“YOU CAN’T SIT WITH US”: AN EXPLORATION
OF MICRO COMMUNITIES
IN ENGLISH 30

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in
English

by
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This thesis takes a case study approach to acknowledge the existence of micro communities in classrooms and to highlight the many purposes these communities serve for students as an important part of their learning experience. The term micro community is an adaptation of the term community of practice, which has been studied extensively by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. By observing the micro community formed by three students in a section of English 30, we can better understand the kinds of support that students need from each other and how we, as teachers, can build practices into our classrooms that allow for such beneficial peer-to-peer interactions.

In the introduction, I will introduce the three students whose micro community I observed and in the following chapter I will review the scholarship on concepts like identity construction, participation, and the underlife phenomenon in order to develop my definition for the term micro community. Chapter 3 will outline my methods for conducting my research, as well as my methods for recording data and Chapter 4 includes my interpretations of that data. Using the terms and concepts discussed in the review of the literature, I draw connections between the
theories of learning discussed in Chapter 2 and the practices that I witnessed students engaging in throughout the semester. My final chapter serves as a space where I imagine ways in which micro communities can be built and maintained with intention in college writing classrooms.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Michelle: “Do you want to work on the same essay so that we have the same general idea of like what to do?”

Bethany: “I don’t even know what essay we have to do?”

Michelle: “Well, like there’s two essays so we have to read and”—

Bethany: (interrupting): “Wait, there’s four.”

Michelle: “There’s four? I thought there were only two?”

Bethany: “There’s four.”

Michelle: “Ugh.”

Bethany: “There’s four and a video, so...” (laughing).

I smiled as the girls talked back and forth, suddenly oblivious to the fact that they were in class and twelve other people could hear them. Ryan, their mentor, looked at me nervously¹. Bethany and Michelle were constantly starting a conversation with him and then excluding him from that conversation as they tried to work out which part of their assignment they needed help with while the rest of the group observed. Other students looked disinterested and, again, I smiled as I recorded this small moment in my notebook.

This piece of a conversation between two first-year composition students was a common occurrence in their English 30 class as, together, they tried to understand their assignments.

English 30 is an adjunct workshop at Chico State that is taken in conjunction with English 130,

¹ I would like to thank Ryan, whose name has been changed for the purposes of this research, for graciously inviting me into his community for a semester and for indulging my eccentric (and occasionally distracting) notetaking processes during my time in his classroom.
Chico’s version of first-year composition. The relationship between English 30 and English 130 is one that has evolved over the past several decades. Judith Rodby and Tom Fox led the change in pedagogy that occurred in the Chico State English department in the early 1990s. In “Basic Work and Material Acts,” Rodby and Fox explain, “seven years ago [1993], we eliminated basic writing courses because of our commitment to broadening student access to the university and its ways of using language and literacy” (84). All first-year students were mainstreamed into what is now called English 130. This course, or an equivalent, is a graduation requirement.

Students who enter the university with low scores on the English Placement Test (EPT)^2 are enrolled in both English 130 and English 30. English 30 serves as a workshop with approximately ten students to one mentor (usually an upperclassman or graduate student in the English department). The course is credit/no credit and requires the participation of every student in the room; the only way to not receive credit for the course is to miss more than six classes throughout the semester (the equivalent of missing three weeks of the sixteen week semester)^3. Rodby and Fox admit that “this is not the ideal arrangement. Low-scoring students are still required to attend a class for which they do not receive graduation credits, and they are still separated out from the other students taking first-year writing” (88). Unfortunately, this is still true some thirty years later, but this model has opened the door for new understandings of what goes on in small classrooms.

Bethany and Michelle (the two students quoted above) realized very quickly that they were in the same English 130 and English 30 classes and they did their best to use this opportunity to their advantage. The two sat side-by-side nearly every class period (unless

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^2 The most recent failing score on the EPT is 147. All incoming students who score below 147 are required to take English 130 and English 30 in the same semester and students are encouraged to complete the two courses in their first two semesters at Chico State.

^3 See Appendix A
separated during the workshop by their mentor, Ryan) and always signed up to bring in the same assignments for help. After observing the two for a few weeks, it became clear to me that Bethany and Michelle had created something of a bubble within the class. Although Ryan did his best to make sure that all of the students felt included in the community they had created, Bethany and Michelle seemed to have created their own exclusive group within the larger community.

The two could often be found whispering to each other and comparing their work, their scores, and their opinions of their English 130 class while the rest of the group focused on something else. It did not appear as though their behavior was meant to be distracting and they were friendly toward the rest of the group, but Bethany and Michelle were part of a secret team of two. After struggling to find the right word to describe this phenomenon, I decided on the term “micro community,” which is meant to describe a community that exists within a community of practice. Bethany and Michelle’s community followed most of the rules that had been established for the larger community, but they were somehow different from the rest of the group. They had something in common that set them apart (the same English 130 instructor) and that encouraged them to work together more closely than other members of the larger community.

The community that Bethany and Michelle had formed became even more interesting when Ryan drew a third student, Miguel, into the community. Miguel was in a section of English 130 taught by the same instructor as Bethany and Michelle, which made him a clear fit for the community; however, the community suddenly became crowded for the three students with the inclusion of Miguel. While Bethany and Michelle had spent the first six weeks or so of the

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4 A community of practice, to borrow Etienne Wenger’s term, is an (in)formal group of people who share a common interest and who turn to their community for support as they learn more about this interest. I will develop this idea further in the following chapter.
semester developing habits that both considered appropriate and helpful for their time in English 30, Miguel had sat on the sidelines, refusing to participate. When Ryan pushed him into the community, Bethany and Michelle found themselves in a position where they needed to decide whether to show a new member how to behave or allow the community they had formed to dissolve.

The choices these students made during their time in English 30 led me to several questions about best practices for supporting students and student communities, as well as the identity work that goes into creating and maintaining a group based on mutual goals in school. What advantages might micro communities provide to students and instructors? How can we (instructors) help students form communities intentionally? And do we even need to help? In Bethany and Michelle’s case, the micro community formed organically and the inclusion of a third student briefly derailed the community’s progress. So, what do we do with these communities of students?

This thesis takes a case study approach to acknowledge the existence of micro communities and to highlight the many purposes these communities serve for students as an important part of their learning experience. By looking at the micro community formed by Bethany and Michelle, we can better understand the kinds of support that students need from each other and how we, as teachers, can build practices into our classrooms that allow for such beneficial peer-to-peer interactions. My goal is to give further evidence to the argument that working together is collaborating, not cheating, and that allowing students the time to talk to each other in class does not take away from the “real” work of the course.

In the following chapter, I will review the scholarship on concepts like identity construction, participation, and the underlife phenomenon in order to develop my definition for
the term *micro community*. Chapter 3 will outline my methods for conducting my research, as well as my methods for recording and interpreting data and Chapter 4 includes my interpretations of that data. Using the terms and concepts discussed in the review of the literature, I draw connections between the theories of learning discussed in Chapter 2 and the practices that I witnessed students engaging in throughout the semester. My final chapter serves as a space where I imagine ways in which micro communities can be built and maintained with intention in college writing classrooms. I also suggest a few readings that may be beneficial to both new and returning mentors in the English 30 program who are interested in building community in their classrooms.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to understand what I mean by the term “micro community,” one needs to first understand several principles of learning: these include community and identity construction, resistance and participation, and the underlife phenomenon. Together, these principles have led to my understanding of micro communities as the existence of a smaller community within a larger community, but has its own rules of conduct and requirements for membership that are outside of those of the larger community. If we accept my definition of a micro community as a community within a community, then we must also accept the fact that micro communities exist everywhere, including classrooms. These communities are an untapped resource for teachers that have the ability to give students a great deal of control over their learning experiences.

