As a young child in Chicago, I was vaguely aware of my parents' aspirations beyond our downtown apartment. So it was no surprise when shortly after my eighth birthday they announced that we were moving to a house in the suburbs. Those were the days of frantic suburban sprawl, with more and more satellite communities appearing each year. At first, those communities were dependent on the city, which provided the heartbeat of the creature known as "the metropolitan area." But as years passed, more and more business, commercial, and cultural enterprises moved to the suburbs, which became independent communities, spawning whatever suburbs of their own that space would allow.

Our suburban move meant more room for each of us to spread, too. By the time I reached my teens, I often lounged in my book-filled room reading and writing my own poetry in my diary. I held Emily Dickinson as my image of a writer, alone in her garret, concentrating on ideas deep within her soul. Years later, I began college teaching feeling equally alone: with two babies at home, I taught part-time, meeting my classes without knowing the rest of the faculty and retreating to my bedroom at home to plan and grade while the babies napped. Community is not a word that applied to either situation.

This essay is the story of dismantling those images. It is about moving from garret to town, about creating community and satellite communities, about watching the communities flourish and expand. It is not my story but our story, for my adventures into the academic worlds of community and collaboration have been shared all along the way. This beginning is mine: I'm Janine. But the rest is a tale of and by two of us: my colleague Esther and me.

Esther became the second part-time English teacher on our small college faculty a few years after I began. We became kindred spirits immediately. Uninformed about what the regular staff was doing, having only the "common syllabus" that no one really used, we compared notes on our classes, planned activities, and tried new ideas. It was a secret bond in a way, because talking to each other or sharing ideas felt like an admission of stupidity: if either of us had known what to do, we wouldn't have had to consult with the other. No one said that, but the notion loomed over our early
days. Now, a dozen years later, we are taking time to reflect on our experiences as colleagues and realize how much that original collaboration and the alliance which followed have informed our teaching, increased our influence, and guided our students.

We began as a community of two. We were the part-time staff. Our class loads, exclusively first-year composition, grew. We learned writing theory the hard way: through practical experience with the diverse students of an open-entry commuter college. We had students collaborate without knowing why; we persisted at group work that was messy and noisy and somewhat fearful because we didn't know it was common for it to be that way. Our jobs changed to temporary-full-time with the arrival of a new president sensitive to overused part-time staff and to women. Eventually we, both in our forties, went to graduate school. There, in a rhetoric and composition program cognizant of collaborative practices, our instincts were validated and encouraged.

We've moved up. I am now department chair, and Esther runs the writing center and teaches the Methods class for secondary English. Our influence has increased. We effected major changes in our college's writing program. We led workshops together on collaborative writing at CCCC and NCTE. We taught recertification classes to our local high school teachers, and we saw our influence on their classrooms. We collaborate with our own students, with graduate school colleagues and professors across the country, with old friends. Collaboration has been frustrating and often opposed by our peers. But we have come to see that we learn best through interaction, that we have greater influence when we work together, and that we are most effective as teachers when we share authority with our students. Working together has brought joy and fun to our work.

Telling our story in the order that it happened seems important here, for a real factor in all this has been our own development from lone part-timers who began working together out of need, to faculty members with some influence who practice and foster collaboration by choice. None of this has happened quickly. It was a long time before we knew that our practice, which sprang from mutual need, was based in theory which we would lay out for our own students and model for our colleagues. It was longer before we understood the interconnections between our own collaborative efforts, our classroom practices, the mutual influence of the "satellite" worlds of our ex-students and our distant colleagues, and the large body of research which corroborates and extends our own experience. It was even longer before we realized that our alliance was really the cornerstone upon which we could structure this new experience. We have moved out of the garret, even out of the town and its suburbs; we depend now on a complex, friendly network of communication satellites to energize our academic lives.
Friends in Need

Our friendship began in 1981 in St. Mary’s Hospital over Thanksgiving break. Janine was there having her last child; Esther was having a hysterectomy. Janine had taught part-time at the college for a few years. It was Esther’s first semester, and we had done little more than smile in passing thus far. In the Ob/Gyn ward, we visited each others’ rooms and talked about school. We seized the opportunity. Because this was not school, and maybe because it was a place full of women who’d never dream we were talking about school, we felt freer to talk; and primary was the issue of how we’d get right back to work and hide the aftereffects of our female surgeries. We both would’ve been afraid to show any signs of letting down just before finals. The quirk of spending our Thanksgiving together in hospital garb and the conversations that followed led us to talk regularly that next semester about our classes: syllabi, great papers, terrible papers, problematic students. But we still didn’t let on at school that we were sharing ideas for classes. It was not a legitimate practice, from what we had seen or read.

