A Dissertation

entitled

Talented Young Writers' Relationships with Writing

by

Jill M. Olthouse

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

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An Abstract of

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Through a qualitative research design, this study explored how eight talented

young creative writers related to their craft. The construct "relationship with writing"

emerged as the study's overarching theme. This theme includes students' influences,

goals, values, identity, and emotions as these relate to writing. The findings indicated

that identity development and the expression of an authentic self were central to students'

relationships with writing. Multiple positive contextual influences led students to view

writing as a means to understand and express themselves. Students valued academic

writing, but felt that creative writing was more congruent with their emotions, goals, and

values. Overall, students' relationships with writing can be described as positive,

personal, and context-dependent.

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Chapter One

Literature Review

This study involves writers, who, at a young age, evidence an unusually high capability for meeting the demands of an unusual writing context: timed, competitive, fiction writing. In the field of gifted education, students who are academically successful in terms of standardized test scores or competitive tasks are often studied in order to better understand how talent develops and how talented people can best be supported. In this study, talent development will be studied with especial attention to motivation; what causes these young people to devote the time and effort necessary to master creative writing skills?

Study Rationale

Gifted education theorists have proposed that motivation plays an important role in talent development (Gagne, 2000; Renzulli, 1984); this study examines motivation specific to the field of writing. This is a relatively new area of inquiry. Previously, most researchers were focused on how writers write, or they assumed that the desire to write was natural (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007). However, not every student has the desire to write, and without that desire, it is very hard for students to master new skills (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

In addition, environmental conditions (such as school structures, parents, and peers) may influence the development of the student's relationship to the domain. These conditions are malleable. Understanding the contexts in which students are more

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motivated or less motivated to write may highlight specific practices that foster or interfere with the development of the motivation to write. For example, some research retrospectives have suggested that people become writers in spite of their school experience, not because of it. In a biographical survey of over 300 eminent personalities, 52% of eminent literary personalities studied disliked school compared to 33% of eminent personalities in general (Goertzl, Goertzl, & Goertzl, 1978). A researcher who interviewed creative writers found that there was little outlet for their creativity in the classroom; restrictions such as time, grades, and topics limited them, and teachers valued grammar and spelling more than imagination (Freeman, 1979). Classroom emphasis on low-level tasks has a negative effect on the motivation to write (Cook, Green, Meyer, Saey, 2001). An interview study with high school writers suggests that even those writers considered good academic writers lose intrinsic motivation as they progress from elementary to middle and high school (Cleary, 1991). A teacher reflecting on her experiences with talented college writers felt that these writers adopt a laborious, impersonal, teacher-pleasing tone (Hairston, 1984). This information suggests a conflict between school-sanctioned motivations for writing and personal goals. If the current study bears this out, it may also offer insights into how students deal with this conflict or overcome it.

Finally, there is a philosophical and moral question. A contemporary school of thought in composition studies describes writing as being about more than skills; it is about values as well (Berlin, 1988; 1982). Therein a writer who writes excellent government propaganda is not, perhaps, as gifted as a skilled writer who transforms our understanding of a refugee's suffering through a creative novel.

Berlin writes about the importance of the values that the writer hold, and the values expressed in the writing. Another question is the value of writing itself. Tannenbaum (1983) would describe creative writing as a surplus talent, one which does not directly aid in sustaining human life. This would imply that writing is not as valuable as, for example, medical research. I was interested in what talented young writers would have to say about values in writing and the value of writing.

Conceptualizing Talent

Providing a background for this specific study begins with broad strokes. Researchers often have differing conceptions of what talent is, and these differing conceptions shape the decisions they make about how to complete their studies. I start my study by outlining some common conceptions of talent and describing how these have influenced my own understanding of the concept. In my discussions of talent, I will address conceptions of the role of the individual, the role of the field of study (writing), and the role of the individual's motivation.

As a teacher, I defined talent as "an IQ above 130 on a state-approved IQ measure" or with a pragmatic, "I'll know it when I see it." Even in practice, these definitions can be problematic. If there are only a few spots in a gifted education program, do we choose the child who is generally good in everything or really superb in one thing? Should coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background be considered as "extra credit" when determining giftedness, especially considering the child might not have had as much exposure to items such as those on an IQ test

Understandings of giftedness and talent impact how teachers practice and how resources are allocated.

A variety of models have been proposed to explain giftedness. These models offer varied combinations of answers to what Dai (2009) calls the "essential tensions" in the field of gifted education. These essential tensions are questions to which the possible answers are seemingly contradictory. Therefore, respondents take sides, agreeing or disagreeing with one side or another, sometimes to varying degrees. Dai's essential tensions are as follows:

1. Ability vs. Achievement: Is giftedness the potential to do great things or the demonstration of these great things?

2. Being vs. Doing/Becoming: Is giftedness who you are, or is it what you can do in a specific context?

3. Continuity vs. Discontinuity of individual and developmental differences: Does the gifted mind develop differently than other minds?

4. Domain-General versus Domain specific: Are the gifted generally good at everything or really good at some specific things?

5. Expertise vs. Creativity: Is giftedness mastery of a field, or is the creativity to change that field?

6. Monothetic vs. Ideographic: Does giftedness fit into a general deductive theory, or should it be understood on an individual basis?

7. Reductionism vs. Emergentism: Can giftedness be reduced to neurology or should it be studied as a complex phenomenon?

8. Excellence vs. Equity: Can we encourage excellence while not discriminating against the socially disadvantaged?

Metaphors for talent.

Another way of understanding differing views on talent is through the use of metaphor. Metaphors serve to organize concepts in relation to other concepts (Lakoff, 1992). One metaphor for giftedness is being born with a special lens through which one experiences the world. This metaphor reflects my understanding of the traditional model of the gifted child, influenced by the IQ testing movement and the Columbus Group movement (NAGC, 2008). In response to question #1 of Dai's essential tensions, this metaphor falls towards the end of the continuum that emphasizes potentiality. Children are gifted if they evidence potential as determined by certain IQ or achievement measures, even though their day-to-day accomplishments may not always reflect this giftedness. In answer to questions 2, 3, and 4 of Dai's essential tensions, this metaphor expresses "beingness," "discontinuity," and "generalizability." This view of giftedness stresses that since the gifted experience the world differently, they may have unique emotional needs as a result, and that, as a minority, they have the need to spend time with mental peers. These practical applications are strengths of this model; however, it could be said that the emotions gifted children experience are a result of how society treats them, and not some inborn uniqueness. The weaknesses of the lens metaphor are that it does not address cases in which talent is focused in one or two domains (fields of study) or talent that waxes and wanes throughout one's lifespan; furthermore, it relies heavily on one method of assessment.

The traditional gifted child definition has been confronted by an alternate definition of giftedness, the "talent development" model. Under this model, the word "talent" is used in opposition to giftedness to indicate that, not only is talent not limited to a small minority of people, but talent is developed through training, rather than an inborn trait. Treffinger & Feldhusen write, "Our abilities are not truly gifts. While some children seem to be endowed with higher potential, it is only through nurturance from family and in school, along with substantial effort from the child, that talents emerge, develop, and grow" (1996, p.184). In response to essential tensions 1, 2, & 4, this model emphasizes achievement, becoming, and domain-specificity. One variation of the talent development model, the theory of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe, &Tesche-Romer, 1993) brings to mind the metaphor of talent as muscle. Most people are born with healthy muscle; some people choose to exercise their muscle, and it grows stronger and bigger. According to the theory of deliberate practice, everyone has access to achieving at the highest levels, if they engage in specific, prolonged, deliberate mental exercise. The muscle metaphor's strengths are that it addresses some of the lens metaphor's weaknesses. Talent may be domain specific, and it may wax and wane across a lifespan. However, it is less able to explain the existence of prodigies or cases in which students who engage in the same amount of practice fail to make equal progress (Feldman & Katzir, 1998; Freeman, 1998).

One recent theory presents talent as situated in social contexts (Barab & Plucker, 2002; Gee, 2004). This theory emphasizes the role of culture in interpreting what is and what is not talent.

The theory can be expressed through the metaphor of "talent as symphony performance." An occurrence of talent, like a beautiful symphony performance, is not dependent only on the gifts of one person. Rather, it requires a variety of people working together. Furthermore, it requires access to specific materials such as instruments and staging. A symphony occurs only once, and it occurs as a result of a culture's values about aesthetics and what does or does not constitute "high art." The theory of situated talent emphasizes the role of context, thus explaining how a person may be talented in one setting, but not in another. Another strength of this model is that it relates how individuals may solve problems differently given differing resources. However, it does not address the concept of "star performers," those whose talent is rarer and more developed than others, and who transform the domain. This theory also de-emphasizes the accumulation of talent over time, in favor of emphasizing the role of context.

Upon beginning this study, my conception of talent can be expressed as a *relationship* between an individual and a group of people. My metaphor is informed by Feldman's theory of nonuniversal talent development.

Feldman's theory of nonuniversal development.

Some theories of development emphasize natural, maturational processes, such as acceleration of what are assumed to be universal developmental milestones. Other theories emphasize the role of instruction and the social structure of a domain. Feldman's theory of nonuniversal development attempts to resolve some of the tensions between conceptions of giftedness as generalized and as specific. Feldman places various abilities on a continuum from universal (meaning all healthy humans will develop

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these abilities in the general course of maturation) and nonuniversal (meaning that these abilities require training and support to develop (Feldman, 1997). An example of a cognitive skill that is universal in its development is development of spatial skills – orienting oneself in one's immediate terrain is universal because all healthy humans will develop these skills. The next category along the continuum is pancultural. Not all humans, but all humans raised within the social structure of a culture will develop these capacities because all cultures share these skills. An example of a pancultural skill is language. Children must be exposed to language in order to develop this skill, but all cultures have language. Feldman describes development in domains as discipline specific. That is, while talent in these areas may rely on some of the skills that are placed earlier in the continuum, it also requires knowledge and skills specific to the field of study. Most talents that we study in the field of gifted education are nonuniversal, and require the structure and support of a domain to develop (Feldman, 2003). When we are looking specifically at creative writing, some of the prerequisites are language ability, imagination, and reading skills. Students who develop these skills early may be presumed to have a "head start" in the development of creative writing skills. However, other generalizable skills, such as computation and motor skills, will not be as important. Using the metaphor of relationship, there exist some general "compatibilities" between the individual and the field of study; these compatibilities are not the same for every relationship.

When describing how the domain (or field of study) functions to aid the development of talent, Feldman's theory can again be understood in terms of relationship. A domain is a group of people with a commonly shared interest. These people need not exist in the same space (or time). Domains can be academic (mathematics, biology), aesthetic (creative writing, sculpture) or vocational and avocational (tattooing, video game playing). The domain can be viewed as a web of associations. At the center of the web are the people who demonstrate the skills and values that the domain holds to be most important. At the edges of the web are groups of people who have mastered some of the skills the domain holds to be important. In order to develop talent, an individual must progress through a variety of social groups towards the most central group. Just as someone may be only a holiday churchgoer or church leader, someone may be an acquaintance of mathematics or an expert in the field. According to the NCTE publication, "What research says about writing," writing talent develops through association with a discourse community (Egawa, 2006).

To progress towards positions of influence in the domain, individuals must master skills in each new stage of development. They must learn technical terminology; in the domain of creative writing, some examples of technical terminology are allusion, enjambment, and hyperbole. They must adopt the values evident in each stage of the domain. While one stage may emphasize conformity, a higher stage may emphasize creativity.

These stages are further organized into subdomains. These include various communities writing for various purposes and using various conventions; in accordance with a multiliteracies perspective on literacy (Cope & Kalantzis, 1999), there is no single standard for literacy achievements. This study examines writing as it is shaped by the conventions of the Power of the Pen (POP) Competition, as well as by other contexts in the students' lives (school writing, informal writing, etc.). The POP competition is both related to and distant from the work that professionals carry out in the areas of poetry, genre fiction, and "high fiction."

The people that compose the domain play different roles in fostering the development of talent. Parents nurture children's talent in the earlier years. In the case of writers, this is often by reading with them or taking them to the library. A child's first teachers (Bloom & Sosniak, 1985) are nurturing, and present the domain as a fun experience. Later teachers are more demanding and help individuals hone their craft. Some people serve as gatekeepers; these people establish challenging standards and decide who meets these standards and who does not. Gatekeepers can help or prevent people from advancing in the domain, and serve to winnow the field when there are many aspiring students. "Stars" shape the high culture of the domain, and transform it; their influence on the skills and values of the domain is often felt even after they die.

In essence, this model has a lot in common with the "talent development" model because it emphasizes performance, instruction, and the role of the discipline. However, a "relationship" metaphor brackets these emphases within the notion of discipline-specific development, noting that not all types of talent are discipline-specific.

Furthermore, the model allows for some pre-existing compatibilities in the form of pancultural, more generalizable talents. Unlike the deliberate practice model, the existence of these compatibilities as well as a balance of attention to both the individual and the domain allows for an in-depth exploration of creativity, or instances in which "star performers" direct the development of the domain. Also, it shares with the situated learning model attention to cultural context and the role of values in talent development; in this case, the values are not only the culture's values, but the individual's values as well.

Writing Talent Development

If talent develops in sequential stages that are specific to the domain, it should then be possible to describe a model of talent development in the domain of creative writing. The prerequisites, skills, habits, and values that an individual develops as they move through the domain will be specific to the field of creative writing. Such a model would be both diagnostic and predictive. Given a description of a person, along with the model, it would be possible to pinpoint how far along that person is in their development and what further skills they need to develop to progress in the field. What follows is a discussion of how talent development is conceptualized in the research. I begin with a discussion of what theorists have identified as contributing factors, and then I move onto proposed models. Finally, I propose my own model that integrates the contemporary research on motivation to write.

Factors.

The domain of writing draws on skills involved in early reading and language development. Early reading and writing is predictive of later talent in writing (Piirto, 1998) as are high verbal abilities, 48% of 317 eminent individuals were avid readers as children compared to 77% of eminent creative writers (Goertzl, Goertzl, & Goertzl, 1978).

Psychological factors have also been offered as contributing to the development of creative writing talent. Women writers are more likely to see the world in intuitive, abstract ways than the general population (Piirto, 1998). Writers of both genders are likely to have personalities that stand in contrast to societal gender roles (Piirto, 2002). Based on historiometric studies of about 2,000 creative writers and a biographical study of eminent personalities, mental illness is associated with creative writing talent (Kaufman, 2001; Goertzl, Goertzl, & Goertzl, 1978). A study by Andreasen (1987), in which the author conducted structured interviews with 30 faculty members of the esteemed Iowa Writers' Workshop, along with 30 matched members of a control group, found that both the creative writers and their first degree relatives had higher rates of mental illness (such as affective and bipolar disorder) than the control group subjects. The author theorized that creativity was independent (both groups were matched on intelligence) and heritable (as evidenced by the writers' relatives' creativity).

Creative writers are described as having depression, mania, and resilience in a literature review focusing on creative writers' psychological makeup (Kohanyi, 2005); they are also described as risk takers, resilient, stubborn, persistent, good at self promotion (Piirto, 1992 in Olszewski-Kubilius & Whalen, 2000) and solitary as children (Gallo, 1994). A literature review of the research about creative writers found that internal variables such as personality, motivation, and intelligence were more salient than environmental variables (Kaufman, 2002).

Environmental factors have also been offered to explain writing talent. Sixty-seven percent of fiction and poetry writers described their childhood homes as unhappy, compared to 44% of eminent people (Goertzel, Goertzel, &Goertzel, 1978). In the study of eminent personalities, 70% of literary figures did not like school or do well in school (Goertzel, Goertzel & Goertzel, 1978), for reasons described earlier in the rationale section. However, in a more recent study, Piirto (2002) examined the lives of 80 male and 80 female contemporary American writers through biographical and correspondence data and found that many of the writers evidenced high academic achievement, especially in the area of writing. The difference in the two studies may stem from the fact that Piirto's study examines a different sample of writers, by focusing only on contemporary American authors. Piirto (2002) also identified other environmental factors; writers had access to mentors, lived in New York City, attended prestigious colleges and majored in English Literature. Male writers had often served in the military, while women writers had a higher than average prevalence of divorce. Simonton's (1986) research suggests that writers tend to be from cities, have small, non-religious families with non-supportive fathers and generally unhappy home environments.

Many experienced severe trauma such as the loss of a parent, alcoholic parents, or serious illness, either their own or their parents' (Olszewski-Kubilius & Whalen, 2000). College, however, was a different story, with writers developing friendships with other writers and attending readings with writer friends (Piirto, 1998).

Models.

While factors suggest generalities in the lives of writers, models describe in what sequence and contexts such factors are activated. Models attempt to provide a framework that can be used to predict whether a certain person will become a writer; models can also be used to evaluate the stage that a person is in their development as a writer.

Kohanyi (2005), in synthesizing the literature on the psychology and experiences of creative writers, proposes a predictive model that focuses mainly on the psychology of the writer, while describing how environmental occurrences could act as catalysts to activate personality traits. The assumption seems to be that only a particular personality is likely to become a writer. His model states that writers suffer an inordinate amount of stress in childhood, which may contribute to mental illness in adulthood. In this way, Kohanyi connects environmental and psychological variables. Kohanyi (2005) names three variables that allow these young people to gain resilience and transform their angst into writing talent. These three variables are: coming from an enriched and child-centered family, having high verbal abilities, and having a rich imagination.

Coming from an educational rather than psychological perspective, Applebee (2000) reviewed a number of models that emphasized characteristics of the domain. These characteristics include skills and strategies such as transferring from informal to

formal modes of expression; understanding the structure and function of varied genres; sentence combining; and process strategies such as brainstorming, revising, and editing. Recent models have emphasized the role of social context and values. These models advocate that students be able to analyze underlying value structures in a text, and when writing their own texts, transform the text and the message. The models that Applebee describes imply that with the proper training, most can become good writers. Some are not complete models, but rather descriptions of important factors. Applebee (2000) suggests that none of these models alone offer a complete explanation for the development of writing talent.

While some of these models touch on the issue of motivation, other psychological factors and specific techniques are more prominent. Recent research in motivation specific to writing allows reflection on how motives might play into a model of talent development.

Motivation to write.

Within the metaphor of relationship, motivation is what causes an individual to devote time and effort to the development of talent in the domain. Thus, it is a fuel for talent development. Motivation for writing has been examined in an introspective, literary fashion by authors for ages. It has been studied from the perspective of educational psychologists (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Pajares, 2003) and a neurobiological perspective (Flaherty, 2004) much more recently.

The lens of educational practice seeks to differentiate the motivations of novice or uninterested writers from those of expert or motivated writers and to test methods for

increasing motivation in reluctant writers. Motivation to write is studied in three veins (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007): 1. motives, needs, values, and interests, 2. self-efficacy and 3. self-regulatory strategies. Self-regulatory strategies are metacognitive strategies writers employ to reach their goals.

Self-efficacy has been studied extensively in relation to writing achievement. Self- efficacy is the belief that one is able to accomplish specific tasks, and it is assessed with items such as "I am able to write a research paper," or "I am able to edit my paper for grammar and spelling mistakes." Self-efficacy is repeatedly found, in quantitative studies, to be the strongest predictor of writing achievement (Anderman, 1992; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Klassen, 2002; Pajares, 2003; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989). Grades and prior performance, likewise, influence self-efficacy (Lackey, Miller, & Flanigan, 1997), creating a sort of chicken-and-egg situation. Simply put, writers who believe they are able to accomplish written tasks generally are able, and vice versa.

Self-efficacy falls into a larger category of study focused on "self-regulation." These are strategies writers use to accomplish their goals. Primarily metacognitive strategies have been studied, such as setting goals, monitoring progress, and managing time. Affective strategies could also fall under the category of self-regulation. Interventions attempting to teach self-regulatory strategies and explicit genre elements were found to be more effective than the writer's workshop model for teaching struggling writers (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006).

In a study of 95 college freshman who were administered self-regulatory scales specific to writing, self-regulatory strategies have been found to account for more variance in writing course grade than verbal aptitude, with the theory being that capability must be complemented by discipline, effort, and motivation for achievement to occur (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Similarly, writers who monitored their progress and shifted from process to outcome goals were found to do better at a writing task than those who did not (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999). One study, however, failed to see a connection between self-regulation and writing quality (Ferrari, Bouffard, & Rainville, 1988). This study did indicate that better writers waited longer to start writing, and wrote longer pieces, perhaps intimating planning and follow-through skills on the part of those writers.

In addition to self-efficacy and self-regulation, "goal" is a construct used by educational psychologists to conceptualize motivation (Elliot, 2005). Goals are general, rather than specific objectives for achievement. Current goal theory focuses on the difference between mastery goals and performance goals. A mastery goal is the desire to improve one's skills. A performance goal is a competitive goal, such as the desire to appear more talented than another student. Mastery goals generally emphasize effort, while performance goals emphasize ability. Scholars have also proposed extrinsic goals (such as the desire for money) and social goals (Elliot, 2005). Social goals are focused on establishing relationships with others (Urdan & Maeher, 1995). Goal theory also differentiates between approach goals, which are stated positively as in "I am trying to gain new skills," as opposed to avoidance goals, which are stated negatively, as in "I am trying to avoid losing my skills" (Elliot, 2005).

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Researchers have also differentiated between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). School-age and adolescent writers are said to rely heavily on extrinsic motivations such as grades (Cleary, 1991). In one study on extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, two groups of undergraduate creative writers were both asked to write poems, one group after ranking a list of extrinsic reasons why they wrote, and one group focusing on ranking a list of intrinsic reasons. The poems were independently rated by 12 established poets, and the poems written after the writers were asked to focus on the extrinsic reasons for writing were judged to be less creative (Amabile, 1983). Professional writers, when speaking of their motivations refer to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Arana, 2003; Fox, 1988).

I would like to add to this understanding of motivation the ideas of values and emotions, both of which may guide a writer. The role of emotion has been addressed by Mem Fox (1988), who used the metaphor of a "battleground" to express the role of both positive and negative emotions in fueling writing. Negative emotions as barriers to writing has been studied as well in an interview study with high school writers in which high school writers participated in "composing aloud" sessions and discussed the negative emotions that hindered their writing process (Cleary, 1991). Neurobiologist Flaherty (2004) attempted to develop an integrative perspective; although she relied heavily on biological explanations and for the most part ignored educational ones, her book integrated personal reflection, empirical studies, narratives, and reflections of famous writers.

The chapter, Why we write: The limbic system" focuses on emotions as the root of writing urge, with the desire to write described as a "secondary" emotion deriving from the need for connections and communication.

Values are abstract ideas that guide behavior and that may come into conflict with each other when making decisions. For example, technical writers may value clarity over creativity, while poets may value creativity over clarity. Examples of these conflicts are at the core of the novels by Chaim Potok, in which talented Jewish adolescents experience conflict between the values of their religion and the values of the academic and aesthetic domains in which they excel (Potok, 1996; 2003).

Finally, identity refers to the extent with which an individual defines himself in terms of the domain. Gifted students in high school, for example, may define themselves as "math people" and "humanities" people (Coleman, 2005). Writers interviewed by Day (2002) expressed a strong writerly identity, transforming a psychological view of themselves as "odd" into a strength— a unique writerly vision. It seems likely that individuals with advanced talent would view writing as more integral to their sense of self than individuals with typical writing skills.

A variety of novel approaches have been proposed in the literature as a means of increasing students' motivation to write. Researchers identify the lack of the following as barriers to motivation: positive self-perception, task control, adequate time to devote to writing, graphic organizers, peer collaboration, and relevant lessons. Over emphasis is put on short, low-level writing and grammatical correctness (Cook et. al., 2001).

Struggling writers have been found to benefit from being taught explicit self-regulation strategies along with genre elements (Harris, Graham, & Mason, 2006). Teachers are advised to give feedback that is specific and task-oriented, and addresses the complexities of writing (Lackey, Miller, & Flanigan, 1997). Writers' retreats are suggested as a way to make the writing process more comfortable and collaborative for academics (Moore, 2003). Another suggestion is establishing a "literate community" in the classroom, in which all students have a role in writing and see it as an enjoyable, social activity (Nolen, 2007). At the college level, one instructor improved student motivation by having alternating groups of students grade each others' essay exams, and justify their evaluations (Shaw, 2002).

