Faculty collaboration in the planning of first-year composition and linked courses in learning communities at Iowa State University

Robert C. Corey

Iowa State University

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Faculty Collaboration in the Planning of First-year Composition and Linked Courses in Learning Communities at Iowa State University

by

Robert C. Corey

Thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements to the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Major: English (Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication)

Program of Study Committee

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Ames, Iowa

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CHAPTER 1:

LEARNING COMMUNITY ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

"I like the simple fact that I have some of my classes with the same people every day, and I can look forward to seeing those same people whenever I need to. If I should need to ask a question about a class or form a study group, it's really easy to do when the same people are in a couple of your classes and are going through the same conflicts as you are." Tammy (learning community student in agriculture)

In recent years, American colleges and universities have paid increased attention to undergraduate education. As part of this attention, numerous efforts have been made to enhance the first-year college experience and keep retention high throughout each student’s college years. Part of the reason for the increased interest in undergraduate education is public demand for more accountability by the schools and teachers as well as continued interest in improving both student learning and resulting outcomes. Recent years have produced extensive educational research about things such as how to actively engage students, how individual and group knowledge is constructed, and how alternative assessments can be designed (Bruffee 1993, Caine and Caine 1997, Tinto 1996), so students are able to retain more meaningful, usable knowledge and are actively engaged in learning.

Students at commuter colleges, community colleges, and large universities feel a need to be connected to their learning and develop a sense of community with other students as well as with the campus as a whole. Additionally, many interested teachers also wish to connect with their students and create opportunities for students to connect to course material.

Making meaningful connections to course content is made difficult by a number of factors, including large lecture classes. While many schools still rely on lectures for delivering course material, large lecture classes limit options for more active learning to take
place and limit potential for both students and teachers to become better connected to each other, the course content, and the school environment. In a recent presentation, Vincent Tinto (2000) noted that “higher education is, for most students, still very much a ‘spectator sport’ in which faculty talk dominates and where there are few active student participants.”

Active learning techniques that go beyond lecture and are available to educators range from responding to student learning styles and brain-based research to implementing various delivery systems—from mnemonics to technology integration, from the standard lecture to cooperative learning, and from teacher-centered classrooms to collaboratively constructed student-centered classrooms. As colleges make an effort to address these various teaching and learning styles, greater emphasis is being placed on teachers to increase involvement in such things as learning communities in order to improve students’ learning, increase retention, and make the first-year college experience more meaningful. Students, faculty, and institutions all share in the benefits of learning communities as research points to increased student retention, higher GPAs, and greater student satisfaction (Lenning and Ebbers 1999). Therefore, if teachers and schools like Iowa State University can enhance the sense of connectedness and community for students through learning communities, more learning should take place.

For example, the increased interest in learning communities at Iowa State has been brought about by a grass-roots effort that has grown out of the interests of faculty and staff (Krapfl 2000), but with no formal centralized infrastructure. A recent article in Inside Iowa State points out teachers’ commitment by reporting that “Iowa State faculty have sponsored learning communities since the fall of 1995” (November 17, 2000); since that beginning, first-year composition in the Department of English has seen a rise in involvement in
learning communities. A total of 36 learning communities were scheduled for the 2000-2001 school year, a total of 43 were scheduled for the 2001-2002 school year, and, according to Krapfl (2001), the number of learning communities is projected to increase.

Part of the reason for Iowa State’s growing involvement in learning communities might be found in Tammy’s statement at the beginning of the chapter. This first-year composition and agriculture student’s response represents those made by other learning community students and reflects a need students have to see the interdependence and interconnectedness of their college experience. One method that teachers might use to help students make meaningful connections between their course material is faculty collaboration. By engaging in collaboration, teachers may begin to make the same types of connections they wish to provide their students, which, in turn, will provide opportunities for teachers to create better lessons and activities within the learning community.

The grass roots effort to make connections through learning communities was started by interested teachers in the mid-1990s and has resulted in a growing awareness of the impact learning communities have on student achievement. The challenge facing teachers, and the purpose for this study, is to identify the frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration, which is critical to the growth of linked learning communities at Iowa State. Iowa State needs to promote these positive characteristics, while at the same time recognizing and then reducing or eliminating non-productive characteristics in order to maximize student development and provide teachers an opportunity to develop professionally. Therefore in my study, I explore the following critical characteristics of faculty collaboration and the nature of teaching practices resulting from faculty collaboration
in planning of first-year composition and linked courses in learning communities at Iowa State University.

Specifically, the exploration focuses on two questions, one dealing with the nature of faculty collaboration and the other dealing with the nature of teaching in linked courses:

♦ What characterizes the nature of faculty collaboration in courses linked with first-year composition? Specifically, what are the frequency, type and perceived role of faculty collaboration?

♦ What characterizes the nature of teaching in teachers who teach courses linked with first-year composition? Specifically, how are course goals, class time and assessment use by teachers?

These questions enable me to focus on two components that I feel are the essence of collaborative teaching: what faculty collaboration looks like and how faculty collaboration affects the nature of teaching, which is central to my concerns about whether or not faculty collaboration is considered a fundamental component of learning communities at Iowa State.

**Rationale for the Study**

The following sections explain what learning communities are, why they are beneficial, and why faculty collaboration within the linked learning communities is critical to improved student learning. My study shows that while interest in learning communities grows among teachers and schools and collaborative projects among students in learning communities increases, Iowa State needs to promote the positive characteristics, while at the same time recognizing and then reducing or eliminating non-productive characteristics of collaboration among teachers and view faculty collaboration as an important first step procedure toward maximizing student learning.
What are learning communities?

Faculty and staff have various definitions of learning communities, ranging from freshman interest groups to clustered classes. Because such a wide variety of definitions of learning communities exists, confusion, misunderstanding, miscommunication, and a lack of collaboration occur at many levels. For example, one department may view a learning community as some number of classes that have something in common, such as a residential or clustered component, while another department may have fully integrated and involved administration, teachers, and students. At the core of learning communities is the “hope of making college a more holistic, integrated learning experience for students” (Cross 1998). Toward that end, I establish what I mean by a learning community and the faculty collaboration associated with it.

♦ A successful linked learning community includes both teacher and student collaboration as a foundational component of a course that engages students in activities that extend beyond discipline-specific content.

♦ Barr and Dailey (1996) provide a definition of faculty collaboration: “the process of shared creation: two or more individuals with complementary skills interacting to create a shared understanding that none had previously possessed” (qtd. in Lenning and Ebbers 31-32).

The stimulus behind my research questions comes from a desire to understand more clearly characteristics of faculty collaboration that lead to positive interaction and reduce barriers thereby, creating greater cross-disciplinary teaching and learning opportunities.
Why are learning communities needed?

In order for learning communities to be successful, by whatever criteria institutions use to define successful, collaboration among teachers should be considered a foundational component in the development of those learning communities. Current research about learning communities and collaboration focuses largely on collaboration among students and very little on collaborative techniques among faculty members as they seek to prepare learning community courses. Researchers (Bruffee 1993, Caine and Caine 1997, Tinto 1996) tell us that collaboration improves many aspects of student success, yet, too few teachers engage in similar collaborative techniques when developing their courses. Teachers generally have knowledge and expertise in a particular area, determine what related material is necessary for the students, and prepare lessons, activities, and syllabi in order to pass on their knowledge. Traditionally, teachers work and prepare lessons in isolation, and students traditionally learn in isolation.

Learning communities are an excellent method for providing teachers opportunities to develop professionally. For example, in many classes, assessment of student achievement is limited to taking multiple-choice tests, pop quizzes, and reiterating what the text or teacher has conveyed. Alternative types of assessment, arrived at collaboratively, have the potential to make stronger connections to linked course material; assessments such as outcomes-based presentations, portfolios, and field experiences are just three types of alternative assessments students may have available to demonstrate their knowledge or expertise.

When teachers do not provide such alternatives, students have fewer occasions to connect with the teacher or the material and little opportunity to meet the "primary challenges in higher education today [which] are to meet the public’s demand for
maximizing students' learning, and to be more accountable for what students learn" (Lenning and Ebbers 1999 1). Learning communities and faculty collaboration are ways for institutions to meet the challenges of maximizing student learning. Iowa State has demonstrated a willingness to use learning communities to meet those challenges as the university’s online catalogue explains:

[Iowa State] Learning communities are a university-wide initiative that provides new students with an opportunity to connect with peers who have similar academic goals. Advantages include seeing familiar faces in classes, making a smooth transition from high school to college by developing academic and social networks, developing links between in-class and out-of-class learning opportunities, communicating with instructors, and reducing scheduling conflicts by registering for a block of classes. (<http://www.public.iastate.edu/~catalog/catalog/geninfo/learn.htm>)

Iowa State recognizes the need for implementing learning communities in meeting some of the new challenges presented by today’s college students, and the institutional need for learning communities may be attributed to one of the following four factors (Cross 1998, Tinto 1996, Shapiro and Levine 1999):

1. Learning communities give schools the ability increase student learning.
2. Learning communities improve student success through higher retention rates.
3. Learning communities give teachers a chance to refine and improve teaching methods.
4. Learning communities provide opportunities for the collaborative interaction of the teachers and students.

These four factors provide incentives for establishing learning communities as an option for undergraduate teaching and learning. While recognizing the importance of all four factors, my study discusses aspects of the last two. Not only does Iowa State realize a need for learning communities and faculty collaboration, the school also realizes a need to commit
resources to its teachers to help make that collaboration happen and help teachers develop professionally.

As part of the commitment to learning communities and the teachers involved in them, Iowa State has established a Learning Community Institute in order to support the teachers of learning communities and provide resources for those teachers to meet the growing needs of Iowa State students. Many resources are available through the Institute's homepage, in the form of conferences set up to introduce interested teachers to renowned experts in the field of learning communities and establish a goal "to promote innovations in learning community program design to enhance student learning, with an emphasis on developing course curriculum, structures, rewards and specific learning activities." In order to achieve this goal, faculty collaboration should have a stronger position in the linked learning community courses at Iowa State.

**Why is faculty collaboration needed?**

One incentive for implementing learning communities on college campuses is the opportunity for students to come together in a community setting to connect with other students, teachers, and coursework in order to improve learning. If this opportunity to come together is true for students, is the same type of opportunity present in faculty collaboration? The role of student collaboration in linked learning communities is a fundamental concept of learning communities and discussed on a regular basis; yet, the same fundamental concept concerning faculty collaboration is not discussed with the same frequency.

In addressing this lack of attention to faculty collaboration, Shawn Bohen and James Stiles (1998) point out that, "at first glance, the very notion of college and university faculty working in teams seems antithetical to the traditional model of higher education in
this country" (39). Several reasons for the resistance to faculty collaboration may exist. As David Bleich (1995) notes, some “challenges [such] as sheer unwillingness to change—a kind of rigidity of style and value that views scholarly work, and writing in particular, as always having to be done alone” (45). A sense of being alone, working alone, and teaching alone is the forerunner of most college teaching. However, some research (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, and Gabelnick 1990) deals with a more positive perception of faculty collaboration in learning communities:

[Collaboration] engage[s] and excite[s] faculty members as well as students. Inspired by the rich possibilities for connecting disciplines, the collaborative planning of syllabi, or the possibility of team-teaching, faculty members view learning community teaching as a special faculty development opportunity. (471)

However, this observation by Matthews and her colleagues does not directly address the issue of the need for faculty collaboration. To help search for an answer about the need for faculty collaboration, I consulted John Masterson’s article, “Learning Communities, the Wizard, and the Holy Grail” (1998), which focuses on a “more subtle and powerful” reason why learning communities work and why we need collaboration:

[Learning communities] work because of the power of collaboration [which is] only fractionally realized up to now because of the departmentalization and compartmentalization of collegiate life. Learning communities are a programmatic expression of a simple but elusive truth: We educate better when we discuss with one another the outcomes we seek and the means we have collectively to achieve them. (1)

Masterson points out that we need faculty collaboration because through its use, teachers become better educators, while also being given a chance to renew their skills and show that they do indeed have a real desire to help undergraduates become better connected to course content. Ultimately, helping undergraduates improve their college education is a goal of learning communities, and to that end placing teachers in a collaborative setting
should result in a sense of community and development for teachers as well as improved outcomes for students. Therefore, my research centers around identifying the frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration, which is critical to the growth of linked learning communities at Iowa State. Iowa State then needs to promote these positive characteristics, while at the same time recognizing and then reducing or eliminating non-productive characteristics in order to maximize student development and provide teachers an opportunity to develop professionally.

**Organization of Thesis**

My thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One has provided a general introduction, situated the issues surrounding the problems I identify, and posed the research questions. Chapter Two reviews the literature about learning communities and faculty collaboration. Chapter Three identifies the research methodology of the study. Chapter Four presents the collected data and a commentary about issues and problems surrounding the data, with a focus about how teachers perceive successful learning community experience and what that experience means to teaching. Chapter Five contains five case studies, while Chapter Six concludes the study and offers recommendations for study.
"A successful learning team involves a group of people that share the same classes and experiences. Every person in the learning community forms a sort of bond with everybody else. I feel that a successful learning team not only helps with your studies, but it also creates valuable friendships." Mike (learning community student in agriculture)

Mike’s comment represents the type of experience that students, and others, have when groups engage in collaborative work and provides a point of reference for this literature review. While the concept of teams, group work, and collaborative projects is found more and more in the workplace, collaborative work is not limited to workplace settings but is an important characteristic in building and sharing knowledge across diverse settings, such as those found in linked academic learning communities. The following examples of collaboration take place in two very different situations, yet contain the essence of collaboration regardless of place or situation—collaboration can make connections to differing bodies of knowledge and bring those differing parts into an understandable whole. The collaboration that takes place in a school setting is much different from a workplace setting; however, some of the critical strategies of collaboration can be learned in college and applied in the workplace.

In his book *Collective Intelligence in Computer-Based Collaboration* (1994), John Smith describes a group working in a software development department in a large computer company. The 15-20-person group collaborated over a two-year period to develop three components of a computer system: the database, the user interface and its function, and communication. Even though the large group was separated into three smaller teams, the
groups were still responsible for the completion of one large project. Additionally, members of each team served in various capacities within the overall project, from functioning in a technical advisory role to functioning as the project leader (18-23). I believe the success of this workplace team is characterized by its ability to make clear connections to seemingly unrelated material, to share knowledge, and to combine different types of material into a single finished product.

The previous workplace example demonstrates strategies of collaboration similar to those found in an academic setting and shows how working together to share knowledge can help collaborators make connections to seemingly unrelated information. The two learning community teachers in this upcoming example share the knowledge of their disciplines in order to help students to connect language skills across disciplines.

This example of collaboration between teachers begins with a first-year composition teacher who explains to her students an assignment dealing with an engineering workplace document. The composition teacher’s linked learning community partner, an engineering professor, is in the back of the room, present at his own request. The students are asked to examine an engineering document, but examine it in terms of purpose, audience, and document design. The students do not immediately see how the English perspective is relevant to the field of engineering. The engineering teacher adds his expertise to the discussion by pointing out to the students that the type of discussion taking place about how the document is constructed is the type that they will encounter as engineers in the workplace. This example demonstrates one way teachers can share their knowledge in order for students to see connections between material whose use goes beyond a single discipline.
Though different in personnel, setting, and material covered, both the workplace and classroom scenarios have one thing in common: the efforts of the members to collectively come together to create knowledge and connections that span content-specific documents. The workplace example demonstrates how varied tasks can be combined to complete a multi-faceted project. The classroom example demonstrates the role of faculty collaboration in a linked learning community that is designed to create a sense of community where “each learner has to construct his or her own understanding. However, this [understanding] is usually most effectively achieved through interaction with others in the course of some purposeful joint activity, where each gives and receives assistance, as appropriate” (Haneda and Wells 2000).

Through a review of literature regarding learning communities and faculty collaboration, this chapter explores the ideas put forth by Haneda and Wells about interacting with others in the course of some joint activity. The two examples demonstrate the usefulness of collaboration and show how learning communities may be a place where students are first exposed to the type of collaborative efforts found in many workplace situations. The chapter affords an overview of the conceptual development of learning communities and furnishes models and examples of current types of learning communities. The chapter also provides a theoretical context of social interaction and “reacculturation” (Bruffee 1993) for constructing and sharing knowledge, which then leads to collaboration. The focus then shifts to a discussion of the literature surrounding issues of faculty collaboration in linked learning communities, finally focusing on the development of learning communities at Iowa State University.
Learning Communities

In this section I discuss and define what learning communities look like, what learning communities do, and what types of learning communities are available to schools. Furthermore, I explore the research supporting the social construction of knowledge found in many learning communities.

What does a learning community look like?

Concerns surrounding undergraduate education led to educational reform dating back to the early 1920s and paved the way for the development and refinement of learning communities, which have gained momentum since the 1980s and 1990s. Various types of educational reform have a long and rich history, and some of the concepts that have sprung from that history are embedded in learning communities. Shapiro and Levine (1999) point to three reformers—Alexander Meiklejohn, John Dewey, and Joseph Tussman—whose work "had a profound influence on the way learning communities are defined and formed today" (17). All three of these reformers were concerned with "fragmentation" at the undergraduate level and concerned with how to make knowledge more connected and more related across disciplines, hence the increased interest in learning communities.

The concept of learning communities and increased interest in them has grown considerably from the beginnings of the 1920s. Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, and Gabelnick (1997) mention emerging learning communities starting with Meiklejohn at the University of Wisconsin, Tussman at Berkeley, and LaGuardia Community College, which "required all day students in the liberal arts programs to take an eleven-credit cluster of courses" (460). Another early learning community program, started in the late 1970s at the University of Washington, developed "a modest but highly effective approach, its Interdisciplinary Writing
Program" (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, and Gabelnick, 460). Also in Washington is The Evergreen State College in Olympia, which was “founded with a curriculum based on interdisciplinary coordinated studies programs” (Shapiro and Levine 1999) and, thus, redefined the way learning is constructed.

These innovators and innovative institutions demonstrate attempts to redefine students’ college experience away from fragmented and disjointed course work toward a more coordinated, connected interdisciplinary program of study.

The state of Washington continued with its own involvement in the historical development of learning communities when the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education was founded in 1984. The Washington Center, “is a consortium of 44 colleges and universities in Washington...supporting the development of learning community programs...[and modeling] ways to build and nurture a statewide commitment to undergraduate educational reform” (Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, and Gabelnick, 461). The National Learning Communities Project points out that the Center consists of a partnership of colleges in the state of Washington based at The Evergreen State College where the Center “has been supporting the development of learning communities—curricular reform approaches that purposely restructure the curriculum to thematically link or cluster courses and enroll a common group of students” (http://www.evergreen.edu/user/washcntr/natlc/leproj.htm). The work done through the Center stands as a prime example of what can be accomplished for students and teachers when curricular innovations are implemented.

All of these historically significant, innovative people and institutions sought to devise a structure that redefined how knowledge is created, how it is presented, and how
coordinated and connected studies are employed to improve college students’ experiences.

From this rich historical lineage, the concept of present-day learning communities has developed into a variety of models designed to better connect the student to the first-year college experience.

What does a learning community do?

Learning communities have the rich, enduring history and are supported by substantial research to establish their value as a teaching and learning tool. While enhanced teaching and learning techniques are the end result of learning communities, many different kinds of learning communities exist, each having its own unique characteristics, each providing an educational setting strengthening undergraduate learning and each fostering a community of practice and shared knowledge within a particular institution.

In order to demonstrate different kinds of learning communities that exist and the evolutionary process they undergo, I present two figures. Figure 2.1 is provided by Vincent Tinto and Figure 2.2 is provided by Jean MacGregor and Barbara Leigh Smith. Even though several types of learning communities exist, certain models are common to many learning communities.

The chart in Figure 2.1, taken from Vincent Tinto’s presentation at Iowa State University (2000), demonstrates how four different models might be configured to form a learning community.