Esther viewed us as the odd couple. She considered Janine daring, dramatic, restless, curious, creative. She saw herself as careful, conservative, contented, what less-kind folks might call boring. We had both come to Colorado from different backgrounds: Janine from the Chicago suburbs, Esther from rural Texas.

Janine first noticed the similarities. She was delighted to have a kindred spirit at work, someone who shared her low status as well as her views on teaching. But then she came to appreciate the balance achieved by their differences: she was impulsive, Esther steady; she came up with the big picture, Esther could always come up with details (and illuminating humor) to fill it in. Our differences showed us that as we struggled for some identity in our work lives we could be more persuasive together. Often we laid the groundwork separately for things we wanted done, and by the time we made our requests together, we were surprised at how convincing the combination of our approaches and our thinking had been. We probably hurried the timetable of our advance to half-time by at least a year by talking to our chair individually and together on various occasions. As two invisible bodies, we were probably no easier to see than one, but when the two of us spoke out, we were more likely to be heard. To this day, however, a couple of colleagues address us by the other’s name, a sign of how interchangeable we have been.

The similarities strengthened our connection as well. We were both avid readers; we had both been high school English teachers; we were both full-time mothers and wives. We both liked Ellen Goodman and Ellen Gilchrist. And we both liked teaching part-time. For us, part-time work was a choice allowed by having husbands with full-time jobs and made to accommodate the families we put first. We each saw our part-time college job as a luxury that let us indulge in work we loved while keeping our priorities straight.
We didn’t anticipate, though, how invested we would become in our work and how our part-time status would put us on the fringe of our department, without community or colleagues, without any voice. We were like the silent women in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule’s *Women’s Ways of Knowing*. We were silenced by our isolation. But, in retrospect, we can see that we’ve had some lucky breaks that make our story more positive than it might otherwise have been. We could afford financially to work only part-time. We were in a small town with one college and a small pool of part-timers. In contrast, our friend Marcia in Pittsburgh supports herself by teaching seven classes a semester at three different colleges. What chance does she have to develop the collegiality that we have shared? A larger Colorado state college has over seventy part-time English instructors. How many of them could, or would, wait as long as we did for change to develop? And how many of them would ever have a chance to work into a full-time job if they were willing to wait? In most cases, these situations preclude any opportunities for community or advancement.

In the early years, we weren’t necessarily sad, but we otherwise each fit perfectly Susan Miller’s prototype of the female part-time composition teacher as “The Sad Woman in the Basement.” For several years the English department occupied two small houses across the street from campus. Our offices were the real dregs: Janine’s, which she shared with a retired faculty member teaching only one class, was in the dark recesses of one of the houses. Esther’s office was in the basement of the other: a big, dark room split without partition between four faculty members without status—each desk and chair staked out the territory. But worse yet was the fledgling writing center. It was in a hallway between the furnace room and the old and now unused rest room. In some ways, this was a step up. The year before, when the English department was housed in an old dorm due for demolition, the writing center was in the women’s rest room. If power to speak and to be heard is dependent on a podium from which to proclaim, our basement offices encouraged silence.

Through these early stages, we were friends, but because our lives outside school were different and because we were in separate basements, we had little opportunity to collaborate as we do now. Nor did we have a chance to see either collaboration or collegiality at work. As part-timers, we taught our classes and went home. We did not know if or when department meetings were held. There was no conscious attempt to slight us; it was simply that we did our jobs, caused no trouble, and didn’t register with anyone as being part of the department. We were invisible. Nobody told us much of anything. We had to use subjective methods to decide our own strategies for teaching: our intuition, our past experiences as high school teachers, and our students’ responses were all we had to tell us if we were doing the job. We could see that writing was painful for some of our students, and that they needed almost constant encouragement to keep at it. It seemed natural to learn students’
Moving Out 243

names quickly as we tried to encourage them, but evidently this was not the norm: when Glenn brought Esther a small box of candy at the end of a semester, he told her, "I want you to know, you're the only instructor I have who calls me by name." Too often, lectures and Scantron tests preclude the personal, even for a straight-A student like Glenn.

It was hard for us to evaluate the job we were doing. (Do they like me because I'm nice, because I'm good, or because I'm easy? Do these Ph.D. men around here know something I don't know about how to do this right?) Our experience as high school teachers had limited value to us because it gave rise to questions about our credibility. To many of our colleagues, our past was a liability, as was our status as housewives and mothers: real professors arrived via straighter, shall we say more "elevated," paths. A colleague revealed his bias just recently while looking at the vita of a woman with a background not too different from ours. He shook his head. "I'm just suspicious of anyone who's taught high school," he said.

