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## Collaboration: Talk. Trust. Write.

Mark Letcher

Kristen Turner

Meredith Donovan

Leah Zuidema

Jim Fredricksen

*See next page for additional authors*

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### Authors

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**About the Author**

*Jennifer S. Cook* is Associate Professor of English and Secondary Education at Rhode Island College in Providence, where she is also Director of the Rhode Island Writing Project. Jenn’s work has appeared in *The New Educator*, *Writing & Pedagogy*, and *Educational Studies*. Her research focuses on the lived experiences of classroom teachers, the personal and professional development of teachers, and teaching undergraduate research and writing.

*Becky L. Caouette* is Assistant Professor of English and Director of Writing at Rhode Island College in Providence, RI. In addition to writing teacher education, her research interests include the history and canon of Composition and Writing Program Administration.

## Collaboration: Talk. Trust. Write

*Mark Letcher, Kristen Turner, Meredith Donovan, Leah Zuidema, Cathy Fleischer, Nicole Sieben, Jim Fredrickson, Laraine Wallowitz, and Sarah Andrew-Vaughn*

We have long recognized English classrooms, at all levels, as sites ripe for collaborative activity among students; when students read, write, and learn together, the classroom becomes a microcosm of the work we do as professionals in the field. In writing, collaboration can be vital. Collaborative writing often leads to projects that are richer and more complex than those produced by individuals, potentially engaging multiple audiences in broader conversations. However, collaboration can also present its own particular set of challenges, ranging from the practical (How do authors find each other and determine publication avenues?) to the more theoretical (Is the negotiation of power an inherent part of the collaborative process, and if so, how can it be successfully managed?).

With these issues in mind, the Conference on English Education’s Commission on Writing Teacher Education sponsored a roundtable session at the annual meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English, in Las Vegas, NV. Titled “Igniting Our Professional Work Through Collaboration,” the session gathered pairs of collaborative writers from across varying teaching contexts, with the shared purpose of discussing and examining the nature and challenges of their work together. Collaborative groups represented in the session included teacher educator and classroom teacher (Cathy and Sarah), professor and graduate student (Kristen and Jeta), and teacher educators across teaching contexts (Jim and Leah, Laraine and Nicole). As the session concluded, and the roundtable discussions extended into the hallway, some of the participants arrived at the idea of capturing their conversations in writing. Focused on the idea that effective and productive collaboration often follows a recursive cycle of “talk, trust, write,” the following sections expand on how successful collaborators manage the multiple issues of composing, both individually and together. To our original triad, we have also added “teach,” acknowledging the vital fact that our actions as collaborative writers can, and often do, carry implications for our own teaching.

**Talk**

***Writing in the Qdoba parking lot: Talk as a vehicle for gaining trust, writing drafts and teaching what we do (Sarah Andrew-Vaughan and Cathy Fleischer)***

The story of our collaboration begins in talk.

Cathy and her English education colleagues at Eastern Michigan University were looking for a high school teacher to teach one section of a required pre-service undergraduate course called “Writing for Writing Teachers.” Sarah—a high school English teacher in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and veteran of the Eastern Michigan Writing Project Summer Institute—was fired up by her professional experiences and excited about the opportunity to teach the course, and Cathy—who had not yet met Sarah—was asked to serve as her mentor. And so the two of us decided to meet for coffee to talk about the class. What we didn’t yet realize was that our initial meeting would lead to what’s become a productive and long-standing collaboration, a collaboration that quite literally has changed both of our lives.

At that coffee date, we talked about our teaching, our beliefs about literacy, and our classroom practices, and as we talked, we learned from each other: Sarah shared with Cathy specifics about her approaches to teaching English in a diverse high school; Cathy provided Sarah with new ways of thinking about research-based practices. Most immediately, Cathy talked about a project she used in her version of Writing for Writing Teachers—what she called the Unfamiliar Genre Project. In this project, pre-service teachers were asked to learn about a genre that they found uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or just plain hard. The goal was to have English majors—secure in their abilities as readers and writers—to experience the kinds of discomfort that many of their future students might experience when asked to write in *their* future classes.