Community and Identity

In nearly every scenario I can imagine, a novice requires the help of a more-experienced peer in order to successfully learn how to do something new. Sometimes, novices and more-experienced peers come together in informal groups that are referred to as communities of practice. In the introduction to Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity, Wenger explains that these groups are not necessarily formal gatherings with consistent, established membership. They are our families, our social circles, our cohorts at work, etc. and they are “so informal and so pervasive that they rarely come into explicit focus, but for the same reasons they are also quite familiar” (6-7). At any given time, one person is a member of several
different communities of practice from different areas of life and their membership in these groups is not always permanent.

Similar to micro communities, communities of practice often begin organically as two or three people try to understand something and these groups grow according to the environment in which they began. Unlike micro communities, however, membership for communities of practice is fluid, with members coming and going as the need for assistance or support arises. In a micro community, membership appears to be far more consistent. Membership in the micro community that I observed only wavered when the mentor, Ryan, added a third member to the existing group. From the first week of the semester, Bethany and Michelle dedicated themselves to their informal community as full members.

For both micro communities and communities of practice, the qualities needed in order to become a member are often rigid (yet unwritten) rules. Although the Bethany and Michelle, two of the students that I observed, never spoke openly about rules for belonging, it was clear to me that they followed a set of norms that had evolved over time. For this micro community, for example, one such rule or norm was that a member needed to have the same English 130 instructor. Another norm was their decision to trust in their mentor’s expertise as a writing mentor by consistently turning to him for help and for feedback on their writing in class. Some of these norms came from coincidence (such as having the same English 130 instructor) and others came from recognizing similar personality traits in one another, which I will describe in further detail in future chapters. These shared identity traits are part of what drives the creation of both micro communities and communities of practice.

Alongside Robert Brooke and Rick Evans, Ruth Mirtz studies student identities as she sees them in her writing courses at Florida State University. In her chapter “A Conversation
about Small Groups,”⁵ Mirtz explains:

What we do and say is largely determined by who we are, who we think we are, who we are trying to be, who we wish we were. Many of these “identity” factors take on a presence in written or spoken discourse. The need for constant direct dialogue in a writing class comes partly from the needs of writers who are trying to construct texts which simultaneously express their selves and relate to other selves, within or without. (172)

In other words, identity is projected, internalized, and fluid. Our identities change constantly based on what Robert Brooke refers to as the “information games” in “Underlife and Writing Instruction.” Projected identity, or the identity assigned an individual by other people, “is largely the product of the ‘information games’ that people play (consciously and unconsciously) while interacting with each other” (Brooke 142). Based on what each person chooses to reveal about himself in each context, Brooke explains, “we develop a sense of that person's identity” (142). As our own identities are constantly shifting, our understanding of the identities that we perceive in others is constantly evolving. The details that get shared or withheld in a classroom environment, for example, help shape the ways in which peers and instructors interact as members of a classroom community. Examples of students participating in these “information games” will be explained in further detail in my findings.

Several aspects of our identities shift as we engage with different communities and identity becomes a performance put on for those around us. In “Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition,” Melanie Kill explains:

It is by engaging in the generic actions and interactions that are valued in particular communities that we perform and develop identities appropriate to the places and spaces we want to occupy. Particular genres and relationships between genres mediate our interactions in these social spaces and, in doing so, shape both our presentations of ourselves to others and our readings of others' selves. (217)

⁵ This chapter is part of a larger work, titled Small Groups in Writing Workshops: Invitations to a Writer’s Life, which is coauthored by Brooke, Evans, and Mirtz.
In many ways, our identities are performances that we put on for ourselves and for others as we try to adjust ourselves to fit in to a certain environment or community. Luckily, everyone else in that environment or community is simultaneously adjusting their selves and signs begin to emerge that dictate what is appropriate.

These performances of selves happen everywhere and such examples of identity construction have been studied extensively by scholars in various fields. In the early 1990s, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger studied the ethnographic research that had been published thus far on cultures with a tradition of apprenticeship and its effects on identity. The two researchers studied cultures with a history of apprenticeship as examples of communities of practice and studied the identity transformations that community members experienced as they underwent the apprenticeship process. In the cases discussed in Lave and Wenger’s research, which includes a group of Yucatan midwives, U.S. Navy quartermasters, and an Alcoholics Anonymous group, the apprenticeship model serves as a way for existing members (old-timers) to bring new members (newcomers) into the fold. The collection, titled Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (1991), includes Carole Cain’s work with an Alcoholics Anonymous group. Cain defines identity as “the way a person understands and views himself, and is viewed by others, a perception of self which is fairly constant" (qtd. in Lave & Wenger 80-81).

Cain describes the Alcoholics Anonymous community as a group that is made up of apprentices (referred to as newcomers) and masters (referred to as old-timers). She writes:

An apprentice alcoholic attends several meetings a week, spending that time in the company of near-peers and adepts, those whose practices and identities are the community of A.A. At these meetings old-timers give testimony about their drinking past and the course of the process becomes sober. In addition to "general meetings," where old-timers may tell polished, hour-long stories -- months and years in the making -- of their lives as alcoholics, there are also smaller "discussion meetings," which tend to focus on a single aspect of what in the end will be a part of the reconstructed life story. (qtd. in Lave & Wenger 80)
In this example, newcomers are brought into the community of nondrinking alcoholics and shown how to behave within the space by a group of more-experienced peers. The practices of the old-timers dictate the norms of the space and serve as an identity model for newcomers to practice inhabiting.

This example of the role of apprenticeship in forming communities of practice highlights the biggest difference between communities of practice and micro communities: communities of practice often consist of members with varying levels of expertise while micro communities are made up solely of novices who are working towards the goal of becoming experts together. As college freshmen, Bethany and Michelle were both novices in the world of college-level writing and they worked together to further their understanding of how to write at the level that was expected of them by their English 130 instructor. While they valued and relied on their mentor’s expertise, Ryan was not a member of Bethany and Michelle’s micro community, making this community different from the communities of practice described by Lave and Wenger. Therefore, the term community of practice served as a starting point for my micro community.

As established by Wenger, communities of practice exist in places where groups of people come together with shared goals or interests. In the university, communities of practice can be found in many classrooms as students and faculty members collaborate; however, not all collaborations seem to serve the purpose of extending each other’s learning. In many cases, small groups of students talking in class can appear to be either cheating or distracting instead of productive collaboration.

Resistance and Participation

Resistance and participation are familiar concepts in the university. Both take on different forms and can be easily misinterpreted by instructors. A superficial example of resistance in
school might be the student who sits in the back of the classroom or the one who only comes to
class to take the midterm and final exams. Other forms of resistance include tardiness, speaking
out of turn, or any other attempt to ignore the norms created by the instructor of the class;
however, not all student resistance is intentionally negative.

