

## TOPIC CHOICE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS WRITING IN AN INVITATIONAL SUMMER INSTITUTE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WRITING PROJECT

**Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar & Dr. Roxanne Henkin**

San Antonio Writing Project (Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching Department)

The University of Texas at San Antonio

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### ABSTRACT

According to Riley and Hawe (2004), "Research interest in the analysis of stories has increased as researchers in many disciplines endeavor to see the world through the eyes of the others" (p. 226). We were interested in examining the topic choice of the San Antonio Writing Project summer institute participants, so we could try and understand the topics the contributors wrote during the San Antonio Writing Project's Invitational Summer Institute professional development program. Our study examined the weekly writing assignment that the members of this learning community wrote and later shared with other participants at the institute. Although teachers could write in any genre, we chose to analyze personal narratives because such writing generated rich themes. In this study, we were also exploring the institute writers' attitudes about writing and sharing. Twenty-three themes emerged after holistic content analysis of the data and four categories (identity, gratitude, reflection, and human experiences) were formed by clustering the twenty-three emergent themes.

**Keywords:** Summer Institute, personal narratives, writing, professional development, & attitude.

### INTRODUCTION

Teachers should write periodically so they can understand the struggles all writers experience before they teach writing to their students. Teachers also need continued professional development to learn and later practice the latest pedagogical tools. The San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP) offers professional development through its month-long annual summer institute. The participants engage in a month-long collaborative writing and sharing activities several times in a week. The teachers are required to write three extensive assignments. They also write during the morning journal time about a topic of their choice or a topic based on the prompt the co-director provides for them. The daily log is a digital multimodal presentation. It is based on the previous day's activities and is a vehicle to help document each day of the institute.

According to the program guidelines, the institute participants can choose one of the following areas to write- "an autobiographical recreation of an experience, a personal essay inspired by that experience, an experimental piece (poem, short story, one-act play) inspired by that experience, or a piece addressing an issue or issues related to the teaching of writing (a position paper, journal article, draft statement of school writing policy)" (SAWP, 2014, Para 8). At the end of the week, each participant reads their writing followed by written comments from the rest of the group.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore teachers' choice of topics and attitudes about writing personal narratives in a professional development summer institute. We also tried to examine the teachers' willingness to write on topics that may be based on sensitive life experiences and the prompts that the teachers may not feel comfortable enough or confident enough to write and share with others. We also wanted to assess the teachers' change in attitudes and perceptions about personal narrative writing and its importance for teachers of writing across the content areas.

## Research Questions

1. What are the topic choices of the San Antonio Writing Project's Invitational Summer Institute Participants?
2. What do the Invitational Summer Institute participants' writing samples reveal about their attitudes towards writing and sharing?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This qualitative study draws on phenomenology (Husserl, 1920) and community of practice (Wenger, 2004). Phenomenology is the immediacy of experience (Goulding, 2004) and deals with 'several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p. 81). A phenomenological approach enables researchers to understand the intentionality and immediacy of the experience. According to Wertz, 1985), the components important for a phenomenological study are – (1) categorical engagement in the situation described (2) taking each moment of the experience into serious consideration (3) highlighting and stressing the condition experienced and (4) analyzing the individual and communal importance of experiences.

A community of practice is "formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain..." (Wenger, 2004, p. 1). It is a social learning sphere, where a group of people is invested in achieving a goal to learn and grow from the experience. In order to be in a community of practice, the participants must have a domain with an established community formed by practitioners. The domain is not a mere arrangement where members get together, but a group of teachers that is invested in achieving a common goal through commitment. Such a community must interrelate periodically and learn from each other. Then, these group members share a repertoire of resources with other practitioners (Wenger, 2004). A community is established through various approaches such as collaboration, learning from other's experiences, recording information, and identifying gaps.

Both community of practice and phenomenology follow Vygotsky's (1998) socio-cultural foundation of knowledge formation and to improve pedagogical practices in a collaborative environment. The Invitational Summer Institute provided teachers with a safe, friendly, and confident space where writers learned from each other in a socio-cultural professional development environment.

## Professional Development through San Antonio Writing Project (SAWP)

SAWP is one of the 200 plus site networks of the National Writing Project anchored in the department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching at the UTSA. Every summer, the

SAWP invites about fifteen teachers across the curriculum to engage in professional development activities focusing on the teaching of writing. The SAWP is built on practicing teachers sharing their knowledge with the other teachers in a community of practice. The SAWP Invitational Summer Institute provides teachers with an opportunity to engage in professional development activities and to be with a cadre of writers who may have experienced the human condition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several of the Invitational Summer Institute participants discussed writing as a process of self-discovery (Murray, 1978). According to Graves (1990), "...[people] want to tell stories about experiences to themselves and to friends, to write about them in a diary, a journal, or a short essay. Writing allows us to look at an experience from [different] angles..." (p.23-24).

However, it is difficult to realize the influence writing has on people. It can be achieved by writing consistently and on the topic of the students' choice rather than teacher-designed topics. Graves (1990) invites teachers to read and write with their students because reading enables people to understand life's perplexities and writing gives people a voice to express and it is this voice that gives writers hope. In addition, "Children pick up many of the skills of literacy through their writing...[and] writing is a social act" (p. 77 and 146).

Murray (1973) lists seven reasons as to why writing must be taught to students. First, writing should be evaluated as an aptitude both at school and out of school. Second, writing has the ability to reveal the essence of language arts. Writing encourages students to read, comprehend words and concepts, and helps collaborative learning in students. Third, writing encourages thoughts. Through writing people think and negotiate what they learn. Writing helps students in rearranging thoughts and thereby progress. Fourth, writing deals with moral principles, as it requires a straightforward effort.

It is crucial for teachers to teach writing for self-expression. Fifth, writing helps people to learn about themselves. Writing is a personal act, and helps people find out the purpose of their life. According to Murray (1973), "It is important that students have the opportunity for disciplined, intensive self-exploration through writing" (p. 1235). Sixth, writing is meant for communication, which is a human passion. Everyone wants to share his or her experiences, thoughts, schemes, worries, happiness, and feelings. All of these factors operate to satisfy people's communal demands. Hence, writers need opportunities to express their worlds on topics such as anxiety, problems, discoveries, and excitement. Students need opportunities to describe their travels (both physical and psychological) and writing may be a conducive medium for this kind of expression.

Toepfer and Walker (2009) in their pilot study with six classes at three campuses in a Midwestern university system discuss the effects of expressive writing on the writer's happiness. The letter writing impacted students in two different areas - happiness and appreciation. This writing activity was compared with students who did not connect with writing. The researchers found that, "...sustained writing is beneficial (p. 192). In addition, writing enables students to express their feelings freely, and writing is an intentional activity that provides students with an opportunity to experience happiness. This happiness through intentional activity aligns with Fordyce's (1988) basics. The act of writing letters of gratitude enables the students to enhance their well-being and thereby help improve their quality of life. The researchers of this study indicate that such happiness through writing may help with depression. Overall, writing facilitates psychological well being needed for academic success.

Hence, practice and mastery are essential for successful writing process. Teachers must think of opportunities where students can learn to write through practice and application and teachers may consider professional development opportunities.

McCarthy and Mkhize (2013) in their study with twenty-nine teachers discussed the findings about teachers' position about writing and power of their convictions. The above articles and studies documented the current trends in writing research through examining the following factors. The role of prior knowledge of the writing process, expressive writing and its benefits to English Language Learners, the process involved in composing texts, the impact of peer review in students' writing, collaborative writing, attitudinal factors involved in writing, writing for expression and writing for learning; and teacher's willingness to help students with writing.

