, experimentation, and cooperative action. A well-nurtured container provides a space to test new ways of being together. By disrupting existing hierarchies and power dynamics within the container and as we engaged beyond the container, we accounted for historical context and implemented trauma-informed approaches. Key strategies that began to redress the history of racism and systemic oppression that characterize how academia relates to surrounding communities included developing a meaningful relationship with a Latino/e-led CBO (e.g., including their executive director on our guiding team), collaborating with leaders in Cooperative Extension to develop an action plan, and engaging in peer-learning across academic institutions through popular education (e.g., Theater of the Oppressed). The container provided the context, processes, and practices that facilitated bridging in these relationships across organizational boundaries.

Table 4. Summary of Axes of Boundary Spanning Using Container Approach

Identity	Organizational	Tactical
• Diverse lived experiences; • Diverse sources of power; • Diverse roles; • Diverse spheres of influence across components of the academic system and community partners	• Extending reciprocal relationships with community-based organizations, campuses, and Cooperative Extension; • Learning across containers with DEIJ teams at peer universities	• Community guiding principles; • Trauma-informed assessment to develop shared definition of equity and belonging (appreciative inquiry); • Conflict resolution, reflection on power imbalance, and attending to harm; • Consensus-building model of decision-making; • Reciprocal relationships practiced within container (e.g., sharing joy, community of care); • Experimentation with new ways of being and doing (e.g., Theatre of the Oppressed)

To successfully use boundary spanning for equity requires that we intentionally acknowledge the history, mission, and location of the institution. To achieve the potential of the land-grant mission, including access to public education for all, applied community-engaged research, and public outreach and engagement, demands that we grapple with the contemporary impacts of a shared history of systemic oppression. This history creates the present-day conditions and exemplifies why boundary-spanning processes and boundary spanners are entangled in societal power relations (Collien, 2021). By continually acknowledging how this history is embedded in our relationships, power dynamics, and institutions, we can disrupt harmful hierarchies and exclusionary practices that limit diversity efforts, redress the injustice that is inextricably tied to our origins, and realize our land-grant mission.

About the Authors

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