As we look back on those days, it was the qualities we hesitated to trust—our more intuitive ways of judging our own teaching and our high school background—that helped us connect with our students. We worried if students dropped our classes, and perhaps we even babied them. Many of our male colleagues held other views: they threatened tough classes both to get their numbers down and to maintain the gatekeeping function of first-year composition. At the end of the semester when many of their classes were down to fifteen students, ours often exceeded thirty. We lived with a nagging feeling that we were the department drudges, and we doubted our own academic integrity.

Only our students seemed to appreciate us. Our resulting student evaluations got us hired for the next semester's classes, but the fact that we became indispensable had more to do with retaining students, taking over classes at the spur of the moment, teaching at any hour, and making no waves.

It wasn't until a few years later, when we were offered a job to split, that we began to feel like "one" faculty member and to share our ideas and concerns more regularly (and openly). The fact that we moved into new, nicer departmental offices and were right across the hall from each other made sharing easier, too. Our status was enhanced by other perks. We immediately were assigned thirty advisees each—more than any full-time faculty member—and between us we served on a double load of committees. We also served plenty of punch; any department-sponsored activity that included food and drink found us with ladles in our hands.

Were we upset? Quietly, yes. We both had a despairing sense of paying dearly for our enhanced status. But, just as our alliance had encouraged us to act and speak up, it now perhaps served to reinforce our silence. "But we did just get benefits. We'd better not say no after they've just been so nice to us. You gotta go along to get along." Hadn't being agreeable gotten us where we were?
Although we worked together more and more, we never used the term "collaboration." Any connections we made with each other stemmed from three causes: the first was our common teaching background; the second, a woman's way of assessing things (an important shared trait in a department composed almost solely of men); the third, our bona fide dependence on each other. Without any real context for what we were supposed to be doing, we naturally gravitated to each other for support. And having worked our way out of the basement, both literally and figuratively, we began to realize that working together was more than just a response to a common struggle. We could see that our combined efforts were actually pretty effective. And, for all its frustrations, working together was more enjoyable.

If we remember correctly, it was Ellen Goodman who wrote a column on "nourishing" friends. She said you should look for friends who "feed" you. We were doing that for each other in many ways. Our ideas provoked each other's, and the mutual support made trying new things less forbidding. Working together was at first a defense, but it became a fulfilling way of doing our jobs. At this time, the only name we had to give our alliance was friendship. In graduate school we found a new word for at least parts of it: collaboration.

Graduate School and a New Midlife Direction
Because we lived over two-hundred miles from the universities around Denver or Salt Lake City, getting Ph.D.'s had seemed like a pipe dream. But when our college's new president suggested to us personally that we ought to pursue the degrees, and that the school would help us financially, suddenly we saw how tough it would be to follow that advice. Such encouragement would have been all that most people would have needed. But our lives, already complicated, were greatly challenged by this opportunity. We had husbands and children who depended on us. For how long could they go without us? For how long could we get along without them? None of us knew.

We enrolled in Indiana University of Pennsylvania, the only program we found which allowed us to get advanced degrees in English and do residency in summers alone. Ten weeks at a time might be manageable. Although our families supported our going, none were sure that this support would last. Also, we each knew women who had left home for graduate school and had never returned. We didn't know if graduate school was their response to a failed marriage, or if it was the cause. Esther said from the start that she'd do it if Janine would, and her husband Bob encouraged her as we wrote for and filled out our applications. But his shock was visible when, one evening in party conversation, he asked Janine what she thought the chances were that she'd go. "Oh, I'd say about ninety-five percent" He gulped. He later told Esther that he had been sure Janine would decide her kids were too young for her to go. But, at this point, he couldn't retract his encouragement.
Our being gone was hard on everyone. We weren't just gaining; we were trading off. Janine's seven-year-old daughter Hannah wrote a letter the first summer on black construction paper in white crayon: "Mommy, sometimes I think you are never coming home." Janine considered jumping on the next plane. Esther felt the same misery when her college-age son Brad brought his friend Anne home for the first time to meet the family. Bob served as host but let Esther know that "without a mother" they were no family. Even harder was coming home—changed ourselves—to altered roles within our families. Some of the rules had changed; they were no longer our rules. To further complicate matters, working on a graduate degree at home while teaching full-time did not sit well with families who had just given mom the summers away and now wanted her attention and care. Going away to school was hard enough; doing it with a full life at home seemed impossible. We each experienced our separate conflicts and heartaches during this time, but having someone who understood the tensions and complications was vital to our sticking out the program.

