

University of San Diego

Digital USD

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

2012-05-01

An Investigation of the Effects of Writing Instruction in an Ungraded Informal Learning Environment

Samuel Patterson EdD
University of San Diego

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Digital USD Citation

Patterson, Samuel EdD, "An Investigation of the Effects of Writing Instruction in an Ungraded Informal Learning Environment" (2012). *Dissertations*. 907.
<https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations/907>

This Dissertation: Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.

**AN INVESTIGATION OF THE EFFECTS OF WRITING INSTRUCTION
IN AN UNGRADED INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

by

Samuel Patterson

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
San Diego State University and the University of San Diego
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Dissertation Committee:

Douglas Fisher, Ph.D., San Diego State University
Nancy Frey, Ph.D., San Diego State University
Robert Infantino, Ph.D., University of San Diego

May 2012

Copyright © 2012
by
Samuel Patterson
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Melissa Bacall, without whom it would not exist. Her patience, love, support and faith makes my best work possible.

Poetry is the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about
what is seen during a moment.

-Carl Sandburg

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Investigation of the Effects of Writing Instruction in an
Ungraded Informal Learning Environment

by

Samuel Patterson

Doctor of Education

San Diego State University – University of San Diego, 2012

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate and describe the teaching of writing in an informal setting through the voices of teachers and students. The intent of this study was to describe the roles of teachers and students in this learning environment and specifically to describe the role of writing response groups in this environment. Research in both writing instruction and informal education suggests that writing instruction is a good contextual match to camp-style informal education. Both informal education and writer's workshop-style writing instruction put the individual and their choices at the center of the experience.

This phenomenological study used the language of teacher and student participants gathered through the use of open-ended surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussions in order to describe the experience of individuals at Young Writer's Camp, and to look at these experiences collectively to answer the question, "What really happens at Young Writer's Camp and how does that happen?" By contributing to a greater understanding of the interrelationship between this informal learning environment and the content of writing instruction, this study supports efforts to create more successful opportunities for writing instruction both inside and outside of the traditional English classroom. The results have implications for classroom teachers of writing, as well as schools and extracurricular programming agencies looking for information on how to effectively structure enrichment activities outside the context of the formal classroom.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	xii
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Significance of the Study.....	6
Purpose of the Study	6
Definition of Terms.....	7
2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
Informal Learning Environments and Their Potential for Good Writing Instruction	9
Writing is an Adventure: Curricular Models	11
Informal Learning Models	12
The Authoring Cycle.....	15
Writing Workshop	16
Instructor's Role in Writer's Workshop	18
Modeling Writing for Students and Writing with Students	18
Modeling Response Group Behaviors	19
Creating and Maintaining a Classroom Environment that Supports the Goals of Writer's Workshop.....	20
Student's Role in Writer's Workshop.....	21
Peer Response	23
Expectations.....	23
The Social Hub of the Writing Workshop	24
Cultural Context and Expectations of Peer Response.....	25
Training Increases Success	26

The Challenges of Peer Response.....	28
Peer Response is not a Replacement for Instructor Response	28
Peer Response Methods Must be Carefully Matched with Goals.....	29
Peer Response Skills and Benefits are Difficult to Assess on a Large Scale.....	29
Emotion, Learning, and the Peer Response Group	30
How an Ungraded Informal Learning Environment can Support the Goals of Peer Response	30
3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	32
The Relationship Between Methodology and Context	32
Design of the Study.....	35
Setting	36
Participants.....	37
Data Collection and Instruments.....	37
Limitations	44
4 FINDINGS	45
A Day in the Life of a YWC Camper	45
Research Question One.....	48
Student Exit Surveys.....	48
Interview Data.....	50
Data from Instructor Interviews.....	52
Pedagogical Description of the Role of Instructors at Writing Camp	56
Research Question Two	56
Student Exit Surveys.....	56
Student Interview Data	59
Instructor Interview.....	61
Pedagogical Description of the Role of Students at Camp	63
Research Question Three	63
Student Exit Surveys.....	63
Interview Data.....	64
Pedagogical Description of the Role or Function of Peer Response in this Ungraded Informal Learning Environment.....	69
Research Question Four	70

Student Exit Surveys.....	71
Interview Data.....	73
Instructor Interviews	74
Conclusion	78
5 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	80
Research Question One.....	81
Student Perspective.....	81
Instructor Perspective.....	82
Implications for Application.....	83
Summary of Research Question One Discussion	85
Directions for Further Study	85
Research Question Two	85
Student Perspective.....	86
Instructor Perspective.....	87
Implications for Application.....	87
Summary of Research Question Two Discussion.....	88
Directions for Further Study	88
Research Question Three	88
Student Perspective.....	89
Instructor Perspective.....	89
Implications for Application.....	90
Summary of Research Question Three Discussion.....	90
Directions for Further Study	91
Research Question Four.....	91
Student Perspective.....	92
Instructor Perspective.....	92
Implications for Application.....	92
Summary of Research Question Four Discussion	93
Directions for Further Study	93
REFERENCES	97
APPENDIX	
A STUDENT EXIT SURVEY FORMS.....	101

B	WORDLE IMAGE “OF SOCIAL” DATA	106
---	-------------------------------------	-----

LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
Table 1. Sample Camper Daily Agenda	47
Table 2. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme of Teachers Share and Model Specific Writing Practices	50
Table 3. Themes Describing the Role of Instructors	54
Table 4. Sample Camper Statements Supporting Theme One of Campers Learn How to be a Writer	58
Table 5. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme: Campers Make New Friends.....	60
Table 6. Themes Describing the Roles of Students	62
Table 7. Themes Describing the Roles of Writing Response Groups	70
Table 8. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme Campers Taking Risks and Becoming More Confident.....	75
Table 9. Themes Describing the Effect of Camp on the Students	77
Table 10. Implications for Application to Camps, Classrooms and Educational Policy	94
Table 11. Directions for Future Study	95

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without a team of people both near and far helping me find my way. I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Doug Fisher, as well as committee members Dr Nancy Frey and Dr. Robert Infantino; Peter Elbow and Max Van Manen for their individual guidance in the process; my family for their support; most of all I thank my wife for her faith and her patience.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an environment where there is increasing pressure to tie funding directly to student or teacher achievement, both teachers and researchers have an obligation to increase the understanding of any pedagogical success and to use that information to help create other successful learning environments. To this end, researchers need to work with instructors, schools and organization to find ways to understand and describe successful learning environments.

While there are plenty of ongoing debates about what good writing instruction is, there is consensus at least that writing is a skill that is becoming more important. “The expanded reach of the Internet provides a wider potential audience for all writers. Schools need to prepare students for writing frequently for multiple audiences” (National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2009, para. 1). The pressure is on schools, teachers, and students. In California, funding is tied to school’s academic performance index (API) scores and districts are desperate to improve these scores. While doubling the student’s time in a “literacy block” English class may increase the school’s overall performance, it may also limit the variety of instructional strategies teachers are using (Public Policy Institute of California, 2005, p. 2). Isolating these skills into a literacy block also shifts to focus away from writing as a life skill students carry with them. Many students carry a full keyboard in their pockets; their notes may be passed to hundreds of other students over thousands of miles. This ubiquitous need to produce text will follow these students directly into the work place. The idea of writing well for a variety of audiences pushes beyond what many people think of when they hear the term writing instruction. Writing instruction needs to prepare students to engage in an entire world of audiences and ideas. We are no longer talking simply about being able to accurately report out what they have read; writing needs to be a skill that students feel prepared to apply in all types of environments.

Teachers in all subjects, English included, are challenged to teach writing in a meaningful way. Many receive only minimal support or instruction in teaching writing

(Squire, 2003, p. 7). This study is another step in the process of extricating writing instruction from the confines of grammar lessons and SAT-style in-class essays. By looking critically at one instance of successful writing instruction in an informal learning environment, this study creates a pedagogical description of the effects of engaging in this work of skill building away from the pressures of grades and benchmarks for students, as well as a description of the tools teachers use to make this work possible.

So much of the discussion of writing instruction centers upon the word *effective*. The focus is on getting the effect you seek. Teaching effectively means the students learn what the teacher imagined they would learn, and even more. The obvious limitation to teaching writing only in English classes is that the only effect the writer is hoping for is to achieve a good grade. The challenge for the English teacher is to create opportunities for students to see an audience for their writing beyond the teacher's desk.

Learning to write is difficult, and helping students see themselves as writers and understand the relationship between their message and their audience is even more difficult (McCarthy, 2001; Newkirk & Kent, 2007; Straub, 1999). Teachers of writing work to create specific spaces and protocols to support success in their classroom. Some of these practices are often grouped together under the heading of "writers' workshop" (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001). These spaces differ from regular class time and use different modes of learning. The work of the teacher is more individual and the teacher often writes with the students to model the process (Graves, 1983; Graves & Kittle, 2005). While these modes of writing instruction seem to be widely accepted, it is challenging to construct writer's workshop space within an English class. Yet even in contemporary writing instruction that focuses on the pragmatic difficulties of managing a collaborative writing environment in an age of accountability, some of the pioneers of this approach to writing instruction remain unwavering in their conviction that the environment for writing instruction makes a profound difference to what happens during writing instruction (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001; Graves & Kittle, 2005).

There are many strategies for good writing instruction available for use in traditional classroom (Patterson, 2009, p. 20). While instructors using these strategies can do so with the intention of creating a communal workshop or studio environment, the reality is that these class sessions still exist within a traditional school environment. What remains

unexplored is the potential of writing instruction in an environment that is further removed from the ideological trappings of “school.” This study examined whether an informal, ungraded environment can change a teacher’s ability to deliver effective writing instruction or a student’s experience of learning to write?

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to create a series of pedagogical descriptions of the roles of participants in Young Writer’s Camp. The goal of these descriptions is to clarify the roles of instructors and students in this informal learning environment, as well as demystifying the effect of the young writer’s camp experience on students. The phenomenological approach uses the participants’ own words collected from interviews, as well as the language gathered from the students’ exit surveys in order to describe the effects of teaching writing and learning to write in an informal setting for teachers and for students from grades three through ten. The results may have implications for classroom teachers of writing, as well as schools, policy makers, and extracurricular programming agencies looking for information on how to effectively structure enrichment activities outside the context of the formal classroom

This study explored the effects of writing instruction in an informal learning environment, outside of the traditional school year, as experienced by both student and adult leader participants.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study began as a curiosity inside of a close-knit, ideologically self-reflective professional community, a local branch of the National Writing Project called The San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP). The questions began as a professional dialogue focused on capturing and recreating the best practices of this community of reflective educators. Within this professional community there was an ongoing discussion of the question “why and how is Young Writer’s Camp successful?” This professional community is defined by a love of writing and a desire to share that love of writing with students. One of the central elements of the mission of National Writing Project (NWP) is that teachers who are writers themselves make better teachers of writing (Liebermann & Wood, 2003, p. 19). As teachers and writers the members of this community could all list ingredients that seemed to contribute to the overall success of the program: a carefully developed culture of sharing and trust to a

consistent approach to writer response groups (WRG), and individual lessons each teacher had developed to prod, inspire, guide, and support the young writers in their classes. These educators regularly engaged in reading research together, and are all well-read enough not to even begin to suggest that the brief, 36-40 hour, summer writing program was significantly changing the student's writing ability as it might be measured by pre and post assessments. Rather, the community needed to understand more about the success observed in this program by participating students and instructors. They needed to know what this success was; they needed to understand how to describe it, understand it, and ultimately, find ways to bring it back into more traditional classrooms.

Students change at the camp. Some of the parents refer to it as “coming out of their shell.” Near the end of camp there is a student reading at a local bookstore. The reading is well attended and often cited as evidence by the parents when they discuss how their child has changed at camp. The teachers that work at the camp do so to “recharge” or “refill the creative well.” They have an experience that is as significant as that of the students. Since this is a community of classroom teachers, we are, of necessity, always looking for channels to bring the great effects of YWC back into our own classrooms.

This professional community met throughout the entire year to reflect on past projects, plan new projects, and examine and maintain ongoing projects. From this ongoing professional dialogue the researcher received the direction and support needed to examine the collected data from the YWC for the three previous summers. This was the beginning of phase one of the study.

The collected data were compiled from exit surveys. This study focused on the surveys that were completed by the campers, excluding surveys that seemed to be completed by parents. The authorship was judged by the use of personal pronouns, as well as the quality of handwriting. The handwriting of the responses was useful in separating the reflection composed by adults from those composed by campers as the adults often have much neater handwriting. Examining these surveys, the researcher found a wide range of factors that the instructors had already discussed as possibly significant elements of our program. These included the unique dynamics of an informal learning space, the camp's writer-centered curriculum, the consistent model of writing response groups, peer response and support, the caring relationship between students and teacher in a non-graded

environment, and the ratio of students to adults. While the data opened a wide range of possibilities, they also revealed a limitation - all of the data had been collected in the last moments of camp, and the information was summative in nature. The camper's reflections trended towards the general and holistic. For specific information about specific activities, another collection tool was needed.

The variety of narrow trends in the data from the exit surveys created a methodological opportunity to focus on the content of individual statements instead of focusing exclusively on averages and frequency counts. A richer pool of data was needed to develop a more clear understanding of the effect of the camp for all of the participants this opportunity was exploited in the second phase of the dissertation study. In order to support and develop an understanding of the overall effect of Young Writer's Camp, more data were needed. The challenge was to engage in data collection that captured the essence of the YWC experience from the participants' multiple perspectives without changing that same experience, to figure out how the camp worked without breaking it in the process of studying it. While not disrupting the camp or significantly changing the experience were key factors in the decision making process for data collection methodologies, another deciding influence was the ultimate purpose of the investigation. In order to learn about the experiences of the campers, and the teachers, the researcher had to capture what the camp means to these populations in their own words as much as possible.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study follows the informal education work of contemporary research-practitioners such as Smith (2005). In his efforts to make informal education a more transparent and accessible field of study, Smith maintained a fundamental connection to the early work in the field of informal education as Fulks (1978). Fulks introduced an American academic audience to a model of classroom organization developed in England following World War II. Fulks' work highlights the need to give students two things: a full menu of meaningful activities to choose from and teachers that make themselves available to help as needed. The literature on informal learning environments describes a context that in many ways mirrors descriptions of good contexts for writing instruction, as can be found through the work of Elbow (1973), Fletcher and Portalupi (2001), and Graves (1983). Each of these

researchers discusses the importance of creating a learning environment where students are making the important choices of what they are writing about and how they will share their writing. All three of these critical texts place the student, not the teacher, at the center of the process and emphasize the importance of the student owning the experiences of writing and learning to get feedback on and revise their writing. The philosophical foundations of the research methodology come from van Manen's (1990) work on researching lived experience through phenomenology. This methodology has fundamental practices and beliefs that are a good ideological match for describing and investigating learning in an informal environment as well as what it means to write or to learn about writing (Elbow & Belanoff, 1995).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

While there is a great movement to reform schools, the focus is often far too narrow. At the same time, teachers experience many individual successes in many environments each year. By focusing on a successful program conducted outside of the formal education process, a wider conversation can be held about how all of us learn throughout our lives in a wide variety of contexts. This study puts the experience of the participants, in their own words, at the center of the data. There are two significant shifts in focus. The first is looking at the ability of informal environments to meet the goals traditionally addressed in formal education environments, and the second is looking to the described experience of the participants as valid evidence (van Manen, 1990).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten. The phenomenological approach will use the participants' own words as well as the language collected from interviews of the participants. The results may have implications for classroom teachers of writing, as well as schools and extracurricular programming agencies looking for information on how to effectively structure enrichment activities outside the context of the formal classroom.

This study places the individual teacher or learner at the center of the data. What remains unknown in writing research is not a question of how many percentage points an

individual has progressed on some standard writing test, but what it feels like to be part of a writing community where everyone is learning to write together. Students were asked about their experience and to share their writing, instructors were to describe their own learning process and their participation in the learning process of their students. These data were collected and the individual experiences analyzed both individually and collectively as a group. When these individual experiences were analyzed together, they illustrated the overall effect of the YWC on the participants.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Describing the effects of teaching writing in an informal setting is generally defined as examining the experiences of teachers and students involved a writing program set in a non-graded camp-style learning environment.

Participants describes all of the participating members of the study including students and instructors.

Students refers to the young people participating in the camp experience.

Campers refers to the young people participating in the camp experience, used interchangeably with students.

Instructors describes the adults organizing, designing, and directing the learning activities taking place at the camp.

Teachers refers to the adults organizing, designing, and directing the learning activities taking place at the camp, used interchangeably with instructors.

The Camp refers to the Young Writer's Camp (YWC), a 36-40 hour day camp which meets for 3-3.5 hours a day, 4 days a week, for 3 weeks in a summer on the campus of a local university and as an additional component has a two hour public reading at a local large-chain corporate bookstore.

Writing response groups (WRG) is defined as collaborative groups of varying sizes of students, instructors, and teacher assistants, reading and responding to each other's writing.

Ungraded informal learning environment refers to the entire camp experience.

Process writing is to the practice of writing a draft, receiving feedback from one or more audience members or readers and revising and editing the draft. This response and

revision process maybe completed multiple times as the writer prepares the piece for publication either in print or as a piece to be read publically.

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a network of local sites serving teachers in all subject areas and grade levels to “improve teaching of writing and learning in schools and communities” (National Writing Project, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting, Young Writer's Camp, on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten. To understand to special context of Young Writer's Camp, it is important to see clearly the compatibility of the foundations of good informal education and the foundations of writing instruction. Workshop-based writing instruction and outdoor education share basic curricular models, both push students to assume more responsibility for their own actions, and both rely on a caring and supportive relationship between teacher and student. In the informal learning environment, as well as in a good writing classroom, teachers are working alongside of students, modeling the process as they go through it together. While the complete experience of writing camp benefits from the central aspects of an informal learning environment, the writing response groups draw much of their success from social and affective elements of the learning environment. The informal learning environments are student-centered and not focused on formal summative assessment. This focus on the individual expression over assessment creates an excellent data field for interview and written survey-based research, as it places the emphasis on the lived experience of the individual as a primary source of data.

INFORMAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR GOOD WRITING INSTRUCTION

Informal education is a widely applied and defined term. The interpretations of the term run from simply learning outside the context of the traditional classroom (Melber, 2008), to fine distinctions between non-formal learning and informal learning based on the amount of overt and visible organization and intention in the learning environment (Eaton, 2010). For the purposes of this study the term applies more closely to Melber's definition, while highlighting a couple of key components. Some important characteristics of informal learning that are common to most definitions include first, as Collins, and Dugard argue, the

assumptions that learning experiences are shaped by the contexts they are embedded in (as cited in Cilesiz, 2009, p. 1); second that non-formal or informal environments facilitate a bounded range of experiences; and third that a well planned informal learning environment can provide activities that are engaging enough to students that they choose to participate (Cilesiz, 2009).

The context and purposes of various informal education programs speak more clearly to the breadth of the term than a collection of definitions. From an afterschool 4-H program teaching science through robotics, to signage and tours at state parks and home improvement clinics, and even teenagers using computers in an Internet café in Turkey, informal education can describe most any situation in which someone learns something because they need and want to know it (Baker & Ansorge, 2007; Cilesiz, 2009; Taylor, 2006).

These contexts were crafted for different purposes, to anticipate the needs of the learners in different ways. Some of these informal contexts, like the state parks, create curiosity, or draw people to them because people want to learn more. Others, like the Internet café, draw a much more diverse audience who has different purposes. Informal learning contexts place the person and his/her choice to learn at the center of the experience (Chazan, 2003). In all informal learning contexts participants make the choice to learn something, and in the best of them this choice to learn is supported through passive and active scaffolding and participants are given an opportunity to work with the information they are learning, to apply it in some way. The basic learning arc in informal education is less structured than in classroom environments:

While procedural knowledge is provided, students are encouraged to transfer such knowledge to similar and different situations. Students who learn in this manner are responsible for their own learning, seek out new knowledge and are better prepared to generalize knowledge (Pressley, Hogan, Wharton-McDonald, Misretta & Ettenberger, 1996, p. 140).