The first model example is Linked Courses in which selected groups of students are assigned the same two classes: for instance an introductory freshman economics class may be linked with first-year composition. The second model example is the Freshman Interest
Group (FIG), which places small learning community groups in a large lecture section but separates the learning community groups for small-group discussion. These small-group discussions may include another component of some learning communities in the form of a peer mentor (a graduate student or upperclass student) who has had prior involvement in the learning community. The third model example is Clustered Courses in which selected students take a group of classes together. These clustered classes may be separate or combined into the fourth model example of Coordinated Studies in which one large class meets four to six hours at a time several times a week.
Figure 2.1 Learning Community Models

This figure presented in a paper, *Learning Better Together: The Impact of Learning Communities on Student Success in Higher Education*, represents four common learning community models. (Tinto 2000)

Figure 2.2, provided by MacGregor and Smith (2001), is another example of the way learning communities can be structured.
In their examples, FIGs are one model, as in Tinto (2000). However they have collapsed linked or paired courses and clustered courses into one category. They have renamed what Tinto (2000) calls “coordinated studies” as “team-taught course pairs.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FRESHMAN INTEREST GROUPS</th>
<th>Introduction to Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey - U.S. History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F.I.G. Discussion Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PAIRED OR CLUSTERED CLASSES       | Introduction to Public Speaking |
|----------------------------------| American History               |
|                                  | Technical Writing              |
|                                  | Intro. to Environmental Science|

| TEAM-TAUGHT COURSE PAIRS          | Technical Writing              |
|----------------------------------| Intro. to Environmental Science|
|                                  | Computer Science               |
|                                  | Political Science              |

Figure 2.2. Learning Community Models
This figure from a presentation given during the National Learning Communities Institute 2001 Choosing Appropriate Sustainable Learning Community Structures (MacGregor and Smith 2001)
The difference between the two figures demonstrates the growth of learning communities and the nature of change in their definition.

The National Learning Community Project accessed through The Evergreen State College Web site mentions that these various types of learning communities are designed to restructure all students’ experience and simultaneously confront many issues such as the need for student engagement in learning...the need for curricular arenas in which student make connections and find relationships between disciplinary bodies of knowledge; the opportunity for teaching writing and speaking in the context of a discipline; the opportunity to explore compelling interdisciplinary problems best illuminated by multiple disciplinary perspectives; the opportunity to foster closer intellectual ties between students and their teachers; ...the need for teachers and students alike to take more seriously both the responsibilities of working toward community as well as the benefits of belonging to one. (http://www.evergreen.edu/user/washcctr/natlc/lcproj.htm)

Restructuring the students’ experience and realizing the benefits of belonging to a learning community place both students and teachers in a social atmosphere, which is one of the many components and a perceived strength of learning communities. Other components of learning communities that contain a social element usually include a residential component where students are housed together, collaborative activities and group projects, and discussions between students and teachers as well as discussions between other teachers about student outcomes. The social component also assists in constructing knowledge for teachers and students and helps to acculturate teachers and students into a new or different culture.

Social construction of knowledge in learning communities

The four models in Tinto’s presentation (2000) and the three in MacGregor and Smith’s (2001) are based on “three things [that learning communities have] in common...shared knowledge...shared knowing...[and] shared responsibility.” Shared knowledge refers to the placement of learning community students in a required course
centered on a common theme. When the students are placed in this manner, the learning community offers a shared, curricular experience that seeks “to promote higher levels of cognitive complexity [not easily] obtained through participation in unrelated courses” (4). Shared knowing asks students to come together to construct knowledge and, within the structure of learning communities, to “seek to involve students both socially and intellectually in ways that promote cognitive development as well as an appreciation for the many ways in which one’s own knowing is enhanced” (4). Shared responsibility asks students to “become responsible to each other in the process of trying to know” (4).

For example, “the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program enables students to share their classroom experiences with a consistent set of peers and, thereby, combine social and academic elements of the college experience” (Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo 1993). Tinto’s theme of sharing is also a consistent theme presented in the literature of learning communities: knowledge, responsibility, authority, dialogue, and experiences. (e.g., Cross 1998, Tinto 1996, Bleich 1995). However, the concept of sharing assumes that others are present to participate, hence the implication that sharing is part of the socially constructed nature of learning, which is a strength of learning communities. For my purposes, I equate the opportunity to construct and share knowledge socially with Bruffee’s term “reacculturation” which he presents in Collaborative Learning (1993).

According to Bruffee (1993), many students come to institutions already acculturated into various communities, including, though not exclusively, a student’s own neighborhood, family, or group of friends. As students continue to broaden their scope of social contacts, Bruffee believes they continue to reacculturate themselves into these other social groups and
"reacculturate themselves by working together" (20), which is one way students in linked learning communities are able to negotiate the acculturation process.

The notion of sharing such things as discipline-specific language, knowledge, or mutual situations is crucial to establishing the collaborative component of learning communities. In the socially constructed collaborative settings that make up learning communities, “group members distribute knowledge and authority among themselves, taking it upon themselves to help each other” (Bruffee 21). Traditionally, first-year college students have classes that are in large lecture halls where both teaching and learning are in isolation. The teacher acquires discipline-specific content knowledge, in many instances without consulting or collaborating with anyone, and then presents that information to students who have yet to be acculturated to the language that would allow them to make connections or acculturate themselves into the first-year college experience.

Learning communities help bridge the cultural and social gap students experience when they come from the high school culture and social milieu to the university and help fulfill the need to make connections to knowledge, professors, and the social make-up of the university. In order to make the transition to college life easier, students need to learn the language of the new culture, and in this case the university’s culture, through such things as shared experience and shared conversation. Becoming familiar with the boundary conversations used within a particular culture allows students access to that culture. Bruffee mentions that even after “direct conversation [ends]...collaboration continue[s] indirectly, because direct conversation had provided the language...needed in order to ...think productively in a new way” (23), and that new productive thinking does not end at the classroom door.
If students are given the language to use and opportunities to use it, collaboration extends itself outside the classroom to other social settings where new knowledge and new thinking is constructed. Thus, the student begins the acculturation process into a new community and a collaborative way of learning:

One purpose of collaborative learning is to give college and university students opportunities to experience this reacculturative, conversational process, direct and indirect, by which not only scientists, but also doctor, lawyers, mathematicians, sociologists, classicists, and other bearers of intellectual tradition construct knowledge in the language of their communities of knowledgeable peers. (Bruffee 53)

In the learning community setting, teachers provide collaborative opportunities for students by creating classroom conditions that allow the acculturation conversation process to take place. Sometimes the conversation is difficult because teachers "have to be able to translate the community boundaries between the academic or professional knowledge communities that they belong to and unaccountable number of nonacademic, nonprofessional communities that their students belong to" (Bruffee 64).

Constructing knowledge in the language of "knowledgeable peers" and negotiating the boundaries between professional communities is the basis for the collaborative effort that should take place, not only for students, but also among teachers in linked learning communities. When teachers begin to negotiate the boundaries between disciplines, the conversation that ensues is the beginning of the collaborative process necessary to construct, shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility. The following two sections explore some of the issues of faculty collaboration in linked learning communities with an emphasis on Iowa State University learning communities.
Faculty Collaboration in Linked Learning Communities and the Iowa State University Experience

Collaboration and teamwork are concepts that have taken on greater importance both in the workplace and schools; therefore, this section considers the literature surrounding faculty collaboration in linked learning communities, specifically dealing with two issues: The first deals with ways in which collaboration in learning communities assists in reacculturating or bridging the gap between different disciplines and content. The second section deals with the question of how Iowa State has applied the concept of learning communities to enhance undergraduate education and foster faculty collaboration.

Reacculturating ourselves: Faculty collaboration in learning communities

The concept of collaboration and teamwork, at most levels, has been documented and established as a useful educational practice and learning tool. As Kip Strasma and Gavin Foster (1992) point out, many “believe collaborative teaching and learning strategies can transform a classroom into a positive writing environment” (111). Used in conjunction with other teaching methods, faculty collaboration can be very effective in creating links to material outside person’s area of expertise, but “the use of collaborative strategies requires a unique educational philosophy” (Strasma and Foster 118). However, as researchers present information about collaboration, they tend to speak of it from the perspective of students, focusing on student-to-student or teacher-to-student collaboration, and little on teacher-to-teacher collaboration. Yet, Tinto (2000) highlights the importance of faculty involvement:

[To] be effective...the academic and student affairs professionals who staff the learning community...[need to] collaborate on both the content and pedagogy of the linked courses. They have to work together, as equal partners, to ensure that the linked courses provide a coherent shared learning experience. (6)

Tinto’s point about teachers collaborating effectively and making connections is echoed
by a recent NCREL article, “What Is the Collaborative Classroom” (2001) by Tinzmann, Jones, Fennimore; Bakker, Fine, and Pierce, which emphasizes the importance of teacher-to-teacher collaboration as a vital component of learning communities. The researchers mention that, “linking new information to prior knowledge requires effective communication and collaboration among teachers...Indeed, it is through dialogue and interaction that curriculum objectives come alive” (1). The emphasis on the need to dialogue underscores a component of learning communities that is stressed less than other components—teacher-to-teacher collaboration is essential to the learning communities. Tinzmann and his colleagues reinforce that point by noting that, "if we expect students to collaborate, we should encourage teachers to do the same” (9). I would take issue with the researchers’ last statement. Rather than just encourage teachers "to do the same"—that is, collaborate—we should expect teachers to collaborate, just as we expect students to collaborate. If the expectation of collaboration is an intrinsic element in teachers' thinking and is modeled by teachers, acculturation into a different discipline becomes more of a reality and allows greater understanding of interdisciplinary connections.

A comment from Merritt Moseley (1992) points to an important challenge in making interdisciplinary connections in general education that “is educating faculty for teaching in an interdisciplinary general education course or sequence of courses” (8). Teachers, who teach in isolation in the interdisciplinary general education courses or feel isolated from the other disciplines and departments need to be acculturated into their linked partner's course in order to be able to develop more fully linked material. Therefore, collaboration among teachers can increase meaningful connections with other disciplines and build a sense of community among teachers, especially at large institutions like Iowa State.
As teachers engage in the collaborative process, they begin to understand and learn what other teachers are doing, and “by learning together everyone’s understanding and knowledge [is], in the eyes of the participants, enriched” (Tinto 6). In order for the outcomes and goals of learning communities to work, teachers need to buy into the concepts and components that make up well-designed learning communities, especially the concept of faculty collaboration. Matthews, Smith, MacGregor, and Gabelnick (1997) point out how acculturation of faculty can take place:

Learning communities engage and excite faculty members as well as students. Inspired by the rich possibilities for connecting disciplines, the collaborative planning of syllabi, or the possibility of team-teaching, faculty members view learning community teaching as a special faculty development opportunity. (471)

The desire to revitalize and acculturate undergraduate education and re-engage teachers may have been one of the reasons Iowa State University teachers and administrators began to look at learning communities.

The Iowa State experience

Since 1995, when learning communities were first initiated at Iowa State (Lenning and Ebbers 1999), the school has had a commitment to educating its students in a way that allows broad connections to various and diverse situations and circumstances. According to Iowa State’s online mission statement, presented through the Office of the President (Appendix B, screen 1), Iowa State is committed to providing high-quality undergraduate programs across a broad range of disciplines, as befits the institution’s stature as a university. In its dedication to excellence in learning, the University strives to instill in its students the discernment, intellectual curiosity, knowledge and skills essential for their individual development and their useful contribution to society. A common goal of undergraduate education is to assure that all students, regardless of disciplinary major, acquire literacy in science and technology, an understanding of humane and ethical values, an awareness of the intellectual, historical, and artistic foundations of our culture, and sensitivity to other cultures and to
international concerns.

Based on some of the promotional information available, Iowa State appears committed to providing connections to various educational and research concerns that range from local to international. What is left to the teachers involved in these connections is to determine the means to accomplish the task of making all of those connections meaningful. Promotional material found in the Scope Statement, also made available online from the Office of the President, has pledged to offer “interdisciplinary programs … that seek to combine the perspectives and methods of more than one discipline to better address the questions and problems confronting Iowa, the nation and the world.”

Recently, in order for teachers and students to make new connections to course content, to acculturate themselves into the college experience, and to confront opportunities to construct knowledge in “more than one discipline,” Iowa State University implemented learning community initiative, which is explained online in the Learning Community’s End-of-Year Report:

Learning communities at Iowa State University began as a grass roots effort in 1994, with the first learning communities implemented in the fall of 1995. Since that time tremendous growth and innovation has taken place accompanied by growing enthusiasm for the learning community concept. (par 1)

Iowa State has recognized the importance and potential impact that learning communities can have on student retention, GPA, and overall student satisfaction, so much so that, according to the same end-of-year report, “[former] President Martin Jischke announced the allocation of $1,500,000 to the development of learning communities at Iowa State over a three-year period, 1998-2001” (1999).

However, while the commitment toward learning communities is present in most
respects, even learning community advocates recognize the lack of teacher involvement at
certain levels. Again the End-of-the-Year Report (1999), recognizes that

faculty involvement continues to be the weakest link in the ISU LC program, as is the
case at most institutions. There is a need to continue to look at changes to the reward
structure to increase faculty involvement. There is also a need to focus training and
development efforts on faculty who are currently involved with LCs. (1)

Iowa State has valuable resource in the many interested teachers involved in the
learning communities, and the grass roots effort started by these teachers should continue to be
encouraged. With the Learning Community Institute firmly established, Iowa State should
continue its efforts to provide incentives and motivation to increase teacher involvement in the
learning communities and faculty collaboration. By doing so, Iowa State takes strides toward
further recognizing the impact of faculty collaboration on the refinement of student and teacher
skills in constructing knowledge and building a greater sense of community campus wide.

The next chapter explains the methods I used to learn about the characteristics that
make up faculty collaboration in Iowa State’s learning communities.
CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

"I would consider a successful learning community to be one in which bonds between people are made. A successful learning community also needs to relate well in the class to one another. I believe that my learning community experience was very successful. I would not have met the people that I did, made the bonds that will last clear through college, or had as much fun my first semester at Iowa State University if I had not been in the learning community that I was." Amanda (learning community student in agriculture)

My first thoughts about faculty collaboration in learning communities were inspired by my participation in teaching two linked learning community sections of first-year composition. I thought that the English teachers were making more accommodations in their course work than other disciplines, prompting me to question the process of selecting teachers and classes to link. Since most first-year composition classes are taught by teaching assistants or temporary instructors, I wondered if the reason English teachers were making accommodations in their course preparation was because of the hierarchy and power structure of the tenured faculty. Because first-year composition is considered a service course, I also wondered if it were seen as the handmaiden to other colleges and departments. I wanted to learn the frequency, type, and role of collaboration taking place between teachers within linked learning community classes. I brought with me a bias based on my experience: My history with the Department of English and my teaching learning community classes have impacted my research questions and affected the development of the resulting survey and interview questions I used to collect data.

By linking my research questions to Bruffee’s theory of reacculturation, I seek to describe through case studies how collaboration can best be used to bring about and enhance greater success in linked learning communities. While a need exists to introduce students to the
culture of their chosen major, to show its relationship to other coursework outside that major, and to acculturate students from a high school culture into the culture of college life, a need also exists to acculturate teachers and introduce them to the linked course in order to have a better understanding of the subtleties of a course outside one's own discipline. Teachers may have difficulty making available to students the necessary connections to material and ideas if the teachers themselves do not make some sort of attempt to connect with their linked partner's culture and material.

I see acculturation of teachers as a developmental process. Learning another culture in one semester would be difficult, yet by immersing themselves in a culture through collaboration, teachers may develop and integrate some of the tools necessary to make better connections to material, to students, and to colleagues. In order for me to discover the collaborative relationships teachers had with each other and find out the extent of involvement teachers have with their linked partner’s culture, I first determined the site and then created my survey.

**Research Site**

The development of learning communities at Iowa State began with a visit from “Vincent Tinto in the fall of 1994, during which he presented information about learning communities and related research” (Lenning and Ebbers 1999, 70). Following that initial visit, groups and individuals such as the “assistant registrar, the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, and the coordinator of the Orientation and Retention Program” (Lenning and Ebbers 1999, 71) became involved in conversations that led to implementing linked courses for the fall of 1995. Because learning communities are so young and the growth so new at the university, I wanted to take an opportunity to study the development of one of the major
components of linked learning communities—faculty collaboration as it relates to the creation of courses, course content, and teacher relationships.

Iowa State University has a growing number of specified learning communities throughout its system, and the Fall 2001 number for all those designated as learning communities across all disciplines totals 42 (Learning Community Homepage <http://www.iastate.edu/learncommunity>). The specific learning communities for all linked courses at Iowa State University are listed in Appendix A.

However, the site for my study includes only the 36 Iowa State University academic learning communities linked with first-year composition for the 2000-2001 academic year. These 36 learning communities chosen for the study reflect the following involvement:

♦ Number of teachers involved 36
♦ Number of departments involved 35
♦ Number of colleges involved 7

The information presented in Table 3.1 shows the individual Iowa State colleges and departments that are linked with first-year composition. Each department listed in Table 3.1 requested a link with English; this list represents linked courses whose teachers are the participants for my study.
Table 3.1. Learning communities linked to first-year composition by college and department (Source for colleges and departments, Iowa State University Bulletin, Undergraduate and Graduate Courses and Programs 2001-2003.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Department (and program, if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Agriculture | ♦ Agriculture Education & Studies  
♦ Ag and Biosystems Engineering  
♦ Agricultural Business  
♦ Agronomy  
♦ Animal and Dairy Science  
♦ Animal Ecology  
♦ Horticulture  
♦ Microbiology |
| Business | ♦ Accounting  
♦ Finance  
♦ Logistics  
♦ Management  
♦ Marketing |
| Design | ♦ Landscape Architecture  
♦ Architecture  
♦ Art and Design  
♦ Community and Regional Planning |
| Education | ♦ Curriculum and Instruction  
♦ Health and Human Performance  
♦ Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
♦ Industrial Education and Technology |
| Engineering | ♦ Chemical Engineering  
♦ Electrical Engineering  
♦ Industrial & Manufacturing Systems Engineering  
♦ Mechanical Engineering |
| FCS | ♦ Human Development and Family Studies  
♦ Textiles and Clothing  
♦ Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Studies  
♦ Food Sciences and Human Nutrition  
♦ Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management |
| LAS | ♦ Biology  
♦ Chemistry  
♦ English  
♦ Music  
♦ Spanish |
Participants

In order to identify teachers of learning community courses linked with first-year composition, I consulted five separate lists of teachers compiled by campus units associated with learning communities:

1. the Learning Community Web site

2. a list of linked English courses provided the learning community coordinator for the Department of English

3. a list of linked English courses provided by the assistant to the Department of English learning community coordinator

4. a list provided by the Director of ISU’s Center for Teaching Excellence and her assistant

5. a list indicating all courses taught by English teachers, provided by the secretary in the Department of English responsible for maintaining the list of all department staffing.

After careful review of the lists, I determined that they do not fully correspond with each other. Inconsistencies exist because linked learning communities are not clearly defined, and miscommunication exists among units within learning communities. For example, a single business learning team consists of 10-13 students, while a normal first-year composition class generally has a maximum of 26 students. Thus, two business learning teams are merged into one first-year composition course, which is one English team. Consequently, in this situation, the business department lists two teams while first-year composition lists one.
Also, inconsistencies may exist because of a lack of coordinated efforts to manage the growth of learning communities, to establish guidelines for implementing a linked learning community, and to help reduce communication problems that exist between teachers and other campus units. For example, a lack of communication between a coordinator and a teacher may result in a teacher not knowing learning community students are in the class or not being aware the class is linked. A particular teacher may appear as the teacher for the linked class on the initial proposal submitted by the department, but because the coordinator did not inform the teacher, the teacher is not listed as a link because no collaboration has been established and the link becomes non-functional.

These illustrations above might help explain the inconsistencies that exist in determining what constitutes a learning community at Iowa State. At the same time the inconsistencies may have impacted the selection of participants by who decided to participate in the study. For example, if teachers are unaware that they are teaching a linked class, then they have no incentive to complete the survey or consent to an interview.

Additionally, I am interested in determining how experience in teaching and experience with learning communities affects faculty collaboration. Therefore, one question on the survey and interview asked about both teaching experience and teaching learning community experience. I wanted to determine if experience is a factor in the perceived success of collaboration. Qualifying experience for participants is indicated in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2. Experience level of survey participants in relation to classroom and learning community experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
<th>Learning Community Teacher</th>
<th>Classroom Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inexperience Learning Community Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience Learning Community Teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consulting Table 3.2 and the lists provided allowed me to better identify participants and refine the questions used on the survey and during the interview.

The Survey

The survey (Appendix B) was born out of several informal conversations with other teachers both in and out of the Department of English. In particular, Dr. Corly Brooke, director of the Center for Teaching Excellence, provided great insight into the design of the survey, and Dr. Lee Honeycutt provided assistance in creating the Web-based version. The purpose of the survey is to provide me with information about faculty collaboration and provide an impetus for a follow-up interview.

The survey contains seven categories:

♦ **Course Information**: Questions about the general background of the course and number of learning and non-learning community students.

♦ **Administrative Information**: Questions about the course designation, the mixture of learning and non-learning community students, and available resources.

♦ **Collaborative Information**: Questions about ways in which participants used collaboration, the frequency of collaboration, and the topics discussed.