Those were problems we couldn't even anticipate that first summer. Graduate school gave us enough to worry about. For a short time, our new world was as devoid of community as it had been in basement offices. We arrived a day early to an empty dorm. Our luggage had not arrived with us, and the dorm's power was out. At forty years plus, the idea of moving into a coed dorm for the summer was ludicrous enough, even if it was a graduate dorm. That first night, sleeping in our clothes on bare mattresses and walking the dark, echoing halls of the empty building were almost enough to send us packing—except that we had nothing there to pack. Psychologically, we felt isolated as well. We were two-thousand miles away from the people who loved us and twenty years away from our past student days. We feared that everyone there would be younger, smarter, and more savvy than we were.

Again, necessity prompted this new phase of our alliance. We were now collaborating students as well as teachers. This may sound like a stride forward in working together, but in some ways, the experience was a step backwards. As teachers, we had begun to work together by choice rather than necessity; as students, we found ourselves again counting on each other out of fear and need. But whereas necessity had ruled for years in our teaching lives, it lasted only days at school. For one thing, this time we were primed: we had learned that what was painful alone could be bearable, even exciting, with a friend. For another, we immediately created a community with our dormmates, who were, in several cases, as old and as far removed from their last schooling as we were. And each one of them had come alone. Was it the fact that we were two that made our rooms the center of activity for the summer? Or was it the fact that we kept the contraband Friday night wine in one of our closets?

By the first Friday night, we were already sure we couldn't have made it without a cohort. We were celebrating, for we had just presented a report on
a one-hundred-page article summarizing new trends in linguistics to our class. We had had just two days to read and prepare, and we hadn’t even recognized half the words in the article. The language was foreign; had either of us been alone, we might have given up. In fact, several students did give up within the first couple of weeks. Blame ranged from root canals to lonesome kids, but they disappeared, never to be seen again. We kept telling each other we could do it. We took two four-mile walks a day, ostensibly for exercise, but those walks made it possible to rehash and clarify and sometimes laugh about the complicated material we were trying to assimilate. We taped up a Far Side card to illustrate our plight: a person’s head cut off above the eyebrows, stuffed with books, with a mammoth plunger right above, ready to shove in a little more. We saw our heads as the receptacles for knowledge. We had also traditionally seen the professor as the one who would hold the plunger. As Emily Dickinson in her garret was Janine’s idea of a poet, the lone soul in the ivory tower who stuffs students with knowledge was our idea of a college professor. We believed in this image because it was still the dominant one in our own institution: when you taught, you worked hard and alone in your office, and you passed on what you learned to your students. Although we had begun to reexamine that image, graduate school provided a replacement for it.

Because the graduate English department’s teaching philosophy emphasized collaboration, we had new models for what English professors could be. We were treated as collaborators in the process, students and teachers alike. We were encouraged to think and write together. We read about Anne Ruggles Gere’s writing groups; we also formed them. We learned about sharing writing from Karen Spear and Nancy Atwell; we also shared the pain we suffered while reinventing ourselves as writers. Donald Murray would have been pleased with our constant, often spontaneous, conferencing. On the other hand, our graduate group’s lore is full of irritating memories: Marianne never shutting up and doing the whole project her way, Steve promising to print up the report on his good printer and losing the disk in a bar on the way home, Earlene just never coming through. By the time we got back to our own classrooms, we were more sympathetic with the occasional student who came in whining, “Please, can’t I just do it myself?”

For the most part we worked well together. What we could only know in retrospect is that the collaborative experience worked so well for us not because we created it, but because we were welcomed into an already thriving collaborative community. At our first cafeteria meal, we were hailed to the table of two senior graduate students who spotted us as neophytes. This was more than a typical kindness; their friendliness was a natural invitation into the ongoing conversation that many students and faculty of this particular department made a point to share.

At a recent conference, we learned how slippery the definition of collaboration can be as we tried with a whole group of people to define it. But
without defining it, our summers in graduate school provided every possible configuration of it; collaboration became the paradigm under which we worked. Our groups might be two or twenty-two; our conversations took place in classrooms, in dining halls, on walks, and over Friday night wine; we felt inspired by our colleagues. Some had rented off-campus, air-conditioned apartments with privacy, peace and quiet, but we considered ourselves lucky to be in the dorm among the dozen English graduate students in communal quarters. In the dorm, we shared everything. We formed study groups. We made copies and library trips for each other. In doing this, we connected, and learning took on new meaning. We interacted professionally in hallways, across toilet stalls, on walks, or in the ever-open rooms of our colleagues. If this sounds too sunny, it is because we were a surprisingly compatible group in the early going because of our need for one another. Later, when individual confidence levels were up, we felt more of the frustrations of working together.