In a community-based program literacy program, this process looks like young and old people reading to each other and writing letters to their friends and family (Gillis, 1992). These activities can be planned, guided and supported in the same way as formal classroom activities, and in order for informal education to be successful, the activities must be supported.

The nature of the relationship between teacher and student is one of the most important markers of informal education. In the parlance of a professional development text: “The sage on the stage must become the guide on the side” (King, 1993, p. 30). While he was discussing an elementary school using an informal model, Fulks (1978) noted that “Informal classrooms place value on the caring aspect of human relationships. Children are accepted as they are by the teachers. [This relationship] enables the human capabilities of caring, courage, and understanding to develop in a positive way” (p. 13).

One of the ways to create this caring environment of ownership and responsibility is to have the teachers write with the students (Graves & Kittle, 2005). In the camp setting used in this study, the class may have 15 students, two teachers and an assistant, and when it is time to write, all the people in the room are writing. When it is time to share, all the people in the room can share. The Young Writer’s Camp “engages students in that process and allows them to discover their own style, voice and potential” (San Diego Area Writing Project, 2010, para. 2). The camp uses the ungraded and informal environment with the goal that “each young writer, regardless of skill level, has the time and space to experiment in a variety of genres while developing creativity and confidence (San Diego Area Writing Project, 2010, para. 2).

The directors of the camp saw a good fit between an informal environment and the writer’s workshop. The theoretical similarities between the writer’s workshop or writing process model and some informal education programs become very apparent when looking at their curricular models side by side. Like the students in Berkenkotter’s (1984) study of the influence of peer response, students in writing workshop have to make choices about how they will improve and edit their texts, and they often have to make this choice in light of conflicting suggestions. While this can be tricky, as Berkenkotter shows in her 10 case studies, it is important to educate students about the ownership they have of their texts and to help them make responsible choices for their texts (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1999).

WRITING IS AN ADVENTURE: CURRICULAR MODELS

The setting of this study is a summer camp that teaches students about a process based model of writing. The curriculum for learning to become a writer mirrors and echoes curriculum for other informal learning experiences. The active learning cycle, a model for

Jewish informal education, and a model for teaching process based writing share many key elements

Informal Learning Models

Martin, Franc and Zounkova (2004) use the active learning cycle as it was explained by Sakofs and Armstong (1996) in their work on the outward bound program, as a foundation for their dramaturgy model. In the active learning model, basically an unbroken circular cycle, Sakofs and Armstrong highlight the continuous and recursive nature of this model: new experiences build learning and skills used in having other experiences. Along the way there is participant engagement on many levels. Through interplay of group and individual activities participants gain new knowledge and build new skills, resulting in teamwork, confidence, maturation, and growth. Martin et al., (2004), developed their Dramaturgy model as an operating model for an eastern European adventure education program. The Dramaturgy model is an adventure learning model that employs, “A range of non-physical, structured and non-structured group activities, incorporating aspects of art, drama, music, and poetry (Martin et al., 2004, p. 16).

Using the active learning model as a foundation, Martin et al., (2004), go on to discuss the adventure wave model. As they describe it, the wave model charts the rhythm of the experiences. In the wave model, experiences happen high on the wave, and reflection happens low on the wave. Martin et al. (2004), use this basic rhythm as an organizing principle to their dramaturgy wave. As they envision the dramaturgy wave there is a rhythm to each of their key areas of focus: social, physical, reflective/emotional, and creative. This dramaturgy wave clearly illustrates a desire to chart the use and development of these waves within the context of one another.

A similar wave for a Jewish summer camp might overlay yet another wave for the spiritual rhythm (Chazan, 2003). Barry Chazan’s (2003) exploration of informal Jewish education focuses on the camp-based Jewish education movement. His discussion of the elements of this environment is written in such a way as to clearly illustrate the differences and commonalties with formal Jewish education. Chazan (2003) discusses eight significant elements of the informal environment, “Eight characteristics are established as defining informal Jewish education: a focus on the learner, a concern for Jewish experience, a

curriculum of experiences, interactivity, group process, a culture of education, an engaged mood, and a holistic Jewish educator (p. 1). While religious instruction may seem different than writing instruction, a close reading of Chazan can yield a deeper understanding of how a carefully constructed informal learning environment can support students as they learn new and possibly difficult ideas and put them into practice in their lives.

Informal education focuses on the individual. Chazan (2003) explains, “The individual is an active dynamic organism who grows and is shaped through his/her own active engagement in learning. Hence, this kind of education places primacy on the person’s own involvement and progress.”(p. 7). This focus on the individual and their progress is matched in Jamieson’s definition of informal learning in a university setting. Informal learning “is defined as course-related activity undertaken individually and collaboratively on campus that occurs outside the classroom and does not directly involve the classroom teacher” (Jamieson, 2009, p. 19). The focus on the individual is not limited to what the individual studies, or reads, but extends to what the individual does. Chazan (2003) describes the importance of experiencing the content studied in a real and lived way, “in terms of informal Jewish education, learning occurs through enabling people to undergo key Jewish experiences and values. For example, an experiential approach to Shabbat focuses on enabling people to experience Shabbat in real time” (p. 9).

In another setting, a 4-H program focused on teaching through robotics, the researchers report that the experience of building and programming robots made it so that the children learning with robots were able to imagine themselves in the place of the robot and understand how a computer’s programming worked. The children were able to transfer their understanding of the real world into comprehension of logic and mathematical principles. (Baker & Ansorge, 2007, p. 233)

The content in each of these cases was made more accessible through the practical application and experience of the learner.

The learning of the individual in the informal environment and the impact of their personal experience with the applied content is made more meaningful through their interaction with others engaged in the same process. Chazan (2003) emphasizes the necessity of interaction to the informal context, “the principle of interactivity implies pedagogy of asking questions, stimulating discussions, and engaging the learner” (p. 11).

Chazan (2003) explains, “Informal Jewish education is rooted in the belief that the active interchange between students and between students and educators is a critical dimension of Jewish learning” (p. 10). While his discussion focuses on Jewish learning this principle can be applied to many situations. Consider a peer response group where students share their writing and “instead of working independently on their own writing, students are continually talking about their writing” (Liu & Hansen, 2002, p. 9). The interaction in some contexts is more free-form, but in the context of this study, much of this interaction takes place in groups. “Groups are not simply aggregates of people learning individually in parallel fashion; they are social networks that teach ideas and values through the essence of the group process” (Chazan, 2003, p. 12). These networks can be casual and self-forming, such as a library-based study group (Jamieson, 2009) or may take careful planning and ongoing maintenance such as a peer response group (Liu & Hansen, 2002). In each of these contexts the learner shares the learning experience with other learners.

An informal environment has the ability, through directing the learner through a process of experiences, interactions, and groups, to invest the learner in a culture that they may not view as their own (Chazan, 2003). This culture might be a culture that adopts many aspects of a scientific or engineering culture in the context of a robotics camp (Barker & Ansorge, 2007). Chazan (2003) explains that, “informal Jewish education is . . . ultimately about ‘creating culture’ rather than transmitting knowledge” (p. 12). Chazan (2003) uses culture here to describe the totality of the experience, “architecture, styles of dress, codes and norms of behavior” (p. 12). This approach to creating an educational environment builds on his previously discussed concepts of interaction and experience and takes it even further. There are exceptional museums, such as the Weisenthal center in Los Angeles that approach this ideal through exhibits that are complete environments. The summer institute experience of the National Writing Project works to surround participating teachers in a culture of writing and scholarship (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). All of these experiences overtly manage the environment to immerse the participant in a specific culture or setting. This immersion allows the participant to begin to feel as though they belong in the culture or setting.

The last of Chazan’s significant elements described here is that of engagement. “Because of its focus on the individual and on issues that are real, informal Jewish education

is often described as ‘fun,’ ‘joyful,’ or ‘enjoyable.’ This should not be taken as a sign of frivolity or lack of seriousness” (Chazan, 2003, p. 14). The entire experience is designed to be engaging to the participants. This engagement is often reported as fun from the point of view of the participants. The fun effect means that this is an activity of environment that the students choose to engage in again and again. The experience is designed to inspire the students to opt into the activity over and over again. This is vital in an informal environment because that lack of formal structure removes the external motivator of grades or test scores. In the discussion of peer response groups this internal motivation of “fun” continues to be important.

The Authoring Cycle

The informal learning models cited above, the Dramaturgy model and the adventure model, when viewed in concert (imagine a line going around in a circle was a multitude of sine waves) suggest an experience that is recursive, grounded in multiple experiences and relationships, resulting in an experience that is profoundly individual for each member of the group. This model is common in informal learning. Experiences are organized, the demands of different activities are balanced for the goals and participants, reflection and meaning making is taught and encouraged, but participants are always going to be in different places on this model. This model of informal education, the recursive sine wave, appears at the core of the writing process as Harste, Short, & Burke (1988) describes it as the “Authoring Cycle.” Harste et al. (1988) uses the image of the recursive sine wave to “summarize many of the insights into the process of reading and writing by suggesting [that] . . . Reading and writing are events that involve the making and shaping of ideas (or meaning) over time. . . .and that the multimodal and social nature of the reading and writing process make reading and writing complex events, but this very complexity supports learning when language users are allowed to shift perspective from reader to writer, speaker to listener, participant to spectator” (p. 53).

Both informal outdoor education and Harste et al.’s (1988) authoring cycle use the same visual metaphor to describe the focus and the pace of the experience.

In Harste’s authoring cycle, the student bring to this cycle their own life experience, and as Harste et al. (1988) explains, “The oval that surrounds the cycle represents the

situational context in which all instances of authorship are embedded, and the activities listed outside the oval represent the multitude of culture specific contexts” (p. 52). The author is moving through these different contexts, making choices about communication, audience and expression. The path oscillates between learning and authoring, acknowledging as Murray (1986) explains “[writers] receive instruction and inspiration from their reading” (p. 35).

This cycle from experience to skills, from silence to voice, from student to writer is at the heart of the workshop approach to writing instruction. Graves (1983) writes that, “writing should be a studio subject where there is patient listening to both children and texts” (p. 7). In his description of the studio there are many spaces to work and students work on different things. The teacher confers with students, but “a student’s writing development is largely self-directed, using tools acquired as he needs them” (Graves, 1983, p. 8). Graves’ description of the studio class is a clear illustration of one of the central ideas of informal education: “Informal learning gives learners more control of what, where, and how they learn and usually involves more intrinsic motivation” (Reiser & Dempsey, 2007, p. 167).

Writing Workshop

The writing workshop model places special emphasis on students learning to manage themselves and work independently, but with support. This value of creating and supporting self-directed learners is also a value visible in many of the descriptions of informal learning programs. For students in a writing class, this is procedural knowledge that has to be built with the teacher’s help. The teacher is responsible for teaching the children how to respect the working environment while also learning how to help each other. Procedural knowledge is built through discussion, modeling and experience (Graves, 1983). The writing workshop creates an environment “where students can acquire [writing] skills along with fluency, confidence and the desire to see themselves as writers” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 1). Fletcher puts the action in that statement on the workshop itself. It creates an environment that in turn creates an opening for students to change their perception of themselves.

In an in-depth study of 12 sixth graders and how their identities were influenced by literacy practices, literacy instruction, and the perceptions of parents, peers and teachers, McCathery (2001) found a strong relationship between the perceptions of others and student's construct of identity. The context of literacy instruction also seemed to play an

important role in the student's identity construction. McCarthery's work was guided by a series of questions: How does the place they are working in change how they see themselves? Who are they when they are reading or writing? Who is it that students are reading or writing for? What is the goal of the reading or writing, is it external, to meet an expectation or standard, or is it to meet a need on the part of the student? Much of McCarthery's evidence was taken from interviews with the students.

While identity construction is infinitely complex, we can learn what position the students are (working/operating) from by how they talk about their experience. By listening to the children talk about their experiences, McCarthery (2001) is "provid[ing] new perspectives about the relationship between students' perceptions of themselves as readers and writers and the perceptions of those who work closely with them. . . the study examines how students' perceptions of themselves as literacy learners are facilitated or deterred by classroom contexts" (p. 123). The content here complements the context because writing is communication and the relationship between the learning partners is a relationship of guidance and caring (Noddings, 2005).

The writers' workshop creates opportunities for students to learn as a community and in conversation with one another. In a teacher-research study of her mixed grade (2nd and 3rd) class, Freedland (1995) found that the collaborative model of the writer's workshop allowed her students to inspire each other through shared story ideas. Throughout the course of the study, the students developed a common set of characters and stories Freedland (1995) calls the "Mr. and Mrs. Club" (p. 98). "As a reader, I could see not only shared topics but also common story characters, elaborated sentences, and parallel story plots. What emerged was what the class called the Mr. and Mrs. Stories" (Freedland, 1995, p. 98). Freedland's observations of her classes daily 50 minutes writer's workshop sessions yielded descriptions of some of the potential outcomes of writer's workshop in the classroom. From her discussion it is clear she credits to collaborative work mode for much of this growth. It is also clear that Freedland was focused on implementing the curricular model, not on reaching the specific pedagogical goals she ended up discussing.

In the context of a graduate -level teacher education class, Perry and Collins (1998) found that students benefited from involvement in writers workshop on two levels. The first was a perceived improvement of the writing that was the focus of the workshop, a research

paper. The second benefit was the understanding of the process that come with experience, “If the students were actually involved in writing workshop sessions, they would be much better prepared to incorporate similar learning experiences in their own classrooms” (Perry & Collins, 1998, p. 670).

The curricular model at the center on the camp in this study was developed in response the curricular model used in the National Writing Project Summer institute, which in turn owes a debt to the writing workshop model as described above. In a 2003 study on two NWP summer institutes, Liebermann and Wood defined “the model” using their own observations and the descriptions of the participants. The model consisted of sharing questions and exploring research together, writing research and experience-based papers. “Over 5 weeks, fellows produce 4 written papers,” and working in a writing response group, “every fellow is assigned to a small writing group, and these groups create a more comfortable context for sharing writing and receiving feedback (Liebermann & Wood, 2003, p. 17).

INSTRUCTOR’S ROLE IN WRITER’S WORKSHOP

The instructional literature regarding the implementation of writer’s workshop contains more detailed descriptions of the role of the instructor in writer’s workshop than the related research. While there is not a complete consensus on how involved instructors should be in the individual activities of writer’s workshop, many of the authors guiding teachers in implementing writer’s workshop describe the some of the responsibilities of the instructor to include modeling writing for students, writing with students, modeling response group behaviors and creating and maintaining a classroom environment that supports the goals of writer’s workshop.

Modeling Writing for Students and Writing with Students

In reading the literature about writing instruction, many of the authors refer to the work of Donald Graves. Graves was a strong advocate of demystifying the writing process by having teachers co-participate in the process. Students need to see their teachers write. “Writing is a studio subject. I invite children to do something I am already doing” (Graves, 1994, p. 47). He explains that “If they [students] see us write, they will see the middle of the

process, the hidden ground – from the choice of topic to the final completion of the work” (Graves, 1983, p. 43). This idea is echoed and supported in Fletcher and Portalupi’s (2001) guide to implementing writing workshop when they instruct teachers to “find a seat and write with your students. . . You are giving your students a powerful image: a grown-up doing what they’re trying to do” (p. 38). Engaging in writing with the students is not advocated solely for the benefit of the students. In their guide on creating a writing-friendly classroom, Harste et al. (1988) tell their readers that, “teachers and other adults should engage in the same communicative activities in which they ask children to engage” (p. 15). The authors explain that this can benefit both the students and the teachers. The students get to see demonstrations of the strategies being learned, and instructors, “learn how the ‘real curriculum’ of firsthand experience relates to the ‘planned curriculum’” (Harste et al., 1988, p. 15).

Graves (1983) assures his readers that this is not easy or comfortable, but the impact of students being able to see an adult struggling with the same issues the student’s face is empowering for students. In a guide to implementing process writing in elementary classrooms, this advice is applied specifically to one of the first steps in writing, topic choice. “You will have to show children how to go about making your own topic choices” (Nathan, Temple, Juntunen, & Temple, 1989, p. 15). Demonstration or modeling each part of the writing workshop is important to the overall success of the workshop and a primary responsibility of the instructor.

Modeling Response Group Behaviors

Writing response groups or peer response groups are a significant component of the writing workshop. They help students understand how potential audiences could receive their text. Throughout the literature, many authors discuss modeling or demonstrating how to participate in a response group. When students are learning how to negotiate the writing response group they need to see best practices in action, “[the modeling instructor] helps students learn how to do something that is very difficult – how to give and receive relevant, tactful, and insightful feedback” (Moffett & Wagner, 1992, p. 206).

In a survey of existing research regarding writing instruction, Farnan and Dahl (2003) identified major trends about how writing is taught to children. One of the major trends was

the need for modeled response. Farnan and Dahl (2003) found that much of the published research on writing response groups put the teacher in the group. “The teacher contributed suggestions for revision along with those made by children within the conference” (p. 999). In their reading of the research, they also found that, “Most of the children studied used the teacher’s ideas about writing and even drew on them later in their own conferences with younger children” (Farnan & Dahl, 2003, p. 999). Students don’t just take away suggestions about specific pieces of writing; they take away knowledge of how to respond to writing. Maintaining tactful and useful response to the writing of other students helps to create and support a caring social environment. The goal of writing response groups is often peer response, but as Graves (1983) remarks, “Children could help each other because they first learned through the routine of response that there was an appropriate pattern that protected against hurt” (p. 38).

Creating and Maintaining a Classroom Environment that Supports the Goals of Writer’s Workshop

The phrase ‘student-centered’ when applied to a classroom or a curriculum can manifest a number of assumptions ranging from a best-case class where students choose how to meet the goals of the curriculum on their own terms to a worst-case equivalent of the patients running at asylum. While many of the texts concerned with writing workshop specifically address these assumptions, others like Elbow and Belanoff’s (1995) *A Community of Writers* leave these assumptions unchallenged. In the case of *A Community of Writers*, it seems to be an issue of audience. Elbow and Belanoff wrote this text as a course reader for a university-level composition course. These courses are often taught by graduate students new to teaching. The text is addressed to the students and seems to assume that the instructor will be assigning pieces of the text and managing the created writing.

Moffett and Wanger’s (1992) definition of student-centered as a curriculum includes the key ideas that the curriculum “teaches each learner to select and sequence his own activities and materials (individualization); [and] arranges for students to center on and teach each other” (p. 20). Instructors in a student-centered classroom have to work to create and maintain an environment that allows students to take on responsibility for their learning as they become ready. The guidance for this type of classroom structure can be carried in many

different catch-phrases such as, “You want to set up a “decentralized” classroom-management system” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 27). Decentralized in this context seems to point to a class where students can problem solve on their own, not having to return to the teacher upon the completion of each task before moving on to the next. The instructor is responsible for constructing a class where the students have the skills and opportunity to learn from each other. “Teachers need to set up their classrooms so that children rely on their own personal and social resources rather than solely on the teacher” (Harste et al., 1988, p. 16). This reliance on personal and social resources is the product of giving students a full menu of good choices to make. “The wisest decision for educators to make is to stock a classroom with as many things as possible [for students]to choose among” (Moffet, 1988, p. 24). Graves illustrates the challenges of implementing this type of classroom through a narrative of experience focused on Mr. Bangs, a colleague. “During class share times, conferences, letters, specialty reports, Mr. Bangs worked hard to establish specific areas of information for each child.” (Graves, 1983, p. 41).

Even reading this description of a student-centered classroom, misconceptions can abound. Such an environment takes care to create and more care and attention to maintain. One of the most basic requirements for success is held in Graves’ simple and significant advice to teachers of writing: “What do teacher’s do? Know the children” (Graves, 1983, p. 22). For this environment to work teachers need to not only train the students, they need to know them. Teachers need to make sure the response groups adhere to the norms of non-hurtful communication established and modeled. Peer response groups require “close monitoring of conferences and . . . alternatives to sole reliance on an audience of peers” (Farnan & Dahl, 2003, p. 1000). In addition instructors need to keep the writing class on track as far as skill building by “find[ing] a balance between teaching smaller specific craft skills and the more general writing strategies that are not at the sentence level” (Hale, 2008, p. 157).