Intrigued by teaching this project as part of the college course, Sarah immediately embraced the idea and then extended it—thinking about how this project might connect to her teaching of high school students. How could she better help her students *really* understand genre? Could the unfamiliar genre study—with its focus on individual study of genre—help?

And so we talked, and our collaboration began in earnest. Cathy’s pre-service teachers and Sarah’s high school students became penpals, sharing drafts of writing as Sarah began exploring the Unfamiliar Genre Project in her classroom. During the conversations, we each brought our expertise - Cathy, articles about genre and genre theory; Sarah, her experiences in the classroom. And we kept talking about how the theory and the practice might intertwine.

Our collaboration took a new direction when Sarah decided to respond to a call from *English Journal* about research and

writing. She drafted an article about the Unfamiliar Genre Project. Taking on this project alone, Sarah realized, upon finishing the draft, that she had neglected to talk to Cathy before writing! As Sarah says:

Talk was the basis of our friendship and trust! I was worried. What would Cathy think of what I'd done? Would she want me to submit it? I needed to do what I had skipped: talk with her. That phone call went better than I could have hoped. Yes, she would look at the article. Yes, she would add her part to the story. And yes, she would work quickly given that *English Journal's* deadline was in just three days.

We returned to the basis of our collaboration—we talked (quickly!) about the draft that Sarah had written, and we began what was to become our emerging collaborative writing process: one of us taking the lead by drafting a first pass and the other responding (orally and in writing) to that draft: pushing each other with challenging questions, cheering each other through the hard parts, wondering together what we were learning from this writing.

That article was published in *English Journal* (and in fact later won the Edwin M. Hopkins Award). Buoyed by the success of the article and the idea that our depiction of the Unfamiliar Genre Project might be of interest to other teachers, we proposed a book to an acquisitions editor at Heinemann. The proposal included research, where Cathy would visit Sarah's classroom and together we would document UGP. The project was fueled by our talk as we considered what we both had learned from our original forays into the UGP, how we might translate what we had learned into a high school curriculum, what kinds of research we would employ to study the practice, and more. Throughout the planning stages, we relied on each other's expertise, raising tough questions that were vital to creating a feasible research plan and a reasonable classroom curriculum.

As with every research project, we needed to work through challenges, and we talked after almost every lesson. Our conversations helped us to think hard about the role of research in a classroom setting, and as we thought about notions of responsibility and ethics, we constantly revised our research and writing plan. After months of teaching and research, we had gathered an amazing amount of material about the class. Ready to write, we again turned to talk. We talked about the format and goals of the book, the way we might design chapters, the approach we might take to writing and revising.

We come from different personal and professional circumstances, and found it sometimes difficult to carve out moments for analyzing data and writing. In order to move forward with the project, we would regularly grab lunch at the local Qdoba restaurant at the end of Sarah's school day. We would talk through the research and what we were learning, as well as the challenges we were facing. Inevitably the talk would keep going, so much so that we'd finally give up our table and adjourn to one of our cars in the parking lot. One day as we sat in the parking lot—a day when Sarah was overwhelmed trying to figure out how to write a chapter that she was taking the lead on—Cathy pulled out her tape recorder and encouraged Sarah to “Just talk through what you want to say.” Sarah needed the reminder that sometimes we can't prewrite the piece in our mind's eye. Sometimes we must just begin; the recorded talk, followed by transcription, became a perfect first draft for the section that Sarah now found easier to complete.

As we kept talking, we returned to one of the realizations we'd had at the beginning of our writing collaboration: while our writing might at certain points be more Sarah-led or Cathy-led, the ideas underlying it were shared ones, ideas that we could not have come to alone or without the amount of talk that surrounded our work. Successful collaboration—we have come to understand—is so dependent on the ability to talk honestly about just about everything connected to the work: from theoretical underpinnings to the intricacies of child-rearing and home life. Our collaboration has worked because we've been able to do this. The trust that we have established through talk allows us to recognize that true collaboration does not mean a 50-50 split on everything we produce, but rather that each of us takes a lead at various times in the process. We both contribute, we both value what each other brings to the process, and we are constantly thankful that we have each other to guide us through.