For the summer, the boundaries of our lives blurred: day, night, school, social life, exercise, meals (there was no rest). We all had a common goal, which at the minimum was survival and at the maximum was success. And the one aspect of academic life that seemed almost completely suppressed was competition—surprising, considering what we had heard about graduate school. However, Esther is quick to point out her feelings of envy that were often just below the surface—for Janine’s reading and typing speed, for Maureen’s political connections, for Martin’s background in composition theory. At times, we all had such feelings. But for those summers, we saw ourselves in it together as campers, although from moment to moment we were not sure whether it was summer, boot, or concentration camp. We returned to our own campus seeing our teaching through different eyes.

Friends in Deed
Because we had prospered in traditional school models as students years ago, we had naturally imitated what had served us. So it wasn’t surprising that before going back to school we had only hesitantly tried reading groups and peer interaction in the writing classes we taught, or that we were often disappointed with the results. After personally experiencing group work, we returned to our fall classes with new intention to make collaboration work for students. We felt ready for the messiness of a collaborative classroom.

For Esther, one of the results of going to graduate school was being assigned to teach the Methods of Teaching English class for prospective secondary teachers. As committed as she was to collaborative techniques in her first-year composition classes of thirty-plus students, she felt even more urgently about their value for her twelve teachers-to-be. Doing collaboration during the summer had transformed her understanding of its value in a way that reading about it or watching it had never done. From the first day, her students had to consider collaboration. At first she assigned students to
semester-long dialogue groups where they responded to each other's writing and journal entries. Other groups formed as students chose assignments from a menu format: reports on current pedagogy, daily lesson plans, unit plans, research on computer applications in English, case studies. Later in the semester, groups formed spontaneously on a regular basis. The whole-class writing project at the end of the semester produced a respectable product with minimal resistance from the self-proclaimed "diehard loner" and the tacitly identified "class slacker." Not everyone in the class wholeheartedly accepted Esther's message that collaboration is an underused asset, but on various levels their understanding of the possibilities and difficulties of collaboration was enhanced.

Shortly after, Janine was able to teach a recertification class on process writing to eleven local secondary teachers. She too insisted that collaboration be entertained. Having years of teaching habits behind them, they were not all as pliable as Esther's Methods students. The class struggled as they, with their combination of personalities both strong and scared, found it hard to turn themselves and their hangups over to collective goals. At times, stamina rather than interest kept them going. But by the end, most of them went back to their classrooms with more open minds.

Because of our preservice and inservice contacts with teachers, our networks expanded, as our students moved into our local schools. Last semester an interesting connection occurred when one of the teachers from Janine's process writing class took on as a student teacher one of Esther's Methods grads. They were both excited about each other because they knew they shared the same philosophy. More traditional teachers were suspicious of "new ideas from the university," making the student teaching experience less profitable for all. The student teachers have found it hard to sustain a progressive teaching philosophy when it is not in schools. The teachers have failed to enlarge their repertoire of teaching possibilities when, as the authorities, they are not willing to collaborate with, and learn from, their student teachers.

In the last two years we've strengthened our connections with the local school district in other ways as well: Janine has spoken at their Whole Language Workshops and Esther has served on a committee for Middle School Certification comprised of teachers from the public schools and Mesa State. Neither of our names would have come up had it not been for our having been identified as advocates of collaborative pedagogy.

It is one thing to believe strongly in the value of collaboration, and it is invigorating to find others who share that belief. But belief only goes so far. In many practical situations, fixed attitudes and traditions implicitly and explicitly reject collaboration. An example comes from our graduate experience. After writing a research paper together, we were encouraged to consider continuing our work. Why not try a collaborative dissertation? Several of our professors confirmed the need for revising the concept of the
dissertation, and they went on and on in class about how great it would be to see a collaborative one approved. More talk with them brought reality closer, however: getting a director in our department for a collaborative dissertation was one thing, but getting it through the university approval process was another. We would have been laughed right out of the graduate office. There was never a choice.

We rejected collaboration in this instance for practical reasons. But we found in our own classrooms that many students resist collaboration for other reasons. The most glaring examples were students in Janine's recertification class when they were faced with a whole-class writing project. Esther came along that night since we were about to do a workshop together with a similar assignment. The class was to use their three hours to read a several of Adrienne Rich's poems and write a response to them. We gave few instructions or restrictions.

"Okay, let's all read the poems," said the woman who was to become the self-chosen and little-loved leader. For what seemed like forever, they sat silently reading and rereading the poetry to themselves and making marginal notes. When someone finally looked at the clock and panicked, they began to discuss. But discussion did not come easily. For all their years of teaching, this was a new approach for them and they were hesitant to begin. They assumed they had to write a traditional analysis covering every poem. The woman who made herself leader insisted that they begin by finding a thesis. Because she dismissed so many ideas early in the discussion, those whose opinions had been rejected refused to speak again. They were stuck, and they were unhappy.