STUDENT’S ROLE IN WRITER’S WORKSHOP

The literature regarding the study and implementation of writer’s workshop describes two key roles for students, that of writer and responder. Each of these roles has its own expectations attached to it, expectations the student is prepared to meet by the instructor.

The role of writer, as described in the literature, is most eloquently described by Donald Graves. The student writer is on a journey of guided discovery. “Children learn to control writing because their teachers practice teaching writing as a craft. Both teachers and children see control of the craft as a long painstaking process with energy supplied along the way through the joy of discovery” (Graves, 1983, p. 3). This discovery is enabled by the teacher’s willingness to allow the student-writer to make choices. Although all writing classes will require students to respond to prompts (Wagner, Close, & Ramsey, 2001), writer’s workshop requires the student to make a number of choices about their own writing. Students need to choose what to write about and in what format to do that writing. As they become more experienced, their understanding of purpose and audience may influence their choices. Students also choose which pieces of writing to share with their peers or instructors in order to receive feedback. The second main expectation carried by the role of the student in writer’s workshop is that of a peer responder. Students are expected to use instructor-modeled protocols to provide constructive response to their classmates writing.

The role of writer in writer’s workshop is built on the idea of choice. Fletcher and Portalupi provide guidance to instructors faced with students who resist the invitation to write. They argue that genuine investment in writing “starts by giving them [students] regular time, real choice, and your genuine interest in what they put on paper” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 23). They go on to quote John Peoton’s adage, “Choice leads to voice” (Fletcher & Portalupi, 2001, p. 23). The connection here between giving students control over their own writing and the student’s experience of a deeper connection to their own writing, here referred to as ‘voice,’ is a significant enough aspect of the writing workshop experience that it is repeated throughout the literature. “By allowing real choices, students have to decide and then begin composing. In so doing, they take ownership of the literacy process”(Harste et al., 1988, p. 62). The active choice of a topic should come from an interest the student has cultivated and explored. This act of cultivating and exploring topics is referred to as *rehearsal* by Graves (1983, p. 221). In addition to writing, the success of a writer’s workshop depends on a student’s active participation in writing response groups.

As an active participant in a writing response group, “students need to study what peer-response groups do and then practice using peer-response techniques” (Barron, 1991, p. 24). This will require that students offer comments, listen to the comments of others, and

learn from listening (VanDeWeghe, 2004). Over time the student will build the skills needed to offer more sophisticated response, but it takes time and practice to build these skills.

“Students need to practice reading one another’s work while giving and receiving feedback before they do more than edit or offer global praise” (Simmons, 2003, p. 684). Eventually the interaction in the response groups can develop into “a dialogue . . . created between the writer and other members of the group which clarifies the intent of the writer’s essay and sharpens the way it is achieved” (Barron, 1991, p. 24). The student gains more than just response skills through their interaction with their response group, through varied readership students gain “a sense of authorship, knowledge of effects on readers, development of an internal monitor, and the ability to evaluate one’s own writing” (Simmons, 2003, p. 692). The role of the student writer within a writing response group will include listening to other students, and providing considerate, appropriate, and useful feedback. The finer points of this role are best elaborated within a greater context a discussion of the literature describing the various expectations, uses, and potential shortcomings of peer response.

PEER RESPONSE

Peer response is a complicated topic. Many instructors have struggled with implementation, and researchers have studied peer response looking for the key to using it successfully. In the literature there is some consensus as to the important elements of peer response.

Expectations

The literature of peer response describes a number of different applications and approaches of class-based interactions. In his 1992 essay, Harris collects the experiences and descriptions of writing center tutors and students in order to illustrate the fundamental difference between a class-based peer response model and working with a tutor in a writing center. The primary differences Harris notes are that in a writing center tutoring session, the writer approaches the tutor with questions and is looking for the tutors’ authoritative experience. The tutor does not necessarily grow in this interaction; it is more unidirectional focused on assisting the writer. As Harris (1992) describes the peer response interaction, it is mutually beneficial, building skills for the responders as well as the writers:

Peer readers critique a draft of an assignment that all members of the group are working on. This keeps the discussion focused on specific drafts, though one of the larger goals is still to improve the skill of critical response by this kind of repetition. The assumption is that the more the student reads and responds, the more her critical skills improve. The more the writer hears reader response, the stronger his sense of audience will be. (p. 372)

Harris describes the mutually beneficial model of peer response in order to differentiate it from a writing center tutorial. This is significant as the focus in many peer response situations is to develop the writer, not necessarily the writing. Clarity between these goals is especially significant when peer response is used in high-stakes academic settings. Newkirk studied the confusion that can result both on the part of the instructor as well as the writer when instructor expect peer responders to be expects instead of apprentices. Newkirk (1984) addressed the tension between peer and instructor response in university level writing workshop settings, and worked to clarify reasonable expectations for peer response.

Students need practice applying the criteria that they are now learning. But rather than being viewed as the “natural” audience for fellow-students’ writing, they might more profitably be viewed as apprentices, attempting to learn and apply criteria appropriate to an academic audience. It follows that the teacher’s role in the workshop should not be passive. If students are to enter into the evaluative community of the instructor, they need to see the norms of that community applied to student work (Newkirk, 1984).

Newkirk’s work highlights the tension the environment can introduce between expression and achievement. In the university environment Newkirk was participating in, the students were trying to approximate the demands of a discipline while also trying to understand those demands. In this case, Newkirk argues, the instructor needs to model and guide the students to understand the discipline both through their writing and their response. Both roles, that of author and responder, are roles of learning and growth in a well-constructed peer response setting.

The Social Hub of the Writing Workshop

Writing is essentially a social act, the effort of one person to be understood by another through words and symbols on a page. One of the challenges of writing instruction is that the artificial environment of the formal classroom often removes students from the social element of writing. In 1973, Elbow published a guide for writing instruction entitled *Writing*

Without Teachers. This text has inspired many teachers to use the ideas and practices of Elbow's writer's workshop, specifically peer response, in their own classroom. The practice of peer response has become so widespread that peer response, "in which students work together to provide feedback to one another's writing in both written and oral formats . . . has become a common feature of L2 instruction" (Liu & Hansen, 2002, p. 1). Some teachers find the experience liberating, while others are frustrated by the loss of control in the class. When compared with other aspects of writing instruction such as prompt design, grammar instruction, and written feedback from the instructor, or improvement in writing over the course of several drafts, there have been few studies of the role of environment in peer response. The studies that have been conducted have focused on the interaction of the members of the group, the amount of control of direction imposed by the instructor on the group, the groups' members' sense of why they interacted as they did (Carson & Nelson, 1996), or to what degree the peer response experience improved their writing (Neubert & McNelis, 1990). A survey of these studies will show that while there are many compelling issues to address within the realm of peer response groups, there has been little recent work examining how the level of formality in the structure of the educational context impacts the participant's experience of the response group.

Cultural Context and Expectations of Peer Response

The ongoing research into the use of writing response groups has a few central points of focus. The first is how various the culturally-based assumptions of certain populations interact with the format and demands of writing groups (Berg, 1999; Carson & Nelson, 1996; Peckham, 1996; Porto, 2002). In Berg's 1999 study of ESL 46 students, the study emphasized the importance of training response group participants in how to participate in a writing response group. Berg compared two groups of ESL students, one trained in peer response and the other untrained, Berg (1999) concludes that while language barriers can impact the success of a response group, the real issue is how the students are trained, "appropriate training can lead to improved writing through more meaning-type revisions" (p. 230). In Carson & Nelson's 1996 study of 11 multinational ESL students, the significant issue impacting the success of the groups was not language, but had more to do with cultural assumptions. Carson & Nelson (1996) found that the individual's culturally-based goals for

the group influenced how he/she interacted with the group. The Chinese students at the center of the study expressed a primary concern for the positive group environment and were less likely to criticize drafts than other group members who saw the goal of the group as task-focused (Carson & Nelson, 1996, p. 7). Porto's 2002 study of peer response in an advanced ESL setting in South America focused on another culturally-based stumbling block, the institution's expectations. In Porto's (2002) study the students found that although the response groups "did not appear to address [the students'] urgent concerns about grammar and failed to be of immediate help with the course requirements," at the end of the year, "93% of the learners' writer reflections included explicit references to the approach [peer response]" (p. 687). Porto reflects that despite the perceived benefit on the part of the student learners, the institution values grammatical competency over fluency or comfort in writing. To make further entry into this environment "further research is needed to test whether the approach succeeds in helping learners meet the requirements set by the institution" (Porto, 2002, p. 690).

Training Increases Success

The second focus of the research into peer response groups is about making writing response groups more effective. Many teacher-practitioners such as Wagner, et. al., (2001) reflect from their experience that "students need guidelines for the expected level of writing" (p. 129). Barron's 1991 essay mines his own experience implementing peer response groups to highlight some key factors that improve the chances for successful groups. Barron (1991) concludes that "when students are not on task in their groups, it is because they do not know what to do or why the task is important" (p. 24). The essay discusses the importance of creating groups with good dynamics and energy. Barron encourages instructors to reform groups as they see fit. Barron (1991) also discusses the need to put many models in front of the students, both of text and of behavior in the group (p. 25).

Other researchers have examined prescriptive approaches to improving students' performance in writing response groups (Neubert & McNelis, 1990; Liu & Hansen, 2005; Holt, 1992; Simmons, 2003). Barron's and Wagner's personal observations are validated by the previous work of Neubert & McNelis (1990). In their study of middle school writing response groups, Neubert & McNelis (1990) found that students made more specific and

fewer vague comments after being instructed in a specific response protocol (p. 56). In this case the protocol was called “Praise-Question-Polish” (Neubert & McNelis, 1990, p. 52). This protocol encouraged group members to begin with a generally positive statement and continue towards more specific and critical components of their response.

Simmons (2003), in a three-year study of multiple high school and college writing classes found that students must practice peer reviewing skills much longer than the duration of a typical year- or semester-long writing course. That study observed students from 2 high school classes in two different school settings, for a total of four classes, and also their instruction in peer response, and quantified the amount and types of peer response offered by the students. Simmons found that as students became more experienced in response, they focused more on the strategies the writers use and the needs of the reader. He also found that the writing portfolios that had been developed with peer help tended to score higher than those that had no peer assistance. The benefits observed were not limited to improved scores; they extended to include a sense of authorship, knowledge of the effect of writing on the reader, and the ability to evaluate one's own writing. Simmons concludes by saying that the occasional good writing class that focuses on peer response will not make a lasting impact; instead Simmons argues for "workshops from the first day of kindergarten onward" (p. 685).

McGroarty and Zhu (1997), in a study of four college composition instructors and 169 students, found that the students who were trained in peer revision had a greater ability to critique peer writing and a better attitude about the peer revision process. This study looked at the students' change in writing quality as well as their ability to participate in peer critique and their attitudes towards peer critique. The researchers, in an effort to create a rich data field, designed a mixed method study that employed quantitative measures for the amount of feedback, type of feedback, and quality of writing, in addition to using a variety of quantitative tools, questionnaires and observation of peer critique sessions, to measure students' attitudes about the process and their ability to perform peer critique. The use of multiple measures created a much more complete picture of the model of peer critique being used. The quantification of types discusses the different types of response as global or specific. These categories in turn mask the actual content of the responses, especially when viewed in light of Straub's (1999) model as Simmons (2003) uses it.

The Challenges of Peer Response

Peer response takes a good deal of class time if it is implemented as it was first described. There are many ongoing projects which have used the peer response model in asynchronous and virtual settings with varying degrees of success. A study published in 1996 by Peckham exposes the challenges of adapting the peer response model to a computer-mediated peer response model. Many of these challenges, such as “the need for giving class time to computer instruction, and the diminished sense of community when compared to a real time face to face group” (Peckham, 1996, p. 334) had not yet been overcome by the rapidly advancing field of communication technologies. In a more recent study of 12 students in a sophomore level writing course at a university in Taiwan (Liang, 2010), students online interactions were studied as well as the later impact of those interaction on the writing produced by the students. In the discussion of the results, Liang (2010) notes,

In linking group participation in revision-related discourse with writing outcomes, one sees that certain types of synchronous online peer interaction facilitate subsequent writing and revision, though admittedly this depends on the group’s co-constructed interactional context for coherent discussion and communication. (p. 56)

Ultimately this suggests that online response groups can be successful, but they, like their face to face counterparts, need specific models that students can access regularly.

Peer Response is not a Replacement for Instructor Response

Peer response is different from instructor response. Caulk (1994), in a study of forty-three 18-25 year old German college students studying to be English teachers, found that the types of response offered by peers was different from the response the instructor offered, but was also an important supplement. While the teacher-researcher in the study tended to give more global feedback, the comments from the students were often more specific and directive. While the peer commentary was more directive, it did not carry “the feeling that [the writer was] obligated to take the suggestion” (Caulk, 1994, p. 186). While there isn’t much detail provided about the training of the responders or the format of the response, Caulk’s focus is on establishing the reliability and validity of peer response in second language settings. As in Porto (2002), there is an institutional expectation that the response of authority will come from the instructor. Each of these settings features L2 students

engaged in writing and response in English. This connects with Newkirk (1984), mirroring the idea that all of the participants in a response group are apprentices, and as apprentices they require models and more experienced guidance.

Peer Response Methods Must be Carefully Matched with Goals

Holt, in her 1992 essay, identifies a split in approaches to peer response, one focused almost exclusively on self-expression, and the other focused on criteria-based response. Her essay explores the common ground between these two with the end of guiding instructors to activities and expectations that are appropriate to their environment. As Newkirk recognized in 1984, Holt (1992) acknowledges that in most formal classroom settings the dual goals of personal and criteria –based response, “work best in tandem in the collaborative classroom because together they capture the struggle between individual expression and social constraint that most of use experience as writers” (p. 384).

Peer Response Skills and Benefits are Difficult to Assess on a Large Scale

In a study of 87 students completing an expressive timed writing assessment in Maryland public schools, Goldberg, Roswell, & Michaels (1996) found that the differences in the scores of students engaged in peer response versus those who simply had a chance to revise their own work was negligible. In their discussion of the results, the authors noted that the peer response groups or partners, who had never worked together previously “may have been loath to criticize each other’s work, and observations of the peer response sessions made the difficulties of these interactions clear” (Goldberg et al., 1996, p. 308). The authors of the study acknowledge that the peer response pairings for this test were made the day of the test and the students paired had not, in most cases, worked previously together on writing. They did share one case where students who had previously been writing partners were paired together. In that case the responses offered, “were lengthier, contained more text-specific comments, addressed a fuller range of textual concerns and contained more affective language”(Goldberg et al., 1996, p. 308) . Although the authors are not able to directly link the quality of response to the quality of the subsequent revision, they do suggest that the

relationship between the responding students can significantly influence the quality of the response offered.

Emotion, Learning, and the Peer Response Group

The peer response group is sometimes a scene charged with emotion, from anxiety to pride. This emotion is a marker of great potential for learning. “In writing groups we ask students to play the role of coach, one that has important emotional components; we can teach them how to play this role effectively through observation and modeling” (McLeod, 1997, p. 38). In Zull’s (2002) discussion of peer support and emotion in learning he explains the potential benefits of students engaging in these emotionally charged roles:

The support part of the [learning] cycle is where I believe interactions with peers can have a powerful impact. When a learner shares an image with his peers, he will not only get new cognitive ideas. He will also gain confidence and begin to recognize the progress he has already made. Without interactions with his peers, the learner may not realize where he stands. (p. 239)

The confidence described here has the same potential to trigger an emotional feedback loop like Ratey’s (2001) model of the fear feedback loop. While confidence is not as openly dramatic as fear, it is reasonable to conclude that as fear begets fear, so can confidence beget confidence. “Each emotion has a cognitive effect: It influences our interpretations of our environment, and makes available certain cognitive resources that allow individuals to reformulate their current plans and actions” (Oatley & Nundy, 1996, p. 272). Considering how emotion can drive learning and thought in a complex social environment such as a writing response group, how does larger formal or informal setting support the social and emotional demands of a writing response group?

How an Ungraded Informal Learning Environment can Support the Goals of Peer Response

The research concerning informal learning environments and peer response groups share an emphasis on an environment that puts the individual student at the center of activity. But this student’s achievement is dependent on interaction with other students. Informal learning environments can submerge students in a culture and ask them to adopt various roles. Through this adoption of culture the student can discover new information about themselves as well as the target culture. In peer response groups students are asked to adopt

the role of author or responder. They learn about themselves as writers as well as the world of writing. They learn about the needs of readers by being readers. Individuals in informal learning environments are pushed beyond their normal experiences and guided into new ones. In a well-constructed environment the emotional risks the students take are supported by instructors, other students, and the created culture of the experience.

Considering the example of Chazan (2003), informal learning environments can be used to teach ideas and values that can have a deep impact on the lives of the learners. Chazan's work supports his belief that these informal learning experiences can help individuals decide how to integrate religious values into their everyday lives. Likewise, considering a skill as foundational as writing, a well-managed informal environment can help a participant find room for this skill in their life long after they leave the created culture of camp. The challenge is, how can educators come to understand this experience in such a way as to make it transferrable to other environments or possibly other foundational skills? The purpose of this phenomenological study was to meet this challenge and to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting, Young Writer's Camp, on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten. The decision to study an ongoing, successful program in which I have a professional as well as personal investment guided my hand throughout the design of the study. The choice of phenomenology as a conceptual framework was made in order both to capture the experience with the participants as the direct source of data, and to interfere as little as possible with the process of writing camp. The true experience of the participants, in their own words, was the most effective data available to cut through my own preconceptions about the nature and experience of Young Writers' Camp (YWC).

In order to have enough information to create accurate descriptions, it was important to design a variety of ways to capture the words and thoughts of the student and teacher participants. In phase one of the study, the responses on exit surveys directed the shape of the research questions for the dissertation study. The questions were designed to open dialogue and to not limit the possible data (van Manen, 1990). As the phase one data collection developed further, the design of student interviews became short but periodic; they were performed during the course of the normal day at the camp, over the course of 3 weeks. The theme that connects all of the data collection methods is that they were designed to create a rich field of data in the participants' own words, while also not significantly changing the camp experience for the participants.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

The context of this study, an educational experience in an informal setting spanning a wide range of ages over a relatively short period of time with no formal assessments, presents a number of challenges to a researcher. This contextual challenge is compounded by the general nature of the investigation. In this case the researcher is looking for the aspects of

this experience that matter most to the participants. The researcher is attempting to better understand the success the participants self-report, without changing the experience itself. These challenges of context are somewhat mediated by the content of the experience. The fact that this is a writing camp, and participants in the camp are guided and encouraged to write about their own experiences, sets the stage for greater self-disclosure. The campers spend a great deal of time writing, so when they are writing at the end of the camp experience for the purpose of data collection, at least the practice of writing and describing their experience is not new to them. While there are several valid and useful approaches to studying such an experience, the context of the study, the content of the camp, and the overall goal of the study all lend themselves well to a phenomenological approach to investigation. This close alignment can be made most clear through a discussion of the available data sources, the interpretative nature of analysis, and the need for pedagogically descriptive outcomes.

The fact that the topic of this study presented itself as a question in the professional life of the researcher suggested early on in the process of this study that phenomenology could be a good methodological lens to use to get the most meaning out of the study. “Phenomenological researchers seek to reveal the essence of human experience by asking, what is the nature of this phenomenon?” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30). In this case, the researcher and his writing project colleagues began by asking, “What is it that happens at young writer’s camp?” and “how can we describe the important aspects of young writer’s camp in a way that others can understand and use the information.” One of the challenges of the camp context is the wide range of ages, skill levels, and backgrounds of the participants. The lens of phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on the experience of the campers as they describe it more than on the demographic descriptors of the campers. “The researcher observes, records, classifies, and concludes, seeking whenever possible, to capture the reality of the *subjects* and not only his or her [the researcher’s] reality” (Lancy, 1993, p. 9). By recording and combining the experience of many campers, the researcher is able to construct a description of the camp experience without simplification or assumption in that using this approach, “subjective realities are . . . often studied comparatively” (Lancy, 1993, p. 9). Another good match between the methodology and the context exists because of the brief nature of the camp and the limited amount of time available for data collection activities as,

“phenomenology is best employed in situations that have relatively confined temporal and physical boundaries” (Lancy, 1993, p. 9).