However, many writing pundits support the writing workshop model to teach writing, especially when our students are at different levels of comprehension with composition skills. The writing workshop model facilitated enhanced writing practices in students. Atwell (1987), Graves (1990), Calkins (1986), and Murray (1968) recommend the writer's workshop model as an effective way to teach writing. The writer's workshop also follows Calkins's (1986) writing process workshop. According to Calkins (1986), "Writing Process Workshop is an instructional model that views writing as an ongoing process in which students follow a given set of procedures for planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing their writing" (p.1). This is similar to the format employed at the SAWP's invitational summer institute. Applebee and Langer (2011) conducted a four year National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI) to explore the changes in writing instruction in schools. By investigating the shift in students' attitudes towards writing. The researchers express their frustrations about how students are "...not provid[ed] with opportunities to use composing as a way to think through the issues, to show the depth or breadth of their knowledge, or go beyond what that they know in making connections and raising new issues" (p. 20).

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were recruited on the first day of the San Antonio Writing Project Summer Institute (see appendix A). There were a total of twenty-one writers who agreed to participate in the study. Except for two participants, all of the subjects were teachers in elementary, middle, high school, or university levels. The two participants that were not classroom teachers were a journalist and a postdoctoral researcher. The participants also included doctoral students teaching in schools. The participants also included the director, co-directors, and past Teacher Consultants (the two researchers of this study). The invitational Summer Institute also provides former teacher consultants with an opportunity to come back and participate in subsequent institutes and all of the professional development activities throughout the year. The study was conducted after obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the UTSA.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The teachers were required to write three extensive assignments along with other pieces in different genres. The institute members could choose to write on any topic of their choice. We were able to collect three sections of writing from each writer, but we chose personal narratives, short stories, or a chapter from novels (those who wrote novels). The following

tables (table 1 and 2) illustrate the data collection and sample assignment topics. The researcher collected all of the narratives from all of the 21 writers at the end of the group sharing session once a week. By the end of three weeks, we had collected sixty-three assignments and out of the 63, we could only use 40 personal narratives for analysis because only these 40 were applicable to our selection criterion.

Table 1: *Participants' Weekly Assignments and Data Collection*

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4
Open topic	Open topic	Open topic	Open topic
Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4
Open topic	Open topic	Open topic	Open topic
Choice 1	Choice 2	Choice 3	Choice 4
Open topic	Open topic	Open topic	Open topic

Table 2: Week One Assignment

Institute Participant	Title - Week One Assignment
1	Tiny Dancers
2	Gratitude
3	He is Learning
4	My Brother
5	Mother
6	Through the Lens of Death: My Glasses
7	Discarded/Fiction
8	Diving in the Red Sea
9	Again
10	Fiction
11	Once Upon a Fabric Store
12	A Mother's Perspective
13	Wearing the Mask (Discarded/Fiction)
14	[My] Coach
15	Water
16	Brooke
17	Two Deaths and a Curse
18	Uncle
19	In Memory of Linda Tafel
20	Reflections
21	Father's Day

### Data Analysis

The narratives from the institute writers were analyzed using Leiblich et al's (1998) holistic content analysis and Barthes' (2013) narratives codes. Holistic content analysis is examining of the entire story looking for themes and ideas as expressed by the writers (Lieblich, et al, 1998). Following holistic content analysis, an approach suggested Colaizzi (as cited in Goulding, 2005) was applied. Specifically, paragraphs were examined as the unit of analysis. After holistic analysis, individual paragraphs were perused for appropriate thematic coding. The focus was thematic expression using the paragraphs as the unit of analysis and not

stylistic expression. We applied both phenomenological process and narrative codes to arrive at the different themes. Then, we clustered the themes to form categories. Finally the themes were clustered to form four major categories.

### Holistic Content Analysis

Holistic content analysis was chosen (instead of form or categorical analysis) because it generates major themes in texts (Lieblich, 1998). For conducting holistic content analysis, Lieblich et al (1998) suggest that the researchers (1) read the texts multiple times until a pattern emerges (2) document the initial overall impression (3) note down the foci or themes of the text (4) color code the themes and (5) keep a record of the themes as they occur in the text. After reading the teachers' write-ups many times, a pattern became apparent. Within the dataset, individual paragraphs were read and the intuitive thoughts were noted down first before writing down the overall impression of the narratives. Next, the central focus of the narrative based on the themes addressed was documented. Later, the initial themes were identified by repeatedly reading the materials. Finally, the initial twenty-two themes were collapsed into three dominant themes.

Next, we applied the process suggested by Colaizzi (as cited in Goulding, 2005) to explore the phenomenological process with the institute writers. According to Colaizzi, the researchers examining phenomenology must understand the explainer's position and the data that is analyzed. He recommended the following seven steps to conduct a phenomenological inquiry:

1. Read the narratives to get a firm understanding
2. Identify the main thoughts that refer to the phenomenon under scrutiny
3. Interpret important statements
4. Cluster the statements to form a themes after doing step 3 with all of the narratives
5. Combine the themes and provide an explanation
6. Eliminate unsupportive themes
7. Conduct member checking

The following flowchart (see figure 1 below) illustrates the analysis conducted:

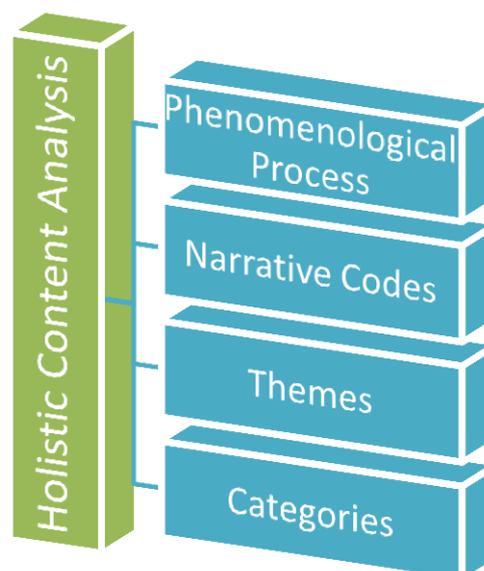


Figure 1: Data Analysis

Next we applied Barthes' narrative codes because several of the personal narratives enabled us to identify the "multivalence of the text[s]... and a constellation or braiding of meanings and voices" (Mozaffarzade, 2007). Multivalence is texts that have the quality of having many beliefs, connotations, or calls.

### **Narrative Coding**

Barthes (1984) suggested using narrative codes to analyze descriptive data. The different narrative codes are - The Hermeneutic Code, which is unknown in the narrative that makes the audience wonder about the story. This code interprets content based on the perplexity the readers face as they are trying to make sense of the story. Any confusion must be answered so the story makes sense to the reader. A good example of understanding the hermeneutic code is through reading a suspense story, where the writer discloses how a crime was committed through the discussions in the story. This code enables the writer and later the reader to examine the story section by section until the mystery is solved in the end. The Proairetic/Action Code is the plot points in the story. These themes create anticipation in the reader. The action builds the story and helps the reader to read on. For example, in the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Frost, the reader has to wait to find out if the traveler describes the road he took or the road he avoided. This sense of anticipation to know more is created through action in the poem or the story.

The Semantic Code reveals the Implications in the text. This code is used to reflect inference in the story. The reader may approach the plot with certain preconceived notions, but they must wait to find out what the text actually reveals in the end. For example, in Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter", the reader's curiosity grows as they discover Hester's sexual life, but it is not revealed until the end. The love affair between Dimmesdale and Hester is made visible through the implicit dialogues and subtle appreciation through dialogues in the novel. The Symbolic Code deals with Imagery within text and it may be hard to differentiate between semantic and symbolic codes. According to Felluga (2009), symbolic code is "The deeper structural principle that organizes semantic meanings, usually by the way of antitheses or by the way of mediations (particularly, forbidden mediations between antithetical terms)" (p. 45). Finally the Cultural Code is the information on scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge as depicted in the narratives. It is this code that reveals the prior knowledge or the background information that the reader needs in order to understand the text. Cultural codes also include idiosyncratic culturally established discourse and popular texts of that particular culture.