Our college students, on the other hand, had looked at this assignment more creatively. Their responses had varied from the traditional analysis, to an essay on one poem, to a poem of their own. To get to the final product, they had worked singly, in small groups, and in the large group. The teachers stayed in their circle of eleven the whole time. They ended with a single sentence, all glaring at each other.

For us, it was a nightmare, too. We were determined to watch the process without intervening, but the longer they went without success and with mounting frustration, the more uncomfortable we became. We saw good possibilities suggested and rejected. Should we intervene? Should we tell them how to get unstuck? We didn't, and we later thought that decision might have been a mistake.

The only saving grace of that night was the lessons learned from talking about it later. We concluded that collaboration doesn't just happen, and that those who are most used to control are those who will need the most guidance to relinquish it. The teachers had looked forward to this project, thinking it would be fun. They learned through their failed effort that working together is a tricky business. They began to understand the subtle interplay of power, accommodation, acquiescence. They reminded us how hard it is for unwilling
or unready students to make these concessions when co-workers are forced upon them. Ann blamed her shyness: "I can write it down so much better myself than I can say it to anyone else." Bertha was frustrated by wasted time: "I could have done it ten times over myself." She called the discussion "mental masturbation." Pete complained that he had nothing to add: "These people just seem to know more than I do, so I'm afraid to tell them what I think. And Marilyn thinks she knows it all anyway. Why not let her just do it for all of us?" Addie told us, "Don't you ever make me work with Susan again or I'll scream." It's hard to know exactly what to say in cases like this. Only because we have known the satisfaction of working together compatibly and effectively have we kept pushing our students to keep an open mind until they've tried our assignments.

Even when classes seem to go smoothly, individual student comments or journal entries show us the fear and uncertainty with which many students approach collaboration. The "I'd rather do it myself" attitude is often implicit even when it's not spoken. So, sometimes, is "I'd rather let her do it herself." Methods student Mary Anne expressed her view: "I had to give up a lot of control [that] I would normally have when writing alone." Making collaboration work means overcoming the intrinsic fear that Nancy put into words: "How can I be one of us when I can't trust them?" There are many good reasons not to want to be one of "us": "they" may be too dumb, too smart, too apathetic, too pushy. "They" may want to meet outside of class in the afternoons when "I" have to pick up my baby/keep my tanning appointments/go to work. "They" may notice my accent, may see me struggle. It's a lot harder to hide in a collaborative classroom.

We found that our biggest frustration was getting the need for change across to our colleagues. One very traditional professor who refers to us as the Bobbsey twins tries awkwardly to hide his derision. "Isn't it cute the way the ladies work together?" In a recent job search, another colleague of ours showed his antagonism for collaborative writing as scholarship: looking at résumés, he immediately crossed out all candidates whose publications had multiple authorship. Often these were women. And in his eyes, the most glaring example of worthless scholarship was by the woman whose publications were written in collaboration with her husband. Because he saw marriage as a hierarchical relationship with husband as boss, he behaved as if it were a simple case of husband thinking, wife typing.

Incorporating new philosophy into our own classes was easier than convincing our colleagues that collaboration was worthwhile and not just pop pedagogy that would water down the curriculum. At least in schools like ours, working together is still something you do when you can't do well enough alone, and collaborative assignments for students are excuses to grade fewer papers. Maybe we keep forging ahead despite the difficulties involved because we are happy when we're collaborating. As we sit here today, for instance, at the keyboard Ferrante and Teischer style, we punctuate
our talk with laughter. Miserable moments are put in a new perspective by talking about them again. Norton Christie, in his dissertation on the literature of the Vietnam War, states that "to live events is not to know them ... that one must relive them in the mind, recovering them in order to recover from them" (39). We can rehash our past, and it doesn't seem so bad. If anything, we probably see this history in a much more positive light because sharing the memory takes some of the bite out of it.

Sometimes the fun that we're sharing is what makes our efforts noticeable, even persuasive. When we decided to do some serious renovating of the research writing segment in our first-year English classes, we met one morning to consider new ideas for a course outline. Before noon, two more colleagues had joined us, offering their own suggestions, thus sharing in the work and the fun of creating something new. As the four of us taught the classes, we passed along new ideas, handouts, and stories of successes and failures. By the end of the semester, we each had accumulated many more ideas and strategies for teaching them than we ever would have on our own.