♦ **Course Goals**: Questions about how participation in a learning community affected the desired outcomes for the courses taught and what those outcomes encompassed.

♦ **Use of Class Time**: Questions about how participants use of class time was affected by participation in a learning community.

♦ **Assessment**: Questions about how learning community participation and collaboration affected participant assessment tools.
♦ **Comments:** Questions about participants' perceptions of their experience and suggestions for improvement.

I user-tested both the print and Web-based versions on five volunteers from the Department of English in order to refine the survey questions as well as help refine my research questions concerning faculty collaboration in the planning of first-year composition and linked learning community courses at Iowa State University.

I sent the initial survey (both print and electronic versions) to 36 teachers who taught at least one linked learning community course—courses indicated in Figure 3.1. Of the 36 who received the survey, 19 (53%) held positions of teaching assistant, temporary instructor, or staff member, and 17 (47%) held positions as full-time faculty members. Recipients were divided approximately evenly between first-year composition teachers (19) and teachers of linked courses (17). In the Department of English, teachers of first-year composition may be either tenured or tenure-line faculty, teaching assistants, or temporary instructors. In other departments, learning community courses are typically taught by tenured or tenure-line faculty.

**The Case Studies**

Before the study started, I realized that my own history and involvement with learning communities might impact my analysis of the results, which will be discussed later. I provide a detailed description of the survey results of teachers' self-reported levels of collaboration as well as perceived success and focus on the situations and the teachers. Then I present more detailed case study descriptions of the teachers' perceptions and interactions, the goal of which is "to learn about the phenomenon [of faculty collaboration] from the perspective of those in the field" (Gall, Borg, and Gall 547). The last of the five case studies is an account of four individuals involved in what I refer to as disjunctures.
The case studies include information from teachers' answers to survey questions but depend far more on the more focused individual interviews about the role of faculty collaboration in learning communities. Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) state that the "major advantage of interviews is their adaptability," and I chose follow-up interviews over giving participants another questionnaire because questionnaires do not allow the probing questions necessary to delve deeper into responses and get the opinions and feelings of the participants (289).

My five case studies fall into four categories that reflect various levels of teachers' participation in collaboration and in the perceived success of their linked learning community. The following cases and categories reflect the designations presented in the case studies section:

♦ Category 1: High collaboration – High success: Teachers involved in this category (10%; 2 of 20 participants) have more than 30 contacts with each other and self-reported that their collaboration and link were highly successful. Case 1 focuses on the only two teachers who fell into this category, Kim and John.

♦ Category 2: Moderate collaboration – High success: Teachers involved in this category (10%; 2 of 20) had 6-10 contacts with each other and self-reported that their collaboration and link were highly successful. Case 2 focuses on Sara and Debbie.

♦ Category 3: Moderate collaboration – Moderate success: Teachers involved in this category (20%; 4 of 20) had 6-10 contacts with each other and self-reported that their collaboration and link were moderately successful. Case 3 focuses on focuses
on Amy and Dan. Case 4 focuses on Tina and Connie. These four are the only teachers in category 3.

- Category 4—Disjunctures: Low collaboration – Low or No success: Teachers involved in this category (60%, 12 of 20) indicated on the survey that they contacted their linked partner 1-5 times or that the question did not apply to them. The four teachers in Case 5 are representative of the low collaboration–low success teachers that comprise 60% of participants. They are represented in Case 5 by Ann, Linda, Greg, and Dean.

**Data Collection**

Data for my study were collected in two ways: surveys and focused interviews.

**Survey**

The surveys (print and Web versions) were given to 36 teachers involved in learning communities linked to first-year composition with the Department of English. (The print survey and URL for the Web version are presented in Appendix B.) I used two versions of the survey (print and Web) in order to give participants a choice about how they wished to respond. Rates of distribution and return for both versions are presented in the Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3. Distribution and return rates for print and online surveys**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Web Surveys</th>
<th>Print Surveys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FYC instructors</td>
<td>Other instructors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed—36</td>
<td>19 (100% of FYC instructors teaching in LCs)</td>
<td>17 (100% of LC instructors linked to FYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned—20</td>
<td>2 (9.5% returned)</td>
<td>5 (29% returned)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I initially distributed the survey the week of February 12 to 36 teachers. By February 29, I had a total response of 38% (14 of 36). Then I emailed and hand delivered the survey to the remaining 22 teachers, which prompted the return of 16% (6 of 36) more surveys, bringing the total rate to 55% (20 of 36). Of the respondents, 35% (7 of 20) returned Web surveys and 65% (13 of 20) returned print surveys. English teachers had a 63% (12 of 19) response rate. Other disciplines had a 47% (8 of 17) response rate.

Follow-up interviews with faculty

Following the collection of the survey results, I conducted a taped interview with a stratified random sample of teachers in the following categories:

1. Category 1: High collaboration – High success
2. Category 2: Moderate collaboration – High success
3. Category 3: Moderate collaboration – Moderate success
4. Category 4–Disjunctures: Low collaboration – Low or No success

I used interview questions to discover background information about learning community components and to further determine the role and nature of collaboration with linked partners. Following are several sample interview questions; the entire list of questions is presented in Appendix C.

1. Describe the type of learning community you had/have and describe how you were involved.

2. In what way does being in a learning community affect your classroom decisions about course content?

3. What do you see as your role when it comes to faculty collaboration in regard to your linked course?
4. Did participation in the learning community change the way you teach/taught your linked courses?

I was also interested in collecting material from learning community participants in order to create a storehouse of information to be used by new learning community teachers and to create a sense of continuity should one of the linked partners leave. Therefore, the last question of the interview asked participants to provide any material that was collaboratively created.

**Data Analysis**

I used the information from the returned surveys and the interviews to create the case studies that help answer the question about the frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration in learning communities linked with first-year composition. "Robert Yin (as cited in Gall et al.) recommends using both methods [survey and interview] when doing case study research" (290). Therefore, I have applied the two methods to my study enabling me to better reflect the thoughts and perceptions of the teachers involved with learning communities.

I also used the content analysis procedures outlined by Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) to examine frequency, types, patterns, trends, and themes of faculty collaboration. Analysis of the data yielded frequency patterns, trends, and themes of collaboration in the type of assignments and activities, and practices between linked partners. I also compared perceptions of faculty collaboration and reported on how teachers regarded collaboration as a potentially successful means of course preparation.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study has several limitations: selection of the participants as well as my history
Selection of the participants

I used a purposeful sample (Gall, Borg, & Gall 1996) because the study participants "suit the purposes of the study...[and] are likely to be 'information-rich' with respect to the study. [However,] purposeful sampling is not designed to achieve population validity. The intent is to achieve an in-depth understanding of selected individuals" (218). In this study the selected individuals are teachers involved with linked learning communities. The teachers involved with learning communities are, for the most part, volunteers to the program and, therefore, have a particular stake in the success of learning communities. As volunteers, these teachers have, in some ways, set themselves apart from their colleagues who are not involved in learning communities. That separation may be in the form of teaching styles or pedagogical practices that are more conducive to collaborative teaching methods and therefore not representative of the entire teaching.

After distributing the survey, I discovered that some of the participants were not aware that they were taking part in a learning community. Since these individuals were uninformed about the linked course, they may not have been as receptive to completing the survey as those teachers who were informed volunteers. Therefore, the sampling may not be representative of the entire learning community teachers.

My history and involvement with learning communities

Because I teach learning communities and support the philosophy of linked courses, I have a bias that may influence my interpretation of the data and, thus, the outcome of my study. Specifically, I am both a researcher for this thesis and a learning community teacher (English 104 linked with animal science and English 105 linked with animal ecology). For the
animal science learning community, I met my linked partner during the Learning Community Institute and briefly discussed some content issues. Then before the semester started I initiated contact with two emails and a phone call about obtaining a syllabus and asking my partner to attend my class. He responded by sending an email telling me he would have his secretary send me a syllabus. For the link with animal ecology, I decided to wait several weeks for my partner to contact me, an event that did not happen.

Therefore, my situation presented two opposing types of contact and collaboration, the results of which affected my desire to see English rise above handmaiden status. My survey was designed to collect data quantitatively and helped define my categories. To minimize my impact and reduce my personal bias, I developed categories based on the data I collected from the survey and interviews.
CHAPTER 4:

LEARNING COMMUNITIES: RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

"I feel that our learning community experience was successful. I know that we got a lot out of it, and it probably helped all of us in our classes in some way, shape, or form. The learning teams made it easier to communicate my ideas because I was with people that had similar views and understood what I was talking about." Christy (learning community student in agriculture)

Christy’s reaction to her learning community experience is indicative of the type of encounter held by many learning community students. While I recognize the university’s emphasis on the results encompassing students’ participation and outcomes, students’ satisfaction, and students’ response to the collaborative efforts of learning communities, the focus of this chapter is the results related to my research questions.

I derived my results from two sources: (1) a survey presented in both online and print versions and (2) follow-up interviews with selected participants. (See Appendix B for the survey and Appendix C for the interview questions.) The results of these two sets of data are incorporated into the case studies presented in Chapter 5. As this chapter demonstrates, the factors surrounding faculty collaboration take on various forms, and the perceptions of collaboration are defined in several ways.

Survey Results

The results of my survey divide my research question into two secondary questions:

1. What characterizes the nature of faculty collaboration in courses linked with first-year composition? Specifically, what are the frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration?
2. What characterizes the nature of teaching in teachers who teach courses linked to first-year composition? Specifically, how do teachers, influenced by collaboration with linked learning community partners, use course goals, class time, and assessment?

The survey questions and interviews explore ways in which teachers of learning communities linked with first-year composition are affected by their involvement in learning communities, the form that involvement takes, the type of collaboration they have with their linked partner, and the extent of that collaboration.

**Frequency, Type, and Role of Faculty Collaboration**

Many factors both aid and hinder the collaborative process in learning communities. My survey was intended to explore whether any relationship exists between levels of collaboration and teacher’s perception of success within linked learning community courses. I sought to answer research question #1 by creating and responding to three subquestions:

- What is the frequency with which teachers met collaborate for their linked courses?
- What type of collaboration took place when teachers met?
- What was each teacher’s role in the collaborative process?

These three questions lay the groundwork for establishing the goals and outcomes of the learning community course, point out the level of involvement in the collaborative process, and describe how that involvement parallels a teacher’s overall perception of success.

**Frequency of contact**

When the survey asked teachers about the number of contacts made with the linked partner, participants provided the data in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Number of contacts between learning community partners
Ranges provided on the survey are 1-5, 6-10, 10-20, 20-30, 30+, Not applicable. No respondents selected 10-20 or 20-30. No participant commented on the error in the categories, with both 10 and 20 appearing in two categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Information</th>
<th>1-5</th>
<th>6-10</th>
<th>10-20</th>
<th>20-30</th>
<th>30+</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many times have you and your learning community partner(s) contacted each other?</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As part of the analysis, I use frequency of contact as one indicator that corresponds to success in a linked learning community. I also define 5 or fewer contacts as infrequent collaboration. With 35% (7 out of 20) of the participants falling into the category of occasional or infrequent contacts, I begin to question ISUs assertions in promotional material that learning communities are successful (Lenning and Ebbers 72). Coupled with the initial 35% are another 25% (five participants) who found the question not applicable to their situation, which brings the total percentage of participants who have infrequent or no contact with their linked partner to 60% (12 out of 20). The remaining participants fell into two categories: six had moderate contact with their linked partner, which appears to contribute to their self-reported success. No participants had between 10 and 30 contacts. The two participants with 30+ contacts with their linked partner seemed to have built a relationship that allowed high frequency of collaboration and, as will be reported in the case studies, a high degree of perceived success.

Information from the interviews reveals that the most frequent reported contact between linked partners came about early in the process—usually during the Learning Community Institute held at the end of the spring semester or during the summer before classes started—and covered various types of collaboration.

The frequency of collaboration is addressed very briefly in the Department of English online suggestions for linking to first-year composition courses, *Guidelines for English Teachers and their Partners in Learning Community Courses* (accessed 2001). While the
Guidelines do not “stipulate how many planning sessions are needed,” three suggestions are mentioned: “meet before the course to make plans..., meet during the semester to make adjustments..., and meet at the end of the term to analyze the course....”

Type of collaboration

While the majority (60%) of teachers displayed infrequent or no collaboration, the responses to the survey question from the 40% who engaged in moderate to high levels of collaboration provide a range of responses. When asked to describe the interaction with their partners, teachers responded in a variety of ways that I have divided into the three sections categorized in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Types and frequency of collaboration used by linked learning community teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Collaboration</th>
<th>Number and percent of teachers indicating type of contact (20 total participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Email-Sent/Reply</td>
<td>15 (70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Face to Face</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Class Visits</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Field Trips</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Materials Sent</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topics</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Content</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Course Structure</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Culture</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Creating (Together/Separately with influence from linked partner)</td>
<td>6 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Information/Telling/Summarizing</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Sharing/Giving</td>
<td>4 (20%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants identified five media for collaboration, as listed in section one of Table 4.2. Email was the most frequently used method of communication, which surprised me especially since face-to-face contact helps collaborators build rapport and collegiality. I was also surprised that none of the collaborators listed phone conversations or voice mail as ways in which they communicated with their linked partner.
The remaining two sections of Table 4.2 compile results about the primary nature of contact and generated responses that I separated into two categories: topics and activities. In categorizing the responses about the section on topics, I developed the following definitions:

- **Content**: 65% (13 out of 20) of the teachers discussed content that takes into account a general discussion on the type of assignments, topics, materials, shared ideas, and activities students may work on during the semester.

- **Course structure**: 45% (9 out of 20) of the teachers discussed course structure that takes into account pre-course work, specifically setting up the course, discussing syllabi, or addressing any potential themes for the course.

- **Culture**: 10% (2 out of 20) of the teachers discussed culture that takes into account the type of language and approaches used in a particular course. For example, if an English teacher focuses on a term like “topic sentence” in class, a biology teacher may wish to reinforce the term “topic sentence” for a report in biology. Conversely, the biology teacher may use a term such as genetically modified organisms (GMO), and that term may appear in a position paper in the first-year composition class about European acceptance of GMOs.

After considering the data in Table 4.2 and following up with interview questions, I found that the majority of the collaboration among linked partners involved discussions about class content and structure (for example, identifying or creating student activities for use during the semester), which took place early in the process; thus, once content and structure issues were established for the course, collaboration diminished. Only 10% (2 of 20) of linked partners extended their collaboration to issues beyond content, which for these two teachers
included discussions around student performance, field trips, and the broader learning community issues.

To categorize the responses about the third section on activities (content issues), I developed these definitions:

- **Creating** – Teachers work with their partner to create/invent new or revise old content for the link; 30% (6 out of 20) of teachers responded that they were influenced by their linked partner to create new activities.

- **Informing/Telling/Summarizing** – Teachers’ discussions surround general conversations where the linked partner is informed of course activities, told how those activities are used and has activities summarized; 20% (4 out of 20) teachers responded that they informed/told/summarized past activities that transcend disciplines.

- **Sharing/Giving** – Teachers share information and give suggestions for potential activities; 20% (4 out of 20) teachers responded that they shared knowledge and gave suggestions about types of future activities. For example, one teacher may share a reading list or particular book or magazine that would be discussed in both linked classes.

The few teachers who engaged in collaboration found a certain amount of satisfaction in sharing what they had with their linked partner. That sharing took the form of creating new assignments and refining old ones.

The categories and explanations in sections two and three of Table 4.2 provided a direction for me to follow during the interviews, helped me pinpoint some areas of collaboration that might need further study, and helped define the role of collaboration.
Role of collaboration

Table 4.3 displays responses to the survey question about the role played by linked partners during class sessions. Participants were also asked to extend their yes/no answer and describe the type of involvement that occurred.

Table 4.3. Survey results related to question about whether or not linked partner played a role during class sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Information</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has your learning community partner played a role in any of your class sessions?</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those responding, 70% (14 out of 20) indicated that their linked partner played no role in their class sessions, while 25% (5 out of 20) acknowledged the role that linked partners played in class sessions. The remaining 5% (1 out of 20) did not respond to the question. As previously mentioned, involvement in each other’s class sessions is one way to make stronger connections with other teachers as well as students. I believe that when students see other teachers, especially ones outside a student’s own discipline, model collaboration with colleagues, barriers between students and teachers are broken down, allowing students a better understanding of the collaborative process. However, when 75% of the participants are not involved in a linked partner’s class sessions, barriers between teachers and students are still present.

The remaining 20% (4 out of 20 participants) replied yes to the question and provided written responses describing their involvement with their linked partner.

♦ “He basically observed the class discussion—it was a class-led discussion though I didn’t participate either.” (Isabelle)
“[My linked leaning community partner] visited English 104 sections to show ideas of Animal Farm and emphasize writing in his...class.” (Amy)

“She had them read a book that had economic ideas built in.” (Don)

“Too numerous to write.” (Ellen)

Ellen’s brief comment indicates that the amount and type of collaboration experienced with her partner are abundant, hinting at the larger role assumed by both linked partners. Ellen extends her comment during the interview and suggests a commitment to students, which implies a caring attitude by the teachers and enhances the role of the teacher as well as the role of collaboration in teaching.

The role of collaboration is so important to the Department of English that the department includes a section on collaboration in its Protocols for Establishing Learning Community Links with English Composition Courses (accessed online, 2001). The Protocols state that teachers should

start the Conversation Early. Once you have notified the English LC Coordinator of your intention to link with an FYC (First-year composition) course, we also ask that you plan on collaborating in the planning of this link. Typically, this planning begins at the LC Institute in May, but the sooner the better.

In addition to the Protocols, the aforementioned Guidelines for English Teachers and their Partners in Learning Community Courses (accessed 2001) offers an implied rationale for collaboration, a list of coordinating activities and hints/ideas about ways to implement the suggestions, in addition to the following list of five specific suggestions for building collaboration.

Planning Sessions: suggesting sequences of meetings between linked partners
♦ Class Visits: suggesting that teachers visit each other’s classrooms at least twice during the semester

♦ Coordinated Course Material: suggesting sharing content material such as readings, journals, assignments, and content units

♦ Co-Teaching: suggesting that efforts be made by teachers to play some role in each other’s class

♦ Out-of-Class Activities: suggesting that teachers move beyond the classroom and coordinate efforts to combine such things as field trips or attending break-out sessions

While the Department of English appears to place the role of collaboration high among items related to learning communities, my survey indicates that not all linked learning community teachers fully embrace this view. While collaboration is strongly suggested by the department, no established procedure exists to ensure that teachers collaborate. Conversations with colleagues indicate that they think collaboration is a good idea, but collaboration’s role only extends to minimal contact and minimal dialogue between linked partners. To help teachers extend the role of collaboration and provide an avenue for dialogue among learning community participants, Iowa State offers the Learning Community Institute as a resource for bringing linked learning community partners together.

A survey question about contacting the linked partner yielded the information in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Survey results for question about whether or not linked partner contacted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Information</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the time after you knew you’d be teaching a LC class, did you contact your linked partner?</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>5 (25%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My survey indicated that 70% of participants (14 of 20) said they did contact their linked partner after finding out about teaching a linked learning community. Opportunities for teachers to make contact with the linked partner can be found in the suggestions from the Department of English Guidelines, the initial request proposal submitted by the department desiring a link with first-year composition, and the Learning Community Institute.

In summary, responses to research question number 1 indicate that teachers do not collaborate frequently (more than 5 times a semester) and collaborate early in the process if they collaborate at all. The type of collaboration that does take place is content driven and the role of collaboration in the learning communities is not a high priority.

The survey's next three sections explore the second research question about what characterizes the nature of teaching in teachers who teach courses linked to first-year composition. Specifically, how do teachers, influenced by collaboration with linked learning community partners, use course goals, class time, and assessment?

**Goals, Class Time, and Assessment**

Whether classes are team-taught, taught in isolation, or any other combination of strategies, faculty collaboration is one approach that can assist in developing teaching techniques. The following three subsections explore the impact (or lack thereof) of collaboration on how teachers shape course goals, use class time for integrating collaborative efforts, and create assessment tools. I sought to answer research question #2 by creating and responding to three subquestions:

1. How does collaboration help teachers shape course goals?
2. How does collaboration affect the use of class time for integrating collaborative assignments and activities?

3. How are assessment tools created through collaboration?

These three subquestions help establish the goals and outcomes of the learning community course, identify the effect of collaboration on class time use, and describe how collaboration can affect assessment.

**Course goals**

Analysis of the section of the survey about course goals supports a question that I had before I started my research: If teachers engage in little or no contact with their linked partner and are not collaborating on course goals and outcomes for the linked learning community course, how can the course be considered linked? Moreover, how can teachers integrate discipline-specific content if teachers do not in some way acculturate themselves into that discipline-specific community?