### **Description of Barthes' Narrative Codes with Exemplars**

#### **a. The Hermeneutic Code**

Hermeneutic code reveals those descriptions in a narrative that creates suspense in the readers. For example, writer 4 shared her excitement about meeting a handsome man in the airport, who eventually she married. But the descriptions (*As I look around, I can't help but notice a very handsome man sitting across from me, and by handsome I'm talking "George Strait" handsome! Suddenly, I no longer feel tired. Surely, the handsome man doesn't know I'm staring because he's ensconced in a paperback about who knows what . . .*) (4, 2014) made us think of why she was focusing so much on a stranger in an airport. As she was reading, we wondered if she had a crush on him or she was just admiring the man because he was handsome. Or what happened to that infatuation?

Writer 16 reminisces about news that he and his wife had to share with each other. *In commemoration of Fathers day that I will not be present for, I want to recall how I became a father. All the way back, ten years this October. It seems so recent, but the joys of aging, is that time does not seem to take so long. I can recall as it was just this last Sunday that I drove home from San Antonio to our new home in the valley, it was dark and you were excited to tell me news. I too had news that I needed to share but I was not so excited* (2014). The listener's had to wait in anticipation until the story was fully read to understand the news that the couple shared with each other.

### **b. Proairetic or Action Code**

Proairetic code deals with the action in the narratives. It builds up the story with plot points. For example, participant 1 writes about her first experience with little children, *"They are all yours. My new boss Linda exclaimed as the doors to dance studio #3 abruptly closed on me. As I took in the scene unfolding before me, I noticed 25 little 4 and 5 year olds donning leotards and tap shoes. It never occurred to me that this flock of tiny dancers would change the path of my life..."* (1, 2014). It make the readers think if this writer chose to pursue a career in dance or did she decided to do something else. In order to know what happened with the writer, the reader must read the entire text and it makes the reader to read on until the truth is revealed.

### **c. Semantic Code**

*Selvage is the technical term for the narrow and tightly woven self-finished edges on blue jeans. They function as the natural endings on each side of fabric woven on an old school shuttle loom and prevent the jean from fraying or unraveling. In denim the selvage is usually white and it often has a colored thread in the middle...which was originally added to help manufacturers recognize the different qualities that they were producing for their different clients* (7, 2014). This excerpt can be interpreted using various lenses. The lines are dense with inferences or implications if the reader takes time to read the text. For example, the word "selvage", to mean fringe to prevent fraying of the material can be interpreted as a person who stays with their group for solidarity. Another example would be the phrase, *originally added to help manufacturers recognize the different qualities that they were producing for their different clients* can be understood as the biased treatment people get depending on their race or color of their skin.

### **d. Symbolic Code**

This story helps the reader understand the culture specific beliefs and how it came true in this writer's life. The prophecies of the elderly people in certain cultures are believed to come true, and this writer captures that aspect of her culture. *It's a sign! Don't take it off or you're going to lose your marriage." One tia exclaimed. "Maybe it means that you are not going to stay married?" I was not amused. But they were right. I got divorced. I am not sad though. Even though I no longer have my tiny ring I can still make tortillas* (20, 2014).

### **e. Cultural Code**

This writer's psychological state about misconceptions around a county due to atrocious acts was deconstructed through her travel exploration. *Travel stretches your mind and helps you grow. My ancestors left Russia, the Ukraine and Eastern Europe in the late 1800's because of*

*the pogroms, violence and Anti-Semitism that were directed at the Jews. There was no love of Russia among my family. I grew up during the cold war when Russia was America's enemy.* (19, 2014). The writer here introduces background information about how she rediscovered herself during travel to another country. The text also reveals the writer's prior knowledge of the historical events that the reader needs to be aware of if they must make sense of the writing here.

The following table is a list of all the codes with exemplars from the institute participants:

Table 2: Barthes' Codes and Sample Quotations

<b>Hermeneutic</b>	<b>Proairetic</b>	<b>Semantic</b>	<b>Symbolic</b>	<b>Cultural</b>
As I look around, I can't help but notice a <i>very handsome man</i> sitting across from me, and by handsome I'm talking "George Strait" handsome! Suddenly, I no longer feel tired. Surely, the handsome man doesn't know I'm staring because he's ensconced in a paperback about who knows what . . .(4)	"They are all yours". My new boss Linda exclaimed as the doors to dance studio #3 abruptly closed on me. As I took in the scene unfolding before me, I noticed 25 little 4 and 5 year olds donning leotards and tap shoes. It never occurred to me that this flock of tiny dancers would change the path of my life...(1)	...They function as the natural endings on each side of fabric woven on an old school shuttle loom and prevent the jean from fraying or unraveling. In denim the selvage is usually white and it often has a colored thread in the middle...which was originally added to help manufacturers recognize the different qualities that they were producing for their different clients (7)	"It's a sign! Don't take it off or you're going to lose your marriage." One tia exclaimed. "Maybe it means that you are not going to stay married?" I was not amused. But they were right. I got divorced. (20)	Travel stretches your mind and helps you grow. My ancestors left Russia, the Ukraine and Eastern Europe in the late 1800's because of the pogroms, violence and Anti-Semitism that were directed at the Jews. There was no love of Russia among my family. (19)

### Thematic Coding

Next, we applied thematic coding and about twenty-three themes emerged from the data analysis. Figure 2 lists all of the themes that emerged after reading the narratives several times (see figure 2).

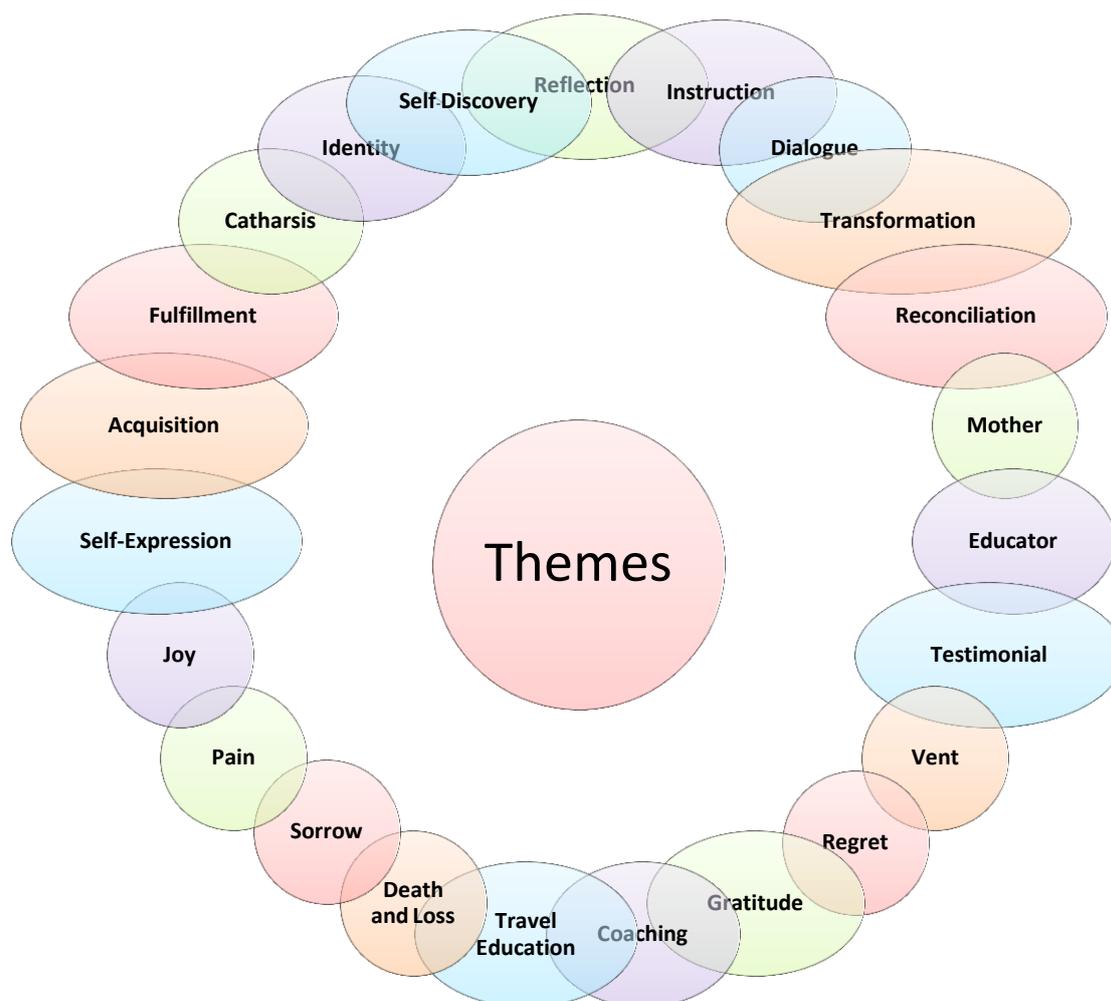


Figure 2: Themes

Twenty themes emerged through data analysis of the twenty-one summer institute writers. The themes were later clustered to arrive at four categories. We decided to discard one of the themes, “venting” because we only found this theme in one of the writers. The different themes that emerged through multiple reading of the dataset are as follows.