On another occasion, Phillip Jason, a poet from Washington, DC, came to campus to read his poetry. In preparation, we had a couple of classes read and analyze his work in groups. Along with grading the essays ourselves, we sent him two of them to read. He responded, the students loved having his comments, and the conversation continued easily when he arrived on campus. We all shared in the critique of his work, with Jason both honoring our interpretations and explaining his intentions. The next year, in a creative variation, Esther's Methods students took lines from his poems to create one of their own. As literature, the poem wasn't that great, but the act of constructing it helped to reduce some of their resistance to working together.

Earlier we referred to collaboration as a slippery term, and it is. As we look at all the experiences we've had that come to mind when we talk about collaboration, we've decided that, at least for us, collaboration isn't an easily definable set of specific behaviors separate from teamwork, fraternity, joint ventures, or group efforts. Instead, it's an attitude. It's an attitude that values cooperation over competition, that values "we" over "I." And defining collaboration as an attitude allows us to see the breadth of its possibilities in practice almost daily. For example, the college Writing Center frequently fostered a spontaneous kind of collaboration: tutors with tutees, tutors with tutors, tutees with tutees, director with tutors and tutees. Our quarters were close, so we could overhear each other's conferences; thus, working together was a necessity. But the blurring of boundaries in the center created a close-knit group that worked out strategies together and laughed about our "ivory basement," which we called the dungeon. Any lull in activity would find the tutors sharing stories of miserable failures, trading tips that had paid off in their conferences, or discussing papers that they themselves were writing. We shared many of the same clients, and maybe it's natural that we developed our own lore.
One story involved an athlete who starred on the football field but was in danger of failing his theatre appreciation class if he couldn’t come up with a decent analysis of *Death Of A Salesman*. When Bruce first stopped by the center to show Allison what he had written, she despaired. His sketchy, handwritten essay was little more than a few random observations with no recognizable organization and surface errors too numerous to count. With feigned confidence, Allison assured Bruce that some serious attention to this paper could bring it up to par, and she encouraged him to schedule several appointments. He complied, working these around an already hectic schedule of classes, football practice, part-time job, and family time with his wife and two-year-old daughter. Scheduling all his visits with the same tutor was not a priority.

Allison was worried. “You say we’re not supposed to write anyone’s paper, that we’re supposed to help the writer, not the writing, but Mrs. B., I’m not sure where to start.” Then almost hopefully she added, “I wonder if he’ll even show up for any of these appointments.” I looked over the schedule for the next three weeks and saw that if Bruce did show up, we’d all have a share in this challenge. We decided that we’d have to start with Bruce just where we started with any other writer: by talking about the writing he was trying to do. Bruce indeed showed up for every appointment, and all of us read his paper as it progressed through multiple revisions. But improving the paper became secondary as we each shared our feelings about the play and were in turn touched by Bruce’s own personal and heartfelt responses to Willy Loman. None of us, we agreed when Bruce had completed his paper, had initially experienced the profound connection with the play that Bruce had. His reactions had caused each of us to understand this play on a deeper, more emotional level. Bruce ended up with a passing paper, but we had gained the shared satisfaction in his progress, and even more important, we had gained an understanding that our earlier individual experiences with the play had not given us. Bruce’s story became a bond that united us as co-workers. It was also the centerpiece of conversation at the end of the year social get-together. We referred to Bruce’s efforts, unlike Willy Loman’s, as a Hero’s Journey.

Last year Janine taught the Senior Seminar in Literature, the capstone class for our majors. The subject matter was the writers of the 1920s in Paris. Each student in the class was assigned a literary figure to study and to become for the semester, and the class culminated in interactive presentations by the ’20s characters. We used name tags at the beginning of the term and soon addressed each other as Gertrude and Ernie and Scott. Studying a generation of writers for whom community was a valuable resource, for whom friendship was “nourishing,” caused the seminar students to work readily with each other as well. As some students discovered the reliance of their authors on others, they immediately made connections with their student counterparts. The semester finished with a mock salon at Janine’s house, but the sense of the salon—the sharing, the open critiques of each other’s work, and the
incorporation of each other’s ideas into their own work—began much earlier.

Our Zelda, a serious A student, took a risk by doing her presentation with F. Scott, who took class responsibilities rather lightly. He risked having to do more work than he might have on his own. Trusting each other paid off. They “became” the couple for us, and their presentation brought across the personal melancholy which directed so much of both Fitzgeralds’ writing. Our Sylvia Beach wondered how she would ever do a presentation: “I’m just a bookstore owner!” By the time her preparation was done, she had demanded time and information from most of her classmates, and she wove many of Beach’s pet authors into her presentation. One student commented, “The class was so much work because we ended up doing stuff for everybody else, too. But that’s also how we learned.”

