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Essence and Meaning in Professional Development: The Writing Project Experience

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ESSENCE AND MEANING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
THE WRITING PROJECT EXPERIENCE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
The Department of Curriculum & Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Professional development in education is often a process focused on teachers' limitations. Teachers are rarely offered choices in professional development, nor are they asked to qualify the attributes of their professional development experiences they find most meaningful. This study situates the National Writing Project as a specific professional development program from which to consider teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding their professional development experiences. The study begins with a broad view of professional development, then directs attention to the Writing Project as a professional development model. Ten teachers participated in individual and focus group interviews for the study. Interview data were collected and analyzed using a qualitative phenomenological approach to discern the features of the Writing Project that teachers value as a professional development experience. Results from this study include five essential elements of the Writing Project experience as reported by participants. Results show that the Writing Project builds teachers' instructional and pedagogical capacity, sponsors teachers' professional voice, breaks down isolationism, connects teachers to the writer within themselves, and attracts leaders while facilitating leadership in its members. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications researchers and educators may draw from the results.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The structure of hierarchies in education has traditionally undermined the authority of teachers. While teachers are central to discussions of education itself, they are rarely viewed as knowledgeable experts within their own field. Instead, teachers are often perceived as a workforce in need of collective remediation. The individual expertise teachers acquire through their daily practice is summarily dismissed in conversations of professional development, as if teacher knowledge ceases when the bell rings to end the school day. On the “professional development landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), teachers become consumers of professional knowledge delivered by outsiders. Instead of valuing their potential contributions to teacher knowledge, traditional professional development programs regard teachers’ experience as inconsequential to their own construction of knowledge. While most professional development initiatives are well intended, little attention is given to the more intangible realities of the classroom experience. At the center of that experience stands the teacher.

The current national fixation on school accountability and standards-based education expands the distance between teachers’ experience and what is valued as professional knowledge. This national movement toward standardization of schools simultaneously regulates the teaching profession. As broad federal mandates such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002) translate into specific state legislation, teachers defer

curriculum and instructional decisions to politicians, nonpractitioners and contracted outside experts. Teachers are expected to accept the changes by falling readily into the new regimen of compliance and standardization. Unlike other professions where the practitioners themselves are catalysts toward meaningful progress, teachers are generally dissuaded from making professional decisions or initiating change. Instead, they are expected to accept that better qualified professionals will make key decisions and deem what changes are necessary for teachers. As a result, teachers' practical classroom experience is disregarded and teachers themselves become professionally inert.

As the title of this dissertation suggests, I am interested in the professional development experiences of teachers as they author their careers through the ever-changing contexts of educational reforms. I hope to learn more about teachers' professional development experience and discern features of that experience that inspire teachers' lives and practice. This study investigates what Ritchie and Wilson (2000) termed the "accidental and deliberate apprenticeships" of teachers within the context of professional development. My research interest extends to the meaning teachers assign to their own professional development as they construct their own professional knowledge and expertise. For this study, I have situated a specific program, the National Writing Project, within the larger context of teacher professional development. I selected the National Writing Project because it has become one of the most successful and widespread professional development programs in the United States over the past 28 years. Although the Writing Project has been the topic of numerous studies, little research has attempted to document how teachers describe the Writing Project as a professional

development experience. For my research purposes, the Writing Project serves as a model of an alternate approach to professional development, an approach that values teachers' experience and knowledge as precursors to professional growth. While professional development literature provides the background for this study, the National Writing Project emerges to the foreground and presents a specific context for studying teachers' professional lives.

The purpose of this study is to better understand teacher professional development and how the Writing Project supports teachers' personal and professional growth. I hope to highlight teachers' professional development experience in the Writing Project and uncover the essential qualities and attributes that teachers assign to this experience. I want to discern the values teachers assign to the Writing Project and investigate how teachers grow as professionals from the experience. In investigating teachers' perceptions of their professional development experiences, I use several key terms throughout this dissertation. The following descriptions define key terms as used in this study:

- Meaning: the significance or quality of an experience
- Essence: the ultimate nature of a phenomenon; the inherent qualities that constitute the phenomenon or experience
- Experience: the direct participation in an event; engagement in an event; the conscious perception of an event; knowledge, meaning, or practice derived from direct participation in an event

- Professional Development: the process whereby the teacher seeks deliberate career enhancement; personal commitment and active engagement requiring effort and intrinsic dedication
- National Writing Project: a professional development program that immerses teachers in becoming a community of learners, knowledge makers, and writers

I hope these definitions help elucidate my research interests for the reader and provide a framework in which to place the study. I consider the definitions as constructs relevant to this study. At the same time, I realize that these terms may carry further connotations for the reader.

This research begins with a consideration of teachers' professional development experiences, then investigates teachers' engagement in the Writing Project as an example of a professional development program. In designing the study, I used a phenomenological methodology to collect and analyze data. Phenomenology requires the researcher to take an *a priori* stance that experiences are meaningful to individuals (Creswell, 1998). The phenomenological researcher assumes that "human experience makes sense to those who live it, prior to all interpretations and theorizing" (Creswell, p. 86). Through an investigation of individual teachers' experience and descriptions of experience, I represent the meanings individuals assign to their experience and address the questions surrounding my research purpose. The guiding questions for this study are:

- What does professional development mean to teachers?
- What attributes of their professional development experiences do teachers value?
- What attributes of the Writing Project experience do teachers value?

- How does the Writing Project contribute to teachers' personal and professional growth?
- What does the Writing Project experience mean for teachers as individuals and as professionals?

The research questions first give attention to teachers' professional development experiences in general, then direct attention to their experiences in the Writing Project. The questions also aim at uncovering the meanings and values of teachers' professional development and Writing Project experiences. These questions align with the primary purpose of phenomenology, which is to understand the essence of experience. The essence of any phenomenon resides in the meanings assigned to that phenomenon by the experiencing individual (Moustakas, 1994). An in-depth discussion of phenomenology is included in the methods section.

A dissertation is a process as well as a product. Meloy (2002) concluded that understanding the dissertation process "can come about only by doing" (p. 167). The long process of "doing" this dissertation began three years ago in a professor's office, when I was led through a series of questions about my personal and professional interests. Again and again, my responses referred to teachers' professional development experiences. I began to recall my own professional development as a teacher, and I wondered what other teachers valued in their professional development. This interest continued through a series of seminars, methods classes, dialogues with colleagues, and personal and professional events. Each course, each dialogue, and each event shaped the current study. At different times during its evolution, I have perceived this dissertation as a narrative of

teacher development, an ethnography of school culture, a critical study of teacher voice, and grounded theory research of professionalism. Now, as the dissertation process culminates with the dissertation product, I understand how those early discussions, reflections, visions, and revisions have led to the current representation. Stark and Roberts (2002) contended that social science researchers are “guided by two primary goals: description and explanation” (p. 4). In this study, I attempted to accurately describe teachers’ experience and explain how that experience is meaningful to them.

Throughout the process of developing this dissertation, I used several guidebooks on social science research, educational research, and qualitative methods. Rudestam and Newton (2001) provided a useful guide that mentors students through developing a dissertation. The authors conceptualized a “Research Wheel” that promotes research “as a recursive cycle of steps that are repeated over time” (p. 5). The wheel metaphor suggests continual iterations of research questions and purposes as literature is reviewed and data is collected and analyzed. The wheel metaphor served as a conceptual reminder that research is an interactive and nonlinear process that requires many revisions along the way. I considered my research purpose and questions as entry points to empirical investigation, yet I remained open to the dynamic nature of qualitative inquiry. I accepted Meloy’s description of qualitative research as “an evolutionary and inductive process” and the reminder that qualitative research “is not a predictable or finite event; rather, it needs time and space to grow and change” (p. 1).

While remaining attuned to the dynamic nature of qualitative research, I also followed Rudestam and Newton's (2001) more tangible recommendation that the dissertation address three issues:

1. Is the question clear and researchable, and will the answer to the question extend knowledge in your field of study?
2. Have you located your question within a context of previous study that demonstrates that you have mastered and taken into consideration the relevant background literature?
3. Is the proposed method suitable for exploring your question? (p. 18)

These questions require a clear statement of the research purpose, a review and synthesis of the existing literature, and a methodology that aligns with the purpose and research questions. I have developed this dissertation guided by these questions. I will return to these questions in the conclusion to ascertain how well my research addressed these recommendations.

Like many qualitative methodologists, Meloy considered qualitative researchers as writers, asserting that in the process of developing a dissertation, the student will "either become a writer or mature as one" (p. 23). The qualitative researcher must simultaneously project a distinct style, tone, and voice, while guiding the reader through complex philosophical, theoretical, and methodological issues. Meloy referred to this task as the "multilayered sensemaking inherent in the role of qualitative researcher as the human research instrument" (p. 26).

In developing this dissertation, I drew on my own personal experience as a teacher, writer, and researcher. I reflected on my own experience as a Writing Project fellow in the summer of 1995 and my association with the Writing Project as a teacher-consultant. I reviewed literature on professional development and the National Writing Project, attempting to forge connections that evoke a need for further research. The process has led me to my research questions and purposes for studying the experience of teachers who participate in the Writing Project to understand the values and qualities they assign to the experience. I am interested in the essence of teachers' experiences and the interplay of personal and professional growth that takes place during the Writing Project Institute. This research continues a curiosity into the personal and professional lives of teachers and the influence of the Writing Project to bring those lives together through a community of teachers teaching teachers.

My interest in teacher professional development began with my experiences as an educator and continued through my doctoral studies. Throughout my career in education, I have participated in state and district sponsored staff development programs. As a teacher, I have participated in successful programs that aided my personal and professional growth as well as poorly conceived approaches that undermined my professionalism. Over the years, I have become skeptical of professional development programs designed to "remediate" teachers by providing ready-made prescriptions for the classroom. I have resisted workshops that undercut teachers' professionalism through cursory activities that advance organizational goals and objectives while dismissing the

practical experience of the classroom. At the same time, I have sought experiences that promote and encourage teachers to grow as individuals and professionals.

Now, working at the district level, I often design professional development experiences for teachers. My own experience as a teacher informs my current tasks of offering experiences that respect teachers' professional knowledge while facilitating their success in the classroom. I strive to help teachers develop their own professionalism, and I wonder how school systems might nurture teachers' professionalism through the programs they offer. I also wonder what teachers value in their professional development and how they perceive themselves as professionals and constructors of knowledge. Finally, as a doctoral student and novice researcher, I want to better understand the essence of professional development experiences for those teachers who actively seek to enhance their personal and professional lives. I want to listen to teachers' own descriptions of their experiences and learn from them the qualities they ascribe to their professional development. Through a journey along the educational landscape as a teacher participating in professional development, an "expert" presenting workshops, a coordinator designing professional development experiences, and a doctoral student attracted to qualitative inquiry, I have arrived at my research interest in studying teachers engaged in their own deliberate apprenticeships. A better understanding of teachers' experience may inform the conversation on professional development.

In the process of developing this research, I also considered my own purposes for researching teacher professional development and the Writing Project. I wondered, what more can we learn about teacher professional development from studying teachers in the

Writing Project? How can I contribute to the conversation about the impact of this program on teachers' lives and their students' achievement? What kind of study could forward an understanding of the Writing Project as an experience in professional development and personal growth? I conceptualized my research interests in terms of a modified KWL chart (Ogle, 1986). Teachers often use the KWL chart as a method to elicit students' understanding of what they already *know* about a topic (*K*), what they *want* to know (*W*), and what they have *learned* as a result of their research (*L*). While the KWL is primarily used as an instructional tool for teachers of elementary, middle, and high school students, I found it useful to apply the KWL to my research topic. I outlined what I want to know (*K*) and what I want to learn (*W*) using two columns of the chart. The results of this study determined the contents of the third column. Table 1 outlines my hopes for this study in the form of a KWL chart.

I have begun this dissertation by articulating my research purpose, questions, and rationale, as well as my own hopes for the study. In the following chapters, I followed a traditional five-chapter format for developing a dissertation. Chapter 1, the current chapter, presents an overview of the study. I hope this introduction at once informs the reader of the topic and purpose of the study as well as familiarizes the reader with the tone and style of the forthcoming text. I have included my research questions and purposes to guide the reader into the context of the study, and I have revealed myself deliberately through a first person narrative. Rather than attempt to remain an objective researcher, I chose to deliberately engage my own voice in the research. Throughout the

document, I speak directly from my own experience and reveal my own relation to the topic.

Table 1: Research Interests Represented on a KWL Chart

<i>K: What do I already <u>know</u> about this subject</i>	<i>W: What do I <u>want</u> to know?</i>	<i>L: What have I <u>learned</u> as a result of this research?</i>
<p>I know that the Writing Project has a significant effect on teachers.</p> <p>I know that the Writing Project is the largest teacher professional development network in the United States.</p> <p>I know that teachers report personal and professional growth as a result of the Writing Project.</p> <p>I know that the Writing Project Institute is modeled as a “teachers teaching teachers” program. The program validates the classroom experience of the teacher as equal to research in constructing knowledge.</p>	<p>I want to know how the Writing Project serves to promote personal and professional growth in teachers.</p> <p>I want to know what qualities and values individual teachers place on their Writing Project experience.</p> <p>I want to know how teachers’ experience in the Writing Project promotes their sense of professionalism.</p> <p>I want to know the role of community in the Writing Project experience and the role of writing in the creation of that community.</p>	<p>In my own pilot study and my review of the literature I have learned that many teachers value their experience in the Writing Project. Teachers report personal and professional changes. I learned more about the essence of the experience that leads to those changes.</p> <p>I learned several features of the Writing Project experience that teachers value as meaningful to their professional development. These features are reported in Chapter 4 of this study.</p>

Chapter 2 provides the reader with a review of literature in two areas. The literature review begins by addressing teacher professional development in general, then narrows to a consideration of National Writing Project as a specific model of professional development. The literature on professional development provides the foundation from which to consider the Writing Project as a specific experience. As part of the literature review, I also developed a conceptual framework in which to situate the study.

The conceptual framework continues into Chapter 3, the methodology section. Since qualitative research is as much process as product, the methodology is an integral component of the conceptual framework. In Chapter 3, I explain how phenomenology is an appropriate qualitative methodology from which to study the experience of teachers in the National Writing Project. This explanation includes considerations of theoretical traditions in qualitative research and a discussion of how my study aligns with those traditions. I describe my research strategies for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 3 also references interview transcripts along with an explanation of the phenomenological process used for data reduction and analysis. In this chapter, I attempted to guide the reader through my data analysis process by demonstrating at each step how the raw interview data gradually transformed into meaningful findings.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the participants and the results of the research. While reporting the results of the study, I attempt to give voice to the participants in the study through a narrative of their experience. For each theme that emerged from the data, I represent findings with verbatim contextual quotes from the participants. While I guide

the reader through an explanation of the themes, the participants' words illustrate the essential features of their experience.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss the results of the study within the context of previous research. I reflect on where this study fits in the current literature on professional development and how this study contributes to our knowledge of professional development. In discussing the results in light of current literature, I also consider possible implications for the findings. I include my own hopes for the findings of this study as well as recommendations for future research. I then conclude the dissertation with a reflection on the process and the product.

The dissertation process confronts the researcher with many challenges. The foremost challenge in developing this dissertation has been to forge my own academic voice while imparting a coherent research plan to the reader. This dissertation represents a guide into research and meaning from the experience of a single researcher. As with any text, the reader ultimately evokes individual meaning from the printed page. As Rosenblatt (1938) theorized, each reader has an individual, subjective, and aesthetic transaction with the text. This transaction is a constructive process in which the reader and the text are "continually affected by what the other has contributed" (p. 26). As both a novice qualitative researcher and the writer of this text, my task was twofold: to articulate a reliable and valid research guide while facilitating an aesthetic transaction between the reader and the text. I hope this dissertation will evoke in the reader a clear understanding of the importance of this study and a consideration of how this research project might inform the current conversation on teacher professional development.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The previous chapter established a general overview of my research interests and plan. In this chapter, I move toward a more detailed discussion of teacher professional development in general and the Writing Project as a unique experience in professional development. I will use the literature review to communicate the current dialogue surrounding professional development and to examine the most recent research addressing the Writing Project. In developing this review, I used Galvan (1999) as a primary guide. Galvan compared the literature review to “creating a unique new forest, which you will build by using the trees you found in the literature you have read” (p. 51). Galvan suggested beginning a literature review by identifying a broad area of concern, then narrowing the review to more specific issues or problems. An effective review must synthesize discrete parts into a new entity and clarify how the pieces relate to one another. In addition, the review establishes the researcher’s position and “develops a traceable narrative that demonstrates that the line of argumentation is worthwhile and justified” (p. 51). Galvan’s guide characterizes my hopes for this literature review.

Following Galvan’s suggestions, this literature review begins with a broad consideration of professional development literature, then segues into a closer examination of the Writing Project as a specific professional development program. In developing this review, I synthesized current research and theories on teachers’

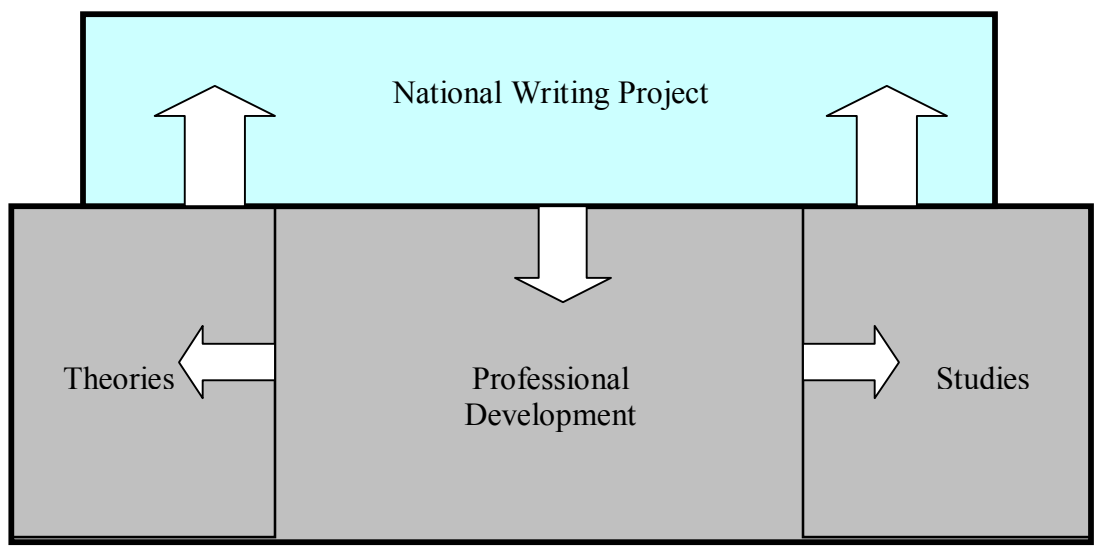
professional development. I looked to this literature to provide a general background from which to study the experiences of teachers in the National Writing Project. Next, I reviewed empirical studies on the National Writing Project, from its inception in 1974 to the present. I then applied theories of professional development to the Writing Project model to provide a new context from which to consider the Writing Project as a professional development experience. This approach helped create the metaphorical “new forest” Galvan conceptualized. In the process, I considered how the individual pieces related to the whole entity. The literature review concludes by revisiting the research questions for the proposed study.

I developed the literature review with the assumption that an understanding of professional development is integral to an understanding of the Writing Project, and vice versa. As I reviewed and synthesized the literature, I attempted to situate the Writing Project within the larger setting of teacher professional development. As illustrated in Figure 1, each of these areas of interest informs and is informed by the other. Since the Writing Project is considered a professional development program, the literature often flows between these two areas. Figure 1 illustrates the interrelationship between professional development and the Writing Project.

As Figure 1 implies, professional development provides the foundation from which to study the Writing Project. Theories and empirical research inform the Writing Project model, and the Writing Project is often cited in professional development literature. Furthermore, studies focused on the Writing Project have begun to influence theoretical stances regarding professional development. Recent research on professional

development often turns the lens toward the Writing Project as an exemplar program that demonstrates specific advantages. Likewise, studies focused on the Writing Project often launch from the platform of professional development. While the overlap is sometimes obvious and interdependent in the research, Figure 1 also suggests a more subtle relation between these two entities. The arrow descending from the Writing Project suggests the influence Writing Project literature radiates onto the larger foundation of professional development.

Figure 1: Professional Development and the Writing Project in the Literature



Because of the obvious interrelationships between professional development and the Writing Project, it was necessary to review literature in both areas. Several focus areas emerged from the literature. The annotated chart in Table 2 outlines specific focus

areas that transpired from the review of literature. The annotations in Table 2 foreshadow key themes from the following literature review. The literature review is in two sections. The first section addresses scholarship and theories concerning professional development. The second section examines the empirical literature on the Writing Project.

Table 2: Focus Areas for Literature Review

Professional Development	National Writing Project
<p><i>Focus areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Theories regarding traditional approaches and the “deficit model” ➤ Research distinguishing accidental and deliberate apprenticeships ➤ Theories promoting alternative approaches to teacher professional development ➤ Literature focused on the Writing Project as professional development <p><i>From the literature:</i></p> <p>Our present approach to professional growth has all teachers marching to the monotonous beat of a single drummer while an orchestra waits in the wings. (Marczely, 1996, p. 9)</p>	<p><i>Focus areas:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Studies reporting cause and effect relationships between Writing Project and student achievement ➤ Studies addressing the culture and community in the Writing Project Institute ➤ Literature citing the Writing Project as an effective model of professional development <p><i>From the literature:</i></p> <p>For the National Writing Project, what each teacher thinks, wonders, reads, learns, and questions becomes the content for professional development. (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, p. 41)</p>

Professional Development Literature

Meaningful growth can come only by focusing on change from the “inside out.”

We start by thinking about learning and moving outward from there.

(Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004, p. 1)

As suggested in the quote above, learning is constructed inside individuals rather than created from the outside. This theory applies to teacher learning as well as student learning. Unfortunately, the American educational system has not always promoted teachers’ learning as individuals and professionals. Instead, teachers are detached from a system that generates their learning from the outside. This approach results in teachers being only marginally engaged in their own professional development.

Over twenty-five years ago, Lortie (1975) reported on teachers’ dissatisfaction with their own professionalism. Lortie found that teachers desired professional socialization yet were constrained by the isolated context of classroom teaching. In regards to professional development, Lortie theorized a “conservatism norm” of organizational-imposed objectives designed to remediate teachers’ practice. Teachers, who relied on personal values and their own classroom experience, felt little connection to these systemic interventions and often discarded such initiatives as unrealistic administrative expectations. Lortie’s landmark publication led educational researchers to study how teachers think and learn as professionals. In characterizing teaching as a lonely and uncertain profession, Lortie exposed a profession in need of collegiality, community, and professional affiliation.

Teacher development begins long before teachers enter the classroom. Ritchie and Wilson (2000) declared that teachers are influenced by dual and dichotomous apprenticeships. Social and cultural narratives of what it means to be a teacher shape the accidental apprenticeship. Accidental apprenticeships are typified by limited decision-making, prescribed curriculum, and hierarchical power structures. Teachers are expected to conform to an external authority that makes important decisions for them. Accidental apprenticeships form over a life of attending schools, preparing to become teachers, and joining a faculty that is already in progress. Since teachers themselves were formerly students, Ritchie and Wilson estimate that by the time a teacher becomes certified, he or she has observed or participated in over 13,000 hours of classroom activity. Most of this time has been spent as passive recipients of “lecture, study guides, quizzes, worksheets, tests, and grades” (p. 37). The accidental apprenticeship continues through college as preservice teachers learn more methods, activities, and management strategies. Finally, when the preservice teacher enters the workforce, the accidental apprenticeship continues to recycle itself as the new teacher is initiated into the educational system.

In contrast to the accidental apprenticeship is the “deliberate apprenticeship,” marked by teachers’ seeking further opportunities to develop as individuals and professionals. The deliberate apprenticeship is individualized professional development, where teachers deliberately participate in graduate courses, professional development programs, or conferences in order to enhance their instruction. These deliberate apprenticeships frequently engage teachers in quality experiences that are liberating and transformative to their careers. The deliberate apprenticeships often occur in social

contexts, allowing teachers to dialogue with colleagues, resulting in a sense of community and collegiality. The deliberate apprenticeship sometimes marked a turning point in a teacher's career and sometimes caused a collision at the schoolhouse door. In their research, Ritchie and Wilson (2000) found a conflict when these deliberate apprenticeships were cast back into the positivist structures of the school. When teachers returned to their classrooms, the accidental apprenticeship often took over, causing the excitement of the deliberate apprenticeship to "collapse under the weight of the status quo in schools" (p. 53).

Teacher professional development has traditionally ignored teachers' own need for deliberate apprenticeships in favor of programs designed to change individuals and schools through teacher remediation. While the terms "staff development" and "professional development" are synonymous in most of the literature, Stevenson (1987) drew a distinction. For Stevenson, the goal of staff development is to further the objectives of the institution. Professional development, alternatively, is characterized by the ongoing development of the individual teacher. Whereas staff development is generally an involuntary systemic effort, professional development is often voluntary and initiated by the individual teacher.

Stevenson's distinction between staff development and professional development practices is useful in considering the experiences of teachers. Rather than see staff and professional development as serving two different purposes, many current researchers consider the two approaches as moving entities on a continuum. Sometimes staff development overlaps with professional development; other times, the two are separate

and distinct. Hargreaves (1992) suggested the term “teacher development” to consider the individual teacher in educational settings. Teacher development, Hargreaves argued, “involves more than changing teachers’ behavior—it also involves changing the person the teacher is” (p. 7). Teacher development considers the individual teacher’s personal and professional growth in the context of the educational setting. Lieberman (1994) supported this view of teacher development as a constructivist approach that assumes the teacher is “someone with a tacit knowledge base, who continuously builds on that base” (p. 15). Throughout this research, I used the terms “staff development,” “professional development,” and “teacher development” when authors of specific literature use those terms.

Traditional staff development programs place teachers in roles of compliant recipients being awarded prepackaged “expert” knowledge and strategies (Little, 1993). The traditional approach involves academic authorities from outside the educational system who somehow perceive teachers’ needs and dispense knowledge to the captive audience in “workshop” or “inservice” settings. These workshops assume that teachers have foundational weaknesses that must be strengthened by the solid structure of expert knowledge. This “deficit approach” to professional development assumes that teachers require strategies and information to facilitate their success in the classroom. Giroux (1983) claimed that these traditional top-down structures have “teacher-proofed” and “deskilled” teachers by limiting opportunities for them to make decisions.

As a result of these traditional settings for professional development, the story of teacher professional development reads like a plot with a proliferation of characters and

conflicts, but little climax or resolution. The characters are indigenous insiders (the teachers) subjugated to contracted outsiders (the experts). The insiders and outsiders are often cast into dichotomous roles of “us” versus “them.” The protagonists are the insiders, individual teachers with knowledge and experience. These teachers are consistently reminded of the insufficiency of their knowledge and experience by the antagonists, outsiders who convey the message that teachers’ professional knowledge needs remediation. The deliberate staff development intended to inform teachers’ practice often engulfs individuals and submerges their own professionalism.

Teachers’ experiences in professional development programs have shaped many theories. In an overview of professional opportunities for teachers, Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) categorized three levels of professional development programs:

1. Opportunities for teachers to learn and acquire knowledge and skills of effective teaching.
2. Opportunities for teachers to develop personal qualities, commitment, and self-understanding essential to becoming a sensitive and flexible teacher.
3. Opportunities for teachers to create a work environment that is supportive and not restrictive of professional learning, and continuous improvement.

(p. 1)

The authors found most teacher development programs fell into the first category, which stresses the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This approach is entrenched in top-down positivist principles that disregard teachers’ knowledge and classroom experience. The traditional approach subordinates teachers to the hired experts and devalues the teaching

profession. In place of such knowledge and skill-based development, Hargreaves and Fullan advocated teacher development that is more “humanistic and critical in nature--forms that take account of the person in teacher development” (p. 7). Their approach goes beyond equipping teachers with strategies for classroom use and embraces teachers’ personal qualities and knowledge as integral to professional growth.

Along with Hargreaves and Fullan, many current theorists argue for more empowering forms of teacher professional development. Richardson (2003) found most professional development to be based on a “short-term transmission model” that “involves little opportunity for participants to become involved in the conversation” (p. 401). The transmission model pays little attention to individual teachers or their school as a unique entity. This type of professional development has never been successful, yet it continues to be the prevailing model. Richardson cites several studies that imply professional development must exhibit more constructivist characteristics. Among the characteristics Richardson promotes are collegiality, buy-in among participants, acknowledgement of participants’ existing beliefs, and follow-up support (p. 401). Goodson (1992) likewise analyzed several studies about teachers’ lives and concluded that what passed for professionalism in official policy is unlike the actual experiences of teachers at work. Policy discourses designed to promote professionalization of teachers often lapse into stances of cynicism and resistance. The inherent problem is that policy serves interests of hierarchies and institutions rather than the experiential interests of teachers. Goodson called for professional development that listens to teachers and reflects teachers’ priorities, a “sponsoring of teachers’ voice” in education (p. 110). The

sponsoring of teachers' voices involves understanding teachers' "personal practical knowledge" and the notion of an "extended professional mind" (p. 113).

Sponsoring teachers' voices requires attention to teachers' personal and professional lives, advocated by Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) as "directing our inquisitive gaze at teachers' own experienced worlds" (p. 22). Only by turning to the work and words of teachers can we gain insight into their experience of professionalism. It is there, Hargreaves and Goodson asserted, that we will appreciate "the social and occupational conditions which support such professionalism or hasten its demise" (p. 23). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) further endorsed an understanding of teachers' personal practical knowledge as a central role of qualitative inquiry. A discussion of sponsoring teachers' voices and teachers' personal practical knowledge as it applies to research is included in the methodology chapter of this dissertation.