*Self discovery, reflection, death and loss, acquisition, identity, self expression, catharsis, joy, sorrow, pain, instruction, conversation or dialogue (intra and inter), transformation, reconciliation, gratitude, coaching, travel education, mother, educator, confessional writing, vent, regret, and fulfillment.*

The following section is a detailed explanation of all of the emergent themes.

*Self Discovery.* Self-discovery is the process where people try to understand the world and about themselves. Institute member 1 was trying to discover herself through her experiences in life. The person was confused due to low performance in a society that valued what the paper said about a person’s achievement. This writer also states, *as a recent high school graduate I was lost. I didn’t know what I could or should do with my life. A victim of “tracking,” I was placed on a general academic track because of “not so great” test scores. Consequently, I didn’t get a lot of direction in high school, nor did I understand at that time that I could advocate for myself* (2014). The participant is engaged in a dialogue where she is trying to discover herself based on the situation.

*Reflection.* Several writers wrote on reflective experiences. The intriguing one was this excerpt - *we went through a rough time once I got into middle school. I was having some cultural turmoil. I was trying so hard, without knowing, to become just like everyone else, that I began ignoring my heritage. I didn't want to speak Spanish, Spending more time with those private school kids than I did my own family had started to change me. I became ashamed of where I came from, I ignored my first language, and I despised how I had different rules than my friends did* (3, 2014). Here, the writer's dilemma about losing her heritage language to fit in is aptly expressed. The text also helps the reader infer that there was a mismatch in curriculum and family expectations. The writer is subjected to humiliation due to who the writer was and what her family expected from her. The writer tried to culturally assimilate with the rest of the group so he/she could be happy, but the family had other plans.

*Death and Loss.* Several writers wrote about death and loss. Participant 17 wrote about the mysterious death of a pregnant woman, *the woman's body was left there that evening. No one had heard the curse that the woman pronounced on that house before she died.* These lines indicate the inhuman actions that people engage in. Fellow 14 describes the untimely death of his mother, *My mother died in my arms as I stroked her hair and told her I loved her* (2014). Here, the writer is expressing his loss and his message to her in deathbed.

This description of death by participant 16 may be a common experience with people who go to war. *They searched where they had last seen him and found him crumpled up. Jaw sunken in, flies crawling about the pool of blood from the star shaped hole in his neck that was quickly going back to the soil* (2014).

*Acquisition.* Achievement was a theme that emerged in several writers' narratives. Acquisition was both personal and family members' achievement. For example, writer 21 is proud of her father's achievement in life, *adorning a wall in his house are pieces of memorabilia that he has collected throughout his career. Uniform patches, captain badges, and retired helmets are among the many things* (2014). Another writer discussed her happiness and how it was fulfilling in the end, *Three months later the very handsome man asked me to marry him; that was in May and by August I found myself walking down another aisle. It's been twenty-one years and we're still enjoying coffee and conversation* (2, 2014). This text is an example of a person's affection and the joy that comes with such an intimate relationship.

*Self expression.* Several fellows wrote about expressing their joys, sorrows, loss, and pain. This writer articulates her role as a new wife and states, *After the short ceremony in the courthouse my new husband returned to base where he would prepare for me to join him. In the meantime I was home [to]gather all of the items for our new household. I quickly realized that there was so many things women needed to, or were "suppose to", learn as new wives. I know that it was different for each culture, but everyone has to eat. The women of my family prided themselves on being great culinary cooks and tamers of the tamales. And a good wife should be able to handle a household and what it entails such as cooking and cleaning. Yes, I realize what decade it is. My mother always told me that she did not mind doing those things out of love* (20, 2014).

*Catharsis.* Several narratives reflect the writer's release of strong feelings of regret, happiness, sadness, and other feelings. This story about her feeling of relief when she heard from a long last friend is liberating to the writer. Like getting a call from a long time friend

who says, *I miss you and just want to hear your voice* (2, 2014). Another story records how she missed the opportunity to get to know learned people who shared the same passion as hers and realized that only after the person's death, *so in memory of Dr. Hu and all our colleagues that we work side by side with each day, but never get to know, we had lunch together on a cool and windy February day* (19, 2014). This writer regrets the atrophy she experienced because of her relatives' loss of memory and she wishes that she could have captured his stories; *I always said he should write a book, but Uncle Jim never wrote his stories down. In his later years, he developed Alzheimer's. All I have now are my memories of times spent with him. Except for the bits and pieces of information remembered, the richness of his stories are now lost forever* (18, 2014). This writer recognized how writing was a mediating tool for preserving memories.

*Joy.* This theme was noticed across the data set because several writers documented happy moments in their lives. For example participant 8 expressed her joy about a family activity and her accomplishment of a skill, *I've dived from time to time since then. Our whole family dived together once on a Caribbean cruise after the children were old enough to take lessons. Ultimately it is much more fun to SAY I have dived in the Red Sea than it was actually to DO it* (2014).

Next, the following narrative can move anyone because the experience is such – a brother's academic success and the joy it brings, *I need to move back to El Paso, I got into the program at UTEP, I start next week he explained. After the details I hung up the phone, and pulled into the driveway. I sat in my Jeep for a while—I am not sure if you can smile, laugh and cry at the same time, but I believe I did. Although I was happy for him, I was sad to see him go* (7, 2014).

*Sorrow and Pain.* This participant is hurt at the living conditions of women and expresses her concern, *I think now about the other tens of thousands of blue-collar garment workers in El Paso who lost their jobs in the 90's and the impact it had on their families. I think about current American factories shutting down and less-than-humane working conditions in foreign countries. Most importantly, I think about how my mother helped me define and re-define the notion of the working-woman* (7, 2014). This description about the living conditions of women addresses social justice issues women's issues in that society. Further, this institute contributor also wrote about how her brother's failure affected her and made her sad, *I saw him hit the rock bottom. I came home from work to find him lying on the living room couch, blinds shut, room silent and dark. There were fast food wrappers on the floor next to his Playstation video-game remote controllers. This had been the daily pattern the whole week. He didn't want to do anything else. He had quit his job at the one of the local bookstores and received a rejection letter from UTSA—no work, no school* (7, 2014). This is a universal experience that people share – a family member's failure and the hopelessness that comes with such situations.

*Instruction.* Several people wrote about how she copes with her migraine by doing chores such as this, *I organize things like clothes or my child's old toys, which takes time so people do not even notice the work I have done. In cleaning, I do get dusty so I have to take constant showers. I would say about every 4 hours I have to use water to get the dust off of me. One day I did not follow my regular procedure and I noticed that it was time to pick up my daughter from school* (15, 2014). A coping strategy to fight an ailment is captured beautifully here.