Professional writers, in response to the question "Why do you write?" have described their relationship to writing in complex, metaphorical terms, such as writing as a servant to "a great cold elemental grace which knows us" (Williams, 1998, p. 11), as a search for acceptance and approval (Salter, 1998), as a license to tell the truth (Jong, in Arana, 2003), and as a form of giving voices to the experiences of those whose voices have been neglected (Doyle, 1998). These descriptions fit with the notion of "relationship" as an ongoing process, as contrasted with dichotomous models of motivation as primarily "mastery" or "performance," or even educational perspectives on motivation, which approach the concept as a deficiency to be remediated. It is these types of rich, multifaceted conceptualizations that I want to explore with younger writers.

Proposed model for writing talent development.

This section weaves together the literature on motivation to write and the literature on the development of writing talent, for the purpose of proposing a developmental model. The model is sequential and cumulative, with writing talent progressing through stages. The characteristics of each stage may overlap into the next stage, and writers in the more advanced stage may have characteristics associated with earlier stages, yet progress through the stages is necessary. A writer cannot skip one of the stages of development.

What is the purpose of developing a stage model for writing talent development? One purpose is to synthesize the research with personal experience and reflection. The stage model presents an overview of how I perceive writing talent to "work" in a way that simply summarizing the research on writing talent development does not. It is important to present my perceptions before beginning the study, because these perceptions are preliminary biases that may affect how I carry out the research. In my study, I am not attempting to prove or disprove a universal model of writing attainment. This cannot be done with a focus on the experiences of a few students. Furthermore, my model of writing talent development is not universal because it is based primarily on studies of American creative writers. Instead of trying to prove or disprove the model, it is important for me to be open to a variety of conflicting interpretations that may not fit within my original thinking. However, the model provides a starting place for examining the connection between motivation and writing talent.

The factors evident in this model include cognitive ability and environmental factors. The factor that propels and sustains development, though, is motivation. The model evidences a number of principles explaining how motivation functions in relation to talent development in writing. Different primary motivations come to the fore at each stage of the writer's development. These motivations accumulate, so at the most advanced stage, the writer has a variety of motivations upon which to draw. Thus, the writer becomes more adaptable and able to sustain motivation. An example of this is switching from process to product goals (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999) within the context of a single task. Emotions, both positive and negative, play a role in motivation; more advanced writers use both positive and negative emotions to their advantage. They develop a daily discipline of writing that is not free of emotion, but not dominated by it. Advanced writers are also motivated by values; implicitly or explicitly they tackle value conflicts about the purpose of the craft and the nature of the world. Talented writers are likely to state their goals in positive phrasings; this means they are thinking in terms of striving towards success rather than attempting to avoid failure. Although they rely on a variety of goals, when forced to prioritize, social and mastery goals will predominate. As writers progress in their development, they will increasingly express their identity in connection with the domain.

Stage one: A love affair with language.

Research into the cognitive development of writers indicates that most have high verbal ability as children, most are early readers, reading chapter books fluently before first grade (Mills & Jackson, 1990). We have seen as well that many writers were avid

readers as children. In high school, their reading interests are comparable to those of adults (Sullivan & Donoho, 1994).

Others though, began reading and writing later than the typical student. These writers still had an engagement in literature – the oral literature of storytelling. Prolific children's book author Patricia Polacco grew up listening to stories, but because of dyslexia, did not learn to read until age 14 (Tomfolio.com, 2009). The commonality is that these writers were all enamored with language before they began writing, and this love affair with language was a primary motivation for them to begin writing. Future writers can begin as readers, but also as listeners, spellers, and storytellers.

In this stage of talent development, the role of the domain is to excite a sense of playfulness and imagination. Families, libraries, preschools, and churches serve as the major contexts for literacy learning.

Stage two: Writing for oneself.
What are the prerequisites for writing? And what impels someone, especially a child, to begin to write? One prerequisite, as I have explained in the previous section, is an appreciation for language and story. The desire to communicate is a universal desire, but the desire to communicate in writing is not. If someone is not attracted to the written word, they will communicate through art, music, talk, or action, but not with writing.

Children do not begin writing because they desire to communicate an idea. By the time their motor skills are developed enough to begin to write or type, their mastery of oral language is a much more efficient way to communicate. Why then, do children write?

In the case of Geoffery, a precocious and prolific young writer (Edmunds & Noel, 2003), he began to write because he wanted his brother to have a book. Did he want to communicate something to his brother that he could not communicate orally? No, he had a personal desire to rectify an unfair situation in which he had been given a book and his brother had not. And perhaps, having been surrounded with books and stories from a young age, he wanted the admiration that would come from his family at his having written a book. So he wrote his brother a book. Personal goals may be either intrinsic or extrinsic.

Extrinsic.

External motivations may compel someone to first begin writing. The desire to please someone, to get a good grade, or put food on the table could be some examples of external motivation.

The written word carries a certain amount of prestige when compared with the spoken word. Written words that have been published, especially, are thought to be important. Thoughts that have been published can initiate a sort of intellectual or aesthetic celebrity, even immortality.

When an adolescent writes a poem to another adolescent, that poem carries the prestige of the tradition of love poems, conferring upon the writer the connotation of aesthetic taste and pure motive. Thus, we can understand why some writers are motivated by the desire to attain the prestige of the title "author."

Schoolchildren are often motivated to please a teacher, thereby earning a good grade, and pleasing their parents. If their primary audience, though, is a teacher, they may develop a skewed sense of audience.

While extrinsic motivations may be integral in first motivating people to write, or in motivating them to finish projects in time for deadlines, inexperienced writers rely too much on these extrinsic motivations and do not balance them with intrinsic motivations (Hairston, 1984; Miller, 1982). Part of a writer's growth becomes the ability to remain motivated through situations where external motivation is sparse.

Intrinisic.

The stereotype of the unstable artist is to some extent based in fact, with 80% of writers suffering from mood disorders to 30% of non-writers in the Andreasen study alone (Olszewski-Kubilius & Whalen, 2000). Kohanyi suggested that traits like mania and depression that are considered maladaptive may contribute positively to a creative writer's development, especially when combined with resiliency. This is because writing can be an outlet for the speeded cognitive associations that writers make when in a manic state. During a depressive state, writers use writing to try to make sense of their emotions. The process of writing is a coping strategy because it elevates their mood. During a depressive period, a writer may apply a critical attitude towards critiquing the writing that they produced in the manic phase (Kohanyi, 2005). Writing allows for catharsis, or the release of strong emotions onto the page. Writers can later go back and read what they have written and reflect upon it.

Writing can also be a sort of problem-solving strategy for understanding oneself and the world. This motivation for writing is part of some contemporary theories of writing, such as Emig's "Writing as a mode of learning" (1977) and Hayes & Flower's (1980) views of writing as a problem solving process. Examples of writing as problem-solving are as follows: jotting down scientific observations; writing a list of "pros and cons" to help make a decision; and outlining a process using a flowchart. Writers also solve problems of how to best communicate their ideas. Creative writers motivated by intellectual and aesthetic exercises experience pleasure when they master a new writing strategy (Miller, 1982).

When engaged in the creative process, writers may enter a pleasurable state of consciousness called "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is characterized by optimal challenge level, focus on clear goals, and a distorted sense of time passing. Flow is intrinsically rewarding. The mature writers, however, knows that they must push on with scheduled writing even when it is tedious.

In this stage, the domain serves a modeling function. Writers learn genre elements through reading and through direct instruction. Writers practice writing longer pieces. Families, libraries, churches, and schools provide models and instruction in writing.

Stage three: Writing and the 'other.'

While writing for the self can help a writer accomplish goals and develop a writer's skills, the prerequisite for a literary career is the development of writing for a

specified audience. A writer's awareness of "audience" is a sophisticated concept. It involves stepping out of the self, and imagining the perspective of another.

The motivation of connecting with an audience who is different than oneself leads to the development of specific skills. Writing for a new audience involves adopting a new vocabulary. In fiction, especially, the author must adopt multiple dialects. Giving advice to aspiring writers, author James Michener recommends that they master the vocabulary of at least three social classes (Arana, 2003).

This is the stage that prompts revision, as writers realize that there is a difference between their initial expression of ideas, and the best way to communicate those ideas to an audience. The use of revision also indicates that the writer understands a core advantage of communication in writing: the ability to craft a message with time and thought. Through revision, writers' understandings of structural patterns and genre expectations increase, and they become able to conform to or defy these expectations in order to achieve their purposes. Writers in this stage understand that revision is not the same as editing surface-level details. It is wrestling with ideas and bringing form to follow function.

Unfortunately, the only audience that school children address is typically their teacher. This leads them to develop revision strategies that are specific to pleasing their teacher. Students who revise only to please the teacher have a very limited concept of both "audience" and "communication." They make only the most basic of revisions, crossing out and replacing words (Sommers, 1980). They avoid risk-taking, and adopt an impersonal, "academic" tone (Hairston, 1984).

In contrast, students who are motivated to communicate with a specific audience will actively seek feedback. Not only will they engage in revision, but they will engage in prevision; that is, they will have a personal vision for what they want to accomplish, and they will use this, in addition to the audience's feedback as a measure of evaluating their work (Miller, 1982).

At this stage, writers may demonstrate emergent writerly identities. They may describe themselves as writers, develop favorite genres, and describe themselves as capable. They may associate with other writers, either metaphorically, as "students" of their favorite authors, or literally as part of a writer's group.

The role of the domain in this stage is to provide authentic feedback and challenging writing tasks. In addition to the contexts associated with earlier stages of talent development, in this stage contexts with writing peers become more important. These could include specialized classes (creative writing or journalism), clubs, contests, summer workshops, and perhaps even entry-level publication opportunities.

An interview study of adolescent writers described the highest level of motivation as being able to balance personal goals and audience expectations. They begin to have a "sustained individual interest" in writing (Lipstein, R. L. & Renninger, K. A. 2007). Thus, the adolescents were in writing across a variety of contexts. This, to me, indicates characteristics of an advanced stage three writer. It is notable, though, that despite schooling, some writers may never progress from stage two to stage three.

Stage four: Writing as a career.

To have a career as a writer in contemporary society, however, writing talent is not enough. The writer must not only understand the audience, the writer must have an audience. This involves networking with other writers, finding a literary agent, understanding market niches, and the ability to deal with rejection. The extrinsic motivation of earning money becomes an important, although not the sole, motivation for developing talent during this stage.

College becomes an important context for inculcation in the domain. Writers train under professional writers; through writers' workshops, writers offer each other constructive criticism. Writers host and attend readings in rather insular circles. Literary agents, literary magazines, and publication companies become important contexts for introducing the pragmatics of the domain. Writers network and learn about publishing trends, self-promotion, addressing a specialized audience, publication, and dealing with rejection as they submit manuscripts and receive feedback. Gatekeepers, in the form of editors, play an important role in encouraging and discouraging talent development. During this stage, writers develop a daily discipline of writing; they learn to write not only when they are inspired, but when they are apprehensive as well. They learn to channel both positive and negative emotions into work.

Stage five: Writing as an art.

In order to write for a career, writers must be able to appeal to specific audiences who are able to pay them for their work. This is also necessary to be recognized as a genius in the literary field. However, genius-level writers must be able to appeal to multiple audiences, rather than just one.

A work judged to have literary merit will often both reflect a specific subculture and transcend it. It makes a statement about the time period it was written it, as it speaks to audiences of different time periods. It is multi-leveled.

Furthermore, the author's use of form demonstrates not only mastery, but creativity. The genius-level writer adapts form and uses language in a way that uniquely addresses the contemporary context. They invent new forms and literary techniques that fit their messages.

The genius-level writer chooses themes of contemporary social importance. Within a story about a few characters, larger contemporary philosophical questions and historical events are tackled, directly or indirectly. Explicitly or implicitly, writers tackle tough value questions, such as "What is the purpose of art?" and "What is the nature of morality, of humanity?" In Wayne Booth's (1983) "The Rhetoric of Fiction," Booth explains that even through the medium of fiction, rhetorical positions are defended. At this stage in writing development, a single writer (or small cohort) has the power to change the course of the entire domain through their interpretations of answers to these important questions.

At this level, motivations might be described as altruistic. Writers want to contribute to the domain, and speak to important contemporary philosophical issues. Writers are in essence, giving back, and establishing a cultural legacy that will influence younger writers. To help them do this, they must associate with other high caliber writers as well as aspiring writers. They may become university professors and become associated with prestigious writers groups.

These social circles are exclusive and associated with "high culture" rather than "popular culture" forms of creative writing.

Progression through the stages.

While there have been reports of very precocious writers (Feldman, 1986; Hulbert, 2004; Edmunds & Noel, 2003), I would hesitate to call them prodigious because their work does not compare with that of seasoned adult writers. It seems to take ten years of writing to achieve expertise, and ten more to pen their greatest works (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2007). However, writers need not begin young to have illustrious, productive careers (Kaufman & Gentile, 2002).

Applying the model: Studying talented young writers.

The proposed study cannot test all aspects of this model; it is not a longitudinal study, and I do not plan to interview writers at all stages of development. Rather, I predict these young writers will fall somewhere within level three of their skill development. This prediction, along with my prior principles of motivation in this model, guide the development of research questions. These research questions are accompanied by preliminary suppositions. The overall guiding research question is, "How do talented writers describe their relationship with writing?" Subquestions and preliminary suppositions follow.

How do students describe the effect of varying contexts on their relationship with writing?

Talented POP writers will be able to describe the conventions for high performance in a POP context, and how these conventions are similar to, and different

from, other contexts. Talented POP writers will not feel they have much room to change these conventions.

Talented POP writers will negotiate conflicts between the goals of writing in school, in POP, and personal goals. They may negotiate value conflicts between writing in various domains, or between writing and other domains.

How do students describe connections between motivations and acquisitions of specific skills?

Talented POP writers will demonstrate an emerging understanding of revision as a way of crafting a message to address an authentic audience.

How do students describe the role of morals and values in writing?

No preliminary supposition.

Chapter Two

Methodology

Research is a systematic, analytic process. In this chapter, I outline my research methods, their history, and the rationale supporting them. Research questions are a starting point; methodology is the process of answering the questions. Questions of methodology are rooted in philosophies of what can be asked and how answers can be reached.

Theories of Knowing

These basic philosophical questions form what Guba & Lincoln (1994) refer to as a "paradigm." In conventional speech, a paradigm refers to a perceptual shift. In Guba & Lincoln's terminology, "a paradigm is a set of basic beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles" (1994, p. 107). This means that a paradigm is a set of assumptions, from which people base their reasoning of what counts as knowledge. An example assumption is "a statement cannot be both true and false." An assumption such as this cannot be falsified; logic cannot be used to prove the truth of logic. Researchers following a process of logical deduction believe that answers that are self-contradictory are not satisfactory. Paradoxes do not fit this paradigm.

Beginning with the European Renaissance, traditional religious paradigms have been challenged by the scientific method, which is now common to students in high school. This strict methodology is connected to the positivist and post-positivist paradigms. Positivists and the post-positivists who followed them believe there exist

universal empirical truths, principles such as "the world is round" or "gravity exists." Researchers can discover these principles through focusing on specific variables, eliminating extraneous variables, and putting aside their pre-judgments of what will occur. Post-positivists differ from the positivists in that they believe that certainty about these truths is impossible. Truths can never be absolutely verified, because there is always the possibility one will discover an exception to the principle.

Both the utility and veracity of these paradigms have been critiqued by two emerging paradigms. One critique is that, with its focus on observable phenomenon and large samples, the scientific method does not address how humans ascribe meaning to their lives, narrate events, and form in-depth interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Another critique has been that the theories and generalizations the scientific method draws in the social sciences may have little meaning or impact on those being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This has been especially true in cases where anthropologists from industrialized nations have described other cultures as savage and deficient. Another critique is that facts cannot speak for themselves; they are interpreted through the lens of theory. Furthermore, the notion that the observer can keep his or her biases from affecting the interpretation has been called into question. Especially in the social sciences, human interaction affects the interpretation that humans make of events. From these critiques, the paradigms of critical theory and constructivism (interpretivism) arose.

Critical theorists and constructivists share the belief that an objective reality does not exist. They believe humans, guided by values shape reality. Critical theorists believe reality is shaped by power over time. Power refers to dominant cultures, genders, classes, and political groups.

Constructivists view reality as local and specific; this is the idea that all humans are engaged in meaning making every day (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Constructivists and critical theorists believe that their paradigms are incompatible with positivist and post-positivist paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Either there is a reality or there is not. Either research is value free or it is value directed.

But this forced choice does not make sense to me. Why can't some things be real and other things constructed? Perhaps constructions are rooted in reality, but grow to take on a life of their own. Why can't values play a variable role in research, dependent upon the roles people play in the research? Acknowledging that values play a role in research does not preclude the possibility that, at times, such values should be tempered. In the positivist and post-positivist paradigms, values play the primary role in choosing research questions and guidelines for the treatment of human subjects, and a more limited role in observation, methodology, and data analysis. In the constructivist and critical theory paradigms, values play a role throughout the research, including in data analysis.

Post-positivism is suited to the physical sciences; in the past, natural change was generally slow, occurring over hundreds and thousands of years. At this rate of change, generalizations are useful for predicting future outcomes. Changes in society and culture, conversely, happen very quickly. Generalization and prediction may have less utility when it comes to people's values, meanings, and corresponding behaviors. I think I am suggesting that there is a good reason why, the greater the research questions reflect human perceptions and experience, the more likely researchers are to take a constructivist approach.

Like interpretivists (Schwandt, 1994), I believe humans have imagination and reasoning skills and are able to make choices; they are not purely mechanistic. Furthermore, in the past two thousand years, humanity's capacity to influence nature has grown exponentially. This fact, combined with reflection on past injustices done in the name of science, lead researchers to give increased attrition to constructivist and critical approaches.

This study is based in constructivist assumptions and accompanying methodological choices. However, I do not reject the utility and veracity of competing paradigms. To illustrate my assumptions, consider the concept "woman." This is a concept rooted in physical realities, defined by physiological features and chromosome pairings. Although constructivists purport that no objective reality exists, they have a concept that, to me, illustrates common ground with the post-positivist notion of empirical reality. Maxwell's (1992) discussion of the importance of descriptive validity explains that the researcher's observations and interview transcripts must correspond with what occurred and what was said. How can there be descriptive validity without some external reality? Descriptive validity, though, is only a starting point for constructivists. The concept "woman" is also defined culturally; many aspects of what it means to be a woman are flexible according to both cultural and individual interpretation. In some Western cultures, contraception has changed the impact of women's physiological features. In the future, it is imaginable that men and women can change sexes and that people born men might be able to experience pregnancy. Under these circumstances, our meanings for "woman," rather than physical realities, will be the ultimate test of what it really means to be a woman.

Connecting Theory to Method

Researching talented young writers' motivations under a post-positivist paradigm would involve placing a large number of students in experimental settings in which they have to choose between alternate rewards. Such a study would rely on observation of behavior. These behaviors would be interpreted according to a predetermined theoretical framework. By seeking to eliminate contextual variables, a post-positivist would hope that the writers' motivations would generalize to a broad array of contexts.

This study emphasizes contrasting aspects of motivation. Motivation is conceived of as an ongoing relationship between these adolescent writers and the larger community of writers. Actions are important, but are not studied is isolation. Rather they are studied in connection with interpretations and contexts. Students are assumed to have trustworthy insights into their motivations, through their interpretations and narratives of their experiences with writing. These assumptions lead me to choose qualitative methods – specifically collective case studies rooted in interview data and document analysis. Theory is not entirely predetermined – it is evolving. Before getting into the specifics of the study's design, I give a general overview of principles involved in qualitative methodology within a constructivist paradigm.

Qualitative Methodology

While qualitative methodology (the use of interviews and prolonged observation) is not used only within the constructivist and critical theory paradigms, the paradigms do influence how the methodology is employed (Coleman, *The Research Knot*). Conducting qualitative research within a constructivist paradigm entails a unique understanding of

concepts such as rapport, validity, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and ethics both emic and etic.

Rapport.

Rapport is a functional necessity to qualitative researchers because they rely heavily on information gathered in interviews and interactions. Respondents will be more likely to give fuller, more authentic responses to researchers whom the respondents believe are trustworthy. Rapport, thus, is defined by the research participant. If the researcher believes he or she has rapport, but the participant does not feel the same way, then functionally, the researcher does not have rapport.

Glesne (2006) mentions some methods for developing rapport. These include spending time with participants and "commitment acts" (Feldman, Bell & Berger, 2003, p.36-38 in Glesne, 2006, p.114). Commitment acts include doing work that supports the research participants' goals. Other means of gaining rapport include keeping a distance from the group's outcasts, and conforming to the group's behavioral standards (Glesne, 2006). Glesne cautions that developing friendships with some participants may lead you to prioritize their interpretations over others'.

My acts of commitment included volunteering for a focus group and serving as a judge at a Power of the Pen competition. Volunteering my time with the Power of the Pen organization allowed me to understand the participants' shared experience better and communicated commitment to the founder of the organization.

Validity.

Conceptions of validity in qualitative research differ from conceptions of validity in quantitative research. Maxwell's (1992) "Understanding and validity in qualitative research" casts validity in qualitative research as forms of understanding. Unlike quantitative researchers in the post-positivist tradition, Maxwell does not believe that understanding of phenomena can be guaranteed by adherence to scientific methods and statistical procedures. However, he believes researchers can come together to make explicit the types of understanding that are, and are not, important to their research.

According to Maxwell (1992), all types of validity that are important to qualitative researchers depend on descriptive validity. Without descriptive validity, the other types of validity would be impossible. Descriptive validity is the "factual accuracy" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 5) of the account. Are the researcher's notes reflective of what was done and said, with no omissions or mistranslations? Descriptive validity can be approximated by comparing the researcher's account with videotapes or audiotapes of the account, or by comparing the researcher's account with the accounts of others who observed the same phenomena. In this study, original recordings and documents will be kept secure and confidential, for the purpose checking descriptive validity.

As an account moves from descriptive specifics to more general and interpretative statements, interpretive validity comes to the fore. Interpretive validity is important to qualitative researchers because it reflects the extent to which they can understand and can represent the insider's (or emic) perspective. To test interpretive validity, researchers can submit their accounts of their research participants' experiences to the participants themselves.

If the participants recognize their viewpoints and interpretations in some part of the researcher's text, then that part of the text has interpretive validity for those participants. This does not mean that the researcher might not also include alternate interpretations; only that, when researchers portray the participant's interpretations, these interpretations will be portrayed accurately. For example, if I wrote that "Angela was sad," from Angela's perspective, and she agrees that she was sad, this would have interpretive validity. This does not prevent me from writing that, from my perspective, it seemed that Angela was more angry than sad. I just need to be careful to delineate one perspective from another.

The next type of validity that Maxwell describes is theoretical validity. Theoretical validity "is concerned with problems that do not disappear with agreement about the 'facts' of the situation; the issue is the legitimacy of the application of a given concept or theory to establish facts, or indeed whether any agreement can be reached about what the facts are" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 8). Theoretical validity refers to the researcher's explanation of phenomenon, or etic perspective. If researchers use established theories to explain the phenomena they see, then the researchers must represent that theory as it is generally agreed upon in order to have theoretical validity. Furthermore, the researchers must relate the phenomena to the theory in a manner that does not either contradict the theory or misrepresent the phenomena. For an assertion to have theoretical validity, it must meet two standards. First, the assertion must be accepted within the theoretical framework of the discipline. It must be understood in terms of the discipline's structure and language.

Secondly, the example of the phenomena must fall within the definition of the assertion. An example of this from my own study would be the extent to which what I document as "nonuniversal development" fits with the general understanding of nonuniversal development.

The next type of validity that Maxwell discusses is generalizability. Generalizability plays a significant role in quantitative research, as researchers try to relate the results of their studies to a variety of people and settings. In qualitative research, generalizability "is normally based on the assumption that a theory may be useful in making sense of similar persons or situations" (Maxwell, 1992, p. 293). An example of generalizability in qualitative research would be if an anthropologist's narrative of a certain culture in order to make a positive first contact with that culture. Generalizability in qualitative research can also refer to generalizing from the data back to the theory.