The focus of teacher professional development on teachers' experiences is a recurrent theme in the literature. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) noted that top-down teacher-training strategies limit teachers' construction of knowledge and skills. They called for professional development that "provides occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (p. 597), an approach termed "bottom-up learning" by Darling-Hammond (1995). This bottom-up learning builds teachers' capacities to share their knowledge about practices and respond to problems. Citing the National Writing Project as an example of a constructivist professional development program, Lieberman (1995) argued for a broader conceptualization of professional development where teachers

actively build knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Lieberman contended that teachers should have opportunities to “discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices, take new roles, and create new structures” (p. 593). This type of professional development would involve teachers as active participants rather than passive learners.

The limitations of the deficit model of professional development are well documented in the literature. Little (1993) correctly predicted that traditional skills-based professional development would not transfer to high standards of classroom practice. Little and others have called for a new model for professional development characterized by teachers’ inquiry into their own practice (Cochran-Smith, 1993), teachers’ daily school experiences (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), the need for professional communities (Lieberman & Miller, 1999), and school-university partnerships (Lieberman & Miller, 2001). In developing a model based on the idea of growth-in-practice Lieberman and Miller identified two underlying characteristics of effective professional development. First, teachers need a sustained professional community. The community serves to support teachers as they implement new ideas and take risks. Next, professional development must combine inside knowledge with outside knowledge. The teachers’ knowledge is not subordinate to outside knowledge; rather the inside and outside knowledge complement each other. The prevailing theory for a new professional development model is that teachers need a constructive and collegial environment in which to build on their experiential knowledge.

Rather than foster such a bottom-up constructivist environment, the education establishment itself traditionally deconstructs teachers’ roles into fragmented strategies,

activities, and practices. As Lortie asserted, teachers often work in isolation, from the planning of lessons, through implementation, and assessment of student learning. The embedded organization of school systems advances an environment of isolation.

Marczely (1996) described education as a “decidedly stratified profession” (p. 3) where the fixed regimentation of schools discouraged teachers’ professional and personal growth. Years of control from external authorities lead to teachers’ acceptance of the imposed regimentation of their profession. Rather than take risks, experiment, and reflect, teachers resort to “conservatism, privatism, and individualism” (Lortie, 1975). The isolation inherent in education leads to what Lieberman and Miller (1999) portrayed as an “underdeveloped knowledge base of the profession,” that subordinates teachers’ knowledge to external “expert” knowledge (p. 19). Furthermore, Lieberman and Wood (2002) reminded us that there is scant evidence about how, or even if, teachers learn and implement instructional ideas and strategies presented during these workshops. In fact, the traditional workshops designed to change teachers’ practice sometimes have the opposite effect as teachers respond with passive resistance.

Indeed, the culture of the educational system renders teachers voiceless. In a vivid and frank portrayal of schools, Gatto (2001) described teachers as “harnessed to a collectivized regimen” that keeps the profession held in a low regard (p. 160). Gridlocked in routine and regimen, teachers become purveyors of the status quo, acting alone in the absence of a professional and collegial environment. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) called for a “paradigm shift” in teacher development guided by results-driven programs, systems thinking, and constructivist approaches that encourage collaboration among peers and

builds knowledge about what makes sense for teaching and learning. Such a shift could nurture teachers' sense of professionalism by recognizing the teachers' voices. These researchers and theorists opposed the current trend to centralize and standardize teaching, and argued for contexts of cooperation and collegiality that recognize teachers as individuals as well as professionals.

In recent years, research on teacher development has investigated the creation of deliberate apprenticeships in the form of professional networks and communities. In a study drawing on three years of fieldwork, McLaughlin (1994) argued that enabling professional growth begins with enabling professional community. These communities, McLaughlin suggested, present different "sites" for professional growth and may include networks, departments, and collaboratives. Sharing, mutual interdependence, support, trust, and high standards characterize such communities. Several researchers and scholars advised a rethinking of professional development to actively engage teachers in ongoing professional conversations. The March, 2002, publication of *Educational Leadership* focused on redesigning professional development to include collegiality and community. Among others, Routman (2002) recommended the development of reflective school communities through weekly "professional conversations" where teachers develop and share their inside knowledge and expertise. Through such conversations, teachers learn to support and trust each other. Lieberman and Wood (2002) supported building and sustaining such communities, finding that, "Students benefit when teachers share and critique their best ideas and strategies with one another" (p. 41).

The current conversation about professional development begins with the individual teacher. In relaying stories of teacher renewal, Fox (2000) argued for an integration of teachers' personal development with professional development. In conducting case studies in teacher development, Fox found close ties between individuals' personal growth and professional development. Fox concluded that the concept of personal-professional development be further studied as "Most of us are not good at translating our passion for our discipline into our own more personal uses" (p. 173). The blending of the personal and professional development of teachers is an intriguing area for educational research.

While professional development literature serves as one aspect of this study, literature centered on the National Writing Project contributes further meanings to this research. Many of the theorists cited earlier have supported the National Writing Project as a model for professional development. Fox credited the National Writing Project with encouraging teachers to connect their personal and professional growth. Lieberman and Miller (2001), Lieberman and Wood (2002) and Ritchie and Wilson (2000) have likewise held up the Writing Project as an example of the constructivist professional development that builds on teachers' knowledge and experience. The next section of this chapter provides a background essential to understanding the approach the National Writing Project takes to teacher professional development.

National Writing Project: Background

The alchemy of the National Writing Project is really the enactment of social practices capable of building relationships, stimulating learning, developing voice and efficacy, and conveying professional purpose.

(Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 32)

As suggested earlier, my interest in teachers' professional development extends to the experiences that promote professional and personal growth in teachers. My window into such an experience is the National Writing Project, a professional network that presents a rich opportunity to study teachers' development. The Writing Project is currently one of the largest professional development programs in the United States, with over 170 sites across the country. The Writing Project model draws from a theoretical base that considers writing as a constructive and creative process that requires complex linguistic and cognitive attention. In the writing process, meaning is constructed through active engagement between the writer and the developing text. Danielewicz (2001) credits the Writing Project as initiating the process approach to teaching writing in high school and colleges. Theorists providing the groundwork for the Writing Project model include Moffett (1968), Britton (1970), Emig (1971), Elbow (1973), and Hillocks (1986). The roots of the model reach back further to the experiential learning theories of Dewey (1938), the transactional theories of Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) as well as the progressive education movement promoted by Dewey.

The National Writing Project began in 1973 as a reaction to a problem noted by James Gray, a writing teacher at the University of California, Berkeley. Gray was dissatisfied with the quality of university students' writing. A former high school English teacher, Gray noticed that many top high school graduates were placed in remedial writing courses at the university. The situation made him wonder why so many students weren't better prepared as writers. At the same time, Gray observed students who were successful writers, and he wondered about the quality of instruction those students received in high school. Gray and his colleagues at UC Berkeley responded by offering a summer writing Institute for teachers. This Institute brought together teachers to share their best practices in the teaching of writing. The model rested on the general assumption that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers, and that an Institute acknowledging the expertise of teachers would result in a unique learning community.

The Writing Project opened its doors to teachers in June of 1974 with its Invitational Summer Institute and operated under nine "basic assumptions." These basic assumptions served as a guide to the first Writing Project Institute and continue to steer current Institutes as teachers first become writers themselves, then teachers of writing, then teachers of other teachers. The basic assumptions have remained mostly unchanged for the past thirty years. Table 3 outlines the basic assumptions as currently posted on the National Writing Project website.

Table 3: Basic Assumptions of the National Writing Project

1. Working as partners, universities and schools can articulate and promote effective school reform.
2. Teachers are the best teachers of teachers; successful practicing teachers have greater credibility with their colleagues than outside experts.
3. Successful teachers of writing can be identified and – while sharing their expertise – be prepared to teach other teachers.
4. Summer Institutes should involve teachers from all levels of instruction and all disciplines.
5. Writing is as fundamental to learning in science, mathematics, and history as it is to learning in English and the language arts.
6. Writing needs constant attention and repetition from the early grades through university.
7. As the process of writing can best be understood by engaging in this process, teachers of writing should write.
8. Real change in classroom practice doesn't happen all at once, but over time.
9. Effective professional development programs are on-going and systematic, bringing teachers together throughout their careers to examine successful practices and new developments.
10. What is known about the teaching of writing comes not only from the research but from the practice of those who teach writing.
11. The National Writing Project, by promoting no single "right" approach to the teaching of writing, allows a critical examination of a variety of approaches from a variety of sources. (<http://www.writingproject.org/About/assumptions.html>)

For many teachers the Institute marks a pivotal moment in their personal and professional development. Rather than operate under the “deficit model,” the Institute embraces the “bottom-up” assumption that teachers must construct knowledge from within. Twenty years after the initial Writing Project Institute, Gray recalled:

The summer Institute is the Writing Project's first step toward recognizing teachers' authority and expertise in the world of teaching. When the Writing Project asks teachers to demonstrate what they know about teaching writing, it is tapping knowledge from practice, the single most important resource to improve teaching and learning in the nation's schools and the one most ignored by the education profession. (Gray & Sterling, 1995, p. 2).

As Gray suggested, the National Writing Project was conceived as a new model for the continuing professional development of teachers. The model applies Dewey's theory of experiential learning to teacher professional development. The model centers on learning rather than teaching, promoting a teacher-centered learning community, where meaning is constructed from the expertise and experiences of the participating teachers. The Writing Project sponsors a "teachers teaching teachers" experience for participants. The model is inherently constructivist and experiential, honoring the value of teacher knowledge and expertise. In acknowledging the central role of the teacher, the Writing Project expands the professional roles of classroom teachers. Teachers participating in the Institute are considered leaders who will provide professional development opportunities for other teachers at their schools. Upon completion of the Institute, participants become "teacher-consultants" with credentials to improve writing and writing instruction in their schools.

This model for professional development reverses the traditional hierarchical approach that places outside authorities at the top, imparting their strategies to teachers at the bottom. The Writing Project model situates teachers at the hub of a professional

community of peers and recognizes these teachers as expert leaders. In a study of the Writing Project model for professional development, Goldberg (1998) highlighted the success of the model through the words of current National Writing Project director Richard Sterling:

The model is extremely sound. You bring expert teachers together for extended summer training, and you have them demonstrate effective practice, discuss the research, and talk about why they do what they do as well as prepare to teach their colleagues back in the schools. (p. 395)

Goldberg found that participants in the Writing Project were able to grow as individuals and as professionals because of the extended time and the collegiality of the Institute. In a January, 2002 telephone interview with Sterling, I inquired about the past successes and future challenges for the Writing Project. Sterling responded that although the Writing Project has been around for almost 30 years, he sees new beginnings for using the organization of the Writing Project as a model for school reform measures. Sterling suggested that school reform begins and ends with the classroom teacher:

The Writing Project seeks ways to include the teacher in his own professional growth. So, we give teachers choices, responsibilities, and an environment to explore their profession, think about their craft, their teaching, and maybe stretch out their repertoire. (Notes from telephone interview January 2002)

Sterling also spoke of his personal commitment to the Writing Project, and envisaged the model used during the Institute becoming more common in professional development programs.

The project begins with a five-week summer Institute that is a collaboration between local school districts and universities. The Institute design is guided by a teacher-centered focus on learning through direct experience. Teachers participating in the Institute become immersed in the writing process, struggling with selection of topics, drafting ideas, reading and responding to others, revising, proofreading, and publishing their work. Teachers do not merely talk about writing; they actually become writers. Moffett (1981) exerted a strong influence on the Writing Project model and supported this component of the Writing Project design: “If teachers are ever going to teach writing more and teach it better, they will have to produce more writing themselves” (p. 81). A basic assumption of the Writing Project is that writing is essential to learning across content areas, and written communication is a fundamental skill for success in adult life.

In addition to developing as writers, each teacher in the Institute prepares and delivers a presentation addressing writing in specific content areas. The presentations must be grounded in theory and have potential for extension into practice. Teachers spend the summer writing, reading, reflecting, and supporting each other in their efforts to understand writing and writing instruction from the inside out. Rather than beginning with theory, the teachers begin by writing. Rather than rely on outside knowledge, teachers construct knowledge from the inside. In addition, the Writing Project provides

ongoing support opportunities for teacher-consultants, including local, regional, and state sponsored activities.

My aim for this study is to identify the essence of experience of Writing Project teachers. I want to add their voices to the current conversation about teachers' professional development. At the same time, I want to assume another role in my own professional career, that of researcher. Throughout this study, I will acknowledge my own experiences and subjectivities regarding the Writing Project while directing my attention to teachers' experiences. The next section of this study brings the National Writing Project into the foreground of teacher professional and personal development. The following section of the literature review focuses on the National Writing Project and its implications for teachers' personal and professional development as well as student achievement.

National Writing Project: Foreground

The Writing Project gave me license to teach.

(Interview excerpt from the pilot study, Farizo, 2002, p. 3)

The National Writing Project has been the subject of research since its inception in 1974. In reviewing the existing literature on the National Writing Project, I found previous research on the Writing Project to fall into three categories:

1. Studies investigating cause and effect relationships between Writing Project teacher behaviors and student writing achievement

2. Studies examining the Writing Project model of professional development
3. Studies describing the culture of the Writing Project Institute

Table 4 outlines the categories of the most relevant studies of the Writing Project from the past 25 years.

Table 4: Categories of Writing Project Studies

Cause and Effect Relationships	Professional Development Model	Culture and Community in the Institute
Stahlecker (1979)	Meyers (1985)	Heller (1993)
Shook (1981)	Gomez (1988)	Sunstein (1994)
Stander (1985)	Wilson (1988)	Wilson (1994)
Perl and Wilson (1986)	Gomez (1990)	Smith (1996)
Krendl and Dodd (1987)	Heller (1993)	Smith (2000)
Pritchard (1987)	Wilson (1994)	Wood and Lieberman (2000)
Olson and DiStefano (1987)	Bratcher and Stroble (1994)	Taylor (2001)
Wilson (1988)	Smith (1996)	Lieberman and Wood (2002)
Bratcher and Stroble (1994)	Kelly (1999)	Marshall and Pritchard (2002)
Academy of Education Development reports (2000, 2001, 2002)	Smith (2000) Marshall and Pritchard (2002)	Lieberman and Wood (2003)
Inverness Research Associates, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003)	Farizo (2002)	

While several studies overlap into more than one category, most studies emphasized one aspect of the Writing Project. The chart indicates that early studies were more concerned with cause and effect relationships, while recent studies are more ethnographic in nature, focusing on the culture of the Institute. As will become evident in the following discussion, little attention has been centered on teachers' experience of personal and professional growth in the Writing Project. Several early studies focused on the impact of the Writing Project Institute on teachers' behaviors and students' writing achievement. The studies sought evidence of cause and effect relationships between teachers' participation in the Institute and their students' writing performance. In an early experimental study, Stahlecker (1979) compared Writing Project teachers to control group teachers. Stahlecker reviewed 11 Writing Project sites and reported strong teacher responses to the Institute. Teachers described their experience as enhancing their writing abilities, promoting group unity, and improved leadership and presentation skill. The effects of the Institute on student writing achievement were inconclusive, with findings suggesting that student performance was affected more by teachers' levels of implementation of the writing process rather than teachers' participation in the Institute. Stahlecker also reported improved writing by students in classes where the writing process was consistently engaged, regardless of the teachers' association to the Writing Project.

Shook (1981) conducted a similar experimental study and likewise found inconclusive evidence of improved student writing. Students in Shook's experimental group did not achieve higher writing scores than those in the comparison group,

suggesting the Writing Project Institute had little effect on student writing achievement. Other studies provided uncertain results about the impact of the Writing Project on student achievement. In a three-year study, Krendl and Dodd (1987) found initial gains in student achievement scores on writing assessments, but the gains dropped somewhat during the second and third years of implementation. In an experimental study, Pritchard (1987) likewise found minimal differences in the writing achievement of experimental groups and comparison groups.

Although these early studies reported ambiguous correlations of student achievement to teachers' participation in the Writing Project, other studies suggested positive long-term effects. Stander (1985) found teachers' enthusiasm for the Writing Project experience to be consistently strong. Teachers reported increased peer collaboration and individual testimonials of professional growth as a result of the Writing Project. One teacher reported that "the Writing Project revitalized my teaching," a sentiment that was echoed in much subsequent research. Olson and DiStefano's (1987) study of a single Writing Project site showed significant improvement for students of Writing Project teachers who fully implemented the writing process in their classrooms. Perl and Wilson (1986) found students' success in writing informed by the "art of teaching" after teachers had completed the Institute. Wilson (1988) further suggested that teachers' implementation of practices learned in the Writing Project were often blocked by the traditional school structure. Teachers met resistance from colleagues and administrators as they attempted to engage their students in the writing process, writing workshops, and constructivist classrooms. Wilson noted that after two years, teachers

overcame these obstacles and changed their practice to include more writing instruction, implying that the success of the Writing Project approach takes time.

Recent studies by independent research organizations and groups commissioned by the National Writing Project have bolstered the claim that student achievement does improve as a result of teachers' participation in the Writing Project. Reports from the Academy for Educational Development (2000, 2001, 2002) found positive correlations between student achievement in writing to the quality of classroom writing assignments. The reports further found that National Writing Project teachers spent more classroom time on writing assignments than their peers, resulting in better student performance. Other reports have suggested that as teachers' comfort level with writing and writing instruction improves, their students' writing achievement improves (Inverness Research Associates, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). These studies also suggest that Writing Project teachers have more success with traditionally low-achieving groups of students. Although these studies were conducted under the direction of the National Writing Project, the research partially answers earlier research questions about student achievement and implies a statistical correlation between teachers' participation in the Institute and student writing performance.

In addition to studies on teacher behaviors and student achievement, researchers have explored the more intangible nature of teachers' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. The apparent personal and professional growth presented itself in early research with teachers reporting their enthusiasm for the Institute experience. Although Wilson's study (1988) was designed to investigate the Institute impact on student writing

performance, qualitative interview and observation data supported the Writing Project as promoting professional growth. While finding nominal statistical evidence of immediate improvement in student achievement, Wilson reported significant qualitative evidence of individual growth. Wilson's study uncovered a need for further research in these unintended effects of the Institute.

In a three-year longitudinal study of a National Writing Project site, Bratcher and Stroble (1994) analyzed both immediate and long-term affects of the Institute upon classroom practices of English teachers and reported that the Institute gave teachers a rhetorical stance for teaching writing in their classrooms. The researchers found teachers moving from individual concerns about writing to confidence in implementing writing in their classrooms. The Institute seemed to create a comfort level that transferred into a stronger competence for teaching writing. In an interesting methodological decision, the researchers included narrative "teacher profiles" from interview and self-report data. The profiles were included to "give voice to the generalizations in the data" (p. 79) and to inform a theory of how the Writing Project "actually works and what happens with teachers as they return to their classrooms" (p. 84). The narrative profiles confirmed strong teacher support for the Institute experience. From the qualitative data, the researchers concluded that the Institute is highly effective for generating teacher enthusiasm. They reported that teachers welcome the collaboration promoted in the Institute and that the Institute expanded the "horizon of teachers' professional lives" (p. 84).

These two studies by Wilson (1988) and Bratcher and Stroble (1994) represent early attempts at collecting and analyzing teacher narratives to represent the *experience* in the Institute. Wilson (1994) later applied qualitative methods of questionnaires, interviews, and case studies designed to “move closer to the experiences—the lived lives—of individuals in an attempt to paint greater detail into my portrait of post-project teachers” (p. 13). Wilson’s portrait of teachers illustrated their enthusiasm for the Writing Project. Participants used terms such as “friendship,” “camaraderie,” “caring,” and “closeness” to describe their experience (p. 37). Many participants compared the experience to a religious conversion, citing a “sense of euphoria” and a “new birth” they felt during the Institute (p. 37). Their sense of personal and professional growth fueled a renewed conviction for teaching. This renewal, however, was often tempered by the realities of the classroom. While teachers enthusiastically embraced the Institute experience, they reported impediments to conveying that experience into practice. Wilson reflected on these impediments as causing a dissonance among teachers as they attempted to implement what they learned in the Institute to their classrooms:

Most moved from a new and enthusiastic community back into the relative isolation of their old classrooms. Many of them did not find the collegial support they wanted – due to factors such as busy schedules or the physical layout of the schools. (Wilson, 1994, p. 45)

Wilson’s study simultaneously gave voice to the “unadvertised effects” of the Institute and heard the voice of unexpected conflicts that arise once teachers return to the classroom. In the process of investigating teacher practice and student writing

achievement, Wilson revealed changes in attitudes and beliefs as a significant component of the Writing Project experience.

Many teachers referred to the Writing Project as marking a pivotal time in their careers. They referred to their teaching as before and after the Writing Project and often expressed regret at their former pre-project practices. One teacher in Wilson's study reported feeling ashamed of prior instructional practices and wanted to "apologize to former students" (p. 21). Another teacher stated, "I cringe when I think back on some of the things I used to do" (p. 21).

While these studies originally sought data to support the Writing Project as leading to increased student achievement, the researchers uncovered another significant aspect of the Writing Project experience, that of teacher growth and change. While the original intent of the Writing Project was to improve writing instruction in the classroom, some researchers have found the Writing Project to be a powerful experience for individuals. These researchers provided an early glimpse into the unintended personal and professional growth engendered in the Writing Project. Research involving the impact of the Writing Project on teacher growth and change provides a bridge for considerations of the Institute as a model for professional development. The founder of the National Writing Project, Gray, maintained that the Writing Project model is consistent at all sites and committed to teachers sharing what is known about the teaching of writing through both theory and practice (Gray & Sterling, 1995). Meyers (1985) investigated the similarities among Writing Project sites across the nation, directing attention to the underlying philosophical and theoretical base that supports the Writing

Project model. The studies reported similarities among National Writing Project sites, including university/school partnerships, teacher collaboration, on-site inservice, and follow-up programs. The researchers credited these commonalities with driving the success of the Writing Project as a professional development program.

Gomez (1988) found three features of the Writing Project as supporting teachers' professionalism: the creation of a community of learners; the validation of teachers' experiences; and the professional opportunities offered to teachers following the Institute. Gomez reported the professional community of the Writing Project as integral to teachers' experience. The theme of community threads through much of the Writing Project research from the past decade. Heller (1993) sampled teacher networks and communities for commonalities in the roles and accomplishments of their projects, finding that teachers across the country expressed a desire to belong to professional communities. Heller described the Writing Project as "one of the premier teacher support networks in the United States" (p. 51). Although the creation of community was not the original goal of the National Writing Project, research has found the Institute to build a community that encourages teacher professionalism, authority, and fellowship.

The professional community cited by both Gomez and Heller has been credited with validating teachers' classroom experiences. Writing Project participants reported a sense of community that expanded their professionalism. Teachers reported the benefits of being treated as professionals and belonging to a community of teachers. In a qualitative study of Writing Project participants, Gomez (1990) cited the "unadvertised benefits of a sense of community and expanded professional opportunities that may be

even more important to the participants” (p. 4). Following their engagement in an Institute, teachers reported a renewed interest in teaching, a sense of professionalism, and a sense of belonging to a professional community. Participants in Gomez’ study echoed the words “professional,” “community,” and “collegiality.” Teachers felt they were treated as the “expert authority” as they constructed meaning from the Institute. Smith (1996, 2000) likewise found the Writing Project as an appropriate alternative model to nurture teachers’ experience in a community of scholars because it creates a culture of learners and writers. Smith (1996) described the Writing Project as a “lifetime approach” to addressing teachers’ desire to belong to a “community of scholars” (p. 691). Smith concluded that the success of the Writing Project rests in its belief in teacher as the best resource to rethink and reshape education.

Another study investigating the continuation of community for post-Institute teachers evaluated their level of participation in Writing Project activities. Taylor (2001) wondered if teachers would become too immersed in daily school issues to continue their Institute zeal throughout the school year. Taylor designed a web-based conferencing system for teachers and invited their participation in interactive sessions. Results showed the event to be a valuable learning experience for teachers, who seized the opportunity to maintain their Institute dialogue on writing and teaching. They were able to sustain their Institute community through web-based networking. These results suggest that follow-up to the Institute is an integral component to the Writing Project model.

Several researchers have explored the effects of the Writing Project on teachers’ practices, experiences, and professionalism. In an ethnographic study, Sunstein (1994)

described the “temporary culture” of the Writing Project that forges a professional community. Sunstein found the Writing Project to influence teachers’ beliefs and values by encouraging parallel movements inward and outward. The movement inward led to teachers exploring their own beliefs and values, while the movement outward brought teachers into a community where they evaluated their professional knowledge. As teachers collaborated, they became agents of their own growth, “turning in upon the self and out again toward her institutions” (p. 11). The community promoted a fellowship of teachers reading, writing, reflecting, and sharing themselves and their pedagogies. Teachers learned through self-reflection within a supportive professional community, a phenomenon Vygotsky (1978) characterized as an “interweaving of two lines” of language and personal development at work within a social context (p. 56). In addition to their own personal and professional growth, Sunstein’s participants reported their own sense of literacy to be strengthened by the community of writers. Sunstein credited the construction of a professional community with promoting change in teachers:

The program holds a strong assumption that change will happen in the teacher herself, that it will continue to happen when her own literacy is strengthened and she is invited to become a member of this community. (p. 7)

Gomez, Smith, Wilson, and Sunstein cited strong evidence of teacher development and change resulting from the Writing Project. Each investigator found the experience of community to promote personal and professional reflection. Wilson (1994) observed teachers “shaking loose from the past and acquiring a new shape, a new vision, a new community” (p. 24). Gomez’ participants cited the “potency of the group experience” and

the “sense of community with others involved in a similar enterprise” (p. 5). Sunstein presented the Writing Project community as “a hedge against professional isolation” (p. 9).

Research further indicates that the Writing Project represents a paradigm shift for teachers’ professional development. Kelly (1999) credits the Writing Project approach with rejecting the traditional paradigm of theory into practice. Instead, Kelly reported the Writing Project as empowering teachers by building on teachers’ knowledge and experiences. Kelly listed several “fallacies of traditional staff development” (p. 427) that were characterized by preconceived, disconnected experiences that subjugated teachers to an outside authority. Conversely, the Writing Project offered teachers an opportunity to advance their professional knowledge by providing a variety of teacher-led experiences. Kelly found teachers in the Writing Project collaborating to solve problems in a risk-free, supportive environment. The Writing Project experience encouraged teachers to construct knowledge and make their own pedagogical decisions.

Wood and Lieberman (2000) likewise found that the Writing Project facilitated teachers’ professionalism, sense of ownership in staff development, and voices as writers and professionals. Teachers in their two-year study reported discovering themselves as writers and professionals. The experience of writing and sharing built a scholarly community that gave teachers ownership and prompted the development of their professional voices. Wood and Lieberman cited The Writing Project model as respecting teachers as experts and inviting teachers to share their insider knowledge. These aspects of the Institute led Wood and Lieberman to characterize the National Writing Project as

“a provocative alternative approach to the professional development of teachers” (p. 175). In another study, Lieberman and Wood (2002) found two key features of the Writing Project that led to its success: social practices and networks (p. 40). The social practices motivated teachers and built professional communities, while the networks organized and sustained relationships in these communities. Lieberman and Wood found these communities and networks to create opportunities for teachers to develop as professionals and as leaders. These same communities and networks led Marshall and Pritchard (2002) to report positive effects that Writing Project teachers exert on their students and colleagues. The positive effects, however, depended on long-term system wide support of teachers after the Institute. The data suggested that when these communities and networks are supported through professional development, the impact of the Writing Project grew exponentially as teachers implemented writing instruction in their classrooms and shared their experiences with other teachers in their schools.

The culture created in the Writing Project gives teachers permission to take risks, make mistakes, and actively engage in writing and reflection. The regional and national networks of the Writing Project extend the local project into a larger community where teachers engage in ongoing professional transactions. The Writing Project occurs from the inside out, rather than from the top-down. Rather than seeking a single answer or one right approach, the Writing Project encourages informed debate among teachers who seek resolutions to their classroom dilemmas (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). This debate inspires teachers to become decision makers and reflective practitioners. The research cited here

suggests that the Writing Project did more than change teachers' instructional practices; the Writing Project changed teachers themselves.

In fewer cases, but still prevalent among Writing Project teachers, is the expression that the Institute experience changed their lives. These teachers discuss deeply personal changes that resulted from the Institute. Often their own writing and the sharing of their writing with a collegial community has touched their lives. Other times, they refer to the close relationships formed through the Institute, and of the intimacy that results from sharing their writing and their lives with others. More research is needed to study these more intangible benefits of the experience and how the Writing Project model might inform the field of teacher development.

My interest in the Writing Project experience as a teacher development opportunity includes both the practical applications of that experience to classroom instruction and the career and life-enhancing benefits reported by participants. While my interest centers on teacher professional development in the Writing Project, I acknowledge how the Writing Project model facilitates the emerging professional voices of teachers in this unique community of discourse. I also realize, as Meloy (2002) states, that qualitative research "emerges as a result of interaction in the research context" (p. 58). The process of reviewing the literature and reflecting on my own experiences has led me to this research topic.

In addition to empirical studies discussed here, archival and secondary data in the Writing Project show that teachers' writing improves and that their students' writing achievement improves. Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) advised researchers to

seek out archival and secondary data sources to enhance the comprehensiveness of a research study. Archival data is defined as “materials originally collected for bureaucratic or administrative purposes,” and secondary data is defined as “raw data that other researchers collect for their own purposes” (p. 202). The Inverness Research Associates 2001 study of the impact of the National Writing Project on teachers’ classroom practice found 10 key contributions of the National Writing Project (NWP):

1. The NWP does high quality work that teachers value.
2. The NWP helps teachers improve their teaching of writing.
3. The NWP helps students learn to write better.
4. The NWP serves a significant number of the nation’s teachers.
5. The NWP serves diverse groups of teachers and students.
6. The NWP grows itself steadily.
7. The NWP leverages federal funding.
8. The NWP is an increasingly cost-effective investment.
9. The NWP produces a lasting resource in its teacher leaders.
10. The NWP is a long-term investment that produces ongoing national capacity to improve the quality of America’s schools. (Retrieved from www.inverness-research.org/reports/nwp).