In her chapter, “A Conversation about Small Groups,” Ruth Mirtz cautions teachers
from being quick to judge student behavior as “good” or “bad.” She writes:

“On-task” behavior is a trap, we have found, and just as problematic as defining a “good”
student as one who plays our games according to our rules. What appears to be on-task or
off-task is often the opposite; what students are learning is more important to us than
whether they follow our instructions to the letter. Some groups need larger amounts of
seemingly “off-task” talk in order to respond meaningfully to texts. (176)

This “off-task” behavior that Mirtz describes may be a form of student resistance, but she
acknowledges that, if students are still learning and stretching their abilities, these behaviors can
lead to more positive learning experiences than if students did exactly what she asked. Seeing
off-task behavior as a form of participation instead of a form of resistance is often difficult for
inexperienced mentors within the English 30 program to understand. Ryan, a first-time mentor in
Bethany and Michelle’s class, often confided in me that he was worried about the girls’ constant
talking, as though their side conversations were preventing them from learning with the rest of
the class. In my Findings Chapter, however, I will show that their conversations were actually
helping Bethany and Michelle learn rather than keeping them from learning.

As Mirtz asserts, in contrast to moments of resistance that seem to ignore the instructor’s
directions are moments of resistance that do follow the instructor’s directions. According to
Melanie Kill, “in order to give productive resistance a chance, we need also to address resistance
that works to maintain stability, not necessarily because that stability serves either individual or

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6 “A Conversation about Small Groups” is Chapter 7 in *Small Groups in Writing Workshops: Invitations to a
community interests, but simply because it is familiar and therefore comfortable” ("Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance” 216). For some students, like two of the three micro community members described in my findings, completing an assignment quickly, but without really engaging in it, was a quiet form of resistance that gave the appearance of compliance.

So how does an instructor learn to tell the difference between productive and resistant behaviors? How do we learn the difference between “on-task” behaviors that complete the assignment without really engaging in the material and “off-task” behaviors that lead students to deeper understandings of that material? Mirtz thinks about these behaviors and their effects on small groups of students by (tentatively) using the label “working.” She explains, “We often worry that a small group isn’t ‘working’ because they aren’t obediently following directions or because they don’t seem to care much for each other, and yet we see those students improving their writing as often and as much as the students in groups that do seem to value each other’s writing and enjoy each other’s company” (176). In other words, just as the term “resistance” is problematic, so are our attempts as instructors to label those moments of resistance as positive or negative.

In the same way that resistance takes on several (often misinterpreted) forms, so does participation in school. Participation is often measured quite simply: the student who raises his/her hand to speak in class is participating and the student who does not is not participating. Unfortunately, this narrow understanding of what it means to participate gives very little room for instructors to recognize those students who contribute to the class in other ways. What counts as participation is often pre-determined by those who are the “leaders” of a space. In school, that person is usually the instructor. When thinking about the ways in which students participate in
her small groups, Mirtz asks, “We need to constantly examine our own definition of ‘working’ when we talk about small groups: Do we mean following instructions, or working out differences, or helping improve their writing, or discovering how other writers work, or experimenting with their identity as a writer?” (177). All of these are ways of participating, but they do not fall under the “raise your hand and speak in class” definition of participation. Instead, these ways of participating help the community of students function as a community of practice that exists to help students become stronger writers, which is the true purpose of participating in that community.

In many communities of practice, the modes of participation that are appropriate in a particular community are determined by what Wenger refers to as “old-timers.” To return to the Alcoholics Anonymous example cited by Lave and Wenger, participation is dictated by the old-timers who show newcomers how to belong in their community of nondrinking alcoholics. Participation in this community takes on many forms: for example, "The contribution of an absolutely new member may be no more than one silent gesture -- picking up a white chip at the end of the meeting to indicate the intention not to take a drink during the next 24 hours (Cain n.d.)" (Lave & Wenger 80). Most members, however, participate by sharing personal stories, which, according to Cain, "is not something one learns through explicit teaching. Newcomers are not told how to tell their stories, yet most people who remain in A.A. learn to do this" (Cain qtd. by Lave & Wenger 82). Unlike in school, these modes of participation are not thought of as “good” or “bad.” They are simply behaviors that help the community reach its goal of helping alcoholics take control of their lives by breaking the pattern of drinking alcohol. A similar example of peers teaching others how to participate through modeling can be seen by members of the micro community described in my findings as a new member learns how to participate in
the group.

Underlife

Stemming from these conversations about resistance and participation in school is the phenomenon that Robert Brooke refers to as the “underlife.” According to “Underlife in Writing Instruction,” underlife “can be understood as the activities (or information games) individuals engage in to show that their identities are different from or more complex than the identities assigned them by organizational roles” (142). In school, students are expected to behave in very specific ways that have been dictated by the institution and by the instructor; these rules are very familiar to students: no cellphones, raise your hand if you have a comment, no food in class, etc. These roles that students are expected to engage in often provide instructors and peers with a very limited interpretation of student identities. Thinking back to how identity is often performative (Kill), the underlife allows students an opportunity to step outside their usual roles and show more of their personalities. Brooke goes on to say, “All these [underlife] activities, in short, allow the student to take a stance towards her participation in the classroom, and show that, while she can succeed in this situation, her self is not swallowed up by it. The interesting parts of herself, she seems to say, are being held in reserve” (148). In other words, the underlife is a student’s way of taking back some of his/her power as a member of a classroom community by deciding when to step outside of his/her established role.

Brooke asserts that the underlife is the ways in which students participate in a classroom and those forms of participation are directly tied to student identities. He goes on to explain that “student underlife primarily attempts to assert that the individuals who play the role of students

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7 Here, Brooke is thinking about participation more broadly -- how a student behaves as a member of the class. Participation includes whispering to friends while the teacher is speaking to the class or passing notes or finishing homework for another class. If the student is in the room, he/she is participating in the class in one way or another.
are not only students, that there is more to them than that. It is thus a contained form of underlife, a form which (as Goffman would say) attempts to exist within the existing structure without introducing too much friction” (151). The micro community described in future chapters of this thesis is an example of “contained underlife.” The members of this micro community demonstrate complex identities and seem to have no intention of disrupting the rest of the class. This community within a community serves the purpose of supporting a small group of students who have the same English 130 instructor and the members use each other’s expertise to help them succeed in their main English class.

According to Brooke, examples of student underlife fall under four major categories: first, students intentionally deviate from the instructor’s intended lesson plan in order to apply classroom ideas to topics outside of class; second, students comment on the roles taken on in the classroom; third, students make evaluations of classroom activities and voice those opinions to peers; finally, students divide their attention between the classroom activities and other activities (144-48). The third and fourth categories include behaviors that I saw happening in the English 30 classroom that I observed, so I will focus on these two for the purposes of this research. The third category of underlife involves private student evaluations of the instructor, the assignments, the course as a whole, etc. Brooke explains that these evaluations “allow the individual students to claim explicitly whether or not they accept the activity going on around them. Interestingly, most of these in-class comments expressed negative evaluations, even though formal student evaluations of the course showed most students thought this was the best writing course they’d ever taken” (147). The evaluations expressed by the students I observed of their shared English 130 class were also generally negative, although usually softened with a positive comment about their instructor as a human being. Interestingly, these negative evaluations appear to bond the
original micro community members and they use their dislike for the course and its instructor as fuel to encourage them to do well in the course.