The survey asked participants whether or not their outcomes/goals for learning community students were different than those of non-learning community students. The results are summarized in Table 4.5.

**Table 4.5. Outcomes/goals for learning community students and non-learning community students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Goals</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are your outcomes and goals for your linked learning community class different than your outcomes/goals for your non-learning community classes?</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey showed that 65% of the participants (13 out of 20) indicated that outcomes/goals were not different for their courses. Information from the survey and interviews indicates that content-driven collaboration is taking place among linked partners,
yet while the conversation centers on content, the conversation does not include the outcomes and goals for that content. Therefore these results seem to challenge information about the type of collaboration taking place among linked partners and the success of the link when faculty collaboration does not match outcomes and goals to the content of the courses taught.

Further results show that only 30% of the participants (6 out of 20) indicated that the outcomes/goals of the learning community were different from the outcome/goals on non-learning community students. The following comments from Ellen and Sara, two teachers who do distinguish between the outcomes/goals of their learning and non-learning community students, show how the distinction in outcomes/goals manifests itself.

♦ "[In my learning community, course outcomes and goals were more] enhanced, much more focused on specific disciplinary communication needs." (Ellen)

♦ "I ask my learning team to do more introspection—more critique of their reasons for selecting a business major, critiquing their notions of future careers, problems, etc." (Sara)

Comments like those from Ellen and Sara are the type that I would have hoped to find among most teachers involved in learning communities where the faculty collaboration brings about more focused on outcomes/goals for students. One participant out of the 20 who sent back a survey did not answer the question.

The survey question summarized in Table 4.6 asked whether or not teachers gave learning and non-learning community students the same assignments.
Table 4.6. Assignments for learning community students and non-learning community students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Goals</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you give the students in your linked learning community class the same assignments as your non-linked learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although 70% (14 out of 20) of the participants indicated that they give the same assignments to both groups of students, recent conversations with teachers indicate that they tailor individual assignments toward discipline-specific content; however, tailoring assignments to discipline-specific majors may not be an option for large-lecture classes. Information presented in the case studies indicates that teachers who have large classes of 200 plus students do not as readily seek to accommodate different disciplines and rarely accommodate assignments in the linked class (commonly the first-year composition link).

One way for English teachers to tailor an assignment and include discipline-specific information is to integrate communication skills into the content. Additional conversations with teachers across various disciplines about integrating more communication skills into course content suggest that these teachers want communication skills added and the survey results summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7. Survey results related to question about collaborating with linked partners to integrate communication skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Goals</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are communication strategies and skills part of your course work?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high number of participants recognize the importance of communication skills in their course work. However, this high number, 80% (16 out of 20), may be due in part to the number of English teachers responding to the question who see communication skills as a basic element of English classes. This table presents the participants’ responses to being asked about
collaborating with their linked partner to integrate communication skills into their course.

**Table 4.8.** Participant responses indicating number of teachers collaborating to integrate communication skills into their course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Goals</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you collaborated with your learning community partner(s) to integrate communication skills into your course?</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey indicates that 45% (9 out of 20) of the teachers collaborate on integrating communication skills into their classes. Unfortunately, the low number of teachers who collaborate on integrating communication skills may not reflect what the students are asked to do in the classroom. If teachers ask students to demonstrate cross-disciplinary communication skills in assignments and activities for linked classes, perhaps teachers would want to use class time to model the same strategies for their collaboration with their linked partner. Teacher collaboration has the potential to bring linked learning community course outcomes/goals into clearer focus, thus making class time more efficient and effective for both students and teachers.

**Use of class time**

Survey questions about teacher use of class time reveal results similar to those in the course goals section. Results from a survey question about using class time to discuss assignments from the student’s linked class are presented in Table 4.9.

**Table 4.9.** Participant responses about using class time to discuss student assignments in linked courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of class time</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever use class time to discuss assignments your linked learning community students have received in their linked courses?</td>
<td>7 (35%)</td>
<td>9 (45%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about using class time to discuss assignments that students receive in their
linked courses, only 35% (7 out of 20) said they discussed student assignments. Of the remaining participants, 45% (9 out of 20) indicated they did not discuss linked assignments, 15% indicated the question did not apply to them, and 5% (1 out of 20) did not respond to the question. I feel that if teachers want students to make necessary connections to linked course material, discussions about assignments in linked courses are important. Failure to acknowledge cross-disciplinary assignments during class distances the teacher and student from the linked material, distances the teachers from their linked colleague, and suggests that class time is not devoted to fully supporting the linked partner’s content or outcomes/goals. If teachers are not making connections to the linked class during class time (that is, material and discussions beyond the specific course), can they legitimately claim they have a working link?

Results from the question about whether or not participants used class time differently with learning community students than non-learning community students are displayed in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10. Result of question about using class time differently for linked and non-linked students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of class time</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel that you use class time in your linked learning community section differently than in your non-learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only 10% (2 out of 20) indicated that they did use class time differently for their linked class, while 65% (13 out of 20) do not. The large number of teachers who do not use class time differently suggests that little or no distinction is made between classes even though one or more classes may be linked. For example, one of the case studies presents a teacher who teaches a large lecture class and does not alter class time or assignments to accommodate the students who are part of a learning community link. Apparently once the initial contacts are
made with the linked partner and the content is in place, ongoing discussions with students or teachers about what takes place during class ceases.

Results for a survey question that asked participants whether or not their use of class time was influenced/determined by collaboration with their linked partner are presented in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11. Results of question about the influences of collaboration from linked partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of class time</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is your use of class time influenced/determined by the collaboration between you and your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>13 (65%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for this question are somewhat troublesome because 65% (13 out of 20) participants said that class time was not influenced by collaboration with their linked partner. I now have to wonder who or what influences or determines class time use and also wonder why the class is designated as a link if teachers are dependent only on themselves to generate material. Part of the reason teachers may not seek suggestions for using class time differently may be found in a comment by David Bleich (1995):

With the increase in such explorations in collaborative classrooms have come questions and challenges. Some of these challenges can be understood as sheer unwillingness to change—a kind of rigidity of style and value that views scholarly work, and writing in particular, as always having to be done alone. (45)

Bleich’s recognition of teachers’ “unwillingness to change” may be a reason why teachers do not actively seek collaboration about how to use class time. Furthermore, based on the results of the previous question, I would have to conclude that much of the planning and preparation about the use of class time is being done in isolation. I feel that one of the principles of linked learning communities is the connection that is supposed to be made
between two classes. In order to achieve the connection, on-going contact and conversation should be part of the learning communities.

On-going types of collaboration allow teachers to collaborate on such things as class visits, field trips, and blending ideas that span disciplines. Ongoing collaboration also gives teachers the chance to inform, tell, and summarize class activities with their linked partner, and at the same time gives teachers the opportunity to share what goes on during class time and make any necessary modifications or refinements to content.

Additionally, if one focus of faculty collaboration is on effective use of class time, then sustained collaboration throughout the semester is attainable. Having sustained, consistent collaboration about the use of class time allows quicker response times to student or classroom problems and situations, as well as quicker responses to modification of course outcomes/goals. As part of the sustained conversation, teachers may ask themselves if they are using class time effectively and efficiently by focusing lessons on material that enhances and complements the linked course and at the same time using class time to support their partner or reinforce concepts introduced in the linked class.

Apparently the attitudes relative to collaboration are only being applied to students, while teachers, many of whom could benefit from another’s expertise and mentoring capabilities, are being left out. As I show in the case studies in Chapter 5, teachers involved in collaboration with their linked partners indicate an increased improvement in student achievement and student success.

Assessment

Iowa State University has a number of assessment tools for measuring the success of learning communities; GPAs, retention rates, and student satisfaction determine part of that
success. The ultimate goal of any institution is to graduate educated students, and, to that end, the university and individual colleges and departments agree upon certain outcomes and goals, usually reached by collaborative means. The results of my survey indicate that the message about the importance of working together to arrive at and assess certain outcomes and goals has not reached the classroom teacher, as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12. Results for question about differences in assessment for linked and non-linked learning community classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the assessments for your students in the linked learning community course different than your assessment for your students in non-linked learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>2 (10%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked about whether or not assessment for learning and non-learning community students was different, 70% (14 out of 20) of the teachers responding said that assessments were not, while only 10% (2 out of 20) indicated that assessments were different. Of the 14 who responded "no" to the question, three added further comment about how assessments were different for learning and non-learning community students.

♦ "They do not dropout as quickly. They tend to try harder. They also participate more freely in the class." (Amy)

♦ "[Assessments are] Slightly [different]. The LC students understand how to relate skills more their field." (Ann)

♦ "My assessment process is no different. The outcomes (grades) are higher in the LC groups. Students are assessed according to the same goals and objectives though." (Sara)

These comments suggest that the participants may have remarkably different definitions for assessment, differences that may have influenced the seeming incompatibility in
their responses. However, upon more careful consideration, these responses may be useful. Amy includes effort as part of assessment, and she believes that a positive assessment encourages students to “participate more freely in the class.” Ann believes that a factor that affects the outcome of assessment is “understanding how to relate skills,” while Sara’s comment seemingly ignores the intent of collaborating with her linked partner on assessment because her “assessment process is no different” for her linked and non-linked courses. If teachers do collaborate about course content and seek to understand each other’s class material, how can the assessment of that material not reflect a difference between learning and non-learning community students? In the teacher’s defense however, they may be using the same type of assessment tools, such as papers and tests, yet using content specific criteria or other methods to assess the results.

The results of many of the survey questions indicate a disturbing trend about commitment to establishing, maintaining, and implementing collaborative efforts. This trend continues to be exhibited in the last two questions in the assessment section of the survey. Table 4.13 deals with whether or not assessment criteria for the linked class are developed collaboratively with the linked partner.

Table 4.13. Results of question about collaboratively establishing assessment criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the assessment criteria for your linked learning community students developed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
<td>3 (15%)</td>
<td>1 (5%)</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the results from Table 4.13 show, 75% (15 out of 20) participants indicate that their assessment criteria was not developed collaboratively, while only 5% (one out of 20) said that their assessment criteria were developed collaboratively. The results also show that 15% (three
out of 20) thought the question was not applicable to them, and 5% (one out of 20) did not answer the question. In essence, teachers seemingly ignore a significant part of learning communities, and indications are that many of the factors affecting teaching, in this case developing assessment tools and criteria, are still done in isolation.

The last question of the assessment section asks participants if learning community student assignments and activities were assessed collaboratively with their linked partner. The results are displayed in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14. Results of question about collaboratively assessing learning community student assignments and activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Yes (0%)</th>
<th>No (80%)</th>
<th>N/A (15%)</th>
<th>N/R (5%)</th>
<th>Total Participants (100%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are linked learning community student assignments/activities assessed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, no teachers are assessing assignments and activities collaboratively. While 80% (16 out of 20) answered "no" to the question, 15% (3 out of 20) found the question not applicable and 5% (1 out of 20) did not respond to the question. The results of the last question are indicative of the process in place at this time as it relates to faculty collaboration in learning communities linked with first-year composition. The results of the survey questions point to a lack of comprehensive collaboration that, if undertaken by teachers, would enhance the overall quality of learning community links and learning communities.

After seeing the responses to these survey questions, I recognize that a system should be put in place to provide the incentive and motivation for teachers to fully engage their linked learning community partners. The results of the last question (Table 4.14) seem illogical in that a teacher's association in a learning community does not elicit a greater response when dealing
with material outside one’s area of expertise, unless, of course, assessment is based on material loosely connected or not connected at all to the linked learning community. For instance, assessing a first-year composition paper about a topic in microbiology becomes more difficult when course outcomes/goals, use of class time, and assessment criteria have not been worked on collaboratively.

The findings of the survey indicate that many ISU teachers in learning communities linked with first-year composition are expressing attitudes and engaging in behaviors that contradict what many educators say contribute to effective learning communities.

I wanted to gain a greater understanding of teachers and their perceptions through interviews that could clarify and expand each one’s responses to the survey. In the next chapter, I present case studies exploring the relationships among teachers associated with linked learning communities and first-year composition.
CHAPTER 5:

CASE STUDIES

"I see a successful learning community is one that the people involved, in fact, come from different backgrounds and get involved in each others lives by having the same classes together, and helping out with each aspect of learning." Tammy (learning community student in agriculture)

The original intent of my study was to identify through cases studies characteristics that form successful linked learning communities and identify the collaborative practices that promote positive characteristics, while at the same time recognizing and then reducing or eliminating non-productive characteristics in order to maximize student development and provide teachers an opportunity to develop professionally. A critical element related to faculty collaboration manifests itself not only in the frequency, type, and perception of faculty collaboration that are present, but also in the frequency, type, and perception of faculty collaboration that are expressed through limited or non-existent collaboration. Therefore, the case studies investigate what appear to be successful collaborations as well as unsuccessful ones with a particular kind of disjuncture: a lack of collaboration and communication among a large portion of the linked teachers (14 of 20 participants). I first discovered the disjunctures during analysis of the surveys of learning community teachers of courses that were purportedly linked, but for a variety of reasons had little or no collaboration.

The questions from the survey and interviews about the nature of faculty collaboration and the nature of teaching in linked courses generated additional secondary questions, which I address in the case studies. These additional questions helped me establish whether or not a models for successful learning communities could be adopted by other teachers and classes.
How do the teacher participants define successful collaboration?

What factors did participants see as affecting the usefulness of their collaboration?

Were any patterns or themes present in those collaborative efforts that were self-reported as successful?

During the interviews, upon which the case studies are based, I discovered a contrast between teachers who self-reported success and teachers who self-reported limited or no success. The differences came about in simple questions such as what constituted a learning community, as well as more complex questions about what constituted successful faculty collaboration relating to learning communities. The discrepancies between these two groups of teachers continue to reinforce my opinion that having a central administrative office for learning communities would help build and maintain consistency and eliminate or reduce misunderstanding and miscommunication problems. The case studies display a variety of demographics for participants, various forms of communication, and a wide variety of attitudes and perceptions about faculty collaboration and success related to learning communities.

In addition, the cases display the advantages of cross-disciplinary communication and collaboration in linked learning communities, which, mentioned by Matthews and her colleagues (1997), are opportunities for teachers to demonstrate growth in teaching methodologies:

Learning communities rekindle the creative side of teaching and provide new challenges for well-established teachers....By asking faculty members to recreate the curriculum, learning communities establish a climate of growth, trust, permission, and personal responsibility—key elements in self-renewal.... Learning communities demand that we again become professors who profess what we think is worth teaching while providing a creative, coherent, and supportive teaching and learning environment. (472)
I believe that faculty collaboration helps establish this "creative, coherent, and supportive" atmosphere found among collaborating teachers and the role of faculty collaboration gains importance within learning communities. In an effort to continue the conversation started by Matthews and her colleagues, I present five case studies.

Analysis of the results of the survey and interviews (Appendix B and Appendix C respectively) contributes to the exploration of five case studies, the fifth of which is a report about a group of teachers that exhibit disjunctures in the learning communities. Overall, the five cases involve 12 of 20 participants to the survey or 60% of the teacher participants. Each of the first five cases focuses on one pair of teachers who taught one or more learning community classes linked with first-year composition. The fifth and final case focuses on four additional teachers drawn from three groups:

♦ One group includes members who were given a linked course but were unaware of the link; consequently, no collaboration or communication took place, therefore, no accommodations were made for learning community students.

♦ One group includes members who were given a linked class but made minimal contact with their linked partner. Those numbers, recorded in frequency Table 4.1, include teachers responding with no collaboration, N/A, or 1-5 contacts.

♦ One group includes members who had one or more learning community groups in a large lecture class but did not collaborate or modify curriculum to accommodate learning community students. These teachers may have been aware of learning community students but took either no action or extremely limited action in distinguishing the link.
Some of the participants in Case 5 initially felt they should not respond to the survey because they had not engaged in a link (even though their course had been designated as such) or had little or no collaboration with their linked partners, and, therefore, felt they had nothing to contribute to my study.

Discoveries I made about collaboration during the study and the information provided by the participants opened my eyes to a variety of important elements taking place among learning community teachers and helped me create the four categories used to differentiate the cases.

1. High Collaboration – High Success: Case 1 participants displayed high collaboration and indicated high levels of perceived success with the linked course and linked partner.

2. Moderate Collaboration – High Success: Case 2 participants displayed moderate collaboration, yet indicated high perceived success rate with the linked course and linked partner.

3. Moderate Collaboration – Moderate Success: Case 3 and Case 4 participants displayed moderate collaboration and perceived their success with the linked course and linked partner as moderate.

4. Low or No Collaboration – Low or No Success: Case 5 participants displayed zero-to-low levels of collaboration and moderate-to-low perceived success with the linked course or linked partner.

The following cases focus my research questions about what characterizes the nature of faculty collaboration with regards to frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration and
what characterizes the nature of teaching in teachers associated with learning communities linked with first-year composition.

**The Exemplars: High Collaboration–High Success: Case 1**

This case shows how the collaborative process works in a self-reported highly successful linked learning community that also contains high levels of teacher contact. The case centers on Kim, an English teacher, and her linked partner John, a biology teacher, who exemplify high collaboration and high success. Although Kim and John have different backgrounds, they engaged in frequent collaboration, which was involved, inviting, and demonstrated important characteristics about the role of faculty collaboration and successful teaching practices in linked learning communities.

However, before discussing the specific characteristics of the case, some demographics about the participants need to be established.

**Background experience with teaching and learning communities**

Kim’s teaching experience is limited; she is in her second year of teaching and in her first year of working with linked learning communities. When asked about past types and experience with learning communities, Kim indicated that she had experience with two different types of learning communities (one in agriculture and one in biology) in three semesters of teaching. However, what is most telling about Kim’s experience is what happened the first time she taught a learning community. “Ok, like my first semester of teaching I had a learning community with the (agriculture) learning community. I had no idea I had it. I never did anything with it. It was just, I guess, given to me, and I never knew anything about it” (Taped interview, March 2001).
Kim’s first experience with learning communities is not uncommon, as will be shown in later cases, and points out a very real problem with communication among all members involved in learning communities. Lack of communication, miscommunication, and misunderstanding between coordinators and colleagues are issues that I address in the case studies. I do not believe that Kim’s initial experience is what was intended when her learning community was initiated, so her comments about issues related to the make-up of learning communities are important and provide some clarification of the entire learning community process.

John’s teaching experience is slightly different than Kim's. He is beginning his 17th year of teaching and has been involved with biology learning communities for some time.

I think six or seven years. I don’t really remember exactly when we started, and I didn’t start it. I mean I was...there were other folks that were involved in initiating it. They asked me if I wanted to be one of the faculty mentors the first year of the program, and I said sure, and I’ve continued to participate ever since. (Taped interview, April 2001)

John’s commitment to the learning community structure is a quality that should be nurtured and emulated by other teachers, so discovering what characterizes the nature of collaboration demands further study.

**Characteristics about the nature of faculty collaboration: Frequency**

Kim and John engaged in frequent collaboration, which was one important characteristic of their perceived success. As Kim points out, their ability to engage in frequent contact—occasional face-to-face meetings as well as email, service learning meetings, and class meetings—to discuss their linked courses is one criterion that sets them apart from the other cases. “[We] talk twice a semester face-to-face, we meet for an hour face-to-face, and then we do emails when needed. I’ve gone to some of the functions, the [service learning]
function that's integral to the [biology] program. He's attended my class once" (Taped interview, March 2001).

John reinforces Kim's point about frequency:

We [biology teachers] communicate with English instructors throughout the semester, in terms of email, you know and keeping up-to-date with stuff. I'd say at this point, I think the link between English and biology is good, and we've identified some things that maybe we could do better. (Taped interview, April 2001)

I believe that one characteristic of successful faculty collaboration is the continuous nature of the interaction (much like on-going student collaboration), and John mentions the on-going nature of his collaboration with Kim. Kim and John do not simply establish content early in the semester and then have no other contact. For Kim and John, frequent contact is important throughout the semester as a form of maintenance in order to ensure the strength of the connections to the students, to each other, and to the content and material. Kim also mentioned an important issue that lies at the heart of the need for consistent contact with the linked partner.