Finally, Maxwell (1992) examines evaluative validity. Evaluative validity involves making moral judgments about observed phenomenon. Ethics are often a matter of great disagreement, so evaluative validity may be difficult to establish. Similar to theoretical validity, a text will have evaluative validity if it meets two criteria. First, one must agree with the ethical philosophy that underpins the specific evaluative statements. Secondly, one must agree with the description and interpretation of the events occurred. For example, one must agree both that torture is wrong and that the scenario meets the criteria for a torture situation.

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Beach's (2003) "a problem of validity for education research" suggests that evaluative validity has an important role in research, but that the role of evaluative validity is simply a starting place for establishing validity. Research must not only make moral judgments, but must make moral improvements in order to be considered valid. This type of validity is called catalytic validity. From Beach's (2003) perspective, both education and scientific research have been traditionally flawed by their tendency to replicate the societal status quo. This status quo is defined by Beach (2003) as the use of capitalism to propagate established social hierarchies. Education and scientific inquiry have been used as capitalist tools to keep the lower classes in their place. Educational research, Beach asserts (2003), only has validity if it results in a change to traditional power structure and undermines traditional attitudes.

While I may not agree with Beach about the morality of scientific research, as scientific research has resulted in many liberating and developments that bettered mankind, I admire the consideration that qualitative researchers, under the constructivist paradigm, have taken for the role of values in research. They have explored the role values play at every point in the research process, and have taken a clear moral viewpoint, explicitly stated in their work.

Subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

Subjectivity in qualitative research has been described as "virtuous" (Peshkin, 1988) for its ability to ground, inspire, and accompany researchers as they grow in their understanding of the topic. Subjectivity grounds by providing starting places, or lenses, through which the researcher meets unfamiliar habits and situations. Researchers' lenses

are composed of their assumptions, beliefs, prior experiences, and emotions. These lenses are specific to the researchers in their places and times.

A researcher's lenses, often called "subjective I's", change as they accompany the researcher through changes in place and time. This occurs, in part, through the process of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity refers to the instances in which an individual's subjectivities interact to change each other. Researchers and research participants may both change their conceptions of a phenomenon through the process of intersubjectivity.

In designing my research, I reflect on the subjective lenses through which I see the world. For this project, certain lenses have had an impact on my research. One lens is the "empirical I." My education has been steeped in the traditional rationalist, scientific tradition. I approach many intellectual tasks with an emphasis on deductive logic. Such a perspective may reflect an intolerance for paradox and complexity, two features of qualitative research in the constructivist paradigm, or to an argumentative rather than explorative interview style. The logical, rational side to my personality helped me as I searched for themes and analyzed my data. It helped me organize my thoughts and form a consistent narrative in my writing. The "empirical I" was less helpful when it came to the interviews. I noticed myself sticking to the script (the list of questions I had predetermined). While I did not have an argumentative interview style, I may have missed following up on some conversation leads because I did not see their initial relevance to my original questions. For example, I was hesitant to ask very personal questions or follow storylines onto meandering paths. The second "subjective I" that influenced my research was the "writerly I." I see myself as a writer.

Although I am not a creative writer, I remember being very enamored with creative writing as a middle and high school student. My "writerly I" allowed me to understand the emotional high and lows these young writers faced. I was able to discuss specific books with the interview participants, because I had read these books when I was in high school. I was able to offer recommendations to further students' talent development. I was afraid, however that I would project myself too much into the research, and interpret students' relationships with writing as my relationship with writing. In the end, I think my interpretation of students' relationships with writing differs from my current relationship with writing, but does have some similarities to how I experienced writing when I was in high school and I spent hours writing fiction and poems.

Ethics.

The ethical guidelines of qualitative researchers tend towards subject-centered policies aimed at protecting the powerless. Contemporary researchers want to avoid past mistakes such as valuing discovery above humanistic ideals, the abuse of utilitarian notions of "greater good," and the use of research to harm the researched. Though these contemporary researchers may view science and even culture as relative, they are not moral relativists. In House's words, (1990, p. 165), "There is a right and a wrong, a true and a false."

Some of these moral guidelines are spelled out in the federally mandated Institutional Review Board (IRB) principles and in the American Anthropological Association (AAA) code of ethics. "Informed consent" is prominent in both the AAA (1998) and IRB (Department of Health and Human Services, 2009) guidelines. This

involves informing participants of the purpose of the study and gaining their consent to participate. Participants may choose to opt out of the study at any time. Studies are to be carried out by a qualified investigator. For this study, the principal investigator was listed as an experienced qualitative researcher and professor who is supervising the study. Both sets of guidelines suggest that investigators must try to do no harm, though they cannot guarantee there will be no adverse effects of the research. The AAA suggests the ideal of reciprocity in which the investigator gives back to the participants. This is an ideal I aspire to in my research; but it is difficult to define. How can you measure how much you give and how much you receive? I received information that helped me in my career. To say that I contributed to my participants by listening to them, or sharing knowledge of other writer's experiences does not seem good enough. They have probably learned a bit about other writer's experiences by participating in POP, and they don't need me to have someone to listen to. However, I found, in the course of conducting interviews that one small thing I was able to give to participants was encouragement. For these students, the very act of talking about their motivations made them feel more motivated. I was able to give Nicole some feedback on her novel when she requested critiques.

The final IRB guideline is that benefits to society must outweigh the risks. Again this is difficult to measure, but it rests on the same principle of reciprocity. The reciprocity here is not only to the individual, but to society as well. This guideline, as well as the guideline prohibiting unnecessary risks, leaves a lot of room for a utilitarian interpretation.

Participants are at risk for psychological harm merely because the investigator records and interprets their stories. Even verbatim records, once published, open up participant's inner lives to the possibility of strangers' scrutiny and judgment. Participants may agree beforehand to engage in such risks, without knowing what their final reaction will be once the manuscript is published. This is the dilemma that Schepler-Hughes (1979) faced when she made private lives into a public document. I attempt to demonstrate reciprocity to society by highlighting the educational needs of gifted students.

Emic and etic.

Emic and etic are terms that are used to describe differing types of interpretation of human behavior. The emic describes the behavior from the perspective of the person or people exhibiting that behavior, while etic is the researcher, or outside observer's viewpoint. They have become important in the social sciences because they represent the two goals of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers believe that the same phenomena can be experienced in many ways, and that conflicting experiences can be valid for different purposes. One goal of qualitative research is to understand how groups and individuals construct meaning from their experiences, and this goal presents a different purpose for research than the goal of interpreting social behavior through a theoretical lens.

Although, both goals are important, emic perspectives are more important. This is because an accurate etic account depends upon an accurate emic account. Before drawing larger meaning from a social phenomenon, we must understand how those involved experience the phenomenon. The emic perspective also tends to outlast the etic

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perspective in scholarly utility. Theories change over the course of time, as new information and interpretations are discovered. However, etic perspectives are also important as they attempt to determine patterns and establish a vocabulary that allows cultures to explore their similarities and differences.

History of qualitative methods.

Qualitative research methodology originated in ethnography and anthropology. Christian researchers encountered societies with vastly different moral systems and their descriptions of these societies were filtered through Christian perspectives. To this day, value conflicts between researchers and researched area are major issues in qualitative research. Values have long driven research, though these values have changed over the years. The theory of cultural evolution, held by many ethnographers for a time, evaluated cultures and placed them on a scale according to their level of moral development. Such research and theoretical perspectives are now viewed as biased. Ethnographers later began to study American communities; "the Chicago school," a group of researchers working in Chicago, highlighted the everyday lives of the urban poor. While many studies were sponsored by corporations and churches, and aimed at integrating disparate populations, later the assimilation perspective was reconsidered. In the modernist phase, theories of constructivist research were formed, and these theories gained acceptance in the research community in the 1970s and 1980s. Current ethnography includes post-modern, many-voiced works. Scholars may spend less time doing extensive fieldwork and more time reading and reflecting, possibly re-interpreting older studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Vidich & Lyman, 1994).

Research Design

The overarching design for this study is a collective case study, based in phenomenological interviews and document analysis. A case study is a concentrated inquiry into a specific, unique bounded system (Stake, 1994). Theory and generalization are of secondary importance to describing the complex details of each case. In this study, the cases are individual student writers. A collective case study such as this one examines multiple cases for the purpose of understanding a specific phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon is the relationship between the individual and the domain. In such a study, it is the phenomenon that is considered the subject of study, not the individual cases; for this reason, a collective case study is also called an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). Cases have a history of use in social work, medical records, and psychology as a form of record keeping. However, doing case study research is different than these forms of record keeping as it entails a long process of reasoned planning, research and theory application, and extensive interpretation on the part of the researcher.

To familiarize myself with the study type, I read three collective case studies from the field of education. Two of the collective case studies focused on small groups of teachers (Au & Blake, 2003; Scheib, 2003) while one focused on large-scale technology reforms in five Asian nations (Lim, Wong, & Quah, 2007). All three included extensive data collection, with about 200 pages of data collected per case. All studies explored both individual themes and cross-case themes. Reports contained anecdotes and participant quotations for support. The studies differed in the extent to which they incorporated narrative or described researcher subjectivities. In reviewing case studies in gifted education, Mendaglio (2003) described features of exemplary studies: they address

the reasoning process and interplay between various aspects of study design, taking on another's perspective, and awareness of one's own perspective.

Although specifying a study type offers some guidance for methodological decisions, these decisions must still be reasoned out. These decisions include research questions, participant selection, access, data collection, data analysis, and reporting.

Research questions.

The overall research question is, "How do talented writers describe their relationship with writing?" The wording of this question emphasizes the focus on the students' perceptions of their motivation. It is assumed, as a tenet of constructivist research, that students have insight into their desires and understandings, and that this insight influences their actions. The word "relationship" is used to illustrate my conception of motivation. Like a relationship, there is reciprocity between the area of study and the scholar. Also, like a relationship, motivations are conceived of as having a story, a history, and changing according to different contexts.

The first subquestion is "How do students describe the effect of varying contexts on their relationship with writing?" This reflects the assumption that contexts, including people and settings, compose the domain and influence the student's relationship with the domain. It is a practical question because it is believed that understanding how to match students to supportive contexts will support the development of the student's relationship with the domain.

The second question, "How do students describe connections between various motivations and the acquisition of specific skills?" The assumption behind this question

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is that it is possible that students have differing reasons for practicing differing skills. The practical application of this would be emphasizing different motivations at different stages of skill development.

The third question is "How do students describe the role of values in writing?" This question derives from the idea of the domain as a culture, with morals and values that the student is acculturated into. Connected to this idea is the development of the writer's identity and whether their personal values are compatible with the values held by the domain.

Participants.

The participants in this study are middle and high school students (and one college student), who as middle school students mastered a competitive writing task. They share a common experience of competing in creative writing competitions at the local, regional, and state levels. However, they differ in respect to their home and school contexts. This will allow comparison in respect to the influence of varied contexts on students' motivation.

Participants were selected based on intensity sampling (Patton, 1990) — the highest level of performers was contacted by letter, with a follow up phone call or email. Out of about 30 students that were contacted, eight participated. Using a highly selective sample, such as top performers in a competition, is referred to as "intensity sampling" (Patton, 1990). Intensity samples seek participants who represent the highest instance of the phenomena — in this case, talent for impromptu creative writing. Talent is defined in part by this context, in which English teachers complete a blind, holistic scoring of timed

creative vignettes in competitions spanning multiple rounds. From 7,500 writing competitors, the students in this study are chosen from the top 200, or top three percent of writers. This is significant considering that the competitors themselves are often the more advanced or more motivated writers, chosen from honors English classes or writing clubs in their home schools.

I did not screen any potential participants regarding their level of motivation for writing. This is because motivation is considered the dependent variable of sorts in the study, the quality to be explored. An assumption of the study is that a minimal amount of motivation is necessary for progressing in the competition.

Most of the students I contacted were recent participants in Power of the Pen competitions; some were still competing. This allowed students to have vivid memories of competition; yet most participants were also able to compare the experience of writing in middle school to writing in high school.

Access.

The founder and organizer of the Power of the Pen writing supplied contact information for 20 students. Originally, I had planned to contact 100 students with the first mailing, but I agreed with her recommendation that I start with 20. All students contacted had reached the state-level competition, and their stories were published in the *Book of Winners*. This is the highest honor state-level competitors can receive, even above winning trophies. The initial letter outlined the main purpose of the study, along with guidelines for participant involvement. I followed up with phone calls that allowed parents and students to ask questions and receive more in-depth information.

Data collection.

In order to complete the comparative data analysis, participants were asked to submit an essay on the theme *Why I Write*, ranging from between 300-1500 words. This presented writers with guidelines to encourage depth and length of response, but allowed for individual variability. No guidelines were given for form or content, in order to allow for the expression of personal style and skill level. Some students submitted poems, others submitted essays, and others chose not to submit written responses. In addition to the essays on the theme *Why I Write*, students also allowed me to use their fiction and poetry as data sources.

The second form of data collection was interview data. Historically, interviews have had diverse functions. Interviewing found widespread use in clinical studies and psychological testing. In 1886, Charles Booth did a social survey of the lower classes in London using the interview method. Interviews were used by Gallup opinion polls and in the Chicago school of ethnographic research. In the 1950s and 1960s, interviewing became more about survey research and generalization than painting individual portraits. The interview has now become a commodity in popular culture, featured in news, magazines, and reality shows (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

The interviews have been described earlier as phenomenological. Phenomenology is derived from a philosophical position, which has been applied to research methodology. Originally, phenomenology was the "objective study of subjectivities." Through studying multiple perceptions, we come to understand the "essence" of the lived phenomenon.

Phenomenology requires researchers to bracket, or put aside their theoretical

presuppositions and focus on the details of lived experiences (Ehrich, 2003). This

philosophy has been translated into methodology through two different intellectual

schools, the Utrecht school and the Duquensne school. From the Utrecht school, some

guidelines that stood out to me were: search for idiomatic phrases; "protocol writing: ask

participants to write down their experiences; and use anecdotes and stories in your

writing. From the Duquesne school comes ideas such as "essence" as contextual. The

analytical method proposed by the Duquense school involves reading the text to get a

sense of the whole, breaking the text up into meaning units while keeping it verbatim,

changing emic into etic language, and then forming a general structural description of the

phenomena (Ehrich, 2003).

     Kvale & Brinkman (2009) list the features of interviews done as qualitative

research, with an emphasis on the constructivist and critical theory paradigm.

Twelve Aspects of Qualitative Research Interviews

1.   Life world – everyday lived world

2.   Meaning interpreting the meaning of central themes

3.   Qualitative, not quantitative

4.   Descriptive: interview attempts for nuanced descriptions

5.   Specificity, does not ask participants for general opinions

6.   Deliberate naiveté on the part of the researcher

7.   Focused

8.   Ambiguity: interviewee statements can be ambiguous

9.   Change: the process of interviews may cause the interviewee to change

their opinions

10.   Sensitivity: different interviewers using the same interview guide may

elicit or make different statements

11.   Interpersonal: knowledge is produced through the interaction

12.   Positive Experience: can be a positive experience for the interviewer (p.

28).

Table 1. Twelve aspects of qualitative research interviews

Interviews in this study will take modified form of the structure suggested by

Seidman (2006). These interviews are described as semi-structured, in-depth,

phenomenological interviews. Semi-structured refers to the idea that general guiding

questions are formulated ahead of the interview; these questions that relate to the study's

research questions.

However, as the interviewer and interviewee's discussion helps construct the data together, these questions may be modified in the course of the interview, based on the interests of the interviewee and the judgments of the interviewer. The term phenomenological emphasizes the participant's lived experiences. The interviews move from the concrete to the general. The first interview focuses on the participant's life history related to the phenomenon of relationship with writing. This includes large, descriptive questions of the type described by Spradley (1979). The second interview emphasizes the concrete details of the experience. In this case, the concrete details related back to the research questions. Such details included describing differing writing contexts, and differing reactions to them. Details also included specific skills and strategies used in writing, as well as reflections on documents and statements in previous interviews. The final interview connected the story of the past with the details of the present, and asks the participant to make meaning of their experiences. This included asking writers to categorize types of motivation, reflect on how their relationship with writing has changed over time, provide motivational hierarchies, and connect motivations to skills and contexts.

The Seidman structure suggests 90-minute interviews. I shortened the interview lengths to about 40 minutes per interview because I was working with younger participants. All interviews were conducted in person, and parents were permitted to sit in on interviews with the students' permission.

Data analysis.

The first step in data analysis is making transcripts of interview data. It is too difficult for the researcher to record all of the relevant details of the event. Transcripts allow us to revisit, recheck, and refine our interpretations. They allow us to move beyond the ordinary and obvious into meaning (Freebody, 2003). Transcripts will be made before the next interviews are completed. This allows participants to check over the transcripts and comment on them.

Data analysis followed a modified form of that described by Moustakas (1994). First, the transcriptions of the interviews and the essays on the theme "Why I write" were analyzed for references to the theme "relationship with writing." Verbatim references were kept, while extraneous details were deleted. This was done immediately following the first transcription. At this point, I also included observations, reaction, and preliminary themes set aside in brackets from the rest of the interview. Transcriptions of each interview were made before subsequent interviews were conducted.

Next, quotations were identified that point to the invariant constituents (or unique qualities) of the phenomenon. This was done after all three interviews had been completed. These unique qualities may be grouped into larger themes. For example the theme of "Emotional responses to writing" may contain the invariant constituents "joy," "anxiety," "fear," etc. Then I wrote "thematic portrayals" in etic language that discussed in general how each theme functions. Next, I wrote an "individual textual description" for each person interviewed; this is a description of the individual's relationship with writing, supported with quotations from the interview. It includes narrative describing the individual's experiences.

I constructed a composite textural description that reflected the themes that were evident in every individual's textural descriptions. I also used analytic induction, by beginning with the first set of three interviews, and modifying analyses as each additional case was added.

I invited participants to comment on the in-case analyses. Most participants read their in-case analysis and commented favorably on them. One participant made some minor corrections. I think the participants were reluctant to give in-depth feedback on the chapters because of the power differential between us (teacher/researcher vs. student/participant) and because they generally have a positive outlook towards teachers. They also might have limited time to discuss the analysis, because most of them had busy high school schedules. A wide variety of techniques were available to me to turn a large amount of data into generalities and themes. Initial data analysis included rereading transcripts and writing reflective thoughts and questions to the side of the transcripts or in another font. Later, I used taxonomies and event analysis. Taxonomies involve organizing information into logical categories. The event analysis involved describing a specific shared event (the state Power of the Pen competition) and its relation to the investigated phenomenon, a relationship with writing (Grbich, 2007).

I used word processing software to organize and analyze my data, but I did not use qualitative research software. Instead of using the tagging feature common to qualitative research software, I created separate documents for various research themes. This is similar to a "block and file" in which applicable quotes centering on one theme are grouped together, so as to allow easy comparison (Grbich, 2007).

In a cross-case analysis, it is recommended that case analysis be completed before cross-case analysis (Huberman & Miles, 1994). It is important that the themes in the cross-case analysis do not become generalizations that relate to no case, but resonate with the personal meanings in the in-case analyses (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

Coding the in case analyses was different than coding the cross case analysis. When coding the in case analyses, I looked at all the quotes on the topic "relationship with writing" and tried to locate qualities that reflected the individual student's relationship with writing. I did not start with any predetermined themes, but tried to pick the themes that were most salient in the interviews. For example, when coding Nicole's interview transcripts, one of my codes was "writing a novel" because Nicole had discussed her novel extensively. This theme was unique to Nicole's interview. Only one other young author had written a novel, and this student (Darcy) did not emphasize the experience of writing a novel in her interview. This is why, in describing Nicole's relationship with writing, "Writing a Novel" was an important theme, though this was not a theme for all the writers. Similarly, while many of the writers discussed values in relation to writing, for Charles especially, this was central to his relationship with writing. Although there were commonalities amongst the in case analyses, each in case analysis was different, and therefore, the chapters describing the individual student writers are each organized differently, and emphasize different themes.

As I was writing the in case analyses, and focusing on the unique characteristics of each student's experience, I was also keeping a journal of themes that were common to all the students. I wrote down possible codes to use when doing the cross-case analysis.

Through this process, I was coming to a better understanding of what I meant when I used the term "relationship with writing." For example, "Emotions" and "Process" were common themes in all the interviews. From this list of possible common themes, I narrowed down the themes to themes that were apparent in all the cases and themes that were pertinent to the interaction of the person and the field of study. For example, I eliminated "Process: Inspiration" because not all the students had the concept of "being inspired" to write. The entire category "Process" was investigated as a cross case theme, but I eventually decided it did not fit the construct "relationship with writing" so when I discussed it in the findings chapter, I discussed it separately from "relationship with writing." Not until after interviewing the sixth student did I have a complete list of common themes. By that time, I had the following themes in mind: influences, values, process, goals, emotions, identity. I reread through all of the interview transcripts and selected quotations that related to these themes. Then, after grouping the quotations and reading them, I developed subthemes. I coded the quotations further by the subthemes. For example, after reading all of the quotations about emotions, I developed the statement "Students mediate their emotions through writing." This statement was supporting by quotations like this:

> Yeah that was an interesting piece to write. I got, you know, really worked up a lot when I was writing it but I think it was good in a way to kind of get that out of my system. That was a really stressfull summer for all of us. I know writing about it definitely helped (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010)

After writing a description of each theme, I considered how the themes interacted with each other to form the students' relationship with writing.

Data reporting.

It is difficult to write for a broad audience, but at the same time, I felt the need to try. A work should be comprehensible, engaging, and useful to those who participated in it, if at all possible. Narratives provide a familiar and engaging mode for communicating with a broad audience. Therefore, I attempted to incorporate narrative into the in case-analysis, especially at the beginning of each case study. Upon reflection, using an engaging narrative writing style is a skill that I need to develop with practice.

In addition to reviewing a number of journal reports of collective case studies, I've read a few book length qualitative studies focusing on talented, successful students. These include *Nurturing Talent in High School: Life in the Fast Lane* by Laurence J. Coleman (2005) and *Doing School* by Mary Pope (2002). In addition, journalists have described the lives of talented students in *Overachievers* by Alexandra Robbins (2007) and *A Class Apart* by Alec Klein (2008). All of these books tell a story. Pope, Klein, and Robbins each featured narratives of individual students as these students navigated their daily high school lives. Coleman incorporated student voices and developed a grounded theory of life at a specialized high school. Unlike Robbins and Pope, Coleman avoids over-generalizing to unlike situations. Coleman's study is also the most in-depth, as the study required him to actually live on the campus of the specialized school.

My dissertation incorporated the individual case studies of Klein, Robbins, and Pope, along with the development of grounded theory like Coleman, with the addition of

literature review and methodology chapters. Each student's chapter is introduced by the student's essay, "Why I Write."

A findings chapter includes the cross-case analysis. This chapter generalizes across cases, but not to populations; the findings are compared to the model proposed in the literature review, and a grounded theory of talented students' relationships with writing is proposed. In the "reflections on the methodology" chapter, I reflect on the process of completing the interviews and analyzing the data. I discuss the methodological choices I made, and whether they were advantageous or disadvantageous to the study as a whole. Planning a qualitative study involves reasoning out each decision in the research process and aligning these decisions with an overarching research philosophy. Exemplary qualitative case studies examine cases that are unusual and of general public interest. The underlying issues are nationally important. The studies are not ended prematurely, but are carried through until there is sufficient evidence. Exemplary studies consider alternate perspectives, and are reported in a clear engaging text (Yin, 2009). In the field of gifted education, exemplary qualitative research does not offer interpretations without explaining the process of interpretations and includes disclosure statements describing the researcher's perspective (Coleman, Guo, & Dabbs, 2007). In addition, these studies avoid generalizing to a population or making causal statements apart from context (Coleman et al. 2007). Three of the book-length studies of successful students (Pope, 2002; Klein, 2008; Robbins, 2007) offer engaging stories, but also attempt to generalize to the larger population by offering a didactic final chapter or appendix. Coleman's study combines current research with a model qualitative

investigation of the lived experiences of gifted students in order to develop a model of

life in a specialized setting, and to avoid generalizing to dissimilar populations.