The use of phenomenology to study a writing camp is a natural choice considering the amount of writing that phenomenology employs. In Peter Elbow’s (1989) essay, “Toward a Phenomenology of Freewriting” he employs a collection of his freewriting samples in order to discuss and describe the nature and uses of freewriting. His essay represents a much more singular and narrative approach to phenomenology. In this study much of the narrative and reflective aspects have been collected and read as data. The important connection between writing and phenomenology is that it is through writing that we as subjects construct and describe our reality (van Manen, 1990). The campers in this study wrote their final reflections in response to prompts that asked them to identify what they liked the most, or what was the most helpful. This occurred after three weeks of writing about themselves and describing their experiences. As research subjects they were primed to express. One of the methodological strengths of phenomenology is that it requires the researcher to believe in and honor the reality as described by the subject. “Hermeneutic phenomenology is a constructivist approach, it assumes that multiple, socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings individuals give to their experiences ought to be the objects of study” (Hatch, 2002, p. 30).

The use of interpretive analysis helps the researcher to render and honor the experiences described by the subjects of the research. In a phenomenological study, the data collected are subjected to multiple readings and interpretive analysis. “Interpretation is about giving meaning to data; it is about making sense of social situations by generating explanations for what is going on within them” (Hatch, 2002, p. 180). In this case the researcher set about exploring the young writers camp experience to better understand how the parts of the camp contributed to the whole, as experienced by many different students.

This methodology guided the researcher in constructing the following questions:

1. What is the role of an instructor in an ungraded informal learning environment?
2. What is the role of the student in an ungraded informal learning environment?
3. What is the role or function of peer response in this ungraded informal learning environment?

4. What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment?

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to describe the Young Writer's Camp, a well-established program that was viewed by participants, parents, and instructors as successful. This study is designed around the philosophical lens of phenomenology in order to create pedagogical descriptions of the learning experience informed by multiple perspectives and to allow for the richest possible combination of data collection and analysis tools, while also clearly putting the words and experiences of the participants at the forefront of the data.

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase focused on historical data from the writing camp and the second phase focused on periodic interviews with participants during one camp session. The data at the center of the first phase were 500 open-ended survey responses from 4 years of previous participants. The data sources for this study include open-ended surveys, and interviews. Following the phenomenological process outlined in van Manen (1990), the data collected from each of the data sources were subjected to multiple analytical approaches to uncover and isolate thematic aspects. The actual textual responses were first analyzed by coding the individual responses in the words of the participants; these codes were then grouped into themes. This selection process follows van Manen's process of a detailed line by line reading of all of the evidence. As often as is practical, the labels of the themes were from the respondents' own language.

The second step in the process was to select and highlight statements that carry a significant portion of the message of a theme. In the discussion of the theme, these are the examples used to build the phenomenological description. Lastly, the process as outlined by Van Manen (1990) calls for a holistic approach, a close reading of the text followed by the researcher writing a statement of theme. Van Manen makes the arguments that the writer of phenomenology has to, on occasion, give language to a moment when a subject suffers from an inability to express what he or she knows. He labels this "epistemological silence" (van Manen, 1990, p. 113). The researcher, as van Manen argues, is responsible for creating a holistic thematic statement that may be more true for the participant than what the participant is able to express. In a variation I believe keeps with the tradition of van Manen's intention while allowing the researcher to distance himself slightly from the creation of evidence, I

employ a digital third party to assist in creating a holistic impression. Throughout the data analysis, the tool *Wordle* was used to create word cloud images that are based on the frequency of individual words in the text put into the tool. These word images will create a holistic impression, or picture, of the data in each theme group. These images were used to help establish the importance of the themes within the sets of data. This gives the researcher access to several different levels of understanding, allowing for the construction of a more meaningful impression of a camp than could be achieved through simply the use of word frequency counts.

Setting

The Young Writers' Camp is sponsored by the San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) site of the National Writing Project, a national association of teachers of writing established in 1973 (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Beginning in 1996, the camp has been located at a prominent public university in Southern California. The camp is a three week summer program for children going into grades 3-10. The camp is not affiliated with any schools and advertises itself as a fun camp to foster young authors. Although the class structure at the camp looks traditional, it is truly an informal environment. There is no system of grading or evaluation. Students are grouped into seven (7) classes based on the grades they will be entering in the fall, but the class activities are designed to have a wide variety of modes of participation. During session of the camp used for phase two of the study there were 177 students divided into 7 classes in the camp: one section of grade three and four combined, one section of grade four, one section of grade four and five combined, one section of grade five and six combined, one section of grades six and seven combined, one section of grades seven and eight combined, and one section of mixed 9th and 10th grade students. The program describes this as “an environment designed to inspire creativity . . . and build confidence. . . [where] Students explore writing styles and methods of self-expression with new friends” (San Diego Area Writing Project, 2010). The daily activities range from demonstration lessons, to walks around the campus practicing descriptive writing, to participating in writing response groups. Through all of this students make their own choices about what to write, how much to share and with whom.

Participants

Participants in phase two of the study were 12 students (2 randomly selected from each of 6 classrooms) and 8 teachers. The process of periodic interviews with the student participants allows for a relationship to develop between the researcher and the participant, so that the interviews will become an ongoing conversation about the camp experience and the students' participation in writing response groups, process writing and other camp activities. This sampling is a convenience sampling and represents the available and willing participants.

STUDENTS

The total camp population includes 177 students ranging from those entering into the third grade in the fall to students entering the 10th grade in the fall. The sample size of 2 students from each of these classes was determined to establish a breadth of data across grade levels, while also keeping the number of participants low enough to not disrupt the classes by removing students from actual writing or class time. Focusing too exclusively on one grade level would provide data that could be too closely tied to grade level context.

INSTRUCTORS

The camp employs 14 teachers, two for each of the classrooms. The teachers for the camp range from early career teachers to those of post retirement age. Eight teachers were interviewed individually for the study. The camp experience is co-constructed between the student and teacher participants, so the choice to include data from the instructors is important to the goal of creating an overall profile of the experience of the camp. The structure of the camp requires that teachers and teacher assistants also participate in the daily writing and sharing activities, so while the teachers may have more responsibility, they also have an authentic camp experience.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data Collection was divided into two primary phases, phase one using participant self reporting on response forms, and phase two employing a series of interviews.

PHASE ONE

Phase one of data collection was conducted by collecting exit surveys from campers over the course of several years.

SURVEYS

The existing data, four years worth of the student exit surveys over, 500 in total, were often anonymous, but were always completed in the participant's own words. Over the course of four years, the program used three different reflection forms. These exit surveys were collected in the four year prior to phase two of the study. The first brief open ended form asked campers to respond to three prompts:

1. My favorite part of camp was . . .
2. At camp I ...
3. One idea to make camp even more fun is. . . (see Appendix A)

The second form, also open-ended, was expanded to collect information on what school the participant attended, which teachers they worked with during the program, as well as what activities helped most with their writing (Appendix A). The third form was just a reflective letter written to the camp director. There are a small number of these suggesting that one class may have run out of forms (see Appendix A). Although the existing data was collected from three slightly different tools, the information is still continuous due to the type of analysis that was applied to the surveys. As these surveys asked the participants about their experiences at the camp and were reported in the participants own words, they provide a strong foothold for gaining entry to the participant's real lived experience (van Manen, 1990). These survey responses helped to create a general baseline of the experience of camp. During phase two of the study this baseline was elaborated by examining the experience of individual campers in greater depth through individual interviews.

The analysis of these 500 exit surveys followed all three of van Manen's (1990) suggested processes for uncovering or isolating thematic aspects. Each survey was read and the statements in the survey were classified into appropriate themes as they are transcribed. This initial processing of the data followed the most detail-attentive process van Manen (1990) describes, "in the detailed approach we look at every single sentence or cluster and ask , *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience*

being describe.” In this occasion, the answer helped to assign the statement to a particular theme category. The sentence or sentence cluster was then preserved in its original phrasing. This close reading helped to sort the data as well as began to build a profile of the phenomenon in the mind of the researcher.

Building a phenomenological description requires the researcher to become immersed time and again in the data. Each reading looks for the examples that will build the phenomenological description. Van Manen (1990) describes a phenomenological description as, “an example composed of examples.” The second trip into the data was a selective approach. In this reading the researcher, “listens to or reads the text several times and asks, what statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). The data, separated into theme groups, were read for phrases that capture essential elements of the description of that theme as a lived-experience at Young Writers’ camp. In the discussion of the data, it is these phrases that do the heavy lifting of crafting the written description of the theme.

Van Manen’s differing approaches to processing and reprocessing the available data bring a microscope to mind. By slightly changing the focus of the lens, a whole different group of organisms appears. So it is with the interview data. Van Manen advocates that the researcher read the data and attend to the text as a whole. The researcher is then instructed to formulate a phrase that “capture[s] the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole” (van Manen, 1990, p. 93). This is the point where the methodology as outlined is augmented by the use of an online tool. Using the online tool *Wordle*, the survey text for each theme was evaluated for key term frequency, and a word cloud image will be created that showed the key terms rendered in size relative to frequency, so the words that show up the most often appeared largest. For example, the word cloud for the theme “writing” which was used to collect participants general statements about writing, such as “I love writing” the word *writing*, appearing 77 times in the sources text, is rendered as huge when compared to the word “idea” which only appears twice in the source text (Appendix B). The result is a graphic that allows the researcher to “see” another layer of meaning held in the participants individual responses.

As the data are read through each of these processes, the researcher isolated and evaluated statements that express essential elements of the Young Writing camp experience.

These were tested for validity using van Manen's process of "Free Imagined Variation" (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). In this process statements are generated, such as "I make friends at camp" were tested by creating variations on the statement and testing that variation against the emerging holistic description of the phenomenon. A variation of this theme could be, "I don't make friends at camp." This variation does not fit with the emerging understanding of camp; therefore the original statement is important to the overall description of camp. Another example statement is "Young Writers' Camp demystifies writing through practice and exposure to working authors," could be varied to simply read that camp does not demystify writing. It could also be varied to read that camp demystifies some other activity, such as football. Neither of these variations reflects the experience the students shared in their survey responses. The student exit interview data were used to create the overall description of YWC camp and address the primary research questions, *What are the roles of the instructors and the students at YWC and What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment?*

PHASE TWO

Phase two of the study was conducted by interviewing student and teacher participants during one season of camp.

STUDENT INTERVIEW DATA

The interviews were designed to be individual and periodic, one interview per student participant per week for all three weeks of the program. In the case of this study, the interviews were designed to be focused, so as to interrupt the program experience as little as possible and to provide a "supplement to the other data sources" (Powney & Watts, 1987, p. 26). The ongoing challenge of doing this data collection in the midst of the program was to provide a continuous experience for the participants so the object of the study was changed as little as possible by the study itself. The interview design was kept very simple. The questions were:

1. Are you currently in a writing response group?
2. What are you doing in your writing group now?
3. How does it feel for you to share your writing with your group members?

4. How does sharing your writing help you?

After the first week of camp the question, “Is your group more or less helpful than last week?” was added. Because of the responsive nature of phenomenological interviewing, these questions were modified slightly as needed within the context of the interview in order to encourage more rich responses.

The purpose of the interview was not only to collect a sample of the population's impression of the writing group experience, but also to provide some insight into how that impression developed over the three weeks of the camp. Although the camp is three weeks long, it only meets for 3 hours a day, four days a week. Overall the camp experience covers about 36 contact hours, and writing response groups may occupy up to 12 of those hours, roughly one-third of the camp experience. Measuring any significant change in writing skill or ability over such a short time is challenging, so the study focused on how students describe, illustrate, and reflect on their own experience. The interviews were recorded, and then transcribed verbatim and coded. The codes and themes from the interviews preserve the experience of the participants in their own words. The analysis included looking at the overall frequency occurrence of codes, the density of themes, the periodic frequency of codes, and how the codes and themes change over the course of the three week camp (van Manen, 1990). As the interviews are focused exclusively on writing response groups, these data should speak directly to the camper's experience in writing response groups, as well as contributing to the discussion of the role of WRG in the camp experience. The initial coding followed the same line-by-line approach detailed for the exit interview. The student interview transcripts were read closely to look for statements that capture the experience. Using Van Manen's three levels of analysis as a loose protocol, the data for this source were sorted into groups by the week of the interview. These three temporal groupings were subjected to Van Manen's second level of analysis; sentences and phrases were selected in order to create a description hewn from the participants' own phrasing.

The holistic reading of the data was accomplished in the three weekly groupings. The word images created by Wordle allowed the researcher to see how the responses changed over the course of the three weeks of camp. For the analysis of the student interview data, Wordle was used to render word clouds, but to a different analytical end. During phase one Wordle was used to render large banks of specific theme data, here it is used to illustrate

change over the course of just 3 weeks. By clustering all of the student responses from each week and creating 3 word clouds, a short image narrative of change in the participants own language is rendered. The effect of working with a writing response group will likely change as the students experience the group more. This periodic separation should allow the development to be rendered in the words of the students. The statements describing the effect of working with a writing response group were tested using Van Manen's technique of "free imaginative variation." The tested and verified statements were used to compile a composite phenomenological description of the student's experience in writing response groups.

INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW DATA

Designing an interview tool to capture the experience of the instructors, while also not significantly changing their experience, was a challenge. This challenge was also complicated by the fact that I was working as the director of the camp. This role required me to supervise, organize, and assist the instructors. So in addition to not changing the experience they will describe, I also had to mitigate the power relationship inherent in my supervisory role. For this reason, instructor interview data were collected differently from the student data. Instructors were interviewed individually, as well as in a focus group session. The individual interviews were conducted early in the camp schedule and the focus group occurred towards the end of the camp experience. In the case of this study, the individual interviews were designed to gather information during the planning and implementation phase of camp in order to capture the thinking and planning the instructors undertook in preparation for the camp as well as the adjustments in methods they made during the camp. The interview design was kept very simple. The questions were:

1. Describe how you plan on using writing response groups in your classroom?
2. How will or did you introduce WRG?
3. What conditions need to exist to make sure students have a successful WRG experience?

The overall focus of the interviews was on the specific practice of writing response groups, although the instructors commented on many aspects of camp. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. Then they were first subjected to a close line-by-line reading

to begin to form a composite of the instructors' thoughts or concerns during the planning and initial implementation of writing response groups. Second, the teacher responses were read for selection of themes. In the discussion of the data it is these phrases, selected as representative of the experience and verified through "free imaginative variation," that are the actual lexical fabric of the description of what it means to implement writing response groups in an ungraded environment. The third level of reading, the holistic impression facilitated by *Wordle*, was created by placing all of the teacher responses in the same image, allowing a visual composite of the instructors' experience of implementing writing response groups.

The second segment of the teacher data was obtained from a focus group discussion held at the close of writing camp. The focus group was audio recorded, and I was present at this session. The goal of this session was to get teachers to talk about the camp experience, as a group debrief. All of the instructors have been through the SDAWP summer invitational institute and have practice in critical reflective conversations. A few key questions were developed in response to the ongoing student interviews, but the discussion among the teachers was allowed to follow the teachers' own interests. The instructor focus group session was first recorded, and then transcribed verbatim. In this process the text receives the first, most detail-attentive level of scrutiny. During this close reading the researcher, began to recognize dominant themes and descriptive statements in the text. During the second phase of analysis, the text was read for selection. These selected statements were the material used to create the phenomenological description of the instructors' reflected experience of writing response groups. These statements were tested using "free imaginative variation," in order to find the most essential elements of the experience. These themes combined with the visual summary provided by *Wordle* of the collected statements during the focus group, will help to create an overall description of the instructors experience. This "reflected" experience of the focus group was considered and discussed in light of the "implementation and planning" statements of the individual interviews. The final product of this comparison and contextual reading will be what van Manen (1990) described as a pedagogical understanding of the experience. The phenomenological description, when achieved correctly carries a pedagogical imperative.

Limitations

Limitations to this study include the length of the study, participant selection bias, and the fact that interviews were only conducted for one year of camp. The timeframe of the study, one 36-40 hour, three-week session, limits the amount of data that can be collected. This limitation is a reality of the writing camp, as each summer the length of the camp is limited to this time frame. The participant selection bias is determined by some of the logistical factors of the camp. The campers have to be driven to camp at 8:30 in the morning in picked up by noon four days a week for 3 weeks in the summer. This precludes the participation of campers who cannot get transportation to and from the camps campus in the middle of the day. Finally, if interviews had been conducted during all four years of camp the data would be more consistent and there would be the added depth of looking at participants, both student and instructor, who participated for multiple years. While these factors limit the ability to generalize the results, the focus of the study is to better understand one phenomenon, the impact of the learning environment on writing instruction.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten. The findings from this study provide a pedagogical profile of Young Writers' Camp. The data have been read, analyzed, mined, reread, and selected, all to the ends of rendering a rich description of the essential experience of Young Writers' Camp. This pedagogical description is an effort to use the combined experience of all participants to understand what happens at Young Writers' Camp, and to make that experience more accessible to professionals in other programs. The descriptions rendered in the language of the teachers and campers, when read together, helped the researcher to sort the incidental experience from the essential. Understanding this essential experience adds detailed, multifaceted, and richly evidenced support for much of the widely accepted ideas about both writing instruction connected with the process writing movement, as well as education in an informal environment. The results of this study were influenced by the context of the data collection as well as the data collection methods. The data collection was achieved in two phases. In the first phase, data were collected in exit surveys from campers during 4 years of the camp experience. In the second phase interviews were conducted with campers and instructors during a session of camp, the exit surveys from the participants in phase two composed the fifth year of the phase one data. In order to understand the influence of how and when the data were collected, it is important to understand what a YWC camper does on any particular day and how this develops over the course of the three-week camp experience.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A YWC CAMPER

The information about the camp schedule was not collected as part of the data collection protocol for this study; therefore it is not included in the analysis or the findings. Although not part of the collected data, the researcher's knowledge of an involvement in the day to day agenda of the camp influenced both the collection of the data, as well as the

contextualization of the analysis. At the time of the study the researcher had worked as an instructor at the young writers' camp for three years and was in his second year working as a director of the camp.

As noted earlier, The Young Writers' Camp is sponsored by the San Diego Area Writing Project (SDAWP) site of the National Writing Project, a national association of teachers of writing established in 1973 (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006). Beginning in 1996, the camp has been located at a prominent public university in Southern California. The camp is a three week summer program for children going into grades 3-10. The camp is not affiliated with any schools and advertises itself as a fun camp to foster young authors. Although the class structure at the camp looks traditional, it is truly an informal environment. There is no system of grading or evaluation. Students are grouped into seven (7) classes based on the grades they will be entering in the fall, but the class activities are designed to have a wide variety of modes of participation. During the study there were 177 students divided into 7 classes in the camp: one section of grade three and four combined, one section of grade four, one section of grade four and five combined, one section of grade five and six combined, one section of grades six and seven combined, one section of grades seven and eight combined, and one section of mixed 9th and 10th grade students. The program describes this as "an environment designed to inspire creativity . . . and build confidence. . . [where] Students explore writing styles and methods of self-expression with new friends" (San Diego Area Writing Project, 2010). The daily activities range from demonstration lessons, to walks around the campus practicing descriptive writing, to participating in writing response groups. Through all of this students make their own choices about what to write, how much to share and with whom.

The campers, regardless of age, had similar daily agendas at camp, see Table 1.

Each class modified this agenda as needed, but in general the instructors try to expose the campers to two mini lessons from differing genre each day and give the campers an opportunity to practice these lessons and get feedback on their writing from their peers.