## Trust

### ***Collaborating Across the Desk (Meredith Jeta Donovan and Kristen Hawley Turner)***

Jeta walked into Kristen's office an eager, hopeful doctoral student. She nervously wondered what her relationship with her new mentor would be. Kristen, a relatively new faculty member working toward tenure, wondered how this novice researcher, who had an interest in literacy, might help her advance her research agenda. Like so many doctoral students and faculty members, we were paired by circumstance and geography - we happened to be in the same place at the same time. Unlike many pairs, who independently work their own interests or who sacrifice the graduate student to focus entirely on the faculty member, we have developed a collaboration that is mutually supportive and beneficial. Imperative in this symbiosis is trust.

Like Cathy and Sarah, our collaboration began with hours of talk. Filling the only two chairs that would fit in Kristen's closet-sized office, we talked about issues of language. Kristen shared her ideas for a research project that investigated the texting language used by adolescents. Jeta responded with stories from her middle school classroom where her 7th graders blended African American Vernacular and Standard English. We connected our practical observations to theory and research that we had been reading, and we began to think about the kinds of questions we had and the kinds of research we wanted to conduct.

The talk turned more formal as Kristen developed a major research project with faculty members from two other institutions,

and Jeta became a sounding board for theoretical framing, methodological choices, and coding practices. By the time it came to code the data, Jeta was as familiar with the project as Kristen, and it seemed natural for her to join the research team in earnest. She coded, trained secondary coders, and participated in analysis as a full team member. Kristen trusted her completely, and invited her to co-author with the three faculty members.

Before we could begin writing together, we had to learn to trust each other. Writing collaboratively, especially between a student and a teacher, requires trust. We needed to trust in each other's abilities, trust in our individual value to each other, trust that we could ask questions and take risks, trust that we could disagree, and trust that we would both be better off for having worked together. We developed this trust through talk, through trial, and through action.

*Trust through talk.* The dynamic between a student and a mentor is an inherently hierarchical one. For authentic collaboration to happen between us, we had to traverse that power imbalance. For Jeta, that meant being willing to open her mind to Kristen's work but also to open her mouth, to share her thinking, her questions, and her doubts. When it came time for Jeta to select a topic for her dissertation, the most conforming and safest route would have been to do an extension of Kristen's research. But for authentic collaboration to happen, Jeta had to know her own mind and take risks down her own academic path. Jeta ended up selecting a topic very much informed by the work on adolescent digital writing she had done with Kristen but also drawn from her own independent experiences as a teacher.

For collaboration to happen, we had to be willing not to defer to Kristen's expertise but to wrestle openly with her thinking. As we worked together on a coding scheme for the study of teenager's writing, we each brought our strengths to the deliberation-- Kristen's knowledge and experience of qualitative coding and Jeta's deep knowledge of the data from the study. This process had to involve push back. As the two of us sat down to define categories and identify themes, Jeta had to be willing to disagree, to question, and to put forth her own ideas. Through our process of disagreements, questioning, consultation, and consensus, we were able to develop a very strong coding scheme, one that represented the strengths we each brought to the work. Dewey (1999) described meaningful, beneficial collaboration between individuals. He said, in “the give and take of participation... conformity is the absence of vital interplay; the arrest and numbing of communication” (p. 42). For Dewey and for us, authentic, honest talk was the only way to build a more balanced relationship. This balance, achieved through trust, allowed us to move from teacher and student to collaborative partners.

*Trust through action.* When Jeta began working for Kristen as a first year doctoral student, she fumbled through the language of qualitative research and trudged blindly through her first data coding project. She spent anxious hours figuring out specific tasks, such as how to code an interview, and more global issues, like how to think and communicate as a researcher. She had much to learn in both process and product, and Kristen took time and effort to guide her entry into the world of academia. As we worked through tasks together, building Jeta's knowledge of qualitative coding software and interrater reliability, we also built trust. New projects brought new tasks, such as field work and transcribing, and with each step, we learned each other's work ethics, problem-solving skills, and communication patterns. These actions all helped build trust in our partner.