You know, I know that there are instructors who teach their link without talking to their partners, but I don’t see how that would be possible because I don’t know the first thing about biology. I don’t know the first thing about what happens in a biology class. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Kim’s comment helps establish the foundation for ongoing faculty collaboration. If contact is frequent, teachers may begin acculturation into their linked partner’s field. The linked partners also begin to build avenues of communication that may lead to stronger teaching methods and more connected activities in the classroom and help provide examples of the type of collaboration found in a successful learning community as well as the workplace.
Characteristics about the nature of faculty collaboration: Type

Kim and John use four types of different types of collaboration more frequently than any other pair of teachers in this study. While I believe face-to-face contact is important, and Kim and John used face-to-face meetings, they demonstrate that face-to-face meetings are not always necessary. For these two teachers, collaborative issues can be dealt with using other means such as email or phone. John mentioned using email to keep “up-to-date with stuff.”

Class visits are important types of contact, and Kim and John made time to attend each other’s class. According to Kim, having John visit her class was a real benefit to her students. John came at “my [Kim’s] request, but at his excited acceptance, and I do feel like we’re talking about what they’re learning in his class and what they’re learning in my class and how those things connect” (Taped interview, March 2001).

The collaboration demonstrated by Kim and John has established strong lines of communication between the two teachers and is varied enough to keep both parties interested and motivated to continue the collaboration. By continuing the collaboration throughout the semester, Kim and John have the opportunity to engage in various types of collaboration, which helps to establish and define the roles they play in linked learning communities.

Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Role

Once the contact has been established, the role of each participant becomes increasingly critical to the process. After Kim’s initial negative teaching experience with learning communities, she had an opportunity to observe others in the program and see ways in which her role and the role of each teacher could be different.

Last semester [Isabella] and I met with [John] once, all of us, the four of us, and I was new, but [Isabella] had worked with him before so I very much sat back and listened and observed and did what I could to make it work in [English] 104. But this semester,
I’m much more confident, so I met with [John] last finals week of fall with all the assignment ideas. You know, it was good for me ‘cause I was planning my next semester, and I said, these are the ideas I have for their assignments, which ones will be most helpful to them as biology writers. And he was able to really, um, you know we really talked about it, you know. (Taped interview, March 2001)

After undergoing an informal orientation session from Isabella and John, Kim saw the potential of collaboration and gained the confidence to present her ideas to John. Kim also recognized the change in her role in the collaborative process, and described her role in the process and with John.

[My] role’s changed, I mean in the first semester with [agriculture], I had no role. It was not even there. The second semester with [biology], I don’t feel like I was fully collaborating, because I didn’t have enough knowledge and security to do so. I observed [a colleague] doing it, which showed me that it was possible, it was welcome, it can happen, but I didn’t know enough to engage. But then now this semester I feel like [John] and I are on the same level. You know we have established a rapport that allows him ...and me ...to talk on the same level. (Taped interview, March 2001)

John has a similar notion about his role as a collaborator as one who is willing to be more open to new and different ideas and have the right frame of mind to accept as well as present new ideas. This willingness to engage each other and break down barriers or resistance to new ideas helps to acculturate the linked partner into an area of shared knowledge. John seems more than willing to acculturate himself into an area of shared knowledge. When asked what how he saw his role in faculty collaboration, John responded this way:

Oh, I don’t know. I guess I see my role as just being ...willing, being open to talk with English folks and taking time to visit their classes and being sure that they’re aware of when we’re [biology students] going to go out and do [service learning] things so [the English teacher] can work it into [her] schedule. And I guess I see it as sort of facilitating...I mean, I’ve had some input into what the link would be too. (Taped interview, April 2001)

John’s last statement shows how the role of collaboration changes from individual types of collaborative teaching to a greater role of helping to define characteristics about the
nature of collaborative teaching. The success of the Kim and John's link depends in part on their ability to open themselves up to unknown possibilities within the link and allow the possibilities of collaboration to potentially affect how they teach.

Characteristics of the nature of teaching: How collaboration affects practice

Both Kim and John were affected by the frequency and type of their involvement in collaborating with each other, and this involvement helped change some of their thinking about teaching. One overriding factor that seems to drive their decisions is a commitment to their students, so the decisions they made during collaboration were grounded in the desire to make connections to course material stronger for their students in the linked classes.

When asked about collaborating with John, Kim commented on the importance of keeping student outcomes uppermost in her thinking, noting also that their discussions were largely directed toward doing what was best for the students:

[Our collaboration is] about what we want for our students...[John] is a professor who cares as much about pedagogy as I do. You know, I've never worked with anyone else, but I think it's that desire to teach well that allows us to be colleagues. His motivation in doing this link is so that his students learn how to be better biologists. (Taped interview, March 2001)

One key element to Kim's comment is the potential effect collaboration has on how teachers think about pedagogy and how the role of collaboration changes what and how teachers teach. Kim's comment is also recognition of John's commitment to teaching, which is reinforced by John's own assessment of his student-focused approach:

I guess I'd have to say that, I've always been very interested in teaching and I've always been pretty student focused. I mean I was interested; I'm not going to put any percentages on this or anything. Some of my colleagues, you know, sort of take the approach of well, I'm going to go into class, I'm going to talk about these things and then I'm going to leave...but I've always been very interested in knowing what students were wondering about because I use those kinds of things to modify my lectures. So I've always really been interested in what students, you know, what their
questions and impressions and concerns are because I felt like knowing those things helped me be a better teacher. So I looked at participating in a learning community as an opportunity to know more about what the students were thinking, what they were wondering about, what they already knew. I shouldn’t be wasting their time or mine, spending a lot of effort trying to explain something to them they’ve already got a good grasp on. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Kim and John are both committed to improving their teaching practices and appear to have established a teaching philosophy that includes faculty collaboration and that drives their desire to help increase students’ knowledge. Their involvement in linked learning communities provides them a way to achieve some personal and academic goals while creating a successful course link.

What is successful faculty collaboration? Self-reported success

During the interviews, both Kim and John reported that because of their high levels of interaction with each other, they experienced success in their learning community, highlighted some of the benefits, and addressed some hindrances to faculty collaboration.

When I asked Kim what she meant by “having a successful [learning community] experience,” she noted several instances of successful collaboration:

Successful is when I have students like [Jane] who took the concept of genetic variability and applied it to genetic engineering and related in a persuasive way to argue that genetic engineering should not be undertaken to the degree that it has been because it compromises genetic variability. You know that’s successful, being able to take something from her major and use it in an English class in a clear way. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Kim also talked about another student who also demonstrated improvement based on the collaborative efforts of the teachers. “The other thing that I measure success by is [Karl] saying, ‘I went to [John’s] office yesterday, and we talked for half an hour about BT corn. He gave me all these great sources. I’m so excited.’ That’s success” (Taped interview, March 2001).
Without the combined efforts of Kim and John—collaborating on the assignment, having John agree to be a resource for his linked partner and students, and Kim integrating the biology connection to English assignments to make the connections work—these students may not have been as successful acculturating themselves into the two learning communities nor made the strong connections between the two disciplines.

When I asked John the same question about his successful experience, he responded with recognition of personal success, “Well, I guess I would say that for me personally, it’s definitely been successful. It’s been a real positive experience, a real growth experience for me” (Taped interview, April 2001). Later on however, he qualified his answer, but the qualification only reflects his continued commitment to the collaborative process. “So I think if we [both teachers] do that [collaborate], we get more participation in the service learning stuff, if we improve the English link, even more than we have, then I guess I’d be prepared to say it’s a success” (Taped interview, April 2001).

John’s answer only reinforces an earlier comment on collaboration being a developmental process. For continued success, I believe faculty collaboration needs to be continued throughout the life of the course; when it is not an ongoing process, hindrances occur.

**Hindrances to successful faculty collaboration**

Many reasons exist as to why teachers may not collaborate as much as they should or as much as they might want to and one reason, mentioned by both Kim and John, is time:

The main hindrance to collaboration is mainly time.... Jim and I can only afford to meet at the beginning and end of the semesters, sort of a heads up: this is going to happen and, ok, how did it go, and then also looking forward to what it will be....It’s possible for us to get together and meet for an hour, but that’s a precious hour. And sometimes two hours or two hour meetings would make more of a difference, would
allow us to get deeper into these issues, would allow us – me to explain to him some things that he might not understand and allow me to learn from him too. Taped interview, March 2001)

Even though Kim and John both recognize some of the negative aspects of collaboration in a linked learning community, they still engage in collaboration frequently, they vary the type of collaboration, and the roles they assume are all designed to enhance the student’s learning and, at the same time, shape what takes place in the classroom while building collegiality between teachers.

The next case study illustrates another method for accomplishing the same result attained by Kim and John, and though this next pair of teacher participants self-report high success, the level of collaboration is decidedly different.

**The Underachievers: Moderate Collaboration—High Success: Case 2**

This second case demonstrates how the collaborative process works in a learning community in which the teachers have only a moderate level of collaboration, yet a self-reported high degree of success. The two teachers are Sara, an English teacher, and Debbie, a learning community coordinator who also teaches a business orientation class. Even though Sara and Debbie collaborated less frequently than Kim and John did in Case 1, both Sara and Debbie felt their collaboration was successful and contributed to a successful linked learning community. One factor that played a role in the perceived success was Sara’s past experience in business. Her reliance on her business experience set a particular tone with her linked partner, which allowed Sara to bring a greater knowledge base to the students and, in turn, helped reduce the amount of collaboration that dealt with content.
Background experience: teaching and learning communities

Both Sara and Debbie have been associated with learning communities for some time and have worked together for the last three years. When asked about past experience with learning communities, Sara considered herself “one of the old people,” by pointing out that “I’ve done only business learning teams, and I started in 1998 in the fall with English 104 and [have] taught [in] 1999 in the fall 104, 2000 spring 105, 2000 fall 104, 2001 spring 105” (Taped interview, March 2001).

Debbie’s experience, however, is different because she is also a coordinator as well as a teacher in the learning communities. Her role as coordinator gives her a different perspective and allows her another kind of involvement in the entire learning community process. She told me that

…the fall of ‘97 would have been my first group of advisees who were involved in learning communities. And then I took over coordinating them in the fall of ‘98…[T]his fall we’ll have 17 teams. We’ve kind of been in that ballpark anywhere from 12-15, 16, 17, somewhere in that ballpark. Two of them we have are residence learning communities, linked to residence halls, and then the others are loosely linked to a residence hall, but they tend to be course-based, they share a core of courses; all of ours do. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Debbie’s role as coordinator also gives her the chance to guide the selection of learning community classes, and she is one of the links in the communication chain. Debbie’s added responsibility of coordinating business learning teams also allows her to view learning communities from a different, broader perspective. Her broader perspective transcends the daily classroom content and materials and allows her to play a larger role in the acculturation process that students undergo during their first-year college experience:

[Students need to understand] that they are part of the college of business at Iowa State. I think that’s something that’s very strong campus-wide. You know it’s that real college connection: I’m a college of business student; I’m a college of LAS student. You know
those kinds of things. And I think that can be different for students you know cause they’re used to being just part of their school, you know, a greater whole that they’re a part of, and I think we’re a little more ‘pocketed’ in some ways at the university in getting students to understand that students are a part of a piece within this greater whole. I think is important because it makes a big place a little smaller place, and I think that’s important, particularly for first-year students. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Another factor that favors this link is the length of time (three years) these two teachers have been together in creating this link, which may have affected the frequency of collaboration.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Frequency**

Sara and Debbie are in a unique situation because the frequency of contact is less than what their perceived success would indicate. The conditions that allow this situation to happen do not always match what Sara and Debbie say about their classes and are indicative of the attitudes they bring to collaboration, as Sara’s comment below points out. A discrepancy exists between the number of times Sara reports meeting and the number of times Debbie reports meeting. Sara indicated one to five times per semester while Debbie indicated 20-30 times per semester. The discrepancy exists because Sara understood the contacts to be face-to-face while Debbie included all forms of contact. However, comments from the two may give a hint to the thinking behind the collaboration and a potential reason for the difference. Sara suggests that frequent contact may not be needed or wanted.

And I guess that’s why it’s working, because I do have the background, and because writing is an integral part of business, whether female writing, or formal letter writing, or resume writing, so the match is so nearly automatic. I don’t think they feel a need for a lot of collaboration, and I’m pretty happy. (Taped interview, March 2001)

On the other hand, Debbie’s response alludes to a higher frequency of contacts. Another potential reason for Debbie’s thinking is that Sara appears to be making more
accommodations to her course, which suits Sara, but may give Debbie a false sense of what is truly taking place. The following comment by Debbie suggests a level of collaboration not necessarily shared by Sara.

You know maybe we worked a little bit harder to make a not so typical link work as well as it has worked. You know, 'cause it would be real easy to link like English and a social science class you know, because that kinda melts together a little bit easier, but to link something a little more non-traditional like an orientation course took a little more, maybe a little more creativity, a little more thinking on that, and I think it's worked out incredibly well. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Debbie’s last statement is the key to her perception of high levels of contact. She sees the link as a difficult one to make, where she needs to do “more” to make the link work, and Sara does not. What is also apparent is that the perceptions held by the partners about the frequency of collaboration affect the type of collaboration that takes place.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Type**

Although both Sara and Debbie acknowledge that collaboration is important, a type of implied collaboration takes place, which Sara describes as “collaboration by default.” Because Debbie has a particular comfort level with Sara, based on Sara’s past business experience, Debbie’s comfort level presupposes continuous or in-depth collaboration. In the past, Sara has acquiesced to the business teachers, but recently, under Sara insistence, Debbie has included specific English topics in the business orientation course.

The attitudes of the participants and the “collaboration by default” interfere with the frequency of contact between the linked partners and interfere with the acculturation process. Therefore, frequent collaboration is essential to developing the type of collaboration necessary to make meaningful connections to material for students and teachers. The uniqueness of this situation sets up a type of communication and collaboration that takes on an interesting twist.
Here Sara provides an example of the type of contact between the partners.

We went to lunch in, I think it was in March. And most of the time that we were there we had lunch with (another instructor), Debbie, and myself. We had lunch. We talked about (instructor’s) child in junior high school, we talked about (the fact that) Debbie had an [illness] we talked about how her recovery was going, things like that. Probably the last 20 min of an hour and 15 minute lunch, I said, “Well, I’d like to talk about next fall.” And they’re, “Oh yeah, sure, oh fine.” (Sara laughs) And I said, “I need some help from you. I want to make my writing assignments, my writing advising, seem more real world.” (Taped interview, March 2001)

Obviously the meeting and its agenda meant different things to each of the teachers. What is odd is the prodding that Sara has to engage in to get her colleagues to collaborate on class business. However, the social aspect of the meeting is not entirely without merit. Social conversations can help break down barriers and enhance camaraderie among teachers, which in turn can enhance collaboration about classroom issues and course content. A little further into the interview, Sara draws a finer distinction about the type of meetings she and her partner have.

Well, I do the reaching out across the curriculum. They reach out across social lines. In other words, they sit with me at the institute. They sat with me at the ISU Comm seminar last year. They send me an email message every so often. We go to coffee or lunch once in a while, 2 or 3 times maybe a year...a semester. If I need something, I can email or call them and they are right there with it. But they didn’t change their syllabus; I changed mine. They don’t change their objectives; I change some of mine. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Sara’s discerning observation about how the partners reach out to each other says a lot about the agenda (or lack of one) during collaboration, the expectations of the linked partners, as well as the interpretation of the resultant contact, perhaps another reason why she sees her collaboration as “collaboration by default.” In contrast to Sara, Debbie’s interpretation and opinion of the type of collaboration between the two becomes clear in the following comment.

We established a really good rapport early on, and I think she was very flexible in terms of what she was open to try or willing to try, and we were obviously very flexible
because in linking an orientation course that’s not really as heavily academic, you know, in order to make that link real easy. But I think Sara’s done a tremendous job in doing that, but it took the both of us together to, you know it wasn’t just me either, there were two of us at the time that taught in the course, plus our director, but you know, I think it was real easy for us to sit down and work through things together because of the willingness on both sides to make this happen. (Taped interview, March 2001)

One key element of faculty collaboration can be found in Debbie’s comment about “the willingness on both sides to make this (the link) happen.” Once both parties find the time and determine the type of collaboration, engagement in the collaborative process determines certain roles. However, Sara and Debbie do not agree on what is actually taking place in relation to their collaboration. Their comments seem to suggest a pre-conceived notion of what they want from each meeting or contact and the communication between them does not change those notions.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Role**

Sara and Debbie have different views about what determines their roles in the collaborative process, determined in part by their attitudes about what each other wants and expects, and reflected in the type of communication taking place during collaboration. When asked what her role in the collaborative process was, Sara pointed out that she saw her role and her classes in service to the goals of business and perhaps did not exert a strong enough desire to have Debbie integrate English topics into her orientation class. “[I want] to support their initiatives. That’s the way I see it. You know, I ... I ... it’s really interesting. It’s very ... now you know why I called it odd. It’s like there isn’t true collaboration, yet it is a collaborative effort” (Taped interview, March 2001).
As Sara continued with her description of her collaboration with Debbie and her role in the process, I began to see how her role and her classes lacked a focus or direction that interfered with a continuous, substantial effort to collaborate:

You know, I don’t know...I don’t know that they’re very concerned about collaborating. I think I fulfill a purpose. They have an objective to reach; I help them reach that objective; therefore, I’m collaborating...Even if I never talk to them, I think they’d still see it as a collaborative effort. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Sara’s point about her collaboration is, as she puts it, “odd,” and her last comment validates that attitude. At this point in the interview, I wanted to know more about what she was thinking in terms of collaboration, and here we discussed a rather broad definition of collaboration in which she reiterated the uniqueness of her situation:

The truth is I don’t need them because I do have the background in business—I don’t need them. And it’s almost how it is, as hectic as things are, especially when I teach in three different dormitory computer labs, it’s almost a hassle to arrange it, and I can muddle along pretty well. I bring in a guest speaker once a semester, I have in the past, I may have to quit that, because the hassle involved with the room, but anyway... So I don’t know, it’s almost like it’s working, it’s fine the way it is, it could be better, but it’s not bad so...My theory is that they’re so busy that as long as it appears to be working, and as long as I don’t ask for anything, they’re happy with it just the way it is. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Sara’s acknowledgement of her own abilities and past experience may hinder attempts to make a stronger effort to collaborate with Debbie. However, Debbie feels that she is open to Sara’s suggestions but also recognizes and respects the business experience Sara has. Perhaps by recognizing Sara’s experience, Debbie is less likely to push collaboration and, instead, trust Sara’s instincts. Yet, Debbie’s view of her role seems in conflict with Sara’s perception of the type of support given by Debbie. When asked what her role was, Debbie explains what is important to her:

The communication piece is crucial. You know, letting Sara know enough about the structure so that she can function within it, being open to suggestions or ideas, or input
from Sara in order that we can make sure our classes are providing her with the things that she needs for her portion of her link as well. I think a willingness to try things on both sides is important. But I really think the communication piece is really... You know letting each other know what’s going on whether or not either of us is supposed to do anything about it, but still letting each other know this is what we did in class today, this student is having a problem with this, you know can you talk to him. You know those kinds of things; it goes much more beyond just this is what we have to do for our class, here’s what she has to do for her class you know. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Sara’s reacculturation into the business community may be enhanced because of her past business experience, while Debbie’s need to acculturate herself into Sara’s English community is hampered by misconceptions of what Sara needs and wants from Debbie. This misunderstanding between participants affected communication and affected what took place in their classrooms. Sara’s reliance on her business sense and Debbie’s reliance on Sara created a unique collaborative situation affecting classroom practice both positively and negatively.

Characteristics of the nature of teaching: How collaboration affects practice

The type of collaboration that has been established by Sara and Debbie does not possess the same continuity as Kim and John in Case 1. Sara’s reference to “collaboration by default” forces her reliance on past business references and limits the amount of continuous, well-maintained collaboration found in Case 1. Debbie’s emphasis on communication as a key component appears to be one-sided; indications are that the collaboration has not really affected her practice.

Sara’s comments suggest that this type of collaboration affects her teaching practices in ways that place her in greater isolation and is more one-sided in terms of assistance from her partner; therefore, Sara has developed a theme-based approach to her teaching that she believes makes the necessary connections to business content and is situated in
...what ... you do out there as a business professional. And I think that's a good thing. I think that's had a very positive impact. It gives me direction; it gives me focus. I think I'm much more efficient. Not necessarily more effective, because I'd like to think I was effective before. But I think everything I do is very calculated, and I have no educational background, except experience as a student, and so this has gotten me closer to the principles of education as far as lesson plans with objectives, and building on tomorrow's lesson will briefly review what we did yesterday, build on that. I never did that before. And this has given me, coincidentally, that structure. (Taped interview, March 2001)

While Sara's thematic approach keeps her focused on the goals of first-year composition, the comment does not include any mention of collaboration with her linked partners and suggests that she planned the course in isolation. Although the thematic structure Sara has developed has not altered her adherence to the goals of first-year composition, it has altered her teaching.