The Inverness Research Associates provided quantitative data to support each of these findings. Findings 1-3 are supported by survey data that asked teachers to rank their Writing Project experience and their subsequent instructional practices on interval and ordinal scales. Findings 4-6 were supported by demographic data on minority teachers

and students served by the Writing Project, Title I students in teachers' classes, and comparisons of urban, rural, and suburban schools participating in Writing Project Institutes. Findings 7-10 reported on local and federal budgets share of Writing Project costs. Similar findings were reported in studies from the Academy for Educational Development (1999-2002). While these findings show the Writing Project as a wide-reaching and cost-effective program with increasing influence, fewer studies have investigated the more intangible personal and professional benefits of the experience. My research interest resides in that experience. The following chapter will explain how phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for investigating this research interest.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to the reader than pages of summarized numbers. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1)

Qualitative research offers a range of opportunities to transform data into words and stories that evoke the richness of individuals' experiences. Miles and Huberman are two of many scholars who endorse the use of qualitative methods to study issues surrounding education. Although qualitative inquiry is widely accepted in educational research, investigators must build a case for using qualitative methods. The methodology must be consistent with the research purpose and questions. Marshall and Rossman (1995) recommended that researchers design their studies "according to the research questions they seek to answer" (p. 36).

The literature on professional development and research on the National Writing Project provided the essential background for this research. Professional development literature provided background on which to feature the Writing Project, while Writing Project studies focused on a specific professional development experience. The review of literature has led me to theorize that the National Writing Project promotes personal and professional growth because it provides an environment that validates teacher knowledge and experience. The questions guiding this study are: How does the Writing Project

provide this environment? What do teachers value in this experience? What are the essential features of this experience? Phenomenology offers a promising method for studying the essences of teachers' experiences in the Writing Project.

In developing a methodology for this study, I recalled Kilbourn's concept of "self-conscious method" (1999). The term "self-conscious method" refers to the researcher's explicit descriptions of methodological decisions. The self-conscious method requires the researcher to explain the decisions being made and demonstrate an awareness of how these decisions affect the overall process. Kilbourn advanced self-conscious method as a stylistic technique to complement phenomenological perspectives. This type of self-conscious writing aids in constructing better representations that readers will find reliable and valid without traditional methods and measurements of reliability and validity. Throughout this methodology chapter, I employed a self-conscious style of writing that overtly clarifies my methodological decisions.

In this chapter, I begin by describing a pilot study I conducted (Farizo, 2002). I included a discussion of the pilot study here to reveal the initial stages of my interest in the research topic. I then consider the nature of qualitative research and qualitative research traditions, which impart a methodology for this study. Next, I discuss how I could best address my current research questions and represent teachers' experience in professional development and in the Writing Project. I explain my decisions for adopting a phenomenological method to answer my research questions. I then outline my process for sampling and data collection, including interview guides and protocols. Finally, I

detail the process of data analysis that seeks to identify essences of the participants' experience.

The Pilot Study

In a pilot study of the impact of the Writing Project on teachers' attitudes and classroom practices, I collected data through surveys and interviews. My working title was "The Writing Project, Teaching, and Learning," and the results were included in *The Voice*, a Writing Project quarterly publication, under the title "Asking the Right Questions." My purpose for the study was to determine the impact of the Writing Project on teachers' professional lives and classroom practice. As I surveyed and interviewed teachers, an intriguing picture emerged of individuals who were profoundly affected by the Writing Project. Teachers provided powerful testimonies in support of the Writing Project. One teacher actually declared, "The Writing Project changed my life." Another teacher acknowledged, "The Writing Project gave me license to teach." The interviews abounded with teachers' stories, metaphors, successes, and struggles as they moved from the Writing Project Institute to classroom practice. These vivid descriptions of experiences kindled my interest in the Writing Project as a dissertation topic.

I began the pilot study by collecting and analyzing survey data to identify the level of Writing Project teachers' involvement in writing and writing instruction. I used surveys to gain an overview of the extent of teachers' implementation of writing and their general perception of the Writing Project as a professional development experience. The survey responses led to the development of interview questions that gave teachers the

opportunity to share their experiences with writing and teaching writing. I compared the interview and survey data and attempted to create a picture of the Writing Project experience. I thought of the surveys as the “frame” and the interviews as “portraits.” I found the framework of the Institute to be sturdy and long lasting. In the surveys, teachers credited the Institute as “very helpful” in preparing them for teaching writing. Teachers overwhelmingly reported professional and personal benefits from the Institute and further emphasized “significant positive changes” in their attitudes toward teaching after the Institute. During interviews, I delved into teachers’ personal and professional connections to their experience in the Writing Project. Teachers’ stories filled the frames with detailed portraits of their experience. Teachers told of the “power of being intimate” with their colleagues and the “support network” they felt in the Writing Project. The surveys and interviews revealed strong connections and a passionate dedication to the Writing Project.

Data from the pilot study suggest that the Writing Project experience facilitates both personal and professional growth. Teachers I interviewed reported both the practical applications of that experience to classroom instruction and career-changing and life-enhancing benefits. The pilot study was the catalyst for the current research. In this study, I expanded and extended the rudimentary methodology of pilot study. Results from the pilot study showed that teachers value the Writing Project as contributing to their personal and professional growth. This study seeks a deeper understanding of the Writing Project experience to identify the essential features of that experience as reported by teachers themselves. The published results from the pilot study are found in Appendix A.

Qualitative Research Traditions

To investigate teachers' experience in the Writing Project, I followed a process that involved my own transactions with literature, texts, course work, methodologies, and data collection. My own research interests surfaced from these transactions. First, reviewing the literature on professional development evoked my own practice as a teacher. My teaching experience parallels reports from the literature that the traditional deficit-model remains the prevailing approach to teachers' professional development, which consists mostly of workshops, inservices, and programs designed to fill perceived deficiencies in teachers' knowledge. Most professional development involves groups of teachers learning from outside experts, then being dismissed to implement the strategies in classrooms.

My perspective of the Writing Project is that of an indigenous insider. I participated in a Writing Project Institute in 1995. Upon completion of the Institute, I became one of nearly 100 Writing Project teacher-consultants in my school district. My researcher subjectivities are obvious since the Writing Project was an important professional development experience for me. I have often wondered, though, about the value of the experience to other teachers. Are there consistent qualities teachers place on the experience? What are the enduring aspects of the Institute and participation in the Writing Project on teaching and learning? What conflicts exist between the promise of the Institute and the realities of the classroom? What can be learned about teacher professional development through a study of the Writing Project? This study is an investigation into teachers' experience in the Writing Project to locate that experience on

what Clandinin and Connelly (1999, 2000) call the “professional development landscape.” I have often speculated on other teachers’ experiences in the Writing Project and the qualities and attributes they assigned to these experiences. As a researcher, I considered what methodology could best be employed to study teachers’ experiences. My research questions and readings for the literature review imply a qualitative methodology for investigating the essence of these experiences.

The variety of quantitative and qualitative research traditions offers many opportunities to collect and analyze empirical data. In advocating a match between research questions and strategies, Marshall and Rossman (1995) presented categories to help the researcher connect research questions to data collection methods. The categories distinguish among four distinct purposes for the research: exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, and predictive (p. 41). Each purpose advances from different types of questions and requires explicit research strategies. In applying these categories to my research questions, I have identified two complementary characteristics of this research. First, the study is inductive as I seek to understand teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes toward their professional development experiences. Next, my purpose is descriptive as I seek to describe the essence of teachers’ experience in the Writing Project. Marshall and Rossman recommend several data collection techniques for inductive and descriptive purposes, including in-depth interviewing, surveying, and participant observation. They further promote in-depth interviewing to uncover “participants’ perspectives on the phenomenon of interest” (p. 81). My purposes for

research, to understand and describe teachers' experience, support in-depth interviewing as the primary method for collecting data.

Many theoretical traditions inform qualitative research. Patton (1990) summarized theoretical approaches to qualitative research, arguing that the selected theoretical stance must align with the research purpose. Theoretical traditions in Patton's summary included ethnography, phenomenology, heuristics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and systems theory (p. 88). In applying Patton's descriptions of each qualitative orientation to my own research interests, I identified phenomenology as particularly relevant to the study of teachers' professional development experience. For Patton, phenomenological inquiry centers on the question, "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (p. 69). The question is answered through systematic investigation into those experiences as perceived and reported by the individuals themselves.

Phenomenology has roots in the philosophy of Husserl, who was interested in how people describe experiences through their senses. Husserl's key philosophical belief was that individuals know only what they experience and that individuals construct the phenomena they experience in order to make sense and meaning of the world. Creswell (1998) identified four tenets of Husserl's philosophy:

- A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy
- A philosophy without presuppositions
- The intentionality of consciousness
- The refusal of subject-object dichotomy (pp. 52-53)

The first tenet suggests a return to philosophy as a search for wisdom rather than an empirical, positivist science. The second principle underlies the phenomenologist's approach to suspend all judgments and prejudgments about an experience and rely on comprehensive descriptions by those who have experienced it. The third tenet accepts that consciousness is directed toward an object. The object and the consciousness of the object are interrelated rather than separated. Husserl's fourth belief elaborates on the intentionality of consciousness and rejects a subject-object duality. The reality of an experience can only be understood through the meaning an individual assigns to the experience. Husserl's approach to phenomenology considers the meaning of experience to individuals.

Patton (1990) recommended two applications of Husserl's phenomenology to research. The first application entails the importance of individuals' portrayal of their experiences; the second application contends that investigators must participate in that experience. Patton assigns one final dimension to differentiate phenomenology from other qualitative approaches. Phenomenology is an *a priori* methodology in that the researcher assumes that "there is an essence or essences to shared experience" (p. 70). These essences represent the essential meanings of a phenomenon as mutually understood by a group of individuals. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to uncover the *essence* of the shared experience as reported by individuals. The phenomenon under investigation may be emotions, social roles, or being a member of a program. Whatever the subject of study, the assumption of commonality in human experiences underlies phenomenological research.

Moustakas (1994) is often cited as a seminal influence in applying phenomenology to social science research. In designing empirical studies focused on the experience of individuals and groups, Moustakas (1994) advocated phenomenology as a method that has potential to “lead to significant new knowledge of everyday human experiences, human behavior, and human relationships” (p. 1). The phenomenological researcher collects data to interpret individuals’ descriptions of their experiences. Moustakas summarized phenomenological inquiry as aiming to “determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). Moustakas emphasized that the *experience* of individuals is the nucleus of phenomenological studies:

The empirical phenomenological approach involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience. (p. 13)

Moustakas further emphasized that the rigor inherent in phenomenological studies may lead to a formulation of grounded theories. Since the purpose of the research is to unravel experiences, researchers may generate theories from the data. Through analyzing, coding, and labeling the experience, the researcher studies interrelationships that enable an understanding of the nature and meaning of the experience to the individuals involved.

For qualitative inquiry, phenomenology is a gateway that admits the researcher to the experience under study. In order to uncover the essence of teachers’ experience in the Writing Project, I have employed a qualitative research plan following Moustakas’ methods of preparing phenomenological research. These methods include:

1. formulating the question
2. conducting a comprehensive review of professional and research literature
3. constructing criteria to locate appropriate participants
4. providing participants with instructions on the nature of the research and obtaining informed consent
5. developing a set of questions to guide the interview process
6. conducting and recording interviews
7. organizing and analyzing data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, including composite descriptions. (p. 105)

These steps for engaging in qualitative research align with qualitative research methods promoted by Patton, Marshall and Rossman, Glesne and Peshkin, and others. Patton wrote that in qualitative inquiry “the researcher is the instrument,” who must rely on sound processes and procedures to ensure validity in the study (p. 14). The systematic process of phenomenology grants the qualitative researcher with substance to guide the study and effective methods for analysis of data.

The goal of phenomenology to uncover the essential features of experience provides an opportunity to further our understanding of teachers’ professional development. Dewey (1916) defined education as the “reorganization or reconstruction of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience” (p. 76). This definition requires the study of theory in practice, as lived and experienced by teachers. Dewey also endorsed a philosophy of education predicated on the experience of teachers and students. Dewey (1938) theorized

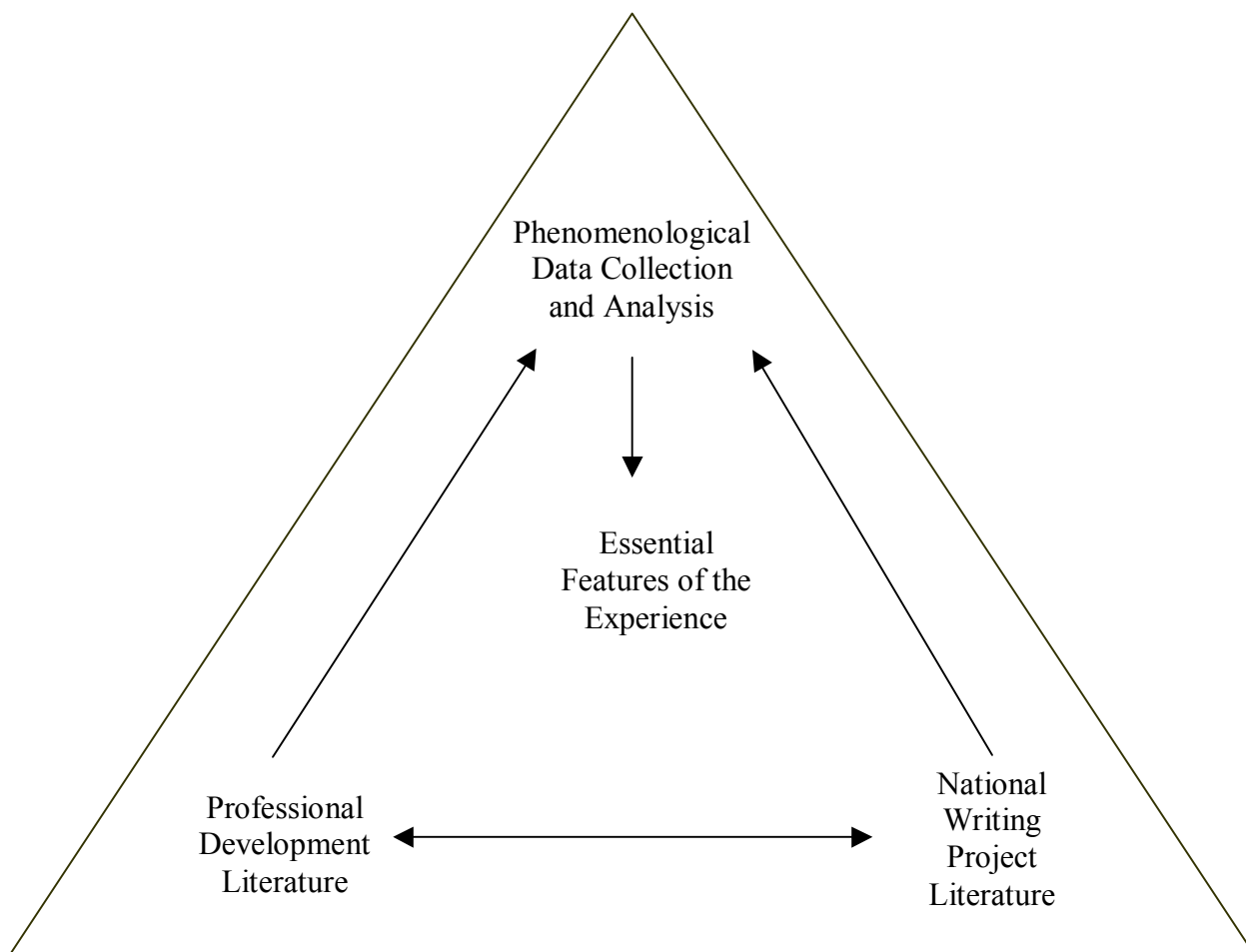
an “experiential continuum” that described experience as both situational and interactional, including the time, place, and environment. The experiential continuum is a *transaction* among individuals and groups engaged in personal and social encounters. Dewey’s belief in the continuity of experience was unbounded by time or situational constraints: “No experience lives and dies to itself. . . . Every experience lives on in further experiences” (1938, p. 16). For Dewey, the experiential continuum presupposes a present that is always informed by a history and is always reaching toward a future. A Deweyan view of education and experience lends credibility to studying the experiences of teachers through their descriptions of that experience. It also underscores the importance of valuing teachers’ experience as contributing to their knowledge.

For purposes of this research, I was inspired by Patton’s description of phenomenology and Moustakas’ suggestions for empirical phenomenological studies. My research questions are closely matched to Patton’s fundamental question for phenomenology, “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” (p. 71). My research purposes seem best matched to a phenomenological approach that seeks to understand the essential features of teachers’ professional and personal experience in the Writing Project. My study also follows Moustakas’ guide for phenomenological research methods.

The methodology for this study provides the framework from which to collect and analyze data. The diagram in Figure 2 illustrates the triangular relation among the three major elements of this study: professional development, the Writing Project, and phenomenology. The diagram implies that each element of this study is integral to

understand the essential features of the experience. While professional development and the Writing Project interact and merge with one another, a phenomenological methodology seems suited to studying the meaning of this experience for individuals. The arrows on the diagram point out interactions between the Writing Project and professional development, while showing how each of these entities informed the data collection and analysis. Finally, the literature and data led to descriptions of the essential features of the experience as described by the participants. The data analysis culminated in descriptions of these features.

Figure 2: Research and Methodological Focus



Data Collection

Data were collected through individual interviews and a focus group from January through March of 2004. Six Writing Project teacher-consultants participated in individual interviews, and another four teacher-consultants participated in the focus group.

Individual teacher interviews were conducted to collect teacher-consultant stories about their experiences with professional development and their participation in the Writing Project. Interview questions were semi-structured to give teachers the opportunity to narrate their professional development experiences and elaborate on how these experiences affected them as individuals and as professionals. The interviews also probed specifically for the values and qualities teachers assign to their experiences in the Writing Project. The interview protocol is included in Appendix B.

A focus group session followed the interviews. The focus group interview guide was designed to provide more breadth and depth to the study. The focus group provided more breadth by including teachers who had not participated in the original interviews. I was able to listen to additional teachers' descriptions of experience and allow participants to reflect their experience to the social setting. The group dynamic contributed to centering on significant issues of the experience. Marshall and Rossman (1995) credit the social setting as an advantage of focus groups: "People often need to listen to others' opinions and understandings in order to form their own" (p. 84). During the focus group interview, I discussed with participants the emerging findings from the interviews and queried for additional understandings and clarifications. I prompted teachers to respond to each other and build on previous responses. The focus group also offered more depth

since I used emerging themes from the individual interviews to develop the focus group interview guide. Focus group participants offered their insight into each emerging theme, often using each others' comments as entry points to the conversation. Since phenomenology assumes a shared essence to human experiences, the focus group provided insight to the underlying structures of the Writing Project experience.

In order to solicit volunteers for the interviews and focus group, I distributed an announcement of my intent to conduct research in the areas of professional development and the Writing Project. In the announcement, I gave a brief overview of the study and called for volunteers. From the responses I gathered, I selected teachers based on the following criteria:

- A representative sampling of teachers across disciplines, grade levels, and years of experience
- Rich informants who are willing to describe their experiences
- Willingness to participate in at least one 45-minute individual interview

For the representative sampling, I sought participants who match the categories and groups outlined in Table 5.

Each category in Table 5 lists several different groups of teachers. I wanted at least one participant for each group outlined in the table, knowing that each participant would represent more than one group. For example, a 5th grade social studies teacher with 14 year of teaching experience represented three of the groups. Following this goal for representative sampling, I was able to find participants who represented each group. Once selections were made, I contacted all teachers selected for the interviews and focus

groups and negotiated dates, times, and locations for subsequent meetings. In addition, I contacted the teachers not selected and thanked them for their interest. I obtained signed consent forms from all selected participants and assured the confidentiality of all participants. I addressed issues of confidentiality and participant consent in the Human Subjects Form (see Appendix C) and the Consent Form (see Appendix D).

Table 5: Categories for Participant Selection

Grade Levels	Teaching Experience	Content Area
Primary Grades (K-2)	5-10 years	Language Arts
Lower Elementary (3-5)	11-20 years	Social Studies
Middle School (6-8)	21-30 years	Science
High School (9-12)		Math
		Other

Interviews

Patton stated that the task for the interviewer is “to make possible for the person being interviewed to bring the interviewer into his or her world” (p. 279). Interviews are valuable tools for peering into someone’s mind and to learn from their experiences. These experiences, as told by individuals, present the researcher with the material of narratives. I structured interviews with specified questions, yet not so tightly structured as to deny

what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) referred to as “unexpected leads that arise in the course of your interviewing” (p. 92). The interview guide below lists the questions, though in actual interviews I did not always ask the questions in this linear fashion. The fluid nature of the interviews prompted me to move back and forth among the questions depending on participants’ responses.

Interview Guide

1. Tell about your experience in the Writing Project.
2. What attributes (incidents, people, activities, structure) of the Writing Project experience stand out for you?
3. How did the Writing Project experience affect you? How does it continue to affect you?
4. What feelings were generated by the Writing Project?
5. What personal or professional changes do you associate with the Writing Project experience?
6. What do you value most from the Writing Project experience?
7. Besides the Writing Project, tell about some of your major professional development experiences.
8. What do you value most from professional development?
9. Have your goals for professional development changed over the years? How?

(Interview Guide cont.)

10. Would you like to share anything else relevant to the Writing Project or other professional development experiences?

Thank the participants for their participation.

(Adapted from Moustakas, 1994, p. 117)

Developing the interview guide brought me back to the original intent of the study: to better understand teachers' experiences in the Writing Project. As I developed the questions, I considered how the research questions were reflected in the interview questions. Table 6 classifies the five research questions addressed through each interview question. The classification outlined in Table 6 is not rigid, of course, and the interviews rarely followed such an ordered path. As in any qualitative interview, participants often responded more randomly to questions. Participants sometimes made opportune associations that benefited the dialogue, and I stayed attuned to the serendipitous nature of the interview and followed the participants along uncharted roads. The table below serves to demonstrate that the interview questions have potential to address the research questions.

Table 6: Alignment of Interview and Research Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions that Address this Research Question
1. <i>What does professional development mean to teachers?</i>	Why do you participate in professional development? What do you hope to learn?
2. <i>What attributes of the Writing Project experience do teachers value?</i>	<p>What attributes of the Writing Project experience stand out for you? (incidents, people, activities, structure)</p> <p>What feelings were generated by the Writing Project?</p> <p>What do you value most from the Writing Project experience?</p>
3. <i>How does the Writing Project contribute to teachers' personal and professional growth?</i>	How did the Writing Project experiences affect you? How does it continue to affect you?
4. <i>What does the Writing Project experience mean for teachers as individuals and as professionals?</i>	What personal or professional changes do you associate with the Writing Project experience?
5. <i>What attributes of their professional development experiences do teachers value?</i>	<p>Besides the Writing Project, tell about some of your other professional development experiences.</p> <p>How have your goals for professional development changed over your career?</p> <p>What do you value most from your professional development experiences?</p> <p>Would you like to share anything else relevant to the Writing Project or professional development?</p>

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) conceptualized interviews as the “process of getting words to fly” (p. 63), likening the researcher to a pitcher who tosses questions to participants and allows them to respond in verbal flight. The interview questions were open enough to allow participants’ personal reflections and verbal flights. I also “tossed” the interview questions lightly. Rather than reading from the prepared guide, I informally began the interview by welcoming the participant and engaging in a few minutes of genial conversation. When the participant seemed relaxed, I segued into a few “prefatory statements” (Patton, 1990, p. 321) to inform the participants of the purposes for the study. Patton recommends prefatory statements that “alert the interviewees to the nature of the questions that are coming, direct their awareness, and focus their attention” (p. 321). My prefatory statements included thanking the participants for their interest, then stating that my research addressed teachers’ experiences in professional development in general and the Writing Project in particular. I informed them that the interview had no right or wrong responses. I explained that I wasn’t seeking any particular “answers” to the questions; rather, I was interested in teachers’ perceptions and opinions. Finally, I informed each teacher that all participants were Writing Project teacher-consultants.

Creswell (1998) suggested the use of protocols to help the researcher organize data collection during interviews. I merged Moustakas’ interview guide with Creswell’s sample (Creswell, p. 127) to develop the interview protocol. I then developed the focus group interview guide based on a preliminary analysis of the interview data. During the focus group session, I delved further into themes that emerge from the interviews. I

audio-recorded all interview and focus group sessions for later transcription and data analysis.

Discussion of Subjectivity

As a precursor to data analysis, phenomenologists often engage in a process of *Epoche* or “bracketing.” Creswell, Moustakas, and others encouraged phenomenological researchers to begin the data analysis process with bracketing their own experience of the phenomenon under investigation. This initial phase of phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to state his or her assumptions regarding the phenomenon and “bracket” any presuppositions. Bracketing is necessary to “set aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences to best understand the experiences of participants in the study” (Creswell, p. 235). This first essential step in data analysis attunes the researcher to the words of the participants rather than impose assumptions on their experiences. Patton considered bracketing as a “phenomenological attitude shift” that reinforces rigor by enabling the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon without presupposing meaning onto the investigation (407). In the next section, I will engage in bracketing my own assumptions and experience regarding professional development. I hope this process will serve to limit the influence of researcher subjectivity and increase the reader’s confidence in my capacity for fully attending to the experiences of the research participants.

Bracketing of Researcher's Experience

In a phenomenological study, the researcher's experience serves as secondary data for the investigation. In the process of bracketing the experience, I also must reflect on how my description may result in certain researcher subjectivities. As a researcher, my experience in the Writing Project has potential to bias me in two directions. First, since I had a valuable professional development experience, I may presume a similar experience in my research participants. Secondly, since I did not find the experience to be deeply personal or life changing, I may discount those experiences in my participants. As a researcher, I must be mindful not to allow my experience to distort any consideration of the participants' experience. The following examination of my involvement with the Writing Project may serve to limit any biases I bring to the research.

I entered the world of the National Writing Project in the summer of 1995. I had been teaching language arts in a middle school for seven years, and I had recently completed a master's degree in English. I learned about the Writing Project from a colleague who had previously completed the Institute. This colleague spoke of the Writing Project as an experience that changed her career and her life. Another teacher heard that I was interested, and he sent me a letter praising the Writing Project and recommending me as a "natural for the Institute." I also knew several other teachers who had completed the Writing Project Institute, and they piqued my interest by statements such as "the Writing Project changed my teaching style," and "the Institute opened doors for me." These teachers often spoke of the Institute as the most valuable professional development

experience of their careers. Even in those early days of my interaction with the Writing Project, I was intrigued by teachers' reactions to the phenomenon.

Teachers often spoke of the Writing Project on a deeply personal level, claiming the experience enriched their lives. Some teachers even spoke with great reverence about the Writing Project, as if they were transformed by their experience. I admit to feeling a certain skepticism to these claims. The Writing Project seemed like a cult, and I didn't particularly want my life changed or my soul transformed. I did, however, want to teach and write, and the Writing Project seemed to provide an excellent opportunity to refine teaching and writing skills. I weighed everything I heard about the Institute, attempting to strike a balance between the potential benefits versus the potential costs. Finally, a respected colleague approached me and said simply, "Be quiet and take the Writing Project. It's the best gift you can give yourself." I had such high regard for this individual that I applied for the Institute that same day.

I participated in a Writing Project Summer Institute in June of 1995 along with 13 other teachers. Now, almost 10 years later, I can still remember each teacher from that Institute. Like most teachers, the Writing Project was a powerful experience for me. I grew as a teacher and as a writer, and my classroom did change as a result. The change was beyond particular strategies or instructional methods; rather, the change involved my expectations for my students. After the Writing Project, I expected students to be readers and writers. I began treating them like readers and writers, giving them choices of novels to read based on their individual interests. I gave them time and opportunities to read and write. They created their own topics for writing. They took ownership of their topics and

wrote pieces for an audience of peers. They read and responded to each other and offered feedback designed to improve their writings. Instead of English and literature, I designed classes as reading and writing workshops. As a result, my students were more engaged in reading and writing, and I was more satisfied with my teaching.

While I benefited from the experience, I found that the Writing Project didn't always translate well into the realities of the classroom. I was questioned, for instance, about the practice of providing 90-minute reading workshops where students spent time immersed in uninterrupted reading. This approach to "Reading Workshop" (Atwell, 1987) was promoted during the Writing Project Institute. During a Reading Workshop, students selected their own reading materials, read their books, reflected through dialogue journals, and kept a log of their readings. They often voluntarily gave book talks. I delivered mini-lessons on literary elements, reading strategies, and vocabulary decoding strategies. Teachers and administrators wondered if this approach "wasted instructional time." I often had to defend my regular practice of scheduling uninterrupted silent reading time and allowing students to choose which books to read during that time. I also had to explain why I read stories aloud to 8th graders since the assumption was that they should read these stories on their own. Administrators and colleagues were particularly distressed that I did not test students on their independent reading. I had to place Atwell's *In the Middle* (1987) into teachers' hands to convince colleagues that we weren't wasting time. I insisted that reading aloud to students and providing them with opportunities to read independently probably denoted the most valuable time these students spent in school all week.

Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advised researchers to monitor their biases. The goal of monitoring subjectivity is to “get as fully as possible in touch with the embodied self who performs the acts of research (p. 106). The first aspect of my researcher bias is in the professional value I place on the experience. The Writing Project offered an alternative approach to my development as a teacher. This approach respected teachers as leaders and professionals and encouraged teachers to build on individual and communal knowledge. I valued being respected as a professional within a community of other like-minded professionals. The professionalism of the Writing Project became more important to me than any other aspect of the program.

My second concern for potential researcher bias is the deeply personal experience I did *not* have in the Writing Project. Unlike many teachers, I did not perceive a “life changing” experience through the Writing Project. The experience for me was on a more professional level. I have never associated any personal changes with the Writing Project, although I certainly saw that potential in the Institute. As a teacher in my pilot study declared, “there’s an intimacy in writing,” and the Institute does nurture intimate moments. Many teachers form life-long friendships through the Writing Project. Other teachers hone their teaching and presentation skills. Others become writers and readers. I certainly relate to all of these experiences. While I did not have the life-changing experience sometimes reported by teachers, I never doubted that many individuals feel that change powerfully.