*Conversation or dialogue (intra and inter).* Through this story, the writer was debating about her decision to help one of her failing students and wondered if her choice was convincing? *Some of the students had figured out what stories to read to get enough points on the reading program to progress to the following story. Even the students' advice did not satisfy Marco. He wanted 2 points on his final grade and he asked why he could not be given those points. I question if I did the right thing given how much he gave of himself and how much he taught the class* (15, 2014). This teacher went through a myriad thoughts before she committed to this profession, *Oh how refreshing it was when my rebel came along and encouraged me to try whatever I wanted...perhaps to even try things I thought I didn't like... Of the many things my rebel opened me up to, music was probably the greatest. I had been a music major, studied all the composers, knew how to notate a perfect fourth AND an augmented one, and could even transpose any instrument (given adequate time to think it through, of course)* (6, 2014). This text is an illustration of the writer's introspection.

*Transformation.* There was indication of calling for change in several writers' narratives. One shared her anxiety about the recent immigrant children from south American countries, *What would it be like...if we lived in a world where children didn't have to be sent away from family to save their lives. What must it be like...to live in a world full of peace* (12, 2014). Here is a wonderful way in which writing can help people capture thoughts that linger and bother them. The description is such that it can affect the readers as well.

Writing has the power to move and change people. participant 16 expresses his admiration to his wife for transforming him in this excerpt. *I am glad you are here to help a buffoon like me. All the triumphs I have had as a father have all been from you, they are rooted in you. Without you to root me on, to guide me, get angry with me, and listen I would be a failure of a father. For all this struggle, we went through I honor you, I love you, and happy fathers day* (2014).

*Reconciliation.* This writer was not happy with her mother's decision to 'Spanish only at home' policy, but in the end, the writers compromise with her mother's transformation was remarkable, *my mom is one of my best friends. She has come so far, been so willing to learn so much. She is one of the smartest and most inspiring people I know. She is truly incredible. She has, over the last twenty years, gotten her GED, "In English because I'm in America," been a successful business owner, learned to play the piano, witnessed me get tattoos, "I didn't expect a tattoo shop to be so clean and people so friendly," and she even attended her gay niece's wedding in New York. I have raised my mother well* (3, 2014). The mother's experiential learning and this writer's willingness to share the happiness are beautifully captured in this text. Such is the relationship between a mother and a daughter – to impact each other's lives.

*Gratitude.* Several writers expressed their feeling of gratitude to their family, teachers, community, and educational institutions. This Participant's sense of gratitude for her mother for helping her thrive in spite of hurdles as a Mexican American immigrant is crucial to understanding children's psychological well being, *she would tell me to look at that kiss anytime I felt like I couldn't go on, anytime I felt lonely, or anytime someone was being mean. She would close my hand into a little fist and tell me she loved me as I got out of the car. I can remember countless times when I secretly looked at my palm and saw her pink lipstick. I'd sit at my desk working and unfurl my left hand to where only I could see my palm, marked by my mom's lipstick. It made me smile every time* (3, 2014). The text may help us discover an object that belonged to a loved one can scaffold people when they are lost or faced with a

hopeless situation in life.

*Coaching.* The following narrative is about his mentoring experiences at the summer institute, *What Pam explained is what had occurred to me many times while teaching. Those kinds of things don't have to be shared with younger students, but they can and ought to be shared with THIS GROUP of adults. She said that my example will definitely give context to the problem-solving schema I will be sharing Wednesday* (14, 2014).

*Travel education.* Travel stories help writers explore about their roots, discover about historical events that impact people, and enable writers rethink about any bias they may have developed due to barbarisms by hate crime groups. This participant discusses her discovery during travel to Russia.

*Mother.* *I could feel my mother's excitement and urgency this morning. My mother, who affectionately referred to herself as a "rancherita", helped me fill my suitcase. Her excitement would spill over to me. I was excited to see my Mama Tere and grandpa Emilio. I loved my Mama Tere and I know she adored me. After all, I was named after her. She was a petite lady, short and slender. I have always felt a connection to her* (20, 2014). This passage beautifully captures the writer's love for her mother.

*Testimonial Text.* This writer's shock upon discovering one of her trusted friend's secret lives, *"Then a shock of monumental proportions. He had not died of a spider bite, but rather had killed himself after being outed as a serial pedophile. A custodian in the school in Nicaragua where he worked had discovered a flashdrive with a series of videos of Bill Vahey molesting middle school boys"* (8, 2014). This is a description of a writer's surprise about a man she knew and how he had a deceptive side to his character.

*Regret.* Teachers also wrote about the lack of basic necessity and its effects on her students, *they cannot afford to stop and get bottled water. Some students want my left over water in my bottle. I have to say no because of sanitary reasons. Their feelings are hurt* (15, 2014). The participant has compassion to the lack of access to basic needs in her students and how she was not able to help them.

*Fulfillment.* *However, through my reflections, I have this new outlook of my life. Experiences such as: marriage, parenthood, college, work, and even the act of ageing have helped to build this view of life. It seems to me that these events have been taken from the pages of a book. Like a book, it has all of the story elements. As cliché as it sounds, I now see that these pivotal moments of my life have developed into individual chapters in my "book of life".* Here, the writer finds contentment with her accomplishments and she looks forward to many more. The positive outlook about life helps her be fulfilled and live life well (4, 2014).

Next we coded the data for categories by clustering several themes (see figure 3).

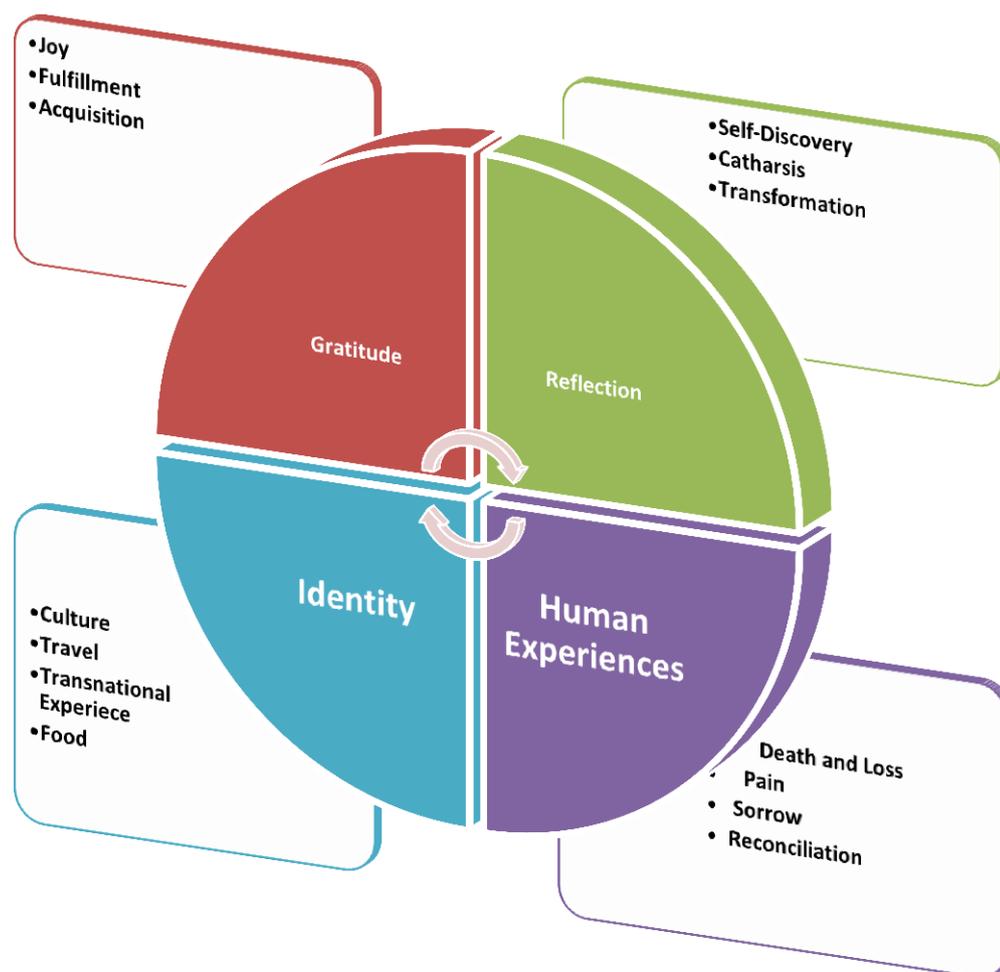


Figure 3: Categories

The following table lists the four different categories evident in the data (see table 4). The four predominant categories were *gratitude*, *reflection*, *human experience*, and *identity*. The following section also provides the reader with explanation of the selected categories.