I still teach the papers that are recommended in the student's guide to English 104/105. ... That hasn't been affected by my involvement in the learning community; everything else has. Absolutely everything else I do has been impacted. I rewrote my entire syllabus, I rewrote my lesson plans, I have different considerations when I lecture, I put emphasis on things I would never emphasized before. (Taped interview, March 2001)

In the last two comments, Sara makes no mention of collaboration with her partners, yet recognizes the thought process she goes through to make the necessary business connections to students. Sara is thinking about the link and the connections to her students, but the question is how much impact her partners had on her thinking about the connections she makes. Sara's comment also suggests that she believes in the "positive impact" of a thematic approach because

...it gives me direction; it gives me focus. I think I'm much more efficient, not necessarily more effective because I'd like to think I was effective before. But I think everything I do is very calculated, and I have no educational background, except experience as a student, and so this has gotten me closer to the principles of education as far as lesson plans with objectives, and building on tomorrow's lesson will briefly review what we did yesterday, build on that. I never did that before, and this [thematic approach] has given me, coincidentally, that structure. (Taped interview, March 2001)
Sara's comment about the sense of direction that she gets from the thematic focus of some learning communities is a real benefit of linked classes. Benefits such as a thematic focus should provide greater opportunity to collaborate and make that collaboration more focused and purposeful. Unfortunately, the ultimate effect of the limited collaboration in this link results in a desire by Sara to seek more from the link in order to make the link more meaningful for her students:

If they [linked partners] actually do reinforce next fall some of my conceptual approaches, then that just makes my class more meaningful to students, and when students find it more meaningful, they’re more eager, they’re more invested, the class is wonderful. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Debbie, on the other hand, finds that faculty collaboration in a linked learning community has little effect either on the way she teaches the linked course or the course content. Debbie does not think that collaboration has affected her teaching in any way:

The same kinds of things were done before [when I was involved in learning communities] and are being done now; it’s just a matter of thinking about them a little bit different especially in those [linked] sections, you know. It doesn’t necessarily drive what we do x or y in class. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Sara and Debbie are involved in a unique collaborative situation where the contact is not perceived the same way by both individuals; yet, for them, the link is working. When asked to rate their collaborative effort, Sara responded by saying that she, “would say successful, because I’m still riding on the results of the initial, more intense collaborative movement.” However, she qualified the last remark by adding that: “if you asked the same thing in two years, I might change my answer. But at this point, I’m pretty satisfied with what we’ve been doing” (Taped interview, March 2001).

As can be seen in the following statement by Debbie, she too seems satisfied with her collaborative effort in the link:
I would say that the collaboration in ours, where we’ve had the shared link in particular, has been very successful. I would say that for a number of factors. Personalities, I think of the collaborators, I think is, um, has been a good match or a good mix, however you want to say that. I think that the communication has been honest, and open and collegial, and you know we both understand that we each have our expertise in different areas and neither of us has to have the way to do it. We’re both willing to meet it the middle to make sure the ultimate goal is met. (Taped interview, March 2001)

I became curious about the ultimate goal Debbie mentioned and asked her what that goal was. Debbie said she wanted to accomplish “the outcomes and directives of the class; what are we [Sara and Debbie] trying to accomplish in each of our classes, and then how can we come together to be able to do that and still you know, kind of share some things” (Taped interview, March 2001). Her reply is interesting because of how it differs from Sara’s view of “collaboration by default,” and even though Sara and Debbie both saw positive things from their efforts, hindrances to collaboration still exist in their link.

**Hindrances to successful faculty collaboration**

Based on some of the inconsistencies in the Sara’s and Debbie’s comments, I would have thought that Sara and Debbie might have mentioned more hindrances than they did. However, the perceived success of the link may have overridden any negatives and given the linked partners a stronger sense of success. However, like Kim and John, Sara mentioned time, as well as some other factors, as a hindrance.

The extra time involved, the extra preparation for class, the meeting time, the gee, what if they want to change something, the recreation time. Those are hindrances, whereas without the collaboration the autonomy allows me to operate, like I said efficient. I’m very efficient. I have gotten now, this is gonna be the fourth fall that I’ve taught 105 or 104 business learning team, I’ve got it down now so I just tweak the assignments in August. I’ve got... my lesson plans are prepared when I start class clear through to December. I mean, it’s efficient. I like that (laughing). (Taped interview, March 2001)

Debbie, on the other hand, did not see any hindrances “because we’ve had such good success with ours [link]. I may think differently if we had more of a struggle” (Taped
The perceptions and practices mentioned by Sara and Debbie clearly indicate a moderate level of collaboration. Their success appears to be based on the self-reported expertise of one individual (Sara) and the misinterpretation of another (Debbie). From my point of view, the efforts of this link appear to work, but clearly the link can be strengthened through semester-long contact with each other. Both Sara and Debbie recognize the need for integrating more of each other’s content, but whether they will engage in more collaboration to accomplish this remains to be seen.

The Middle of the Road: Moderate Collaboration—Moderate Success: Case 3

Amy, an English teacher, and Dan, an economics teacher, demonstrate the next level of faculty collaboration and success within a learning community. Both Amy and Dan are experienced teachers, but in this case Amy’s experience with learning communities is more extensive than Dan’s.

Background experience with teaching and learning communities

Amy indicated that she has been involved with a variety of learning communities during the last four years including horticulture, Ag business, music, and economics, though she thinks that “Ag business is the most enduring, the longest nature, the longest running.”

Dan has many years’ of experience teaching; however, when asked about his past experience with learning communities, he replied that his last semester “was the first and only time” that he has had a linked class. His class was made up of approximately 90 students, 40 of whom were learning community students, which made up Amy’s two learning community sections.

In a situation similar to the last case, Amy and Dan exhibited limited collaboration, but they considered their link moderately successful. Perhaps the moderate success may be due in
part to infrequent collaboration, the type of contact that does take place when they do contact with each other, and importance they give to collaboration in learning communities.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Frequency**

Amy and Dan have both identified their link as moderately successful, based in part on the limited amount of contact they have had with each other. The infrequent opportunity to collaborate leads to a lack of continuous and sustained discussion that weakens their link.

According to Amy, time seems to be one detrimental factor in having frequent meetings with her partner, although she mentions that, “we do some planning in the summer sometimes, but it depends on availability. Last summer (Dan) was, well, in Europe somewhere... I was gone a lot ..., too.” (Taped interview, April 2001)

When the survey asked about the number of times she and her partner contacted each other, Amy indicated they had between one and five contacts. The infrequent contact may be a primary factor in the self-reported moderate success of the link, partly “because it’s such a minimum contact.” However, Amy indicates that some of the infrequent contact is beginning to change because she mentions that recently “there is more collaboration, there is more discussion, [and] more interaction between departments never hurts.”

When I asked Dan about the frequency of collaboration, he indicated that “we probably had two one-on-one meetings, and then maybe two phone calls, and then probably 10 or 12 emails back and forth until we nailed down what we wanted to do.” On the surface the amount of contact may seem fairly substantial, but Dan’s comment suggests that all this contact came before the class started – “until we nailed down what we wanted to do.” Little indicates ongoing collaboration was taking place during the semester, which may be necessary to make substantive adjustments to the direction of content, to continue monitoring student progress, or
to engage in basic discussions with a colleague in order to become inculturated into another discipline.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Type**

So far the type of collaboration that is taking place between Amy and Dan centers around what takes place in the classroom and is predominantly content driven. Amy and Dan are not an exception to this type of collaboration although the kind of material Dan suggests for Amy’s class is different and allows for some interesting cross-discipline discussion. As we will see in the next sections, the type of collaboration in this link places a greater burden on Amy who (like Sara in the previous case) is more likely to alter her curriculum to meet the needs of Dan’s class:

And then [Dan] wanted them to read *The Economist*. You know that is a pretty intense publication. Boy, is it well written, man. And *Animal Farm*, and when the students read *Animal Farm* the first two semesters, he came and talked to them about the political—about the economics of *Animal Farm*, ... He pointed out all the economic material in there. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Unfortunately, the type of collaboration that takes place between Amy and Dan results in a lack of continuous contact throughout the semester; they can only speculate about what takes place in each other’s classes. This speculation and lack of shared knowing comes from insufficient collaboration, which is reflected in Amy’s next comment. When asked about what goes on in Dan’s class, Amy said she did not know

...what he’s doing in there. They may be all multiple-choice questions; I’ve never asked. I was assuming they had an essay component on the test, but I really don’t know. I don’t think there’s a paper; they’ve never mentioned one...They did stress writing. ... He’s one of the few [teachers] who stresses [writing] always practice, practice, practice. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Even though Dan is in the Department of Economics, he emphasizes the importance of writing, and he appears to be doing this of his own volition. However, beyond his own desire
to emphasize writing, Dan’s class is not affected by the type of collaboration he has with Amy. Dan admits that being involved in a learning community does not affect his course content; “I couldn’t make too big a deal out of this in my class, because I had too many people who were not in the learning community.” From this last statement, Dan shows that his class is unaffected by the type of collaboration, or lack thereof, that takes place between Amy and him. In fact, Dan mentions that “we’re not doing it [collaborating] right now” though they started the semester collaborating.

I think that without any real type of collaboration taking place, trying to determine a role in the collaborative process is difficult. I believe that continuous and purposeful collaboration helps establish roles within the collaborative process and adds to the general tone of the contact. 

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Role**

In the case of Amy and Dan, the lines of communication between them appear so weak that determining the role of the participants is difficult. Although these two teachers indicate that collaboration had taken place early in the semester, the result of that collaboration is limited. Amy’s comments during the interview led me to ask her about whether or not she felt as if she were in service to her partner.

Yeah, I don’t know because I don’t fall into all the pits that there are, but I suppose more service than they are because I’m going to bend more than they are. My curriculum is looser. Well, as long as they (the students) do, well for 104, as long as they do a summary, you know the basic exploratory writing, then I can pretty much have them read whatever I want to and pretty much aim the assignments anywhere I want to. So I suppose I am more the service partner. (Taped interview, April 2001)
After she mentioned being a service partner, I wanted to know how that influenced her role, whether or not she was an equal partner in the link while maintaining a service role. Amy said that she thought so:

...[T]hey respect my opinions, too. You know when I said something about wanting them to read something rather than straight ag stuff, that's when (Dan) threw up the one about *Animal Farm*. I know I mentioned to him that I was very lit oriented, and so maybe that's where that came from too, you know. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Dan's willingness to incorporate literature into an economics class speaks well of his commitment to providing for students' connections to linked learning community material. Although collaboration on the tasks/content of the class was difficult, when Amy and Dan worked together early in the semester, Dan felt the results worked well.

We had to work it out as we went along. I think she and I had a challenge as to how do you integrate two very different disciplines in a way that students find convincing. And we came up with this way and we experimented with it, and that was it. I didn't... I'm not sure we could have done it any differently or any better. You know with chemistry or physics or something, I could see how there could be much more overlap, but economics doesn't have a whole lot of natural overlap with English unless you read, in my opinion, unless you read certain English texts. She picked *Animal Farm* out of a list I suggested for her. Those texts, which themselves are famous as literature, can also have a lot of economics in it. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Dan's comment shows how well collaboration can work when it is implemented. When the roles of each teacher are equal and material and ideas are shared across disciplines in a strong collaborative effort, learning communities are a great benefit to both teachers and students. What struck me as interesting was the inclusion of *Animal Farm*. Amy had always viewed the novel from a political perspective rather than an economic one. By bringing this economic view to Amy (and her students), Dan began the acculturation process for her, and Amy now had a different perspective on a well-known novel. Unfortunately for these two
teachers, this type of collaboration did not happen often enough. Without the sustained contact, strong and continued influences on teaching practices cannot be maintained, nor can continued acculturation take place.

**Characteristics of the nature of teaching: How collaboration affects practice**

The limited collaboration between Amy and Dan has had few effects on the practices of the two teachers. The times when these two did collaborate are evident: two-hour conversations about the introduction of literature into an economics class, the introduction of a European economics magazine (*The Economist*) into an English class, and some acculturation into a different discipline.

While Amy reports that collaboration does not affect how she teaches, she does point out how connections to her link are becoming a greater part of the content of the class. She felt pretty good about the collaboration with Dan:

> I think left to my own devices [my class] would be more lit based, it would be more generic, but because it was a learning community, I'd focus more on ag issues, more on economic issues, more on very, very current affairs, as opposed to lit. Not that I do a lot of that anyway, but there's definitely a difference in what they read. But as far as the way I teach, I don't think it affects the content of what I teach. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Amy's last statement draws a thin line between content and the way a subject is taught, which causes me to wonder if other teachers make the same distinction—content determines the way I teach. Dan's situation is somewhat different than Amy's because he has a large-lecture introductory class:

> We need to really get moving, and there's a lot of expectations on me and the students as to what they're going to know after this test, and I can't waste any time at all. Not that this [link] would have been a waste, but it would have been viewed as a waste by the people not in the learning community. (Taped interview, April 2001)
The restrictions that handcuff Dan and the lack of substantial and sustained collaboration between Amy and Dan are just two areas that affect the success of the link.

What is successful faculty collaboration? Self-reported success

Amy’s comments about the moderate or limited success of the collaboration are tied to the hindrances, which I address in the next section. Dan agreed with Amy on ranking the success of their collaboration and link as limited, and, during our discussion about the success, Dan mentioned one criterion for successful collaboration, which was lacking in his link—sustained collaboration:

Well, we didn’t continue it. I mean, you know successful projects are continued. So I guess what I’m saying is I got a lot out of it, but she must not because she apparently chose not to go forward with it. And I don’t know why she, what she didn’t like about how it all worked out, but whatever it is, is the reason I’m giving her only limited success. Had she been as enthusiastic about repeating it as I was, then it would have been more successful. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Amy’s enthusiasm for continued collaboration could have led this link to greater success. However, an experience she had with another link, a failed link, may give a clue as to why her enthusiasm had dampened:

The person we’re linked with has been invited to come to class [just] doesn’t come. So there’s nothing going on there. I just made two sets of assignments, one for them and one for the rest of the class, because I tried to relate theirs [class content] to things they would use (in the link). (Taped interview, April 2001)

When one member of the learning community does not commit to the link as readily as others, enthusiasm diminishes and greater obstacles are in place that hinder the success of collaboration and, ultimately, the success of the learning community link.

Hindrances to successful faculty collaboration

In Amy’s case, she sees the large lecture classes as a hindrance to making greater connections to her discipline of writing.
I’ll bet there’s 200 people in there, and I know he’s got two sections. It’s a lot of people to grade essays on. I just can’t imagine doing it.... I don’t know what their class is, I don’t know what econ’s curriculum is like enough to... I don’t know why not. I don’t know why he couldn’t give them all something and say this is what we’re going to do here in short essay things. Yeah, or paragraph development and look at some issue in depth. I don’t know why he couldn’t. But again it may be a simple matter of numbers and time cause he does a lot of research,... so he’s a very busy person, and I’m a little freer. I don’t know... I really don’t have a problem.

(Taped interview, April 2001)

Amy’s comment recognizes the difficulty Dan may have making writing a priority with 200+ students. As she hints, having students write essays and finding the time to grade them would not be an easy task. The time involved in grading 200+ essays and realizing that not all 200+ students share the same major can be a large hindrance to teachers of large lecture classes to actively collaborate on integrating certain English skills into their assignments. As an experienced teacher, Dan recognizes the restrictions of a large lecture class and the hindrances they bring to his teaching and his collaboration with Amy, but he sees little that he can do about it.

(Taped interview, April 2001)

In (my class) you’ve really, I mean, you get in there, you’ve got 15 weeks. You cram them full of stuff. You ask them... you have 4 exams and they’re based primarily on the text and their understanding of the lecture. And it’s not like a laid-back seminar where you can really tease out and see if they’re learning anything or not. It’s an introductory course, and it has to be taught like that. There’s just too much they don’t know, that they need to know very quickly before they head on to another subject. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Perhaps what can come of this comment is some assistance for those teachers involved with large lectures. If the learning community link is going to be successful, teachers of large lecture classes need to be given alternative methods for integrating linked course material that comes as a result of faculty collaboration. The one-sidedness of the link between Amy and Dan is apparent to both teachers, and though Dan does not like the conditions, he seems to have
no alternative. He recognizes that Amy does most of the work in terms of integrating his discipline into her course content, but that does not make the link any more successful:

The hindrances, there’s not a lot except that um, it’s really be easy. I was going to say, it was hard to organize. Actually, [Amy] did a lot of the work and made it easy for me. I would guess that on the scale of things, she and I did not collaborate as much or interact as much as other learning communities. Ours was like an experiment deal. (Taped interview, April 2001)

Conceivably if these two teachers continue their collaboration in the future, the information that they have given will help guide them to more successful faculty collaboration.

**The Middle of the Road: Moderate Collaboration—Moderate Success: Case 4**

The second case for the “middle of the roaders” also demonstrates moderate collaboration and self-reported moderate success. Even though the courses and teachers are different, the conditions that affect the link and cause the teachers to recognize the limits of their collaboration are similar in nature. The backgrounds of these teachers are also similar to many teachers involved with learning communities.

**Background experience with teaching and learning communities**

This case involves Chistina (Tina), who teaches English. This is Tina’s “second year taking them through it [learning communities], so I had...I took them a whole year through last year and the whole year this year” (Taped interview, March, 2001). Tina was in a unique situation in that she was able to have her learning community students the whole year rather than the traditional one semester. Tina’s linked partner is Connie who teaches a course in Human Development and Family Studies, which is another large lecture course of approximately 200 students. Connie has a number of years teaching but experienced her first learning community in the fall of 2001.
The same conditions that determined the moderate faculty collaboration and perceived learning community success from the last case are also found in this one.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Frequency**

Both Tina and Connie indicated that the frequency of contact and lack of sustained collaboration were issues that needed to be addressed by them. According to both teachers, a good deal of collaboration took place early on, but factors prohibited continuing the practice. Tina mentioned that “there’s a lot of collaboration in the planning stages ... before classes start. There was a lot of collaboration; I got to have a big hand in actually designing the learning community” (Taped interview, March, 2001). However, Tina mentions one overriding factor that restricts continuing the process: “we didn’t stick with it after the semester really got swinging.... [Connie] and I met before the semester, this summer...,” and then rarely met.

Connie also acknowledged the infrequent amount of time spent in collaboration with Tina, by indicating on her survey that they met approximately five times. As Tina mentioned, most of the contact took place before the class started and discussions focused on content. I believe that collaboration that is this infrequent affects the type of collaboration that takes place.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Type**

My research up to this point has found that the type of collaboration that takes place centers primarily, though not exclusively, on the various aspects of class content. Case 4 also has content-driven collaboration; these two teachers had limited contact and collaboration. While the collaboration was early, and not well-maintained, it did cover content along with some broader learning community issues. Even though, “we didn’t stick with it after the
semester really got swinging," the types of meetings Tina and Connie had covered content issues.