*Trust through trial.* As a graduate student learning the ropes, Jeta often felt uncertain, and in the fast-paced world of research, she needed to plunge into this uncertainty with full force in order to hold Kristen's trust. At the same time, she needed to admit when she was unsure, trusting that Kristen would be there to support and help. When Kristen invited Jeta to co-author with the faculty research team, Jeta put aside her fear of putting her own writing alongside that of seasoned academics. She was willing to take that risk because we had developed a relationship where we respected each other's efforts. We did not develop trust by staying in our comfort zones. To move forward, we had to take risks, to experiment with each other, to be willing to make mistakes, and (even worse) to be willing to make mistakes in front of one another. When Jeta first sent her draft of the paper to Kristen and the research team, she accepted a certain professional and even personal vulnerability. It is a risk for others to read your words, to know your skills, to know your thoughts, and evaluate those. Sharing our writing and taking these risks has been an integral part of our pathway to collaboration. As her doctoral advisor, Kristen reads Jeta's writing all the time, but Kristen also asks for feedback from Jeta before submitting manuscripts. This give and take of feedback and critique, though scary at times, is how we built value, trust, and respect for each other's perspectives. These trials shaped our collaboration and solidified the trust we had in each other.

Trust cannot be achieved without talk, action, and trial, and through these recursive phases our collaboration has blossomed. From that moment four years ago, when Jeta entered Kristen's office, two novices have become two colleagues who talk, share, and write together - from their individual perspectives, across the desk.

## Write

### ***Forming Partnerships and Writing Identities (Nicole Sieben and Laraine Wallowitz)***

Just like Cathy and Sarah, and Kristen and Jeta, our collaboration began in talking, taking action, and trusting. As critical feminist pedagogues, we found that our mutual interests and goals in research, teaching, and learning led to fruitful teaching, presenting, and writing collaborations. When Nicole was a master's student, Laraine was her professor for five courses. During one course, Laraine allowed Nicole the chance to plan a lesson with her on preconceived notions of feminism. As a preservice

teacher, it was a powerful experience for Nicole to talk through the metacognitive process of planning and writing a lesson with an experienced educator. As it turned out, the lesson was a success in that everyone was engaged and eager to share perspectives on our position statements. From this first, low-stakes collaborative experience, Laraine and Nicole realized the potential success that their collaborations could have. We believe that this brief writing and lesson planning exercise was an important part of our establishment of trust in each other as writing partners and co-authors.

After talk and trust, it was time to write! Once we had collaborated on a short writing activity, we were able to engage in larger research and writing projects together. Deciding who should begin the writing was our starting point. On our first publication, Laraine took the initial lead, since it was initially her project, and she had invited Nicole to write with her as part of Nicole's final assignment in her master's seminar. Laraine suggested splitting up the task 50/50. She wrote the introduction, and Nicole wrote the conclusion. Then we divided the chapter into subsections. Every time we completed a sub-section, we would exchange sections, read each other's writing, edit and revise for one another using track changes in Microsoft Word, and then we would meet to talk about the draft. Together, we researched, wrote, revised, and edited each other's work on influential women in the labor movement until we—and our editors—were satisfied with the product we created. For this publication, we wrote in a singular voice, taking care to ensure that our piece sounded unified. From this writing project, Nicole learned experientially about editing, deadlines, researching, and formatting for publication.

A year after our first publication, as a high school teacher with a master's degree completed, Nicole still kept in touch with Laraine as she had been, and still is, an extremely influential mentor in her life. When we learned of the call for manuscripts for a special issue of the *English Journal* on teaching gender and sexuality in secondary schools, we decided to collaborate and create a double voice article. After conferencing, we realized that it might be more effective to layer the article using two voices to illustrate the effects that a graduate class on gender and sexuality could have on a teacher's classroom. For this piece, we decided to maintain our *individual* voices as writers but to share our *mutual* perspective about the importance of teaching queer theory in secondary classrooms and in English education programs. With this shared vision, we detailed our inclusive teaching practices at the college and secondary levels respectively. This is the article that resulted in our 2010 Edwin M. Hopkins Award.