The final category of Brooke’s underlife includes the art of multitasking. From the instructor’s perspective, multitasking may look like students finishing homework for other classes, reading and responding to emails, or checking in on social media sites. The behaviors that fall into the final category include “those private activities whereby an individual divides her attention between the class activity and something else” (148). The most common multitasking behaviors I saw in the micro community that I observed included side conversations about the English 130 course as well as comparing scores and methods for completing previous assignments. These last two categories of student underlife are the most similar to the micro community phenomenon that I discuss in my findings. The micro community members consistently split their time between the work that their mentor was asking them to engage in and the work that they were engaged in as a group.

Brooke’s final conclusions on underlife activities that he observed are that these activities are constantly occurring in school and that these occurrences should be viewed positively. He explains that, “even in the most docile class hour, such activities are constantly going on, and (significantly) they are usually connected to the class activities in some way. The students are developing their own stances towards class activity, not whispering about unrelated subjects like parties and dates as I had always assumed” (144). These activities help students participate in ways that are outside the scope of those behaviors modeled by the instructor and they help students create their own communities without the instructor’s permission. They are both a form of resistance and a form of participation with direct ties to community building and identity construction.
Together, the principles of learning discussed above have helped me better understand the micro community phenomenon that I witnessed in the English 30 classroom I observed and led to my definition of the term. Understanding community and identity construction in higher education has helped me to better understand the complexity of group dynamics as well as the difficulties that students face in deciding which role to play in a classroom setting. By redefining for myself what resistance and participation look like in a classroom, I am now able to recognize and better understand some of the moves incoming freshmen make in English 30 settings as they attempt to find their place in a new community. Finally, the underlife phenomenon ties together these ideas about identity and resistance and participation as they apply to interactions in school. I am reminded that a student’s projected identity in a classroom setting is not their full identity and that the “information games,” as described by Brooke, are never ending. In Chapter 4, my findings will outline examples of student interactions that highlight each of these frameworks and the final chapter will include recommendations for how instructors can use these micro communities to their advantage in future classes.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Before I was certain what aspects of English 30 I wanted to study, I began by inserting myself into a section of English 30 as a silent observer. This particular section of English 30 was led by a first-time mentor who I will refer to as Ryan. In addition to being a first-time mentor, Ryan was also in his first semester of the graduate program at Chico State. Ryan received two Bachelor degrees at Chico State (English and Philosophy) before returning to pursue his Masters. I have known Ryan as a peer for the past five years and he served his internship for English 431: Theory and Practice in Tutoring Composition in my section of English 30 in the Spring semester of 2014. I chose to observe Ryan’s class for a few reasons: first, he agreed to let me sit in his space and, second, none of his students were students in the section of English 130 that I was teaching at the time.

Within Ryan’s section of English 30, I began to focus on a particular group of students (mentioned in previous chapters). I chose this case because it is representative of the kinds of structures, successes, and struggles that occurred across my study of English 30 (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This group also demonstrated ways of participating in the university that I had never closely examined. The choices and behaviors of these three students have led me to new understandings of the identity work that goes into building and maintaining a community of practice as well as the advantages a support group can provide to students who are newcomers to life in the university.

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8 Passing English 431 with a B or higher is a prerequisite for applying to mentor in the English 30 program; the course includes an internship with an English 30 mentor or in the English as a Second Language (ESL) Resource Center as a tutor for ESL students.
Setting

I chose to observe an English 30 space for my research for a few reasons: first, the small student population allowed me to pay more equal attention to each student’s development as members and participators in the space throughout the semester; second, English 30 spaces offer a wide variety of the kinds of tools and techniques that students are expected to master throughout the semester. In addition to these reasons, which helped guide my research, I was genuinely curious about how other English 30 mentors led their spaces. Mentors are encouraged to sit in each other’s spaces, but that so rarely occurs. Although I had been a mentor for the past five semesters, I had only ever sat in one other mentor’s section of English 30. Ways that other mentors lead their sections of English 30 has been a bit of a mystery to me.

Participants

The students, interns, and mentor who participated in this research are all current Chico State students. The ten students in Ryan’s class were all first-semester freshmen who scored below 147 on the English Placement Test. These ten students were members of seven different sections of English 130. Ryan’s two interns were undergraduate students in the English department and, at the time of my study, Ryan was a first-semester graduate student in the Masters program.

Role of the Observer

For the first half of the Fall 2014 semester, I took on the role of a silent observer. I recorded the audio of each class and took notes. Occasionally, I would help a mentor with a technical issue (i.e., teaching students how to share a folder on Google Drive) and I spent a few minutes debriefing with Ryan after class. As a first-time mentor, Ryan was very interested in my
unique perspective in his class and would ask my opinion on his norms, community building techniques, concerns about students’ progress or behaviors, etc.

For the second half of the semester, I interacted with Ryan, his interns, and his students during class time. I left my designated corner and became another resource for students who had questions or wanted someone to read and respond to their writing. I also was given access to student writing via a shared folder on Google Drive in Ryan’s section of English 30 and, therefore, the feedback given to students by their peers and more-capable peers.

Data Collection

After receiving permission to record human subjects as part of my research, I began to record the audio of each class period. I briefly considered video recordings, but I have found that both students and mentors are less likely to notice an iPad or an iPhone sitting on a desk recording audio than a video camera recording video. I wanted my recordings to be an accurate representation of what goes on in each space and I did not want students to feel the need to censor themselves because their faces were being recorded as part of my data. Since I was not doing fine-grained discourse analysis, there was no need to capture gesture as well as the students’ conversations. Recorded audio with my field notes captured who was in the space and the conversations students were having.

The first seven weeks of the semester were spent in almost complete silence as I sat in a corner of the classroom taking notes. At first, I tried to take note of everything going on around me, which was difficult; I tried to consistently record who was speaking, what kinds of questions were being asked, who was on their cellphones, who brought in a laptop, how was Ryan utilizing his interns, where everyone sat, who was absent, everything I could think of that might turn out to be important. After a few weeks, I realized that I had pages and pages of handwritten notes.
that were essentially a play-by-play of what was happening in each space with almost no analysis. I spent so much time recording what was happening and very little time thinking about what any of it meant.

About halfway through the semester, I began translating my handwritten notes into colorful mind maps\(^9\). According to Wikipedia, a mind map is “a diagram used to visually outline information... often created around a single word or text, placed in the center, to which associated ideas, words and concepts are added” (via visualsforchange.com)\(^10\). I bought two white posters and a set of ten Crayola markers and that purchase fundamentally changed the way I worked with my data. Eventually, I stopped writing pages and pages of notes and began drawing the space, which led to my interest in micro communities. By drawing the space, it was easy to recognize students who always sat together, creating a bond that existed within the community. Each page has a graphic that shows where the students, interns, and mentor sat in each class period along with notes on who was absent, which student(s) was signed up to workshop, whether or not the students responded to the quick write prompt, who spoke and who did not, who was on their phone, who was late, how the intern(s) participated, as well as some notes for when I debriefed with Ryan after class. Instead of haphazard notes, I now had the fifty minute period represented on one 8.5”x11” piece of paper\(^11\).