Connie and I met before the semester, this summer, and she made some alterations in the writing patterns for her class. She set up the meetings with the students. When I had instructors come to visit this semester, she was not available, so I had other HDFS instructors come, or last semester, and then have had no contact with anybody, for this 105. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina and Connie have the beginnings of a potentially strong link, but because the contacts were limited, I believe the type of collaboration was affected; as a result of the moderate contact,

Tina took the initiative to design and implement certain assignments:

I invented two assignments, a 104 assignment, and a 105 assignment, that I now think have a much broader, have a very broad use, but I invented them originally because I wanted to know what I could do with HDFS (human development and family studies) students. In 104 I developed an observation assignment. I'm still a bit wary of it beyond certain fields, ... but I developed it because early on it becomes very important, observation becomes very important in HDFS. In 105, I invented an assignment that I called audience analysis where I asked them to write the same basic piece of information to two different audiences. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Even without strong collaboration, Tina implemented what I think is a fundamental component of learning communities, student assignments that created a connection to the linked discipline. Even though Tina's last comment is about content, Tina and Connie have knowledge and insight that transcends the basic learning community link. Because of this knowledge, and Tina's experience, some of their collaboration went beyond content-driven discussions when Tina pointed out that she

...got to have a big hand in actually designing the learning community. The proposal had been submitted, which was a pretty generalized proposal, and they said they wanted to do this, this, and this, and then I was able to, the spring, it would have been spring of 99, and the summer of 99, able to work with [another instructor] and a couple of other people in actual planning how they would do this, how we would deal with the fact that a lot of the students weren't getting captured, things like that. (Taped interview, March 2001)
Understanding of the broader workings of learning communities is a distinct advantage to learning community links because Tina and Connie can provide a greater understanding of how content connections should work to positively affect practice and may help direct the type of collaboration that takes place between them. Even though the collaboration between Tina and Connie was content-driven in this situation, that content was influenced by their broader perspective, as Connie notes in her interview:

The [department] learning community that I work with is residential. They live together in the dorm, and there is a peer-mentor, they have service projects related to the field. At this time I’m teaching the introductory...course, which has that as much of its curriculum. So Tina and I were working, um, so that ...her assignments and her writing assignments would be related to human development curriculum. It started to work beautifully, and we did do pieces of it, but because the other students enrolled in her English section were not even [department] majors, it made it very difficult for her to then focus her curriculum on [the department]. (Taped interview, March 2001)

After talking to these two teachers, I concluded that they know what needs to be done to make the collaborative link successful, they want to do all the right things in terms of collaboration, and they both understand the meaningful connections that can be made with each other and the students. What these two teachers have shown is that despite their earnestness and knowledge about learning communities, barriers to meaningful and sustained collaboration exist. Much of their focus for collaboration continued to center on content issues, and unfortunately, these two teachers could not find the time necessary to maintain the link strengthen the role of collaboration.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration: Role**

After two years of involvement with learning communities, Tina has determined that her role has changed and cites low numbers of learning community students as one reason for
forcing her to alter curriculum. This type of situation defines roles within collaboration and gives Tina the impetus to make changes:

I guess I think in some ways that I might be one of the only people left who even cares about the learning community. You know what I mean. Like there is no collaboration not because...I don’t get the sense that it’s my job to change my class. There have been moments where I felt like instructors I was paired with were starting to say that, and I resisted that. No I can’t do all the changing, you have to do some... No one seeks me out to collaborate; almost all my collaborations have been initiated by me. (Taped interview, March 2001)

When asked about why she felt that she needed to initiate collaboration, Tina’s response was very reflective.

Tina: Because I think I care. I mean, I’m teaching this 104/105 because I chose it. They’re teaching 102 because they’re assigned to it, and it happens that there’s a learning community in it. I think that’s what makes the difference.

Bob: So ...it could come up that someone’s just being assigned to that class who doesn’t really care?

Tina: Right, and when you have 400 students, you’re not choosing that class because of the 10 who are in a learning community, you’re choosing it because it’s your turn, ...And I wouldn’t be teaching this 104/105 if I hadn’t chosen the learning community, and I think that’s a big difference. We choose where we want to be and a lot of our partners don’t. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina also defines her role by recognizing that she chose to teach a learning community, whereas other teachers are sometimes assigned to a particular course on a rotational basis.

When asked about her role in the process, Connie saw it, “as a collaborator, and hopefully we would ... we were instructors that were planning the curriculum” (Taped interview, March 2001). Because of Tina’s experience with learning communities Tina, “taught me [Connie] a lot, cause she’d done this before. She was ... she brought me along in terms of what the possibilities were and what we could do” (Taped interview, March 2001).

The possibilities that Connie mentions are at the heart of collaboration, and without teachers collaborating, many of those possibilities may not be reached, either by the student or
the teacher. When teachers begin to realize the possibilities of collaboration with colleagues and inculturation into another discipline, pedagogy is affected in many positive ways.

**Characteristics of the nature of teaching: How collaboration affects practice**

When Tina and I discussed how collaboration affected her teaching, she called upon the past two years experience with Connie and other teachers to provide her view of how collaboration affects practice:

My sense of the collaboration that I have done, instances where I have had collaboration, is that people have been willing, within the constraints of having a 400 person class, to alter the ways in which they think about communication in their classrooms. (Taped interview, March 2001)

When asked about whether or not she influenced the teachers to alter their ways, Tina replied that the alterations were made, “because we all sat down at a table and talked about what could be linked, how we could do things.” When teachers are willing to sit down and talk together about teaching options, they begin to move away from isolating themselves and move toward sharing knowledge across the campus.

Connie’s knowledge about learning communities gives her insight into how the phenomenon of isolation affects practice and sets in motion a shift toward teachers’ methodologies.

We see teachers isolated in their teaching efforts. I mean they plan it, you go into the classroom, the door’s shut, and you teach, and then you come out and you might talk about it especially if you’re having a disruptive student or a frustrating situation, but you don’t really talk about your teaching and your planning of the course, and we don’t at universities. We’ve never enhanced this feeling of making teaching community property. It is a very isolated, lonely, closed-door phenomena, and you met what your were told to do for that course, and it was between you and the students. What this (collaboration/learning communities) does is it starts changing the paradigm. There’s a paradigm shift to making teaching more community property. We’re going to share, we’re going to talk about what we’re doing, we’re going to plan jointly, um and get into each other’s classroom, class participation. It’s so difficult to accomplish at this level. You can learn so much from that, seeing each other’s style, all kinds of things that are
on the periphery. So I see that as a real goal – making connections and then making teaching community property. That would be my dream for this. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Connie makes an insightful observation about “making teaching community property”.

Perhaps this comment is what is behind events like the Learning Community Institute. By attending the Institute, teachers will find the opportunity to collaborate, not only with their linked partner, but also with other teachers, and at the same time finding opportunities to foster new relationships and new potential links. Connie’s idea about teaching becoming community property is innovative thinking and teaching as community property would require teachers to share a great deal of themselves, their ideas, and creativity, as well as their time. However, hindrances to successful collaboration exist. If some of those hindrances are reduced or eliminated, perhaps Connie can realize her goal of teaching as community property.

Hindrances to successful faculty collaboration

As the cases progress, more and more hindrances to faculty collaborating appear. Hindrances such as time, planning and teaching in isolation, and a lack of motivation due to small numbers, or an unwillingness by some to alter teaching methods for large lecture courses are just a few. Tina’s experience with and insight into the process and development of learning communities makes her comments about hindrances timely and noteworthy:

So it’s... the class links are much looser (in her link). I’ve never had more than 10. I had 10 first semester 104. Two of those people weren’t officially in the learning community. I sort of discovered that they also were the same major. Somehow they had slipped through the cracks, so we sort of adopted them in, but we had 10 then. But with so many people testing out of 104, and then, they haven’t found a really good way to get all of the HDFS students into the link, I don’t know why. I always have a minority of students in the link. So that’s a hindrance, because the kinds of things we talk about in this link don’t translate well to a larger class population. So if I had someone in Animal Science, I could see talking about endangered species. When you have early childhood education students the rest of the class is not going to sit through bottle-feeding vs breast-feeding. So we have to find really creative ways to do it like the
selling, the convincing of women to use formula in third world countries even though
the water was dangerous and it had a negative effect. You know, so we sneak it in as,
you know, some other type of conversation, business, ethics or something like that.
(Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina also made an observation that no one else had made up to this point, an observation that
has the potential to reveal a particular hindrance to successful collaboration. However, more
study would have to be done in order to see if what she says is a common occurrence across
campus. Tina observed that part of what may interfere with successful collaboration is “that the
people who propose these links... are not the people teaching them” (Taped interview, March
2001).

One hindrance for Connie and others is “development time.” Development time could
include such things as time to visit other classes that are models of success or time to explore
“expectations and possibilities for linked courses” (Taped interview, March 2001). In Connie’s
case, time was indeed a factor because she and Tina were unable to continue the link. After the
initial collaboration before the semester started, the link deteriorated and was less successful
than hoped.

What is successful faculty collaboration? Self-reported success

When asked, both Tina and Connie reported moderate success with their collaboration
in the learning community. These two teachers have spent some time examining learning
communities and their roles in them, so when they report moderate success in their link, that
degree of success is based on careful analysis of the situation. Tina’s self-reported success was
moderate:

[I would] say moderately successful, because the students seem happy. I feel like
they're missing out on so many benefits that they could get. But I don't get a sense that
my students feel that they're missing out on something by being in learning
communities or feel that they're not getting all they should. So clearly, they're seeing
benefits to it that satisfy them in some way. but I wouldn’t claim it highly successful because I think there are so many more benefits that they could get academically, with increased interaction among their courses, with increased interaction with individual instructors, with increased access to social activity that are pertinent. So, it’s a situation where they’re happy, but I feel like they’re missing out. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina’s next comment takes the concept of success and moves it away from students to encompass larger issues about learning communities. Also, I think that in order to be successful, a learning community has to have widespread support throughout the department and the university. Tina recognizes this point as part of her self-reported moderate success:

And if the [department’s] learning community demonstrates anything, it’s that when you don’t have that support, it really doesn’t matter what benefits you plan, what mechanisms you put in place, the success is going to be severely limited because of the level of participation you’re going to get from faculty and staff. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina’s comment underscores a consistent theme I heard during my conversations with teachers; if you want learning communities to be successful, then support must come at all levels, including providing time to meet, compensating teachers for those meeting times, recognizing the value of teaching collaboratively, and increasing the participation of teachers in collaborative teaching. In fact, first-year composition teachers are compensated for their participation in learning communities.

Faculty collaboration has been left to the consciousness of the teachers who care deeply about their teaching practices and their students and have found a balanced focus that puts student learning and content issues on even ground. But even those conscientious teachers have difficulties finding the time, resources, and rewards for their efforts. Some might say that the rewards are found in helping students; however, a lack of recognition and support for teacher’s efforts can discourage motivated teachers and learning communities lose a valuable
resource—teachers who are interested in students making connections to cross-disciplinary material.

Connie also comments about a potential problem, which may account for some of the limited success in her learning community. Her comment is also about support, in this case support for recruiting more students to her program. Connie comments about her collaboration and learning community success:

honest opinion of it would be moderately successful....Right now I'd say moderately; we've tried it, we've seen what happened, we've seen our potential to move forward. We, like everybody else, got less from what we thought we were going to get, so we're deciding how we're going to move forward with that, but hopefully we'll know what we want to do next. But recruitment's going to be a sticking point. (Taped interview, March 2001)

Tina and Connie are willing to put the necessary effort into their link despite the hindrances to their perceived success. Unfortunately, the willingness and motivation that Tina and Connie possess to try and make their collaboration work is not found in all linked courses as will be demonstrated by the next section.

**The Disjunctures: Low to No Collaboration—Unsuccessful Link: Case 5**

For reasons of continuity, I use the term “case” to refer to the teachers I discuss in this section. However, this “case” is a departure from the format of the previous four cases because of the nature of the disjunctures exhibited by the participants. Also, rather than demonstrating the paired collaboration of the previous cases, the participants in this case did not collaborate with a linked partner; therefore, this case presents these participants as non-paired individuals.

In order to demonstrate the type of disjunctures in Case 5, I present an example of two non-paired individuals, Andy and Delores, whose situations represent nearly half of the teachers involved in linked learning communities 44% (16 of 36). For instance, when I asked
Andy about collaboration, he felt that collaboration meant someone was going to “be looking over [his] shoulder” while he was teaching and also felt that he would have to meet with his linked partner on a regular basis, something he did not want to do because of the time commitment. Therefore, in his situation, he only contacted his linked partner twice, once during the Learning Community Institute and once, shortly thereafter, when he sent an email asking for a syllabus.

In another example, Delores returned a blank survey on which she indicated that she was not involved in a linked learning community when, in fact, she was on the list provided by the Learning Community Web site as part of a linked course. Because Delores did not respond, I have no information from a survey or interview (which she declined to do) to find out why a discrepancy existed. The fact that these two individuals displayed these situations shows a need to report situations about the lack of faculty collaboration and the lack of functional links.

In order to report such information, I used the following conditions to select the four teachers in Case 5. These conditions for each teacher may be a single condition or a combination of those listed.

Collaboration

♦ Limited collaboration: 2-3 contacts

♦ No collaboration: 0-1 contacts (one contact to find out if the link was active or not)

Communication problems

♦ Miscommunication or no communication between learning community coordinator and the teacher
♦ Teacher has awareness of link in a large lecture class, but makes no accommodation for learning community students and does not communicate this situation with the purported linked partner

♦ No communication is established between the link

Courses

♦ Course was part of a cluster usually involving three classes

♦ Rotational courses—teachers do not choose to be linked but are assigned

Case 5 explores, at various levels, the experiences of the following four individuals:

Ann—English teacher

Linda—English teacher

Greg—agriculture teacher

Dean—agriculture teacher

Background experience with learning communities

Ann, Linda, Greg, and Dean have varied teaching backgrounds as well as varied experiences with learning communities. Ann and Linda have only taught one year and have one semester of learning community experience each, which is typical of teaching assistants in the Department of English. Greg is an experienced teacher but has only been involved with learning communities for two semesters. Dean is also an experienced teacher and has taught three semesters of classes with learning community students. Greg and Dean also both teach large-lecture courses that include learning community students. The experience level and teaching load for Greg and Dean are typical of other introductory classes linked with first-year composition. The limited amount of learning community experience of all four individuals may be one of several factors that had a bearing on the collaboration that did or did not take place. I
recognize that more successful links occurred with equally inexperienced teachers (e.g., Sara and Debbie in Case 2); however, the success of those other links may be due in part to the collaborative efforts of the two teachers and some implicit mentoring or modeling behaviors.

**Characteristics of the nature of faculty collaboration**

As I have pointed out before, time seems to be a central factor interfering with faculty collaborating with each other. Ann and Linda had little time to collaborate with a partner because they found out about their link too late. Ann found out she had a learning community “the day classes began,” while Linda found out “months into the semester.” Greg had a similar situation in that he “was not informed that this was a linked course this semester.” Reasons why teachers are late getting information about a linked learning community include things such as miscommunication or no communication between the coordinators or a shift in personnel due to a new section of first-year composition opening up late.

Dean’s situation was somewhat different in that he knew about his link approximately three months before the semester began. However, Dean indicated on the survey that he felt a “lack of personal time to develop the link,” and even though he had two contacts with his linked partner, one before the semester began and one shortly after school started, the linked partner initiated both contacts.

These four teachers were placed in situations that could have been beneficial to both students and teachers. The teaching experience of Greg and Dean could have been used to mentor younger teachers. The opportunity to teach in a learning community environment is also an opportunity to explore different teaching methodologies and explore new disciplines with a linked partner. Unfortunately, the collaboration that could have taken place did not largely because of communication problems.
Communication hindrances

In the matter of these four teachers, a lack of communication existed on various levels. On one level was a lack of communication between the linked partners as neither linked partner contacted Ann or Linda. This does not exclude Ann and Linda from initiating contact with their linked partner; however, the reasons for the communication oversight exist on several levels:

♦ The linked partner had no knowledge of the link. Instances exist where the coordinator does not inform the teacher of large lectures that learning community students are present.

♦ The courses were part of a cluster rather than a paired link. Teachers who are part of large lecture classes believed that the link was established in the smaller breakout sessions or labs and that they had no responsibility to do anything.

♦ Misunderstanding and miscommunication existed between the teachers and the coordinators. While resources like the Learning Community Institute provide teachers an opportunity to meet, assumptions about initiating the conversation or not realizing what was to be done or how to start the conversation exist.

Whatever the reasons for the lack of contact and communication, little or no collaboration was taking place among these teachers. For example, Greg’s situation has similarities to Ann and Linda in that he had no communication with his linked partner because his coordinator did not inform him about the link. Doug’s situation was somewhat different from the other three teachers in that he knew about his link but did not have the time (or take the time) to collaborate.
I believe that something more than the lack of time lies beneath the scarcity of communication between many of the linked partners. Other factors that affect communication and collaboration may be a lack of outside stimulus or incentive, a lack of personal motivation to collaborate or initiate communication, or a lack of importance placed on sustained communication and collaboration. Another factor that hinders the communication process might be the way courses are designed around the link.

**Characteristics of the nature of teaching: Course model and design**

Early in this study I referred to figures by Vincent Tinto and Jean MacGregor that showed different models for learning communities (Chapter 2 Figure 2.1 and 2.2). During recent conversations with teachers and information from interview data, I discovered that teachers do not understand how learning communities are constructed. Teachers do not necessarily need to know how links work, but that knowledge could help communication between links. For example, one teacher of a large-lecture class linked with a first-year composition class believed a link existed in the lab/breakout session (Freshman Seminar). Therefore, he did not engage in collaboration with the first-year composition teacher and the link became non-functional. This is an example of cluster courses rather than linked courses. However, coordinators and departments may be confused about linked courses and cluster courses; therefore, when departments request a link with first-year composition, all parties involved should know what is expected in linked courses and what is expected in cluster courses. Regardless of the designation, faculty collaboration should take place among all involved. Both Greg and Dean teach large-lecture courses but indicated that participation in linked learning community courses did not change their student outcomes or goals for their course, nor bring about meaningful collaboration with their linked partner.
Knowing this, I question the value of involvement in a linked course where the collaboration and communication across disciplines—which should be inherent in all the linked learning community courses—does not occur. Without collaboration and communication across disciplines, learning communities appear to bring about no changes in what and how courses are taught or what or how the students learn.

One aspect of learning communities that needs further study is course design or course match-ups. Several comments from teachers in this study indicated that the large-lecture courses, as most teachers apparently present them, are not conducive to successful learning communities. Some of Greg's comments demonstrate the distance between him and his students, with this distance hindering any form of connection to a discipline other than his own, because “I've got 200 students out there, and I didn't know which ones were in the learning community” (Taped interview, March 2001). Even if he recognized the existence of the link, Greg would have a problem with “treating some subset of my class differently. If I'm going to offer them something, I'm have to offer it to all of them [the rest of the large class]” (Taped interview, March 2001). Greg's comment and the attitude it reflects prevent constructing a sustainable, successful link and adds to the hindrances to faculty collaboration.

Overall, if Iowa State is going to continue supporting the learning community concept, several efforts should be taken by administrative units to ensure collaboration among its teachers. Continuing the grass-roots efforts of willing teachers is not enough. Centralizing some management issues of learning communities in order to encourage and aid collaboration is critical as well as help to eliminate misunderstanding and miscommunication among the links.
The five cases in this chapter show the various types of collaboration taking place among the linked courses and the perceived success of the collaboration and the link. While several teachers successfully collaborate with a linked partner, many more teachers have limited or no contact with the link. As demonstrated by Case 5, when no functional link exists no collaboration takes place. If teachers are not collaborating, fewer connections to cross-discipline material are being made. Given that some “links” exhibit these conditions, I have to wonder how the courses can be considered linked.

However, the cases also reveal the talent of the teachers involved with the linked learning community classes. Case 1, Kim and John, is a prime example of the type of strong collaboration that results in teaching practices that help students learn. The teachers in Case 1 should become a model for a type of collaboration that is possible among other teachers.
CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

"For the most part I have been impressed with how my classmates and I have bonded and formed a community. I think the aspect of community is what I like best about the learning community experience. It is not like we sought each other out...we merely became friends, all of us, through our close knit...section. The network of friendship and study groups spread from one thing to the next. The whole group started out as merely classmates, now we go out together to social events, consider each other friends and hold a true respect for one another." Amanda (learning community student in agriculture)

A brief summary of my study indicates that Iowa State has made tremendous strides since 1995 in implementing learning communities linked with first-year composition and in displaying innovative, forward thinking in the overall scheme of learning communities. Support for learning communities has come in the form of things such as the allocation of funds by the central administration, a stipend for English teachers involved in teaching first-year composition, release time for learning community coordinators in many departments, and the Learning Community Institute, which hosts once-a-year presentations featuring experts in the field of learning communities like Vincent Tinto and Jean MacGregor. While these resources are key components in the success of learning communities, the most important element that Iowa State has at its disposal is the pool of talented, committed teachers associated with learning communities.

If Iowa State’s talented teaching pool is paired with a strong collaborative effort in the linked courses, Iowa State will meet the challenge of strengthening the frequency, type, and role of faculty collaboration, which is critical to the growth of linked learning communities at Iowa State. Iowa State needs to continue to promote positive characteristics of learning communities, while at the same time recognizing and then reducing or eliminating non-
productive characteristics in order to maximize student development and provide teachers an opportunity to develop professionally.

My study explored critical characteristics of faculty collaboration and the nature of teaching practices resulting from faculty collaboration in planning first-year composition and linked learning community courses at Iowa State University. Specifically, the study focused on two questions:

1. What characterizes the nature of faculty collaboration in courses linked with first-year composition? Specifically, what are the frequency, type and perceived role of faculty collaboration?

2. with first-year composition? Specifically how are course goals, class time and assessment used by teachers?

The answers to these questions point out that Iowa State learning communities display some positive characteristics and show support for the learning community initiative. However, as supportive as the Learning Community Institute is and as talented as the teachers are who engage in learning communities, success is inconsistent in part because faculty collaboration is sometimes inconsistent and sometimes non-productive even nonexistent.