Data Reduction and Analysis

Creswell (1998) approached qualitative data analysis as a quest for understanding situated within certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge:

Knowledge is within the meanings people make of it; knowledge is gained through people talking about their meanings; knowledge is laced with personal biases and values; knowledge is written in a personal, up-close way; and knowledge evolves, emerges, and is inextricably tied to the context in which it is studied. (p. 19)

These beliefs about knowledge lead the qualitative researcher to renounce any posturing as the “expert.” Instead, the researcher listens, records, reflects, and strives to value issues from the participants’ perspectives.

Qualitative data hold great potential for understanding how individuals construct meaning and knowledge from their experience. The data will likely lead to new understandings and unanticipated findings. At the same time, the data may suggest contradictions and convergences of the phenomenon under study. Because of the open nature of qualitative data, the research requires a plan for organization and analysis.

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested an interactive model for data analysis that consists of four concurrent activities: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (p. 10). These activities are considered interactive and reciprocal, gradually guiding the researcher to transform data into meaning. As Miles and Huberman explain, the researcher moves among all four activities during data collection, then “shuttles among reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verifying for the

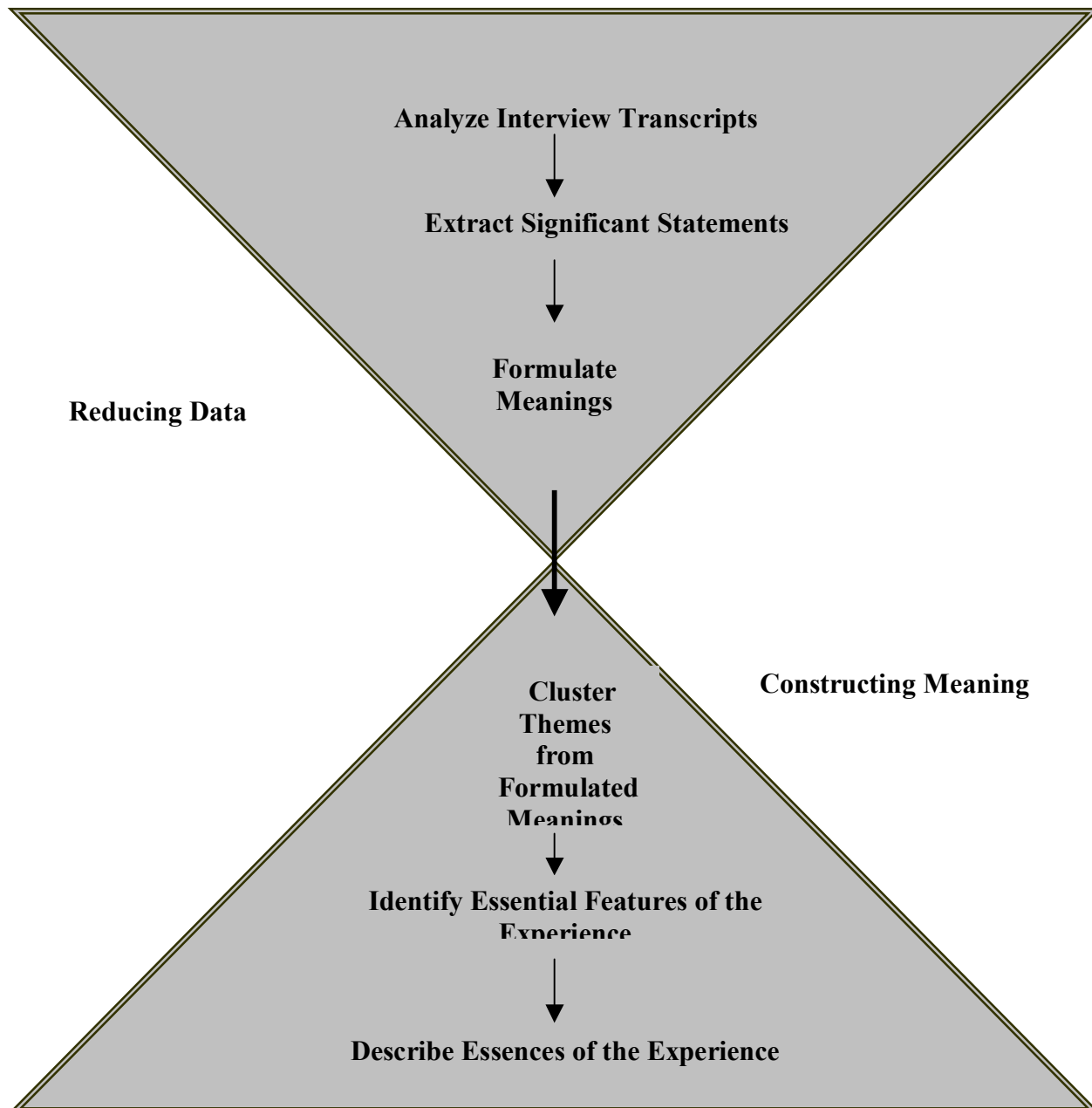
remainder of the study” (p. 12). The model presents qualitative data analysis as an ongoing, iterative endeavor.

In the literature on phenomenology, there is no agreement on a single “right” approach to data analysis. Miles and Huberman’s interactive model served as a starting point for developing a plan for data analysis. While the interactive model offers a general strategy for data analysis, Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994) developed specific guides for organizing, reducing, and analyzing data in a phenomenological study. Most proponents of phenomenology use adapted versions of either Colaizzi’s or Moustakas’ guides. The guides all begin with developing verbatim transcripts from interviews, then offer detailed steps to reduce the data through extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, and concluding with descriptions of the essential attributes of the experience. The graphic in Figure 3 represents the general process of data reduction and meaning construction in phenomenology.

As the diagram suggests, the first steps in phenomenological analysis is to reduce data from pages of verbatim transcripts to significant statements relevant to the research questions. Once the data has been reduced to significant statements, the researcher formulates meanings from these statements, thus further channeling the data from statements to components of meaning. When the data has been reduced to this point, the researcher begins constructing meaning from the data. The researcher begins constructing meaning by identifying emerging themes, then clustering data around those themes. The themes gradually reveal the essential features of the experience. Finally, the researcher develops descriptions of the essential features, or essences, of the experience. Within

each of these steps is a series of sub steps as the researcher first reduces data, then constructs meaning. The hourglass graphic in Figure 3 illustrates the process that guides the researcher.

Figure 3: Reduction of Data and Construction of Meaning



Since there is no single agreed upon process for phenomenological data analysis, a researcher must adopt a method based on the purposes and questions outlined in the study. Creswell (1998) endorsed the method of analysis modified from Colaizzi and Moustakas. This method offers a useful analytic process that applies elements from guides developed by both Colaizzi and Moustakas. In considering my research questions and data collection, I found the procedural steps offered by Creswell to be appropriate to this study. The following steps reflect Creswell's method for phenomenological data analysis:

1. Read all participants' transcripts to acquire a feeling for them.
2. Record all significant statements from each transcript, including phrases and sentences that directly pertain to the phenomenon and the research questions. This step provides a "horizontalization" of the experience.
3. List all nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, eliminating redundant statements. These statements are the invariant meaning units of the experience. In this step, all significant statements are given equal consideration.
4. Formulate meanings by reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements from the original transcriptions. The formulated meanings uncover meanings that may be hidden in the original context of the transcripts.
5. Cluster the meanings into themes common to all participants' descriptions.
6. Refer all clusters of themes to the original transcripts to validate the meanings. Use verbatim quotes and examples to illustrate the themes.

7. Develop a description of the phenomenon that states the essential structure of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. This description is a statement of the essential structure, or essence, of the phenomenon.
8. Validate the findings by returning to the participants and asking if the description accurately reflects their experience. (Adapted from Creswell, 1998, p. 280-281)

This method of phenomenological data analysis served several purposes. First, it allowed me to reduce the large volume of interview data I had collected. Next, the method guided me to make sense of the data and construct meaning through identifying themes that emerged from the interviews. Finally, the method led me to communicating the essences revealed by the data. I followed this process in analyzing interview data from the interview and focus group transcripts. Through this data analysis, I represented the experiences of teachers' professional and personal growth and uncovered the essences of these experiences for individuals. As I analyzed the data, I explored the terrain of what Clandinin and Connelly (1995, 1999) called the "professional knowledge landscape" of teachers, a concept best understood by listening to teachers' descriptions of experience. Furthering the landscape metaphor, Palmer (1998) conceptualized the "inner landscape of teachers' lives" and raised the question, "How can educational institutions support the teacher's inner life, and should they be expected to do so?" (p. 6). The method of data collection and analysis in this study made possible a journeying across the landscape of teachers' experience in order to reveal the essential nature of that experience.

Phenomenological inquiry is a method of qualitative research that provides the opportunity to peer inside individuals' lived experiences on the personal and professional landscapes. The approach seeks to uncover the essences of shared experiences within a specific landscape. I hope the phenomenological analysis of the individual interviews and a follow-up focus group helped develop a picture of teachers' professional and personal growth in the Writing Project as situated within the larger context of their professional development experiences.

I followed the data analysis process promoted by Creswell for the six individual interviews and the focus group interview. I also followed Reimen's example (1986), and displayed each step in a table in order to organize and represent the data. The tables also serve to steer the reader through the multifaceted process of phenomenological data reduction. Finally, I included a brief reflection on the ongoing data analysis as I completed each step of the process.

In the first stage of data analysis, I gathered all transcripts together as a single manuscript and read through the entire document. I read and reread the transcripts to immerse myself in the participants' language and fill myself with their words. After a first reading of the entire volume of transcripts, I revisited my original research questions to provide a frame of reference for this initial analysis of the transcripts. The research questions are:

- What does professional development mean to teachers?
- What attributes of their professional development experiences do teachers value?
- What attributes of the Writing Project experience do teachers value?

- How does the Writing Project contribute to teachers' personal and professional growth?
- What does the Writing Project experience mean for teachers as individuals and as professionals?

As I read and reread the transcripts, I reflected on how the participants' words addressed the research questions. At this time, I refrained from coding the transcripts. The purpose of this initial step is to begin understanding the phenomenon as described by individuals. Even as I avoided coding at this point, I was often captivated by the richness of the participants' responses. Mark gave a detailed account of how the Writing Project instilled in him a passion for writing that now causes him to take his journal along on fishing and hunting trips. Pamela spoke openly about the "eye opening" experience of discovering her own talents and skills as a teacher and presenter. I recalled the tremble in Kelly's voice as she tearfully described intimate relationships with her Writing Project colleagues. Reading all six transcripts in one sitting gave me a genuine sense of each individual's voice as well as an amalgamated group voice of experience. I could easily imagine the tone and modulations of the voices as the participants became the experts of their own experience. Mark would often say, "for example" before narrating a personal story of his experience. Terri spoke in long, streaming sentences that quickened for emphasis. By contrast, Robert's responses were slow cadences, where emphasis was often punctuated by silence.

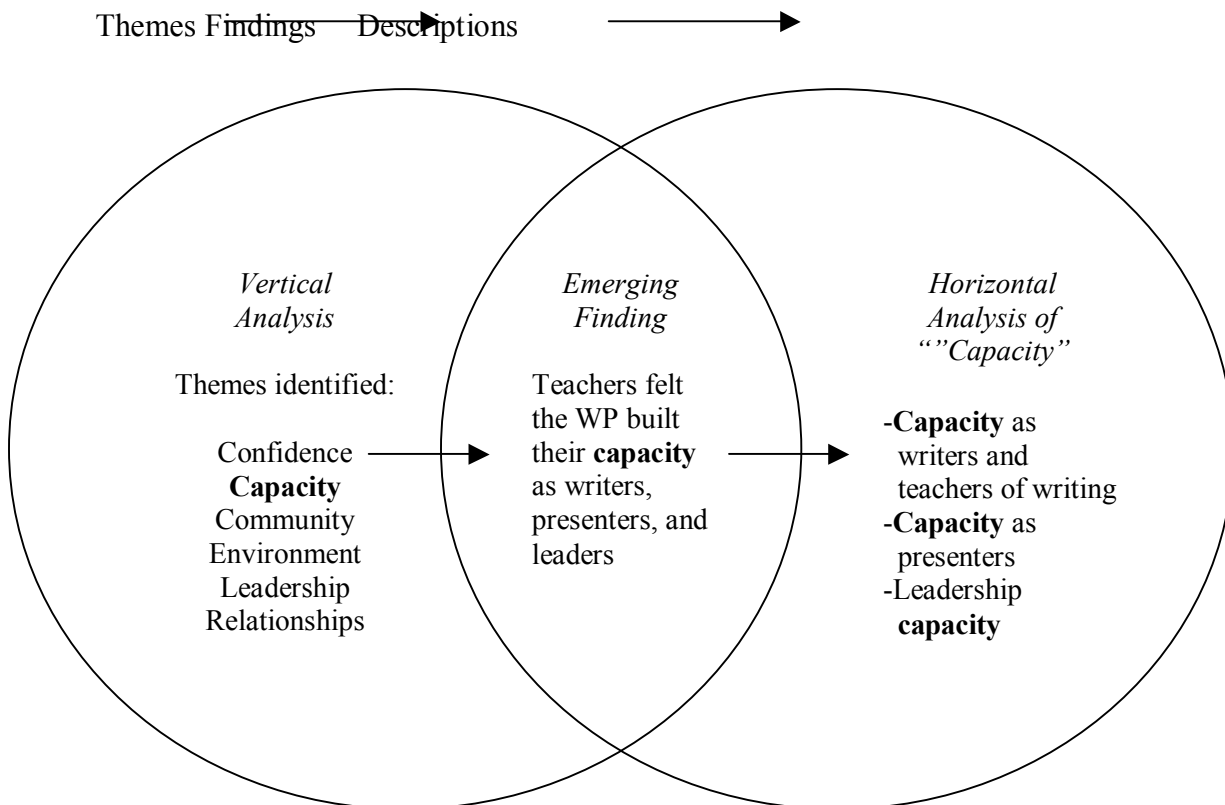
Through reading and rereading the verbatim transcripts, I was better able to acknowledge my own preconceptions and give attention directly to the participants'

attitudes and perceptions. In addition, a consecutive reading of the transcripts excited me with the prospects for this study. The participants came across as intelligent, candid, and confident. In most cases, they spoke with authority about their own experiences. In all cases, they frankly voiced their opinions. Near the end of Terri's interview, I thanked her for being forthright in her responses. She stated, "Well, you said you wanted me to speak openly and honestly, and that's what I do!" I felt assured that the data I had collected would yield interesting results.

Vertical and Horizontal Analyses

At this early stage of data analysis, I began to conceptualize two simultaneously occurring processes: a vertical analysis and a horizontal analysis. The vertical analysis involved reading and coding the interview transcripts packaged together as one extensive document. In the vertical analysis, I aggregated the transcripts into one entity and created codes as different themes emerged from the data. Once themes emerged from the collected transcripts, I then isolated specific themes, such as "confidence," and conducted a horizontal analysis across all transcripts. The horizontal analysis involved analyzing each individual transcript for incidences of that specific theme. If a particular theme emerged in several transcripts, I considered the theme as an emerging finding. I then combed through the transcripts for participant descriptions that exemplified the finding. The modified Venn diagram in Figure 4 illustrates how themes, findings, and descriptions emerged from the vertical and horizontal analyses.

Figure 4: Vertical and Horizontal Analyses



I found these complementary data analysis processes to be beneficial. In conducting vertical and horizontal analyses, I was able to identify themes in individual transcripts, then corroborate the theme across transcripts. The vertical analysis allowed me to identify emerging themes while the horizontal analysis substantiated the theme across transcripts. The horizontal analyses then provided teacher descriptions of the findings. During this stage of data analysis, I employed pattern coding, which helps the researcher to “reduce and channel data into a small number of concepts” (Miles and

Huberman, 1994, p. 69). Following recommendations from Miles and Huberman, I generated pattern codes from my preliminary vertical and horizontal analyses of the data. At the same time, I heeded Miles and Huberman's warning to not become "locked too quickly into naming a pattern, assuming you understand it, and then thrusting the name onto the data that fit it poorly" (p. 69).

Horizontalization of Experience

The next stage of phenomenological data analysis marks the beginning of data reduction. From the lengthy interview transcripts, I coded significant statements. I defined a significant statement as any statement that addressed one of the research questions. This step is sometimes referred to as the "horizontalization of experience," a term that signifies the importance of the researcher "being receptive to every statement of the co-researcher's experience and granting each comment equal value" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). The compilation of significant statements offers a "horizon" of the experience, as if the phenomenon could be viewed as a panorama. This horizontalization of data contributes to understanding the meaning of the participants' experience.

Table 7 represents the horizontalization from a single transcript. The table shows a sample of coded significant statements extracted from one interview transcript. Following the statement is the code I used during analysis (in bold caps). For each participant, I coded then extracted the significant statements and listed each statement in the order presented during the interview. All tables representing the horizontalization of participants' experiences are included in Appendix E.

The significant statements sampled in Table 7 include codes I developed as themes emerged from the transcripts. I used an inductive coding technique described by Miles and Huberman (1994) in reducing data from the transcripts to the significant statements. As a way to develop coding categories, Miles and Huberman recommend the strategy of creating a “start list” of codes by looking for attributes such as conditions, interactions, and consequences. Since I did not want to precode the text with my own a priori categories, I read the data line by line within the context of the original transcripts.

Table 7: Sample of Horizontalization of Experience

<i>Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience Sample from Transcript 1</i>
<i>Codes: WR Writing; CAP Capacity; LEAD Leadership; REL Relationships REC resources; PRES Presentations PROF Professionalism</i>
<p>1. All the research and all the professional resources they gave us was most important of all; having all of those resources to come back and share with my students. REC LEAD</p> <p>2. Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before. WR</p> <p>3. It brought out the positives, especially with the groups, the positive feedback you</p> <p>Table 7, cont.</p> <p>got from your peers and your co-workers was great. REL</p>

4. Preparing a 3-hour presentation was an immense impact on my future professional opportunities. I went on presenting at other conferences. **PRES PROF**
 5. Having the feedback from the teachers and the other colleagues. **REL**
 6. I have grown through the experience of presenting and the professionalism of being a consultant. **CAP PROF**
 7. The structure of the Institute; as writers we wrote on our own topics, and we wrote everyday and worked in groups. **WR**
 8. The professors put it into our hands. **LEAD**
 9. Having the opportunity to attend all the presentations from all the colleagues at all the grade levels. **PRES REL**
 10. Understanding that everybody is different; everybody has their own personality, their own strengths and weaknesses. **REL**
 11. The true personality comes out from everybody and we all bring our own strengths and weaknesses to the table. **REL**
 12. It just adds to your backpack of knowledge. **CAP**
 13. Writing Project just gives you such a bigger perspective. **CAP**
 14. Writing Project turns the program over to the teachers. **CAP**
 15. I value a lot of the resources that I got. **CAP**
- Table 7, cont.
16. It has changed how I see myself. **CAP LEAD PROF**

17. I think it really showed me that I feel like a professional; I have so much knowledge, but I also see that there's so much more that I want to go out there and get. *CAP PROF*
18. It's like opening the door and giving me these opportunities. Opportunities to present and network and learn and want to get more. *CAP*
19. The writing experience was tremendous, it was powerful and I want to give my students that same opportunity. *WR CAP*
20. It's just that certain bond because you share so much. You're like a family. *REL*

In the margins, I coded any responses that seemed linked to any research question, using a separate number code for each of the five research questions. At the same time, I generated provisional codes, such as “relationships,” “presentation,” and “colleagues.” For example, the following excerpt from Terri’s interview was coded *CONF* for “confidence” and *CAP* for “capacity”:

The main thing was that I wanted to encourage journal writing in my class, but having never had an English or creative writing background, I didn't feel equipped to give those assignments and assess them. So that was professionally, the main thing. It gave me the, well, I guess I already had the skills, but it gave me the confidence to give those assignments and to evaluate them in a communicative way, as opposed to what I did before...

Although Terri spoke about wanting to use journals in her class, the essence of her response was that her newfound confidence afforded her the capacity to use journals with her students. For Terri, the Writing Project developed her capacity to engage students in writing.

Miles and Huberman also recommended reading transcripts for “regularly occurring phrases, with an eye to surprising or counterintuitive material” (p. 58). The word “confidence” occurred frequently in Terri’s transcript, so I highlighted all sections of the transcript where she spoke of confidence. Sometimes she discussed her confidence as a teacher and writer, and other times she described how this confidence informed her entire life:

It gave you confidence. It was about how to make *yourself* better. You ask, “well, what’s better?” I don’t know, it’s what do *you* think is better. That, *that* was the best thing about the Writing Project.

This type of coding led to the identification of themes that I could then use in further horizontal analyses of other transcripts.

Aggregate of Significant Statements

From the lengthy lists of horizontalized statements, the next step in data analysis and reduction is to record all nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements, eliminating redundant statements. In phenomenological data analysis, this step is sometimes combined with the previous step. I preferred separating the steps for two reasons. First, I wanted to “slow down” the analysis to ensure that the process was thorough and complete at each step. Secondly, I wanted to list all relevant statements from each transcript before reducing the

statements to formulated meaning units. During this step, I attempted to reduce the data further by eliminating statements that had the same, or nearly the same meaning. Finally, I developed an aggregate of the nonrepetitive statements. These statements are commonly referred to as “invariant statements” or “meaning units” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). The term “invariant statement” connotes statements that directly relate to the phenomenon under investigation, free from vague or repetitive expressions of the experience.

Table 8 lists a sampling of all significant, nonrepetitive statements from the six transcripts. The aggregate of significant statements further reduced the data to more fundamental components. At this step, the six interviews coalesce into a single focus. As Creswell described, the researcher “enters the field of perception of the participants” (p. 31). Each participant’s voice still stands as unique and meaningful to the study, but the collective of common meanings also begins to surface. The entire table of aggregate statements is included in Appendix F.

Table 8: Sample of Aggregate of Significant Statements

*Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience:
Sample Aggregate of Significant, Nonrepetitive Statements*

1. Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before.
2. Having the feedback from the teachers and the other colleagues.
3. It just adds to your backpack of knowledge.
4. The Writing Project just gives you such a bigger perspective.
5. It's like opening the door and giving me these opportunities. Opportunities to present and network and learn and want to get more.
6. It's just that certain bond because you share so much. You're like a family.
7. It made me look at my practices.
8. It made me think about my philosophies as an educator.
9. It gave me some validation that, yes, maybe I can do this, and it made me start writing.
10. It was a good thing for self-esteem personally and professionally.
11. It made me look at how I teach reading and writing.
12. I made some connections that I might not have ever made.
13. The way the atmosphere is set up, the playing field is leveled and everybody is in the same boat.

Table 8, cont.

14. There's an environment of total honesty that's just not threatening.
15. I'm more confident about if somebody came to me and asked a question; I really do know what I'm talking about.
16. Writing Project encouraged and polished some possible leadership skills; it really helped me.
17. There's so much freedom within that structure; that's what makes it so unique.
18. It makes you step back and evaluate
19. You get inside yourself enough to do that, and it does change the way you approach your classroom.
20. Everyone took risks; you had to bare it all.
21. You're willing to take risks with these people because you feel you got nothing to lose.
22. You see someone you have respect for, and they're totally willing to share their live, sharing and pushing each other.
23. I realized that teachers don't have to be faceless and with no personality.
24. The Writing Project gave me another goal, an avenue for my life.
25. The Writing Project maximized my potential and opened me up to so much more.
26. The Writing Project gets rid of that excess emotional baggage.
27. I'm able to take more chances in my classroom now; I'm able to reach out and touch kids' lives.

Table 8, cont.

28. The Writing Project gave me the confidence to give writing assignments and grade them and to be able to evaluate in a communicative way.
29. I definitely expect different things from my classroom now than I did before.
30. The Writing Project was empowering.
31. The Writing Project awakened writing in me.
32. It instilled in me a little sense of confidence that maybe I didn't have before.

Formulated Meanings

In the next step of data analysis, the researcher formulates meanings from the data. Formulated meanings are arrived at through reading, rereading, and reflecting upon the significant statements in the original transcripts to further probe into the meaning within the original context of the statement. This step of data analysis reveals meanings that may be hidden when taken out of the original context of the interviews. In this step, the researcher relies on interpretive skills to spell out the meaning from the invariant statements. Reimen characterized this step as “difficult” and cautioned researchers not to arrive at meanings that “sever the connection with the original description” (Creswell, p. 280). This step further reduces data and marks the beginning of clustering the data into themes. In formulating meanings, I returned to the original transcripts and reread each invariant statement listed in Step 3 in the context of the original interviews. I then developed the formulated meanings enumerated in Table 9.

Table 9: Formulated Meanings

-
1. The Writing Project experience touched individuals' inner feelings and brought out their strengths.
 2. Teachers valued their peers' feedback and constructive criticism regarding writing, teaching, and presenting.
 3. Teachers grew from the experience of being treated like professionals.
 4. The Writing Project added to teachers' knowledge and gave them a bigger perspective from which to consider their own teaching.
 5. The Writing Project changed how teachers see themselves as individuals and professionals.
 6. The Writing Project empowers teachers with professionalism by giving them the responsibility for their own learning.
 7. The Writing Project experience gave teachers professional resources to bring back to their classrooms and share with their students.
 8. The Writing Project experience made teachers feel like professionals with something to offer other teachers.
 9. Teachers valued the close bonds and relationships they formed with their colleagues.
 10. The Writing Project encouraged teachers to take professional risks.

Table 9, cont.

11. The Writing Project was an introspective time where teachers reflected on themselves, their teaching, and their writing.
12. Teachers valued the environment of non-threatening total honesty.
13. The Writing Project gave teachers more confidence in themselves as writers, teachers, content experts, and presenters.
14. The Writing Project validated teachers' love of teaching, reading, and writing.
15. The daily writing and sharing opened teachers to new perspectives and viewpoints.
16. Teachers expected different things for their classrooms after the Writing Project.

Identification of Themes

Once meanings were formulated, I clustered the aggregate of the formulated meanings into themes. In order to identify themes, I returned to the vertical and horizontal analyses of transcripts and compared the emerging themes with the formulated meanings. The previous analytical steps I followed revealed a few patterns in the data. First, the data revealed that teachers referred to the environment of the Writing Project as a “non-threatening” setting that encouraged them to take risks. Also, all teachers spoke of the sense of community, relationships, and collegiality. Since the previous steps to phenomenological analysis had already uncovered such patterns, I felt justified in beginning with these themes. As I searched for patterns in the data, I was careful that the clusters represented themes that emerged from the data and were common to all

participants' descriptions. These themes were referred back to the original transcripts to validate their accuracy and to assure that all themes were accounted for in the original interviews. The following clusters represent general themes that emerged from the data and describe participants' experience in the Writing Project:

Professional Resources

- Professional resources were available for the teachers' use. A professional library was available for teachers to check out books, and teachers are given several books to keep and take back to their classrooms.
- Teachers had their colleagues as resources. Teachers valued each other's opinions and perspectives and actively learned from one another.

Instructional Strategies

- Teachers learned new instructional strategies from their colleagues. They were able to implement these strategies in their classrooms.
- Teachers shared strategies with each other through presentations

Professionalism

- Teachers valued being treated as professionals. They made their own decisions about topics for writing and presentations.
- Teachers felt empowered by the structure of the Institute, which turns over the responsibility to them.

- Teachers left the Institute feeling more confident as teachers and as professionals. They felt that the experience gave them something to bring back to their schools and share with other teachers.

Writing

- Personal writing challenged teachers and sharing their writing brought teachers close together.
- Through the sharing of drafts teachers learned to trust each other while improving their writing skills.
- Teachers learned writing from the inside, as writers themselves. This experience gave teachers the confidence to talk about writing and the teaching of writing. In addition, the experience gave teachers the confidence to teach and evaluate their students' writing.

Relationships

- Teachers broke through barriers that contribute to isolationism in the classroom and formed personal and professional relationships with colleagues.
- Teachers formed close bonds with their colleagues. The relationships were formed through common goals, shared interests, and the sharing of writing. The relationships were often intense and long-lasting for teachers.
- Teachers felt a common bond with other Writing Project teachers because of the shared experience.

- Teachers began to see themselves as entering relationships with their students as well. They reflected on the teacher-student relationship and the relationships they can nurture within the classroom among students.

Leadership

- Teachers credited the Institute co-directors as leaders who facilitated teachers' growth.
- Teachers cited the Writing Project as facilitating their own leadership skills.

Environment

- The environment of the Institute was open, honest, and non-threatening.
- Teachers felt they could take risks without the fear of failing since they all shared the common goals of progressing as writers, teachers, and individuals.
- The interdependent environment of the Institute caused teachers to feel a responsibility toward their colleagues. They wanted their colleagues to succeed and perceived the success of each individual as beneficial to the whole group.

These themes resulted from preliminary data analysis and are not presented here as findings from the study. At this point in the study, I conducted a focus group interview with additional participants to explore the emerging themes. The focus group interview guide contained questions that probed these themes and solicited deeper descriptions from the participants. I began the focus group with prefatory statements explaining the research project to the participants and revealing the themes that had emerged from

previous interviews. I prompted the participants to think about these themes and to elaborate on any or all of the themes as we engaged in the interview. I also encouraged the group to respond to each other's comments. I used the following questions to guide the focus group:

1. Tell about your experience in the Writing Project.
2. What did you value in your Writing Project experience?

In previous interviews, teachers have indicated qualities of the Writing Project that they value. I would like to ask you about these qualities of the Writing Project:

3. Teachers have said they value the resources and strategies they received in the Writing Project Institute. What do you recall about resources and strategies?
4. Teachers have said they value the writing they did in the Writing Project Institute. What do you recall about writing during the Institute?
5. Teachers have said they value the professionalism of the Writing Project Institute. What do you recall about the professionalism?
6. Teachers have said they value the relationships they formed in the Writing Project Institute. What do you recall about relationships?
7. Teachers have said they value the overall environment of the Writing Project Institute. What do you recall about the overall environment?
8. Besides the Writing Project, tell about some of your other professional development experiences?