The success that we have experienced in writing together has come from a multitude of factors. When we originally discovered our mutual pedagogical interests, Nicole was Laraine's student at their university. Based on our dialogues during class discussions and advising sessions, we quickly discovered that we shared a mutual vision of teaching for social justice, particularly with respect to issues of gender and sexuality. Thus, our collaborative writings so far have been grounded in critical theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. Together, we have contextualized current issues in education, problematized the familiar, and created curricular frameworks and recommendations for secondary English language arts teachers to use in their classrooms.

We also respect each other as writers, thinkers, teachers, and researchers. Neither of us clings desperately to our egos. We welcome feedback from each other and are open to recommendations for changes and edits. As scholars in English education, we value intellectual property rights and realize that discussing first authorship roles is important when setting out on a collaborative research and writing project. Laraine took the lead on the first publication and was first author; however, Nicole took the lead on the second publication and was first author on that piece. Ultimately, we felt that we had both contributed to both publications equally and therefore alternated first authorship roles. We believe that this discussion of authorship and sharing credit is important in maintaining a collaborative relationship.

In addition, we are loyal to deadlines and make sure to update each other on progress that we are making along the way. While writing deadlines are important to maintain, we realize that as teachers sometimes our students have needs that require us to revise our writing schedules. With our students and our writing as equally important priorities, we maintain constant communication with one another so if an event necessitates our immediate attention, we are able to adjust.

We are still supportive of each other's individual work in various ways. While Nicole is completing her dissertation at another university, Laraine has provided sound advice as a friend and mentor about the process and has remained a supportive collaborator in offering to be a second coder of essays during Nicole's data analysis. Additionally, Laraine's writing on social justice teaching methods in literacy education has been influential in Nicole's dissertation work and curricular choices. Nicole's students often read Laraine's writing and other texts that spark important conversations and collaborations in Nicole's classes. As a collaborative team, we have modeled the benefits of collaboration for our students and often encourage our students at the university where we teach to find those powerful partnerships and pursue them to create joint writing identities. As many of us know, writing is an identity building skill (Lavelle, 2009) and writing collaboratively also contributes to our individual and collective identities as scholars. The people who we choose to write with become a piece of our writing histories, and we become a part of theirs. Therefore, choosing the right collaborations are important.

Since writing can be a strenuous process—one that takes a great deal of time, commitment, and energy—we also feel that celebrating the small victories along the way is important in motivating us to forge forward. During our writing collaborations, we make sure to self-consecrate. Whether we treat ourselves to dinner or a show in the city, we make the time to reward our proximal accomplishments en route to meeting our long-term writing goals, with shared celebratory moments that continue to establish the trust and trueness of our working relationship. Working together in this way, we have established a professional friendship that transcends

our writing, but we recognize that it is through our collaborations that we have formed a trusting alliance that we can both equally depend on for professional support throughout various academic endeavors.

## Teach

### *Collaborative Writers Teaching Collaborative Writing: Lessons Learned (Jim Fredricksen and Leah Zuidema)*

When the two of us reflect together on our experiences with collaboration, we notice some unique aspects of the goals and situation of our partnership, yet we also see many connections with the ideas shared so far. Unlike the other pairs in this article, ours is a long-distance collaboration: when we were both beginning professors, we agreed to be thinking partners who would check in once a week to talk reflectively about our teaching, our scholarship, and our roles as professors. Initially, writing was a means of “talk”: we used a shared Google Docs journal to dialogue about our work. We've since broadened the range of tools that we use to support our collaboration: now, in addition to sharing documents in Google Drive, we have regular Skype and Google Hangout meetings that allow us think aloud together while also drafting, revising, and editing in our shared online tools, which include VoiceThread conversations, Dropbox folders, and DeDoose data analysis projects. We've become writing partners who compose teaching materials, teacher-research studies, conference presentations, and manuscripts together, but we've found that talk still takes as much or more of our time as putting ideas into words on the screen.