Several writers expressed through their personal narratives how they constructed an identity of their own. Various areas such as culture, travel, food, transnational experiences, and code switching were used to negotiate identities. The declaration such as “I am Mexican...” reiterates the writer’s confidence in accepting her identity. Travel is not just passage from one place to another, but a learning experience to some writers such as institute participant 19. According to her, travel can deconstruct certain myths and misconceptions that people hold in their hearts, ...*you are forced to confront your old beliefs and understandings about life...* This writer is negotiating her positionality and wondering if she must let go of the baggage that she held in her heart. The personal narratives also indicated the feeling of gratitude to different aspects in life. Travel gives this writer an opportunity to discover herself.

Two of the teachers attributed their success to the professional development opportunity through the San Antonio Writing Project. Others discussed their indebtedness to all the happy events and people they have in their life. Several others expressed their happiness about their family members. Foods help in identity construction according to this narrative, *Tortillas fix everything. One day I will teach you how to make tortillas for your family...* (20, 2014)

Transnational experiences where the writer had the opportunity to travel from one country to another taught her how not to let go of her roots and take pride in the ownership, *My Rio Grande's water has never settled. For thirty-five years it has gathered memories, artifacts, and symbols to carry them east, initiating in the Sun City to eventually collect in the Alamo City. San Antonio, Texas is where I am now, but my heart and my identity is made up of pieces of my past, which still thrive in the bustling waters of my Rio Grande...* (7, 2014). This participant is engaging in an internal conversation so she can accept where she is originally from and how she takes pride in that negotiated space.

Institute participants wrote about interspersing two languages while speaking. This writer considers her ability to code-switch is what transnational students engage in and she anticipates a new person because of this reality, *once such memory is my first day of school, where my Spanish speaking background crashed into my English-speaking future for the first time. It was then when I realized that my culture and family practices would soon intermix, transform, and create new ways of being* (7, 2014).

The following table lists the themes and four categories with exemplars from several of the San Antonio Writing Project Invitational Summer Project Writers' Narratives. The writers are identified with numbers.

Table 4: Categories and Quotations

1. Identity	Exemplars
(a) Culture	I'm a Mexican woman, born and mostly raised who defies the stereotype of a Mexican for many people; I am not short, brown, or have an accent. In fact, I am fair skinned, have blonde hair, and green eyes. Another norm I break is that I'm well educated yet deeply enjoy cursing and have a growing collection of beautiful tattoos... "Babe, I think I have ojo," I said to him one day. The befuddled look on his face begged an explanation. Apparently, I had never mentioned ojo before. Try explaining the evil eye and how an egg rub down and prayer cure this ailment to someone who grew up in the Northeast in the town of Bethlehem, PA. This was going to be a challenge (3)
(b) Travel	Something amazing happens when you travel. As you see new sights, you are forced to confront your old beliefs and understandings about life... My ancestors left Russia, the Ukraine and Eastern Europe in the late 1800's because of the pogroms, violence and Anti-Semitism that were directed at the Jews. There was no love of Russia among my family. I grew up during the cold war when Russia was America's enemy. My feelings about Russia were complicated and I had no identification with the country. My knowledge of Russia was limited to the samovars and the nesting dolls that my Grandmothers had in their houses. The samovars were a way to heat water... I grew up thinking I was the only one I knew who had such white skin with such dark brown hair. In St. Petersburg, I saw many people who looked like me. I remembered other Russian influences in my life such as the borsht (beet soup) my Grandmother's served or Ms. Sybil, my Russian ballet teacher with whom I spent many years taking ballet lessons (19)
(c) Food	Being part of the Mexican American culture a woman takes pride in how well she can make homemade arroz, menudo, and tamales. Food is an integral part of our culture. It is present at every family gathering from birthday parties to funerals. Visiting family members expect a home cooked meal when they to come for a visit. Whenever I visited my tia's house they tried to feed me.

	<p>“Tersita, que quieres comer?” “You look too skinny.” They would say. I did not mind though because I loved their cooking... “Tortillas fix everything. One day I will teach you how to make tortillas for your family” She said. I knew that it was a rite of passage into womanhood. I knew that one day I would be a part of that group of women in the kitchen (20)</p>
(d) Transnational Experiences	<p>A river shares two living worlds such as past and present, success and failure, old and young, English and Spanish. Nestled between the United States and Mexico is my Rio Grande, and growing up in El Paso, Texas was like looking at this bustling river as a massive living zipper. For me, two diverse worlds have oftentimes either come together or have been cut apart by my Rio Grande... My Rio Grande’s water has never settled. For thirty-five years it has gathered memories, artifacts, and symbols to carry them east, initiating in the Sun City to eventually collect in the Alamo City. San Antonio, Texas is where I am now, but my heart and my identity is made up of pieces of my past, which still thrive in the bustling waters of my Rio Grande...(7)</p>
(e) Code-switching	<p>Once such memory is my first day of school, where my Spanish speaking background crashed into my English-speaking future for the first time. It was then when I realized that my culture and family practices would soon intermix, transform, and create new ways of being. What was this new world, this American world that I was sheltered from for five long years? It was as if solid grounded rocks were splitting the waters of my Rio Grande (7)</p>
<b>2. Gratitude</b>	
(a) Professional Development and Scaffolding	<p>These days it is common to hear “have an attitude of gratitude.” I agree. For example, gratitude is what I have as a member of the 2014 class of the San Antonio Writer’s Project (SAWP) and to have been awarded a SAWP scholarship humbled me (2)</p> <p>So to the San Antonio Writing Project class of 2014, I want to thank you for being an incredible group to work with. I learned so much from you and all of you have helped me do the growing I so desperately needed. To the teachers of the group, I’m inspired by and in awe of the amazing things you do with your students. To the non-teachers, I’m so glad I was able to experience your extraordinary writing talent and can’t help but to wonder if maybe one day you’ll return to SAWP but next time as the visiting authors (21)</p> <p>I have learned a great deal through our interactions on how to provide constructive criticism and instill the value of rethinking problematic areas without losing hope. I have also learned how not to dismiss my students’ serendipity. I flourished because you took me under your wing and guided me in completing a difficult and daunting doctoral program. By May of 2014, I was a fully-grown flower with a PhD; I now have become a productive, versatile, confident, and grateful teacher. Here I am again at the Summer Institute conducting a study with you. I keep coming back to you, but I know that in doing so, I continue to grow under your guidance (17)</p>
(b) Life	<p>Being grateful is a daily choice and I have many things to be thankful for in my life. First, I have been married to my best friend for twenty-one years and have two wonderful sons. The three men in my life are loving and fun to be around. In fact, living with three men is never boring! It’s sort of like being in a fraternity year round except I’m the house mother. Fishing, camping, hunting, and basketball are the norm. Discussions at the dinner table may revolve around nature, trucks, or technology. Never about Downton Abbey (2)</p>