9. What did you value in those other professional development experiences?
10. Would you like to share anything else relevant to other professional development or the Writing Project?

These questions allowed me to address the emerging themes and offered me a deeper understanding of how teachers' Writing Project experience. Participants in the focus group started slowly and hesitated in offering their comments, but after the first teacher began speaking the group seemed to relax and offered comments freely. I followed the same analytical process with the focus group interviews as with the individual interviews. Appendix G includes the significant statements from the focus group organized into the pre-identified themes.

Validating Themes

This step of phenomenological data analysis represents a clarification of data while simultaneously functioning to construct meaning from the data. The themes that emerged from the interviews began to uncover the essential features of the experience. The themes were referred back to the original transcripts from the individual interviews and the focus group to validate their accuracy and to assure that all themes were accounted for in the original interviews. Following Creswell's example, I used verbatim quotes and examples to present the participants' direct words that give voice to the themes. Creswell saw this step as a way to validate the themes. By analyzing the themes in context, the researcher is able to determine how those themes reflect the participants'

original words. Further data analysis and reduction gradually lead to a description of the essence of the experience. The themes developed through the data analysis in this chapter served as an outline to present the results of the study. The following chapter will describe the results of the study through a descriptive narration of these themes within the context of the participants' words.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The Writing Project maximized my potential and opened me up to so much more.

(Robert, research participant in an interview excerpt from this study)

The above quote from Robert typifies a recurring theme of this study. The interviews abounded with such statements. Participants figuratively described the Writing Project as “recharging my batteries” and “waking me up to enjoy teaching again.” On a more profound literal level, participants declared the Writing Project “changed the way I think about my classroom,” and “changed my life.” The focus of any phenomenological study is to identify the essences of an experience as described by participants, and this study investigated the Writing Project as a phenomenon experienced by its participants. The questions centered on *how* does the Writing Project “recharge” teachers’ batteries? How does this program “wake up” teachers? How does it change the way they perceive their classrooms or their lives? A phenomenological analysis of the data revealed five essential features of the experience. These essential features represent the “essence” of the experience for these participants.

Patton (1990) stressed that “the purpose of qualitative research is to produce findings” (p. 371). While this statement is certainly a goal for any investigation, the challenge facing qualitative researchers is to construct meaning from substantial amounts

of data. While phenomenology encompasses a variety of methods, all approaches promote the primacy of individuals' subjective experiences as leading to research findings. In this chapter I begin with a brief description of the participants of this study. I then identify five findings as essential features of the Writing Project experience. For each finding, I narrate a description of that feature using the words of the participants. Following standards for a phenomenological representation of findings, I conclude the chapter with textural and structural descriptions of the essence of the experience.

Description of Participants

All ten participants were teachers in a single school district who have completed the Writing Project Institute some time over the past 15 years. All participants are considered Writing Project teacher-consultants, yet have varied experiences in education. The matrix in Table 10 includes relevant demographics about each participant's professional career at the time of this study. As the table shows, the participants had varied backgrounds in education, ranging from elementary to secondary grades. They also represent a range of teaching experience, from five years to twenty-eight years. The matrix, however, cannot convey the individuals behind the professional. Since the Writing Project is attuned to the individual as well as the professional, a brief description of each participant is useful. Following Table 10 are descriptions that offer insight to each participant's personality and background.

Table 10: Participant Demographics

Participant	Teaching Experience	Grade Levels	Content Areas	Institute Year
<i>Pamela</i>	8 years	3 rd – 5 th	Reading, Social Studies	2002
<i>Marie</i>	10 years	9 th -11 th	Language Arts	2000
<i>Robert</i>	5 years	9 th -12 th	Spanish	2002
<i>Kelly</i>	9 years	11 th	Science	1998
<i>Terri</i>	18 years	6 th	Special Education	2003
<i>Mark</i>	19 years	8 th	Science	2000
<i>Bonnie</i>	8 years	7 th -8 th	Language Arts	2000
<i>Suzanne</i>	26 years	5 th -6 th	Social Studies, Language Arts	1990
<i>Sandra</i>	28 years	9 th -10 th	Language Arts	1992
<i>Jeremy</i>	18 years	9 th	Language Arts	1995

Pamela

For a teacher with only eight years of experience, Pamela has received an impressive array of educational honors. In addition to being a Writing Project consultant for her school district, she is a National Board Certified teacher and Elementary Teacher of the Year. Pamela has presented at numerous local, state, and national conferences and considers education her life's work: "I think it's my passion. I have a passion for learning and teaching," she said in the interview.

Marie

Marie's entrance into education was born from a love of language and literature. She readily admits that she teaches to "stay close to books, writing, and ideas." She is an active participant in Writing Project activities, and frequently serves as a presenter for local and regional Writing Project events.

Robert

Robert is a former newspaper reporter who applied for the Writing Project to reconnect with writing. He has considered writing professionally, and especially enjoys writing stories and poetry. Robert has served in several leadership capacities for the Writing Project, including presenting at regional meetings and serving as an Advisory Board member.

Kelly

Kelly has twice been nominated to serve as an officer for the Writing Project, and twice she has declined the nomination. She prefers to let others take leadership positions while she hones her skills teaching and writing in the classroom. For Kelly, interpersonal relationships are important, and she values the personal connections she makes with each student: “That’s what you have to offer these kids,” she says, “that’s what they need the most.”

Terri

After 18 years in education, Terri maintains a growing enthusiasm for teaching. She is surprised that she is still “in the classroom” after 18 years and realizes that it’s her “quest to keep learning new things” that keeps her there. Terri considers herself a lifelong learner, always searching for new experiences to inform her practice. “You know” she admits, “I haven’t found that ultimate thing yet.”

Mark

With 19 years experience in public education, and nearly as many years experience in the private sector, Mark is the eldest of participants in this study. Mark remembers a childhood surrounded by learning, and credits his past with informing his career decisions. He says he “inherited” his love of teaching children from his father, a career

educator and administrator. “I like working with children, helping get them through a lot of what they have to go through,” he observed.

Bonnie

Bonnie has been in education for only eight years, but in those eight years she has taught three grade levels and three different subjects. She welcomes new challenges and prefers teaching to any other position in education: “I miss the kids when I’m not in the classroom. I miss the interaction.”

Sandra

Sandra has been in education for 28 years, long enough to recall days before standardized curriculum and testing practices. She remembers teaching from “whatever books we had available.” She has seen many movements come and go in education, and considers the Writing Project to have a lasting effect that transcends these fads.

Suzanne

“The Writing Project was the best gift I ever gave myself,” Suzanne stated in the interview. Since her summer in the Institute over fifteen years ago, Suzanne has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Writing Project, sponsoring writing clubs at her school, initiating reading and responding groups with teachers, and presenting at local and state conferences.

Jeremy

Jeremy has always been a “writer who teaches, rather than a teacher who writes.” He originally saw the Writing Project as an opportunity to write and publish rather than an experience in professional development. Indeed, he often submits poems and stories to “various journals all around.” Like other participants in this study, Jeremy has taken on leadership roles in his school and the district.

Potential Biases of Participants

This description of the participants compels a discussion of potential biases. Each of the nine participants came voluntarily to the Writing Project and to the interviews; therefore, these participants probably already had strong feelings about the Writing Project. Each knew in advance that this research investigated the Writing Project as a professional development experience, and each willingly participated in the study. Because this research acknowledges the Writing Project as a powerful experience for teachers, it is predictable that teachers who volunteered for this study would approach the interviews as enthusiastic participants. The participants in this study were all successful, confident, and established teachers in their schools. They were known for their professionalism and competency. As a result, they spoke with confidence and conviction about their Writing Project experience.

Teachers who volunteer as participants for research studies may be biased for or against the subject of the study. In this study, the participants were certainly proponents of the Writing Project. They had high regard for the Writing Project and were eager to

discuss their experience. This fact does not invalidate the study, however, as the purpose of this research is to uncover the subjective values teachers place on the experience, not to determine objective “truths” about that experience.

Although I did not attempt to control participant biases in this study, I did obtain a representative sampling of teachers, as outlined above in Table 10. The variations in teachers’ educational backgrounds allowed the opportunity for different opinions of the Writing Project experience. The participants represent several content areas, which opens the possibility that these teachers will perceive their experience differently. Even though the teachers represent a range of content areas, six of the participants are primarily language arts teachers. The reason for the large number of language arts teachers is due to the nature of the Writing Project itself: it attracts more language arts teachers than teachers of other content areas. Finally, six participants completed the Writing Project Institute within the past four years, while four completed the Institute from 1990-1998. Since several professors and teachers have taught the Institute over the years, there is a possibility that teachers from earlier Institutes have opinions diverging from teachers from more recent Institutes. Of these participants, two teachers had over 20 years experience, which offered insight to the sustained interest in the Writing Project.

Findings

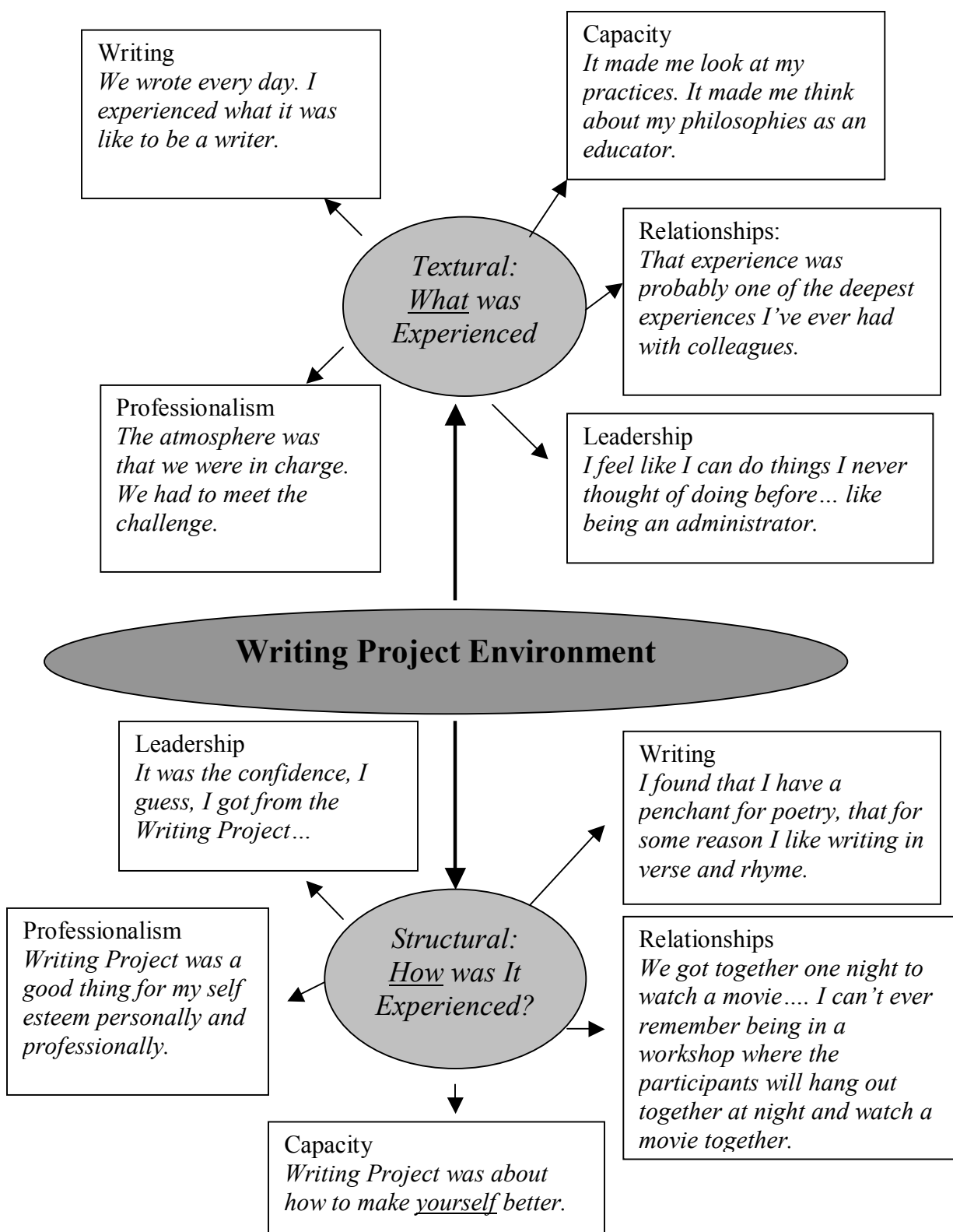
The analysis of data produced themes surrounding teachers’ Writing Project experience. The formulated themes identified in the methodology chapter served as entry

points to a deeper analysis of the data. Analyzing the data within the context of these themes, I identified the following five essential features of the experience:

- *Capacity*: The Writing Project builds teachers' instructional and pedagogical capacity.
- *Professionalism*: The Writing Project sponsors teachers' professional voices.
- *Relationships*: The Writing Project breaks down isolationism by promoting interdependent personal and professional relationships.
- *Writing*: The Writing Project connects teachers to the writer within and extends that connection to classroom practice.
- *Leadership*: The Writing Project attracts leaders and facilitates leadership in members.

The context chart in Figure 5 illustrates the themes and essences of the Writing Project as emanating from the environment that contributes to teachers' personal and professional development. The essential features of the experience all seemed to revolve around the central tenet of environment as the Writing Project creates a climate that nurtures teachers' growth. Following Creswell's (1998) recommendations for phenomenological representation of findings, I illustrated the findings as textural (what was experienced) and structural (how was it experienced). The chart is annotated with relevant quotes from the participants. Each quote was selected for its potential to express that particular feature of the experience in the participants' own words. The chart provides a snapshot of the findings of this study, which I will elaborate in the section.

Figure 5: Context Chart of Textural and Structural Features



These features of the experience incorporate the formulated themes and reveal the essence of the experience for teachers. The following discussion narrates the findings as six essential features of the experience using verbatim quotes from the participants.

Finding 1: The Writing Project Builds Teachers' Instructional and Pedagogical Capacity

Teachers described the Writing Project as building their capacity for teaching and learning through the resources provided and strategies shared. The resources gave teachers a new language to use and theoretical support for new instructional strategies. Each participant in the study referred to these features of the Writing Project as contributing to their understanding of how to teach writing. One teacher referred to her new understandings as a “backpack of knowledge.”

One way the Writing Project succeeds in building capacity is by offering resources to teachers and guiding teachers in using these resources. During the Institute, a professional library is available for teachers to check out books, and teachers are given several books to keep and take back to their classrooms. The resources often translate into strategies teachers can use in the classroom. As a result, the resources and strategies became more than mere assignments or academic exercises. Instead, they represented a new way of thinking for teachers. Many teachers were introduced to innovative research-based practices during the Institute. Teachers did not actually use terms such as “pedagogy” during the interviews, but their comments implied a pedagogical shift in their approach to teaching writing. For example, Terri recognized Atwell’s book *In the Middle* as a significant contribution to her classroom:

I would have never, it would have never occurred to me to do Readers' Workshops had I not experienced the Writing Project. The big picture, the Atwell book especially and some of the other things that we read. It just gives you such a bigger perspective. Had I not been exposed to that, I might not have taken the risk to try a Reading Workshop model.

Pamela likewise identified resources as significant to the Writing Project experience. She described the value of the resources as helping her make connections between theory and classroom practice. The resources were particularly important because they translated into classroom practice and changed her way of teaching and thinking:

All the research and all the professional resources that they gave us through the experience was the most profound importance of all, having all of those resources to come back and share with my students, especially the book by Atwell.... I value a lot of the resources that I got there, all those research-based practices. Myself, it has changed how I see myself. I'm surprising myself, because I didn't think I could do all this. I feel that it's really showing me, I feel that I have so much knowledge.

The resources referred to in the Writing Project addressed theory and practice. Many teachers never considered the theory behind the practice. Jeremy found the discovery of theory to confirm his instructional practices:

I never heard of Moffett or Hillocks or Atwell or Calkins or any of those people really, and here we were, reading Moffett. I've been teaching all these years, I majored in

English, and no one ever referred me to those books. And Moffett's saying teachers should teach writing the way I always wanted to teach it anyway. I mean, I was doing it anyway, not even knowing there was this whole theory behind it.

Even when teachers did not enjoy the "tedious" process of reading theory, they appreciated the value of theoretical contributions. Mark saw the value even though he disliked the text:

I liked most of the books, like Atwell especially, and another one that we read, I think it was Donald Graves. I hated that one book by Moffett. It was so tedious, just so boring, but still, I'm glad we read it because that's the whole foundation to support what we do. So you can back yourself up, so to speak.

Teachers reported leaving the Institute confident that they could implement newly learned reading and writing strategies in their classrooms. The resources extended beyond studies, articles, and books from outside scholars. Another important resource was the portfolio of drafts, reflections, and writings the teachers created themselves. Pamela discussed the portfolio as a resource:

You see where my binder of resources is... I keep it here. My portfolio is here. I had it out last week because I was talking to the students about portfolios and student-led conferencing. And I share my portfolio with the kids; I have every year since. It's become a resource for me.

As well as serving as an artifact from the Institute, the portfolio became a teaching resource after the Institute. The portfolio also afforded teachers credibility with their students. Kelly shared her portfolio with students and described their impressions:

The students are amazed, they're like, "Oh, you've done what you're asking us to do, so it gives me a lot more integrity and validity with my students.... So I pull it out, or I read from it. It's become a teaching tool for me.

Teachers valued their portfolios as a remembrance and a resource. Teachers in the focus group also discussed the portfolio as following them from school to school and classroom to classroom:

Bonnie: I still have my portfolio. I bring it home every summer and back to my classroom every year. It's like my record of that summer in the Writing Project. I think everybody keeps their portfolio in their classroom.

Sandra: I've moved that thing to three different schools and different classrooms in those schools, so now I keep it at home. I have it on my bookshelf where I know I can find it.

For Marie, the portfolio symbolized the Writing Project itself. Her portfolio, like the Writing Project experience, is imbued with meaning:

The Writing Project is something that stays with you. I still have my portfolio and all the handouts from everyone's presentations. I've moved from house to house and school to school, but I keep that portfolio close by. It's come to mean something to me, like a reminder of what I did and what I can do.

In addition to the resources provided in the Institute, teachers valued learning from each other. Their colleagues were important resources for learning new instructional and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning. Their teacher colleagues, rather than the Project directors, often provided teachers' with insight to teaching and learning. Kelly described her colleagues as offering new perspectives:

I think there were fourteen of us and we were chosen as well so that there were teachers from all different grade levels and subject areas, and a number of professional backgrounds as well. So, it was a lot of growth as far as meeting people and seeing new perspectives to teaching.

Kelly went on to describe how these differing perspectives improved her performance in the Institute:

You learn the most important lesson, that your pieces are your own, and other people's opinions have to be welcomed, though, because your pieces will never get better if you don't get other perspectives. That's how you learn and grow, through that kind of interaction with each other.

Many participants echoed Kelly's appreciation of their colleagues. Teachers also appreciated the opportunity to learn from other teachers. Marie recalled the Writing Project motto:

They say it's all about teachers teaching teachers, and it really is just like that. We taught each other through presentations, R&R (Reading and Responding) groups, and all the constant feedback we gave. Everybody had their own little expertise, like science, or a social studies teacher, and then there were the English teachers who were

sort of the language experts. But everybody contributed to the whole group. We learned from each other that way.

Along with valuing collaboration, Mark saw a major benefit as the time he had to discuss, consult, and work with other teachers:

We get the feeling that we work independently, and it's different when you hear the different voices, not only the voices from the experts. And again, I think the Writing Project gives you the time for this, time to discuss, to think and talk about these things. The opportunity to talk and listen and learn from each other is great, it's tremendous, and it doesn't happen to often in teaching.

Finding 2: The Writing Project Empowers Teachers as Professionals

Teachers reported leaving the Institute feeling more confident as teachers and more empowered as professionals. When teachers described the Writing Project as “changing the way I think about my classroom,” they usually followed with statements such as “You get in touch with yourself as a teacher.” In the course of the summer Institute, teachers made their own decisions about topics for writing and presentations. They felt that the experience gave them something to bring back to their schools and share with other teachers. Teachers felt empowered by the constructivist nature of the Institute, which charges participants with responsibility for their own learning. Kelly found this feature of the Institute to be professionally liberating:

The Writing Project turns it all over to you. You have a bunch of work, you have the day, and you get to use your own personality to organize it.... It was about how do

you make *yourself* better. Well, *what's* better? I don't know, what do *you* think is better? That, *that* was the best thing about the Writing Project.

Kelly and others were surprised at how the Writing Project bestowed control of the experience on teachers. Marie likewise referred to the experience as liberating:

The atmosphere was unburdened and free. We tried different things, professionally, and learned from others. We were free to experiment and discuss new ideas. It was fun and liberating at the same time. We were encouraged to take risks and to be comfortable taking risks, to ask different questions, to share things we might not always share with other teachers.

Teachers appreciated the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning. Robert remarked that the experience was unique because it empowered the participants rather than the presenters:

In the Writing Project you get to showcase yourself. No other professional development does that. It's all about someone else showcasing *themselves*. I liked the Writing Project because it was about me and how I can improve. The others really don't compare to Writing Project. There's nothing like that, really. You, the teacher, you're the one. You become more confident. I prefer that approach, really, and I try to use that with my students as well. You get so much more from learning that way.

As these quotes imply, the environment of the Institute was open, honest, and non-threatening. Teachers acknowledged the possibilities offered by the Institute. As a

result, teachers felt safe to take risks in their thinking and practice. Teachers felt they could take risks without the fear of failing since they all shared the common goals of progressing as writers, teachers, and individuals. The interdependent environment of the Institute affected in teachers a responsibility toward their colleagues. They wanted their colleagues to succeed and perceived the accomplishments of each individual as benefiting the whole group. Participants in the focus group credited the professional environment of the Writing Project to the structure of the Institute, where teachers become central participants in learning:

Bonnie: The facilitators, the personalities of the facilitators, they set the tone for everything.

Sandra: And we had totally different facilitators than you guys had. We had a professor from Massachusetts, and another teacher from another parish. But we still felt the same warmth and caring, even though they were outsiders. They still made us feel safe and professional.

Jeremy: It's just that way of treating teachers like professionals, not like some kids. That's what the Writing Project does, really, it give teachers the control. It doesn't matter who's teaching it, because it's about the teachers taking it.

The Writing Project also empowered teachers to experiment with newly discovered strategies. Teachers spoke of becoming more confident writers, presenters, and teachers during the Institute. Mark found a particular boost in his confidence:

I think that it probably instilled in me a sense of confidence that I didn't have before. You know, the presentation we did was challenging. And your colleagues write a very in-depth critique of the presentation. The critiques were positive, but very beneficial to you... It's a strong reinforcer.

Like Mark, other teachers felt a reinforcement of their strengths that raised their confidence. For Kelly, her increased confidence resulted in implementing more writing in her classroom:

It gave me the confidence to give those writing assignments and grade them, you know, to be able to evaluate them in a very real communicative way, as opposed to what I had done before, where I was looking for something in these sentences that was right or wrong. So, it gave me a strong tool I didn't have before.

Terri likewise felt more certain about herself as a teacher with a knowledge base to share with others:

I definitely became more confident about teaching writing and I was more confident about if somebody came to me and asked me a question, I thought, yes, I really do know what I'm talking about. I felt very validated that yes, I know it now, there's no question. I do know what I'm talking about.

One key feature of the Writing Project that instilled confidence in teachers is an environment that promotes risk-taking. Teachers are encouraged to try new instructional approaches, attempt new understandings, and communicate their vision of teaching and

learning to others. At the same time, teachers were there to teach other teachers. They assisted and learned from one another. Terri described importance of the open and interdependent climate of the Institute:

The way the atmosphere is set up, you feel that you're stripped naked and the playing field is leveled, and everybody is in the same boat. And there's just an environment of total honesty that's just not threatening. We had some very strong teachers and personalities in our Institute, but everyone checked their egos at the door. We were there to help each other.

Kelly also cited the non-threatening environment, but she specified that the risks teachers took in sharing their writing and their presentations were meaningful risks:

I just never had experienced something where everything you did was so significant. And yet, there was not a lot of penalty to it.

Robert went further to describe the Institute as a time to cast off some of the barriers teachers sometimes allow to obstruct their learning. He described how the non-threatening environment broke down barriers that often stop teachers from taking risks:

Everyone took risks. You had to bare it all. Writing Project was a release, the breaking point where you could let it go. The Writing Project breaks down that hard shell, that barrier. It takes awhile but once someone took the plunge, and we were all able to catch them, then it was ok. That does it. No one held back.... In Writing Project, we learned to take risks and take chances.

For most teachers, the Writing Project was a comfortable place to take risks because of the support embedded into the Institute structure. Teachers were required to present to their peers, but their audience was fellow Writing Project participants. As a result, teachers felt they were on an even playing field with their colleagues. Bonnie found this feature to be important:

We never did anything alone. Everything was together. Like, everybody was in the same boat; everybody was doing the same types of things.... Like taking a risk. I didn't even feel like I was taking a risk because everyone else was doing it. It wasn't just one person.

Every teacher interviewed for this study referred to the Writing Project as the most important professional development in which they have participated. Teachers in this study felt empowered as professionals by the Writing Project. They felt they were valued as professionals who had experiences and expertise to share with others. Part of this empowerment resides in the Writing Project structure that turns over the program to teachers. Terri attempted to describe the personal and professional benefits she derived from the experience:

I think that particular experience was probably the most, I don't know where to start with the adjectives, professionally and personally life changing experience that I've had in a professional development situation. I definitely felt like I grew as an educator.

Finding 3: The Writing Project Breaks Down Isolationism by Promoting Interdependent Personal and Professional Relationships

Teachers conduct most of their work apart from other teachers. It is common for teachers in a large school to be unaware of their colleagues' curriculum or instructional practices. Classroom walls partition teachers into the specialized grids of content areas and grade levels. History teachers rarely collaborate with science teachers. English teachers perceive little advantages in teaming with math teachers. Teachers' work is isolated in classroom cubicles that disaggregate the profession into a system of disciplines and levels. Participants in this study recognized the figurative and literal partitions that disconnect them from their colleagues. The Writing Project replaced the seclusion teachers often experience with personal and professional relationships teachers valued.

The Writing Project offered teachers a break from the isolationism that characterized their professional lives. As teachers collaborated as writers and teachers of writing, they often formed relationships that went beyond collegial associates. Teachers in this study described close bonds with their Writing Project colleagues. The relationships were often intense and long-lasting. They felt a common bond with other Writing Project teachers because of the shared experience. Kelly offered insight onto the powerful bonds that form during the Institute:

The experience leaves a mark on me because of the people. I don't think you feel responsible to a subject. I don't think you feel responsible to a company. I don't think

you feel responsible to a workshop. You feel responsible to people. Period. No one I know who will work and continue working for a subject area and the subject is your best friend. But for most of us, we're social animals, and you're responsible to the people you work with. And the Writing Project asks you to dedicate to those people who are going to be working with you. You know, it makes a difference; it really does. During the Institute, teachers form Reading and Responding (R&R) groups that promote interdependency among participants. The success of each individual is linked to the success of the group. Mark appreciated the feeling of comradeship he experienced in the Institute, particularly the R&R group:

Well, the camaraderie was outstanding. That experience was probably one of the deepest experiences I've ever had with colleagues. It was very deep. I got to where, with the R&R groups, you got to know at least two other individuals very well and you had to work as a team because you're helping each other in reading and responding and doing critiques.

The Institute structure compels teachers to consider one another as individuals and professionals. As Kelly and Mark stated, teachers in the Institute come to know others very well and feel a responsibility toward their colleagues. Teachers accept the individuality around the table while working toward a collective interest. Pamela associated the relationships formed with the writings teachers shared during the Institute:

It came out how everyone is so different. Everybody has their own personality, their own strengths and weaknesses, and it's evident in their writing.... I was always scared to share my writing, but everybody was different, especially when they wrote

back to us and we got to see their writing, and it made me feel like the true personality comes out from everybody and we all bring our own strengths and weaknesses to the table.

A sort of metaphysical tessellation combining personal writing and deepening relationships formed during the Institute. The relationships formed during the Institute often resulted from emotions spurred through the writings. As teachers wrote on self selected topics, they shared their lives with each other. This sharing brought teachers together and nurtured budding relationships. As the relationships grew, teachers shared more intimate details, which led to deeper relationships. Mark recalled the phenomena of individuals forming relationships through sharing:

When we had to share the pieces once a week in our large group, it was amazing the amount of emotion involved because you were really pouring your heart out in your writing and when you read about it yourself sometimes, even reading silently to yourself was not the same as when you were actually hearing yourself read it. And, that was, I think, very binding to all the people who were involved. It was soul searching, and the most inspiring process that I've ever been through.

The process inspired other teachers as well. Terri summarized the Institute as an entire "relationship cycle" that takes place during one month:

You walk into the room the first day, and you're looking at all these people, and you think, oh God, what am I doing here? And the first week you've cried. You've told things that you never thought you would tell to anyone, but by the second week you're

laughing. By the third week you're sweating it out, like, I'm never going to get this presentation done, and this paper done, and this done and that done. And the fourth week, you're crying again because you don't want to leave. So, there's this whole year's worth of a relationship cycle that happens in this four week span. But, I think, because people share, and share amazingly freely...honest things come out, and the atmosphere of honesty is a part of it.