Chapter Three

Reflections on Methodology

Research does not always progress as outlined in the research proposal; in this study, it was necessary to make a few changes to the original plan. Many of these changes were the result of recommendations from participants themselves or a result of discussions between the researcher and the POP organizers. As a new researcher completing her first large-scale study, it was important for me to reflect on these changes and how they may have impacted the findings. I kept a dissertation journal to reflect on these changes and on the research process. There were 14 entries in this dissertation journal, each about a half page in length spanning from January to April.

Initial Participants

The first change that occurred was the number of participants I originally contacted. I had planned to send letters to 100 current POP writers. I would acquire these writers' addresses from a database of POP writers with the participation of the POP organization. My contact at POP recommended that I look through past *Book of Winners* and identify a smaller pool of students to contact. The advantage of this method was that I was able to do a "pre-selection;" I could find students who lived within two hours of me, who had received special recognition or awards in addition to being published in the Book of Winners (for example, one student won a Poetry award, one a Humor award, and a couple won Best of the Best awards). My contact at POP suggested I send 20 names to her. I did this, and POP sent out letters to those of the contacts that they had information

for. Then, I called each of the students who received letters. I was able to find five participants in this manner.

The *Books of Winners* that I had access to were from 2007 and 2008. This meant that my participants were in high school when I interviewed them. I believe this turned out fortuitously. Students were able to give me some information on the transition out of POP, and relate the types of writing they did in high school. Contacting only a small initial number of students also helped me to schedule the interviews so I could focus on one participant at a time. Participants did not have to wait long before interviews or between interviews. In order to find more participants, my contacts at POP advised me to attend events as a way to network and talk with students. This turned out not to be an effective method of finding participants; however, it did turn out to be a strength of the study. By attending POP events, I was able to learn more about these students' shared influences, and I was able to demonstrate commitment to the organization.

Commitment Acts

I attended two POP events. The first event I attended was a series of focus group interviews. The purpose of the focus groups was to discuss the possibility of expanding the POP program to the high school. While I did no formal interviews at this event, I did take some field notes. From this event, I learned that teachers and students both cherished the structure of the program as a site-based tournament and did not want to make many changes to the essential design. For example, they were wary of attempts to adapt POP to an online program. I learned that many students were frustrated by their experiences writing in high school. These experiences were not as fun as POP, and did

not value emotion, detailed description, and creativity. I also learned some of the hidden curriculum of POP; for example, I learned that some teachers feel that POP judges tend to favor stories with flowery, descriptive language over stories with a strong plot and minimal description, and that they worry that this puts male contestants at a disadvantage in judging. It was advantageous that I participated in this focus group because I was able to learn a bit more about POP and demonstrate some reciprocity with the organization.

The second event I attended was a regional competition. At this event, I was a judge. I was able to judge without bias because I did not know any of the students at the regional competition, and the writings were given to the judges using numeric codes rather than the names of students. In addition to judging, I got an idea of the tone of the competition, the number of volunteers that are required, and the systematic organization of the tournaments. I also got an idea of the closing ceremonies and distribution of awards. Probably the most important thing I learned at the competition was how judging decisions are made, and the importance of creativity. Responses that were deemed to be too similar were not given the top prize, while pieces that took risks (such as writing in the second person) and succeeded were the winners. I was also able to find one more participant, who was actually the daughter of the tournament organizer.

Finding More Participants

The one participant that I found via networking was Darcy. She was a college junior at the time I interviewed her; she was about five years older than all the other participants. Though I did not plan to interview a college student, interviewing Darcy was advantageous to the study. Darcy was more advanced in the development of her

writing skills when compared to the other writers; so when I interviewed Darcy, I could

get a feel for the road ahead for the other writers, and could use her skills to benchmark

the skills that the other writers had yet to develop. Although, all of the writers I

interviewed had a fair amount of passion and determination, Darcy was especially strong

in these areas. When we study gifted students, they can seem so exemplary in

comparison to their peers that it is difficult to identify areas in which they need to grow.

Darcy allowed me to see where the other writers might be in a couple years. However,

because I did not interview any established professional authors, it was hard for me to

develop benchmarks for Darcy's own talent development trajectory.

At this point in the study, I had six participants. I contacted POP with some new

names but the organization was busy and did not respond to my requests for contact

information. After a few follow-up calls, I suggested the idea of contacting students via

Facebook. This was not the ideal way to contact students, because it lacked the formality

of letters, and approached the student directly, rather than the student and family. I found

the rankings from the most recent competition and compiled a list of students who

attended schools that were within two hours' drive. I identified students who had unique

names; this means that they were not likely, like "John Smith," to be duplicated. I

searched for these students on Facebook, and sent them an electronic copy of the official

introductory letter. I was a bit concerned that students would view this as more intrusive

than letters, as Facebook is conceived of as a social, rather than a professional platform. I

was also concerned that the students' parents would object to contacting the students

directly. However, in my experience, this was not a problem. I had about a 50%

response rate from my Facebook contacts.

All but one of the responses indicated that the student would be interested in participating in the study. The students seemed very comfortable making contact via Facebook and were quite prompt in their responses when contacted via Facebook. I did not use Facebook to collect personal information, and all of the contact information I found on Facebook had been made available to the public by the students. At the time I completed my study, all Facebook information could be made private or unavailable to search, and some students who had profiles had chosen to make their profiles unavailable to be contacted. So with Facebook, students choose to what extent they want to share information or be contacted.

I found nine participants. Later, this number dropped to eight as one of the students who had expressed interest was later unavailable to contact.

Despite my attempts, I was unable to gather a very diverse representation of student writers. All of the writers I interviewed were from Caucasian families. Most attended school in a suburban district. One attended school in a larger district, one a rural district, and one a parochial school. When I attended the POP event, I noticed that the area's largest school district, Toledo, was not represented, although some charter schools and parochial schools from Toledo were represented. This disparity in POP participation may be due to the costs accompanying this extracurricular activity. Seven of my participants were female, and only one was male. My participants were very representative of POP writers, but they were not representative of creative writing talent in general. This was one of the biggest limitations of the study.

Problems of Representation

Finding talent in underrepresented populations is always a challenge, partly because talent is defined by the majority population. For example, most POP writers use standard grammar and punctuation conventions in their stories, which may put students with nonstandard dialects at a disadvantage. Another reason that it is hard to find talent in underrepresented populations is that these populations do not have the same access to talent development resources. There are expenses involved in the POP program, and although scholarships are available for a few schools, most schools must find the funding on their own. A coach must be found, registration fees must be paid, and transportation must be arranged. Many volunteers are also required.

The students in this study can tell us a lot about their experiences with writing, but they cannot represent all youngsters with writing talent. In order to address the limitation of this study, it might be appropriate to design a companion study that specifically seeks to find talented writers from underrepresented groups. Some cities host urban writing cooperatives and poetry slams, which might be good places to find writers. Writers could also be nominated by their teachers or peers. It would be interesting to compare the experiences of these writers to the experiences of the POP writers. As for the representation of male writers, I think it might be difficult to find these writers. I did contact a disproportionate amount of male writers, but they seemed less interested in participating and it was harder to find them, because the large majority of writers were female. Of about 10 male writers I contacted, only one agreed to participate. Male writers could possibly be found online on fanfic websites, by teacher nomination, or by expanding the search area and expressly contacting only males.

In addition to making some changes to the participant selection process, I made some changes to the interviews. My interviews generally were 40-45 minutes long instead of 90 minutes long. This gave us plenty of time to discuss all of the questions on the original interview schedule, along with follow-up questions and even additional questions that were added in the process of completing the study. Shortening the length of the interviews did not seem to affect the ability of the study to answer the original research questions. However, it could be considered a limitation of the study, as any time less data is collected; it results in less full and substantial findings.

Another change to the study was that some interviews were conducted in one or two sessions as opposed to three sessions. This was done for the convenience of the researcher and the participant— for example, when the participant lived more than two hours away, or near the end of the study when time was a factor. In these cases, students did not always look over transcripts, but they were always able to look over the chapter draft. There did not seem to be much difference between the content and the tone of the two-hour interviews or the three forty minute interviews. The participants did not seem to grow bored or tired towards the end of the two-hour interviews.

As the study progressed, and I noticed that the interviews were not taking as long as planned, I began to add other questions to the interview protocol. I asked about the role of emotions in writing. I asked about the value of writing to society, when compared to other professions. I asked students whether they felt like outsiders, since some of the Piirto research suggested that writers tend to feel like outsiders. It was an advantage to add these questions to the study; however, it would have been more advantageous to add these questions earlier in the study.

Data analysis proceeded according to the procedures originally outlined. Possible themes were identified in brackets during an initial reading of the transcripts. Transcripts were then read again, and themes were sometimes modified. Quotations were identified that aligned with the themes. I pulled the quotations out and looked at them in order to make the finding more specific. For example, one theme might be "emotions." After reading all the quotations that related to emotions for one specific student, I might then specify the emotions that really stood out in that student's interviews, or I might specify "emotions as mediator."

Using a few key points in each theme, I wrote the thematic portrayals, trying to express the ideas from the participant's point of view supported by quotations from the participants. After writing the thematic portrayals, I wrote a final textural description describing the individual's relationship with writing. I attempted to synthesize, interpret, and extend the information in the thematic portrayals, rather than simply summarizing. The individual textural descriptions give the "big picture" of how the student relates to writing. I tried to bracket the in- case analysis from the cross-case analysis, by writing the chapter as in-case analysis, and then, after writing the chapter, making notes regarding cross-case analysis in my dissertation journal.

Cross-case analysis was completed in an inductive manner. As the study progressed, notes about overall themes were recorded in the dissertation journal and modified as more cases were added. After the chapters were written, I reread the transcripts and gathered quotations corresponding to the themes I had identified. Then I wrote the thematic portrayals and textural descriptions in much the same way as writing the original in-case analysis.

Analysis procedures were a strength of the study. Because I transcribed the interviews myself, and went through them three times, I went through the data five times for each student.

Research Questions

Over the course of the study, I also found it necessary to modify my research questions. The overall research question, "How do talented writers describe their relationship with writing?" remained the major focus of the study, but some of the subquestions changed.

The first subquestion, "How do students describe the effect of varying contexts on their relationship with writing?" remained a part of my examinations of students' relationships with writing.

The second question, "How do students describe connections between various motivations and the acquisition of specific skills?" was addressed in some of my interviews. However, I did not collect enough detailed data on this topic to warrant any conclusive findings. This is because some of the skills the students demonstrated differed, and when describing why they used various skills, they generally referred to only one reason: that they were doing what they had learned from practice and feedback.

The third question, "How do students describe the role of values in writing?" is addressed in my findings chapter as a component of students' relationships with writing. In addition to contexts and values, I also determined that a students' relationship with writing was composed of goals, emotions, and identity. These were not specifically

mentioned in my research questions. They were themes that occurred as I did the cross-

case analysis.

Chapter Four

Jane

Why I Write

By Jane Doe

Writing:

Verb

The act of spilling one's soul

For everyone to see

Analyze

Criticize

To tell the world about injustices

The joy of life

The tragedy of heartbreak

And even when you know you may be hated

You still write

Because to keep it bottled up

Would be to deny yourself

The opportunity

To soar

Jane is a self-described "loquacious" high school freshman who loves Harry Potter and compares herself to the fictional Luna Lovegood, a bright but loopy girl who is a member of Ravenclaw, the group of wizarding students who are considered to be exceptionally clever. Jane has short blond hair, and wears thick black "geek" glasses lined with rhinestones and a Ravenclaw t-shirt. She chose her pseudonym "Jane Doe" because of its offbeat and somewhat morbid connotation; "Jane Doe" is a term used to describe an unidentified female body in a morgue.

In eighth grade, Jane competed in POP. She scored in the top 50 students at the regional competition, which qualified her to compete at the state level. State-level competitors were also allowed to submit poetry for the POP poetry competition. The poetry competition was a "side competition;" unlike the main POP competition, poetry entries were written on the students' own time and submitted prior to the onsite competition. Four entries were chosen for top honors by a published poet and college English professor; Jane's poem, "Memories" was one of these four.

Poetry is Jane's specialty. It is the area in which she feels she has the most freedom. Unlike other forms of writing, Jane occasionally writes poetry outside of school. Jane's poetry is characterized by the use of unusual, specific images often inspired by her personal experiences. Her poetry also exhibits juxtapositions of emotions and connotations. For example, in "Memories," Jane describes a couch with the "distinct smell of/ Cigarettes/ Cat-pee/ And Beef Jerky" and the "strange bond" shared by a mother and her daughter who sit on the couch. In another poem, Jane describes chasing after an ice cream truck.

While ice cream trucks are normally associated with happy childhood memories, Jane's diction includes terms with negative connotations, such as "squealing," "blaring," and "ragged gasps." Jane explains her poem through her personal experiences, "I've always had bad experiences with ice cream trucks" (Jane, personal communication, February 20, 2010).

Influences

In her freshman advanced English class, Jane reports that she is assigned a lot of literary analysis papers. She also writes poetry in English class. When examining her literary analysis, her teacher focuses on organization and MLA citation. When they study poetry, they focus more on the feel and content of poetry rather than sticking to a strict format. Jane does not do much writing in her other high school courses. Occasionally, she writes for history class. Her history teacher focuses not so much on mechanics, but on whether the historical facts were portrayed accurately in the writing.

Jane recalls doing more writing in middle school than she does now in high school. In middle school, Jane did a lot of creative writing. She wrote science fiction, realistic fiction, and a lengthy "choose your own adventure story" for her English classes. She also practiced her writing once or twice a week in POP. Her team would get together and write stories in under 35 minutes. They would discuss their stories, and discuss things they had read together. Most of Jane's writing was tied to school assignments. She wrote on topics such as slavery and the Holocaust, and wrote an epic poem that she put to music.

From elementary school, Jane remembers writing for the district writing

assessments, her school district's standardized writing tests. Jane was recognized for her

creativity and talent in her elementary years. Jane says:

> Cause I remember once we learned about adjectives in fifth grade, and we were
>
> supposed to write about a house, and I wrote about fairies living in this house that
>
> was all torn down. And I was really proud of it. And my teacher was like, "This
>
> isn't what I asked you to write about, but it's really good, so I'll give you a good
>
> grade anyways. I mean it was really nothing like I'm not writing the epics. It was
>
> just like learning the mechanics of writing. "This is a noun. This is not a noun.
>
> This is a verb." (Jane, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Writing Process

Jane's writing process is mysterious and spontaneous. Poems seem to spring

from her, basically fully formed, like Athena from Zeus. In fact, Jane's award winning

poem, "Memories" was written in ten minutes, the time between when Jane learned of the

poetry competition and the time when it was due to be faxed to the POP organization.

Jane discusses her writing process in terms of getting it on paper quickly.

Jill: OK, so when you're sitting down to write a literary analysis, what are the

steps you go through?

Jane: You don't really go through steps; you just sit down and get it over with.

Jill: Ok, like how many drafts do you write?

Jane: One.

Jill: One, and it's done?

Jane: Yeah, I'll go over it, but I'm not really big on writing drafts. Even in creative writing, I only do one or two drafts (Jane, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Jane views the process of writing a story or poem differently than the process of writing a school paper. Writing an academic paper is mechanistic. Jane explains, "Well, you know, here's how you write your opening paragraph, here's how you write your body paragraph. Do it. Write quotes in MLA. Bam. Bam. It's done" (Jane, personal communication, February 13, 2010). Conversely, Jane believes her better pieces are written in spontaneous, passionate, inspired moments. When something "random" inspires Jane, she will sit down, form an idea in her head for a few minutes and then "whip it out" on the page. Inspiration often comes from everyday experiences. Jane writes about a break-up, an ice cream truck, a garage sale, and playing her game boy on the school bus. These everyday experiences form a kernel for the story or poem, and Jane elaborates with imaginative details. Sometimes the stories or poems stay close to the experience. Other times, they snowball into unusual areas.

Creativity

Jane believes that her creativity is a natural outgrowth of her odd, outsider personality. In her study of American creative writers, Piirto (2002) found that many of these authors felt like outsiders in society, and they used their unusual perspectives as strengths in their writing. Jane identifies with this idea. When I asked her if she saw herself as an outsider, she answered

Yeah, so there's the way that most people see the world, and there's always been

the way that *I* see the world. It's like I don't know, just, I've always been really

different. I'm not too big in fitting in, like my entire life I've kind of been on the

cusp of society. I'm not hated, but I'm not loved by everyone. I mean I'm just

kind of a weird person (Jane, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

Jane used terms like "odd" and "weird" to refer to herself and her writing many

 times throughout the three interviews.

Her creativity can be an asset in her writing, but there are also times when her

writing is too off the wall, and her readers have trouble understanding it. Jane relates a

time, during Power of the Pen, when the prompt was to write a story around a word that

ended with the suffix "-less."

Well, with all the power of the pen kids once it was a really bad day cause I get

really hyper sometimes, and the prompt was like your title has to end with "less"

and base it around that and I wrote "legless" and I started off with really good

intentions and I wrote about a whale, like how whales don't have legs and it gets

beached. And I ended up writing about a whale that really wanted a bratwurst but

it can't because it's a whale and it beached itself and died and that lived in infamy

with the rest of the power of the pen team (Jane, personal communication,

February 20, 2010).

Jane's experiences with Power of the Pen gave her the opportunity to express her

creativity, but also test the boundaries. Her coach and friends gave her feedback.

Jane is proud of her original ideas, and disdains when people write about ordinary topics without adding specific details to bring the story to life.

Jane believes that creative writing, especially poetry, allows her to express her individuality, and gives her the freedom of few boundaries. These values, freedom and individuality, are integral to Jane's identity and help her identify with creative writers and poets.

Identity

Jane says her identity as a writer is dependent on whether she writes. When she was involved in POP, she felt like a writer. On the days that she is inspired and writes something she considers really good, she views herself as a writer. On the days when she watches TV and plays video games, and doesn't write, she does not consider herself a writer.

Jane believes she has talent for writing, but does not overstate her talent. However, she speaks of the act of writing as being significant because it is part of a larger endeavor that connects her with famous authors:

It's like, when you write, you're on a different plane and you're just connecting with all other great writers, "oh, that's a really good passage." It's like you're a part of something, no matter how much you're not a part of anything, cause no one's unique. It's all already been done before. It's just like you're a part of this humming, living being that's always changing. You're just a little speck, but being a little speck makes you part of something that's so great. I mean, in a

community of writers, it's just this great feeling like you're not alone anymore (Jane, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

Jane's identity as a writer has to do with connecting her with other "outsiders;" others who also have a unique perspective and communicate their perspective through creative writing.

Emotion

Even though Jane is a good writer who qualified for the state writing competition, won a major poetry award, and has always participated in accelerated English classes, her emotions towards writing are very mixed. These emotions include catharsis, self-consciousness, and hatred.

Jane hates writing literary analyses. She refers to it as "taking apart" books, and this activity forms a large portion of her school writing. She also dislikes writing when she feels coerced or is not in the mood. She admits that much of her writing is passionless, and is done just to fulfill a school assignment and meet requirements.

Jane also occasionally hates reading her own work, even when this work is creative writing. She can be very self-conscious, and this affects her writing process. She does not like to re-read or revise work she dislikes. Her work, to her, is either good, or too bad to revisit.

Jane also experiences positive emotions as a result of writing. She is proud of her talent; proud that there is something she is really good at. Jane also experiences catharsis, which she refers to as "venting." She likes to get her emotions out on paper and examine how she really feels about an issue.

Motivation

As part of the interview, Jane wrote a list of reasons why she writes. She ranked them in order of importance. This is her list.

1. Because I have to

2. So I can seem intelligent

3. I feel like I'm wasting my talent if I don't

4. Make things easier to understand

5. Venting

6. Free coffee at open mic night

Jane asserts that her biggest reason for writing is extrinsic. She writes because she has to for school. Her writing for POP may even fall under this category. Even though she volunteered for POP, POP had a structure that required writing practice on a consistent basis. Jane told me that her POP coach would often remind her to be quiet and write during practice, as she was very talkative. Sometimes she would even be placed in a room separate from the other writers to eliminate distractions and focus on writing a complete draft in the 35-minute time constraints.

Jane's second reason for writing has to do with presenting a persona to the world. Writing, and receiving recognition for her writing, is a way to manage her identity. Jane also feels she has a real responsibility to avoid wasting her talent.

The next two reasons on Jane's list involve writing for herself. These are intrinsic reasons that have to do with getting emotions out on paper, and then reading over these writings in order to gain self-understanding. Jane explains:

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Say I'm having a really tough time with a friend, you know if I write something

about it then it's like oh, I guess I can take it like this, and sometimes I'm like

"oh, now I realize how angry I am" or "oh, look, I'm depressed" (Jane, personal

communication, February 27, 2010).

Finally, on Jane's list was her humorous but true, "free coffee at open mic night."

Jane describes going to open mic night at the coffee house:

If you performed, you got a coupon and you got half off a coffee. And I'm like,

man, I want me a vente chai. So I just started reading slam poetry about the

government and stuff. It's like 'darkness spiraling into more darkness about

government. Global warming. Bush. Things. You know, the norm.

Jill: And you got the coffee.

Jane: Didn't have to perform *well* (Jane, personal communication, February 27,

2010).

Jane is also able to draw from motivations that are not on her list. These are

primarily social goals. As she mentioned, she feels like part of a community of writers

when she writes well. She is also very motivated by her peers, teachers, and POP coach.

She describes her seventh grade English teacher:

My seventh grade teacher Mrs. P, she really made me love writing. I mean she

was just a really great person, she was really fun. She'd give me like positive

critique about my writing, not like 'oh this is really good', but' 'oh this is how

you could make it better.' She was just a really good teacher, and I just felt really

comfortable and I could write whatever, and obviously Mr. F. [POP coach]

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positively impacted my writing experience (Jane, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

In POP, Jane had some good friends who shared her interest in reading and writing. She contrasts this experience with the experience of being in classrooms of students who have no interest in the material and do not try to learn the material.

Future as a Writer

Jane has a head start on her future writing endeavors. She uses specific imagery in her writings, she writes on unique topics, and she is developing her own voice. Jane also reads frequently and has advanced reading interests. She read all of the *Harry Potter* books in a week, and when she was choosing a novel to read for her English class, she chose to read the dark, Nobel Prize-winning *Blindness* by Jose Sara ago.

Jane's goals for the future include improving her mechanics, including her spelling and her tendency to capitalize random words in the text. She also wants to learn to trust in her writerly instinct. Jane says:

I guess sometimes I just got to get over myself, past the "oh is someone not going to like this passage" or "oh does this relate too much to someone in the real world and they would see it and be like, oh Jane hates me, which is probably true that's why I'm writing about it." You know, get past what other people think and just write what I think is cool (Jane, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

Jane does not consider writing to be a career, nor does she actively try to publish and publicize her writing through writing conferences, literary agents, or literary magazines. However, Jane shares her work informally through events like open mic

night, and by posting poetry on her Facebook page. She writes poetry for her friends occasionally. Once she wrote a poem in exchange for a shaped rubber band, and once she wrote a poem for a friend who has cancer.

Jane is aware that published authors engage in multiple in-depth revisions, and realizes that in the future, she may need to do more in-depth revision, and she may need to write many more dreaded literary analyses in order to make it through college and reach her career goal of becoming a veterinarian. To reach her goals, Jane's solutions are lots of practice and "grin and bear it." Jane believes that, although she does not plan to become a creative writer, writing poetry will always have a place in her life.

Relationship with Writing

Jane describes her relationship with writing using the following metaphor:

> I'd say me and writing have kind of been like the US and China, ever since Mao
> Zedong took over. There's times when I avoid it like the plague, like "oh, I really
> don't want to do this cause it might turn out badly." Butt then my trade routes are
> good, with writing (China) and so it's kind of like we worked out a deal. I'm not
> like 'oh, I'm going to write all the time' but you know, I do it when I need to.
> It's, I mean, sometimes I love it and sometimes I hate it, but kind of like the U.S.
> and China, I'm growing more to love writing (Jane, personal communication,
> February 27, 2010).