	Classmates convinced me that this young freshman Marco, was a father (15)
(c) Family	Adorning a wall in his house are pieces of memorabilia that he has collected throughout his career. Uniform patches, captain badges, and retired helmets are among the many things. In the middle of the wall, is The Firefighters Prayer. He doesn't know it, but that is his daughter's favorite piece. Every day when he goes on shift she reads from it, praying faithfully the lines: Enable me to be alert, and hear the weakest shout, quickly and efficiently to put the fire out. I find extraordinary selflessness in a man who has dedicated over thirty years of his life to protecting and serving others. He calls himself a firefighter, others call him a hero, and I proudly call him my dad (21)
<b>3. Reflection</b>	
(a) Self-Discovery	Certain experiences in my life such as taking courses at UTSA and teaching have helped me to develop and refine the ability to reflect on situations (20) Part of growing up is not only learning to take care of yourself, but also learning to share your burden with others who help to lighten your load (1) He wanted 2 points on his final grade and he asked why he could not be given those points. I question if I did the right thing given how much he gave of himself and how much he taught the class (15) I wonder who will remember me and my stories when I close my eyes (18)
(b) Catharsis	She is truly incredible. She has, over the last twenty years, gotten her GED, "In English because I'm in America," been a successful business owner, learned to play the piano, witnessed me get tattoos, "I didn't expect a tattoo shop to be so clean and people so friendly," and she even attended her gay niece's wedding in New York. I have raised my mother well (3) I loved hearing about each person! I loved it! When we consider the intricate lives of everyone in the room, it is astounding and overwhelming. There are 20 complete and different worlds in this room. Each person contains an entire world, different from our own, inside their head. This is an extremely important fact to consider when looking out our classroom of children (5) Death- so fleeting. So final. And yet, it's funny how it seems to linger. Perhaps it's not Death that lingers, but everything it leaves in its wake. The memories of those who have moved on. The reminders of words left unsaid. The fear of facing it personally. Or the acceptance that it is inevitable. We all experience it eventually...it's part of the cycle of life. There's no avoiding it (6)
(c) Transformation	I wanted to experience something with her that was of interest to me, and since I knew she wouldn't get a tattoo with me, I asked her to go get her nose pierced with me. She agreed. We went to a well-known tattoo shop, and she sat nervously. She saw me go first. It wasn't so bad. She sat in the chair and went through it like a champ. That was three years ago, and while my nose piercing is long gone, my mother still wears her and is proud to share the story with anyone who asks (3)
<b>4. Human Experiences</b>	

(a) Death and Loss	After having his body transported to Alice, Texas to be buried beside my mother, we all packed quickly and headed south. We spent the night at my sister-in-law's house in George West, then went the next day to plan the funeral at my sister's house in Alice. After planning with the Methodist pastor, I found myself sitting in the living room alone. I remember hearing the men in the kitchen laughing about something. Then some church people came in the front door, shaking my sister's hand and saying how sorry they were for her loss. I heard an old man say, "I know how dissatisfied he was. Maybe he is happier now (5)
(b) Pain	Death- so fleeting. So final. And yet, it's funny how it seems to linger. Perhaps it's not Death that lingers, but everything it leaves in its wake. The memories of those who have moved on. The reminders of words left unsaid. The fear of facing it personally. Or the acceptance that it is inevitable. We all experience it eventually...it's part of the cycle of life. There's no avoiding it (6)
(c) Sorrow	Bo doesn't have a clue why his wife's brain got bashed that July. No clue about his mom or little sister getting murdered by a drunk another July. But sometimes when he looks in the eye of others, sometimes he recognizes something, some suffering beyond his own (9)
(d) Reconciliation	<p>What would it be like... if we lived in a world where children didn't have to be sent away from family to save their lives What must it be like... to live in a world full of peace (12)</p> <p>Incidentally, Mrs. Sanchez later had a change of heart and fully restored her husband's ride. I'm not sure how this ranks in the seriousness of Catholic or Protestant sins. All I know is Mrs. Sanchez was Mom's friend. I guess if it were left up to Mom, she might consider that no sin was committed at all (14)</p> <p>There are times in all of our lives when we question why things happen. It is not good enough that they just happen. We need an explanation. If we are lucky, we sometimes get the answers to our questions. If not, we are stuck reliving those moments over and over again trying to find meaning. And even though the years pass and our lives become filled with many more moments, something will suddenly trigger that memory and once again, we begin to question (4)</p>

## Findings

Through this qualitative study, we found that the San Antonio Writing Project's Invitational Summer Institute participants wrote and later shared writing topics, testimonial texts, identity memoirs, self-discovery narratives, and family stories. Several teachers developed confidence in writing about sensitive topics and later decided to share them in public. The analyses of data indicated that the Invitational Summer Institute's format and the participants' lived experiences both in the classrooms and in their personal lives encouraged others to delve into writing. They shared personal narratives that might have evoked fear of exposure, ridicule, or stigma in a less supportive environment. The narratives suggested that teachers at all levels share common experiences about life and welcomed a space to express their insights.

The teachers discussed their attitudes about writing and the teaching of writing. Several

participants indicated that they would not have written about these topics in another setting or shared them publicly. However, they felt comfortable and confident to read them at the institute because according to participant five, “*At the institute, everyone is intelligently involved, optimistic, and not critical. We all have a common goal; everyone is interested in what you write and share...The participants of the institute did understand my suffering through my writing*” (2014). The Invitational Summer Institute’s design was one of the major influences on teacher’s attitudes on writing those sensitive personal narratives. The institute’s setting clearly laid out the expectations of a supportive and nurturing classroom for teachers through establishing a community of practice (Wenger, 2004).

Another contextual component at the Invitational Summer Institute was the time allocated for writing, rewriting, revising, and editing the texts crafted. The teachers felt they had time to compose, confer, review, and edit before reading to the entire institute. Some of the teachers even acknowledged that listening to others’ experiences provided them with inspiration and with writing topics. When they heard similar stories, the teachers who had dismissed their own experiences began to rekindle their interests in sharing their personal narratives that they had buried in their hearts.

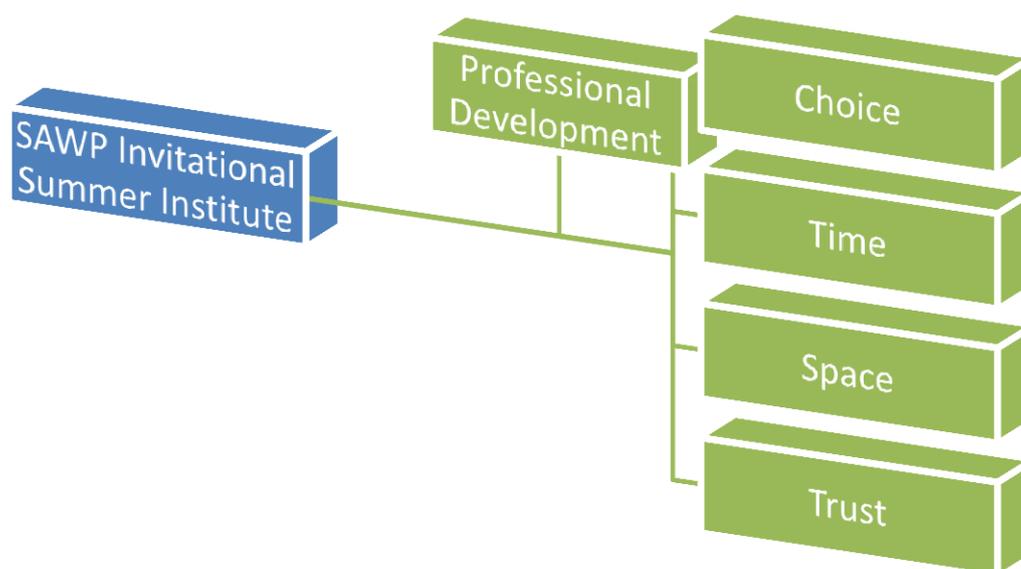


Figure 4: SAWP Invitational Summer Institute

### Member Checking

Reading these narratives and conducting member checking with the authors of the personal stories provided new information to the researchers. Our original questions were ‘why would teachers choose to write on the topics that they chose to write on?’ For example, this participant wrote on how “Most children don’t know themselves as writers” (5, 2014). Some of the writers encouraged others at the institute to express their narratives freely in writing and reading through their teacher demonstration and their own stories. One writer was particularly encouraged to disclose the gothic family story that she had been thinking of

writing for twenty years. One instance that facilitated sharing an immodest topic was when a story revealed to the institute about the dark side of one of her friends, *“This man who had inspired so many young people to become teachers, who had been my friend, and who had worked with great confidence and renown all over the world was a pedophile who had hidden in plain sight for nearly forty years”* (8, 2014).