Out of this mind-mapping method of recording my fieldnotes came a few key questions about what I saw occurring in this 30 space. The questions that guide this research are:

- What advantages might micro communities provide to students and instructors?
- How can we (instructors) help students form communities intentionally? And do we

\(^9\) See Appendices B-C
\(^10\) Visualsforchange.com is a resource for better understanding the value of visual language for meaningful learning. The site was founded by Amanda Lyons and includes blogs from online classes taken at Rheingold U with Howard Rheingold, a widely known researcher and user of mind maps.
\(^11\) See Appendices B-C
even need to help?

- How does each micro community member participate in their community?

In order to provide some tentative answers to these questions, I realized that I needed to better understand what goes into building and maintaining a community of students with a common goal. As a mentor myself, I had some practical knowledge of the work that goes into guiding a group of students, but I needed a more thorough theoretical background on why mentors make the moves we make in small-group settings like English 30.

**Analysis**

I began my analysis by transcribing the audio recordings from Ryan’s class. I found myself drawn to one specific group of students in Ryan’s class. This group of three students were members of a smaller community within the larger community, a phenomenon that I refer to as a micro community. As I was transcribing, I was listening for moments in which the micro community members I was observing interacted together and with Ryan as well as the ways in which this group existed within the larger community. There were several instances where the only voices in the room where those of Ryan and members of this micro community for several minutes while the rest of the group listened quietly.

In order to better understand this micro community, I needed to reexamine my data. Once I recognized the group of students I was interested in examining more closely, I looked over my field notes with a new lens: I began looking at the ways in which the members interacted with each other. What was once a micro community of two, eventually became a community of three and the newcomer (to borrow Lave and Wenger’s term) needed to be shown how to participate in the group by the two old-timers.
With this information, I began a new set of mind maps\(^\text{12}\). While the previous set were visual representations of my observations at the time when I was conducting my research, the new mind maps were based on my interest in the three micro community members. Mind mapping gave me a clearer image of the community I was studying and helped me identify key moments that I might not have noticed otherwise. An example of one of these moments might be one in which a community member takes on a new role (mentor-role) that is outside her usual role (student-role) within her community. In the following chapter, I will provide a clearer understanding of the ways in which these micro communities are created and the benefits such communities may provide to students within a larger class structure.

\(^{12}\) See Appendix D-E
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The first norm that Ryan put into place in his 30 space was what many 30 mentors refer to as the “circle of trust.” Grouping the desks into a circle is a common tactic used by mentors because it not only forces students to see each other’s faces instead of the backs of each other’s heads, but also disrupts students’ expectations of the space. Nearly every college classroom these students had seen thus far had looked almost identical: rows of desks facing a whiteboard or chalkboard with a middle aged teacher standing in front of the class. The circle encouraged students to get to know each other because they saw each other’s faces for an hour twice a week and it gave the group a sense of “us.”

Since this circle of trust was rather small (ten students, two interns, and one mentor), two of Ryan’s students recognized each other as classmates in the same section of English 130 and immediately chose to sit next to each other in the 30 space. Sitting side by side in the space gave these two students, Bethany and Michelle, opportunities to make decisions together about which assignments were most important to bring in for help and allowed them to keep in constant contact about their progress in the class. Interestingly, a third student in Ryan’s class, Miguel, had the same English 130 instructor as Bethany and Michelle, but did not decide to capitalize on this coincidence as Bethany and Michelle did. He sat quietly while his classmates worked together or discussed various assignments that he was also working to complete and he did not attempt to work with either of his classmates.

While signing up for workshop dates on the class calendar one morning, Michelle turned
to Bethany to ask if she wanted to workshop together since they have the same instructor. The conversation quickly turned into a discussion of the directions for the assignment in question as the girls used each other’s understanding of the assignment to reach a consensus:

Michelle: “Do you want to work on the same essay so that we have the same general idea of like what to do?”

Bethany: “I don’t even know what essay we have to do?”

Michelle’s question marks the beginning of her working relationship with Bethany. From this point on, the two regularly signed up to workshop the same assignments, which led to my interest in Bethany and Michelle as members of a micro community. I was particularly interested in this group because, as the previously described conversation was going on, Miguel was in the room, watching this exchange between his two classmates and he still did not mention to Ryan (or to his classmates) that he was working on the same assignment. One reason for this may have been that Miguel was not working on that assignment, despite the fact that the due date was looming and his peers were obviously worried enough to bring their writing to Ryan for help. Another reason may have been that he did not feel comfortable working with Bethany and Michelle. The two had made it clear that they were not interested in resisting their English 130 instructor or the class assignments and perhaps Miguel’s silence was his version of resistance.

After observing this group for a semester, I have come to define a micro community as one that lives within an existing community without the intention of disrupting the larger community (occasionally the side conversations were distracting, but I do not believe that was the students’ intent). Their behavior was simply a mechanism geared towards helping them pass their English 130 course. Together, Bethany and Michelle developed a set of practices and norms that guided their relationship. An example of these practices includes the moment described
above in which the two would be in the middle of explaining an assignment to Ryan and end up talking to each other instead of the rest of the group as they tried to remember the instructions.

Another example is the way in which Bethany and Michelle would use each other’s memories to help understand the directions and due dates for a particular assignment:

Ryan: “How long does it have to be?”

Michelle: “It has to be a page and a half.”

Ryan: “A page and a half....”

Michelle: “So, like, 400 words.”

Bethany: “Really?”

Michelle: “Ya. What did you do for the last one?” (laughing).

Bethany: “I did three pages, cuz hers is--hers is like five--the example online.”

Michelle: “She says we only--she says we only need like 400-500 words minimum?”

Bethany: “Really?”

Michelle: “Ya.”

Moments like the two described above were very common for Bethany and Michelle. Nearly every time they brought in an assignment, there was a corresponding conversation that served to clarify their understanding of the instructions. In some ways, the girls needed each other in order to understand what was being asked of them by their instructor. Even with the syllabus and course calendar in hand, the two were confused and needed to talk out their different understandings of assignments.

Ryan: “Ok...so wait when you turn in--on the calendar due date--Draft 2 due, is that like final paper due?”

Michelle: “Ya.”
Bethany: “It says that”--

Ryan: (interrupting): “Or like, that’s like the final copy? Is Draft 2?”

Michelle: “Ya.”

Bethany: “I don’t know because it says that we’re presenting them on December 9th?”

Michelle: “Ya, but that doesn’t mean that like” --

Bethany: (interrupting): “I have no idea.”

Michelle: (interrupting): --“Draft 2 is the final one because she wouldn’t have like written down like...there’s no other reviews that we’re doing with our peers so...”

Bethany: “No, cuz look” -- (indicating printed syllabus) -- “we’re still continuing this after the 20th.”

Michelle: (mumbling while reading syllabus): “Then I don’t know.”

The two were constantly communicating, constantly interrupting each other, and constantly asking each other how they understood the instructions for a particular assignment. Despite how common these conversations were, Miguel did not once offer his assistance to his classmates as they tried to work out the specifics of an assignment. It is entirely possible that Miguel was equally confused or that he was simply allowing the girls to work out their questions for him, knowing that he would hear the answer as soon as they arrived at one. Regardless of his reasons, Miguel absence from the conversations is not a reflection of his absence in the room. Attendance was not a problem for Miguel and I believe it is safe to assume that he had little to fear from going to class since little was ever asked of him in class.