The relationships caused teachers to open to each other and to the experience itself. For some teachers, writing, sharing, and forming relationships were emancipating. Robert found the honesty in relationships to helped him break down the barriers to learning new things:

Writing Project was a release, the breaking point where you could let it go. The Writing Project breaks down that hard shell, that barrier. It takes awhile, but once someone took the plunge, and we were all able to catch them, then it was ok. That does it. No one held back. It was the domino effect, all these strong feelings falling out. Then, you took the plunge and you got acceptance for taking chances. It really forms a bond. It forms respect and you get close. You're willing to take risks with these people 'cause you feel you got nothing to lose. You're sharing together and listening. It brings you together, and you're not so driven by egos.

After the Institute, teachers began to see themselves as entering relationships with their students as well. The relationships formed during the Institute showed them how they could use social bonding as a catalyst for learning in their classrooms. Robert

described the teacher-student relationship and the relationships he tries to nurture within the classroom among students:

I realized that teachers don't have to be faceless and with no personality. Or, you don't have to teach from books, or everything right from the teacher. Teaching could be person to person. You could have these relationships where you share with your students. You could stray from the book and the materials and the curriculum. That's the most enjoyable thing for me. I learned from the Writing Project to be real and to have a personal connection with the kids and let them share and have that connection too.

Kelly also transferred the social experience of the Institute to her students:

I had been teaching in a very rigid way with kids. You know, like, you don't share with the kids, you don't want to be taken advantage of, and you know, the Writing Project just reminded me of the teachers who I liked when I was in school, the ones who were human and told you what they felt and what they thought.

Writing, of course, is a central component of the Writing Project. The initial intent was to have teachers experience writing from the inside, as writers themselves. As teachers engage in the writing process, their experience extends beyond words on paper. Writing becomes at once the foundation of the Institute experience and a portal to the more peripheral experiences of collegiality, community, and relationships. Pamela adequately condensed the experience:

Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before. It's just that certain bond, you know, because you share so much. You're like a family, and oh,

you feed them, figuratively and literally. We ate so much that summer. There's that certain little bond.

Finding 4: The Writing Project Connects Teachers to The Writer Within and Extends that Connection to Classroom Practice

For most teachers in this study, the Writing Project awakened the writer inside of them and gave them the confidence to write. The Writing Project strategy is to immerse teachers in writing so they experience writing as writers first, then as teachers of writing. This approach had a deep impact on the participants. They often entered the Institute as non-writers or reluctant writers and exited the Institute as writers and teachers of writing. Mark described the Institute as stirring his passion for writing:

I didn't realize that I would like writing as much as I did, and I found that I have a penchant for poetry, that for some reason I like writing in verse and rhyme based on my experience. So I found that I could write a good story in a way to express some things, experiences that I never thought about. The Writing Project, I guess, awakened writing in me. It showed me that I could write from my experiences and enjoy writing that way.

While Mark felt an awakening passion for writing, Robert rediscovered his interest for writing during the Institute:

I wanted to write for myself as well. As you know, I used to write for the newspaper, and I was wanting to write not so much for the paper, but I was considering writing

professionally, fiction and poetry, novels. Writing Project made me want to pursue more writing. It validated my love of reading and writing.

Pamela also recognized her growth as a writer during the Institute:

Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before. And my weakness is being a writer of the written language. It's my weakness. It brought out the positives, especially with sitting in the groups, the positive feedback you got from your peers and your co-workers was great.

As Pamela suggested, teachers also found the personal and social connections to writing as meaningful. Teachers selected their own topics, wrote drafts, shared their drafts with reading and responding groups, received feedback, revised, edited, and published their stories, poems, and essays. Because of the personal and social nature of this process, teachers experienced writing in a new way. Kelly expressed how emotionally involved she became with her own writing and the writing of others in her group:

I think you care about words on a piece of paper like you have never cared before.... I know some of the teachers had already written, so they like tried new types of writing that they had never tried before. For a lot of us, we had never written, so you know, in that way it gave you a new way to express yourself. I cared about my pieces and I found myself caring about the pieces I helped to edit too.

Robert earlier had recalled how the experience “validated his love for writing” and further observed that the writing began as personal then became social:

The main thing was using personal experiences to bring out our work. We always began with that focal point, personal experiences. It was personal, start with you, you, you, you are what's important. And there was no pressure to be a great writer, to do great work. It was the experience, sharing, and the pride everyone took in their work. It was about that person, me, my experience, my things.

As teachers move through the Institute, they first become writers, then are challenged to connect writing to the content and context of their classrooms. Pamela saw the ability to translate her personal writing experience to her classroom as a great benefit:

What I really thought was a strength, was coming back into the classroom and letting my students write, like today, letting them write without a topic. Before what I did was just gave them limited opportunities to write. After the Institute, you know, it was ok just to let them read a book, listen to music, and put their thoughts on paper.

The focus group members discussed how the interrelationships between writing and the reading/responding groups led to becoming better teachers:

Bonnie: It was very powerful. I experienced what it was like to be a writer.

Sandra: And you see the importance of writing so much that you want other teachers to become better teachers of writing. So that kind of leads you.... You become a better communicator. You become a better grant writer, a better teacher. A lot of things. You feel easier when it comes to going to graduate school and writing papers...

Jeremy: That's true, we've been talking about teaching, and it does make you a better teacher, but it does apply to graduate school, grant writing, all those things...

Sandra: And through that, through the importance of how strongly we found writing and the R&R groups, when I went to grad school, and we got together in small study groups, it really helped with that. I think most of us who had been through Writing Project, we saw the worth of that, the power of small groups and of writing.

Bonnie: It was powerful to experience what it's like to be a writer. I grew tremendously. After leaving the Institute, my whole style of teaching changed. Writing was like the driving force of my instruction.

Sandra: I'd have to agree. It changed my teaching too, the way I taught. Mainly, I think I changed a lot because of it. Prior to the Writing Project I was very insecure as a writer.... It was really a growth experience for me. Definitely my writing experience. I felt like I was a writer, whereas I didn't before.

Suzanne: And, too, you know, once you write something and share it, and you hear and you see reactions, then you're hooked. It's like a positive experience of communicating yourself out to others. And that feeling of having written something is such a great feeling you have.

Bonnie: That's how people get to know each other, through writing. Like, you can't help getting to know people when you're always sharing your writing.

Mark, who felt he had become a writer during the Institute, articulated the importance of translating his own newly discovered passion for writing into classroom practice:

In the classroom it's even helped me a lot, I think, especially recognizing the importance of reading and writing for young people in all phases of the curriculum, not just language arts. You know, writing helps you communicate the subjects, putting forth ideas. No matter how intelligent you are, you can characterize an idea or event or something like that in words that are not only going to be informative but also interesting to other people. And one of the problems we have mainly with our kids is interest and motivation. And for motivation, writing can be very effective for kids to use and show how they know things about your class.

The experience of writing paralleled the features of building capacity and professionalism discussed earlier. The Writing Project does not promote one correct approach to writing instruction. In the Institute, teachers are not provided with a formula for teaching writing. Rather, they are immersed in situations where writing and sharing are required for them to succeed. Then, they are prompted to consider how their experience as a writer might translate to the teaching of writing. They work together to explore possibilities and potential barriers to applying writing in their classrooms. Through this process, teachers gain capacity as writers and teachers. They are honored as professionals who have the ability to solve their own pedagogical puzzles. Marie summarized her thoughts on the role of writing in the Institute:

It changes you. You become a better writer and get to know yourself as a writer and a teacher. You get in touch with yourself as a writer and a teacher.

*Finding 5: The Writing Project Attracts Leaders
and Facilitates Leadership in its Members*

Throughout the interview process, it became obvious that the participants in this study were leaders in their schools. They were department and committee chairs, presenters at conferences, candidates for National Board Certification, and potential future administrators. Although no research question directly inquired about leadership, the theme emerged as teachers discussed why they valued the Writing Project experience. Robert found that the Writing Project fostered his current success as a graduate student and will continue to help him achieve future goals:

Writing Project maximized my potential and opened me up to so much more. I would say it steeled me for other things and helped me succeed in classes I've taken since. It just made me more confident, like I'm untouchable now. I feel like I can do things I never thought of doing before, like writing and presenting and being an administrator.

The potential of the Writing Project to facilitate leadership is linked to building capacity. For many of the teachers in this study, the leadership issue revolved around becoming accustomed to take on leadership roles. Prior to the Institute, teachers had not been asked to take control of their own professional development. The Institute not only asked them to take control, but required teachers to become experts of their own experience. Pamela recalled her first impression of the Institute:

At first I thought, this is the easy way out (for the co-directors). They just sit there while we do all the work. But it wasn't like that at all. It's amazing what we did. I was uncomfortable with it at first, but then we started to write, and well, I just fell in.

Marie also recalled her initial impression of the Institute, but for her it was liberating:

They never told us what to do or how to do it, and I remember wondering, what should I do now? Like are they going to give us an agenda or something to follow? I think that was the best thing of all; you knew what had to be done, and you got it done without someone always directing you and supervising you and saying, like, "you have two more minutes."

In addition to treating teachers like professionals and leaders, the Writing Project provides teachers occasions to assume leadership roles. The most challenging role asked of teachers is the role of presenter. All Institute participants are required to prepare a two-hour presentation of a successful classroom practice. At first, teachers were leery of their own abilities as presenters but became more confident as they witnessed themselves and their colleagues succeeding. Marie's presentation increased her confidence in her own abilities to lead a group:

I volunteered to go first for the presentations because I wanted to just get it over with. Then, it happened and I wanted to do it over again. I really wanted to do it again, to do it even better, because I think I did ok, and I didn't even think I could ever get in front of adults. Now, I get in front of adults all the time. I've presented to the Writing Project, at their big meetings. I presented to my community and at faculty workshops. I feel I can do it now.

The presentations, collaboration, discussions, and writing all combined to facilitate teachers' leadership roles. Again, the Institute built teachers' capacity and increased their confidence in themselves. Teachers felt more confident as teachers and professionals; therefore, they were more likely to seek leadership positions in their schools and district. Pamela, especially, felt that the Writing Project opened doors for her to take leadership roles:

I went on to present at other conferences. I have grown through that experience, learning the do's and don'ts of presenting and the professionalism of being a consultant.... I feel it (the Writing Project) really showed me, I feel that I am a professional, that I have so much knowledge, but I also see that there's so much more that I want to go out there and do. It's like opening the door, and giving me these opportunities, these networking opportunities, to present and go to conferences, and present. It's also giving me opportunities to learn and want to get more. It's an eye-opener. It is.

Like Pamela, not all teachers thought of leadership as administrative. They considered themselves as teacher-leaders, which marked a paradigm shift in their professional identity. Whereas most teachers consider leadership as external to the classroom, the participants in this study saw classroom teachers as leaders within their schools. Kelly articulated her thoughts on the teacher as leader:

I can remember people saying that in the Writing Project, that there's a lot of people in upper administration that have done the Writing Project. So, it was good for me for like, pursuing National Boards, or being on the Advisory Board, or working with other teachers here. Because it does teach you about other people. It teaches you how to give others the chance to speak without necessarily changing or bending to their will. So, it was advantageous at many different levels.

Terri also saw her leadership skills as relevant to her role as a classroom teacher rather than some future role as administrator:

The leadership stuff, I've always dabbled in that. Writing Project really helped me because it sort of polished those things, like getting up and doing presentations, and that. Writing Project definitely encouraged and polished some possible leadership skills.

Individuals in the focus group suggested that the Writing Project not only promotes leadership, but also appeals to leaders. Sandra, who recently was promoted to an administrative position, credited the Writing Project with facilitating her success:

I really don't think that I would have that position if it hadn't been for the Writing Project. I would never have had the confidence to get up and present in front of people. I did what I needed to do at my school. I was a good teacher, but I never took on any leadership roles until the Writing Project. It was that confidence, I guess, I got from the Writing Project, but I started to take on more roles in my school, and now in the district.

Suzanne also recognized how teachers take on leadership positions in the Writing Project:

A lot of times people are put in a role representing the Writing Project as a building rep, and they take on things like Young Authors' Contest, and they do such a good job. They take it seriously. They become leaders for that one little program.

Bonnie shared her own experience that demonstrated the Writing Project as promoting teacher leadership. She also reflected how the Writing Project fosters leadership and offered insight that perhaps leaders are drawn to the Writing Project:

When I started the Aspiring Leadership group last year, the big joke was, "Look, we have all these Writing Project people here." There were so many of us that were in the leadership class. It's like every other teacher there was a Writing Project teacher. I think people that are in the Writing Project are committed. They're giving up a month of June and are pretty passionate about education; that's first. And in the interview, you're selecting like only a few, and they're probably the leaders. So, that's before you even go through the summer. You've picked the leaders. Like, 43 people applied the year I went through, and only 13 were selected. Naturally the leaders get picked, I guess that's a part of it.

The Writing Project honors teachers as leaders in their classrooms. While many teachers described leadership in terms of becoming presenters or administrators, Kelly acknowledged the Writing Project as facilitating her leadership in the role of classroom teacher:

I can remember people saying that the Writing Project was this stepping stone for administrators. And this one thing for me is that I want to be a teacher, not an

administrator. If I'm not going to teach, then I'm not going to be in the education system. And, yet, the Writing Project was good for me.

The notion of teachers as leaders begins in the classroom and extends to the entire school system. Kelly also was able to articulate the benefits of the Writing Project to a school system:

You know, if I were the superintendent, I would want a broad base of people. I would want to call Writing Project teachers to make decisions, develop curriculum, write grants. And any of those people could help with it. And they would do it.

The findings and subcategories of those findings described here separate into dual themes of professionalism and relationships, signifying the professional and personal connections teachers have to the Writing Project. These two themes revolve around a larger central theme of environment. The Writing Project environment itself embodies the essential features of the experience. When teachers describe how the Institute fostered their professionalism or rekindled their interest in writing, they are ultimately referring to an environment that offered the opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Phenomenological Descriptions

From the results discussed in this chapter, I developed textural and structural descriptions of the Writing Project experience. As discussed earlier, the textural description addresses *what* was experienced, while the structural description addresses *how* it was experienced. Together, the descriptions are statements that represent the

essence of the Writing Project for the individuals who experience it. The following descriptions are syntheses of the results, integrating the formulated meanings and findings to describe the essential features of the experience. Table 11 provides a textural description and Table 12 provides a structural description.

Table 11: Textural Description of the Writing Project Experience

During the Writing Project Institute, teachers unite as a community of learners. This community consists of teachers from a variety of backgrounds and educational experiences. Teachers have resources and time to think, discuss, and share their best practices with colleagues. In the process of learning and sharing, teachers must rely on their colleagues' experience and expertise. Teachers engage in the writing process, selecting topics, drafting, revising, and publishing personal essays, stories, and poems. Teachers also prepare and deliver a two-hour presentation that highlights an effective classroom practice. Through their engagement in the writing process and the presentations, teachers learn from each other and become both leaders and learners in the Institute.

Table 12: Structural Description of the Writing Project Experience

Teachers perceive the Writing Project as more than a professional development experience. While teachers value the resources available to them, they also form bonds with their peers that facilitate their own personal and professional growth. Writing is a major catalyst for the personal and professional relationships that form during the Institute. Teachers write and share personal, often intimate narratives. This sharing of their writing and their lives brings teachers together and forms trusting interdependent professional relationships. The relationships further promote an open, honest environment where teachers feel comfortable taking risks. They try new strategies, consider different viewpoints, and experiment with various forms of writing. Teachers feel at ease sharing and experimenting because they share common goals with their colleagues. The overall environment of the Writing Project promotes a professionalism that often surprises teachers. The professional environment is one of collegiality, shared responsibilities, and learning from each other.

After developing these descriptions, I returned to the participants and requested feedback to validate my findings. In consideration of the participants' time, I emailed them a list of the five findings and the culminating phenomenological descriptions. I prompted the participants to think about their experience in the Writing Project and verify

whether my themes and descriptions were accurate. I encouraged the participants to respond in the most convenient way for them, suggesting phone or email. The responses were brief and confirmed the accuracy of the findings and descriptions I developed. Most responses were just a sentence or two, such as the following from Robert: "I think you described what's important. I agree with everything you said." Marie thought the findings were accurate as well: "Everything you wrote is true. I like it just the way it is." Although the responses were brief, I believe the participants recognized the findings as consistent with their thoughts and words during the interviews. None of the participants disagreed with the findings or the descriptions, nor did any participants offer suggestions for clarification.

Education is a profession that blends aspects of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy. Educational research is increasingly designed by drawing on elements of many social fields and research methodologies. While my focus for this study was teachers' experiences and the essential features of those experiences, I also wanted to create a multifaceted impression of teachers' personal and professional growth as they forge their own professional identities. In developing this chapter, I remained mindful of Polkinghorne's (1989) counsel to researchers developing a phenomenological report:

Produce a research report that gives an accurate, clear, and articulate description of an experience. The reader of the report should come away with the feeling that "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that." (p. 46)

Through a phenomenological perspective, I intended to accurately represent the participants' experience in addressing the purpose and questions of this study. I hope the discussion of results fulfilled my purposes and the reader now has insight to teachers' experience in the Writing Project.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Professional development has to inspire me personally or I don't like it.

Writing Project gave me another goal, an avenue for my life.

(Robert, research participant in an interview excerpt from this study)

A dissertation is an extensive project on a narrow topic with potential for substantial results. Because of the breadth of a dissertation, both researcher and reader often eagerly anticipate the final chapter. As a result, the concluding chapter is sometimes perceived as a postscript. Rudestam and Newton (2001) counseled against developing an “anticlimactic” conclusion, characterizing the discussion chapter as an occasion to “move beyond the data and integrate, creatively, the results of your study with existing theory and research” (p. 167). They recommended that researchers integrate several elements to the discussion chapter:

1. An overview of the significant findings
2. A consideration of the findings in light of existing research
3. Implications of the study for current theory
4. An examination of findings that fail to support the hypotheses
5. Limitations of the study that may affect validity
6. Recommendations for further research
7. Implications of the study for professional practice

(p. 167)

Just as I have employed Rudestam and Newton as a guide throughout this research project, I likewise adapted these recommendations for the final chapter. I will begin this chapter with a consideration of the findings in relation to existing research on the Writing Project and professional development. Next, I will discuss the implications of this research on current theory and professional practice. I will also include a discussion of possible limitations of this research that may affect the validity of the findings. Finally, I will offer recommendations for further research.

Findings and Current Research

The results of this study point to the Writing Project environment as contributing to teachers' personal and professional development. The results of this study both complement and advance previous research on the Writing Project. Many researchers have found the Writing Project as enabling teachers' personal and professional growth (Wilson, 1988, 1994; Sunstein 1994; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Beginning with Wilson's study (1988), researchers began to unfold teachers' attitudes toward the Writing Project, which were usually positive and powerful. The current study continued the investigation into the personal and professional connections teachers attribute to the Writing Project experience. Each of the five findings contribute new understandings to results from previous research. The findings were reported as essential features of the experience in Chapter 4. For convenience, the findings are again listed below:

- The Writing Project builds teachers' instructional and pedagogical capacity;

- The Writing Project promotes professionalism;
- The Writing Project breaks down isolationism by promoting interdependent personal and professional relationships;
- The Writing Project connects teachers to the writer within and extends that connection to classroom practice;
- The Writing Project attracts leaders and facilitates leadership in its members.

These features of the Writing Project experience do not exist in isolation from each other. The elements of the experience are interactive and interrelated. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) referred to “multiple embedded contexts” that influence the professional development of teachers (p. 146). The findings from this study present features teachers value in their experience with the understanding that these features are surrounded by the context of the Writing Project. Each feature contributes to an overall environment where teachers construct knowledge from their individual and collective expertise and experience. While the following discussion considers each feature separately, the Writing Project environment results from the interdependence of the features.

The first finding from this study is that teachers recognized and valued the Writing Project as building their capacity. Schlecty (2002) declared that the business of any organization is to build the capacity of individuals who work within that institution. Contrary to common perceptions, building capacity does not merely involve teaching individuals new skills. Darling-Hammond (1998) suggested that professional development must shift roles from “designing controls intended to direct the system to developing capacity that enables teachers to be responsible for student learning (p. 643).

As Darling-Hammond suggested, the conception of building capacity extends beyond supplying teachers with new tools to use in the classroom. Capacity building involves empowering individuals with new roles, responsibilities, and opportunities. The founder of the Writing Project, Gray and Sterling (1995) considered the project as a model for enabling teachers with educational “authority and expertise“ (p. 2). Teachers arrive at the Institute with a wealth of classroom experience. The Institute contributes to building teachers’ capacity to become instructional and pedagogical authorities by recognizing the knowledge teachers have derived from their experience.

This study found the Writing Project to build teachers’ capacity by immersing them in new roles, handing them responsibility for their own learning, and providing opportunities for teachers to share their expertise and knowledge. Goodson (1992) described this type of professional development as honoring teachers’ “personal practical knowledge” and attending to an “extended professional mind” (p. 113). The Writing Project does seem to “extend the professional mind” of teachers. Along with the responsibilities, the Writing Project gave teachers the time and attention to read, think, and discuss their practice. Not only were resources purchased for each teacher, but the teachers also read and discussed the books and implications for instructional practice.

The concept of building capacity recognizes that teachers have the responsibility and ability to construct knowledge from their experience, then translate that knowledge into practice. Lieberman and Miller (1999) found that professional development is most effective when it values teacher insider knowledge as well as outside knowledge.

Participants in this study found the Writing Project to respect their insider knowledge and

guided them to use their individual and collective knowledge to construct further knowledge; therefore teachers became theorists, scholars, and experts. The Writing Project Institute afforded teachers the time to engage in constructing knowledge from the range of their experience.

Related to building teachers' capacity, results from this study show that teachers valued being treated as professionals in the Writing Project. Researchers have developed theories of the "deficit model" (Wilson, 1994) and "transmission model" (Richardson, 2003) to refer to traditional professional development programs that "broadcast knowledge to teachers" (Richardson, p. 401). The Writing Project rejects the deficit and transmission models and replaces them with a constructivist approach that respects the teacher as a professional. Results from this study show how the Institute invited teachers to enter and contribute to a professional conversation. As teachers add their voices to the conversation, they feel valued as professionals with their own theories, opinions, and areas of expertise. Knowledge and meaning have not been transmitted to the teachers. Instead, teachers have constructed knowledge and meaning from their experience, which is deemed as valid. Teachers enter professional dialogues as contributors to the conversation rather than recipients of knowledge.

While traditional professional development situates teachers as heirs to external "prepackaged knowledge" (Little, 1993), the Writing Project recognizes teachers as constructors of knowledge. Approaches to professional development have been contrasted as "bottom up" and "top down" (Darling-Hammond, 1995). While theorists differ in describing the best approach to professional development, most agree that

positivist hierarchical approaches limit teachers' professional development (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992; Goodson, 1992; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Rather than depend on the experience and knowledge of outside experts, the Writing Project relies on the experience and knowledge of teachers themselves.

Another aspect of supporting professionalism is that teachers taught each other during the Institute. These strategies were not presented to teachers by outside "experts." Rather, the teachers themselves shared ideas and strategies with each other. Each teacher prepared a two-hour presentation of reading and/or writing strategies for the classroom. The group then critiqued the presentation. The sharing of strategies through peer-to-peer presentations reflects the Writing Project "teachers teaching teachers" model. The success of the model rests in the acceptance that the best teachers of teachers are other teachers. This finding is consistent with Smith's (1996) report that the Writing Project succeeds in honoring teachers as the best resources of educational knowledge and Gomez' (1990) report that the Writing Project resulted in teachers' perceptions of themselves as expert authorities. Among Gomez' findings was that the validation of teachers' experiences allowed them to construct knowledge from their experiences. The structure of teachers teaching other teachers gave Institute participants the opportunity to articulate their beliefs and present their knowledge. Lieberman and Wood (2003) credited this aspect of the Writing Project as providing teachers with a "transformed vision of what it means to be a professional teacher and colleague" (p. 13). Other professional development programs could adopt a "teachers teaching teachers" model and provide opportunities for teachers to share their own best practices with their peers.

The Writing Project broke down the isolation Lortie (1975) found inherent in teachers' professional lives. The third finding of this study revealed teachers surmounting the isolation of their profession and entering interdependent relationships during the Institute. Common goals, mutual interests, and the sharing of writing bound the relationships. Teachers' experiences paralleled Wenger's (1998) conception of "social participation" that assumes learning is a process of engagement in a "community of practice." Wenger's community of practice may either be formal membership in an organization or an informal identification with the goals of the organization. In either instance, individuals identify with the organization through their interest in common pursuits. The Writing Project experience gave teachers common goals to be pursued through interdependent efforts. Teachers' isolationism conceded to collegiality. Wenger cited advantages of professional communities that imbue individuals with shared meanings, a sense of belonging, and new identities (p. 4). Participants in this study felt they belonged to a community that valued them as individuals and professionals.

The Writing Project community provided teachers with a sense of individual professionalism, which released them from isolation. They now identified with a professional community. One component of teachers' enhanced sense of professionalism is their engagement in professional conversations with their peers. The Writing Project valued their professional opinions, and teachers responded by listening and responding to others' beliefs. They built confidence by entering into collegial conversations within their Writing Project community, which was low risk and high gain. Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) noted that teachers engaged in such activities did not perceive any risk because

they were all learning together. The low risk environment of the Institute promoted collaboration and collegiality. At the conclusion of the Institute, they felt ready to extend that conversation beyond the Writing Project and into the larger community of teachers.

Many previous studies have addressed the community and culture of the Writing Project that promoted personal and professional relationships. Sunstein (1994) and Wood and Lieberman (2000, 2002, 2003) especially addressed the professional communities that sustained teachers in the Writing Project. A temporary culture (Sunstein, 1994) does emerge during the Writing Project Institute. Teachers from a variety of backgrounds are suddenly immersed in a community of learners. They must rely on themselves and each other to succeed in this new territory. Teachers are encouraged to tap the strengths of their colleagues as they proceed through the Institute. As a result, elementary teachers become the reading recovery experts; middle school teachers are regarded as authorities on adolescent development; secondary teachers become content leaders. An interdependent community forms where teachers do not have to leave the room to find expertise in various areas.

In steering teachers away from the seclusion of the classroom, Palmer (1998) recommended that teachers turn to “the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn” (p. 141). The Writing Project created a community for teachers that extended beyond the isolationism of the classroom. Teachers in this study valued the relationships they cultivated in the Writing Project. These relationships were nurtured because of the extended time of the Institute and the ongoing professional dialogue. Teachers met daily for five weeks, writing, sharing their thoughts, presenting to each other, and critiquing

themselves and their peers. Teachers in this study used metaphors such as “breaking down that hard shell” and “taking the plunge” when referring to the Writing Project taking them out of isolation and into a community of colleagues. As Lortie and others have stated, teachers often work in isolation from each other, and rarely have occasions for sharing their knowledge with colleagues. Lieberman and Wood (2003) reported the Writing Project as “providing the antidote to the isolation and silence all too typical of many teachers’ professional lives” (p. 23). Participants in this study reported a renewed sense of professionalism because they felt they had something to contribute. Furthermore, they had collaborators willing to experiment with new ideas. The Writing Project removed barriers that often detach teachers from their professionalism.

An understanding of the relationships that form during the Institute is integral to an understanding the Writing Project experience. The Institute is a five-week combination of graduate course and professional development program. To the participants in an Institute, however, the five weeks is charged with meaningful experiences. Table 13 contains dialogue that demonstrates a typical interaction among Institute teachers.

This dialogue is a representation of an exchange that took place among three teachers during a Reading and Responding (R&R) session. Christy had just read aloud a draft addressing her separation and impending divorce, and the other R&R members were responding following a protocol for collegial conversations. This recreated conversation among these three teachers demonstrates the close connections Institute participants feel toward each other. They are willing to share intimate details of their personal lives. They

trust their colleagues to respond critically yet tactfully to their writings. The goal of the R&R group is to offer constructive comments that advance the writings of the group members. The outcome of the group meetings extends beyond the intended goal. R&R members become close, form relationships, and learn from each other. The group dynamic serves as an example of how the Writing Project moves teachers beyond a typical professional development experience.

Table 13: A Moment in an Institute

Christy finishes reading her essay and gently places it down on the desk where she sits. "That's it," she says softly, "that's how it ended." She has just read a personal narrative about her recent divorce, in a marriage where she was "often screwed, but never kissed." Her reading and responding (R&R) group are silent, stunned by Christy's direct descriptions, from the subtle changes in her husband over time to the final 4 a.m. rude awakening that brought the relationship down with the words, "I want out." Christy's narrative poured out in painful lines, such as when she first noticed a discarded coffee cup in her husband's car and observed, "That's strange. He doesn't drink coffee."

The group sits in silence, but it's not at all awkward. They're waiting for the right words at the right moment. They have learned to be patient with each other. Finally, one member observes, "You really let it all out here, you know, and I admire that. What I like best about this piece is it's blatant honesty. I know every word is real."

"That's right," another member agrees. "Strong voice, steady, even in the middle of falling apart. It's a brave piece of writing."

Table 13, cont.

“That’s what I like best; it’s bold, just like you, Christy. The language is direct, never wavering, like you’re not only writing about a relationship breaking apart. You’re also writing about how strong you were. I think you should explore that side more. That whole feeling that ‘I’m not defeated. I’m stronger than ever, and I won’t be fooled again this way.’ Like at the end, you’re not bitter or angry, just strong.”

“Yes. I wonder how you could explore that part of it more. How could you really make this piece more than a narrative. It’s almost like a slice of life that shows courage, lessons learned, that sort of thing.”

“Maybe you could just freewrite more about your reactions. Like, instead of just saying you found the coffee cup, share with us your reaction. Like Daniel (the Institute director) says, ‘show, don’t tell.’”

“I like that, show us how you found the cup, when and where you discovered it. Like, was it sudden, you know, you opened the car door and you knew something was wrong.”

“Right, or was it gradual? You’re so good with descriptions. Could you describe the gradual awareness brought on by the cup?”

“In fact, you know how we were talking earlier about lead-ins and lead sentences? Maybe your first sentence could be about the cup. Something like, ‘My husband never drank coffee.’ Something that foreshadows the piece, but doesn’t give anything away at the same time.