Inconsistencies in teacher collaboration affect success; teachers cannot or do not make the time necessary to maintain a strong consistent channel of communication and collaboration with their linked partner. Creating a vibrant linked learning community course takes time—time to establish a collegial relationship with a partner, time to acculturate partners into another field or area of interest, and time to build meaningful content into a class structures in order to achieve consistent success in the linked courses.

Inconsistency also exists in defining a learning community. What constitutes a linked
learning community for one department is not always the same for another. For instance, is a student part of a freshman interest group, a clustered course, or a linked class? Does the learning community have a residential component, complete with a peer mentor?

Another vital component present in less successful linked learning communities is infrequent and inconsistent communication, which exists on several levels between coordinators and teachers, between coordinators and departments, and to a large degree, between teachers, resulting in a lack of consistent and sustained faculty collaboration.

All of the aforementioned challenges—time, definition, contact—can be positioned under one of three categories:

♦ public relations challenges
♦ teaching challenges
♦ communication challenges

To some degree, all three challenges deal with certain aspects of communication. The large size of the university may be a factor in the lack of sustained and consistent communication among teachers. Though learning communities began as a grass-roots effort, this effort appears to have grown large enough that the whole process is now at a crossroads and may be too big to sustain itself without more direction or guidance. A centralized system providing more coordination could manage the growing number of learning communities and make sure that all available resources, both faculty and administrative, are implemented, talented teachers are recruited, and communication problems are reduced. The successes of learning communities are impressive—as Kim and John illustrate. However, for many more teachers non-productive or non-functional links exist. Without some sort of system in place to manage aspects of the process and provide greater support, learning communities at Iowa State
will continue to look good on paper, but the day-to-day teaching, collaborating, and community atmosphere touted as a benefit of learning communities by the university will continue to be a challenge to teachers and a barrier to teacher collaboration.

**Public relations challenges**

The public relations challenges to teacher effectiveness in linked learning communities fall into two categories:

- Recruitment of students and teachers
- Inconsistencies in what is promoted and what is actually happening

One area of interest for Iowa State, and one that may be the most visible, is public relations. Recruiters from many departments on campus actively pursue prospective students, in some cases for specific learning communities. The surveys and interviews in this thesis show that in some cases a substantial and sustained link with first-year composition is difficult to make with only five, seven, or nine learning community students in an English class of 26.

Table 6.1, taken from a list provided by the Department of English, shows the number of students enrolled in courses linked with first-year composition.

The table clearly shows the large discrepancy in the number of students enrolled in linked courses linked to first-year composition. Of these 23 learning communities, nearly 35% of them have less than half of the students in the learning community. And only another 35% have all of the students in a learning community.

As a result, can teachers of linked courses that have such low numbers coordinate and collaborate on purposeful connections for all students? If so, the impact on learning and public relations should reach new levels of success and lessen potential teaching challenges.
Table 6.1 Number of students enrolled in learning community sections of first-year composition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LC Link with FYC</th>
<th># LC Students</th>
<th># Non LC students</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACES</td>
<td>2 (8%)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td>4 (15%)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IndEng</td>
<td>5 (19%)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChemEng</td>
<td>7 (28%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS</td>
<td>8 (30%)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>9 (35%)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>11 (42%)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnEcology</td>
<td>11 (44%)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>17 (68%)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AgBusiness</td>
<td>19 (79%)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>20 (79%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>23 (88%)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>23 (88%)</td>
<td>3 related majors</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnSciences</td>
<td>25 (96%)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>24 (96%)</td>
<td>1 non-LC won't</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicult.</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AgEng/AST</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicult.</td>
<td>16 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>20 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnScience</td>
<td>24 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnSciences</td>
<td>25 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>26 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agronomy</td>
<td>26 (100%)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never got started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Never got started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-link</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers need to collaborate about course content so meaningful connections can be made for the limited number of learning community students, while at the same time making content relevant to non-learning community students. One way to solve the problem of low numbers in linked courses is to have the department requesting the link with first-year composition recruit larger numbers of students or place students who have related majors in with the linked learning community students.
Another way to help reduce public relations' challenges is to continue to recruit talented teachers who are interested in collaborating in linked courses and help acculturate teachers into another discipline. According to Lenning and Ebbers (1999), schools should recruit “two types of faculty…’early adaptors’ and those known for innovative classroom techniques” (76). Teachers who are enthusiastic and engaged can be used as models for other teachers and help recruit students and act as a resource for bringing other talented teachers into the learning community family.

Another public relations challenge Iowa State should address is the inconsistency in what is promoted in learning communities and what is actually happening. Public relations information, in the form of such things as articles and books, herald increased GPAs, higher retention rates, and student satisfaction, which are important. However, not much is presented about the extent to which teaching methods improves, faculty collaboration increases, and teachers’ acculturation improves.

**Teaching challenges**

Certainly, low numbers of learning community students in linked courses are but one teaching challenge to overcome; however, other challenges to teaching are present:

**Lack of support services**

- A lack of support for changes in philosophy and pedagogy beyond the Learning Community Institute
- A lack of resources such as teacher mentoring programs, sample syllabi, and activities
- Lack of recognition by administration for participation in learning communities with regards to promotion and tenure
Violation of good teaching practices coupled with the poor use of teacher resources

- Planning and teaching in isolation
- Courses that have rotating teaching assignments
- Large lecture classes

Once teachers find out they have low numbers of learning community students for a linked class, they may ask themselves, "Now what? What can I do with these students and where do I go if I need help?"

Iowa State has several support services in place to provide assistance to teachers such as the Learning Community Institute, usually offered in the spring semester of each school year. The institute gives learning community teachers of the opportunity to meet and discuss areas of interest and concern pertaining to learning communities, as well as provide an opportunity to meet with their linked partner. Yet another source is the Learning Community Web site (http://www.iastate.edu/~learncommunity/), which has as one of its features a list of other schools that also offer learning community opportunities. While not directly associated with learning communities, ISUComm is designed to provide teachers with information and resources for implementing communication skills in their courses. These available resources can assist teachers at Iowa State in meeting some of the teaching challenges they face.

While Iowa State provides a variety of resources for teachers, a lack of support still exists for teachers on several levels. For example, teachers new to teaching learning communities do not have access to past linked material, and, based on conversations with several teachers, I find a faculty-mentoring program that exists only on the most basic level. Last, at the time I began the study, the administration was undertaking dialogue about recognizing teaching as an added criterion for promotion and tenure. According to Dan and
John (both tenured faculty), work done by teachers in linked learning communities was not recognized as highly as other criteria for promotion and tenure.

Recognition of good teaching and involvement in learning communities are both important steps in moving teachers out of the isolation and into involvement with other teachers and other disciplines. If a system is in place for teachers to engage in collaboration and teachers in a department are modeling collaborative behavior, other teachers may be enticed to do likewise. However, when teachers are put on a rotational schedule to teach linked courses, the incentive to build a strong collaborative bond with a partner may not be present. Thus, no matter how much modeling or recognition of good teaching practices goes on in a department, not all teachers will fully engage in faculty collaboration.

Another area where teachers are not fully engaged is found in teachers of large lecture classes. Large-lecture classes need to be viewed in a different way in relation to learning communities. A class of 100-400 students may only have 20-40 students who are in a linked or clustered class. Unless these teachers are shown how to be innovative with this configuration, faculty collaboration suffers. Faculty collaboration may be the one ingredient large lecture classes need to help students and teachers connect with course material.

Communication challenges

Communication challenges to linked learning communities exist on two levels. The first involves communication between coordinators and teachers of linked courses. My data indicate that some teachers are not aware of the extent of the link with which they are associated or who the linked partner is. Indications are that coordinators do not always inform teachers that a class is linked with another or that those teachers of large-lecture have learning community students in their classes. If classes are to be considered linked, teachers should be
made aware of the link, who the link is with and the number of students in class. In order for classes to be considered linked, establishing communication between coordinators and teachers is critical to the development of the link.

The second level of communication challenges is between teachers within the link. Once a link has been established, both teacher should communicate with each other to determine course content, student activities and assignments, in addition to collaborating about assessment, the use of class time, and student issues. Communication between teachers, in the form of collaboration, is a foundational component of linked courses. Without continued and sustained communication, faculty collaboration breaks down and links can become non-functional.

Iowa State is currently at a juncture in the growth of its learning communities in relation to the challenges of public relations, teaching, and communication. What has kept Iowa State at the forefront of learning community practice are the teachers who have come forward to work with learning community students. I believe learning communities at Iowa State can be better because I believe in the potential of faculty collaboration to add a new dimension to the practices that take place day to day in the classroom. Iowa State needs to harness the energy already in place in classrooms across campus and in teachers such as Kim and John featured in Case 1. Iowa State needs to continue to move learning communities forward to the next level of commitment and achievement. At the same time Iowa State needs to remember the high ideals set in the goal of the Learning Community Institute’s Web site, which is “to promote innovations in learning community program design to enhance student learning, with an emphasis on developing course curriculum, structures, rewards, and specific learning activities.” Therefore, with this goal in mind, I propose several recommendations for
Iowa State's learning communities.

**Recommendations**

Based on my analysis of the survey and interview data—especially the portraits presented in the five case studies—I am making recommendations that could strengthen the learning community initiative at Iowa State University.

Public relations

♦ Recruit more students for learning communities to reduce the ratio of linked learning community students to non-linked learning community students in linked English courses. I would recommend that English classes with low numbers of learning community students be dropped until such time as there is a full complement of students.

♦ Implement measures to ensure that students in English classes are all the same or related major.

♦ Recruit teachers willing to engage in learning community pedagogy. Teachers unwilling to engage in learning community practices, including teacher collaboration, should be grounds for removing the linked course designation. Rotational assignments for faculty should be kept to a minimum, and teachers not wanting linked courses should indicate their desires and steps taken to remove the link.

Teaching

♦ Assign learning community teachers with enough advanced notice to ensure collaboration by linked partners. The Learning Community Institute could be designated as the first contact session.
♦ Provide teachers of large-lecture classes with alternative teaching strategies that include active teaching and learning practices. Teachers who wish to move beyond a strictly lecture-based delivery may find alternative strategies in conferences such as the Learning Community Institute and ISUComm.

♦ Make linked learning community course material available online in order to provide a resource for teachers. Access to this material should be available to all teachers with the goal to make teaching community property.

♦ Provide incentives to teachers of linked learning communities. Presently, for example, teaching assistants and temporary instructors in the Department of English receive a stipend. Measures should also be taken to compensate faculty in a manner commensurate with their position.

Communication

♦ Centralize and coordinate efforts to reduce or eliminate non-productive communication between departments, between coordinators and teachers, and between linked partners.

♦ Centralize and coordinate efforts to disseminate information related to learning communities such as updates to learning community policies and procedures, Learning Community Institute information and related conferences, calendars of events announcing upcoming departmental events—guest speakers, presentations, and conferences.

♦ Inform teachers of links made by departments. Coordinators should give teachers the option of establishing the link or dropping it. Whatever the decision, communication between departments and teachers must be established
to help eliminate non-productive links.

♦ Establish lines of communication. Teachers of linked courses should communicate throughout the semester. Suggestions guidelines can be found through the Learning Community Web site’s link to the Department of English Protocols and information provided by the Department of English learning community coordinator.
APPENDIX A:

Learning Communities: Fall 2000
## Learning Community Sections: Fall 2000

(List provided by assistant learning community coordinator-Department of English)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LC Link</th>
<th>Sect. No.</th>
<th>English Teacher</th>
<th># LC St.</th>
<th># Non LC St.</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
<th>Degree of integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACES</td>
<td>104-HB</td>
<td>Laura Fuller</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Helen Olson 4-1438</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AgBis</td>
<td>104-17</td>
<td>Alzire Messenger</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ebby Luvaga 4-5765</td>
<td>Substantial content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>104-18</td>
<td>Alzire Messenger</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Substantial content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agronomy</td>
<td>104-21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CANCELLED AS LC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnScience</td>
<td>104-30</td>
<td>Bob Corey</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Doug Kenealy 4-6022</td>
<td>Content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnEcology</td>
<td>104-ML</td>
<td>Scott Thune</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>John Burnett 4-3681</td>
<td>Content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>104-FL</td>
<td>Sherry McGough</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ann Farni 4-8431</td>
<td>Content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>104-KP</td>
<td>Sherry McGough</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Content link</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>104-MK</td>
<td>Sherry McGough</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>Content link</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AgEng/AST</td>
<td>104-39</td>
<td>Elizabeth Wardle</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Howard 4-5025</td>
<td>Genre/content link high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>104-33</td>
<td>Carolyn Kelly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gail gone till 6/28; Barb Osborn 4-0037</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS</td>
<td>104-22</td>
<td>Terri Burack</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Corly 4-2402</td>
<td>Genre/content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IndEng</td>
<td>104-24</td>
<td>Sam Miller</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Deb 4-1603</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>104-14</td>
<td>Kelly Peterson</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lynn Smith 4-2558</td>
<td>Content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>104-10</td>
<td>John Jamison</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nancy Bourny 4-6831</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicult.</td>
<td>104-20</td>
<td>Carol David</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Doug Gruenwald</td>
<td>Different animal entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td>104-MC</td>
<td>Adrienne Lambert</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peggy Talbert 4-3181; Dian Bystrom</td>
<td>Never got off the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wom/Pol</td>
<td>105-MN</td>
<td>Adrienne Lambert</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Peggy Talbert 4-3181; Dian Bystrom</td>
<td>Never got off the ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnSciences</td>
<td>105-14</td>
<td>Al Clarke</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Doug Kenealy 4-6022</td>
<td>Some content link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AnSciences</td>
<td>105-16</td>
<td>Al Clarke</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some content link</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td>105-25</td>
<td>Lee Furbeck</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Barb Osborn 4-0037</td>
<td>None or little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro</td>
<td>105-10</td>
<td>Joe Sample</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Nancy Bourny 4-6831</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChemEng</td>
<td>105-19</td>
<td>Jay Judge</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Wendy Ortman 4-7643; James Hill</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105-17</td>
<td>CANCELLED AS LC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST</td>
<td>105-11</td>
<td>Irene Fuass</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3 ok, related majors</td>
<td>Lynn Smith 4-2558</td>
<td>Content, maybe some genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicult.</td>
<td>105-15</td>
<td>Julie Minkler</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Doug Gruenwald</td>
<td>Different animal entirely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105-HL</td>
<td>Karla Block</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Different animal entirely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105-18</td>
<td>Carolyn Kelly</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Different animal entirely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>105-27</td>
<td>Barb Duffelmeyer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Barb Duffelmeyer</td>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>105-21</td>
<td>Amanda Fields</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1 non-LC won't leave</td>
<td>Ann Farni 4-8431</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL Bus</td>
<td>101C-1</td>
<td>Roberta Vann</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ann Farni 4-8431</td>
<td>High content link--our LC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag 356</td>
<td>309-D</td>
<td>Dave Roberts</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coach/Tom Polito</td>
<td>High genre/content link</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B:

Survey Questions

Survey Responses
## Survey Questions

### Course Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of learning community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long before the semester started did you know that you would be</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teaching this learning community?</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>more than 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your course and section number</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of learning community students in your section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of non-learning community students in this section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of semesters teaching a learning community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Administrative Information

1. Your class was originally designated a learning community class linked course. Did the fact that your course was linked affect your decisions about course content and teaching methodology?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. If you have both learning community and non-learning community students in your course, do you feel that this mix affects your ability to achieve your goals for the learning community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Have you received any faculty development services/support for the development of your linked course? (LC Institute, Workshops, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, what were those services and how effective were they in meeting your needs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. If additional training/workshops were available, would you attend?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. What would you hope to gain by attending?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaborative Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6.</strong> What is the name of your learning community partner(s) (that is the person(s) teaching the other linked course(s))?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **7.** During the time after you knew you'd be teaching a LC class, did you contact your linked partner(s)? | Yes  
No  
Describe your interaction with your partner(s). |
| **8.** Did you discuss your syllabus with your learning community partner before you created your syllabus? | Yes  
No |
| **9.** How many times have you and your learning community partner(s) contacted each other? | 1-5  
6-10  
10-20  
20-30  
30+ |
| **10.** What was the primary nature of the contact? (discussed syllabi, assignments, assessment, etc.) |
| **11.** Have you ever attended a class taught by your learning community partner(s)? (at whose request)? | Yes  
No  
How many times? |
| **12.** Has your learning community partner attended your class? (at whose request?) | Yes  
No  
How many times? |
| **13.** Has your learning community partner played a role in any of your class sessions? | Yes  
No  
Describe the involvement. |
| **Course Goals** |
| **14.** Are your outcomes/goals for your learning community class different than your outcomes/goals for your non-learning community class(es)? | Yes  
No  
How are they different? |
<p>| <strong>15.</strong> How has participation in a linked learning community course changed your student learning outcomes/goals for the course? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Course Goals, continued</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 16. Do you give the students in your linked learning community class the same assignments as your non-linked learning community class(es)? | Yes  
No  
How are they similar/different? |
| 17. Are communication strategies and skills part of your course work? | Yes  
No  
Describe the type. |
| 18. Have you collaborated with your learning community partner(s) to integrate communication skills into your course? | Yes  
No  
If so, how? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Use of class time</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 19. Do you ever use class time to discuss assignments your linked learning community students have received in their linked course(s)? | Yes  
No  
How much time? |
| 20. Do you feel that you use class time in your linked learning community section differently than in your non-learning community class(es)? | Yes  
No  
If so, how? |
| 21. Is your use of class time influenced/determined by the collaboration between you and your linked partner(s)? | Yes  
No  
How much? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Assessment</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 22. Are the assessments for your students in the linked learning community course different than your assessment for your students in non-linked learning community courses? | Yes  
No  
If so, how? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment, continued</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Are the assessment criteria for your linked learning community students developed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Are linked learning community student assignments/activities assessed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. What is the most rewarding thing about teaching a linked learning community course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. What is the most frustrating thing(s) about teaching a linked learning community course?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Please list any suggestions for enhancing collaboration between faculty partners in learning communities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
### Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>N/R</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrative Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Your class was originally designated a learning community class linked course. Did the fact that your course was linked affect your decisions about course content and teaching methodology?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If you have both learning community and non-learning community students in your course, do you feel that this mix affects your ability to achieve your goals for the learning community?</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you received any faculty development services/support for the development of your linked course? (LC Institute, Workshops, etc.)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If additional training/workshops were available, would you attend?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative Information</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. During the time after you knew you'd be teaching a LC class, did you contact your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Did you discuss your syllabus with your learning community partner before you created your syllabus?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How many times have you and your learning community partner(s) contacted each other?</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have you ever attended a class taught by your learning community partner(s)? (at whose request?)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Has your learning community partner attended your class? (at whose request?)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Has your learning community partner played a role in any of your class sessions?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Course Goals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Are your outcomes/goals for your learning community class different than your outcomes/goals for your non-learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do you give the students in your linked learning community class the same assignments as your non-linked learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Are communication strategies and skills part of your course work?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Have you collaborated with your learning community partner(s) to integrate communication skills into your course?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of class time</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Do you ever use class time to discuss assignments your linked learning community students have received in their linked course(s)?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Do you feel that you use class time in your linked learning community section differently than in your non-learning community class(es)?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Is your use of class time influenced/determined by the collaboration between you and your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Are the assessments for your students in the linked learning community course different than your assessment for your students in non-linked learning community courses?</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Are the assessment criteria for your linked learning community students developed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>24. Are linked learning community student assignments/activities assessed collaboratively with your linked partner(s)?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Question 8 is not on the online version.
2 Ranges for question 9: 1-5, 6-10, 10-20, 20-30, 30+
APPENDIX C:

Interview Questions
Interview Questions

1. What is your past experience in learning communities?

2. Describe the type of learning community you had/have and describe how you were involved?

3. What do you think are the components that make up a learning community?

4. Which of those components did/do you participate in?

5. Which component did you see as valuable to you? Your students? To the continued development of the learning community concept?

6. In what ways does being in a learning community affect your classroom decisions about course content?

7. Describe the nature of your collaboration with your linked partner? With the learning community process? (ISU Comm, LC Institute) (on survey)

8. What do you see as your role when it comes to faculty collaboration with regards to your linked course?
9. What do you see as the greatest hindrances to faculty collaboration?

10. What do you see as the greatest benefits to faculty collaboration?

11. Did participation in the learning community change the way you teach/taught your linked courses?

12. In the survey you said:

13. How would you classify the success of your learning community? Successful, Moderately successful, or Unsuccessful? What criteria would you use to determine whether or not your learning community was successful?

14. Could you provide me with course material: syllabi, assignments, activities, etc.?
Works Cited