Since Bethany and Michelle sat next to each other in the circle and exhibited similar
levels of dedication to succeeding in English 130, it took Ryan until the sixth week of the semester to realize that Miguel had the same English 130 instructor. While Bethany and Michelle were fairly forthcoming about their assignments and their opinion of their English 130 instructor, Miguel was less forthcoming in the “information games,” as Brooke describes them in his work on student underlife. Bethany and Michelle often told the group about their instructor and their opinion of their English 130 class:

Michelle: “We just talk in class. That’s all we do. We sit there and just talk and turn in everything. That’s all we do.”

Bethany: “And she gets off topic a lot, which just drives me nuts.”

Michelle: “Like she’ll start talking about, um, about her family and she--like one time, she got really bored and she got on Facebook to prevent herself from, like, grading papers. She showed us, like, her blog of, like, party planning for her kids. What does this have to do with English? I don’t know.”

Bethany: (laughing).

For Bethany and Michelle, conversations like these helped solidify their relationship. Their mutual dislike for the way their instructor taught the class helped them work together. In the conversation described above, Miguel was in the room, presumably listening to his classmates’ complaints, but he chose not to include himself in the conversation, which led me to wonder how he felt about the class and the instructor. His silence had become a pattern and, had I not recorded which students were present in class each day, I might have forgotten he was ever in the room while listening to the recordings of each class period. Unless spoken to directly, Miguel’s voice was almost never heard in the classroom.
By the time Ryan made the connection, Bethany and Michelle had each brought in three assignments and Ryan had no idea if Miguel had completed those assignments. While adding to the class calendar again one class period, Ryan decided to try to pull Miguel in to work more closely with Michelle and Bethany:

Michelle: “Can I also go the 12th?”
Ryan: “Yes. Same thing [as Bethany], right?”
Michelle: “Ya.”
Ryan: “Alright. And Miguel, you’ve got this same class, too, so...um...”
Miguel: “Ya...you can put me down, too.”
Ryan: “Ya. You wanna just keep you guys together, that’d be--that’d be pretty sweet.”
Bethany: “Can I take--Can I take the 19th, too, for Draft 2 of the inquiry paper?”
Michelle: “Oh, Draft 2?”
Bethany: “Ya there’s two--we have to have two drafts.”
Michelle: “Oh...ew. Why?”
Bethany: “I’m so done.” (laughing).

This small moment is interesting for several reasons: for one, it is the moment when Bethany and Michelle’s micro community received its third and final member; for another, Bethany and Michelle continued their pattern of working together to understand an assignment’s directions while Miguel continued his pattern of silence while his peers figured it out. Miguel’s quiet agreement to work with Bethany and Michelle is the equivalent to an Alcoholics Anonymous member taking a white chip at the end of a meeting to signify his/her agreement to not drink during the next 24 hours; it served as a signal to Ryan and to his peers that Miguel would work
alongside them and attempt to enter their community.

Although Miguel was most likely aware of the fact that Bethany and Michelle had the same English 130 instructor, he initially chose to distance himself from his classmates for unknown reasons. I can speculate that one reason may have been the obvious bond the girls shared or their willingness to bring in their writing for help, but I cannot be certain of the reason. Miguel’s intentional separation from his peers took on several forms for the first few weeks of the semester. As previously stated, one form was the physical distance he put between himself and the girls, but another form was in asking to workshop different drafts of the same assignment than the ones that Bethany and Michelle had requested:

Ryan: “So, ok. So when is Draft 2 of the inquiry paper due?”
Michelle: “Draft 2...” (looking at her copy of the syllabus).
Bethany: “The 20th of November.”
Ryan: “Ok. So you guys want to do Draft 1 [on November 12th]? Miguel, how do you feel about that? You wanna--would you rather bring in like--revise it one time in 130 and then bring in Draft 2 maybe on the 19th? Or the 17th?”
Miguel: “Um. I’ll do Draft 2 for the 19th.”

This conversation between Ryan, Bethany, and Michelle had been going on for several minutes while Miguel sat quietly. He waited until Bethany and Michelle had chosen a workshop date before choosing a different date; however, it is unclear here if he chose a different date at Ryan’s request or if he wanted to continue to separate himself from his peers.

Despite Miguel’s initial reluctance to join forces with Bethany and Michelle, Ryan’s response to the realization that the three had the same English 130 instructor was to force the
three students together during class time, which is a very common move for English 30 mentors who realize that their students have the same instructor. Seemingly unaware that Bethany and Michelle had already formed their own micro community, Ryan was hoping to create a support group for the three students within the larger class structure.

Michelle: “Um me, Bethany, and Miguel [mispronounced his name] have a, um, it’s um, it’s kind of like the, ya know what we had before? The mini research paper thing that we brought in last time? It’s like a second one and it’s due the 14th. I don’t know if Bethany or Miguel wants that day, but I’d like that day.”

Ryan: “I’m just gonna put all three of you down for that day.”

After a moment of further description of the assignment by Michelle, Ryan goes on to explain his reasoning for workshopping the three together for the first time:

Ryan: “I’m thinking about just, every time we workshop like you, we’re gonna workshop all three of you guys, I think, because you guys are all, like, in it together. And the three of you guys, since you have, like, the same class, you guys should be, like, collaborating.”

Having seen three assignments from Bethany and Michelle and none of Miguel’s assignments, it is safe to assume that Ryan was worried about Miguel’s progress and thought that the girls would be a good influence. This move also cut down on Ryan’s workload of trying to keep track of ten individual students’ assignments.

Forcing the three students together a few times throughout the semester had interesting results. In some ways, Ryan’s decision had exactly the results he hoped for: the micro community took away Miguel’s ability to hide in the 30 space. For new mentors, splitting one’s

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13 Bethany and Miguel were both absent during this class period.
attention between ten students can be difficult, which makes it surprisingly easy for the quiet student to hide in the small space. Miguel had taken on the role of a silent observer in the 30 space until Ryan included him in Bethany and Michelle’s micro community. His silence had effectively hidden him in the space. It kept Ryan from recognizing that Miguel had the same English 130 instructor as Bethany and Michelle until the sixth week of the semester. Ryan was unable to force Miguel to speak in class or to bring in his assignments, but, despite the fact that he was not receiving specific help, Miguel continued to come to class.

The first time Ryan asked the three students to work together in class, Bethany and Michelle automatically took on the role of old-timers (to borrow Lave and Wenger’s language) and began to show Miguel (newcomer) how to behave in their micro community. I am not certain that the two girls took on these roles with the explicit intent of helping Miguel fit into their group, but in continuing to behave in the ways that they had previously established as appropriate, Bethany and Michelle began showing Miguel how to participate in their micro community as well. When Michelle’s paper was being workshopped in class, Bethany demonstrated ways she had grown accustomed to giving her peer verbal feedback:

Bethany: (to Michelle): “You say things like, “the author gives many reasons” and then you”--

Michelle: (interrupting): “And then I don’t go into detail”--

Bethany: (interrupting): “You jump to another part so, just, I would say go into detail about that. Find a quote that you can go off of and then basically analyze that. That’s what I did for the last one that we did.”