Unique themes in Jane's relationship with writing are her descriptions of herself and her writing as *odd*, and her emphasis on the importance of *inspiration*. Writing, for Jane, is a natural expression of her odd, outsider perspective. However, though she feels

she is an outsider, she does not feel alone; writing helps her connect with a community of outsiders. It helps her realize that being odd is not necessarily being alone, or even being unique.

Her writing process is a mysterious process of spontaneous inspiration. Jane believes her writing is part of her yet it is unpredictable. It may strike at any time. A piece of writing may come out great or terrible. It seems like too much work at times for Jane to harness this unpredictable talent. It is difficult for Jane to view writing as a daily discipline because she conceptualizes her talent as having a mind of its own, and has mixed feelings about outside pressure to perform, and negotiating a balance between external and internal standards. Jane realizes that professional writers engage in in-depth revision and that her writing is not perfect; at the same time, she is reluctant to revisit past writings. She can be very critical of her writing, and she is reluctant to engage in analytical or non-fiction writing, viewing it as mechanistic writing. Revision and the ability to write when uninspired may be future challenges for Jane.

Chapter Five

Lily

Writing is the guiding star when my life is a vast stretch of darkness. When I write, the paper never tells me I'm wrong and never talks back. It doesn't walk away when I'm mid-sentence and is always there no matter what time it is. I write because it lifts me up from my depression and sits me in the world I create on paper. For those forty minutes or so while I scribble down a short story, I don't exist. I'm in another world, another universe, billions of miles away from me at my desk. This feeling of nonexistence is what brings me back with a pen in hand and a notebook in front of me every time.

Writing is what I'm best at. I've tried every sport from field hockey to track and at best, I'm mediocre. I've attended every summer activity and class from Camp Invention to pottery and still I showed no aptitude at any of these. It seemed that my goal in life was to try everything until I found something I was the best at. In seventh grade when I was picked to be on our Power of the Pen team I thought I had finally found what I was good at. Apparently I was, because in eighth grade I was judged number one writer in Ohio. The knowledge that writing is not only something I enjoy, but something I'm good at keeps me coming back.

Writing is so powerful. Not only can it reduce a reader to tears, but it can hold the memories of a person's entire life. The way I look at it, every person experiences life differently. Unique feelings and thoughts. By expressing what I feel and experience, I look at it as a gift to my reader. My work is the gift of understanding

and acceptance. If people look at events from every viewpoint, acceptance in encouraged. With acceptance comes a greater earth we live on. It may seem silly, but I feel that I'm making the earth a better place (Lily, personal communication, April 11, 2010).

Lily is a multitalented high school sophomore who looks equally graceful in a blouse and slacks or her track team hoodie and jeans. Our discussions about writing were just one of the many activities Lily juggles in what seems to be the typical life of a high achieving student; Lily takes all advanced classes, including studying German. She is an artist, is interested in science, babysits, and is currently practicing for her driving test. She says she likes to keep busy. Like many high school girls, she has a crush on the star of the *Twilight* movies, Robert Pattinson (Although, unlike most high school girls, she dislikes the *Twilight* series).

Lily and I sat in her family's sunroom and talked for three afternoons, sometimes with her mother listening in to the conversation. Lily's POP writings sat on the table in front of us, bound in two thick binders, one from the seventh grade, and one from the eighth grade. Lily was a phenomenal POP success story. In seventh grade, she was the top scoring writer for her grade level in the state, beating out about 3,000 other POP writers. In her second year, she placed in the top 25 writers for her grade. It struck me, then, to hear Lily say, early on in the interview, "I don't think any of my stuff [creative writing] is better than anyone else's. I think I'm mediocre" (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Lily's specialty as a writer is writing a fictional story of about two to four pages in a 35-minute time limit. Her stories show a definite personal style. She writes tight prose that begins by creating a general mood, with some specific detail missing to incur the reader's curiosity. Her stories include a great deal of sensory description and imagery, but this sensory description is specific to the theme or mood of the story. Lily builds suspense by keeping key details until the end, or having a pivotal event happen at the end of the story. Her themes are generally character focused, and may occur in various time periods and cultures. Lily uses sentence fragments and repetition to heighten the drama at pivotal points in the story. At times, Lily uses an extended metaphor or motifs to tie her story together.

This is true of her award winning story, "Locker Room." Lily was given the prompt, "write about a different kind of jungle." Lily wrote about a fight between two boys in a high school locker room. She opens it with a description of a "warm cloud" of water, and rivulets of water trickling across the floor. Lily wanted to create a parallel between the atmosphere in a rainforest jungle and the atmosphere in a high school locker room. As she continues this story, she continues this extended metaphor, comparing the high school boys to animals who have climbed the "food chain" of popularity. They fight for supremacy, and the story ends with the same imagery it began with, except, instead of rivulets of water trickling down the tile, there are rivulets of blood.

Influences

In elementary school, Lily was not an avid writer. She found writing boring. However, Lily was always an avid reader. Lily's mom said, "Oh she read all the time. It

got to the point where I said, "Stop reading, go outside and play" (Lily's mom, personal communication, February 13, 2010). Lily liked to read historical fiction as well as classic novels. In fifth grade, Lily read many selections from a college preparatory reading list she'd found. She loved the look of shock on her teacher's face when she told her that she was reading books like *The Grapes of Wrath*. Lily understood the books she was reading, and once she tried to write a story patterned after a book she'd read:

> Yeah, I think a couple times I started trying to write, 'cause I wanted to write something as great as the books I was reading, and I think it was something by Thomas Hardy, and I went onto the computer and I used the same setting as he did and I tried to write a story as great as his, and it didn't work out. It lasted maybe three pages (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Lily's teachers were aware of her reading and writing talent in elementary school, but the modifications they made were minimal. Lily remembers a program for gifted students; the gifted students worked together in a small group with a teacher in their regular classroom. They wrote stories and drew pictures. However, Lily's teachers did not modify her reading assignments. Lily found the assigned readings boring, and she had already read them when she was much younger.

Middle school, and the POP program was a turning point for Lily. Lily explains how she began to recognize her own writing talent:

> I didn't think what I wrote was any good, so I thought what's the point of it? No one's going to like it if I don't even like it. And one of the reasons I went on with writing is because it was one of the things I was really good at, so I want to be really, really good at it.

Cause I'm not very good at sports. Yeah, writing was one of the reasons I kept on it and I didn't even really think I was that good. So, seventh grade was a big turning point (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Notice that Lily describes herself as being good at writing in this excerpt, where earlier she described herself as being "mediocre." POP was not only a turning point for Lily because she recognized her talent, but for many other reasons as well. The teaching methods emphasized challenge and creativity because they were very open-ended. For example, students were given a word like "robot" and asked to write a story about it. In POP, the most successful stories were ones in which the prompt was interpreted in an unusual or metaphoric way. For example, an author might write about how fashion models are robots because they are all "manufactured" by the media and strive to be the same. Sometimes, the teacher would project a photo or artwork on the overhead projector, and the students would write about the image. Time limits imposed additional challenge on the students and an additional sense of accomplishment when students were successful.

Lily's teacher, Mr. F. also made writing a *social* activity. He set up an online discussion board. The girls in POP would use the board to invent their own writing prompts, and give each other feedback on their stories. The students would engage in practice even outside of their extracurricular practice time. The students always shared and discussed their writing at each session.

Finally, Mr. F. used famous works as models for the students. Students would read classic works, and then try to imitate these authors' writing styles. All 12 members of the POP team read Steven King's *On Writing* and discussed it.

Lily discussed her experiences writing in high school. Essentially, in her freshman English class, she hit a wall. In contrast to the two thick binders she wrote in middle school and in high school, she has not done much creative writing at all.

Jill: Ok, so that's research papers, so do you get to any kind of writing that you like more, do you get to do any creative writing?

Lily: The past two years, no.

Jill: Nothing?

Lily: Not at all. I think I wrote, a poem, a vignette last year, and my teacher said I was doing everything completely wrong. In middle school, in Power of the Pen, it taught me to be creative and do absolutely anything I want, and I did well doing that. Then I went to freshman English, and my teacher, she was a very conservative classical type of writer, and she was like, "this is wrong, this is horrible, this is a fragment" (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010)

In high school, the teacher was concerned with structural rules. Lily was frustrated by these new expectations. Lily has tried to adapt to the expectations of high school writing and still retain a personal style. However, she reports that she rarely does writing outside of English class. In English class, she writes mainly research papers.

Writing Process

Lily's writing process for creative writing differs from her writing process for research papers. Her writing processes, in both cases, are influenced by the contexts in which she writes and how her teachers teach writing.

Lily's writing process for creative writing is influenced by POP. She excels at writing "sudden fiction" in a short time frame. Lily makes revisions as she writes. Understandably, she cannot make major revisions to a piece and still finish it in time to be judged. This necessitates that much of what Lily writes is very strong the first time around. However, Lily does make small but meaningful revisions as she writes. For example, she may make changes in word choice, or delete a passage that seems too obvious. When the time is up, and the piece is finished, Lily often gets very positive feedback on the piece. Lily is reluctant to visit these pieces after competition. Lily states:

> I tend to like not revising too much because I tend to stray from what my original goal was and I like the things I first think of, and I know my second idea won't be as good when I change it (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

When writing research papers, Lily uses a process approach that is dictated by her English teacher. Lily reads a book, and that book becomes a central source and focus of the research paper. For example, Lily read the book *Three Cups of Tea* and wrote a paper about heroism, using the main character as an example of a hero. Lily spends a week in class researching information for the paper. Along with the book, Lily uses scholarly

journal articles and websites as sources for her paper. Then, Lily makes an outline for the

paper:

Lily: Yeah, I don't like outlining.

Jill: What don't you like about it?

Lily: Because it's hard to organize all my thoughts into, I don't know, subjects

like certain paragraphs and it seems like once I put it down on paper it doesn't make as

much sense as it did inside my head, it takes a while to like rearrange them.

Jill: So do you ever like change the outline after its written?

Lily: Oh yeah, in fact a couple times I've completely changed ideas after I wrote

the outline, so I have to make another outline and the teacher doesn't like that (Lily,

personal communication, February 13, 2010).

When writing research papers, Lily engages in in-depth revision, changing the

overall structure of her papers, and sometimes even changing the central thesis. After

outlining, Lily writes the introduction and concluding paragraphs. Then, she writes the

body of the paper. Next, Lily's peers look over the paper and offer suggestions. Lily

finds this process helpful when she is working in advanced classes with peers close to her

ability, but not when she is working in classes with peers who do not give correct advice.

After three or four peers look over the work, she makes revisions again. Often, her peers

give her advice about how to organize the paper and which information to put in which

paragraphs. After she makes those revisions, her teacher looks over the paper. Her

teacher gives her feedback about mechanics and MLA formatting.

Motivation for Writing

       Lily is able to draw from many different motivations for writing. When she listed her motivations, Lily came up with the following list, ranked in order of importance.

       Lily's list:

1. escape from my day

2. therapy-like

3. sense of accomplishment after writing something

4. a way to process thoughts

5. one of the only things I'm really good at

(Lily, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

       From this list, it seems that *therapy* is Lily's most important reason for writing. Lily uses writing to escape the stress or everyday doldrums, and uses writing as therapy. These are similar ideas.

       Notice also that all of Lily's reasons are intrinsic. Lily is happiest when she is writing for *herself*. Lily says:

> I think writing a research paper is writing something for someone else, to someone else, to inform another person what they don't know, so you're writing for an audience. And creative writing is writing for myself, what I choose to write, and if other people like it, great. But, um, a research paper I think is definitely writing something for someone else, it's not doing anything for me (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Lily views writing research papers as writing for someone else, and when she discusses her motivation for writing research papers, she talks about wanting to please others.

When she discusses her creative writing, Lily focuses on the *experience* of writing. Lily says, "But I loved tournaments, especially writing three or four pieces right after the other because it seemed like I was 'in the zone'" (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010) and also, "I loved that, like it was cool being in the story that I was writing, like 40 minutes would go by and I think it's like five minutes because I'm so into it" (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010). Lily's descriptions of her experiences writing correspond with an understanding of flow because the writing transports her to another place, and she loses sense of time.

When she discusses why she uses specific skills and strategies when writing, such as her use of extended metaphor, Lily usually refers to the responses she receives from readers such as teachers and peers. She speaks of having respect for the reader, and trying to make the story interesting to the reader; this suggests social goals of writing.

Creative Writing vs. Academic Writing

Lily feels that writing a story or poem is much different than writing a research paper. In fact, she sets up a dichotomy between the two, not only in terms of their formats, but also in terms of the values expressed in each, and the use of creativity in each. As seen earlier, Lily's writing process is different for creative writing and for research papers. She also views writing research papers as for others, and creative writing as for self.

Lily believes the values prioritized in creative writing are in conflict with the values prioritized in academic writing. Lily was asked to list the values associated with creative writing and academic writing. For creative writing, Lily listed "individuality," "freedom," and "respect" [for the reader]. For academic writing, Lily listed "structure" and "obedience." Lily asserts that there is some individuality in school writing, but much more in creative writing. And she feels that her values are more in line with creative writing than academic writing. Lily says, "Well, I'm more for individuality and freedom and stuff like that. I don't like the structure and obedience of school writing, because I like being myself and I don't like changing that, and I like how people can show themselves in writing" (Lily, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

For Lily, creativity has a lot to do with expressing one's unique personality. It also involves originality, or coming up with ideas that others are not likely to come up with. When it comes to boundaries, Lily believes that it is acceptable to break boundaries in small, careful ways if "it works." However, while academic writing is focused on obedience, Lily believes creative writing is all about breaking boundaries.

Relationship with Writing

Lily compares her relationship with writing to a relationship with a best friend. Mmm, maybe like a best friend, or, yeah, you get in arguments a lot and you don't want to see each other for a certain amount of time, but then, you kind of feel something's missing and you want to try to make things work out, even though you know you'll have to say you're wrong and try harder, but you're always

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going to really like that person (e.g. "slash writing"; Lily, personal

communication, February 27, 2010).

Although she is not currently doing much creative writing, Lily has an interest in

continuing her creative writing as a hobby. She would like to be involved with her

school's literary magazine, or possibly send a story to a national student publication.

One aspect of Lily's relationship to writing that stands out is the theme of

cherished memories. Lily and I both attended a focus group; the purpose of this focus

group was to discuss extending the POP program to the high school level. During this

discussion, Lily commented that if a program were to be made at the high school level, it

would be best to keep all aspects of the program exactly the same. When discussing her

current writing, Lily shared the experience of returning to the middle school POP

practices. She felt self-conscious when writing with the middle school students, and she

felt "rusty." Lily pointedly admitted that she felt like she had a persona to uphold, and

this affected her writing. Lily's cherished memories seem to be a double- edged sword.

Her experiences have made her love writing, but her past experiences and stellar

performance create a standard to "live up to" that may limit her current writing

endeavors.

Writing is therapeutic for Lily when she can feel comfortable and accepted for her

creative ideas. However, writing can also be a source of stress in Lily's life when she

struggles to adapt to conflicting expectations. Writing represents the struggle to negotiate

between accepting herself and earning the acceptance of others. This may explain to

some extent why Lily at times is very proud of her work, and other times is overly

critical.

Lily believes she is a writer, and encourages others to write. Lily's goals in the future are to become a psychiatrist. She realizes that she will be writing many more academic papers to accomplish her goal. She joked that her research papers will always contain plots and sensory imagery. We briefly discussed Oliver Sacks, a psychiatrist who is the author of many popular books about mental illness. He presents case studies in a narrative mode, similar to short stories. I wanted Lily to understand that there are authors who combine academic and narrative writing styles. In the future, Lily will continue to negotiate between writing for herself and writing to please others.

Chapter Six

Darcy

As to "why I write," there are a number of reasons I could give. I have to –for

two reasons. One is that writing is in my blood. Both my parents love to write,

encourage my own writing and instilled curiosity in me from a young age. Writing

is how I react and relate to the world. I "speak" best with a keyboard or a pen. I also

have to write because it's how I support myself financially. I pay as much of my

tuition as I can with my own writing, and all of my disposable income is the direct

result of my writing. Additionally, I love language. I am addicted to words, to

saying words and putting them down so that I can read them. Language fascinates

and intrigues me, and I love being able to use language in my own particular way

(Darcy, personal communication, April 22, 2010).

I found Darcy through a connection with her mother, who was organizing a

regional POP competition. Darcy's mother is an author, and Darcy shares her mother's

love of language. Darcy was on spring break from her junior year of college when we

met in a local coffee shop. Darcy is petite, brown eyed, and has her brown hair pixie cut.

Darcy is a self-described bookworm who recently got a tattoo of a quotation by Frank

Lloyd Wright. I was interested in talking with Darcy in order to get some sense of the

long-term impact of the POP experience, and to compare the development of her writing

skills to those of high school students.

When Darcy was in seventh and eighth grade, she participated in POP. She

qualified for State competition both years, and her writing was published in the *Book of*

Winners. POP is not offered in high school, but Darcy continued her creative writing on her own. Darcy chose to major in creative writing as an undergraduate. Her minor is Classics, and Darcy takes a broad range of liberal arts courses ranging from Shakespeare to Archeology to Business Law.

The thing that stood out in my mind after talking with Darcy is how much writing she does on a daily basis. When I Googled her name, I found over a hundred articles she had written. Many of these were factual, encyclopedic entries written for web content services. Others were regular columns written for newspapers such as the *Findlay Courier* and the *Cleveland Literature Examiner*. Darcy authors multiple blogs, and she edits and produces her own literary magazine. Darcy writes a 50,000-word novel every year during the month of November, and she uses twitter and Facebook to send out brief messages that publicize her writing and connect her with friends. This writing is in addition to the academic and creative writing Darcy completes for coursework as a full-time college student.

Writing Process

Darcy has a flexible and multi-leveled approach to writing. It is flexible in the sense that it changes depending on the writing task and situation. When she is writing a creative piece, she focuses first on developing characters. Later, she makes sure the plot is consistent. When she is writing an academic paper, she will need to begin with research and developing a bibliography. She uses tools like notes and outlines to structure academic papers. Darcy said, "I have a lot more structure with my academic writing than my creative writing. I think the structure you know I have a clear outline

and a framework to work in and that helps me really organize my thoughts, but with creative writing I like to kind of throw it all out there and go back and find the framework later."

Darcy's writing process is multi-leveled because she uses multiple steps, and makes adjustments at each stage in the process. Darcy's writing involves research, drafting, structural revisions, paragraph revisions, sentence revisions, and grammatical edits. Unlike some of the other POP writers, Darcy also really enjoys revision and editing. So much in fact, that she edited 27 of a friend's papers for free! Darcy says of revision:

> But I really enjoy doing that. I love just taking a piece of writing and seeing you know if I can help improve it in any way. Sometimes that's hard to do with my own writing, that's something I've learned that I have to do. It's not just get caught up in what I wanted to say, but make sure what I said is working for the piece and not just being a cool sounding sentence. You know sometimes it's fun to play with the language like that, but it has to serve the piece as a whole. So revision is all about finding the balance in all those areas. But yeah, I love that (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Unlike some of the other POP writers, Darcy has a final step in her writing process: publishing. Darcy publicizes her writing through web content services. The web content services place advertisements on the articles she writes. Darcy is paid for each article she publishes; however, she is paid more for popular articles. This means that if Darcy publicizes her writing, she will earn more. Darcy has recently started publicizing her writing using social media.

She says, "I started using twitter probably in October to publicize things. I started writing for Suite in august of last summer, and it's a good way to advertise a specific topic and post a link to the article" (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010). Darcy must have some finesse with this process. If Darcy only publicizes links to her writing, others will view her as an annoyance and not develop a connection with her. However, if she discusses topics of common interest, she can develop relationships and recommend articles to her online friends on topics they both share an interest in. She can also "trade" publicity with other writers; Darcy says:

> One of 'my writers' (the people who write for the journal), she just published a novel in October so she and I do a lot of mutual publicity. I wrote a review of her book on my blog and she puts little blurbs on hers about my journal, and she put a quote from my review on the next edition of her book, and it's going to publicize the journal further so, mutual stuff like that, that's been the past six or eight months (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy's writing process integrates technology to a high degree. Darcy uses Twitter, blogs, and web content services to publicize her writing. She has developed a web persona that introduces her as a writer with a quick Google search. Darcy's picture and profile (brief bibliographic information) are tools in her writing career. Darcy even has a service that helps her organize her Twitter feeds. She can group them according to the association she has with the person: writer friends or college friends, for example. Darcy also uses technology to revise her writing.

She uses the "track changes" feature to edit pieces in her literary journal; this allows her to make changes and suggestions to submitted manuscripts and then send these back to the writer. She uses the "read aloud" feature of Microsoft Word to assess the flow and logical coherence of a piece by listening to it. In addition, she uses Amazon's CreateSpace to produce a professional layout and printed hard copies of her literary magazine.

One final aspect of Darcy's writing process is that it is a daily habit. Darcy devotes a great deal of time to writing, and yet, struggles with wanting to devote even more time to writing. Darcy describes her drive to write.

I'll get up early and stay up late. I'll be up at 5:30, 6:00 in the morning sometimes you know if I have an idea I really want to work on, I'll force myself to get up, and make a lot of coffee. I'll take a notebook with me to class or my laptop depending on the professor, and if we take a break I'll write then or sometimes during class if I can't wait, um or I'll take it with me when I go eat. If I'm really feeling the need to work on something, I know I can make time for it. It's just a matter of forcing myself to do that (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy reports that one week, in a crunch for money, she wrote 58 short articles for web content services, in addition to the writing she had to do for school that week

Writing History

Like many of the POP award-winning writers, Darcy has had a history of enriched educational experiences. She would probably not be writing at the level she is today

without the support of various teachers and programs. Darcy remembers inspiring experiences even as far back as elementary school. She remembers her first grade teacher making a small modification for her. When it was time to send home book order forms, Darcy's first grade teacher would give Darcy one of the forms that were normally distributed to the fifth grade students. It is inspiring that even a small modification like that could be in Darcy's memory many years later. Her first grade teacher also had a book binding machine, and Darcy remembers writing, illustrating, and binding her own books. In fourth grade, Darcy remembers that her school system did not meet her educational needs; she was then enrolled in a private Catholic school.

In middle school, Darcy was in accelerated English classes. Her teacher was also her POP coach. Darcy appreciated the flexibility of the teacher, who did not limit her students with overly detailed requirements. Darcy says:

> I had a great teacher my 7th and 8th grade year named Mrs. B. and she was you know really flexible. We would sort of discuss as a class. She'd give us some options for books and we would choose one and write about it, and she was really great about not really putting any limits on our writing. She might set like a minimum but beyond that you could write as much as you wanted and you could bring in outside resources and she just really encouraged us to explore our writing which is not something you find in a lot of other classes (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy also experienced a sense of community with the other POP writers. Darcy's definition of fun was the social experience of being with other students who enjoyed writing. She says:

That [POP] was a lot of fun. I went to state both years, and that was a good experience. It's nerve wracking but fun.

Jill: What was fun about it?

Darcy: Just getting together with a whole bunch of other writers. You don't know anybody you're in the room with. Everybody's nervous which instantly makes everyone friends, because you know you're all going through the same thing. And, you know, it's just a lot of fun to be around other writers, especially you know at that age when everything is like peer pressure and everybody is at that awkward stage, it's just nice to see 150 or 200 kids, or how ever many people there are there who all have a shared interest with you. That's a really good confidence booster.

Darcy's POP coach prepared them for the competition by telling them what they could expect at the district, regional, and state events. The students also practiced writing to a prompt in a limited amount of time. The coach would even send prompts home with students, taped up so the students could not see them until the minute they began to practice.

High school was a time of intellectual challenge for Darcy. She was enrolled in advanced courses and AP courses. Her class was reading college level texts, and she was expected to be able to do college level analysis. Darcy also took a creative writing course in high school. Perhaps just as important, was that Darcy continued writing outside of her classes. In high school, she first started participating in National Novel Writing Month. She also continued to write short stories outside of class.

Darcy wished, like many of the writers, that POP would continue into high school. Even with the creative writing class and the AP classes, Darcy thought there could have been more done to encourage creative writers. However, Darcy seemed to really enjoy the analytical writing in her AP classes.