Throughout the three weeks of camp, all campers are expected to create at least one piece of writing of their own choosing that will be submitted to an anthology. The anthology

Table 1. Sample Camper Daily Agenda

8:30-8:45 Freewriting
8:45-9:00 Sharing Freewriting and Transitioning into Lesson One
9:00-9:15 Writing Lesson One
9:15-9:30 Guided Practice with Lesson One
9:30-10:00 Writing Response Group or Small Group Share and Discussion
10:00-10:15 Snack/ Social/ Restroom Break
10:15-10:45 Writing Lesson Two - Presentation and Practice
10:45-11:15 Writing Response Group Two
11:15-11:30 Large Group Share/ Author's chair and set focus for the next day
11:30 End of Camp Day, Parent Pickup begins

is published in the third week of camp. This means that the instructors schedule more response group time during the second week of camp in order to allow each camper to get as much feedback as he/ she needs to prepare the piece he/ she has selected for the anthology.

The writing lessons can be held in the classrooms of the camp, but many of the instructors take opportunities to allow the campers to explore the university campus. One class group might have a writing lesson in the university library and follow that up with response group time in the coffee house. Another group might teach a lesson about observation and writing by going on a listening scavenger hunt throughout the campus.

Data collection in this dynamic and flexible context was a challenge that had to be answered by dynamic flexibility of the part of the researcher. All of the phase one exit survey data were collected on the last day of camp, for four consecutive years. The focus of the exit survey was asking the campers what they liked the most about camp or what helped them the most at camp. The responses were written and often clearly reflected whatever was topmost on the camper's minds. The second phase, the periodic interviews, was designed to look more deeply into writing response groups. During some of the classes, response groups occupied almost one third of camper's day in class, yet they were not discussed widely in the

exit surveys. The periodic interviews asking campers to describe their WRG experience were often conducted during the class break time. In this situation the researcher was in competition with the camper's very social break time, and there were interviews that got cut short so the camper could get a snack, or use the restroom. There were interviews that had to be cut short due to the researcher's directorial responsibilities, including everything from helping a camper with a bee sting to waiting for the paramedics because someone had broken his arm. Despite these contextual challenges, the campers were able to share much of their experience in a genuine way.

Ultimately, Young Writer's Camp is a very full and busy experience for everyone. The campers were anxious not to miss anything and the researcher worked to not interrupt their experience.

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

What is the role of an instructor in an ungraded informal learning environment?

Student Exit Surveys

In the exit survey data from phase one, student discussion of the teachers and their role at camp appeared in two major themes.

THEME 1- INSTRUCTORS SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

This theme developed from student statements that described or mentioned how teachers supported students and kept them involved in the camp process. One camper wrote, "The teachers at YWC are helpful and attentive" (personal communication, August 19, 2004). When asked what helped them the most during the camp, 55 of the 500 campers who completed the exit survey indicated that the teachers were important in helping them feel successful. The statements ranged from simply acknowledging that the teachers were nice or friendly, to more specific statements recalling support the campers saw in the classroom. The following statements illustrate this range:

- [what helped most was] our nice teachers
- [what helped most was] how friendly my teachers were

- [what helped most was] the way the teachers taught the students, they made sure every student understood
- [what helped most was] the way teachers explain to you a lot about the lesson which also gives out examples
- I think being around teachers to help me was the best

These statements from the campers reflect the campers' experience of the instructors at camp as nice, friendly, and helpful. They also begin to describe the role of the instructors in the camp experience. The statement that "[The teachers] made sure everyone understood," most clearly expresses the sentiment behind many of the campers' descriptions of how the teachers interacted with them.

THEME 2 -INSTRUCTORS SHARE AND MODEL SPECIFIC WRITING PRACTICES

In response to the questions "My favorite part of camp was" and "The most helpful part of camp was . . ." many of the campers described or named specific types of poems or stories they were introduced to during camp. This was a theme that many of the campers contributed to; of the 500 exit surveys, 341 campers discussed some specific writing practice or lesson that the instructors shared with them. The level of detail in campers' statements in this theme ranged widely. Some of the campers simply named an activity, while others explained why the lesson was so important. A representative sample of these statements is collected in Table 2.

The campers mention a wide variety of activities, from simulating the writing process with play-doh to eavesdropping on people and using that to write dialogue. While there were many different lessons mentioned, some of the lessons, like historical fiction writing, appeared in exit surveys each year. There was only one teacher at camp using this lesson, and his energy and passion for the research and the writing was commented on specifically. Another example was the recurring comments on the six square writing lesson, a favorite of another YWC teacher. The camper responses indicate that there is not one great lesson or writing style that is the key to a meaningful camp experience, but there are a multitude of good lessons that vary from classroom to classroom.

Table 2. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme of Teachers Share and Model Specific Writing Practices

Sample data from camper exit surveys

Focusing the binoculars helped me because it was fun and it opened up my imagination
Color poem lesson because it helps me be more descriptive
I loved walking around and taking sensory notes
The poems helped me out the most because they're short and describe a lot
Writing circle
The bring-a-character walkabout
Studying other author's craft helped me because I learned why that author used those ideas
The two voice poem because now I get to work with friends and now our writing has double brain power
Character biographies helped me the most so I could show my characters personality
The idea where you could picture yourself anywhere and write about it
The monster story project
Personifying an ordinary object into something real
I liked the connection between play-doh and the writing process
Use your writers eye
Using extraordinary not ordinary words

Interview Data

Interview data were collected from students as well as instructors. The interview data provided insight into the individual as well as the group experience.

DATA FROM STUDENT INTERVIEWS

The individual student interview data supported and provided further perspective on the exit survey data. The students' descriptions of the role of the instructor were occasionally direct, but more often they required active interpretation from the researcher.

THEME 1- INSTRUCTORS SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The individual student interviews provide a more detailed exploration of the theme that instructors support student engagement. The descriptions of writing response groups in the student interviews focus on sharing and responding, illustrating an active interchange of ideas. This is the embodiment of engagement as defined by Chazan (2003): an “active interchange between students and between students and educators” (p. 10). Each of the 12 students interviewed discussed the transactions within their writing response groups. Over half of the respondents mentioned instructors explicitly, as “we have 3 teachers in our room, one TA and the TA also has a response group, so we are divided into 3 response groups” (personal communication, August 2, 2006). The student is providing concrete description of how an instructor supports the WRG, in this case through participating in the groups. Another mentions his instructor by name as he describes how instructors participate in order to encourage others to share, “lot more people share after journal time in the morning, at the beginning there is just one person and then Christine and then all share because no one else has volunteered” (personal communication, August 3, 2006).

While the exit survey data described teachers paying attention to everyone and making sure that everyone learns, the individual interview data revealed the instructors as actively engaged participants in the process. This is perhaps the greatest way that instructors support student engagement, by being engaged themselves.

THEME 2- INSTRUCTORS SHARE AND MODEL SPECIFIC WRITING PRACTICES

This theme was the most developed in the students’ interview responses. All of the students described their instructors sharing and modeling the practice of participating in a writing response group. In addition, the students interviewed discussed writing response groups using a consistent model, a model they had learned from their instructors. The WRG model described by the students consists of three main parts: writing, sharing, and responding. A sample of the descriptions illustrates the variety:

- we just read the writing we have done that day out loud to the writing response group and they give you suggestions, they tell you what they like and didn’t like and what you could do to make it better

- we read our writing to each other and then we give advice, our responses to it, comments to help the writer
- we have a silent writing and then we share our writing as like adults do (personal communication, August 2-8, 2006).

This common understanding of WRGs is evidence of direct instruction on the principles and practices of WRGs. The interview descriptions viewed in concert with the exit survey descriptions illustrate instructors actively teaching one common lesson across all grade levels, how to participate in a writing response group. In addition to this common lesson, the students describe many unique lessons designed by the teachers in order to connect with the students.

Data from Instructor Interviews

The individual interviews with the instructors described the less visible side to the instructor's role. The students described instructors in their active teacher roles whereas the instructor interviews focused on maintaining the right environment for learning to write. There were two major themes describing the role of instructors in camp that were mentioned consistently by the instructors: maintaining a safe environment, and designing appropriate writing response groups.

THEME 1- INSTRUCTORS NEED TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Between the individual interviews and the focus group, all eight of the instructor participants discussed the need to establish and maintain a safe environment. In the individual interview one of the instructors commented that, "I think that you need to build a sense that it is okay to be honest" (personal communication, August 10, 2006). Honesty requires trust, and here the instructor has stated that this environment that supports honesty needs to be built by the instructor. A second instructor discussed the sense of confidentiality she introduces into her writing groups in order to create, "a sense of privacy but a sense of safety" (personal communication, August 10, 2006). A couple of the other statements from the individual interviews of the instructors illustrate the consistency of this theme:

- I think the ability to know that they can share, not be judged, and get helpful feedback to their work is the most important.

- there needs to be a sense of community in the classroom mutual respect, this has to be in place on day one where we are appreciative of other people's writing, we are showing that we are writers and that we are listening to all of them and we model this for the kids (personal communication, August 10, 2006).

During the focus group interview, the theme of maintaining a safe environment was also discussed as the instructors reflected on what made WRGs successful:

The number one [concern] is that [the environment] is a safe because the students are sharing their writing, sometimes it is very personal and if [the campers] don't feel they can share it or they think the other children will laugh at it or criticize it in a negative way then they won't be willing [to share their writing]. So creating that environment from day one is really important. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

The unanimous agreement with and support of the idea that a safe environment is important illustrates the foundational nature of this truth. This environment, as described by the instructors, is a needed precondition for many of the roles the campers are expected to inhabit.

THEME 2- INSTRUCTORS DESIGN WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS WITH THE NEEDS OF THE CAMPERS IN MIND

The second main theme describing the roles of instructors that emerged in the analysis of the phase two instructor interviews was that the instructors design writing response groups with the needs of the campers in mind. Overall 4 of the 8 instructors commented on this directly during either their individual interviews or during the focus group. One instructor reflected during the focus group discussion on the challenge of putting together a good WRG:

I think there is a lot to be said for the right chemistry in a group, We have a new configuration of really interesting writers, but a dead group, no one said anything, they all happened to not have great social skills, and so the chemistry was just awful. And chemistry is pretty important interestingly enough. It is important to scaffold things, but thinking about who is in the group and how the group is structured is really important. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

A second instructor explained her model of "designing the writing response groups based on writing level, leadership, and compatibility, making sure groups are well designed" (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Another instructor commented on the tension between letting the group work independently and adjusting the group to create the best

possible dynamic in the group in order to meet the needs of the greatest number of campers. Overall, both the instructors and the campers define the role of the instructor. As illustrated in Table 2, the campers' description is focused on the work that happens in front of them in the classroom, supporting engagement and sharing specific writing lessons. The descriptions of the instructors' role at camp collected from both students and instructors, illustrated in Table 3, focus on the planning and thought that goes into creating the writerly environment.

Table 3. Themes Describing the Role of Instructors

Themes	Student Exit Survey statements supporting the theme	Student and Instructor Interview statements supporting the theme
Instructors support student engagement	55 of 500 students	12 of 12 students
Instructors share and model specific writing practices	341 of 500 students	12 of 12 students
Instructors design WRG with the needs of the campers in mind		4 of 8 instructors
Instructors create a safe environment		8 of 8 instructors

As the researcher evaluated the evidence, the themes were tested for validity using Van Manen's process of "Free imagined Variation" (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). In this process, statements generated, such as "I make friends at camp" were tested by creating a variation on the statement and testing that variation against the emerging holistic description of the phenomenon. A variation of this theme could be "I don't make friends at camp." This variation does not fit with the emerging understanding of camp; therefore the original statement is important to the overall description of camp. While most of the individual observations about lessons could not be validated, meaning that it was not the individual lesson that was significant, there were two observations from this discussion that survived,

YWC teachers are able to shape the curriculum to the needs of the campers.

YWC teachers teach from their passions and interests.

The first statement was generated through many of the campers sharing their experience of feeling that the teacher had changed or created something within the class just to serve their needs. The second statement evolved from the campers' descriptions of specific lessons and what the individual teachers brought to those lessons.

When discussing the camp program, the teachers interviewed discussed the needs of the program. They discussed what they did, or had to think about and consider, while implementing the program. These discussions yielded a number of validated statements about the role the teacher needs to play in order to create this experience for the campers. The first validated teacher statement was

At YWC teachers design the environment carefully to support student involvement.

The discussion of the student role will clarify that students are expected to take risks at camp and this requires a safe environment. The creation and maintenance of that environment is a primary concern for the teachers.

As the teachers continue to discuss the work they do, a second validated statement emerged

YWC teachers consider and protect student's emotional well-being.

This is a more detailed statement continuing from the first. The teachers will ask the students to take risks, and the teachers have to pay attention to the students' emotional state during the process. Another aspect of caring for students and creating a good environment is establishing writing response groups that fit the needs and personalities of individual students. This was a key component of the teacher focus group discussion.

From all of the statements of teachers about WRG design came this third validated descriptive statement

Teachers at YWC create successful writing groups by making sure each group has: the right group dynamic, an understanding of the purpose of the writing response group, direct instruction in appropriate methods of response, and an opportunity to observe the process.

All of these statements were then used to craft a pedagogical description of the role of instructors in writing camp.

Pedagogical Description of the Role of Instructors at Writing Camp

From the data collected, the following pedagogical descriptions can be drawn in response to research question 1, what is the role of an instructor in an ungraded, informal learning environment? Instructors at camp are expected to believe in the work they are doing and teach from a personal place of passion and interest. In addition to supporting the students' engagement, the instructors themselves must be engaged in a way the students can see. Just as the students are choosing to buy into the environment, so must the instructor. While being helpful and attentive, shaping the curriculum to the needs of the campers, and designing a safe environment carefully to support student involvement, instructors at YWC create successful writers by making sure each writing group has: the right group dynamic, an understanding of the purpose of the writing response group, direct instruction in appropriate methods of response, and an opportunity to observe the process. The success experienced by YWC campers happens in a supportive and generously-staffed instructional environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

What is the role of the student in an ungraded informal learning environment?

Student Exit Surveys

The student exit surveys helped to establish a fundamental description of the camp experience.

THEME 1- CAMPERS LEARN HOW TO BE A WRITER

In the campers' exit survey responses, definition and description of the student's role in an ungraded and informal environment occurred in two significant themes. The first theme was that "campers learn how to be a writer." This theme developed from students' statements that described or commented on the activities of camp that the students connected with being a writer. In the exit surveys 280 of the 500 respondents discussed camp activities and directly connected them with their own identity as writers. The statements varied quite a bit from student to student, reflecting the wide range of age and experience in camp. Many of the students see "becoming a writer" as the goal of writing camp, and rightly so. The

camp is called “Young Writers Camp,” so simply attending the camp seems like an act of self identification. As students describe their own experience at camp, the act of “becoming an author” is something that the campers report happening. In response to the question “What did you like most about your experience at YWC?” students wrote about their experience at camp and really reflected on how the camp has changed them with statements like, “At camp I truly experience what it is to be a columnist, author, or just a plain straight writer” (personal communication, August 19, 2004).

The focus here is not on the effect on the camper of becoming a writer, but describing the activities that populate the role of writer in the minds of the campers. This role is full of things they do. The actions students describe when they talk about becoming an author include: writing, learning about writing, sharing their writing and by extension sharing part of themselves. The student descriptions of the role of writer include statements like, “I think that when we look at how real authors write then reflect on it, it helps me get an idea” (personal communication, August 21, 2003). This student is describing a lesson looking at master texts and discussing them.

Another camper uses the familiar experience of school to describe camp, “I liked everyday because it was like school when you write but you have more fun at camp” (personal communication, August 21, 2003). This student describes the role of writer as similar to, but more fun than the role of student. In the role of writer, the students study different genre in some depth. “I liked learning about all the different poems there are” (personal communication, August 22, 2002). The campers discussed the activities they engaged in at camp. Many of these activities were closely related to the idea of being a writer.

One of the elements common across all of the camp classrooms was freewriting time at the beginning of the day. This process of writing without restriction is described throughout the literature of the process writing movement. The students appreciate the time to use writing as a tool to explore their own interests, “[I liked it]when we got to freewrite in the mornings write whatever we wanted about, nobody telling us, just letting our imagination be in charge of our writing” (personal communication, August 18, 2005). The campers’ statements illustrate a wide range of understanding of and engagement in writing activities. Table 4 presents a sample of these responses to illustrate this range.

Table 4. Sample Camper Statements Supporting Theme One of Campers Learn How to be a Writer

The experience of learning how to write better

I liked writing freewriting and poetry because they have less restrictions and more freedom to express yourself.

I learned a whole new way to write.

I got to interact with other writers

I liked getting feedback from other students and teachers

Being able to write freely everyday and of course the writing

Having plenty of time to write and be around other writers

I learned how to use different strategies to improve my writing

The thing that helped me the most was sharing my pieces

It help me by writing with periods because I forget it sometimes

Hearing other people's work, I realize I am not the only one who writes weird things

I liked being around many other good writers

The experience of learning how to write better

I liked writing freewriting and poetry because they have less restrictions and more freedom to express yourself.

I learned a whole new way to write.

The campers statements focus on interacting with other campers: sharing, reading the work of others and responding, giving constructive response to their writing response group members and the act of writing itself.

THEME 2- CAMPERS MAKE NEW FRIENDS

The second main theme describing the role of students that emerged from analysis of the exit survey data was that “campers make new friends.” In the exit surveys 76 of the 500 respondents specifically discussed making new friends at camp. The students commented on the number and quality of friends they make. For example one camper struggled to describe the experience, “The people! I have made so many friends! And it’s not because they’re not necessarily LIKE me, cause we’re different, but we just . . . Click” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). Other statements from campers about friends ranged from the positive “I made new friends,” to the not negative, “I had no enemies” (personal communication, August 21, 2003). Table 5 includes a range of the camper statements about making new friends at camp.

While “campers make new friends” may seem like an obvious statement, the frequency with which the campers mentioned it requires the researcher to acknowledge and contextualize it. (see Table 5 for a few examples.) In the holistic reading of the student statements as rendered using *Wordle* (see Appendix B) the words describing meeting people and making new friends dominate all the other information the students mentioned in connection with the social aspects of the camp environment. It is possible this is influenced by the exit surveys being completed on the last day of camp and the campers thinking about how they will miss the new friends they have made. Even if this is the case, the importance of friends is undeniable. In the discussion of the results, this aspect of making new friends will be discussed in connection with the social environment created and maintained by the instructors using writing response groups. This idea will be connected back to some of the more affective aspects of process writing and writing instruction as discussed in the literature review.

Student Interview Data

Students discussed their experience with the researcher. In these discussions, common threads, or themes developed.

The analysis of the data collected from the individual student interviews about the student’s experience in their writing response group also contributed to the theme of “campers learn how to be a writer.” Of the 12 students interviewed, representing all ages and

Table 5. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme: Campers Make New Friends

<i>Sample data from camper exit surveys</i>
all of the awesome friendships I made, the inside jokes. I could totally be myself here
I made lots of friends/
I made a new friend/
I met a lot of friends and wrote a lot of things
I have made so many friends! And its not because they're not necessarily LIKE me, cause we're different, but we just . . . Click.
I made new friends and I like my teacher
[I liked] to make friends
I liked that we made friends and wrote at the same camp.
I met new people and had a good time
I had no enemies .
I liked meet new friends that helped me understand writing better/

grades, all of them discussed the sharing and response process. In some of these statements the campers simply said they were getting and giving feedback to their group members. Some talked about the freedom they have to choose whether or not to share their writing. “Last time I wrote something I was embarrassed to share was I think Friday” (personal communication, August 9, 2006). Another student discussed the joy and validation she finds in engaging the response process. “I like people reading my work so I can see how to correct it, and I like to share my work because sometimes it is pretty good and people like reading it” (personal communication, August 10, 2006). In discussion of this process one of the campers said, “feels like I am gonna become a better writer” (personal communication, August 16, 2006). The students are not only engaging in a writer’s workshop process, they are making their own choices within that process. It is not only the engagement within the writing and response process that is described here. It is also the student’s independent decision making within that process.