Another writer explores her relationships, which was difficult for a woman of her age and comments, *He’s not intimidated by my independence, he knows that peonies are my favorite flower, knows what kind of wine to bring over when I’ve had a particularly stressful day... He has seen me at my best and always sees me at my worst and still insists that I am just about the most beautiful thing he’s ever seen. He gets me and for now this is enough. I am blessed and life is good* (2, 2014). The Invitational Summer Institute provided several of the writers with a safe and comfortable space to rethink on their human experiences including their joys, tribulations, and biases to later write and share their personal narratives (1, 3, 7, & 11, 2014). For some, it was this quality time to think, conceptualize, and later write to share with other teachers at the institute was a gift. For others, it was the fear of expression given that families may be scared of writers in the household because of fear of exposure, ridicule, and stigma (19, 2014).

A few other participants expressed their apprehensions about writing the stories they wrote at the institute (2, 6, 9, & 20, 2014). They would not have had the courage and strength to write and share their family stories in a public forum. However, one of the institute writers shared a teaching demonstration that encouraged writer 19 to share the dark secrets of her family so others could learn from her life experiences. She also wanted to purge it and she found the SAWP as a safe space for sharing. Writer 18 also confirms her anxiety about sharing with outsiders, *“I would not normally have shared these stories with non-family members, but the Summer Institute fellows become your family and you feel comfortable sharing stories with them. It is almost like you think they should **already** know the stories because they **are** family. Being a participant opens you up to sharing more of yourself, and has made me less apprehensive about writing to share with others”* (2014).

Sharing the obstacles and learning from those experiences were referenced by several institute writers (2, 7, 9, 14, 15, & 19, 21, 2014). Others agreed that teachers should consider writing and sharing about their own difficulties so teachers can relate to the tribulations of their students and how writing is a literacy tool to explore issues related to social justice (14, 15, 17, 19, & 20, 2014). Writer 14 confirms this common sharing among teachers and students, *I believe storytelling is an act of social justice, because stories make us aware of the obstacles we have faced and what we have in common with others who have faced similar, and dissimilar, obstacles* (2014).

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Through the analysis of the invitational summer institute writers’ narratives and member checking, the researchers were able to identify three key points – (a) Safety, (b) trust, and (c) time to write.

The researchers argue here that once the invitational summer institute professional development participants become aware of the safe space to share, time to engage in personal writing assignments, and the trust established at the institute, the participants may be comfortable taking this learning into their classrooms. Young writers with little writing

experience can grow with a teacher creating a safe place for children to express their thoughts in writing. Students may open up if the teacher creates a trustworthy space in the classroom. Finally, if the teacher provides time for students to think and later compose, the students may gradually learn to write confidently. It takes extensive work for both teachers and students to establish trust, safety, and space, but if the strategies are implemented, these teachers may be able to help their students become confident writers over time.

Future research areas include the following.

1. What does it mean for other writing projects or teachers engaged in professional development?
2. When do teachers become fully engaged writers and teachers of writing?
3. How do teachers of writing integrate the knowledge they formed at the invitational summer institute into their classrooms?
4. How do these teachers take their new sense of themselves as writers into their classrooms to scaffold their students?

It was evident through the data that writing teachers must become writers themselves. Also, in order to help their students become confident writers, teachers must be able to design curriculum based on professional development opportunities. Teachers also must encourage their students to write regularly, consistently, and coherently with contextualized writing assignments in all of their classes.

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## Appendix A: Announcement

To 6/9/14  
The San Antonio Writing Project Summer Institute Fellows, 2014

From  
Dr. Kalpana M. Iyengar & Dr. Roxanne Henkin

Dr. Henkin and Dr. Iyengar are conducting a study on the narratives you write for the weekly writing assignments at the summer institute. We request your willingness to participate in this study. It is entirely voluntary and you are not obligated to be in the study if you choose not to be part of it. You may withdraw from the study at any point of time. Your identity will not be revealed; we will assign you with numbers instead.

**Tentative Topic:** *San Antonio Writing Project Summer Institute participants' Choice of Topics for Weekly Writing Assignments and the Cultural Relevance of the Topics*

**Investigators:** Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar and Dr. Roxanne Henkin

**Contact:** [Roxanne.henkin@utsa.edu](mailto:Roxanne.henkin@utsa.edu) or [yadugiri@hotmail.com](mailto:yadugiri@hotmail.com)

You are required to write weekly narratives that you will present every Thursday during the open sharing session at the institute. You are free to write on topics of your choice. You can also choose one of these narratives to be published in the annual SAWP anthology. Dr. Iyengar and Dr. Henkin are interested in exploring your narratives and are conducting a study on your weekly writing assignments. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will do all of the following:

1. Submit your narrative piece once a week (on Thursday after you read it in the institute)
2. Fill out a post survey questionnaire if you were part of the study
3. Be willing to answer a few questions in an interview
4. Sign the enclosed consent form and submit it to Dr. Iyengar in class today (6/9/14)

Thank you in advance for your consideration and participation

Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar and Dr. Roxanne Henkin

## Authors

### Dr. Kalpana Mukunda Iyengar

After the completion of her Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching at the University of Texas at San Antonio, USA, with a dissertation on *Asian Indian American Students' Expression of Culture and Identity Construction Through Narrative Writing*, she is currently working on postdoctoral research and has published articles in peer-reviewed journals. Dr. Iyengar has taught and designed curriculum for the Intensive English and English as a Second Language. She is also involved in a Texas Education Agency grant funded teacher development program for the South San and Harlandale Independent School Districts under the guidance of Dr. Roxanne Henkin. She also organizes the *Kahani* Project for students of Asian Indian origin annually. Her areas of research interest include multicultural/transnational identity construction, multi-modal teaching and learning, literacy acquisition through transmediation, Asian Indian performing arts, teaching writing, wikispaces and technology integration in teaching writing and literacy, and continued professional development. Currently, she teaches at the Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching Department at the UTSA in San Antonio, TX, USA. Dr. Iyengar (Co-director) and Dr. Henkin (Director) are taking the San Antonio Writing Project to Devsanskruithi Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar, India, in summer of 2015.

**Dr. Roxanne Henkin**, Professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Learning & Teaching at The University of Texas at San Antonio, earned her doctorate from Northern Illinois University and has 18 years of teaching experience in public schools. She then taught at National-Louis University in Chicago before joining the faculty at The University of Texas at San Antonio in 2003. Dr. Henkin's research interests include multiliteracies and multimodal digital literacies, confronting bullying through literacy, critical literacy for social justice, writing process and instruction, and in-service staff development in literacy. She has published many articles and two books, *Who's Invited to Share: Using Literacy to Teach for Equity and Social Justice* and *Confronting Bullying: Literacy as a Tool for Character Education*, both published by Heinemann. She was also the lead co-editor of the journal *Voices from the Middle* (2006-2011) published by the National Council of Teachers of English. Dr. Henkin directs the San Antonio Writing Project, which is associated with the National Writing Project containing 200 sites across the country. The National Council of Teachers of English awarded Dr. Henkin the 2009 Halle Award for significant contributions to literacy at the middle level. She was also awarded the UTSA 2009 President's Distinguished Achievement Award for Community Service and the 2012 Headliner Education Award from the Association for Women in Communication, San Antonio Texas. Dr. Henkin helped to create the Limpopo Writing Project in South Africa, led the first Summer Institute in January 2009, the third writing institute in 2011 and continues with fund-raising activities to support this important project. Dr. Henkin was Dr. Iyengar's dissertation chair.