Darcy is now in college, and it has provided an important context for the development of her writing skills. In college, Darcy has an interdisciplinary approach to her studies, which informs her writing. Her writings touch on a wide variety of themes and integrate information from disparate courses and personal experiences. Darcy's creative writing courses use a workshop format. Peers read each other's writing and give critique. Students learn how to submit writing for publication and produce their own publications. As a result, Darcy has published a personal essay in a literary journal. During college, Darcy has also started earning money from her writing. She says:

> I write for Demand Studios and Suite 101 [online web content providers].
> Demand Studios is a lot of how to articles and fact sheets and just sort of basic information. It's supposed to be backed up with scholarly sources, which I really appreciate. Helps with research. It's fun. I pay a good portion of my tuition with that, so that's good experience. Suite 101 is longer kind of more in-depth pieces. I tend to use a lot of the same ideas on both websites because I know that's what people are looking for. I enjoy that (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Motivation

Darcy's motivation is all-embracing; she enjoys writing nonfiction, analysis, fiction, personal essays, and even poetry from time to time. She enjoys researching, planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Darcy writes in varied contexts, including school, job, and hobby.

Darcy described many motivations in her interview. She described extrinsic motivations when she referred to grades and money. Social motivations were referenced when Darcy talked about Power of the Pen, and also when she discussed her connection with other online writers. Writing is one of Darcy's ways of being social:

> Yeah, I'm not a terribly social person. I tend to hang out with myself or with a very small group of friends, but knowing that people read what I write or have some interest in what I have to say is an interesting relationship even if I never meet that reader, just knowing if someone somewhere is reading what I said, it's kind of astounding really, the process (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Social atmosphere was also a negative influence in one case, where Darcy was working on a school newspaper and she did not get along well with the teacher or the editors. Darcy says, "There was the editorial clique and if you weren't an editor, they tended to look down on you and that went for the teacher as well as your classmates. I had some problems with the teacher" (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy also referred to love of language and narrative. She was inspired by favorite authors like Neil Gaiman. When she attempts to model her style after her favorite authors, or write something that approaches that level of quality, this is an example of

mastery motivation and being motivated by the appeal of the structure and challenge of the discipline itself.

Darcy also refers to writing for pleasure, writing for personal development, and writing as a way to "relate to the world." This last idea will be explored more in the section, "relationship with writing." Her motivations are listed here and are ranked in importance by Darcy.

1. Writing is how I relate to the world and my understanding of it.

2. I love writing and finding new ways of using language to express an idea.

3. Writing allows me to connect with readers in a unique way.

4. I am paying tuition and buying food/paying rent with my writing.

5. I'm addicted to the process of creating and revising writing – I'm a perfectionist, and writing gives me control over that.

Like many of the other POP writers, Darcy also speaks of motivation differently when she describes learning specific skills than when she writes of her overall motivation:

A lot of stuff I read -- I read a lot about writing, I try to pick up a lot of advice from other writers, and I've had a lot of instruction from my POP coach and my teachers at the university about, you know, how to be conscious of the tone or the language without getting caught back up in reading what you wrote or being too perfectionistic about it (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

When she is referring to specific skills she learned in writing, she refers to the power of habit, instruction, and feedback from readers such as coaches and teachers.

Advanced Development

When compared to other POP writers, Darcy exhibits some advanced skills. She is older than some of the other students, and has had more time to develop these skills. She has also had the benefit of a college writing program to nurture advanced skills.

Darcy has developed the self-discipline to write every day, and this includes writing beyond her school requirements. She schedules her day and organizes her time to allow for academic, for-profit, and hobby writing. This suggests that Darcy's interest in writing may not be as context dependent as that of other writers in the study, she has a sustained individual interest. Darcy is also proactive about shaping her own contexts. She has formed an unofficial writing community on Twitter, and has started her own literary magazine, which she continues past the date for it to be a school requirement. Darcy is savvier about the business aspect of the writing life than the high school writers. She understands, not only how to make money with her writing, but she also is knowledgeable about the larger corporate context in which publishing decisions are made. She says:

> I think it's probably a bad time for the big six publishing houses because they're being incredibly inflexible, especially Amazon about e-book publication and pricing, and it's really hurting a lot or writers which is not good. I think smaller publishing houses are really starting to bring in people, and not as many people are reading, but the people who are reading are reading a lot, so I think there's definitely still a market for it. I think the advent of things like the Kindle and the Nook, and I don't know if you've heard of the Entourage, but it's a combination e-reader and netbook, and it's something I'm saving up for. It looks really cool,

and you can search for chunks of text; it's really interactive, and I just think it's really an interesting time for the publishing market and as an up and coming -- whatever I end up doing in publishing I'm really interested in staying current with this stuff, so the more I get into it, the more interesting I find it (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy wants to move to Boston, where they have a lot of publishing houses, and major in publishing. Darcy is knowledgeable about the publishing industry. Darcy says, "I'm really interested in acquisitions because that's something that I'm working on. It's very challenging and just sort of the whole publishing process, I don't know how exactly I want to fit into that world and especially as the game changes with online publishing, the roles of editors and agents are changing very quickly." Darcy knows that the business is very competitive.

She says:

Smaller publishing houses tend to maybe have a brief period of publishing things and then they lose funding or they are no longer taking submissions or they can't support themselves. It's really hard for a small publishing house to break into the industry, because the big publishing houses can eat their losses if they have to but a small publishing house cannot afford that. And editors, within the past 20 years, it's hard for an editor to stay in a job with a publishing house for more than five years at a time because they want you to be bringing in the next you know wildfire best seller and if you're not, they're going to let you go so it's become a different atmosphere (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Darcy's writing is also advanced in the sense that she writers longer pieces, and writes in many genres and styles. She believes that her writing has progressed since POP, because she now pursues deeper themes and tests the limits in her writing. When asked, "What have you learned since POP? How has your writing changed?" Darcy replied:

> I hope it's matured. I'm a lot more focused on social issues or philosophical concepts. I think I've deepened my interests. I still do write in the same formats or genres. I still write science fiction and fantasy for fun. My novel was that, where I'm using that for a vehicle for larger message, whereas for POP I was just telling a story. I've grown in that way. I've learned to take bigger risks with what I'm writing about. I'm less worried about offending a reader with something they don't want to hear for a character or plot might not end like the Disney tale happy ending, so I'm experimenting with how far I can take readers before I lose them, so that's something. It's harder to do that with POP because you're such a young writer. I don't think most writers are experimenting with that sort of stuff but you're writing for a specific judge, and it's a competition and you don't want to be pushing your readers away at that moment (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Relationship with Writing

Darcy describes her relationship towards writing in strong terms. She speaks of *loving* the different aspects of the writing process, and of having a "borderline obsession

with reading and language and words." When asked to come up with a metaphor to describe her relationship, she gave this response:

> I mean it's really just kind of a love affair. That's what I tell my boyfriend all the time, I'm having an affair with my writing. In elementary school, until I got interested in writing to publish at about 15 or 16, it was just always exciting to write, just like the early stages of a relationship where you're so excited all the time, and then it kind of got into a stage where there's work to maintain it, and sort of the honeymoon stage is over and you know I'm definitely still immature as a writer in a lot of ways. I'm always looking to improve, but I'm getting to a stage where I'm comfortable with writing, with making sure I'm at least aware of things I need to work on if I'm not actively working on them, so it's a maturation process with my relationship with writing and I don't think it's anything that's ever going to die. I think it's something that I will continue to be involved with for the rest of my life, definitely (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Writing mediates Darcy's experience of her life. She processes events in her life and her reactions to them through writing. She relates to others through writing, and she believes it relates to the ongoing development of her sense of self. She can monitor the development of her values and beliefs through her writings.

Writing is not a fairy tale for Darcy but a way of life. Even though Darcy writes often and well, writing still involves emotional risk. Darcy says, "It's always kind of a love-hate thing. It's a very insecure way to write sometimes.

It takes a lot of ego to say 'I have something to say, and I'm the only one who can say it'" (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010). Darcy also referred to being "lucky" when she talked about her publication. Darcy feels unsure sometimes about her capabilities.

Darcy's relationship with writing is complex and advanced. It is complex because Darcy relies on a variety of motivations, and Darcy does not have a uniformly positive response to writing. For example, Darcy experiences conflicts between writing for pleasure and writing for profit. Writing 58 encyclopedic articles on a deadline may surely seem at times like more drudgery than fun, and when Darcy thinks of selling her creative writing, she may feel this is exploitive.

Darcy's relationship with writing is more advanced than the other POP writers. Her writing is longer, and deals with subtler themes. She devotes more time to writing and is more proactive in her writing. Yet, Darcy shares some of the same characteristics with other writers. She expresses a subtle favoritism for her creative writing, evidenced by the fact that when she listed values associated with creative writing, she listed "pleasure" and "love" but did not list similar values in connection with academic or for-profit writing. However, Darcy prefers creative writing to academic writing, she also views academic writing congruent with her identity. Both academic and creative writing can communicate personal philosophies and aid in personal development.

She also references social, mastery, and intrinsic reasons for writing in general, and when referring to motivations for learning specific skills, she refers to the influence of habit and reader feedback.

As Darcy grows as a writer, she will face competition for jobs in the world of writing, publishing, and editing. She will need to develop a wider audience and continue to hone her writing skills. She will need to balance writing for profit and writing as an art. Darcy is certainly on the right track towards having a career in writing.

Chapter Seven

Mara

Mara is a perky high school freshman who takes honors courses and participates in dance courses two nights a week. She is also an avid reader and writer. Her story, "The right decision" was judged "best of the best" of the state competition. This means that it beat out hundreds of other stories to be the very best interpretation of the prompt. Mara is now mentoring her younger sister in POP. In fact, on the day I interview Mara her younger sister was competing in the regional tournament.

Mara's writing style is varied. She can write in a serious and darker or a light and humorous vein. In one story, Mara sets up a humorous contrasts between an edgy, sarcastic student who has been suspended from school and his relaxed "hippie therapist." In another, she describes the emotional roller coaster experienced by a mother who was accused of killing her son, and is now being freed from jail because the actual killer has been identified. Mara creates a parallel between the mother's experience of being interrogated and the interrogation of the real suspect. Mara's stories often begin with attention getting dialogue, and proceed tightly to the climax and resolution. Mara's stories include descriptive imagery; she especially focuses on trying to incorporate specific, unusual verb choices.

Writing History

Mara's high school English course includes reading discussion groups and practice writing research papers. Mara's teacher grades on the basis of organization,

content, coherence, and adherence to standard grammatical conventions. Mara regrets that she does not do much writing in her other courses. Her history course, for example, is mainly structured around memorizing facts.

Mara remembers learning to write five paragraph essays in middle school. She remembers these as being somewhat restrictive, but she tried to add creativity through specific word choice. Mara also did creative writing in class and in POP practice.

Middle school writing, that was a lot of fun. On Fridays we would share like a story we had written or like it was like a free for all, like you could write anything you wanted, and I would write a story, and sometimes she would give us a prompt and we would sit in a circle and I really liked that, and it was really relaxed but we were still getting graded on it.

In middle school, Mara was in advanced English courses and she read Edgar Allen Poe, *Great Expectations*, and *Wuthering Heights*.

In elementary school, Mara began her school career in a remedial reading course. She remembers that her parents were worried that she would always have trouble reading. However, when Mara worked with her reading tutor, she grew to love reading. By third grade, she was in the advanced English class. From third through fifth grade, she attended the advanced English course. Students did self-selected reading and learned about grammar. Writing assignments in elementary school were mostly confined to answering questions about books.

Writing Process

Mara's writing process for POP is focused on originality, and writing a complete story within the time limit. Mara describes her writing process:

I'd probably spend like two or three minutes thinking of what to write about. Like, we talked a lot about POP and trying not to pick the obvious thing. Like, if it's "the secret" try not to make it exactly like a secret, try to think outside the box. Or I remember we did "the line" and everybody wrote about crossing the line, and somebody wrote about lines on the paper, and lines on the paper always got like the best reviews. So I'd try to think of something unusual to write about. And then I'd start out, I'd usually start out with dialogue for some reason just to make it more interesting, and try to think of a way to capture the reader's attention at first. And I'd write the climax really like interesting and bold, and then for the ending I'd try to like find a solution to the problem (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

The requirements for writing a research paper are different, but Mara's attention when writing a research paper is still on the demands of the context. The research paper is spread out over a longer time period:

Well, for the research paper we're doing now, we spent a week or two doing note cards. We had source cards because we had books we were reading from. We would write notecards and that took a long time. And then I arranged them in order of what I was going to write the paper. And then I wrote the outline, and I wrote the paper, I started out at his birth, and the hard part was making it not like a biography, but like a research paper, so I had to focus on his achievements. So I

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focused on everything great he did up until his death, John F. Kennedy, and then I

had to go back and cite everything, and then I had to go back and check that my

outline was perfect and all the spacing, and that was hard, and then I checked for

grammar and that kind of stuff and then I was done (Mara, personal

communication, March 20, 2010).

When Mara speaks about revision, she talks about both organizational level

changes and surface-level changes. Many of the surface-level changes are changes I

would term editing. The difference between editing and revision is that revision

addresses larger conceptual changes in the piece and therefore necessitates changes at the

sentence and paragraph level, while editing focuses on attempts to standardize and polish

discourse and therefore is mainly concerned with changes in punctuation and word

choice. In reference to POP, Mara suggests that she leaves about two or three minutes at

the end of her time, and makes small edits in word choice or in the title. Mara does not

make any changes to her writing after competition. When writing for school, Mara

spends a lot more time making changes; much of these changes are edits. Mara uses a

revision checklist to make changes:

Um, contractions, I'm always aware of that now, because the first paper I turned

in had a bunch of contractions and I got points off for that, so I turn all the don'ts

into do nots and stuff like that and commas, I'm really bad with commas because I

never know where to put them. Usually spellcheck works but sometimes it

doesn't. And we're never supposed to start sentences with "there is" and "there

are" so I'm always going back and changing the order of sentences. And I use the

passive voice a lot so I try to go back and change that but I have a hard time

changing that (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Mara also makes major changes in some cases with the intent to focus the paper

on the central thesis. She has also trimmed papers considerably to get them down to the

maximum length requirement.

Emotion

Mara uses many positive words to describe her feelings towards writing. She

loves big words, she is inspired by passionate teachers to have a *passion* for writing, and

she thinks that writing is a lot of *fun*. Mara is also nervous sometimes when she writes,

but POP has helped her learn how to regulate her emotions. Mara says:

> That [POP competition] was a lot of fun, like at first it was really nerve wracking,
>
> especially my first one because I didn't know what to expect but after that you just
>
> kind of relax and you have a lot of fun each time, especially if like you're friends
>
> with people on the team or people who were runners. I loved the tournaments
>
> (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Mara talks about conquering nerves.

> I thought I was going to be really nervous the whole time but the first five minutes
>
> I just stopped being nervous and just wrote, especially since there wasn't a lot of
>
> time, I just had to start being calm and focus on writing (Mara, personal
>
> communication, March 20, 2010).

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Influences

Mara has had the benefit of a variety of nurturing influences. She has been very receptive to the people and books that have crossed her path. In her interview, Mara acknowledges all those who have had a positive impact on her relationship with writing. Mara recalled four teachers by name who have influenced her. One was her POP coach:

> I remember in seventh grade I had a really awesome POP coach, Ms. H. She was always pushing me to do better. But she taught me a lot, like writing from different perspectives, like one girl wrote from the perspective of a hot dog --that was fun. And just different ways to capture the reader's attention, she was really awesome and she was very serious about it too, like if you didn't turn in your prompt on time, like your writing it was not good. I was always on time and everything because she was very strict about it, but she was so nice. I loved her (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Mara benefited from individualized instruction, including remedial and accelerated instruction. Mara benefited from the structure of the POP program. Mara had friends in POP, and friendly competition was a motivation for her. Mara's family was also supportive. Her mother volunteers with POP, and her family took her to the library and the bookstore. Mara's school system even has a program that involves bringing famous authors to speak at the schools. Mara was inspired:

> In seventh grade, Neil Shusterman came to my school, because every year they have an author come. Actually, an author is coming to the high school, but I haven't read any of her books. But Neil Schusterman came, and I loved him. My sixth grade teacher had read *The Schwa Was Here* out loud to our class, and he

read *The Shadow Club*, so I'd read some of the books. And when he came, every book he'd written had like a story behind it, which was really interesting. And he was talking about having a journal that he wrote a bunch of ideas down, that I've been meaning to do so afterwards he was talking about how he was going to be at Barnes and Noble, so I was talking to my mom about how I had to be at Barnes and Noble that night, and I got the book *Everlost*, and I got it signed by him, and I still have it. I read *Everlost,* I read *Full Tilt,* all of his books. It was my goal in the seventh grade to finish all of his books. I just loved them (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Motivation

Motivation is a highlight of this study, but it is a complex concept. Many of the writers in this study were able to draw from a variety of motivations, both extrinsic and intrinsic. Many of the student writers speak differently about motivation when referring to the specific strategies they use, and when referring to their overall motivations for writing. They also speak about motivation differently when talking about their creative writing in POP and when talking about their "school writing." These generalities hold true for Mara.

When speaking of general motivation, Mara's biggest reason she writes is because it is fun. The second reason she refers to often is that she wants to improve her writing skills and become a better writer. Mara listed her motivations for writing, ranking them in order from the most important to the least motivating.

1.   For pleasure

2.   Express myself, my feelings

3.   To become a better writer

4.   Random ideas that come to life

5.   For school (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010)

When she refers to the pleasure of writing, Mara remembers how fun competitions were. She loves the social aspect of hanging out with some of her best friends and eating pizza after the writing rounds were over. Of course, she also loves the writing itself. She likes trying new strategies and loves big words.

Mara also often speaks about "being my best." She has an ethic of achievement and says:

I like good grades and I've always had good grades, so I try to write my best so I can maintain my good grades because I don't want to have a bad piece of writing anywhere. I always want to be my best (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

When she speaks about specific strategies she uses in her writing, many of these strategies are influenced by her training and practice, or from feedback she received from judges. She refers to using metaphors and similes because she had had a unit about that in her English class. She says she tries to move the action in her stories along quickly because she does not want judges to take points off if her story is boring. When speaking about specific strategies she uses, Mara's motivation has to do with the structure of practice and feedback from specific audiences.

Mara is more motivated to write creative writing than research papers. Writing research papers is writing for the "other" whereas writing creatively is writing for the self; Mara speaks of having more control in creative writing; creative writing allows her to reflect emotions of the moment. Writing for school is both enjoyable and less fun than creative writing. Mara says "So even if I don't like the assignment or I have to have it done tomorrow and cram it in, I try to write my best but since it is a school assignment, that kind of takes the fun out of it" (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010). She says, "I think I write more for school but I'm not as motivated to write for school, when it's like a research paper or an essay because it's not something I really want to do but I still enjoy it" (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Structure

Structure is present in many of Mara's writing endeavors. Structure can be defined as regulations, conventions, patterns, and external controls. Structure has a dual role in Mara's relationship with writing. Structure is positive because it provides standards to master, and structure demands regular practice in writing. Yet some structures are seen as complex, restrictive, and imposed.

Mara views the structure of POP as positive. She says:

Um, I think when I was in elementary school, I liked reading more so writing just came along with it and in middle school, it changed more to writing like especially in POP, since that was like a club and I had to write. We wrote in 7th grade twice a week and in 8th grade once, it really pushed me to like write more and I read still but I didn't read as much, and now since POP is over I think I read

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more than I write, especially since POP pushed me to write every week. I don't think without a deadline I would write as much. So that really helped (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

In this quotation, Mara uses terms like "had to" and "pushed" to illustrate that this structure was an external force acting upon her, but she viewed this as positive. POP developed Mara's enthusiasm for writing. POP is not offered in high school, but Mara's high school offers an after school creative writing club. Mara visited the club a couple times, but found it lacked structure.

Mara says:

POP was a lot more structured-- like we had meetings and we would get a prompt and we would write from it, and talk about the prompt and discuss what we could do better and what were our strong points and stuff, and in this club it's just sharing your stories and poems and they didn't critique us as much. This club is run by students, and I think that was the problem. It's just a lot more relaxed, and I didn't like it as much (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

The structure that Mara describes in POP is a bit different than the structure she describes in academic writing. The structure in POP involves developing the habit of devoting time to writing. The structure in POP also referred to structured feedback received from judges, coaches, and peers. There were definite patterns to the stories in POP. They included sensory imagery, specific verb choice, dialogue, tight plotting, and a climax. However, Mara, and others were quick to note that there is freedom within this structure.

Mara tried to explain to me why the structure in POP feels like freedom, whereas the structure involved in school writing can take the fun out of writing.

> I think it's because you get to choose what you write about. That was the main factor for me, because in school, especially in middle school, it was always if we were reading a book, it would have a question about the book, and then you had to answer it, but in POP you could do whatever you wanted with the prompt. You could make it something weird and abstract or you could make it normal, whatever you were feeling that day. So even though you were trying to make it normal, have a climax, have big words, trying to make it more appealing to people and the best it could be, you could take it wherever you wanted, but in school you have to stick to the question asked, and everything has to be kind of, like in order, but in creative writing you can kind of be like whatever you want (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Furthermore, when Mara discussed boundaries in creative writing, she suggested that the boundaries could be broken and still be successful. However, in academic writing, she believed the boundaries were strict, and breaking rules would lead to a poor grade. Structure in school writing refers both to the orderly process of writing, which is outlined by teachers, and the text itself. In reference to the text itself, Mara referred the grammatical rules that must be followed. In POP, grammatical rules were more flexible and a piece could be successful even with grammatical errors, because it was graded for the holistic effect.

When Mara was asked to reflect on the values involved in creative writing and in school writing, structure again came up. For school writing, Mara listed "facts, perfection, and honesty" (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010). For creative writing, she listed "interest, pleasure, and creativity." It is conceivable that the values "perfection" and "pleasure" can conflict.

Relationship with Writing

Mara's relationship with writing is emerging. It has been nurtured for many years by positive role models and educational and environmental supports. Mara has been very receptive to the influences in her life. Mara describes her relationship with writing as a flower:

> I think it's kind of like, this is cheesy, but like a flower because its grown, its gotten prettier as its gotten longer and its been watered by my coaches. They definitely helped me grow more and become a better writer and also my peers pushed me a lot especially since I'm a little competitive but now it's like grown (Mara, personal communication, March 20, 2010).

Even though her relationship with writing has grown overall, she still feels it is a bit more distant than it was in POP. Mara no longer does regular extracurricular writing. Mara wants to pursue a career in writing, but she is unsure what form this career will take. She plans to take a journalism course next year. She would like to be able to write a piece that is longer than her POP pieces, which are about three to four pages long. She says the idea of writing something longer seems "scary." It would be very tedious to include all the necessary detail and have the details match up. It would take a long time

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to write such a lengthy story; Mara worries about keeping the reader's interest, or the time it would take to change direction in the story and have to rewrite it again.

Mara believes that what will motivate her to improve her writing is the fact that she wants to be a writer, but that she is open to many possible writing careers. So, she will need to be open to learning many different writing techniques and styles.

However, understanding the role that structure and nurture has played in Mara's relationship with writing, it seems likely that she will need both structure and support to continue to be successful in writing. In the future, Mara will need to seek out passionate mentors and writing communities to help her nurture her skill and enjoyment of writing. She will need to learn how to structure larger writing tasks, and go deeper with her revisions.

Chapter Eight

Charles

Charles is a thoughtful high school sophomore who discusses abstracts and philosophical concepts with ease. He takes advanced courses and is enrolled in two electives: musical performance and creative writing. Charles travels with a youth orchestra and spends much of his free time in religious studies.

Charles won the humor award from POP. His stories are often light, with the use of exaggerated scenarios and word choice to add humor. Examples of Charles's humor are a poem about a food fight at school, a story about a teenage boy being embarrassed by his younger brother, and a story told by a dog who is trying hard to earn doggy treats. Humorous stories are Charles's specialty in POP, but he has another, more serious, writing interest as well. Charles writes sermons in his spare time. One of these is entitled, "The Problem with the Selfish Life."