Sometimes collaboration is unanticipated. Two years ago we invited a friend to go with us to the spring NCTE conference in Washington, DC. Mary is a middle school English teacher in our home town. When Kate, a graduate school colleague and high school teacher from Pennsylvania, drove down to join us for a couple of days, she and Mary found they had many classroom concerns in common. This meeting resulted in a flurry of correspondence, trading ideas and assignments cross-country.

Esther often talks on the phone to Judy, an old friend and teacher in a mostly-black high school in Tyler, Texas. These phone calls and Esther’s graduate school theory validate Judy’s intuitive ideas about teaching. Judy has become a regular part of the network. In the last year, she has corresponded with Kate to share ideas about teaching Holocaust literature, and she has incorporated Janine’s ideas about having students assume identities into her Julius Caesar unit. And she and Esther have collaborated on an article about using groups to rewrite Julius Caesar in the students’ own dialect.

What seems important about these examples is not only that our friends are talking to each other, but that they are beginning to talk about each other as well. Our experience tells us that when academics work together, they usually don’t talk about it. It’s a closet activity, one that may be prevalent but is still belittled. For us, talking openly about the nourishment we get from colleagues has served to validate it.

Beyond the Ivory Tower and the Marlboro Man

The American ideal of rugged individualism has ruled much of our thinking about how to lead a successful life. It's a male thing; it's Ernie Hemingway, Superman, the Lone Ranger, Paul Bunyan, John Wayne, and the Marlboro Man. Working together has traditionally been seen as a weakness, a dependence, when it's been considered at all. It hasn’t been accepted, much less admired, as a means of achievement. This notion is reinforced in the academic world by the idea that independence is the key to acclaim, for the artifacts of solitary scholarship have won tenure and promotion and publica-
But in most worlds, this image is a myth: most successful people, male or female, do not and cannot work alone. They work with the people above and below them and value what those people have to offer. Yet the Marlboro Man stereotype hardly acknowledges this reality. And even in situations where “teamwork” is appropriate—working toward a touchdown or a budget that ends in the black—“collaboration,” a word with more feminine associations of helping each other out, is disdained. However, the concept it represents is endorsed in many situations outside the academic world.

An example is a book that Janine’s son Warren recently received for high school graduation. The book is Stephen Covey’s *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey suggests that the path to maturity leads from dependence to independence to interdependence. Interdependence, he says, is the highest stage of maturity, only achievable by the independent person, one who has attained self-respect through “dominion over self” (186). Interdependence goes beyond this; it “opens up worlds of possibilities for deep, rich, meaningful associations, for geometrically increased productivity, for serving, for contributing, for learning, for growing” (187). For Covey, interdependence requires self-mastery and begets power.

The two of us started working together out of dependence and need, relying on intuition and each other for direction. It was our defense. Now, having more theory and practice behind us, we choose collaboration in order to reconstruct the attitudes and behaviors around us. We haven’t mastered the universe or even perfected our own practice, but, for us, the attitude reflects growth. Our alliance has been the vehicle which allowed us to move out of isolation and up to positions from which we can foster interdependence. But as we’ve worked together to enrich our ways of teaching, our confidence in the quieter pedagogy that comes with giving up center stage has more than doubled.

We’re free-floating, hundreds of miles above earth. Colorado is directly below us, but we can see both the Pacific and the Atlantic curved off at the ends of our vision. It’s night. Magically, at the same moment, lights go on in all the homes of people who share in the network, those from whom our conviction has come and to whom it has gone. Although more lights glow directly below us, we see glimmers here and there across the continent. Tomorrow’s bright lights will eclipse this scene. But tonight, from this distant, dark and quiet perspective, the informal system of which we are a part radiates.

*Mesa State College*  
Gravel Junction, Colorado

**Works Cited**


---

**Rhetoric Society of America**

The Rhetoric Society of America invites you to join or renew membership. Membership in RSA (regular $20, student $5) includes a subscription to the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* and an invitation to RSA's biennial conference.

*RSQ*, under the editorship of Eugene Garver and Philip Keith, publishes articles on rhetorical theory, criticism, history, pedagogy, and research, as well as bibliographies, book reviews, and notes on programs and conferences.

RSA was organized in 1968 for the advancement of the study of rhetoric. The current RSA board of directors includes Lisa Ede, Michael Halloran, Nan Johnson, Michael Leff, Carolyn Miller, James J. Murphy, Gary A. Olson, Marie Secor, Kathleen Welch, and past-presidents Richard Leo Enos and Winifred Bryan Horner.

Rhetoric Society of America  
Department of Philosophy  
St. Cloud State University  
St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498