As Bethany shifted from her usual role as a student to more of a mentorship role, she engaged in the underlife by demonstrating that her identity is more complex than the student role she usually
portrayed. While Bethany’s identity was shifting with the situation, Miguel and Michelle’s identities shifted slightly as well. Staying true to his established pattern, Miguel stayed quiet during this exchange of ideas, but by showing up to class and sitting with his new group, he silently agreed to become a member of the community. By bringing in a first draft of an assignment, Michelle took on the identity of a student writer and, hopefully, Miguel recognized some of his own identity in Michelle in that moment, just as apprentice A.A. members see some of themselves in the old-timers personal narratives.

Implications

To another instructor, Bethany and Michelle’s behavior might have been seen as distracting. Throughout the semester, Bethany and Michelle occupied Brooke’s fourth major category of the underlife by consistently splitting their attention between the work Ryan was asking them to engage in and the necessary work of helping each other understand what their English 130 instructor was asking them to engage in. The two could rarely say a complete sentence without interrupting each other and they were by far the most eager students to bring in work for help, which Ryan eventually saw as an opportunity for other students (like Miguel) to hide their writing from him in class. At one point, Ryan had to ask the girls to think carefully about the types of assignments they signed up to workshop:

Ryan: “Ya, if this is a big one”--
Michelle: (interrupting): “Oh! It’s the inquiry paper, that one’s like a big one.”
Ryan: “Ok”
Bethany: (laughs).
Ryan: “The inquiry paper?”
Michelle: “That’s what she calls it.”
“Sounds like something a scholar would write.” (typing): “Alright ya, because like, ya know, when you have a class like that, you gotta kinda pick and choose like what is more important--maybe like, “hey, we have this like huge research paper that’s worth 50% of our grade.” Like that would be something to bring into here instead of like a little blog post.”

Despite the potential distractions micro communities may provide to different groups of students, they also provide a helpful support group for students. We know that learning is a social act and by allowing students to work through their struggles in school together, we give them an opportunity to develop ways of being in the university. Practices like discussing assignments with peers before asking the professor for help or having someone read over a piece of writing before turning it in for credit in a class are ones that Bethany and Michelle taught each other (and began to teach Miguel) in their micro community.

So, what do we do with these communities when we see them beginning to form in our classrooms? What is the role of the instructor in these communities and (how) can we guide their growth? The important next step for English 30 mentors like Ryan is to recognize the micro communities forming in their spaces. In small spaces like English 30, with only ten or so students, it is not difficult to notice which students consistently sit together; in fact, mentors are expected to know which students are in which sections of English 130 very early on in the semester. One option for 30 mentors, especially those who have an intern, is to create intentional, permanent micro communities in the first few weeks of the semester. These communities may be based upon common English 130 instructors or, in the event that there are no instructors in common, students may choose their communities.

If mentors help students create micro communities intentionally, there are more
opportunities for all members within each community to contribute to group norms and fewer chances for any one student to feel like an outsider within his/her community (as Miguel seemed to feel as a latecomer to his micro community). This model gives students a lot of power in the classroom because it gives the students choices about the kinds of behaviors that are appropriate within their group as well as opportunities to occupy different roles in the classroom (as Bethany took on the role of old-timer when Miguel joined the community). The mentor, then, exists outside and alongside these groups and looks to them for decisions about how time is used in the classroom. Micro communities also give students more opportunities to step outside of their established roles in the classroom and engage in Brooke’s underlife. If the mentor (the established group leader) is working with another group, a community member might be more inclined to offer up his/her own expertise and (briefly) occupy the role of a mentor or a more-experienced peer.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

After spending a semester observing Bethany, Michelle, and Miguel’s micro community, I have come to the conclusion that micro communities can be an incredible advantage to instructors working with small groups of students. Advantages that I observed in Ryan’s class included a sounding board for understanding a difficult assignment’s directions; convenient peer review partners, since the group members were all working on the same assignments; a community that understood the inner-workings of the English 130 class and the difficulties these students had with their instructor; as well as simple consistency in terms of who these students sat with in the English 30 class and confided in when it came to their struggles with their English 130 course. Since I only observed one group of students, it is clear that more research and observation is necessary. Future researchers might look to other courses in undergraduate education to see if the patterns that I noticed in Bethany, Michelle, and Miguel’s micro community exist in other spaces. In addition, it would be interesting to note whether or not students continue to maintain these communities once the semester has ended. I could imagine that these communities might dissolve at the end of the semester, particularly if the course is a general education course and not specific to any major in the university, but I have no proof to support that hypothesis at this time.

It seems to me that there could be many advantages to encouraging students to work together in permanent groups, particularly in writing classes. Although Bethany, Michelle, and Miguel all had the same English 130 instructor, I could imagine that having a consistent group of peers to work with throughout the semester would be helpful and supportive for a group of first-
time composition students, regardless of English 130 instructors. Students could still share an assignment’s directions with group members and talk through the specifics of the assignment, peer review each other’s writing, and confide in each other.

For the English 30 mentor who is interested in forming permanent small groups within the larger class structure, I highly recommend Brooke, Mirtz, and Evan’s book *Small Groups in Writing Workshops: Invitations to a Writer’s Life*. This collection of essays, particularly Mirtz’s chapter, “A Conversation about Small Groups,” focuses exclusively on teaching writing using small groups and pays particular attention to issues such as participation and resistance. Mirtz addresses instructors’ fears of not being in control and not being able to see what is going on in each small group, which are often fears that new mentors express in weekly mentor meetings. She also addresses misunderstandings of what participation and resistance look like in school. Mirtz’s discussion on on- and off-task behavior could be very beneficial for mentors since “resistant students” are one of the difficulties most often mentioned by mentors.

Given that participation and resistance are two major concerns of new (and returning) English 30 mentors, I also recommend a few readings on the two subjects during the training period offered before each semester. Lave and Wenger’s work on apprenticeship (*Situated Learning*) is already on the list of required readings for English 431: Theory and Practice of Tutoring Composition, however, the section on Alcoholics Anonymous is particularly enlightening in terms of participation. Although Alcoholics Anonymous meetings are voluntary and English 30 is a requirement, the organization of the group (old-timers helping newcomers learn to live without drinking alcohol) can be helpful when thinking about mentorship in the university (mentors helping incoming freshmen learn to live in the university). A conversation on ways in which mentors can work alongside their students may help dispel fears expressed by
many new mentors that they are expected to “teach” the students something. In reality, mentors are simply expected to guide students as they learn to use writing as a tool to help them thrive in the university; similarly, old-timers described in the Alcoholics Anonymous group are not expected to prevent newcomers from drinking, but they are expected to show newcomers a new way of living without relying on alcohol.

Additionally, Melanie Kill’s article “Acknowledging the Rough Edges of Resistance: Negotiation of Identities for First-Year Composition” makes several interesting points on understanding resistance. She proposes that there is resistance and there is “productive” resistance in classrooms; in other words, there are true acts of resistance that serve to derail the class (i.e., consistently arriving late to class) and there are behaviors that may appear resistant (i.e., talking out of turn), but are actually helping a student better understand the material of the class. This reading can provide an opportunity for returning mentors to share their experiences with resistant students in discussion with new mentors and offer ways of handling resistance in the classroom. I can imagine using this reading in particular as a starting point to group new and returning mentors to create micro communities within the larger community of mentors. Permanent groups with mixed levels of experience gives each mentor a smaller community of peers to share new experiences with throughout the semester and an opportunity to brainstorm ways of working through problems of practice.