Christy listens while here R&R group provides feedback for the piece she just read to them. She nods, takes notes, and when they’re finished, she responds, “You know, I think I’ll use that cup as a metaphor for the whole thing. Opening the door and letting the bad stuff out. Getting trampled on. I never thought of it that way, but I think there’s something there.”

She’s now ready to revise.

Writing is central to the Writing Project experience. The fourth finding reported in this study addressed the personal and social experience of writing. In some ways, writing is the source from which emanates the other essential qualities. The Writing Project draws on research and theory that supports writing as a social practice (Atwell, 1987; Moffett, 1968, 1981; Graves, 1983). Writing becomes a shared effort in communicating meaning. Lieberman and Wood found that the intensity of the writing “amplifies teachers’ voices, releases their knowledge and perspectives, surfaces their questions and problems, and creates communities of mutual concern and helpful critique” (p. 21). Participants in this study echoed these sentiments as they described their discovery of the writer within themselves. Most participants were surprised by the connections they felt to their writing and the writing of their colleagues. Teachers form a community of writers that nurtures the success of its members.

While most previous studies found that the Writing Project influenced the teaching of writing (Shook, 1981; Krendl & Dodd, 1987; Pritchard, 1987), few studies have directly addressed teachers’ personal commitment to writing. This finding underscores the importance of the constructivist environment of the Writing Project. Teachers learn to be better teachers of writing by becoming writers themselves. In the process, they struggle with issues that writers face. They must create topics, write drafts, seek feedback, incorporate feedback into revisions, proofread, edit, and publish their writing. They do not merely discuss the writing process; rather, they engage in the process as writers themselves. The Institute instills a habit of writing in its participants.

The fact that teachers become writers during the Institute may explain why they feel empowered as experts and authorities. They know that they can teach writing because they have experienced writing from the inside. Smith (1996) found the Institute to create a culture of learners and writers but did not explain the power of teachers becoming writers themselves. This experience should not be overlooked, as it is central to the Writing Project. Participants in this study cited the act of writing as “therapeutic,” “engaging,” and “transforming.” They felt that writing enriched their lives.

Throughout the Institute, personal writing challenged teachers and sharing their writing brought teachers close together. Through the sharing of drafts teachers learned to trust each other while improving their writing skills. Teachers learned writing from the inside, as writers themselves. This experience gave teachers the confidence to talk about writing and the teaching of writing. In addition, the experience gave teachers the confidence to teach and evaluate their students’ writing.

The Writing Project seems to exist in simultaneous cycles of attracting leaders and promoting leadership. The final finding of this study is that the Writing Project attracts leaders and facilitates leadership in its members. The cycles of leadership represent “deliberate apprenticeships” in teacher professional development (Wilson, 1994). As a deliberate step teachers take in their careers, the Writing Project naturally attracts teachers who actively seek professional growth. In fact, the application and interview process purposely screens candidates for the Institute. A typical summer Institute may have only 14 or 15 participants from a pool of 25 or 30 applicants. Because

of the selective nature of the Writing Project, participating teachers usually possess some leadership qualities.

Teacher leadership does not often assume a dominant role in education. According to Lambert (2003), the hierarchy of authority in schools reserves leadership roles to a few administrators. Teachers tend to view others in the hierarchy as leaders rather than view themselves as leaders. The Writing Project reverses that inclination by embedding purposeful leadership roles in the Institute, then expecting teachers to extend these roles to their schools. Lambert cited the Writing Project as a “thoughtfully designed initiative” that “reawakens a sense of purpose” in teachers (p. 33). The learning community of the Institute improves teachers’ professional self-concepts while allowing them to reconsider their roles as teachers. Teachers re-enter their schools as changed individuals and professionals, with a greater capacity to assume leadership roles.

The culture of the Writing Project Institute provides teachers opportunities to experiment with leadership roles. Fullan (2003) upheld the importance of culture in fostering leadership and recommended more professional learning within a culture of continuous deliberation. The Writing Project culture reflects professional learning as continuous deliberation. Teachers in the Writing Project are engaged in deliberation and debate concerning standards, best practices, and new strategies. Teachers first become immersed in this culture, then emerge as more confident and capable professionals. They begin to perceive of themselves as leaders. Such cultures may facilitate leadership because the supportive climate moves individuals toward achieving self-directed goals. The positive and supportive culture of the Writing Project is a critical force in fostering

leadership in its members. Teachers in this study reported taking leadership roles in their schools and districts upon completion of the Institute. The Writing Project clearly facilitated their entry into leadership positions. Lieberman and Wood (2003) attributed this feature of the Institute as enabling teachers to “become accustomed to and practiced in playing leadership roles” (p. 29). Through the Writing Project, teachers recognize their capacity for leadership. The Institute provided ample time and non-threatening opportunities to try on leadership roles.

Building leadership capacity has been identified as a key to continuous improvement in education (Darling-Hammond, 1998; O’Neill & Conzemius, 2002). Leadership capacity develops when teachers learn collaboratively and focus on shared goals. Professional development programs have the potential to tap teachers’ leadership capacity by convening teachers around common purposes to work toward improvements together. The Writing Project seems to bring teachers together in this way, with common purposes and shared goals aimed toward continuous improvements. The Writing Project expects teachers to take ownership of their learning, and share responsibility. Teachers’ leadership roles are created more through their participation in the collaborative effort than their individual agendas.

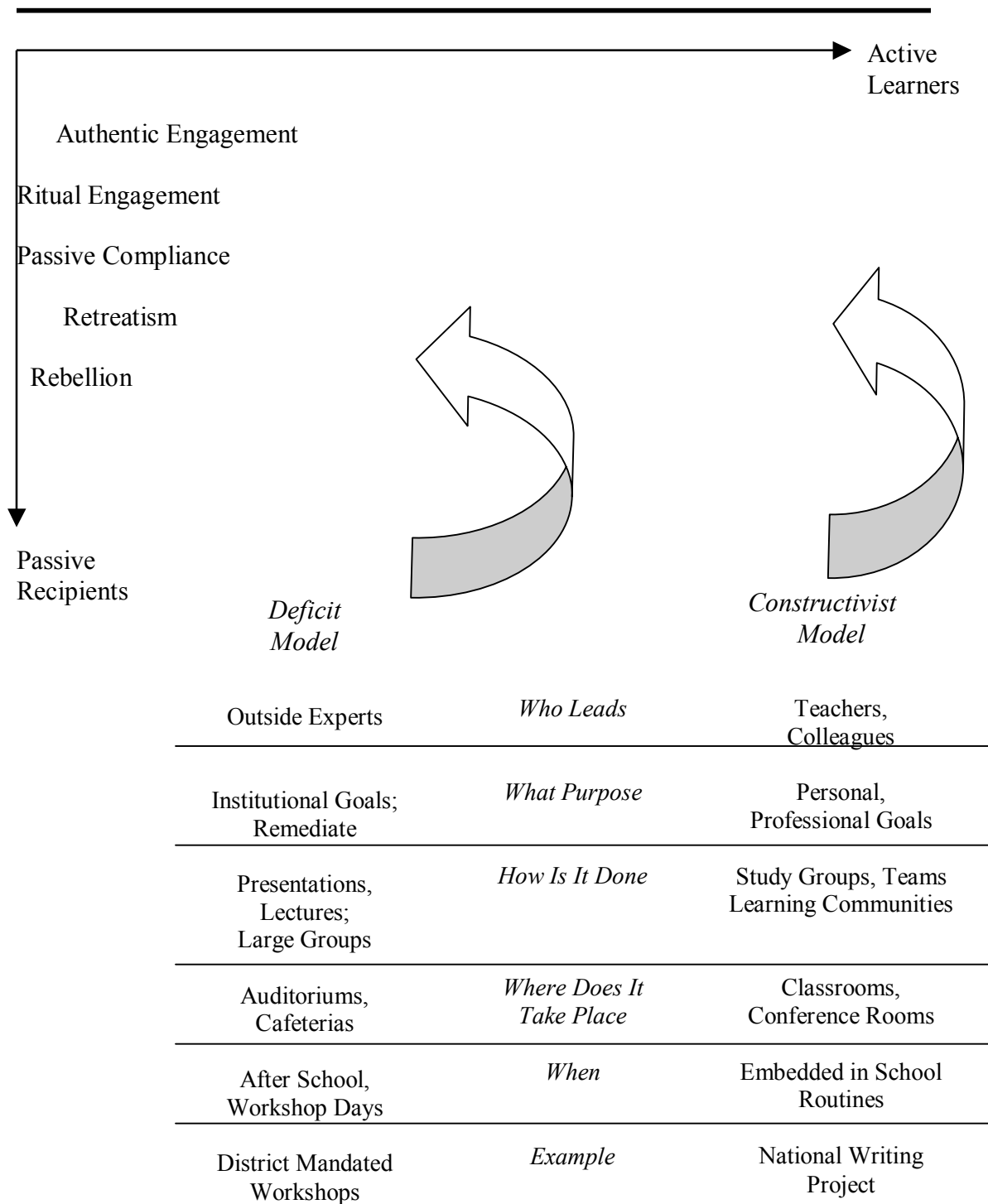
It is interesting to note that the interview questions used in this study did not directly inquire about leadership. Participants recognized their own leadership roles as an outcome of their participation in the Writing Project. Ultimately, this feature of the Writing Project is communicated in the motto “teachers teaching teachers.” The entire Writing Project experience is devoted to teachers becoming leaders in a broad sense.

They may or may not pursue administrative or consulting opportunities, but teachers become leaders as teachers of other teachers.

This discussion of findings recalls two theoretical stances from the literature regarding professional development. Wilson (1994) and Richardson (2003) referred to traditional professional development models as the “deficit model” and the transmission model” respectively. As discussed throughout this study, the Writing Project follows a constructivist model for professional development. The literature and this study clearly imply that teachers become more engaged in constructivist models than in deficit models. While the deficit model may result in cooperation and compliance, the constructivist model stimulates active engagement. Figure 6 synthesizes many elements of this study into a single representation. The terms on the chart (adapted from Schlechy, 2002) signify levels of teacher engagement. Beneath the chart, descriptions of the deficit and constructivist models outline key characteristics of each model.

The curved arrows pointing from the deficit and constructivist model descriptions suggest the level of engagement likely invoked from each model. As Figure 6 indicates, the deficit model generally leads to rebellion, retreatism, and compliance, resulting in passive learners. The constructivist model often leads to more ritual and authentic engagement, resulting in active learners. Teachers in the deficit model rely on others to organize their knowledge and impart meaning. Conversely, teachers in the constructivist model take responsibility for their professional growth and actively construct knowledge and meaning to guide their careers.

Figure 6: Teacher Engagement in Professional Development



Adapted from:
 Schlecty, P. (2002). *Shaking up the schoolhouse*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Implications for Current Theory and Practice

Qualitative research opens possibilities that increase our knowledge and understanding of human phenomena. In advising researchers to consider the consequences of their research, Wolcott (2002) posed the question, “Where do our studies go and what do they do there?” (p. 132). We can never be certain of how our research may be received, or who will read it. Likewise, we cannot know what effects our research may have on individuals or institutions. Wolcott counseled that although we have our personal hopes for our research, “the uses to which our studies may be put are totally beyond our control once we make them available” (p. 143). While I am mindful that this study may be put to varied uses, I also harbor my own hopes for this research.

This study aimed to discern the essential features of a single National Writing Project site. Through this investigation, we have a deeper understanding of the values teachers place on their professional development activities. Previous research showed that students benefit from their teachers’ participation in the Writing Project. This study represented the benefits teachers derive from their experience in the Writing Project. Findings from this study support a focus on teachers’ experience as central to discussions of education.

The National Writing Project recently established the following five goals for self-funded research initiatives:

1. To document the impact of Writing Project efforts on student outcomes, particularly student learning;

2. To inform the professional development community about the efficacy of the model and equip it to create and implement more effective professional development;
 3. To explore the importance of writing in the curriculum, both as the focus of learning and as a tool for learning;
 4. To explore the ways in which the Writing Project model and support structures develop, nurture, and utilize teachers as leaders;
 5. To educate the policy community about the policies and organizational contexts and structures that support high quality and effective professional development.
- (p. 2)

This study addressed goals 2, 4, and 5. Administrators seeking research on efficacy in professional development will find evidence from this study that supports the implementation of the Writing Project model. Teachers seeking deliberate apprenticeships in their careers will find confirmation in this study that the Writing Project supports teachers as leaders and promotes their professionalism. Policy makers seeking alternative professional development programs could turn to this study to substantiate funding the Writing Project as a powerful, high quality program. Finally, anyone interested in research that tells a larger story about teachers and their professional development experiences may evoke that story from this study.

As with any research, selected methods of data collection and analysis have certain limitations that may affect the validity of the findings. Researchers avail

themselves of many strategies to minimize these limitations. For this research, I followed accepted guides for conducting the literature review, designing the methodology, and analyzing the data. These guides (Galvan, Meloy, Patton, Miles and Huberman, Creswell, Moustakas, etc.) are widely accepted as handbooks for qualitative researchers. Within each guide are concrete suggestions for developing a defensible study. I feel that in following recommendations from these guides as well as advice from my committee members, I have developed a credible study. The guidebooks and committee advisement, however, can only bring a research project so far. The researcher's experience and representation of that experience ultimately carry the project forward to credibility. I hope that my explicit explanations and self-conscious style of representation have bestowed integrity to this research.

Considerations for Further Research

Research often begets further research. Just as the studies discussed in the literature review informed this research, results from this study present occasions for future studies. This study implies a need for further investigations in the areas of professional development and the Writing Project. Each of these areas is well established in the current literature, and each area continues to be a source for both qualitative and quantitative investigations. As national, state, and local school reform efforts take hold of education, there is a need to keep the conversation surrounding teacher professional development moving forward. Many current reform efforts rely solely on quantitative data to drive improvement initiatives. This data is useful to a certain extent, but numbers

alone cannot relate the larger narrative of *what* works and *how* it works for teachers and students. Researchers must advance more qualitative methods to quarry down beneath the numbers and reveal the stories of success and challenges. We must remain curious and continuous learners on a quest for continuous improvement.

Teacher professional development is an important component of any school system, yet teachers are not often asked what they value in their professional development experiences. They are less likely to be tapped as knowledgeable resources who can contribute to the staff development program of a system. Future studies should address teachers' needs as they perceive those needs and how those needs align or misalign with institutional goals. Further studies could investigate the deliberate apprenticeships of teachers to determine how and why teachers actively seek their own professional development.

Additional research is also desired for the Writing Project itself. The Writing Project is only one aspect of the participants' professional development, but as this study demonstrated, it is a powerful part of teachers' professional careers. Future studies could delve further into the Writing Project experience through a variety of methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative. While this study revealed essential features of the experience, future studies could delve further into these features to contribute a deeper understanding of the essences of the experience. For example, this study found that the Writing Project attracts leaders while simultaneously facilitating leadership in teachers. Future studies could address leadership in the Writing Project to further describe the role leadership plays in the program.

Another avenue for future studies could be on isolationism in the classroom. This study found relationships to be an antidote to teachers' professional isolation. While previous studies have addressed the culture or community formed during the Writing Project Institute, future research could investigate the extent to which relationships are essential to the culture of the Institute. In addition, little research has investigated how teachers transfer relationships and culture to their classrooms. As two participants in this study noted, they began to nurture teacher-student and student-student relationships to benefit their classroom practice after the Institute. Future studies could address how isolationism affects teacher professionalism and student learning.

Conclusion

I cannot say "in conclusion" because I am probably laden with another beginning...
(Meloy, 2002, p. 183)

Teaching is a profession steeped in controversy and contradictions. Teachers are at once praised for their service, yet degraded for their results. Schools are considered as having primary importance to communities, yet they are consistently underfunded and understaffed. Teaching is deemed a noble profession, yet teachers are rarely regarded as professionals themselves. Even within the educational environment, teachers are often monitored with suspicion. They continually must justify their competence to communities, school boards, and the public. One aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act

requires every teacher to attain “highly qualified” status by 2006. In order to attain this status, teachers must provide evidence that they have participated in 90 hours or more of “CLUs,” or continuing learning units. It is of no consequence that these teachers already have received college degrees and lifetime teaching certificates from accredited universities. The only consequence is the punitive result of not achieving the highly qualified status.

As accountability measures increasingly regulate school systems, we enlarge our capacity to quantify and objectify outcomes of our practice. We are able to document growth over time and identify weaknesses for remediation. Unfortunately, the quest for school improvement also steers an effort for reform through uniformity. The value of teacher autonomy, experience, and knowledge is increasingly marginalized in place of the prevailing standardized packages. While we fulfill the need to quantify our improvement, we simultaneously surrender the more serendipitous benefits of the teaching and learning experience. Lost in this homogenization of American schools is the voice of the teacher, the professional at the hub of any educational reform.

Perhaps instead of viewing teachers as a “human resources” in need of upgrades, we should turn to teachers as humans who are expert resources of educational practice. As many studies show, and this study supports, there are approaches to teacher professional development that simultaneously build teachers’ capacity while honoring their professional knowledge and experience. The Writing Project is one program that succeeds in aiding teachers’ growth as professionals. Until teachers are viewed as

professionals and treated as professionals, all attempts at educational reform will fall short of the intended goals of improving schools.

As the opening quote to this chapter suggests, all endings are somehow beginnings. The completion of this dissertation marks the start of new goals, both personally and professionally. Although I am pleased now to draw to a conclusion, this dissertation has always been much more than the final product. It has been a recursive process of reading, reflecting, writing, and constructing knowledge. While I hope the reader has learned from this final product, I know that I have gained more from the process than I could possibly recount. In addition to maturing as a writer, I feel that I have grown as a researcher as well. The development of this dissertation continues to inform how I read, write, and think. Since the influence continues, I will not conclude with any grand statement of my own. Instead, I will allow a participant from the study to have the final words, as these words are relevant to both the topic of this research and the process of developing this dissertation: It's an experience that stays with you.

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APPENDIX A: THE PILOT STUDY



| NWP Interactive |

The Voice [May-June 2002](#)
 [print version](#)

Asking the Right Questions

By [Kenneth P. Farizo](#)

Summary: A survey of teachers conducted by Kenneth Farizo of the Louisiana State University Writing Project shows that teachers feel a personal and professional connection to the writing project.

During the upcoming summer months, teachers in all 50 states will once again gather to participate in the writing project pièce de résistance: the invitational summer Institute. If matters run true to form, the overwhelming number of these teachers will leave the experience with the impression that the Institute has changed them in ways both professional and personal.

Kenneth Farizo, teacher-consultant with the [Louisiana State University \(LSU\) Writing Project](#) and now, after 12 years of teaching middle school, a curriculum specialist in the St. Charles Parish Schools, decided to probe deeper by researching more specifically the ways that newly minted teacher-consultants change. He devised a survey that he sent to all of the teacher-consultants in the St. Charles School District. He then used the results of the survey as the basis for in-depth interviews with the respondents. The 36 surveys that were completed and returned were a representative sample from teacher-consultants who had gone through the LSU Writing Project Summer Institute during the 14 years of the project's existence.

Because of space limitations, we are able to present here only an abbreviated version of Farizo's extensive study. But those who are now participating in the summer Institute will have a chance to consider his conclusions and to think about and test his questions against their own experiences as they return to their classrooms.

The survey focused on five themes: 1) impact on instruction, 2) practical applications to the classroom, 3) collaboration with peers, 4) personal writing, and 5) professional and personal perceptions.

Theme 1: Impact on Instruction

Survey Questions and Results

How often do you implement reading or writing instructional strategies learned in the Institute?

daily	14
weekly	16
occasionally	4
seldom	1
never	0
no response	1

Since the Institute, do your students write:

more	26
about the same	7
less	0
never	0
no response	3

Has there been a significant positive change in your students' attitudes toward writing since the completion of the Institute?

yes	29
no	4
no response	3

Analysis

The surveys show that teachers are implementing strategies learned in the Institute. Most teachers report that they implement reading or writing instructional strategies daily or weekly, with students writing more after the Institute than before the Institute. Teachers

also report a significant positive change in their students' attitudes toward writing. In the interviews, teachers were specific about which strategies work for them. All teachers interviewed referred to the writing process as a central component of their instruction. Teachers reported that they use all stages of the process, from prewriting through drafting, revision, and sharing. In connection to the writing process, teachers reported using reading and responding groups, writing workshops, and reading workshops in their classrooms. Teachers also spoke of the "permission" the writing project gave them to try new instructional techniques in their classrooms. One teacher spoke of this permission as empowering her with freedom:

The writing project gave me permission to write and conduct workshops with my students, to change my approach, and to conduct writing and reading workshops as described by Atwell and Graves. I felt I had the autonomy and freedom to create a classroom environment I like to be in, to grow and to change. And my students responded to that, to experiencing language arts and writing in an active way. I don't teach English in isolation any more. I teach it through writing.

Theme 2: Practical Applications to the Classroom

Survey Questions and Results

How well did the Institute prepare you for the realities of the classroom?

Very helpful	17
reasonably helpful	10
somewhat helpful	5
not very helpful	2
no response	2

How helpful was the Institute in preparing you to implement writing in your classroom?

Very helpful	27
reasonably helpful	5
somewhat helpful	3
not very helpful	1

Analysis

The surveys revealed an interesting perception among teachers. While the majority

thought the Institute was very helpful in preparing them to implement writing in the classroom, fewer teachers thought the Institute was very helpful in preparing for the realities of the classroom. I probed this question in the interviews, and teachers reported the writing process, and writing and reading workshops, as very successful when implemented in the classroom. The conflicts, however, included teacher research and presentations. In the interviews, teachers cited the lack of time for these activities. In one teacher's words:

Teacher-research has not worked for me. I don't have the time for it, and I don't have the time to prepare presentations and present like I want to. I would like to have more of a reading and responding community at the school as well, but there's no time or interest among the faculty.

Presentations consume so much time. It's hard to fit it all in, and we focus so much on presentations in the Institute, but when the school year starts again, there's little time to devote to presenting.

Theme 3: Peer Collaboration

Survey Questions and Results

How often do you collaborate with other writing project teacher-consultants?

Daily	1
weekly	4
occasionally	24
seldom	6
Never	1

How often do you share your Institute experiences with other teachers?

Daily	0
weekly	10
occasionally	22
seldom	4
Never	0

Analysis

Responses to these two questions from the survey show that teachers only occasionally collaborate and share their experiences and expertise with their colleagues. Again, most

of the teachers referred to time constraints as the greatest obstacle to collaboration. “I would love to collaborate more,” one consultant wrote on the survey, “but there’s not enough time in the day.” In the interviews, teachers indicated a desire to collaborate and share with their colleagues:

We really don’t have time to continue the writing community we start in the Institute. Reading and responding groups of teachers hasn’t worked although we’ve tried. Teachers are focused on standards and their curriculum, and not many have the time or inclination to form groups just to read and write.

Theme 4: Personal Writing

Survey Questions and Results

Since the Institute, do you write for your own purposes (aside from job-related writing):

More	22
about the same	9
less	3
Never	2

Since the Institute, do you share your writing with others:

More	20
about the same	11
less	2
never	2
no response	1

Analysis

The Institute had a definite positive impact on teachers’ personal writing and the amount of writing taking place in their classrooms. In fact, the Institute seemed to encourage “closet writers” to pursue and publish their works:

Before the Institute, I wrote now and then when I really felt strongly about something, and I never shared what I wrote. I think I was just afraid that I wasn’t a good enough writer. The Institute showed me that I can write, and that writing is more than an activity. It’s a way of thinking and living

and creating. I write more now because I know I can, and I think the Institute gave me that confidence.

Theme 5: Professional and Personal Perceptions

Survey Questions and Results

How often do you think about your experience in the Institute?

Daily	10
weekly	9
occasionally	15
seldom	2
never	0

Has there been a significant positive change in your attitude toward teaching since completion of the Institute?

yes	27
no	7
no response	2

Did you benefit professionally from your participation in the Institute?

yes	36
no	0

Did you benefit personally from your participation in the Institute?

yes	34
no	0
no response	2

Analysis

The survey data strongly suggest that teachers receive positive benefits from their participation in the Institute. Teachers feel both a professional and personal connection to the Institute experience. In interviews, teachers often referred to the “writing project community” or the “community of writers.” They spoke of their fellow teacher-consultants as “friends” and looked forward to opportunities to connect with their

colleagues through district meetings and the three annual LSU Writing Project meetings. One participant summed up the power of the personal connection:

There's a power in being intimate and vulnerable with a group, and writing brings this out. The writing project gave us a support network and a positive experience that people remember. After five years, people still like to talk about it; it's like you can still feel this power, and it was all through the writing. The LSU Writing Project was the most enjoyable and meaningful professional development experience I've had as a teacher.

Conclusion

As I collected data through surveys, and interviews, I also paid attention to the activities of writing project teacher-consultants in St. Charles Parish. These teachers are involved in numerous writing activities in their schools, including Young Authors' Contests, Young Authors' Celebrations, Young Writers' Camps, Letters to Santa, Family Write Night, Open Mic Poetry Nights, Reading-Responding Groups, and bringing writers into the schools as guest speakers. Their motivation to facilitate writing and writing instruction goes beyond any small stipend they may receive for their extra effort.

The findings from this study support continued involvement in the LSU Writing Project. The model of the writing project, teachers teaching teachers, lives on in the daily lives of the teacher-consultants. Teachers feel a personal and professional connection to the writing project, and this connection contributes to their successes as writing teachers and facilitators of writing instruction in the district. As one teacher-consultant told me, "We are the guardians of creative thinking." Indeed, in the current environment of high-stakes testing and accountability, programs like the writing project offer us enriching opportunities to extend the experiences of teachers and students.

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APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Title: *The Writing Project: Merging Personal Growth and Professional Development*

Date _____ Time _____ Location _____

Participant _____

Institute Year _____ Grades/Subjects _____

Teaching Experience _____

1. Tell about your experience in the Writing Project.

2. What attributes or qualities of the WP experience stand out for you? (incidents, people, activities, structure)

3. How did the WP experience affect you? How does it continue to affect you?

4. What personal or professional changes do you associate with the WP experience?

10. Would you like to share anything else relevant to the WP experience or your professional development experience?

APPENDIX C: HUMAN SUBJECTS FORMAL PROTOCOL

1. Title

*The Writing Project: A Study of Structure and Meaning of
Experience in Professional Development*

2. Investigator

Kenneth Farizo

3. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand the National Writing Project as a professional development experience. The study focuses on how the Writing Project experience influences teachers' personal and professional growth. Over twenty-five years ago Lortie (1975) reported teachers' dissatisfaction with their own professionalism, finding that teachers desired professional socialization, yet felt constrained by the isolated context of classroom. Lortie theorized a "conservatism norm" in professional development, involving organizational-imposed objectives designed to remediate teachers' practice. Little (1993) correctly predicted that traditional skills-based professional development would not transfer to high standards of classroom practice. Lortie, Little, and others have called for new models for professional development characterized by teachers' inquiry into their own practice (Cochran-Smith, 1993), teachers' daily school experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1998), school-university partnerships (Miller, 2001), and the need for professional communities (Lieberman & Miller, 1994).

The isolation inherent in education leads to what Lieberman and Miller (1999) portrayed as an “underdeveloped knowledge base of the profession,” (p. 19). This underdeveloped knowledge base subordinates teachers’ knowledge to external “expert” knowledge. Lieberman (1995) argued for a broader conceptualization of professional development where teachers actively construct knowledge and meaning from their experiences. Lieberman asserted that teachers should have opportunities to “discuss, think about, try out, and hone new practices, take new roles, and create new structures” (p. 593). A new form of professional development would involve teachers as active participants rather than passive learners. Furthermore, Lieberman and Wood (2001) reminded us that there is scant evidence about how, or even if, teachers learn and implement instructional ideas and strategies presented to them during these workshops. In fact, the traditional workshops designed to change teachers’ practice sometimes have the opposite effect. The National Writing Project serves as an example of an alternate model for professional development (Wilson, 1994, Lieberman, 2003).

Many current theorists support the National Writing Project as a model for professional development. Fox (2002) credited the National Writing Project with encouraging teachers to connect their personal and professional growth. Lieberman and Miller (2001), Lieberman and Wood (2002) and Ritchie and Wilson (2000) have likewise promoted the Writing Project as an example of a constructivist approach that builds on teachers’ knowledge and experience. Theorists providing the groundwork for the Writing Project model include Vygotsky (1962), Moffett (1968), Elbow

(1973), and Hillocks (1986). The roots of the model reach further to the experiential learning theories of Dewey (1938), the transactional theories of Rosenblatt (1938, 1983) and progressive education movement promoted by Dewey. The following chart outlines the categories of the most relevant studies of the Writing Project from the past 25 years. While several studies overlap into more than one category, most studies emphasized one aspect of the Writing Project.

Cause and Effect Relationships	Professional Development Model	Culture of the Institute
Stahlecker (1979)	Meyers (1985)	Heller (1993)
Shook (1981)	Gomez (1988)	Sunstein (1994)
Stander (1985)	Wilson (1988)	Wilson (1994)
Perl and Wilson (1986)	Gomez (1990)	Smith (1996)
Krendl and Dodd (1987)	Heller (1993)	Smith (2000)
Pritchard (1987)	Wilson (1994)	Wood and Lieberman (2000)
Olson and DiStefano's (1987)	Bratcher and Stroble (1994)	Lieberman and Wood (2002)
Wilson (1988)	Smith (1996)	Marshall and Pritchard (2002)
Inverness Research Associates, 1999, 2000, 2001	Kelly (1999)	Lieberman and Wood (2003)
Roberts, 2002	Smith (2000)	
	Marshall and Pritchard (2002)	
	Farizo (2002)	

The chart indicates that early studies were more focused on cause and effect relationships, while recent studies are more ethnographic in nature, focusing on the culture of the Institute. As will become evident in the following discussion, little attention has been centered on teachers' experience of personal and professional growth in the Writing Project. I intend to add a fourth column to this chart. The fourth column will consider the structure and essence of the Writing Project experience and its impact on teachers' personal growth and professional development.