THEME 2- CAMPERS SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

A second major theme from the student interviews was that, “campers support each other in the process of learning.” A third (four of twelve) of the interviewed campers made statements that contributed to this theme. The statements reveal what this support looks like as it is practiced in the group. For example, one camper stated, “they [group members] are really nice about giving suggestion, people in my writing response group, I mean they are not like ‘oh that is awful’ they are like ‘that could be better’” (personal communication, August 10, 2006). Another camper described the support:

I feel good because the group members basically them make the right comments, they don’t make comments that hurt people’s feelings. If they don’t like something they say it politely like “I don’t agree with this, I don’t agree with that” or they say I really like the way you did this, but I would like it even more if you did this. (personal communication, August 10, 2006)

Instructor Interview

The instructor interviews, both individual and focus group, supported the themes generated by the student data. In several cases the instructor discussion created a more complete a clear picture of what it means to be a student at writing camp.

THEME 1- CAMPERS LEARN HOW TO BE A WRITER

The teacher interview data, in many cases, support and develop the themes describing the roles of students. During the focus group interview four of the instructors made statements that contribute to a greater understanding of the theme that students learn how to be a writer at camp. One of the instructors talked about how rewarding it was to be “helping kids develop that affection for feedback and behaving like real writers, which is so much of what we are always after in writers’ workshop type stuff” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Her description of helping the kids develop affection for behaving like writers is telling. While this does point back to the earlier discussion of engagement, it also clearly identifies a role of the student. Students are expected to behave like writers.

THEME 2- CAMPERS SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

The instructors, in their discussion of creating and maintaining a safe working environment, also discussed what role they saw for their students in that environment. Each of the instructors described how important it was for the campers to support each other in their learning. The instructors saw many of the significant teaching moments happening between the campers. In a discussion of how to structure a mystery, one of the instructors comments, “it is good for [the campers] to get feedback from their peers about what would be a good road to follow” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). When the campers support each other, the group becomes something greater than its parts. One instructor describes this effect as lifting them up, the group itself is the scaffolding needed to achieve a greater level of understanding. “It was able to lift them up. The kids were able to say things really meaningful about the work being shared, it was really impressive.” Table 6 illustrates the depth of support for each of the themes describing the roles of students.

Table 6. Themes Describing the Roles of Students

Themes	Exit Survey statements supporting the theme	Interview statements supporting the theme
Campers learn how to be a writer	280 of 500 students	12 of 12 students 4 of 8 instructors
Campers support each other in the learning process		4 of 12 students 8 of 8 instructors
Campers make new friends	76 of 500 students	

From these themes and evidence, validated statements about the role of students at camp were created. The statements, once tested and validated, were compiled into a pedagogical description of the roles of students at camp. These statements do not reflect the sum of all possible roles at camp, but the baseline expectation, as reported by the participating students. The instructor data in phase 2 did not add any significant data to

describe the role of student, although the instructor discussion of writing response groups did not contradict any of the data supplied by the students.

Pedagogical Description of the Role of Students at Camp

From the data collected, the following pedagogical descriptions can be drawn in response to research question 2, What is the role of a student in an ungraded, informal learning environment? As the students at YWC describe it, the role of student is very active. Students make friends at camp and learn how to be writers. These activities reflect an engagement in the interactive and experiential nature of the camp. The instructors describe the students as learning actively from each other and investing themselves in the role of writer. The fact that students make new friends displays an investment in the group nature of the informal learning experience. The students need to be active writing partners and they are also expected to grow as writers. At camp students learn, write, and become a writer. Students are expected to share their writing, and they are expected to participate in response groups as other students share their writing. Students are expected to make choices about their own writing. Students are encouraged to trust and support their classmates; to this end, they are instructed in how to support each other in the learning process.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

What is the role or function of peer response in this ungraded informal learning environment?

Student Exit Surveys

In the exit survey data from phase one, student discussion of the role of writing response groups appeared as one significant theme, “the writing response groups help campers with their writing by providing feedback from a real audience.” This theme developed from the relatively few students who identified the response groups as the most helpful or favorite part of their camp experience. Of the 500 exit surveys analyzed, only 29 contributed to this theme. The student responses are noted here to provide greater context for the instructor discussion of Writing Response Groups. Discussing the writing response

groups in their exit surveys, students focused on the benefit they felt from writing response groups. The following statements illustrate this range:

- What helped me most was my response group.
- I think the response groups really helped me a lot.
- The thing that helped me the most was sharing my pieces.

The response groups help, in these camper's eyes. Help is not very descriptive. Looking further into the responses, help becomes better defined, "I liked getting feedback from other students and teachers," and, "I loved the social interaction that helped me improve my writing" (personal communication, August 22, 2002). The campers defined the role of the WRG as helping the individual campers with their writing. Some of the classes at camp dedicated almost one third of their class time during camp to developing and participating in writing response groups, but this prominence in the camp experience was not reflected in the camper's self-reported descriptions.

Interview Data

Students as well as instructors were interviewed throughout the camp experience.

STUDENT INTERVIEW DATA

Student interview responses provided individual perspective as well as a composite image of the camp experience.

THEME 1 - WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS PROVIDE FEEDBACK FROM A REAL AUDIENCE

In the second phase of the study, campers and instructors were asked specifically about their participation in writing response groups. The individual periodic student interviews revealed that the students' understanding of writing response groups developed over the course of their camp experience. All of the students interviewed, 12 of 12, discussed writing response groups and these data contributed to the theme that emerged: "Writing response groups help campers with their writing by providing feedback from a real audience." The data illustrate the campers' developing understanding and appreciation of the function of the WRG. So the theme of "writing response groups help campers with their

writing by providing feedback from a real audience.” develops over the course of the three week camp experience.

In the data from the week one interviews the theme appears in a very simple form, “the writing response group gives me ideas.” Of the 12 student interviewed four of the respondents made clear statements that described the writing response groups as a place to get ideas, and to let other people know who you are and what your interests are:

- If I share my writing it helps other people understand what basically is my favorite type of writing, ‘cause it lets you communicate with others. It lets you have your feelings
- Sometimes I can hear other peoples writing and I sorta know how to add something on maybe to my story
- It tells me what other people think about my writing and you know it can help me in how to . . . and I could um, I could listen to other peoples writing and learn stuff from there and get new um, creative ideas from that.
- I kind of get to know the people in my group personally and about their experiences and whatever they write, how they like to write, it gives me ideas. (personal communication, August 3-10, 2006).

This focus on self, “it gives me ideas,” “it lets other people know what kind of writing I like,” transforms into a focus on the writing itself.

During the second week, a greater portion of the campers, 6 of the 12 interviewed, reflect a more developed understanding of how the WRG, and the writer and the writing all interact. One camper described it by saying, “in our writing response group like we share pieces of writing and get feedback on them, what’s wrong with them, what is good about them what would be better if you changed something about it” (personal communication, August 9, 2006). This statement illustrates a developing understanding of the role of the WRG as a present and responsive audience. The focus on a one way communication from writer to audience is developing into an awareness of a two-way interaction between the author and the audience. Another development the data illustrate is that campers get more comfortable in their groups as they get to know each other it gets more comfortable to share:

It helps you a lot, like it lets you, basically the first time you share your writing it is like, you are all nervous and you are wondering what the others are going to say about you, but as you keep on sharing it you get used to it and you won’t be scared. (personal communication, August 9, 2006)

This last statement reflects both a developing appreciation for how the writing response group helps to develop an awareness of audience in the writer, as well as echoes one of the main themes discussed by the instructors, the role of the WRG as a confidence builder. By the third week of data collection, even the youngest students were clearly articulating how the WRG helped them.

In the student interview week 3 data, even the youngest campers expressed their understanding of the activity and purpose of the writing response groups. One of the 3rd grade campers said, “it is good to get someone else’s perspective on your writing Just because. . . I don’t really know, I write at home, but I don’t really share it” (personal communication, August 16, 2006). A camper from the mixed 4th and 5th grade class explained, “It can [help] because sometimes I can get a little feedback on it to tell me what needs to be improved and what you need to tell the detail of” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Another camper recalled how a specific response session helped her see how to develop her story more,

They [my group members] told me that I needed to talk more about characters, what they look like, since I didn't go into my main characters family and what they looked like, so you can get more of an idea of the story or what their barn or house looked like. (personal communication, August 16, 2006).

This is an example of how the audience, through questions, can get the writer to see what elements of their story have not yet been explored. Another camper discussed a similar experience in much more general terms.

[WRG] is good because they give me feedback what I need to work on, you know what my strong points are and my weak points so it is good for me. Usually we have the people in the writing response group read whatever story or piece they are working on at the time and they give us suggestions or things they like and stuff. (personal communication, August 10, 2006).

The student interview data reveal an understanding of the role of WRG that develops over the course of the students’ involvement in the camp experience. By the third week of camp all of the interviewed campers made statements that supported the theme “Writing response groups help campers with their writing by providing feedback from a real audience.” While many of the campers had never participated in writing response groups before, all of the instructors at camp have prior experience with the WRG model used at camp, as it is an

important piece of the invitational institute experience the instructors are required to participate in before they are eligible to be an instructor at camp.

INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW DATA

During the individual teacher interviews as well as the focus group interview, instructor statements supported the themes that had emerged in analyzing the student interviews. In addition, these additional significant themes developed from the instructors' discussion of WRGs in their camp classrooms: Writing response groups help campers with their writing by providing feedback from a real audience; writing response groups are an important tool for creating and maintaining the supportive social culture; and writing response groups are a tool to build skills and confidence.

THEME 1 - WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS PROVIDE FEEDBACK FROM A REAL AUDIENCE

The initial instructor data from the focus group reinforced the message from the student interviews and the exit surveys that "writing response groups help campers with their writing by providing feedback from a real audience." One instructor explained the role of the WRG:

The role of writing response group in our class this writing camp was to provide an opportunity for the students to share their work and receive feedback, not only receive feedback from someone else, but do a little bit of self-reflection in the middle of their writing process before they go to revision, a pre-step before revision. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

This description clarifies some of the undefined "help" described by the students. The WRG gives an opportunity to provide and receive feedback as well as providing an ongoing engagement in the writing process. In the context of the writing process, the WRG also gives the campers a real and responsive audience, as another of the instructors explained, "they like that genuine audience, it was impactful on them" (personal communication, August 16, 2006). In addition to supporting the theme described in the student's experience, when the instructors' descriptions are viewed in light of the developing descriptions offered by the students over the three-week course of camp, there is evidence that this information

was passed from instructor to camper, and the camper's experience at camp helped to clarify this role.

THEME 2- WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS CREATE AND MAINTAIN THE SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL CULTURE

The instructor's definition of the role of the WRG was not limited, as the camper's descriptions were, to improving the writing of an individual. The WRG are an important tool for creating and maintaining the supportive social culture the campers enjoy and often connect with the phenomenon of making new friends. As another instructor described it:

I had one kid in a group who was a real goof off and he ended up in a group with really serious writers and he was a completely different kid in that group. When they met it was like I wanted to leave him there for an hour or two it was very cool. He was suddenly much more writerish. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

The groups are designed with an expectation of the campers taking it seriously, and when most of the campers are on board, they can pull the others along. This expectation was described by one of the instructors: "There needs to be a sense of community in the classroom mutual respect, this has to be in place on day one. We are appreciative of other people's writing, we are showing that we are writers and that we are listening to all of them and we model this for the kids" (personal communication, August 17, 2006). As the instructors describe it, the writing groups serve as both training and practice grounds for how to behave in a community of writers. For an example of this we can look to one of the vignettes an instructor painted of his classroom.

This raucous debate ensued about whether or not diamonds were the hardest substance known to man and whether they could shatter because this kid had a diamond tip on the sword, it was pretty important in his story, these were the first pages of a novel, and they got into this huge debate. The debate started between these two kids, who really self-identify as writers, and the other kids in the groups also got drawn into this argument in a productive way. They were really battling it out. In terms of reinforcing a writerly culture and recruiting kids into that that was a really good example of it. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

THEME 3- WRITING RESPONSE GROUPS ARE USED TO BUILD SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

In addition to creating a positive social atmosphere, the instructor's description of response groups yielded another important theme, "the instructors use the WRGs to build both skills and confidence." This theme was supported by comments from each of the interviewed instructors. One instructor commented,

I was struck by how it was able to lift them up. The kids were able to say things really meaningful about the work being shared, it was really impressive. It is part of that freakish magic I was talking about. (personal communication, August 17, 2006).

The freakish magic, or as she later named it "benevolent peer pressure" described by this instructor is supported by the WRG. The campers, in a group, engage in a reading and response protocol that helps them improve their writing. As the campers work together, often the group helps the writer more than the writing.

Another instructor in the focus group discussed this same theme of building skills and confidence, but was not convinced that the campers get enough exposure to the practice to make enough of a difference. "It is hard to really have a genuine response group aura forming, we certainly get a great shot at having them practice some response strategies but more long term, if we had camp all summer, that would be interesting" (personal communication, August 17, 2006).

Table 7 illustrates the reliance on instructor data to describe the roles of writing response groups at camp.

Pedagogical Description of the Role or Function of Peer Response in this Ungraded Informal Learning Environment

From the data collected, the following pedagogical descriptions can be drawn in response to research question 3, What is the role or function of peer response in this ungraded, informal learning environment. Over the course of the camp students become more comfortable with their fellow campers, with themselves, and with their voice. Their appreciation and understanding of the writing response groups grows over the course of the camp. The campers see the writing response groups as a means to help them improve their

Table 7. Themes Describing the Roles of Writing Response Groups

Themes	Phase One statements supporting the theme	Phase Two statements supporting the theme
Writing response		
groups help campers		12 of 12 students
with their writing by	29 of 500 students	8 of 8 instructors
providing feedback		
from a real audience.		
WRG are an important		
tool for creating and		
maintaining the		8 of 8 instructors
supportive social		
culture		
The instructors use the		
WRGs to build both		8 of 8 instructors
skills and confidence		

writing by providing the campers with feedback from a real audience. Campers learn about writing from the interaction with members of their response group. In addition, campers learn how to be writers from their peer models in the response group. The instructors' description of response groups supports the camper's description while expanding it to discuss how WRG support the cooperative environment established at YWC and help campers build writing and sharing skills as well as confidence. As students become more comfortable in their groups, they share more and they learn more. Response groups affect the writers by giving the opportunity for the less dominant kids to get some voice time.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment?

Student Exit Surveys

The exit survey data analysis yielded two main descriptive themes regarding the effect of the camp experience on the students.

THEME 1- THE CAMP EXPERIENCE DEMISTIFIED THE WRITING PROCESS

The most significant theme was that the camp experience demystified the writing process for the students. This theme was constructed from statements that made a direct connection between the activities of writing camp and a reported perceived change from the student responding to the survey. Most of the statements describing the effect of camp were collected from the exit surveys from the campers. The theme of “shift” tracked specifically statements where the campers expressed a perceived change in themselves or their writing abilities. The camp encourages campers to take on the role of writer. In the process the instructors define, model, and demystify the role of writer and the writing process. This is accomplished in many ways, but the most commonly mentioned in the campers’ responses were practicing writing, meeting authors, and studying the craft of other writers. The challenge in using the camper’s words to describe this effect is that many of the campers do not have the language to describe their experience in the same terms as an instructor. Of the exit surveys, 75 of the respondents shared statements that reflected an increased comfort and understanding of writing. For example the statement, “If I come back next year I would be so happy because YWC changed my attitude about writing” doesn’t tell much directly about how the camper’s attitude changed (personal communication, August 21, 2003). The fact that the camper would be happy to return suggests the camper’s attitude about writing has improved, and that the camper has become more comfortable with writing and sharing that writing. Another camper who felt a change, but could not fully explain it stated, “I don’t know, it just helped me learn to love to write” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). One of the campers discussed the connection between writing practice and the feeling of being a writer: “If you try writing better before you know it you’re an author” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). The campers asserted that part of the process of becoming a writer was to learn more about different types of writing. The following statements illustrate this idea in a range of levels of expression:

- I learned a whole new way to write
- I liked writing new types of poems I had no idea about.
- I didn't quite understand what metaphors were but now I do. (personal communication, August 2002-5)

The campers understanding of writing grew as they were exposed to a wide variety of model texts.

The students also discussed demystifying the writing process when they reflected on the visits from authors. Each year YWC brings published and working authors in to talk about their life. In the exit survey data, 45 of the respondents commented directly on the author visits. One camper recalled simply, “I had many thing help me, like the authors” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). The authors typically visited with individual classes and discussed their writing with the campers and usually led the campers through a writing exercise. Campers, when asked what helped them the most, would cite the author visit. “When the poet Frank Barone came to our class and taught us how to look at things and turn it into a poem,” and “When John H Ritter came and told us about different ways of writing” (personal communication, August 22, 2002). The authors who visited camp would integrate themselves into the writing community established in the classroom they visited, and this supported and validated the work the campers and instructors were doing in those classrooms. The authors who visited camper confirmed for the campers that the work they were doing- writing, sharing their writing, getting feedback, editing and publishing- were the essential activities all writers engage in. Overall this resulted in writing being more accessible and less mysterious to the students.

THEME 2 - THE CAMP EXPERIENCE TAUGHT CAMPERS TO TAKE MORE RISKS AND BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

The second theme in the exit survey data related to the effect the camp experience had on campers was that “Campers learned to take more risks and became more confident,” specifically when sharing their writing with their peers in a group setting (personal communication, August 22, 2002). While comparably few campers commented on this effect on the exit survey, 38 of the 500 respondents did discuss this effect directly. One camper wrote on her exit survey, “The fact that I can talk loudly in front of people is really a

positive point in my experience” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). The daily work of the camp asks the campers to read their writing in both large and small group settings. The statements reflect that this sharing is not easy for many of the students, but when they are able to meet this challenge, they feel a real sense of change in themselves, as reflected in this camper’s statement: “I learned to speak up and not be shy” (personal communication, August 19, 2004). Another camper framed his experience like this: “Even though it took me until the end of camp, I was comfortable with sharing and learned how to be a better poet” ” (personal communication, August 22, 2002). Here, a camper has linked the experience of sharing with becoming a better poet. Another camper linked the ability to share in the group with an increased ease of writing, “I think I am less afraid to share my writing out loud. Also my thoughts flow more easily now” (personal communication, August 18, 2005).

Interview Data

Student interview data yielded themes that shaped the descriptions of the camp experience.

THEME 1- THE CAMP EXPERIENCE DEMISTIFIED THE WRITING PROCESS

During the individual interviews many of the students discussed their areas of growth or challenge. Of the 12 students interviewed, 5 made statements that directly supported the theme of the camp experience demystifying the writing process. Some of these statements reflected that through sharing and talking about writing, the campers came to understand their own writing better:

- I like doing it. It is like a chance to hear how other people write, how I write, how we can get ideas from each other’s writing
- It gives me a chance on how to, it gives me an easier way to write a story or something
- Because sometimes I can hear other peoples writing and I sorta know how to add something on maybe to my story (personal communication, August 3-9, 2006).

As the writing process becomes more familiar, the students become more comfortable. “Yes it helps you a lot, like it lets you, basically the first time you share your writing it is like, you are all nervous and you are wondering what the others are going to say about you, but as you

keep on sharing it you get used to it and you won't be scared" (personal communication, August 9, 2006). Students engage in many activities in order to demystify writing, as one interviewed camper reflected: "This week we are doing riddles together, playing games together, writing this down, communicating" (personal communication, August 10, 2006). In week 3 one of the student's comments that the role of writer has become more comfortable: "I don't know, I think that now we are more into the concept of writing response groups, I think [working in them is] more helpful" (personal communication, August 16, 2006).

Each of these respondents pointed to something in the camp experience that made writing and participating more accessible to them.

THEME 2 - THE CAMP EXPERIENCE TAUGHT CAMPERS TO TAKE MORE RISKS AND BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

During the individual interviews, the 12 camper participants were asked to discuss their writing response groups. In this discussion 8 of the 12 interviewed made statements that supported the theme of learning to take risks and becoming more confident. Some of these statements are collected in Table 8. These campers' statements once again illustrate a range of levels of expression and understanding.