Influences

At the time of the interviews, Charles was studying biographies and autobiographies in his sophomore English class. Students in Charles's class wrote their own autobiographies and interviewed each other in order to write biographies. This English class emphasized nonfiction studies, including book reports. Charles appreciates being able to practice his nonfiction writing skills, and he likes to get feedback from his teacher on how to organize his thoughts and improve his mechanics. Unlike some of the other POP writers, Charles says he likes writing nonfiction and fiction equally well.

In his creative writing class, Charles has very open-ended assignments. There are few restrictions. One assignment might be to write words that are associated with the word "anger." These assignments are similar to POP assignments, but the feedback Charles receives is not as detailed.

Jill: So what type of assignments would do that, or what type of feedback would help you?

Charles: Hmm. Probably people giving me specific feedback about the style of my writing, and not just "Oh I like that," or "I don't like that," I would like people to be more picky about my writing, definitely, and you know just really pick out things that they didn't think flowed through the writing, or confused them. People in that creative writing class, more just looked at the whole idea of the writing, and "Hey, I liked that story. It's good for a sophomore and for this class" but that's not really what I wanted to know (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

Charles enjoys his creative writing class, and the freedom it allows him, but he wishes for more in-depth critique.

Charles remembers POP as an enjoyable activity that incorporated a lot of practice time, and meeting new people. Charles enjoyed reading his stories aloud to the rest of the team. Charles would often go home and practice by asking friends to come up with a topic, and he would write about that topic.

Charles learned to read at a very young age; it was a skill he picked up on his own. Charles enjoyed reading fantasy novels for a time, but now he reads mainly religious literature. His memories of writing in elementary school are mainly memories

of learning grammar and learning cursive handwriting. However, he does remember a teacher who let class members take turns coming to the front of the class to read their stories aloud. Charles always enjoyed this.

Motivation

When Charles discusses motivation for learning specific skills, or using specific techniques in his writing, he often refers to specific audiences. For example, he remembers a specific classmate from elementary school who inspired him to write his best:

> I remember that I, it's kind of funny, one of the main things that I had a goal for, it's kind of funny in class, there was this kid, he'd always laugh really hard at my writings, so I kind of put it in the back of my mind, it was a tool to be as humorous as I could so I could make that kid fall out of his chair. And it happened a lot of times -- he fell out of the chair. I mean, I used that as a tool. He was always sitting in the back of the class in the far right chair, so I'd try to make that kid fall out of his seat. And so, you know that would challenge me to write as humorous as I could and that would bring out humor in me. You need some kind of tool in writing, you need something to challenge you to write even if it's way in the back of your mind. I remember that (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

The POP judges also motivated Charles to try new techniques and improve his writing.

So, I would take what the judge said, and I'm sure I did this with my writing, because after this I went to state and worked really hard to get some feedback. So what I would do is, so description as this judge says, is a big problem, give more descriptive words, a larger vocabulary so I could express a deeper meaning through small words and that kind of thing. I would put a lot of descriptive words, and even if that meant smaller story, I would go overboard with writing descriptive words in (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

When describing his motivation for writing, Charles lists a variety of intrinsic motivations that balance the needs of the writer with those of the reader. Charles's list of reasons for writing (ranked) are as follows:

1. To tell something that you believe is so true, it would hurt from the inside not to write it down on paper.

2. To say things that nobody would really like to talk about in everyday conversation.

3. To convey to others certain feelings that you wish to express and not just hold to yourself.

4. To express those feelings of love, happiness, anger, confusion, regret or any emotion you want to the world (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

Most of Charles's motivations have to do with self-expression, and expressing personal values. For Charles, expressing something on paper gives it permanence and

authority. Later in the interview, Charles read from a list of famous quotations that all deal with the motivation to write. He pointed to his favorite one.

This one. "Writing is the best way to talk without being interrupted" because that's exactly how I feel. You know, I can be, especially with creative writing and these kinds of sermons, because you know I'll be talking about something I feel a certain way about and people can interrupt you as much as they want. I don't want to hear that, but if I write it down it's a way to know that I've gotten it out somehow. Yes, that one definitely (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

When Charles is struck with an idea, or feels passionate about an issue, it is imperative for him to express it, uninterrupted. Charles also mentioned being motivated by the possibility of cash prizes in POP, but believes that intrinsic motivations are even more important.

Creativity

Charles's understanding of creativity is shaped by his experiences writing fiction. Creativity for Charles is summed up in two concepts – freedom and challenge. Charles repeatedly describes the freedom that is involved in creative writing. When describing creative writing class, Charles says, "It's a lot more free than English class, of course, um, creativity. You get to… There's so much freedom (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

Later, "I like the freedom of creative writing where I can just write whatever I want and not stick to a specific theme (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

Charles contrasts the freedom he had in middle school with the writing he does for high school.

Way back in middle school level you had so much freedom, you could go up and read whatever and your teacher would be respectful of that as long as it was appropriate and now it's kind of expected in English class, you know you're supposed to do these certain sentence structures together, certain concepts in your writing, which is helpful, you know, but it's different in that way (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

When asked to list values associated with creative writing, Charles listed "freedom, expression, and individuality." He points out how the standardized assessments also limit creativity. Standardized writing assessments give very narrow prompts, and expect specific elements in the response. Charles explained:

You know, they'll tell you certain things to put into your writing and they'll really give restricted prompts, for example, they'd tell you to write about a boy from the future and all the trees are gone. They'd tell you this; they'd tell you all the trees are gone and you need to find a new way to save the ozone layer. And for me that takes away from my freedom of writing, that's something that I would make myself, like if they'd say "trees."

In POP, they'd say "trees", and let's say I'd write about the boy and the ozone layer, but it seems to me in the state tests, they've already constructed things that you have to build off of and you don't have much freedom so that's kind what they do, and they judge how well you write and grade you by that whether you put those concepts in (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

When choices are limited, not only is there less freedom, but there is less challenge. One knows easily what is expected from a prompt that states, "How could you save the ozone layer if there were no trees?" POP offered Charles a lot of challenge because he was competing against such a large number of students, and because the writing assignments were open-ended enough to allow room for creativity.

This example was especially interesting to me because the prompt Charles mentioned, from a teacher's standpoint, was designed to elicit higher order thinking. Conversely, I can imagine asking students to write about "trees" and receiving very low-level responses such as "trees are green." It is paradoxical that a prompt designed to elicit creative thinking is viewed by this talented student as limiting his creativity.

Writing Process

Charles is inspired by what he reads and by events in his daily life. His story about a dog was inspired by watching a dog show. His story about an embarrassing little brother was patterned after his relationship with his own brother. His poem about a food fight at school was patterned after the style of "Casey at the Bat."

Unlike some of the other POP writers interviewed for this study, Charles views his POP stories as rough drafts. His goal in writing is to write the best rough draft in the

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time frame given. However, after his stories had gone through multiple rounds of judging and were declared to be "the best of the best," Charles still makes revisions to them. In fact, Charles wished he could make revisions to some of the stories POP chose to publish in *The Book of Winners*. POP generally publishes the stories exactly as they are judged in tournament competition.

Charles says revision is not his favorite thing, but he enjoys seeing the results of it. His revision process is lengthy. Charles says:

> So, I usually take the rough draft and read through the whole thing and change the things that don't flow. I usually have to read over about four times, each time correcting something that could confuse you or doesn't flow correctly. That's probably the longest process. And I still have to have the same meaning, so I can't change it that much. For each circumstance I come to, I stop and think about it a while, what needs to be changed and what I can change with it and then I do that. The last process would be, I usually give the paper with those revisions to a few people who are really good at English, like my grandma or past English teachers or friends that are awesome at English. I usually print off a few copies and give them to different people, and they'll mark them all up in red and go through and print off that revision, and send it off again to different people and get a second revision and they'll mark it up, probably fix errors, and by that time spell check and everything has usually fixed everything. That's usually my revision process (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

Charles makes multi-leveled revisions. He addresses issues of paragraph organization, and may add paragraphs. He also works on his sentence structure and word choice.

Values

My interview questions included a discussion about the values associated with writing. Values are connected to issues such as our identities as writers, and our motivation for writing. I asked Charles to list the various types of writing he does, and then to consider what values were associated with each type of writing. Charles listed the following values:

Creative writing: expression, freedom, individuality

Academic writing: rules/restrictions with a purpose, structure, purpose

Sermons: truth, religious beliefs, conviction to help others, passion (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

More than writing or performing music, Charles's passion is to study and teach the Bible. Charles reads the Bible every day; he also reads literature of other faiths in order to better understand how to talk to people of other faiths about the Bible and Christianity. Charles's passion relates to his writing. His highest motivation for writing is to express things he believes to be true. And when he talks about his personal values, truth is paramount. It is no surprise, then, that the writing he is most attached to are his sermons. Charles does not publish his sermons, some are written for personal use and others are written and stored for reference. Charles says:

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I think I started off when I was seven I read the Bible. I loved to study and I've never stopped. Probably every day I read the Bible, I can never get enough of that and you know books about the Bible I can never get enough of that. And then when I would talk to friends about the Bible, not of my own, but of the Christian faith, when I talked to other friends, they would, um, we'd openly discuss religion. People always say don't talk about religion or politics but for me, I knew how to control myself when I talk to others about my opinion, and I wouldn't go too far to make them angry and I wouldn't be controlling about what I believed towards them. So we could discuss things openly and my friend who was Mormon, he'd tell me what he thought. And then I'd read the book of Mormon so I could discuss things with him. And it kind of went like that. So, basically I have my own faith and then I read other religious books so that I can discuss them with other people. That's kind of my passion (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

When Charles has religious discussions with his friends, sometimes his friends will ask him for more information on a topic. Then, Charles gives them one of the sermons he has written.

I talked to Charles about the idea that we prioritize our values, and sometimes these values come into conflict with each other. For example, a writer who values freedom more than structure may have difficulty with formulaic writing. Charles talked about how truth and compassion were both personal values, but truth came first. He applied this idea to a writing scenario:

In a writing scenario, say in creative writing, if somebody would ask me, y'know, if somebody was writing some kind of satire, some creative satire about something or a poem about emotions that I didn't think were truthful about the subject they were talking about, that would overcome my compassion for the person. So the compassion for the person would be, you know I feel really, I feel for this person, but then the truth side of it is if they asked my opinion I would say I don't agree with that really, the side you took on it (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

Being able to express his honest opinion on topics that matter to him is a big part of Charles's relationship with writing. I imagine that discussions about religious concepts may not be commonplace occurrences in high school classrooms and hallways. Writing allows Charles to have these conversations, uninterrupted, even when there is no audience. Writing validates his search for truth.

Relationship with Writing

Charles uses the following metaphor to describe his relationship with writing:

Maybe like a tide, a tide that comes up over the beach and it really stretches out there, it's a high tide, but then it kind of relaxes a bit. It's been with me like a tide on a beach in my middle school and elementary years it really went up there and I like, I loved, I mean it was my passion, what I concentrated on as well as music but it really came up there and now it's not as much but it's still one of my favorite things (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

This quotation expresses to me that Charles still likes to write, but it is no longer as big a part of his life as it once was. His unofficial ministry and his desire to become a pastor are his passion now. Writing helps him serve that greater goal.

Some unique aspects of Charles's relationship with writing are his command of humor, and the integration of his personal faith with his identity as a writer.

Charles's goals for the future are to enhance his academic writing. This includes using varied sentence structure and using specific word choice. Charles also wants to continue to develop a personal style. Charles's advice to other writers is to become self-motivated.

Chapter Nine

Chelsea

Chelsea is a pretty and popular high school sophomore. She has long brown hair and brown eyes. Chelsea attends public school in a small town and is involved in many school activities. Her sports include tennis, cross-country, softball, and swimming. She's in art club, band, Spanish club, student council, and is her class president. As class president, she is responsible for leading committees and helping to plan homecoming. She takes Honors courses and a couple college courses as well. Her conversational style is very diplomatic and positive.

Chelsea competed in POP during eighth grade, made it to the state level, and was selected for inclusion in the *Book of Winners*. Her strength is writing an engaging storyline and developing plot. Chelsea shared with me a story about a boy who was adjusting to his new school, and a story she had written for a library contest about the kidnapping of a young girl. Chelsea's imagery was vivid and her stories were nicely paced.

Chelsea's writing process at a POP event involves coming up with a few ideas prior to the event. Then, when she is given the prompt, she tries to modify her original ideas to ones that fit the prompt. Chelsea used a plot diagram or a short outline to plan her stories. Chelsea has a writing ritual that she uses to begin writing. She holds a piece of paper in front of her, and lets it droop down over itself. She looks at the paper and uses the lines of the curving paper to help her visualize her story.

For example, if one of the characters is a girl with long hair, she may see the image of the girl when looking at the line of the curled paper. Chelsea has used this technique since she was young and began writing. Next, she forms the opening of the story in her mind, and once she has a good opening on the paper, the rest of the story flows from it. Chelsea says that the experience of writing nonfiction is similar, except that the purpose is to inform rather than entertain.

Chelsea does not always officially write a complete second draft, but often, in the process of writing the first draft, Chelsea rereads sections and makes changes. She says:

I normally am kind of bad about making sure I do a rough draft and going through, but one of the things my teachers always tell me is that I never write the same thing twice...Even when I do the first draft, I rewrite it but I change a whole bunch of things, almost to the point where I need a whole other like draft, but I like it [revision] a lot especially like when you give it to a teacher or friend because then you give it another perspective (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Chelsea says that rereading and revising while one is writing brings new paths and opportunities to light. When she makes changes, Chelsea checks her grammar and word choice.

Chelsea promotes her writing by entering, and winning, local contests. Her writing has been published in young writers' collections. Chelsea has not sold her writing.

Influences

Chelsea's high school experiences have emphasized analytical writing and taught her to adapt her style to meet the demands of varied teachers. Some teachers have very strict formulas for essays, while others are less strict. Chelsea says:

I guess I'm just not used to writing in a format, like essays starting at opening it up and giving information, but some teachers are really specific. They want it a different way each year, because of personal preference, and I'm just kind of used to personal narratives. I like doing those but when it comes like actually structuring things, I kind of have to take a little bit to get a feel for how they want it, but then once I get it, then it's O.K.... Some teachers like our freshman teacher had a very set pattern. Like you would have topic sentence, and then you would have an example, like "for example" and then you'd have to give your "for example", which is your concrete detail, and then you'd have two commentary sentences. And you'd have another concrete detail that would start with "in addition" and then you had two more commentary sentences, and then a concluding sentence, and that's how all your paragraphs had to go. But this year our teacher gives us a bit more leniency and he actually doesn't want us to say "for example" or "in addition" all the time. He wants us to kind of change it up, but keep the same kind of idea (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

During high school, Chelsea's creative writing has dropped off due to her busy schedule. She says:

I would like to write more. I don't write as much as I used to because obviously we do a lot of essays now and we don't do as much personal narratives writing. But I always thought it'd be fun to write a book, maybe when I'm older, but I haven't had time with sports and everything (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

High school experiences have nurtured her analytic ability and taught her academic formatting, but they have not given her an outlet for her creative writing talent.

During middle school, Chelsea was able to take a few electives that fostered her writing skills. In her Great Books class, Chelsea learned the elements of literary analysis for the first time and had book discussions with classmates. In Chelsea's Power of Words class, she did a variety of writing activities including interviews, comic books, and writing letters. In her seventh grade English class, Chelsea did a lot of writing and learned about different forms of poetry. The class used a website called "Poetry Wars," in which students could write poems, rank poems and vote on "battles" between which competing poem was the best. The students also wrote fiction. In eighth grade, Chelsea's English class focused on literature and grammar, and less on writing.

Middle school was also when Chelsea was in POP. Chelsea says:

I liked POP a lot. We'd never really had anything like that before, like we didn't even have POP til my 8th grade year. They just started it up, and I did it with one of my friends, and it was kind of funny.

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I thought it was really cool to see what we could get in forty minutes, and it kind of really showed who could get some ideas, because I was really good at like thinking up storylines and ideas, and I could make a good story, but I wasn't really good at writing it down and getting good descriptive words or remembering my grammar rules, so that actually helped my writing a lot because we got a lot of critiquing from our teacher, and I benefited from it, I guess (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Chelsea's practices consisted of timed writing, discussion of excerpts from the past *Book of Winners*, and vocabulary practices. She remembers being nervous and excited at the tournaments, and enjoying meeting people from other schools.

In elementary school, Chelsea was a very advanced student. In fact, in kindergarten, the school offered to accelerate her two grade levels. Instead, her mother chose to have her stay with her grade and participate in the gifted program in first grade through fourth grade. In her gifted program, Chelsea participated in a program that taught vocabulary enrichment and analogies called Word Masters. Chelsea's gifted education teacher was enthusiastic about writing and about poetry. Chelsea remembers doing writing in elementary school:

We did a lot of fiction writing, and we made our own books. When I was bored, like when I came back to class, they'd be doing their reading but I already did my reading in gifted class, so we'd have like a little study hall. And I wrote a little book about a dog, and it's pretty cool, but my teacher read it, and all my friends thought it was cool. And we wrote a lot of poetry back then.

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I did a lot more poetry than stories because we did poetry a lot in the gifted program. I thought it was cool. We read a lot of poetry by, I think his name is Mattie Stepanak; our teacher liked him a lot. He's a young boy that wrote a lot of poems, and so we all wanted to be like him so we all wrote poems (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Chelsea's gifted education teacher communicated to students the idea that they could be authors at a young age like Mattie Stepanek, and encouraged them to make their own books. When she was in elementary school, Chelsea published a poem in a young author's compilation, and she also remembers learning to use dialogue in her stories.

Other than school, Chelsea's major influences are books and family. Chelsea is an avid and early reader. Chelsea says, "I like writing; I love reading. I liked reading before I liked writing. It was kind of, I liked reading so much that I kind of wanted to make my own books but it's just, it's a hobby" (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010). She reads teen novels and adult literature. She especially likes stories of survival, triumph through struggle, and historical fiction. One of her favorite authors is Jodi Piccoult.

Her family is also supportive and proud of her writing, and they often ask her to recite her published poem. Chelsea's mother read to her when she was young. Chelsea's parents have also affected the development of her writing talent in another way. When she was young, Chelsea's parents got divorced. This was a very stressful time for Chelsea, and she used writing as a form of catharsis. She also wrote stories for her parents to make them happy during this difficult time.

Values

Chelsea sees her writing talent as a way to make people happy. She likes to please people and cheer them with her stories. For example, when her friend failed to make it into National Honor Society, Chelsea made her a funny pop-up book. Chelsea says her values guide her writing, because there are ethical lines she does not like to cross in her writing. She says, "I don't do gory stories, and I don't do openly mean stories; but they also let me kind of, I'm into like openness like I think of myself as unique" (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010). Openness and uniqueness are two values Chelsea identifies with creative writing. She also views creative writing as carrying more freedom than research papers, which must be unbiased. Chelsea believes that there are boundaries in writing; for example, opinions can be expressed in creative writing, but should not be presented in heavy-handed ways. She says:

> I don't like stories where personal beliefs are kind of like in your face or right
> there, like when you read a lot of old stories and they have like racial things in the
> stories, I don't like that (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010)

In research papers and essays, Chelsea also points to the value of "relation" or being able to make a connection between the author, topic, and reader. Chelsea says the only time her values interfere with her writing are when she wants to make a story too happy. It is hard for her to write story endings that are sad, even though sad endings do occur in real life.

Chelsea believes writing is valuable because it can communicate important themes, such as the theme of tolerance in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She believes that people may be more open to learning these themes in the form of a story. For example, a child

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may be more willing to learn from a book than from a parent's lectures. She believes that writing is valuable when it is good writing, but not when it is mere self-promotion. She says, "We need writers, but we need like good writers. We don't need people that just want to go write a biography about themselves" (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Goals

Chelsea's list of motivations is, as follows, ranked in order with 1 being the most important.

1. Sometimes, I'll be relaxing and doing my little "paper thing" and suddenly I have a story going, and I have to finish. It's like watching a movie!

2. I like to think of writing as one thing I really excel at, my friends are great swimmers or singers; I have this!

3. Someday I would love to write a book. It's sort of how one day you find an idea and you never put it down. I have a lot of those.

4. It's pretty therapeutic for me sometimes and it helps me to concentrate on something else.

5. I like the pure challenge of creating a story with a prompt.

6. I write stories at times to cheer my friends.

One thing I noticed about Chelsea's list is that when she is referring to writing, she is referring to creative writing. She does not refer to writing for grades or because it is assigned. Chelsea's reasons are mostly intrinsic. Chelsea's main reasons focus on having an ability, a story inside her, and wanting to express it. Because the telling of a

good story is of primary importance, these might be seen as mastery motivations, especially 1, 3, & 5. In addition, Chelsea mentions therapy, or mediating her emotions. Chelsea also mentions "excelling" at writing; this may be thought of as a performance goal, with the idea that Chelsea is better at writing than her peers are. However, she does not quite phrase it as being better than others, but being equal to others, just in another area. Chelsea says that her motivations have changed since she was younger. When she was younger, writing was primarily therapeutic.

Relationship with Writing

Chelsea says that her relationship with writing has changed since childhood. Where writing was once primarily therapeutic, it is now fun. She says:

When I was younger, it was just kind of, you know, when I wasn't feeling good or when I was having trouble at school, I would write a little bit. It was a nice little therapeutic thing, but now since I did POP, it's more for fun, writing a story (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

In POP, Chelsea learned to write on a prompt. She says:

It was just kind of a thing before POP I would do it whenever I got in the mood, but during POP it was more like just for fun. We're going to write and see, write about a spoon and see how that goes, and that was kind of fun. Normally, I'd just kind of like get an idea and think oh that 'd be a good story, and I'd write it down, but now it's more you challenge yourself, like write about a flower pot and see what you can do. I thought it was more fun.

Jill: So you had to learn to kind of be inspired on the spot.

Chelsea: It was a challenge; I liked it (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

She used metaphors to describe her relationship with writing:

When I was younger, writing was kind of like, writing was kind of like drinking some hot chocolate and relaxing after having a really stressful day, or if you were having an upset day and you were crying. Like you know when you're all upset; not that I'd be upset and write a book, but if a person were really upset or really..., and if they took a nap or relaxed that's probably how it was back then. Now, I think it's probably like when someone's at work they suddenly get the inspiration to go off on their own and try something new, like someone who works in an office building gets an idea and gets up the courage to kind of make a presentation and go show their boss, since it's not really a requirement any more, since we do essays, it's kind of when I get the inspiration by myself and go (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Chelsea has also gained new skills since she was younger. She is able to vary her sentence length and vocabulary. She is able to pace her stories better. She knows how to build anticipation by slowly describing the details of the scene. She knows how to add resolution to the story, whereas before she would end her stories abruptly. Her goals for writing in the future include developing a personal style, and continuing to improve her vocabulary.

Chelsea has had very positive experiences with writing since she was young, and she focuses on the ability of creative writing to bring happiness to people's lives. Her stories are conciliatory and hopeful, as is her relationship with writing.

Chapter Ten

Madison

As i sit here wondering

why it is i write

I'm not only scratching my head

but also my fourteen mosquito bites

As i'm itching i remember

that I once wrote a story about bugs

it told my readers about when i went camping

across my foot crawled a slimy slug

At that moment that it happened,

I was convinced it was the worst thing i'd ever faced

that was until i got an assignment

to write a six page report on space

Hey! I got one!

I write for school

that may not be the best reason

but it can sometimes turn out cool

Also in school i'm in a group

called Power of the Pen

it's a wonderful experience

that I wish would never end

We write and write and write

until competition comes

we enter our stories and make new friends

who are the farthest thing from dumb

I write to compete against others

from all over the state

I make it factual, creative,

or even out of date.

When I come home from a bad day,

I whip my pen and paper out

and do this thing called free-writing

to express my emotions without a doubt

People often argue about all kinds of topics

this leads to disputes and fights

instead of getting involved

I write to say how i feel about the matter when nobody is in sight

Don't get the idea

that you always need a reason to write

it can be simply just for fun

or in a secret journal at night

Write because you want to

write because you care

write so everybody knows your abilities

before you get gray hair

(Madison, personal communication, April 27, 2010).