4. Participants

In the course of this study, I will conduct individual interviews and focus group interviews with six adult volunteers. The six participants in this study will be Writing Project teacher-consultants. All Writing Project teacher-consultants are certified teachers who have successfully completed a National Writing Project Summer Institute. For this research I will solicit the participation of six teacher-consultants who have at least five years of teaching experience.

5. Justification for using this particular population

The purpose of this study is to investigate the values teachers assign to their professional development experiences, specifically their experience in the Writing Project. Since the focus of this study is on the professional development experiences of teachers in the Writing Project, this population is integral to the research.

6. Subject Recruitment Procedures

In order to solicit volunteers for the interviews and focus group, I will send out an announcement of my intent to conduct research in the areas of professional

development and the Writing Project. I will send the announcement to all teacher-consultants within a particular Writing Project site. In the announcement, I will call for volunteers to participate in the study. Potential participants will be able to email, fax, or mail back a response. From the responses I gather, I will select teachers based on the following criteria:

- A representative sampling of teachers across disciplines, grade levels, and years of experience
- Rich informants who are willing to describe their experiences
- Willingness to participate in one individual interview and one focus group follow-up interview

For the representative sampling, I will seek participants who represent the following categories:

Grade Levels	Teaching Experience	Content Area
Elementary Grades (3-5)	5-10 years	Language Arts
Middle School (6-8)	11-20 years	Social Studies
High School (9-12)	21-30 years	Science
		Math
		Other

I hope to find at least one participant to represent each group outlined above, although each participant will represent more than one category (e.g. a 5th grade science teacher with 12 years experience). I will contact all teachers who respond to the

announcement and thank them for their interest. I will contact the selected teachers to schedule a date, time, and location for their interviews.

7. General Experimental Procedures

Data will be collected through interviews and focus groups between November, 2003 and February, 2004. Six Writing Project teacher-consultants will participate in individual and focus group interviews. I will conduct individual teacher interviews to collect teacher-consultant descriptions of their experiences with professional development and their participation in the Writing Project. Interview questions will be semi-structured to give teachers the opportunity to narrate their professional development experiences and elaborate on how these experiences affected them as individuals and as professionals. The interviews will probe specifically for the values and qualities teachers assign to their experiences in the Writing Project. A focus group session will follow the interviews. The focus group will include the same teachers as the individual interviews and allow participants to reflect on their experience in a social setting. During the focus group interview I will pose general questions and allow participants to discuss as much or as little as they wish.

Each individual interview and the focus group interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I will use the following guide during interviews:

Interview Guide (adapted from Moustakas, 1994, p. 117)

1. How do you define professional development?

2. Tell about some of your major professional development experiences.
3. Which of these experiences did you find most valuable? Why?
4. Why do you participate in professional development? What do you hope to learn?
5. What deliberate steps have you taken for your professional development?
6. Have your goals for professional development changed over your career? How?
7. What was your experience in the Writing Project?
8. What attributes (incidents, people, activities, structure) of the WP experience stand out for you?
9. How did the WP experience affect you? How does it continue to affect you?
10. What changes do you associate with the WP experience? (as an individual? as a professional?)
11. What feelings were generated by the WP experience?
12. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the WP experience?

8. Procedure for obtaining subject consent

Upon their agreement to take part in the study, I will send participants a copy of the consent form for their perusal. Before each interview, I will read the consent form with each participant and seek any questions or concerns they may have regarding the contents of the form or the nature of the research. I will also inform participants that they may choose not to answer any questions for any reasons. I will obtain participants' signatures on the consent form prior to conducting the interviews.

9. Discussion of anonymity, confidentiality and handling of data collected in the study.

I will protect the identity of all participants and ensure confidentiality throughout the research process. This research will not refer to any specific group of individuals, institutions, or geographic areas. The interview notes and transcripts will remain confidential information between each participant and me. The data will not be shared with other individuals, participants, or researchers. In analyzing and reporting the data, I will assign pseudonyms to each participant and refer only to general groups (e.g. teachers, administrators).

10. Debriefing procedures

I will initially inform participants of the nature of the study through the announcement I send to solicit participation. The announcement will contain my email address and phone number for potential participants to reach me if they have any questions. Before each interview, I will inform participants of the purpose and nature of the study and encourage them to ask any questions. Participants will also be encouraged to ask for clarification at any time during the interview. At the end of the interview, I will encourage participants to give me any feedback they may have regarding the interview process. Finally, I will remind participants that the results of the study will be published in a doctoral dissertation that may be available at the University of New Orleans Library upon the successful completion of the program.

11. Describe potential risks to subjects and measures that will be taken to minimize risks (attach medical clearance form if appropriate).

Potential risks to participants include fatigue from an in-depth interview, discomfort with the setting, and uneasiness with the interview or focus group format. In order to minimize these potential risks, I will take several measures. First, for the individual interviews, I will keep the interviews within the 45-60 minute time frame. If any participant grows weary or fatigued, I will suggest a break or cessation of the interview. Next, I will attempt to conduct the interviews in a comfortable setting of the participants' choosing. If any participant seems uncomfortable with the setting, I will suggest an alternate setting or time for the interview. Likewise, I will inform the participants beforehand of the structure of the focus group interview to determine their comfort level. During the focus group, any participants who are uncomfortable with the questions may abstain from participating. Finally, I will assure that all participants understand the interview and focus group format prior to selection. If any individual seems uncomfortable or threatened by the interview format, I will suggest that they may not want to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

1. Title of Research Study

*The Writing Project: A Study of Structure and Meaning of
Experience in Professional Development*

2. Project Director

Kenneth P. Farizo (504) 488-6440

3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to better understand teachers' personal and professional growth as influenced by professional development programs, specifically the National Writing Project.

4. Procedures for this Research

Each teacher in this study will participate in one individual interview and one focus group interview. Individual teacher interviews will be conducted to collect teacher-consultant descriptions of their experiences with professional development and their participation in the Writing Project. A focus group session will follow the interviews. The focus group will include the same teachers as the individual interviews and allow participants to reflect on their experience in a social setting. The interviews will be audio-recorded. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

5. Potential Risks of Discomforts

Potential risks to participants may include fatigue from an in-depth interview, discomfort with the setting, and uneasiness with the interview or focus group format.

In order to minimize these potential risks, I will take several measures. First, I will keep the interviews within the 45-60 minute time frame. If I notice participants growing weary or fatigued, we will take a break or reschedule time to interview on another date. Next, I will attempt to conduct the interviews in a comfortable setting of the participants' choosing. If participants seem uncomfortable with the setting, we will arrange for an alternate setting or time for the interview. Finally, I will assure that all participants understand the interview and focus group format prior to selection. If you wish to discuss these or any other discomforts you may experience, you may call the Project Director listed in #2 of this form.

6. Potential Benefits to You or Others

Participants in this study will be asked for their perceptions, opinions, and values regarding their own professional development in educational settings. Participants in a similar pilot study reported that they enjoyed the interview process and valued the opportunity to share and describe their experiences. These teachers felt enthusiastic that their voices would be added to the current research on professional development and the Writing Project. Participants in this study may likewise benefit from this opportunity. Benefits resulting from this research include a better understanding of what teachers' value in their professional development experiences and a greater awareness of how the Writing Project model may be applied to other professional development programs.

7. Alternative Procedures

There are no alternative procedures for this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

8. Protection of Confidentiality

I will protect the identity of all participants and ensure their anonymity throughout the research process. I will not use your name, school, or district location in any part of this study. I will refer to participants in general terms (e.g. an elementary teacher), but I will not reveal any specific information that would compromise your anonymity. This research will not refer to any specific group of individuals, institutions, or geographic areas. The interview notes and data will not be shared with other individuals, participants, or researchers. In analyzing and reporting the data, I will assign pseudonyms to each participant and refer only in general terms to groups.

9. Signatures

I have been fully informed of the above-described procedure with its possible benefits and risks and I have given permission of participation in this study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Subject	Name of Subject (Print)	Date
_____	_____	_____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)	Date

APPENDIX E: HORIZONTALIZATION OF EXPERIENCE

*Horizontalization of Experience:
Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 1*

1. All the research and all the professional resources they gave us was most important of all; having all of those resources to come back and share with my students.
2. It was so tear-jerking.
3. Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before.
4. It brought out the positives, especially with the groups, the positive feedback you got from your peers and your co-workers was great.
5. Preparing a 3-hour presentation was an immense impact on my future professional opportunities. I went on presenting at other conferences.
6. Having the feedback from the teachers and the other colleagues.
7. I have grown through the experience of presenting and the professionalism of being a consultant.
8. The structure of the Institute; as writers we wrote on our own topics, and we wrote everyday and worked in groups.
9. The professors put it into our hands.
10. Being a presenter and having that constructive criticism.
11. Having the opportunity to attend all the presentations from all the colleagues at all the grade levels.
12. Understanding that everybody is different; everybody has their own personality, their own strengths and weaknesses.
13. The true personality comes out from everybody and we all bring our own strengths and weaknesses to the table.
14. It just adds to your backpack of knowledge.
15. Wp just gives you such a bigger perspective.
16. The wp was really demanding; expected something out of you every night, every day, for a month.
17. Wp turns the program over to the teachers.
18. I value a lot of the resources that I got.
19. It has changed how I see myself.
20. I think it really showed me that I feel like a professional; I have so much knowledge, but I also see that there's so much more that I want to go out there and get.
21. It's like opening the door and giving me these opportunities. Opportunities to present and network and learn and want to get more.
22. It's an eye opener. It is.
23. The writing experience was tremendous, it was powerful and I want to give my students that same opportunity.

24. It's just that certain bond because you share so much. You're like a family.
25. There's a certain little bond.

Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 2

1. Both professionally and personally it's the most life changing experience that I've had in a pd situation.
2. I definitely grew as an educator.
3. It made me look at my practices.
4. It made me think about my philosophies as an educator.
5. It gave me some validation that, yes, maybe I can do this, and it made me start writing.
6. It was a good thing for self-esteem personally and professionally.
7. It made me look at my teaching, and in the setting that I'm in.
8. It made me look at how I teach reading and writing.
9. It would have never occurred to me to use reading workshops if I had not experienced the wp, the big picture.
10. Wp just gives you such a bigger perspective.
11. Had I not been exposed to wp, I might not have taken the risk to try a rw model.
12. I've definitely taken more risks.
13. I've submitted poetry to be published, which I would've never thought in a million years about doing.
14. It was a very introspective time; you look at your life.
15. It really made me stop and look at my teaching, some of the experiences I've had and the relationships I've had.
16. I made some connections that I might not have ever made.
17. It's so real.
18. The way the atmosphere is set up, you feel that you're stripped naked and the playing field is leveled and everybody is in the same boat.
19. There's an environment of total honesty that's just not threatening.
20. There's a whole year's worth of a relationship cycle that happens in a four week span: The first week you've cried; by the second week you're laughing; by the third week you're sweating it out; by the fourth week you're crying again because you don't want to leave.
21. The atmosphere of honesty is a part of it.
22. I feel like I'm constantly thinking, how can I do that or this better.
23. When you go through the wp, and you go through the writing process yourself, you can't deny the impact it has; I think that perspective has definitely helped me bring more value to my students when I teach writing.
24. Wp was intense.

25. It was a lot of work and you get what you put in.
26. You need to organize and work your way through it.
27. I'm definitely more confident about teaching writing.
28. I'm more confident about if somebody came to me and asked a question, I really do know what I'm talking about.
29. Wp encouraged and polished some possible leadership skills; it really helped me.
30. Wp is definitely quality; it's designed and structured, but there's so much freedom within that structure; that's what makes it so unique.
31. It was a major metacognition moment.
32. It makes you step back and evaluate
33. You get inside yourself enough to do that, and it does change the way your approach your classroom.
34. That's the big thing, the reflection piece; structured reflection, collegial conversations that are important.
35. It finally forces us to do what we know we need to do but just never take the time to do it.

Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 3

1. It was a fun experience.
2. It was like a jump start, like a kick start, helping you charge up your motor for you to begin the year.
3. It was a challenge.
4. It made me want to pursue more writing.
5. It validated my love of reading and writing.
6. The main thing was using personal experience to bring out our work.
7. It was personal; start with you, you, you, you are what's important.
8. It was the experience, sharing, and the pride everyone took in their work.
9. It was that person, me, my experience, my things.
10. Everyone took risks; you had to bare it all.
11. In the wp I opened up; I was able to open up with strangers.
12. We were writing and sharing all these personal things, and someone always had some connections.
13. It's the personal touch of finding your own weaknesses and making them stronger.
14. With the wp, you're human and it's ok, ok to be vulnerable.
15. Wp was a release, the breaking point where you could let it go.
16. Wp breaks down that hard shell, that barrier.
17. It was the personal experience, but it was safe.

18. You took the plunge and you got acceptance for taking chances.
19. Wp really forms a bond; it forms respect and you get close.
20. You're willing to take risks with these people because you feel you got nothing to lose.
21. You're sharing together and listening.
22. It brings you together, and you're not driven by egos.
23. You're able to accept your peers.
24. You see yourself as vulnerable.
25. You're breaking down that hard shell.
26. You see someone you have respect for and they're totally willing to share their lives; sharing and pushing each other.
27. My whole professional outlook changed.
28. My whole outlook on teaching changed.
29. Wp was a good experience.
30. I realized that teachers don't have to be faceless and with no personality.
31. Teaching could be person to person; you could have relationships where you share with your students.
32. I learned to be real and to have a personal connection with the kids and let them share and have that connection too.
33. In the wp, you get to showcase yourself. No other pd does that.
34. Wp was about me and how I can improve.
35. You become more confident.
36. I feel more confident to present now and talk and stand in front of people and share what I do.
37. I can talk about my teaching in a confident way now.
38. Wp helped me to stand in front of other teachers and talk about that, and do research in my classroom and talk about that.
39. Wp said, "Hey, you can write. You can present. You have something to say."
40. It gave me the drive to present to others and have confidence in what I say.
41. Wp spoiled me.
42. Wp gave me another goal, an avenue for my life.
43. Wp maximized my potential and opened me up to so much more.
44. I would say it steeled me for other things and helped me succeed in classes I've taken since.
45. It just made me more confident, like I'm untouchable now.
46. I feel like I can do things I never thought of doing before, like writing and presenting and being an administrator.
47. Wp gets rid of that excess emotional baggage.
48. You learn to take risks and you're ok after.
49. Everyone's in the same boat, learning and taking chances. That was eye-opening for me.
50. I felt I had nothing to lose.
51. In wp we learned to take risks and take chances.

52. I'm able to take more chances in my classroom now; I'm able to reach out and touch kids' lives.

Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 4

1. It was a lot of growth as far as meeting people and seeing new perspectives to teaching.
2. Wp gave me the confidence to give writing assignments and grade them and to be able to evaluate in a communicative way.
3. It gave me a really strong tool for evaluation and alternative assessments that I didn't have before.
4. It personally made me feel like I had the ability to communicate things.
5. Other people were helping you along, so you felt like you had someone helping and something to contribute to.
6. It's your knowledge of human beings... that's what it gave me.
7. You care about words on a piece of paper like you've never cared before.
8. For a lot of us, we had never written, so it gave you a new way to express yourself.
9. You learn the most important lesson, that your pieces are your own, and other peoples' opinions are welcomed because you're pieces will never get better if you don't get others' perspectives.
10. I just never had experienced something where everything you did was so significant, and yet there was not a lot of penalty to it.
11. In a strange way, the people who have gone through the wp have a closeness to each other.
12. They're willing to share their most intimate writing with you.
13. There's a closeness that you just can't shake.
14. You become a confidant.
15. Intense relationships had to be bound.
16. You feel responsible to people.
17. The wp asks you to dedicate to these people who are going to be working with you; it makes a difference.
18. When it comes to writing, it's really an inoffensive topic.
19. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain, like friendships.
20. It made me want different things for my classroom.
21. It has changed what I want for my classroom.

22. Without wp, I would be a different person; I would look at kids differently.
23. I definitely expect different things from my classroom now than I did before.
24. I expect different things from people around me.
25. It's made me a bit arrogant about being a teacher.
26. I was treated like a professional for a month.
27. You have work, you have the day, and you use your own personality to organize it; wp allowed me that.
28. I like to give the kids that same kind of freedom.
29. I want them to feel like they did it themselves.

30. The wp was about how to make yourself better; what's better...I don't know, what do you think is better.
31. Wp was empowering.
32. Wp teaches you how to give others the chance to speak without necessarily changing or bending to their will.
33. It was advantageous on many different levels.
34. You had people who will help you with writing and help you reevaluate yourself without a lot of penalty in the end.
35. Wp gave you this really great resource to use.
36. Wp is a little box you open up whenever you need it; it's always there.

Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 5

1. I didn't realize that I would like writing as much as I did.
2. The wp awakened writing in me; it showed me that I could write from my experience.
3. The camaraderie was outstanding.
4. That experience was probably one of the deepest experiences I've ever had with colleagues.
5. It was very helpful be it was not threatening.
6. You didn't feel like anyone was criticizing; you knew they were actually trying to help you.
7. It was an amazing amount of emotion involved be you were really pouring your heart out in your writing.
8. It was a soul searching.
9. It was the most inspiring process that I've ever been through.
10. I think it probably instilled in me a little sense of confidence that maybe I didn't have before.

11. The critiques were all positive, but very beneficial to you.
12. In the classroom, it's even helped me a lot I think, especially recognizing the importance of reading and writing for young people in all phases of the curriculum.
13. The presentation taught me the skills and techniques of having to do it yourself for colleagues; that was the biggest challenge point right there.
14. You received so many non-threatening suggestions to use with the students.
15. The presentations were challenging but not threatening to you.
16. You learned new strategies to keep students interested.
17. There's nothing like that other than the wp.
18. The wp made you feel like a colleague.
19. You were there as a group of individuals of equal rank; there was no one higher or lower.
20. Everyone was a human being, there was no ranking, no politics.
21. I really felt like I was part of a group that was doing something that was not only educational, but was entertaining and rewarding at the same time.
22. Wp made me think a lot about this, about this ongoing love I have for nature and writing about it.
23. I guess you could boil it down to the humaneness of the leaders. They were in charge, but they made you feel like colleagues.
24. You felt like somebody was there really helping you.
25. The support was very encouraging.
26. Wp was magnificent, a very positive experience.
27. You made good friends, and they are a part of me, always will be a part of me.
28. People would actually listen to you.
29. It's nonthreatening.
30. Wp gives you time to discuss, to think about these things.

Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience
Transcript 6

1. It was fun.
2. It was liberating.
3. We got to experiment.
4. We learned from others.
5. The atmosphere allowed you to be open and made you feel comfortable to take risks.
6. It was challenging to keep up with it.
7. The teachers provided that atmosphere.
8. You become very close to every participant.

9. You understand where everyone is coming from.
10. You're opening yourself up, and others are willing to do that and take those risks.
11. There was an atmosphere where we were in charge.
12. You had to meet the challenge.
13. I was liberated with writing to try different genres.
14. I was liberated professionally to take risks.
15. I was unburdened from a rigid curriculum or lesson.
16. I could see, with every writing activity, see this actually working in the classroom.
17. I felt free to go in and try new things.
18. You had a lot of freedom with it.
19. That first day, where we list questions we have about writing; I still use that with my students.
20. We were writing all the time and reading all the time.

21. It was powerful just having that freedom to try different things, to have that time to write knowing you were going to have an accepting audience.
22. Having an accepting audience allowed you to try new things.

23. It was powerful personally and professionally because I use writing differently in my classroom now.
24. The way I approached my classroom changed.
25. It had a lasting affect on me, definitely.
26. I write more; it's therapeutic.
27. I see my students now as writers. I tell them I am a writer.
28. Going to the wp workshops is helpful.
29. I valued the writing I did; the writing was important.
30. The reading, writing, and the exchange of ideas; talking about the books we read.
31. You know people from the wp, and we just think alike.
32. When you meet people and you find out they're from the wp, they're your friend in a sense; you know that they think like you do.
33. You know they're passionate about it.
34. There's a philosophy behind all of this; people who are writers because they have written.
35. They approach education and the creative process; they have that in them.
36. You know they're open to people and new ideas.
37. Nothing was intense as the wp.
38. The way it's set up, you become not only the learners, but the teachers and the participants.
39. It's not belittling; most other workshops, you're sitting there on the level of the student with the handouts.
40. With the wp, you're involved for a whole month in every aspect of it.
41. You can't just go back to your classroom and forget it; it's ingrained in you now.
42. I can think of ways now that I never could before of how to incorporate writing into

science.

43. The atmosphere, the way it's set up; it takes time.
44. People get personal; you get naked with each other in a sense and you have to feel comfortable.
45. When you start hearing confirmations about what you've been believing about educational practices, and what you know you want to do, it confirms you.
46. Wp becomes a kind of philosophy and you start believing in it.
47. You get that confirmation.
48. With pd, I hope to leave with something that causes me to become a better professional.
49. I want the strategies and the time to do something with it.
50. I want workable stuff from a workshop.
51. I didn't consider wp a workshop.
52. I crave professional growth.
53. I think it's insulting to expect a teacher to learn something in a three hour workshop and then hold them accountable for it.

54. Wp makes teachers do it and present it; you internalize it.
55. You get to feel the frustrations and how it feels good to write something well.
56. We get to transfer that experience back to our students.
57. When you're with people for four weeks, and you get intimate, it is powerful; you can't ignore it.
58. Another important thing is that teachers have to present; that's how you really learn by teaching and presenting.

APPENDIX F: AGGREGATE OF SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

*Qualities Valued in the Writing Project Experience:
Aggregate of Significant, Nonrepetitive Statements*

1. Just writing really touched some inner feelings that I never expressed before.
2. It brought out the positives.
3. Having the feedback from the teachers and the other colleagues.
4. I have grown through the experience of presenting and the professionalism of being a consultant.
5. The structure of the Institute; as writers we wrote on our own topics, and we wrote everyday and worked in groups.
6. Being a presenter and having that constructive criticism.
7. Having the opportunity to attend all the presentations from all the colleagues at all the grade levels.
8. Understanding that everybody is different; everybody has their own personality, their own strengths and weaknesses.
9. It just adds to your backpack of knowledge.
10. Wp just gives you such a bigger perspective.
11. The wp was really demanding; expected something out of you every night, every day, for a month.
12. Wp turns the program over to the teachers.
13. I value a lot of the resources that I got.
14. It has changed how I see myself.
15. I think it really showed me that I feel like a professional; I have so much knowledge, but I also see that there's so much more that I want to go out there and get.
16. It's like opening the door and giving me these opportunities. Opportunities to present and network and learn and want to get more.
17. It's just that certain bond because you share so much. You're like a family.
18. Both professionally and personally it's the most life changing experience that I've had in a pd situation.
19. I definitely grew as an educator.
20. It made me look at my practices.
21. It made me think about my philosophies as an educator.
22. It gave me some validation that, yes, maybe I can do this, and it made me start writing.
23. It was a good thing for self-esteem personally and professionally.
24. It made me look at how I teach reading and writing.
25. I've definitely taken more risks.
26. It was a very introspective time; you look at your life.
27. I made some connections that I might not have ever made.
28. The way the atmosphere is set up, the playing field is leveled and everybody

is in the same boat.

29. There's an environment of total honesty that's just not threatening.
30. There's a whole year's worth of a relationship cycle that happens in a four week span.
31. I feel like I'm constantly thinking, how can I do that or this better.
32. When you go through the wp, and you go through the writing process yourself, you can't deny the impact it has; I think that perspective has definitely helped me bring more value to my students when I teach writing.
33. I'm more confident about if somebody came to me and asked a question, I really do know what I'm talking about.
34. Wp encouraged and polished some possible leadership skills; it really helped me.
35. There's so much freedom within that structure; that's what makes it so unique.
36. It makes you step back and evaluate
37. You get inside yourself enough to do that, and it does change the way your approach your classroom.
38. That's the big thing, the reflection piece; structured reflection, collegial conversations that are important
58. It finally forces us to do what we know we need to do but just never take the time to do it.
59. It was a fun experience.
60. It was a challenge.
61. It made me want to pursue more writing.
62. It validated my love of reading and writing.
63. The main thing was using personal experience to bring out our work.
64. Everyone took risks; you had to bare it all.
65. In the wp I opened up; I was able to open up with strangers.
66. It's the personal touch of finding your own weaknesses and making them stronger.
67. With the wp, you're human and it's ok, ok to be vulnerable.
68. Wp really forms a bond; it forms respect and you get close.
69. You're willing to take risks with these people because you feel you got nothing to lose.
70. You're able to accept your peers.
71. You see someone you have respect for and they're totally willing to share their lives; sharing and pushing each other.
72. My whole professional outlook changed.
73. My whole outlook on teaching changed.
74. I realized that teachers don't have to be faceless and with no personality.
75. Teaching could be person to person; you could have relationships where you share with your students.
76. I learned to be real and to have a personal connection with the kids and let them share and have that connection too.
77. Wp was about me and how I can improve.

78. Wp helped me to stand in front of other teachers and talk about that, and do research in my classroom and talk about that.
79. Wp said, "Hey, you can write. You can present. You have something to say."
80. Wp gave me another goal, an avenue for my life.
81. Wp maximized my potential and opened me up to so much more.
82. I feel like I can do things I never thought of doing before, like writing and presenting and being an administrator.
83. Wp gets rid of that excess emotional baggage.
84. Everyone's in the same boat, learning and taking chances. That was eye-opening for me.
85. I felt I had nothing to lose.
86. I'm able to take more chances in my classroom now; I'm able to reach out and touch kids' lives.
87. It was a lot of growth as far as meeting people and seeing new perspectives to teaching.
88. Wp gave me the confidence to give writing assignments and grade them and to be able to evaluate in a communicative way.
89. It gave me a really strong tool for evaluation and alternative assessments that I didn't have before.
90. For a lot of us, we had never written, so it gave you a new way to express yourself.
91. I just never had experienced something where everything you did was so significant, and yet there was not a lot of penalty to it.
92. You feel responsible to people.
93. The wp asks you to dedicate to these people who are going to be working with you; it makes a difference.
94. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain, like friendships.
95. I definitely expect different things from my classroom now than I did before.
96. I expect different things from people around me.
97. It's made me a bit arrogant about being a teacher.
98. I was treated like a professional for a month.
99. The wp was about how to make yourself better; what's better...I don't know, what do you think is better.
100. Wp was empowering.
101. Wp teaches you how to give others the chance to speak without necessarily changing or bending to their will.
102. The wp awakened writing in me.
103. It instilled in me a little sense of confidence that maybe I didn't have before.
104. In the classroom, it's helped me a lot, especially in recognizing the importance of reading and writing for young people.
105. The wp made you feel like a colleague.
106. Wp gives you time to discuss, to think about things.

APPENDIX G: AGGREGATE OF FOCUS GROUP SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

Theme 1: Resources and Strategies

1. I felt more confident in my own classroom.
2. I knew I was going to do a better job teaching writing because we had been through the process ourselves.
3. I knew how my students were feeling when given a writing assignment to do.
4. We had some great readings, like Atwell and Writing Down the Bones.
5. We read Moffet and Atwell and had discussions about them.
6. My wp portfolio, I can get it in a second.
7. I saved the portfolio and all the handouts from every presentation.

Theme 2: Writing

1. I experienced what it was like to be a writer.
2. It made me look into relationships with people...because I started looking at the theme and different relationships and how they fit into that theme.
3. I wrote different each week, a different style.
4. I had never written different genres, other than research papers.
5. I wrote different genres and things that I ordinarily would have never done.
6. That's how I grew as a writer, because I tried different styles of writing.
7. You see the importance of writing so much that you want other teachers to become better teachers of writing.
8. I never wrote for pleasure before.

Theme 3: Relationships

1. People from the Institute, we still get together after 12 or more years.
2. We formed this bond.
3. This unbelievable bond that I can just pick up the phone and call anyone of them.
4. You just grow so close to all those people.
5. You learn so much about them, their emotions, their feelings, their innermost thoughts.
6. We got together one night and rented a movie based on a book we were reading. I can't ever remember being in a workshop where the participants will hang out together at night and watch a movie together.
7. That's an interesting thing about the wp, that personal commitment that people have to it.

Theme 4: Professionalism

1. I don't think I would be in the position I'm in today if it hadn't been for the Writing Project.
2. I would never have had the confidence to present in front of people.
3. It was the confidence I got from the wp, I guess, but I started to take on more leadership roles in my school and in the district.
4. When I started the aspiring leadership class last year, it was like, "look, we have all these wp teachers in here."
5. I think wp teachers are committed.
6. They're pretty passionate about education in the first place.
7. In the interview, you're only selecting a few, probably looking for leaders.
8. Naturally, leaders get picked for the wp; I guess that's a part of it.
9. The wp experience of giving presentations and doing the writings, that gives you so much more confidence.
10. You become a better communicator.
11. Wp changed you professionally and personally, I think.

Theme 5: Environment

1. The facilitators set the tone for everything.
2. We felt that warmth and caring.
3. They made us feel safe to take risks.
4. We never did anything alone; everything was together.
5. Everybody was in the same boat; everybody was doing the same type of things.
6. Like taking a risk, I didn't feel like I was taking a risk because everyone else was doing it.
7. There were just so many deep conversations and professional dialogue, and thought-provoking presentations.
8. It was a safe environment.
9. People complain about the amount of work in the wp, but they love it.
10. We had choice, and that was empowering. We had choice of what and how we were going to write and what we were going to present.
11. The whole wp exp fueled us with knowledge that we needed to go out and move forward with our students, with ourselves, with our colleagues.
12. It's the only summer in my whole professional career where I wanted school to start the next day.
13. When wp was over, it was like I couldn't wait for school to start.

VITA

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Dr. Farizo received the David England Teacher Research Award from the LSU Writing Project in 2002 and published the findings of his research in the National Writing Project Quarterly, *The Voice*. This publication led to an interest in the Writing Project as a professional development model, which is the topic of this dissertation. Dr. Farizo has presented his research interests at the Qualitative Interest Group (QUIG) Conference at the University of Georgia in Athens. He resides in New Orleans with his wife Angela.