From the campers' interview statements it is clear that sharing is risky business. When we hear a student say that camp is good because, "without this camp I probably wouldn't share my writing at all," we know that this camp has made it safe and possible for this student to take the risk of sharing his writing with peers (personal communication, August 10, 2006). Although the range of expression varies, the event described is consistent. The campers feel more empowered to share in the context of camp. This is most clear when they are directly discussing their writing response groups.

Instructor Interviews

Instructor interview data yielded themes that shaped the descriptions of the camp experience.

Table 8. Sample Camper Statements Supporting the Theme Campers Taking Risks and Becoming More Confident

Sample data from student interviews
I feel good when I share my writing with my group members
I like to share my work because sometimes it is pretty good and people like reading it
I just share it and I like it
a lot more people share after journal time in the morning, at the beginning there is just one person
It is good because without this camp I probably wouldn't share my writing at all
Basically the first time you share your writing it is like, you are all nervous and you are wondering what the others are going to say about you, but as you keep on sharing it you get used to it and you won't be scared

THEME 1 - THE CAMP EXPERIENCE DEMYSTIFIED THE WRITING PROCESS

In the instructor interviews, a couple of the instructors made statements that can be directly linked to the theme of camp having the effect on students of demystifying the writing process. One of the instructors' main goals at camp was to get students involved in the writing process quickly. Even as the instructor is designing response groups, the in-class discussion is designed to get students thinking practically about what it means to be a community of writers. As one instructor commented, "I think there has to be some really specific ideas about what helps writers, and what types of things don't help writers. When we introduced writing response groups, we talked about what things are helpful to do and what things are not" (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Exposing campers to group standards for writing response directly makes the process less mysterious. The instructor needs to make sure the students know how they can help each other.

Instructors demystify the role and identity of writer to make it more accessible to the students. One of the instructors talked about one of the goals of her work at YWC is "to get [the campers] to see themselves not just as a writer from the inside, but as a writer from the

outside as well” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Students gain access to writing through the demystification of the writing process. What is perhaps more impressive is that students gain access to themselves through increased confidence and ability to share their work.

THEME 2 - THE CAMP EXPERIENCE TAUGHT CAMPERS TO TAKE MORE RISKS AND BECOME MORE CONFIDENT

In the work of constructing and maintaining the camp environment, the instructors are looking to create venues for writers of all confidence levels to share. One of the instructors explained why there is such a variety of group sizes in his class: “It affects the writers by giving the opportunity for the shy, less dominant kids to get some voice time” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). Another instructor was discussing her use of small groups: “I would reiterate that some of the kids who probably wouldn’t have shared, came out of their shells” (personal communication, August 17, 2006). The instructors work to create a variety of sharing environments, from pair share to large group. Part of the reason for this is to support students in taking risks and becoming more confident. “I see that as a super-valuable part of writing response groups, [campers] get an opportunity to share and have their voice heard” (personal communication, August 17, 2006).

In addition to providing a comfortable venue, instructors see students gaining confidence through their work with one another. In the focus group, one of the interviewed instructors stated,

Because of the culture of kids making interesting comments I think a lot of kids make more specific more interesting comments to each other. It is just part of what is going on at camp. I was really impressed and they seemed to get into that audience. One day after we did writing response groups and then came back in and shared, it seemed like a lot more kids read, so I think there was confidence bolstering going on. (personal communication, August 17, 2006)

This instructor links the activity of students providing critical feedback to each other in the writing response groups to the effect of students becoming more confident in sharing.

The support for these themes is illustrated in Table 9. The number of students in the interviews reporting an increase in confidence as compared to the number making similar statements in the exit surveys suggests the interviews were a much more effective tool for

Table 9. Themes Describing the Effect of Camp on the Students

Themes	Exit Survey statements supporting the theme	Interview statements supporting the theme
The camp experience demystifies the writing process	75 of 500 students	5 of 12 students 3 of 8 instructors
Campers learn to take more risks and become more confident.	38 of 500 students	8 of 12 students 5 of 8 instructors

getting to this information. It does not suggest that the interviewed students had a significantly different experience, just more of an opportunity to render this aspect of their experience.

PEDAGOGICAL DESCRIPTION

The descriptive statements created from the student exit survey data answer the fourth research question, “What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment?” YWC has the effect demystifying the writing process and making it possible for all students to share their work. This mirrors what Chazan (2003) says we can expect from a good informal environment. Students report engagement in the process. This engagement leads to a greater integration of the target content. In this case, that means students gain a better understanding of writing and are able to better integrate the culture of writing communicated through the camp experience into their own sense of self. The camp curriculum exposes the students to many different types of writing and they are encouraged to engage in a wide range of writing activities. Campers are given many opportunities to choose to participate. Through this process campers write and become better writers. By meeting authors and listening to others read, they can see themselves in the role of author. Another effect of this camp style ungraded writing instruction is that campers learn to share themselves, by taking the risks needed to learn new things about writing and themselves.

Conclusion

Through the reading and analysis of this data, it became clear that the camp experience was a carefully constructed experience. Instructors had to create an engaging and safe environment filled with opportunities for students to participate in a variety of groups and to interact with each other through the content. Although the instructors would plan an agenda in a number of sections, similar to the sample agenda in Table 1, the campers experienced the day at camp as a holistic unified experience. One activity fed into another. The mini-lesson would lead into the writing practice. The campers would share the writing they created during writing practice with their writing response group. In turn, they would take the advice from their writing response group into their next writing lesson or individual writing practice. This work would then be shared with their writing response group, or during the whole group sharing time. The campers' engagement in the groups allowed them to build their confidence and internalize the values and lessons about writing.

To better understand this experience, this study has collected descriptions of the roles of the participants in the words and writing of the participants themselves.

In this informal ungraded camp-style environment, what is the role of the instructor? The participants describe a passionate, engaging, and patient leader. The instructors carefully design a safe environment to support student involvement. Instructors at YWC create successful writers by making sure each writing group has the following components: the right group dynamic, an understanding of the purpose of the writing response group, direct instruction in appropriate methods of response, and an opportunity to observe the process. The success experienced by YWC campers happens in a supportive and generously-staffed instructional environment.

The specialized environment carries with it a unique role for the student. Students make friends at camp and learn how to be writers. The instructors describe the students as learning actively from each other and investing themselves in the role of writer. The fact that students make new friends displays an investment in the group nature of the informal learning experience. Each student needs to be an active writing partner, and is also expected to grow as a writer. At camp students learn, write, and become a writer. Students are expected to share their writing, and they are expected to participate in response groups as other students share their writing. Students are expected to make choices about their own

writing. Students are encouraged to trust and support their classmates; to this end, they are instructed in how to support each other in the learning process. Students have many demanding roles whether it be writing or sharing that writing. Students have to take risks and fully participate.

The third research question focused more closely on the writing response group, one specific piece of the writing camp experience. The question asked, “What is the role or function of peer response in this environment.” The study found that peer response made students more comfortable with their fellow campers. Writing response groups activity build community. Campers learn about writing through the interaction with members of the WRG. The group applies direct instruction in the moment it matters most. From the instructor’s perspective, WRG support the cooperative environment established at YWC and help campers build writing and sharing skills as well as confidence. As students become more comfortable in their groups, they share more and they learn more.

The fourth research question asked, “What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment?” The study shows that students feel like they understand writing more at the end of camp. Students learning writing in this environment become engaged. This engagement leads to a greater integration of the target content. In this case that means students gain a better understanding of writing and are able to better integrate the culture of writing communicated through the camp experience into their own sense of self. By meeting authors and listening to others read, they can see themselves in the role of author. Another effect of this camp style ungraded writing instruction is that campers learn to share themselves, to take the risks needed to learn new things about writing and themselves.

The next chapter will discuss these findings and present implications for informal education in a wider variety of settings. Lessons learned from the writing camp experience will be applied to show how they can be integrated into traditional schools and classrooms.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A camp-based summer writing program for students in grades 3-10 sponsored by a professional development group for writing teachers provided a rich source of information about how learning can happen in an informal environment. This study used exit interviews from over 500 campers and periodic interviews with 12 campers and 8 instructors in order to create descriptions of the roles of students and instructors in this program, as well as description of the function of peer response in this environment, and finally a description of the effects of participation in the program on students. Learning to write can be challenging, but in the study we see a community of people coming together to write. They sit in a circle. They write. They respond. When the students describe their group members, they describe them as friends.

The data were collected from interviews and surveys. Statements were extracted, grouped into themes and read for meaning. The campers described all the most important parts of camp. Their days were full of writing and learning. They had fun at camp. They described what their teachers did, evaluated lessons, and talked about plans to come back next year. The excitement generated in camp survived in the data. This excitement is a type of renewable energy, student engagement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the effects of writing instruction conducted in an informal setting on the teachers and their students in grades three through ten.

Typically a study of this type would focus on a question of quantifiable improvement, asking the question, "How much does the student learn in this informal ungraded learning environment?" Instead this study asked, "What is really going on here?" Phenomenology allowed the researcher to privilege the voices of the participants in order to preserve and better understand the energy created at camp. The participants gained a greater love and understanding of writing through their camp experience. Reading the exit surveys, the reader could feel the enthusiasm pouring off the page. The tapes of the instructors interviews are

thoughtful and focused conversations between professionals who care deeply about their work. This study looks at the Young Writer's Camp (YWC) experience in order to create a more concrete understanding of what everyone at camp does to make it successful. This study brings two well established fields, informal education and writing instruction, into more direct conversation. Looking past this individual study the question becomes, *How many of the answers to the challenges facing education today lie in a place outside of the traditional classroom setting?*

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

In this informal, ungraded, camp-style environment, what is the role of the instructor? The participants describe a passionate, engaging, and patient leader. The instructors design a safe environment carefully to support student involvement. Instructors at YWC create successful writers by making sure each writing group has the right group dynamic, an understanding of the purpose of the writing response group, direct instruction in appropriate methods of response, and an opportunity to observe the process. The success experienced by YWC campers happens in a supportive and generously-staffed instructional environment.

Student Perspective

The students noticed their teachers a lot. In the exit surveys, many teachers were referred to by first name. The students loved the help and attention they felt from their teachers. When the students discussed specific lessons in writing, they often discussed their teachers. Campers noticed and responded when teachers shared their own writing. A teacher sharing his or her own writing requires a genuine engagement and students respond to that. This is why Graves advocates teachers co-participate in writer's workshop. "Invite the children to do what [you are] already doing" (Graves, 1983, p. 47). In the case of YWC, this advice seems to have taken. The teachers created lessons passed on their passion and interests and adapted them to the needs of the students. A wide variety of specific writing lessons reported by students suggesting that the significant factor in student engagement is not any one lesson, but the energy each teacher invests and communicates to the camper through that lesson. This mode of co-participation allows the instructors to model all aspects of the class from writing to working in a writing response group to sharing their own writing.

This is the norm at writing camp, and a clear goal in the literature describing writing workshop. This idea of co-participation supports well a key principle of informal education: it must be engaging (Chazan, 2003, p. 14).

Instructor Perspective

As active as the instructors are, when they talk about their own work, they focus on the planning and the behind the scenes work of constructing appropriate groups, providing the right challenges and supports. Their descriptions in individual interviews and in a focus group interview shaped the language. One instructor commented, “Instructors at YWC create successful writers by making sure each writing group has the right group dynamic, an understanding of the purpose of the writing response group, direct instruction in appropriate methods of response, and an opportunity to observe the process.” The writing groups are a significant piece of the camp curriculum, but the instructors know that if the writing groups are working well, many of the other issues will work themselves out more easily. This is because the students have to cooperate and respect each other in order for the writing groups to work. Once the students are taught to interact in a way that values an individual and that person’s work, there is a good foundation for all kinds of cooperation and communication.

This focus on creating an energetic and responsive environment was further validated by the statements of the teachers in the individual and focus group interviews. The instructors have to create a safe environment carefully to support student involvement and engagement. This kind of environment is one that protects and supports students in becoming stronger independent learners. Children at camp “rely on their own personal and social resources rather than solely on the teacher” (Harste et al., 1988, p. 16). All of the instructors commented and spoke directly to this theme. In an informal environment it is important for the student to be able to discover and apply resources instead of waiting for the teacher to tell them what to do and what to learn. They learn what they choose to learn; they are able to find the resources to apply the skills needed to solve the problem they have identified.

Implications for Application

This study carries implications for application in camp and classroom settings, as well as policy discussions.

CAMPS

Although the call for teachers to be more participatory is not new, it bears repeating especially in this context. Young Writer's camp is created as a fun and challenging experience. It is elective, the space is limited and there is always a waiting list. The goal is to get students more comfortable as writers. The evaluation of the student comes from peers in the form of supportive critique. The environment is designed to introduce tools and provide feedback as the campers learn to apply those tools. There is no failure at camp. Many people experience different levels of success. All of these aspects of the camp experience rely on an instructor taking on a variety of informal roles, and casting aside other formal roles. A good instructor "Know[s] the children" (Graves, 1983, p. 22). Knowing the children is a skill of collecting important information about children and using that information to quickly make the decisions needed about the learning environment such as writing group assignment. It is also something more. Relationships form quickly at camp. It is part of the engagement dynamic. Instructors are emotionally tuned in to the students; the writing that the instructors and the campers share is charged with emotion. They tell each other the truth.

The relationship of trust and exchange of information is a valuable piece of my own experience as a writing instructor. This study provides a more pragmatic description of the role of the instructor. The instructor is charged with the creation and maintenance of the learning environment. This model affords the instructors a great deal of autonomy. These instructors are all members of the National Writing Project and they have all participated in a summer invitational institute with the San Diego Area Writing Project. In this institute these instructors were participants in writers' workshop, prepared mini lessons, provided written feedback, and developed youth workshops. During the YWC the instructors met regularly to share success and brainstorm challenges. The administrator was in charge of managing the communication between the office and individual classes. The instructors in camp were

expected to make the right choices for their students on a day to day basis and then they were given the freedom to make those choices.

CLASSROOMS

In the endless cycle of education reform, many people ask why it is that teachers do the same activities to instruct facts, skills, concepts, and ideas. They ask how else teachers can guide students to content and make it meaningful. The role of the instructor within a formal setting can evoke co-participation at needed times. With enough choice built into the curriculum, teachers can bring their passions into the classroom and share their learning with their students. Some of these strategies can be simple such as the “completion grade.” One instructor describes it this way: “When I want my students to really have fun with a piece of writing we are doing in class, I tell them at the beginning that this is a completion grade assignment. This means that as long as they are writing, they will get full credit for the assignment. From that point on I push them to really get into it. When I see them taking risks or trying something new I heap praise on them.”

Completion grades are just one small way students can be released, temporarily, from some of the formality of every other day in English class. The informal learning model is very useful in writing instruction even within a conventional class. Even though the camp days were short, that three week camp experience was equal to more than seven weeks of class time. Camp provides the time that the standard school year has difficulty allowing.

This study suggests that an effective instructor makes a safe environment that is responsive to the needs of students.

POLICY

The teachers in this study were on their summer break. Many of them report this work to their districts as professional development to their districts. It is a great model: teachers get together and run a camp about writing. In the process the teachers get to develop and teach lessons they don’t often have the curricular flexibility to implement during the school year. The teachers finish this work energized for the upcoming school year.

From the perspective of the instructors, using such a model for summer enrichment camp would allow meaningful professional development focused on the instructors’ needs

and interests. From the perspective of a student, consider the option to take 2 or 3 “elective camps” in the summer. What can be achieved is a year-round school model where summer school feels a lot like camp. The focus of each camp would be applied core content. Teachers can bid for camps as students do, teachers can co-design and propose camps. Each camp can provide 40+ hours of content enrichment time while allowing teachers to work with colleagues and design rewarding programs.

Summary of Research Question One Discussion

In Young Writer’s Camp, the instructor works to design and maintain an environment that is safe, supporting, and student-centered. The instructors model all aspects of the writing process, but what they model first is engagement. Instructors teach from a place of passion, knowledge and interest. The function and style of such a camp can carry over into school year instruction in many subjects.

Directions for Further Study

One of the directions for further study would be to look at long term involvement with programs such as the Young Writers Camp. Does working in a different mode during vacation actually help the instructors in their professional and personal lives? If so, how? Do the students of teachers involved in a summer program like this one learn more in the next school year? Is the teacher better prepared to meet the challenges of the school year?

In addition to looking at the effects of working at the camp on the instructor, research could evaluate attempts to use informal instructional modalities within a formal context.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

What is the role of the student in an ungraded informal learning environment?

The specialized environment of young writer’s camp carries with it a unique role for the student. Students make friends at camp and learn how to be writers. The instructors describe the students as learning actively from each other and investing themselves in the roles of writers. The fact that students make new friends displays an investment in the group nature of the informal learning experience. The students need to be active writing partners and they are also expected to grow as writers. At camp students learn, write, and become writers. Students are expected to share their writing, and they are expected to participate in

response groups as other students share their writing. Students are expected to make choices about their own writing. Students are encouraged to trust and support their classmates; to this end, they are instructed in how to support each other in the learning process. The students have many demanding roles whether it be writing or sharing that writing. Students have to take risks and fully participate.

Student Perspective

The role of the student is reflected in their statements about the social environment in the camp. The statements collected from the theme “social” describe the social environment at the camp. The statements from the students about the social aspects of class focus what the students feel they get out of the experience, but their statements also describe the role they occupy. The students commented time and again on the new friends they had made at camp. The *Wordle* (see Appendix B) created from these statements clearly reflects the dominance of making friends. Camp brought many kids from many schools together. Many students arrive in class knowing no one; then they make new friends.

More meaningful friendships seem to require greater emotional risk. The element of emotional risk becomes clear as the students discuss what the social structure of camp allows them to learn about themselves. As one camper reflected, “I learned it is ok to have sad angry feelings, then take these feelings and write poems. Poems are an outlet of my emotions.” Poems are shared at camp, so it would be reasonable to conclude that this student is discussing how he understands his emotional self and how he shares it with others.

Another role the campers occupy is that of writing partner. This requires them to actively engage in the writing process, listen to others, and be willing to grow as writers. In addition to learning “what peer-response groups do and then practice using peer-response techniques” (Barron, 1991, p. 24) the writing partner role requires students to interact with each other in a genuine way. This is a role of active development, and the camper’s investment in this role is reflected in statements like, “[I] have learned many new things to help me grow as an author and to have fun doing it.” Throughout the discussions of the daily operations of camp collected into the theme “process,” the term fun is closely paired with many of the individual activities, and it is clear that one of the roles of the campers is to have fun. From the campers’ descriptions at no time is it necessary to stop having fun in order to

perform the role of a friend, or a WRG member. All of this fun has a focus and a goal, which is the “joy of discovery” (Graves, 1983, p. 3). The students create the conditions needed for learning by engaging all of the roles available to them.

Instructor Perspective

From the perspective of the instructors there was unanimous agreement that a very important piece of the role of students was that students need to support each other in the learning process. The instructors describe camp as a learning community where learning happens in many directions. As Chazan (2003) discusses in informal Jewish education, the learning and the practice happens together in interaction amongst the learners. This focus on learning and practice in interaction is important for the instructors because it keeps the energy of the class in the hands of the campers.

Implications for Application

The product of the instructors observations can be applied in a variety of settings.

CLASSROOMS

The students in camp are friends working together. It is a good model. In the classroom do teachers spend as much time promoting friendship as they do combating bullying? Classrooms cannot always look and feel like a super friendly summer camp environment, but teachers can find ways of giving students choice. Schools can create environments that promote student learning to apply skills together. Most of all, teachers need to honor and use our students’ social learning abilities.

POLICY

The camp setting asks a lot of the students, and they rise to the occasion. As we educators examine ways to use informal learning to help students achieve skills and increase student motivation and engagement, we cannot let ourselves wonder if the students are ready. Campers as young as third grade gather in a circle and read their writing to their classmates. The classmates listen and respond thoughtfully. The students will be ready for informal learning.

Summary of Research Question Two Discussion

The student at YWC makes many choices, and many friends. They take risks and support their fellow writers in risk taking. The environment makes it possible for these students to feel like they are going beyond simply completing the task of school. As teachers in traditional classrooms struggle to keep students engaged, informal environments like this camp can provide a model of how student choice can energize a learning community.