Though the projects and modes of collaboration have changed over time, the goal of learning together has stayed the same. We share anecdotes from our work and make meaning of them; we raise questions that surface assumptions about learning, teaching, and writing; we challenge each other's assumptions, practices, and interpretations of ideas. In short, we take an inquiry stance toward our work, and as others have already said so well, we've learned that there is a reciprocal relationship: to risk meaningful inquiry requires trust, and trust fosters meaningful inquiry. We aren't “just” writing. We are learning together, and we are learning how to learn and write together.

### *Teaching Writing Together*

Our inquiry has consistently included a focus on teaching writing. One unanticipated outcome of our own collaboration (and of our attempts to have our students engage in cross-institutional collaboration) is that we've also learned a few things from these experiences and conversations that are useful for teaching our students to be effective collaborative writers (and teachers of collaborative writing).

Although others have made the point that writing teachers should be writers themselves (*e.g.*, Gillespie, 1991; Kittle, 2008; McEntee, 1998; Mohr et al., 2004; Romano, 1991), we want to extend the idea. As we see it, teachers of collaborative writing should be collaborative writers themselves. Our reasoning is simple: writing together influences the way that we teach students to write together. To make our case, we share here a few of the lessons about teaching collaborative writing that we've learned by doing collaborative writing.

1. *Writing well together requires talk about process.* Collaborative writing helps writers in our courses better understand the writing process, specifically how it can be a distinct and individual process. In our own collaboration, we see this at play. Often, we find ourselves talking to one another as a way to find the things we might want to say in a piece. Yet, we approach these moments quite differently. For example, one of us might open up a Google Doc and start throwing down words and ideas. The other might need to do more reading. We might need to clear other things off our plates or we might work for just a handful of minutes as we only have a set amount of time in our day to work.

These differences in writing processes play out in our classes when we teach writers or future teachers of writers. One of our takeaways is that we want our students to better understand their own writing processes and practices and, at the same time, to learn how others approach the act of writing differently. We want to open up space—not only to talk about content in our pieces or about the final products we create, but also to talk about our stories as writers: what are our goals? what obstacles do we face? what resources, including others, could help us overcome these obstacles? how do I see the process and how is that different than my collaborator's view? We ask these kind of questions of our students, and we're able to share from our own experiences, because we take the time to ask ourselves these questions as we work together.

2. *Writing well together requires rhetorical attention.* Collaborative writing helps writers in our courses understand rhetorical principles. One such rhetorical principle might be, “Move your reader from what is familiar to what is unfamiliar, from what is known to the reader to what is unknown to the reader.” In our own writing process, we sometimes do not consider the audience, especially early on. Usually, we're simply trying to figure out our own claim, how our evidence supports it, and how it's all tied together to what others have written or thought about before. Yet, there is a point when we do consider the audience, and it's usually after we have a good start on where we might want to head. Of course, this happens when we write individually, too; however, our collaboration means that we must talk and, importantly, listen to ourselves. Our conversation around a central task - the push and pull of talking

and of listening and of writing - means that we can check our own assumptions about what we're writing, about what we're trying to say when we write, and about what we want our audience to consider. As collaborative writers, we find that we need to return time and again to questions of genre, audience, purpose, and situation. And as teachers of writing collaboration, we find that students need support in developing these same kinds of rhetorical sensitivities—and in doing so with a partner. Like us, they need time, space, and permission to spend at least as much time in talking as in putting words on a page.

3. *Writing well together may be messy.* We know some collaborators who divide the work into sections, and one person takes the lead here and the other takes the lead there. Occasionally that happens for us, but our most generative and satisfying collaborations happen when we work through a section together, testing what we mean against what we write. We do that through the lens of moving from what we think our audience is coming to our text knowing and believing, and then moving them to new insights. This movement, of course, takes place at the whole text level, at the section level, and even at the sentence level. Collaboration helps us as we generate ideas, but also as we refine them. A rhetorical principle helps to move our conversations forward in a focused and shared way.

This informs our teaching in many ways, but mostly it's because this approach is pedagogical: we're trying to teach our readers, and to understand our students' knowledge and abilities. Put another way, we find our collaborative writing to be analogous to our teaching: we take a stance of inquiry in our teaching, which means that we want to learn from our students as we pursue answers to big questions central to our work. That is, although we're leaders of a group of students, we see ourselves as collaborators, too.