Finally, Robert Brooke’s article “Underlife and Writing Instruction” is another potential resource for English 30 mentors that offers unique insight on the roles students choose to play in classrooms and the ways in which students participate and resist the “rules” laid out for them in college classrooms. It seems to me that a better understanding of the underlife phenomenon can help new and returning mentors better understand the roles that we (instructors) demand that
students play in school and consider other ways students may choose to participate in class. One way to begin a discussion on the underlife phenomenon may be to list the unspoken “rules” that students are expected to follow in college classrooms and deciding (individually or as a group) which rules are firm and which are flexible. Knowing which rules are really important to each mentor (for example, tardiness or the use of cellphones in the classroom) can help mentors design their classroom space and share that information with students to (hopefully) avoid future problems.

When thinking about creating permanent micro communities in a section of English 30, the first step is knowing which students are in which sections of English 130. Ryan had good intentions when he forced Miguel into Bethany and Michelle’s micro community, but giving the girls six weeks to bond and create their own set of norms and expectations did not help Miguel fit into their community. Had Ryan made the connection sooner, it is possible that Miguel would have felt and acted more like a full member of the micro community. On the other hand, had Ryan chosen to make permanent small groups at the beginning of his class, it is probable that Miguel would have joined a different group, regardless of the fact that the three shared the same English 130 instructor. Throughout the semester, Miguel often positioned himself away from his peers, rather than closer to them and, if given the choice, it is likely that Miguel would have continued that pattern.

While allowing students to for their own exclusive communities within the larger class structure may feel as though it loses the small-group mentality that English 30 is built on, micro communities can still achieve the goals outlined by the English 30 syllabus:\textsuperscript{14}:

You will receive support from your peers and the English 30 group leader for the writing you do in English 130, including, but not limited to:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Navigate resources for research and academic writing at Chico State
\end{itemize}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{14} See Appendix A
\end{footnote}
- Develop a writing identity and habits/practices that contribute to success
- Practice verbal and written feedback
- Engage in revision strategies for both low and high stakes writing assignments

All of these goals can be achieved in micro communities like the one Bethany, Michelle, and Miguel formed. In different kinds of ways, having two or three micro communities within one English 30 space can take the responsibility of meeting each of these goals away from the mentor and gives it to the students because they make decisions together about how they spend their fifty minute period. The mentor’s role becomes observing each group’s growth, as described by Brooke, Evans, and Mirtz, and being available as a more-experienced peer when needed instead of the established role of “teacher” or “authority figure.”


Welcome to English 30—a small-group workshop in which students focus on critical reading and writing practices to benefit their writing and the writing of others.

What Are the Goals of This Course?
You will receive support from your peers and the English 30 group leader for the writing you do in English 130, including, but not limited to:

- Navigate resources for research and academic writing at Chico State
- Develop a writing identity and habits/practices that contribute to success
- Practice verbal and written feedback
- Engage in revision strategies for both low and high stakes writing assignments

What Will I Do Each Day in Class?
English 30 is a writing workshop that relies on student participation and daily activities will vary depending on the needs and interests of your community. You will: write, discuss, brainstorm, experiment with different writing techniques, deconstruct readings and other media, work on revision, research, practice presentations, respond to peer writing, explore technology, and much more!

What Are My Responsibilities in English 30?
English 30 is graded Credit/No Credit. To receive credit for the course, you must:

- Attend regularly. To receive credit for the course, you cannot miss more than six classes—no exceptions, no excused absences.
- Come to class prepared. English 30 is a reciprocal learning environment. Some days, your writing will be the focus. Other days, your peer’s work will be. It’s imperative that you are there in either case to cultivate a rigorous, productive conversation around writing. Being prepared means that you have submitted your work ahead of time and are ready to engage in dialog toward the best revision possible.
- Expect that your work will be the focus two times formally workshop and two times in an
informal workshop. You and your English 30 leader will use your course calendar to make decisions about when these workshops are scheduled.

- Come to class on time with your English 130 materials. If you do not come to class prepared or if you come more than 5 min late, you will be marked absent.

**Required Materials:**
Binder/Notebook for keeping track of your writing and work in English 130 and English 30. If you have a laptop, bring it.

**For the next English 30 meeting:**
Bring a copy of your English 130 syllabus to your next English 30 workshop AND, if the syllabus is available electronically, send a copy to your leader. Bring your first major writing assignment as soon as you receive it.

Get ready to write, talk with other writers, and enjoy your English 130 and 30 experiences. We look forward to working with you!

**Our English 30 Norms:**
Together, we will create other norms for this class and post to your group Google Drive.
Circle Time in 30-03: 9/29

In Class: Read from Student #2's reading list (Hyperbole 4 1/2)

AFTER CLASS: Use your interns! Use small groups to build community/confid
Use QWS as a "check-in" for what's happening in 130 class (WS Student)

MISSING: Student #4, Student #5, & Student #7
APPENDIX C: FIELD NOTES FROM NOV. 3, 2014
Circle Time in 30-03: 11/3

Student #8 (WS):
- BF: class needed more sources

Intern #2:
- Still need to facilitate WS together

Student #5:
- Very quiet students
- Should try separating... both are very quiet & haven’t bought in to the space

Student #10:
- Broken arm

Student #9 (WS):
- Needed 2 more sources

Mentor:
- LS’s class is going well
- Has wanted 3 students to work more closely all semester
- Student #1:
- Needed arm. bib.
- Peer reviewed
- Back-up WS again

LR’s Class:
- FAC: facilitated WS together

Student #4 (WS):
- Took notes to help write paper
- Didn’t want us to read original draft
- Late to class

Absen: Student #6, Student #7

MC:
MICRO COMMUNITY #1: RYAN’S 30

Bethany
- Insiders
  - Began as result of proximity
  - Similar goals

Michelle
- Insiders
  - Began as result of proximity
  - Similar goals

Miguel
- Outsider
  - Did not recognize micro community was already formed
  - Forced together by mentor
  - Aware of outsider status within the group

- Created long before Miguel was forced into the community

Insider norms: Outsiders do none of these

- Sit together
- Complete assignments
- Understand assignments - confirm in group
- Ask mentor for help
- Peer review each other’s writing
- Workshop together
- Constant contact

Conclusions:
- Micro communities must be created ASAP - Students will make them anyways
- Mentor can guide norms - All parties need to play along...
- Diligence - Pull out students not benefiting from community
APPENDIX E: MINDMAP II
Student 1
Student 2
their proximity to each other helped Eric remember that they had the same 130 instructor

Student 9 - opposite side of the circle + quiet → Eric assuming he had another instructor

Never associated the three students as belonging together

Solution: force the three together a few times a month to check in with Eric

Result: kept Student 9 accountable but also highlighted extremely different work ethics

Students 142 would have full drafts needed peer review; Student 9 needed help finding sources

leads to questions:

- What do we do with students who have the same 130 instructor?
  - Instinct: force them together but does that help or hinder?
    - Helped 142 because it happened organically
    - Hurt 9 because it was forced upon him too late in the semester
  - What about students who don't have the same 130 instructor?
    - Permanent "mini communities"? Each group decides together: Ws, work day, break down an assignment
    - Rotate Mentor & interns