Directions for Further Study

One direction for future study would be to look at the long term effects of participating in Young Writers Camp on students. For example, if a student participates for three years will he or she score better on a grade level appropriate writing benchmark than a student without similar experience? Another question is, does a student in this type of summer program retain a greater amount of writing skill over the summer when compared with peers who did not participate in summer program? What is the impact of a program like this for ELL students?

Another research direction would be to look at camps with other academic and cultural skills as their center. Do these camps experience similar perceptions of success? What range of skills can be learned through fun and cooperative activities?

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

The third question focused closely on the writing response group, one specific piece of the writing camp experience. The question asked, “What is the role or function of peer response in this environment?” The study found that peer response made students more comfortable with their fellow campers. Writing response groups actively build community. Campers learn about writing through the interaction with members of the WRG. The group applies direct instruction at the moment it matters most. From the instructor’s perspective, WRG support the cooperative environment established at YWC and help campers build writing and sharing skills as well as confidence. As students become more comfortable in their groups, they share more and they learn more. In many ways the Writing Response Groups are a learning tool that allows instructors and students to fully inhabit their described roles at camp.

Student Perspective

Students saw their writing response groups as friendly and helpful. The students interviewed specifically about the writing response groups in the last year of the study were able to clearly articulate how supportive and helpful the WRG was. The students appreciated their freedom to choose to share. They also expressed that they enjoyed the safety of WRG. They knew that no one was going to be mean to them in WRG. In the informal learning environment, the WRG plays a support part in the leaning cycle (Zull, 2002). The supportive and cooperative environment of the WRG is supported by careful attention to the environment of camp. As the participants described it, YWC is a positive and productive place where people make friends; YWC fosters a friendly environment between writers and creates opportunities for campers to learn about their emotional selves.

Instructor Perspective

Instructors noted that Writing Response Groups support the cooperative environment established at YWC and help campers build writing and sharing skills as well as their confidence. As students become more comfortable in their writing response groups, they share more and they learn more. In many ways the writing response groups are a learning tool that allows instructors and students to fully inhabit their described roles at camp. Writing response groups require explicit training of participants for success (Barron, 1991; McGroaty and Zhu, 1997; Simmons, 2003). As such they provide instructors and students an excellent opportunity to discuss and set group norms of behavior and communication. The instructors take the time to model the correct interaction in the writing response group because when it runs successfully the discussion has a focus among individual students instead of always lying between the teacher and the student. So in this way the WRG is a tool for instruction as well as group management in this kind of informal learning environment.

Another instructor perspective on the writing response group is that it is a tool of formative assessment. The protocol of sharing and responding carries many messages of assessment from clear to subconscious. The writer observes the reader as the reader first hears the text. The feedback from the reader is assessment; the author decides what to do with the feedback. There are as many opportunities for this type of assessment as the student

wants. Some students will share everyday while others share much less often. Regardless of how often they share, having been trained in providing feedback, they may be better prepared to receive it.

Implications for Application

This perspective on writing response groups can be useful to several communities.

CLASSROOMS

Writing Response Groups can be a powerful tool for classroom instruction, and in this case they worked very well because they complemented the needs of the informal learning environment. The WRG allowed the students choice on many levels from content to whether or not they wish to share. In the case of YWC, the methods of response match closely the goals of the camp experience (Holt, 1992). That is the classroom-based take away from this description of writing response groups: choose a learning mode that closely matches your overall goals. In this case the goal was to get campers to take control of their writing and learn from each other; the WRG helped students to meet those goals.

POLICY

If having students participate in writing response groups in an informal learning environment makes them better writers, and policy makers believe it is a good idea to give all students the opportunity to become better writers, then how can this type of experience be made more accessible? Writing Response Groups are not a cure all for education, but they have the potential to serve as a powerful mode of interaction that shows students how to take control of their own writing. The lesson here is more of a lesson about a good match between the goals and needs of a learning mode. WRGs and the environment and resources available in this informal learning environment are a good match between needs and resources.

Summary of Research Question Three Discussion

Writing response groups are a good match for the goals and environment at Young Writer's Camp. The WRG requires students to share their work, and the YWC creates a caring environment that supports the students in sharing. The WRG serves to both manage

the interaction among students and provide ongoing formative feedback to students. This allows students to improve a piece until they feel the feedback they have received indicates the piece of writing is ready for publication. The camp environment meets well the needs of the response group, and the interactions within the response group lead to a more productive and engaged camp environment.

Directions for Further Study

To further understand the relationship between this mode of interaction and educational context, WRG in formal educational setting could be compared to WRG in informal settings. Participant interviews could be used to establish descriptions of each experience and these could be compared. Another study could be to perform a case study on a number of students from YWC who participate in response groups at school. The students could discuss the two writing environments in order to help researchers better understand the difference context can make in a learning experience. A parallel study could be made of a YWC instructor who uses WRG in both his YWC class and his regular teaching class. This study could yield an understanding of the difference context makes from an instructor's perspective.

RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR

The fourth question asked: What are the effects on students who are learning and practicing writing in an ungraded informal environment? The study showed that students feel like they understand how to write more at the end of camp. Students learning writing in this environment become engaged. This engagement leads to a greater integration of the target content. In this case that means students gained a better understanding of writing and are able to better integrate the culture of writing communicated through the camp experience into their own sense of self. By meeting authors and listening to others read, they can see themselves in the role of author. Another effect of this camp-style ungraded writing instruction is that campers learn to share themselves, to take the risks needed to learn new things about writing and about themselves.

Student Perspective

Many of the students interviewed described becoming more comfortable with writing and their writing response group over the course of camp. A majority of the students interviewed indicated that the camp experience had boosted their confidence either as a writer or just speaking in front of a group. A smaller number of students commented directly on how the camp had demystified the writing process and made writing more accessible. The role of writer was made very accessible to the campers and the entire experience was very engaging. The students were surrounded by positive adults who identify themselves as writers.

Instructor Perspective

The effect most often commented on by the instructors was an increase in campers' confidence. Over half of the instructors discussed students gaining confidence. The instructors discussed students gaining confidence as something they witnessed or something that helped shape the instructors' decisions about the classroom environment. In many ways the camp works to get students to take control of their own voice and share it with the world. This takes confidence.

Implications for Application

The model of student-centered, high engagement, skills focused informal learning demonstrates the power of a learning community of choice. Allowing students to have a choice about what they are writing, or how they will be assessed, or whether or not they have to read their writing out loud, makes a difference in the way they engage in the activity. So certainly with writing instruction, follow the well established lead of the writing workshop movement and privilege student choice. In other subjects the challenge is how choice can be used to build a community of engagement. The choices available to students all have to be more attractive than choosing not to participate at all. The students choose to participate because of the models available to them. They want to be a part of the community of learners.

This is not to suggest that all classrooms need to be super engaging cooperative learning adventures, but is only to suggest that with the proper management of content, students would be able to meet any given set of learning objective in such a class.

Summary of Research Question Four Discussion

The camp experience has the power to open the world of writing to students. It does require that they open themselves to the experience. Once students choose to participate, the activities are designed to be fun, build confidence, and reveal the world of writing to students in a way that they feel like welcome participants.

Directions for Further Study

While the student exit surveys are very positive and reflect an emphasis on friends and fun, they don't speak directly to the issue of identity. How many campers self-identified as a writer before camp, how many after the camp experience, and how many 6 months after that. If this writer identity persists, what difference does it make? Do students who engage a subject on this level experience broad academic advantages? Do they become more engaged in other subjects? Do they become more successful?

In addition to looking at whether students identify as writers, studying this type of informal learning environment could yield important information about engagement. Are students more or less engaged in a choice-based environment? Does participation in a highly engaged learning environment during the summer lead to improved performance or less skill loss in the fall?

Looking closely at learning situations that are successful can yield many lessons and ideas. Table 10 collects the implications for application, sorted by context. There are still many lessons to be learned from looking closely at this informal learning environment as well as others. Some of the possible directions for further study are collected in Table 11.

The study found that Young Writers' Camp was an engaging environment carefully constructed to allow students to view instructors as knowledgeable models and co-participants. The descriptions of the roles of the instructors and of students highlight some of the fundamental differences between the experience of the instructors and the campers; campers *become* while instructors *guide, construct and maintain*. The study also found that

Table 10. Implications for Application to Camps, Classrooms and Educational Policy**Camps**

Using a curricular model that ensures high quality and consistency while still giving teachers a great deal of autonomy can create an environment where teachers are able to model the application of the skills being taught in a way that is highly engaging to the students.

Choose a learning mode that closely matches your overall goals.

Classrooms

Build choice into the curriculum

When you are asking students to try something out, do not penalize them. Use completion grades to make the focus on the skill and application, not the grade.

Honor and use students' social learning abilities.

Choose a learning mode that closely matches your overall goals.

The challenge is how choice can be used to build a community of engagement. The choices available to students all have to be more attractive than choosing not to participate at all.

Policy

Engaging content-centered camps can supplement the traditional school year.

Making such enrichment programs commonly available could have many benefits, from skills to confidence and community.

the Writing Response Groups served a pedagogical function as well as a social function. The writing response groups allowed the participants to assess each other while the instructors co-participated. The structure of the camp used many of the principles of good informal education to support implementing a writer's workshop within the camp.

Writing instruction in a traditional, formal environment has had a amazing impact on writing instruction for many students and for specific purposes. Formal writing instruction serves educators well to teach the modes of Rhetoric, the tropes of composition, syntax, and

Table 11. Directions for Future Study

Does working in a different mode during vacation actually help the instructors in their professional and personal lives, if so how?
What other examples of informal education in a formal environment can be studied?
Look at the long term effect of participating in Young Writers Camp on students:“If a student participates for three years will they score better on the writing SAT than a student without similar experience?”
Does participation in a highly engaged learning environment during the summer lead to improved performance or less skill loss in the fall?
What is the impact of a program like YWC for ELL students?
Do Writing Response Groups in formal educational settings behave similarly to WRG in informal settings.
What effect does long term participation in WRG have?
Would this program work as well with populations not represented in this study?

paragraph structure. But when it comes to teaching writing as an essential act of communication between individuals, when it comes to teaching students that they have something to say, and helping them find the tools to say it, an informal environment is better suited to the demands of the task. Students learn more about communication in an environment with an active social component. Educators need to find more informal venues for instruction in order to get students to choose to participate and thereby internalize these important skills and lessons.

REFERENCES

- Baker, B. S., & Ansorge, J. (2007). Robotics as means to increase achievement scores in and informal learning environment. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 39(3), 229-243.
- Barron, R. (1991). What I wish I had known about peer-response groups but didn't. *English Journal*, 80(5), 24-34.
- Berg, E. C. (1999). The effects of trained peer response on ESL students' revision types and writing quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8, 215-241.
- Berkenkotter, C. (1984). Student writers and their sense of authority over texts. *College Composition and Communication*, 35(3), 312-319.
- Brannon, L., & Knoblauch, C.H. (1999). On students' rights to their own texts: A model of teacher response. In Richard Straub (Ed.), *A sourcebook for responding to student writing* (117-128). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Caulk, N. (1994). Comparing teacher and student responses to written work. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(1), 181-188.
- Cilesiz, S. (2009). Educational computer use in leisure contexts. *American Education Research Journal*, 46(1), 232-274.
- Carson, J., & Nelson, C. (1996). Chinese students' perceptions of ESL peer response group interaction. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 5, 1-19.
- Chazan, B. (2003). *The philosophy of informal Jewish education*. Retrieved from www.infed.org/informaleducation/informal_jewish_education.htm
- Eaton, S. E. (2010). *Formal, non-formal and informal learning: The case of literacy, essential skills, and language learning in Canada*. Retrieved from http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/eaton_literacy_languages_and_types_of_learning.pdf
- Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. London, England: Oxford University Press.
- Elbow, P. (1989). Toward a phenomenology of freewriting. *Journal of Basic Writing* 8(2), 44-71.
- Elbow, P., & Belanoff, P. (1995). *A community of writers*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc.
- Farnan, N., & Dahl, K., (2003) Children's writing: research and practice. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 993-1007). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Fletcher, R., & Portalupi, J. (2001). *Writing workshop: The essential guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Freedland, R. A., (1995). The Mr. and Mrs. club: The value of collaboration in writers' workshop. *Language Arts*, 72(2), 97-104.
- Fulks, D. G. (1978). *Informal learning in elementary schools*. Washington, DC: University Press of America.
- Gillis, C. (1992). *The community as classroom: Integrating school and community through language arts*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1983). *Writing: Teachers and children at work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Graves, D. H., & Kittle, P. (2005). *Inside writing: How to teach the details of craft*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Goldberg, G. L., Roswell, B. S., & Michaels, H., (1996). Can assessment mirror instruction? A look at peer response and revision in a large-scale writing test. *Educational Assessment*, 3(4), 287-314.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Harris, M. (1992). Collaboration is not collaboration is not collaboration: Writing center tutorials vs. Peer-response groups. *College Composition and Communication*, 43(3), 369-383.
- Hale, E. (2008). *Crafting writers K-6*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Harste, J. C., Short, K. G., & Burke, C. (1988). *Creating classrooms for authors: The reading – writing connection*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Holt, M. (1992). The value of written peer criticism. *College Composition and Communication*, 43(3), 384-393.
- Jamieson, P. (2009). The serious matter of informal learning. *Planning for Higher Education January-March*, 18-25.
- King, A. (1993). From sage on the stage to guide on the side. *College Teaching*, 41(1), 30-35.
- Lancy, D. F. (1993). *Qualitative research in education: An introduction to the major traditions*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.
- Liang, M. (2010). Using synchronous online peer response groups in EFL writing: Revision-related discourse. *Language Learning & Technology*, 14(1), 45-64.
- Lieberman, A. & Wood, D.R. (2003). *Inside the national writing project*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Liu, J., & Hansen, J. G. (2002). *Peer response in second language writing classrooms*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Martin, A., Franc, D., & Zounkova, D. (2004). *Outdoor and experiential learning; a holistic and creative approach to programme design*. Burlington, VT: Gower.

- McCarthy, S. J. (2001). Identity construction in elementary readers and writers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(2), 122-151.
- McGroarty, M., & Zhu, W. (1997). Triangulation in classroom research: A study of peer revision. *Language Learning*, 47, 1-43.
- McLeod, S. (1997). *Notes on the heart: Affective issues in the writing classroom*. Carbondale, IL: SIU Press.
- Melber, L. M. (2008). *Informal learning and field trips*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moffett, J. (1988). *Coming on center*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Moffett, J., & Wagner, B. J., (1992). *Student-centered language arts, k-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Murray, D. (1986). *Read to write: A writing process reader*. San Francisco, CA: Holt Reinhart and Winston.
- Nathan, R., Temple, F., Juntunen, K., & Temple, C., (1989). *Classroom strategies that work: An elementary teacher's guide to process writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- National Writing Project, & Nagin, C. (2006). *Because writing matters*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- National Writing Project. (2010). *NWP-about the national writing project*. Retrieved from <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/about.csp>
- National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE]. (2009). *An administrator's guide to writing instruction*. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Magazine/Chron0192_PolicyBrief.pdf
- Neubert, G. A. M., & McNelis, S. J. (1990). Peer response: Teaching specific revision suggestions. *English Journal*, 79(5), 52-56.
- Newkirk, T. (1984). Direction and misdirection in peer response. *College Composition and Communication*, 35(3), 301-311.
- Newkirk, T., & Kent, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching the neglected "r"*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Noddings, N. (2005). *Caring in education. The encyclopedia of informal education*. Retrieved from www.infed.org/biblio/noddings_caring_in_education.htm
- Oatley, K., & Nundy, S. (1996). Rethinking the role of emotions in education. In D. Olson & N. Torrance (Eds.), *The handbook of education and human development: New models of learning, teaching, and schooling* (pp. 257-274). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Patterson, S. (2009). One time at writing camp. *California English*, 15(2), 19-20.
- Peckham, I. (1996). If it ain't broke, why fix it? Disruptive and constructive computer-mediated response group practices. *Computers and Composition*, 13(3), 327-329.
- Perry, L. A., & Collins, M. D. (1998). Incorporating peer response to writing in a teacher education course. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 41(8), 670-674.

- Porto, M. (2002). Implementing cooperative writing response groups and self-evaluation in South America: Struggle and survival. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 45(8), 684-691.
- Powney, J., & Watts, M. (1987). *Interviewing in educational research*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan.
- Pressley, M., Hogan, K., Wharton-McDonald, R., Misretta, J., & Ettenberger, S. (1996). The challenges of instructional scaffolding: The challenges of instruction that supports students thinking. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 11(5), 138-146.
- Public Policy Institute of California. (2005). *The success of San Diego school reforms could serve as a blueprint for the state. Research Brief, 104*. Retrieved from http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/RB_1005JBRB.pdf
- Ratey, J. (2001). *A user's guide to the brain- perception, attention and the four theaters of the brain*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Reiser, R. A., & Dempsey, J. V. (2007). *Trends and issues in instructional design and technology*. Columbus, OH: Pearson.
- Sakofs, M., & Armstrong, G. P. (1996). *Into the classroom: The outward bound approach to teaching and learning*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.
- San Diego Area Writing Project. (2010). *Young writer's camp*. Retrieved from <http://sdawp.ucsd.edu/programs/young-writers-camp/index.html>
- Simmons, J. (2003). Responders are taught, not born. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 46(8), 684-693.
- Smith, M. K. (2005). Introducing informal education. Retrieved from <http://www.infed.org/i-intro.htm>
- Squire, J. R. (2003). The history of the profession. In J. Flood, D. Lapp, J. R. Squire, J. M. Jensen (Eds.), *Handbook of research on teaching the English language arts* (pp. 114-132). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Straub, R. (Ed.). (1999). *A sourcebook for responding to student writing*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Taylor, E. W. (2006). Making meaning of local nonformal education: Practitioner's perspective. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 56(4), 291-307.
- VanDeWeghe, R., (2004). "Awesome dude!" responding helpfully to peer writing. *The English Journal*, 94(1), 95-99.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Wagner, D., Close, E., & Ramsey, K. D. (2001). Writing groups in the middle school classroom. *The English Journal*, 90(5), 127-133.
- Zull, J. E. (2002). *The art of the changing brain: Enriching teaching by exploring the biology of learning*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishers.

APPENDIX A

STUDENT EXIT SURVEY FORMS

Young Writers' Camp 2003 Reflection

Name Raymond Contreras

School I attend St. John

Teachers I worked with at YWC Lilan, Melissa, and Carly

How did you find out about Young Writers' Camp? My dad just found out and sign up me.

What lesson or idea at YWC helped you the most with your writing? That writing can do anything in the whole world.

What did you like most about your experience at YWC? I got to learn poetry decent sym. It made writing easier for me. I learned all rules about digress.

What would you like to see improved at YWC next summer? Next year I would like to improve poetry. I would like to improve digress. I would like to improve sharing.

Please add any additional thoughts you have about YWC? The only thing about writing camp is so much.

Name Narayan Gopinathan

My YWC teachers were Divya and Linda Sue and I made my

How did you find out about Young Writers' Camp? I have no clue.

What lesson or idea at YWC helped you the most with your writing? Nothing
but I learned not to get a Mango-A-Go-Go at
Jamba Juice.

What did you like most about your experience at YWC? Break and the
rides there and back.

What would you like to see improved at YWC next summer? _____

Please add any additional thoughts you have about YWC? I like golden
line poems and Linda Sue's stories.

San Diego Area Writing Project

University of California, San Diego

Visit our website • <http://create.ucsd.edu/sdawp/>

Dear Mr. Sam,

I like the games and walks
it's really fun but
writing is the best
and I would tell any
kid to come next

next year to writer's
camp. And I would
tell them it's really
cool, fun, and exciting
like the time we
ate chocolate and
chips.

Love,
Tikiam

Supporting Teachers' Growth & Leadership

THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREERS

APPENDIX B

WORDLE IMAGE “OF SOCIAL” DATA

new