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**Unexpected Benefits of Collaborating:** an article of approximately 1,000 words by Hazel Edwards and Goldie Alexander.

*‘Ever thought about being a collaborator?’*

*‘Like in wartime? A spy? Sort of espionage?’*

*‘No. A creative collaborator in writing a book.’*

Writing can be very solitary. Occasional but regular collaboration with creative partners can have unexpected benefits.

- Increases your skills if they have complementary but different strengths.
- Provides variety in workstyle
- Helps overcome procrastination because you are obliged to produce your share by the next meeting.
- Multiplies marketing opportunities,
- Stimulates: One plus one often equals more than two ideas.
- More effective use of time if you have a definite three hours blocked in.
- Electronically possible via e-mail, tracking editing and Skype talking through computer.
- Can have social benefits if you meet in person
- Built-in editor
- Two perspectives for titles, publicity and interviewing.

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### **Our Collaboration**

Is there a right way to collaborate as co-creators of scripts, books or articles?

No. All partnerships are different. Collaborating on writing has been described as a bit like marriage without the sex. Choosing a writing partner is a risky business, but very satisfying. Skills need to be complementary, not competitive.

Apart from occasionally substituting as workshop speakers, we had already collaborated on a novel, a textbook and two play series for secondary students before starting recent projects.

We knew the benefits of exchanging dialogue, using each other as a sounding board , and forcing each other to continue working when ‘flat’. Even when we collaborated on an earlier YA novel e-mail Murder Mystery the dialogue came more easily.

People often ask us how collaboration works. Do we sit at the same desk? Who is the ideas person? There’s no doubt that co-writing takes lots of commitment . Often a sentence or a scene painstakingly and lovingly crafted by one writer would be sent into oblivion by the other. Anyway, by the time a piece had gone through half a dozen drafts, we could never be sure whose idea or phrase it had been in the first place.

Collaborating on Right or Wrong: a collection of classroom scripts presented certain practical problems. We live a thirty-five minute off-peak drive apart. Peak hour traffic across town takes twice as long. And realistically for this type of concentration, three-hour bursts of work are about the limit.

Generally when we have a mutual project, we do a combination of email, tracking edits, Skype conversations via the computer and meeting face-to-face at least once weekly, often in cafes. But we have had the odd embarrassing moment where eavesdropping coffee drinkers have assumed our dialogue was a real conversation, rather than us acting out a scene. Trialing material matters for a play.

Facts matter. The classroom playscript Antarctica : Cool or What? was based on the research Hazel did as Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition writer-on-ice 2001 ,on the polar re-supply ship to Casey Station. But normally we don’t go as far as Antarctica, nor get stuck in the ice in order to collect our facts, though Goldie did win a scholarship to Romania and we’re working on a script set in the Transylvanian Alps. As writers we knew a lot about the moral issue of copyright for the play Copy:Right or Wrong, but we needed to check out how a pop group recognised it. Then we had to write a Teachers’ Resource Book with activities.

Goldie’s strength lay in characterisation, dialogue and description. Hazel’s in plotting and ideas. But one writer tends to be over wordy, the other overly brief. One is easily distracted and has a short attention span. The other has

the resilience of a mountaineer and is an obsessive worker, but sloppy about layout.

Research was carefully logged into the computer. The attached file was then e-mailed to the co-writer as well as being recorded on USB disk in case of break-down.

In the beginning, we crossed cyberspace together, and one draft was superimposed on the other. To eliminate a multiplicity of script versions, we agreed to a time-schedule. The early morning writer 'fowl' would work on the current draft until 'brain-dead' 2-3 hours later. Then the story draft would be e-mailed to the night writer 'owl'. Until the next draft was e-mailed back, no further work was to be done. OVER TO YOU was the message. This provided a thinking break, but also a moral obligation to work when it did arrive.

Whatever arrived was modified, criticised, edited and returned. But the advantages of collaboration were amazing. Writing fiction is a painful, lengthy, demanding process; much like putting together a very elaborate cake where each unique layer must be integrated into the whole. All kinds of issues about the emerging scripts were better understood collaboratively, as were the number of drafts to 'get the concept right'. Having a second mind to check the logic of the satires was invaluable.

Our plays had to accommodate any number of performers from ten to thirty and keep the entire class occupied whether it be with producing sound effects, finding equipment or helping with staging. As far as possible the plays had to be gender free, allow for divergent reading abilities, be topical, thought provoking, funny and lead to other classroom activities.

When two people work on any project together, there should always be a sense of being in it together. We joke that we like collaborating because if we get bad reviews, one can always blame the other. We both find it much easier to take praise for something we've done with someone else. "We did it" versus "I did it". Success, like misery, prefers company.

We are now working on a limited vocabulary 5000 word adult literacy 'Shooting Antarctica' mystery for very new readers.

Each of us also collaborates with other creators who have different skills.

Collaborating is fun but you need:

- a letter of agreement on a 50/50% split of costs and income

- compatible computer systems
- similar ethics and pace of working.

[www.goldiealexander.com](http://www.goldiealexander.com) and [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) have discussion notes, links to publishers and writers' organizations such as **Australian Society Of Authors** [www.asauthors.org](http://www.asauthors.org) and to other authors.

Previous co-authored works by Alexander and Edwards include:

The Business of Writing for Young People. Hale & Iremonger ( set text for many professional writing courses.)

Excuse Me! Three Outrageous Plays Longman/Pearson

Right or Wrong. Phoenix Education 2002

e-mail Murder Mystery. (Longman's Rave series)1997

articles include:

'Kill is a Four Letter Word.' Sisters In Crime Journal

'Judging Violence' VIEWPOINT Winter/97

'The Autographing Gamble' Aust. Book.& Pub. Sept 99.

Currently they have a 13 book series on Health and Understanding with Blake Education out in 2008.