We see this pursuit with our students as a form of collaboration, and we're trying to model and mentor our students into a collaborative way of inquiring and producing. When we collaborate with one another, we are in fact engaging in the kind of practice we see as central to our work as teachers and scholars.

4. *Writing well together is a creative act.* Collaborative writing helps students see that writing is not simply an act of demonstrating what one knows: it's also a way to discover those ideas. We see this play out in several ways. We often work with students who believe that they have to know what they want to write before they put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboards. We want them to begin to recognize that writing can be one way to discover (e.g., when a writer writes an initial draft and discovers the thesis at the very end of that draft). Collaboration, we think, helps writers discover insights they wouldn't otherwise make on their own. When we collaborate, we often find ourselves speaking to the other person while that person takes notes. These are often brainstorming moments, and later, when the speaker looks at the notes, an insight not considered beforehand rises into view. That is, the collaboration helps us learn how to listen to our own selves, because someone else is listening to us and consequently helps us pay attention to our own words.

When our students—who often see writing as a one-shot demonstration of proving what they know—begin to collaborate, they are forced to work with new and different ideas. Differences and even conflicts arise. We don't shy away from them. In fact, we come just short of celebrating them, because we believe these conflicts are the whole point of working with another person: how does someone see a situation differently than you? How can you come to consensus? How might you synthesize your ideas or approach? This kind of conflict is often an internal one when writers work alone, and it can be the thing that prevents some students from committing to an idea. In other words, sometimes students have conflicting ideas and aren't quite sure how to move forward to the first sentence of a piece. Other times they have an idea and never question it - never see how others might read it differently than what they imagine. Collaboration can provide a space and an opportunity to practice identifying and navigating more than one idea.

5. *Writing well together is a choice.* An important lesson from our collaboration is that we collaborate by choice and we're generally interested in the same goals. That is, we value the same kind of relationship and goals for our work together. This raises questions for us about teaching collaborative writing. How can we ensure that our students have significant learning experiences with collaborative writing—essentially requiring that they participate—while also allowing them the freedom to make the kinds of choices that are essential to writing well together? How can we provide them with both the opportunities and the skills to build collaborative partnerships around shared goals and practices? We have more questions than answers on this front, but our own experiences with collaboration lead us to believe it is important for us to keep negotiating these dilemmas.

For us, collaborating as partners in inquiry about our teaching evolved into a way to also be partners in scholarship and writing. Unexpectedly, our work together has also become a resource for thinking about how best to help students collaborate as thinking partners, scholars, and writers. We wouldn't have it any other way.

#### **Conclusion: Successful Collaboration is about Relationships**

It was apparent during the NCTE session, as we feel it is in this piece, that at the heart of every successful collaboration is a successful relationship. The authors represented above have negotiated issues of power (such as the student-teacher relationship), institutional differences, and geographic distance. Above all, they have valued the relationships that form the core of their writing partnerships. Throughout the NCTE session conversations, those relationships were consistently mentioned above all else, and we feel that as with any relationship, trust can emerge.

Laraine and Nicole, as keynote speakers at the session, presented attendees with a tip sheet for collaborative writing, which we have collaboratively revised. We share these tips with other writers, with the understanding that a true collaboration will begin with talk in an effort to build trust.

#### **Tips for Writing Collaboratively:**

- Let go of egos.
- Be honest about what you do and do not know.
- Respect co-writer's expertise.
- Allow co-writers to be mentors.
- Decide on double voice or unified voice.
- Establish authorship roles.
- Maintain deadlines.
- Self-consequence as a team.
- Use technology as an aid for editing, meeting virtually, and researching collaboratively.
- Maintain a sense of humor and seriousness in harmony.
- Recognize the power and possibility of writing with other people.

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#### **About the Authors**

The authors presented a version of this article at the 2012 NCTE National Convention in the CEE (Conference on English Education) sponsored concurrent session "Igniting our Professional work through Collaboration."