Madison is a current eighth grade student who lives with her mother and her father on a quiet country road. Madison's mother is a school bus driver, and her father is a farmer. Madison has glasses and shoulder length blond hair; She is soft-spoken and smiling, with braces and neon pink rubber bands adorning her teeth. Madison takes finance, careers, and choir as her school electives. Her extracurricular activities include Power of the Pen, basketball, volleyball, softball, and Future Farmers of America. In her seventh grade year, Madison was ranked in the top 15 seventh grade writers at the state competition. Madison's mom was inspired to look for more writing opportunities for her daughter. Madison's parents paid for her to take an online college creative writing workshop.

Writing Process

Madison's stories range from light interpretations to very serious themes. For a prompt on "reverse reaction," Madison wrote from the perspective of a bumblebee that turned out, at the end of the story, to be allergic to humans. When writing about the harm a rumor can cause, Madison placed her story in the context of the Holocaust, which included a somber ending for the victim of the rumor. Madison's favorite writing strategy is personification. She has written as a bee, a cloud, from the perspective of a cow. Madison also loves developing characters and coming up with twist endings.

When writing in a competition, Madison starts with a graphic organizer such as a plot chart or an idea web. She then jumps right into writing the story. When the competition is done, she does not go back to the story and revise it. When she is writing a research paper, she takes more time to write outlines and to revise her papers. Even though she is only required to do one rewrite, she usually writes two or three drafts. She makes changes to timelines, sentences, wording, and mechanics. Madison's work is shared with her family, her teachers, her principal, and adults in her online writing course. However, she does not actively try to publicize or publish her writing.

Subtle Conflicts and the Need for Challenge

Prior to Power of the Pen and her online creative writing workshop, Madison's assignments included journal writing, formula essays, extended response questions, and research papers. Madison showed me one of her research papers. It was a single spaced biography of about four pages, which was a very detailed description of the life of Thomas Jefferson. The assignment did not ask for analysis or evaluation, and much of the work of the paper was organizing and rephrasing facts found on websites. Madison

had a perfect score on this paper. Madison told me that her class practices writing for the

Ohio Achievement Tests once a week; however, Madison has passed the achievement

test at the highest level. Madison is very accepting of the assignments that her teachers

give her; however, they did not seem to me to provide her with much challenge. Madison

described her writing assignments, which were formulaic down to the sentence level:

> She does it [grades] on grammar first, your spelling, capitalization, and
>
> punctuation. And usually she has you include at least two similes and two
>
> metaphors in there so you get a variety of writing in there, and she grades you on
>
> that, and she grades you on structure. There's a formula. [It's] "TS3XSS" which
>
> means topic sentence, three examples, and a summary sentences for each
>
> paragraph. So she grades on your form and how much paragraphs you have. She
>
> doesn't actually grade it on how the story goes (Madison, personal
>
> communication, April 7, 2010).

> According to Madison, 40% of the grade is allocated to grammar and mechanics.

Madison says that her POP writing is more challenging than her school writing, but that

she enjoys the challenge. She admits that writing to a formula sometimes creates a

conflict for her:

> The teacher always gives you a strict formula that you have to write by and I'm so
>
> used to free-writing that it can be hard to go by his formula or her formula,
>
> probably because I like making up my own stories. When they give you a topic,
>
> and you can only go there, it makes a conflict because you want to go further but
>
> you can't; you have to stay on that one topic.

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Sometimes I find myself going off topic (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

Madison's creative writing class was different than the writing Madison had come to expect in public school. She says:

I thought it was going to be proper grammar and how to do nouns and adjectives, and then it ended up being like they actually told you, not how to write your story, but they went a lot deeper into small parts that I hadn't really thought about (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

It seems that Madison's previous experience had not challenged her creatively. Like many POP writers, Madison sees a dichotomy between what was valued in the world of creative writing and what was valued in the world of school. When listing the values central to creative writing, she lists imagination, originality, and detail; but when listing the values central to academic writing, she lists grammar, facts, and accuracy, all of which are lower level skills.

Emotion

Madison does a lot of free-writing; writing is a way to manage and express her emotions (catharsis). Madison describes free-writing:

Sometimes, like free-writing, if you don't have anything to do, or a lot of times when I'm angry, you just go and write, just free-write, it doesn't have to make sense, or have to be punctuated or capitalized, just write down whatever is on your mind (Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2010).

Madison says she writes best when she is happy, and that when she is angry, the emotions bleed into her writing:

> Usually if I'm in a good mood, then I can write about anything, but if I'm sad or I'm tired or something, I don't think much; I'm not as creative because I'm not exploring as much as I should be. When you're mad, you seem to make the story in a threatening way, like when you're mad, it has lots of conflicts in it and everyone's mad in the story because that's how your mood is (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

Madison's view on emotions is somewhat unique and philosophical. One of the ways she tries to live her life well is by detaching herself from her emotions because "everything is impermanent" (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

Influences

Madison describes the many influences on the development of her relationship with writing. Influences are people and contexts that aid or hinder writing talent. Madison described her gifted/talented education teacher and POP coach as a major influence, as well as her family:

> My major one that's had an influence on me is probably my coach, Mrs. P. She's taught me a lot of ways to make my writing better, and even if you don't do well at competition, she's there to support you or help you fix what you did wrong. Like we go over our stories and she helps us with that. She helps us, but she's also really fun; she's not strict about it. And I don't think I've had many negative influences. Obviously, my family is there when we go [to competitions] to

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support me with my writing, and they want to read it when we get back. That

keeps me writing because I know they like reading my stories (Madison, personal

communication, April 12, 2010).

Books are also an important influence for Madison; she reads at least one book a

week and approaches her writing assignments with an attempt to write something that she

would enjoy reading.

Goals

When looking over the poem Madison wrote on the theme, "Why I Write" as well

as her interview transcripts, many different goals are apparent. When talking about

specific pieces of writing and skills she demonstrates, Madison points to the importance

of instruction. She can remember when she started realizing the power of descriptive

adjectives, and when she tried personification for the first time:

In 6th grade I remember, we did this whole big lesson on description, and when

we read a book, every time we wrote we answered chapter questions after

reading, we had to go into detail about what happened, and instead of telling what

happened in the book, we'd have to use our own words and use similes to

compare things. In my class we're studying like adjectives, like more in-depth

adjectives than just your simple ones that everyone always uses. And then you

have prepositions and like all the other ones that make the sentence more detailed

and alive (Madison, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Madison is also motivated to write something she would enjoy reading. She has a

strong concept of herself as a reader.

Madison says:

I read about a book a week, and I like to read different kinds of books and

reading those and seeing how those authors write, when I go and write my story, I

try to relate to how they write and how they use different forms of grammar and

like similes and metaphors and all those things. Then I try and put that into my

writing, or they help spark ideas when I think of different prompts because I can

relate to stories that I've read (Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2010).

She speaks of adding detail and describing the setting in order to make her stories

more interesting and less confusing for her readers, because if she were the reader, that's

what she would want to read.

In her poem, Madison describes trying to beat her POP competitors and yet

bonding with them at the same time. Developing friendships is an important goal for

competing in POP. Of her POP team, she says, "we're all real good friends. We do stuff

out of POP, like we're all going to State together so we can do things, because it's funner

when you're together and not alone" (Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2010).

This suggests both performance and social goals.

Her poem also describes writing as problem solving/analysis, extrinsic (writing

for school), fun, self-expression, and talent development. Talent development and

emotional expression seem to be the most important motivations for Madison. Talent

development may be a mastery motivation; Madison wants to become better at her craft

and write a children's book. This is her top ranked reason for writing. Her next three

reasons are related to managing and expressing emotions. Reason number two deals with

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boredom. Reason three could involve emotional processing as well as an analytic approach. Reason three may relate to free-writing.

Madison's List:

1. to become better at writing so hopefully I can write a book someday

2. to make a non-interesting subject interesting by putting it into a detailed story or essay

3. to express how I feel towards certain subjects/events

4. to get anger or sadness out

5. just for fun (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

Relationship with Writing

Writing, for Madison, is a way to add spice to school assignments and manage and express emotions. When she speaks about writing, Madison is usually referring to her creative writing. Creative writing represents the values of freedom and challenge. Writing in POP is both harder and freer than writing in school. When asked if there were boundaries in writing, Madison says:

No, you can write whatever you want and take it wherever you want to; like it's better if you focus on it so the story makes sense, but there are some people that are writing things that don't seem to make sense to some people, but it makes sense to others, so depending on the person you are you can like different stories, so there are really no boundaries on what you can write about (Madison, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

Madison sees herself as a writer, and sees a continued role for writing in her life. She says:

I want to write a children's book, like I told you before, and I just even with other stuff that I do, I know that I just want to have time for writing, just the free-writing or whatever I decide to do, and it would be kind of nice to coach a POP team too like my coach does (Madison, personal communication, April 26,2010).

Seeing as Madison has already taken a college creative writing workshop in seventh grade and her high school does not offer creative writing courses, Madison may need to look outside her rural community for further instruction. She has the option of enrolling in more advanced online courses, traveling to larger cities to writing workshops and author events, or applying for residential summer writing camps for young authors.

Chapter Eleven

Nicole

It's hard to tell when I'll suddenly feel that inner desire to sit in front of a computer screen and type away my thoughts and feelings. Writing, for me, isn't something that I can schedule or plan out. Getting that urge to write is like suddenly deciding you need a bowl of ice cream (mint chocolate chip) at midnight or you want to go on a walk when it's 10:22 in the morning and you're sitting in the middle of third period class trying to conjugate Spanish verbs in the past tense. Writing's so much a part of me that it's not really a question of why I write, but when.

Sometimes it's Saturday afternoon and I'm supposed to be cleaning my room. A half an hour in I'll find myself staring out the window, thinking, formulating ideas in my head. I don't know if it's the enticing view of the woods behind my house, or the boredom, or the fact that I'm not supposed to be doing it, but suddenly I'll have this great idea I've never thought up before and I have to share it, at least with my ever-friendly computer screen. That's when I write for myself.

Sometimes I'll be in an argument with someone: with my teacher over the finer points of evolution, with my friend because she just won't understand, with the annoying guys online who don't know a thing about sports.

Usually I'm so full of frustration or things I could've said but didn't think of until later, and with furious fingers I'll type out my argument in a clear, precise, undeniable way that completely proves my point but will never, ever find its way to the person I wrote it to. That's when I write because I couldn't say what I wanted to say before.

Sometimes I'll just have one of those experiences that leave me breathless in their wake. It could be as simple as five minutes in a summery field or as long and harrowing as the hardest race of my life, but they all leave behind such an impression in my mind that there's no question of if I'm going to write it, but when. I'm so filled with emotions that give birth to words that give birth to stories that I can't not share it. That's when I write to show the world who I am and what I've done.

Sometimes the teacher hands out one of those papers detailing the whats, hows, and whys of our latest essay. I'll groan with the rest of the class even as my eyes scan hungrily over the paper, looking for ways to insert a little bit of myself into this mundane bit of high school. It makes the assignment (almost) fun, (almost) like a puzzle to solve. That's when I write to make the mundane (almost) like a little bit of me.

Sometimes I'll believe in something so strongly that it almost seems to manifest itself on the screen, and I'm merely the one witnessing the idea emerge from my fingertips in a way that is entirely not my own work. It takes a hold me, eating up hours with an alarming frequency as my own work lies betrayed next to me. That's when I write because it seems that something bigger needs me to exist.

And sometimes I'll have something beautiful that's mine, that I'm nurturing and feeding and watching grow up in a way that's at once both too fast and excruciatingly slow. In this people are born and ideas are made and things that never occurred to me before become normal. That is my favorite writing of all, when I write to explore the people and thoughts and ideas and the world around me and make some sort of crazy sense from the bits.

So, in summary, words and I have a pretty good relationship, in the billion and one ways they can be written down and expressed. I can only say that I'm very, very, very glad of this and if pressed to give one single reason for why I write, it's because I just can't seem to stop; there are too many reasons to keep the ink flowing (Nicole, personal communication, May 9, 2010).

Nicole is a freckle-faced high school freshman with shoulder length dark hair and brown eyes. She has attended parochial schools since preschool, and she loves her Catholic high school, where she takes honors courses and is on the track team and in the school band. She is the eldest of three sisters. During our interview, she spoke softly, earnestly, and eloquently about her passion for writing.

Nicole wrote her first book, a children's book, in third grade as a present for a sister. In middle school, Nicole's teacher encouraged her to try out for the Power of the Pen team. Nicole was very successful in Power of the Pen, making it to the state competition, and having her story chosen for publication in the *Book of Winners*. In middle school, her history teacher gave her the assignment to invent her own country.

Nicole developed a country called Snownen, with its own set of political turmoil, economic development, religious ritual, and cultural practices. From this assignment grew sketches of life in Snownen, and from these sketches grew aspiration to write a novel in middle school. When I spoke with Nicole, she had finished 50,000 words in a novel that she planned to write as the first in a trilogy for middle school readers. Nicole was the only middle school writer I spoke with who was working on a novel. However, Darcy had also written novels as a high school student. Not surprisingly, both Nicole and Darcy demonstrated the highest degree of conceptual-level revisions and the most steady, self-disciplined writing habits of all the students.

Nicole's writing style includes rich description, well-paced plotting, and a subtle command of language. Her writing process focuses heavily on visualization, and, when possible, revision. Nicole recalls when she began to grasp the importance of visualization and concrete imagery in writing.

> That's when I got the concrete imagery. And the way our coach did it was if we can picture it in our minds, then we can put it on paper. I never really had brought an actual picture in my mind. I thought about it, but I couldn't see it. And then I learned to see it in my mind. If you see it, you can write it (Nicole, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Influences

Nicole's family and friends are supportive of her writing. In fact, one of Nicole's friends from Power of the Pen is also writing a novel; she and Nicole support each other and critique each other's work. Nicole's father also encourages her and reads her novel as

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it grows through multiple drafts. Nicole's mother is also supportive and reads her daughter's short stories. As the eldest child, Nicole is also motivated to foster a love of reading and writing in her younger sisters' lives.

"School writing," or assignments such as literature responses, research papers, and essays compose a large part of Nicole's writing life in school. Nicole's attitude towards school writing is open and accepting, but somewhat nonplussed. She says,

> Nicole: Usually we do things like, like we just turned in an essay that was your journey towards becoming an uncommon person -- how can you make yourself into a better person? We outlined three characteristics that we could use to become a better person and the steps that we could take to do that. So that's usually like that.
>
> Jill: How did you like that?
>
> Nicole: It was O.K. I like more short stories and creative writing than essays, but it was fun.
>
> Jill: O.K., did you do any research papers?
>
> Nicole: In biology we did a research paper in November, and again, I like more creative writing, but I did well on that (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

Nicole's school writing is varied, from the typical research paper and formula essay to more thoughtful pieces like "Describe what it would be like to live in Nazi Germany." Nicole is accepting of formula writing, and says it helps her organize her thoughts and stick to one topic. Nicole does not remember doing much writing in school before Power of the Pen.

Her children's book was written outside of school. She remembers writing a story in her second grade gifted class; however, much of school was focused on grammar instruction. Nicole had developed an intuitive understanding of grammar rules due to her reading habits; She would often zone out during English class and yet still do well on the tests.

As is the case with many of the writers in this study, Power of the Pen was a catalytic experience for Nicole. POP began with a trial period, in which students met and wrote each week, and the list of potential team members was narrowed. Then, Nicole practiced after school on Mondays and during lunch on Wednesdays and Fridays. These days were the days Nicole looked forward to all week. In reference to POP practices, Nicole says:

> The thing I remember most is just how she would like, every other week or so, she'd bring in a novel or something that all of us were familiar with, but she wouldn't tell us about it. She would read a passage from it and see who could guess it. It was pretty fascinating like just seeing how you can recognize a writer just by their techniques" (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

This quotation alludes to another influence – reading. Nicole, like many of the young writers in this study, is also an avid reader. Tournaments were nerve wracking and exciting. Nicole said that the moment of sitting down at a tournament and coming up with that one brilliant idea that you know is going to be successful is "the best feeling in the world" (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010). Nicole described the impact of POP on her writing:

Before POP, I kind of, like, dabbled in writing. I had kind of written a novel. I wouldn't really call it a novel because it wasn't really a storyline. It was just me writing down a bunch of ideas; but once I got into POP, I kind of put a focus on my writing to make it have a point, and I learned a lot about perspective. It just gave me more techniques and more purpose to my writing (Nicole, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Writing a Novel

When Nicole mentioned her novel, I had already read three of her shorter pieces. Nicole emailed me her novel, and I planned to read the first couple chapters to get a sense of her ability and how the novel differed from the shorter pieces. As I read, I was amazed by the level of writing talent and how the details of the novel intertwined and compounded, developing a very realistic world. The novel was composed of many short chapters, about 3,000 words each. The chapters alternated point of view between the main character, a girl growing up within the warrior culture of Snownen, and the secondary character, a boy from the same culture. Each chapter contained, or ended with, a new bit of revelation, foreshadowing, or plot twist. This resulted in a fast-paced, compelling read. I read the entire 50,000-word document, which was still in progress, and was left wanting to read more. I talked to Nicole about the process of writing a novel in middle and high school, and found that her writing process was quite professional.

Nicole is a busy high school student, but finds time to work on her novel about ½ hour each day. The amount of time she spends varies based on her interest and schedule. As part of Nicole's school fees, students receive a laptop computer. This allows Nicole to

write at her convenience. She also often writes scenes in the margins of her school notebooks. In addition to working on the text of the novel, Nicole completes additional exercises to help her conceptualize and organize her novel. For example, Nicole created many character profiles to help her develop characterization. Nicole says:

> I've had full-page detail ones. Like I can remember the one for Colin [a minor character] that I made. I drew a picture of him and I actually gave myself questions, like how old is he, what nationality is he, what's his background story, describe him, and then I just have space for interesting facts and like how he ties into the story (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

Nicole also developed plot outlines spanning the entire book and beyond into the next two books. Finally, she made a map of Snownen and its neighbor, Kata.

Nicole has engaged in a number of major revisions during the two and a half years that she has been working on the novel. When a scene doesn't sound right or when her tastes have matured, she looks at large chunks of writing. She places the old section and the new section on the screen simultaneously while she rewrites the section. One of the major revisions she has done was adding the perspective of the secondary character. Because this character's perspective alternates with the main characters throughout the novel, this required extensive rethinking.

Nicole was inspired by the fifteen-year-old author of *Swordbirds*, Nancy Yi Fan. She says:

> I've gotta say, I wasn't really sure about, I wasn't really sure when I started my novel. I wasn't really sure if I could do it. It seemed like such a big project, but there's a girl called Nancy Yi Fan.

She was 12 years when she wrote her first novel, and it became a best seller. And that really inspired me, like I can do this. If she can do it, I can (Nicole, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Emotion

Writing, for Nicole, is both a conduit of emotions and a moderator of emotions. Writing is a conduit because Nicole's writing often reflects the emotions she was feeling at the time she wrote the piece. Because of this, she must often revise works that require a different tone than the emotion she was in when she wrote the piece. Nicole believes emotion is very important in writing, and in her novel, tries to convey a wide range of emotions specific to the plot.

Writing also moderates Nicole's emotions. Nicole has learned, through the process of competing in POP, to calm herself and focus when she is nervous. In the process of writing a novel, Nicole has developed the discipline to write even when she doesn't feel like it. She told me that even when she is not in the mood to write, once she begins writing, the mood arises. And often, she is in the mood to write. Daily events, like the 4 x 800 track meet, inspire her. In fact, she says, she even has a "writing mood" that her friends recognize. She says:

I love how it takes me out of any mood I'm in, and puts me into this thoughtful, open receptive mood, and helps me organize my thoughts even when I'm writing about something completely opposite of what I'm going through. I think it helps just being able to step into someone else's skin and dream a bit (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

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In this quotation, receptiveness and empathy are emotions central to writing. Openness is important in writing, because as Nicole says:

> It's a whole lot easier for me to write what I'm feeling than to say it, because words, when you're speaking them, can get all confused and jumbled up, and you lose what you're thinking. Another thing about speaking is people can stop you; sometimes you feel pressures from the way people are reacting. When you're writing, there's no pressure. It's completely unjudged. No one can stop you while you're writing; no one can interrupt you (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Values

Nicole and I talked about the role of values in writing. Nicole's personal values are hard work, which is evident in her schedule and the amount of energy she devotes to writing, and openness, which is evident in the theme of her novel. *Snowmen* deals with the racism and sexism faced by the teens in Snownen at the hands of the residents of Kata. Nicole is very concerned with fairness in the world. She relates this to her personal experience with ladies' sports, which are often regarded as inferior to men's sports. In her novel, the girl and boy warriors of Snownen are trained differently with different specialties in combat, but are regarded to have equal power, value, and athletic prowess. Nicole also relates the theme of prejudice to her experience as the big sister of a person with Down syndrome, and her feelings when her sister is teased or ignored. Having a point, an argument, a thesis, is what Nicole believes makes both long fiction and essays successful. Not many of the writers I interviewed brought up this crossover

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between fiction and nonfiction, or the need of fiction to have a rhetorical perspective. Many of them though, like Nicole, viewed the value of "emotion" as central to fiction but not to nonfiction. The only time she feels that her values conflict with her writing is when she must invent characters whose values are antithetical to her own. She says:

> It's harder for me to create characters that I'm not comfortable with, like people that I don't really like talking to, that I'm not friends with, but there's going to be people like that in stories, people who give up easily. I have yet to write a character that gives up easily, so that's where the big conflicts come in (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

Goals

Nicole was asked to list and then rank reasons why she writes. Her goals are primarily interpersonal goals; they are all intrinsic. Her most important reason is self-expression and intrapersonal, to "let my emotions out." Her list continues:

2. I have an experience I want to share

3. For fun

4. To show people who I really am

5. I have an idea I want to share (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Number five is differentiated from number two, because number five deals more with a thesis or argument, while number two deals more with a narrative or impression. Nicole has, on occasion, written persuasive essays on topics discussed in her English class. After debating a topic such as evolution with her English teacher, Nicole will write

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an unassigned essay as a way to process her arguments and her reactions after the debate, but she does not show these essays to the teacher. Nicole also differentiates between writing "for yourself" and "for others", where writing "for yourself" is much more fun. Nicole gives this advice to other students:

> You can't think of it as something you're going to hate because writing for fun is a whole lot different than writing for somebody else. When you're writing for you it's the greatest feeling in the world. And if it's hard at first, it's hard at first for everybody. The start is hard (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010).

Relationship with Writing

Some of the young writers who excel in POP grow more distant in their relationship with writing as POP ends, but Nicole believes her relationship with writing continues to grow stronger. She says:

> I guess I didn't know how writing would affect me; the closest metaphor I can see [to my relationship with writing is] like I was a sail, and the words were like my wind or whatever, and once I started, once the wind started to pick up, I began to realize, "oh wow, I can do things with this," So it started picking up and picking up, and now I'm full sail (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Nicole's relationship with writing has grown since elementary school, with POP as a major catalyst for this growth. She says:

> When I was in elementary school, writing wasn't really a big part of my life. It was like out of all eight years, I produced that [the children's book] and a couple

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other ones. Then I started getting into POP, and now I can't imagine life without writing; whenever I get an idea, I need to jot it down quickly. It's really changed (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Nicole is self-motivated and self-disciplined when it comes to her creative writing. She can manage her emotions in a way that adds to the development of her writing skills. She is open to improvement, and actively seeks feedback on her writing in order to make revisions. Her values align with, and are reflected in, her writing. Nicole has realistic goals for her future writing. She says:

I'll need to learn to broach subjects that I'm not really comfortable with because so far I've been writing things that I've been very comfortable with, things that I think about all the time, that are part of my normal life, and I need to learn how to write to more audiences, because obviously there's going to be people who look at my book and say that's too childish, and I want something more out of it, and hopefully that'll help as I mature (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Perhaps one oversight is that Nicole has not sought out publication opportunities yet; it is unusual, but not impossible, for teen authors to be published in national literary magazines and consumer markets; in fact, the magazine *Merlyn's Pen* specifically features the work of young writers. To turn her love of writing into a career, Nicole will need to learn career skills such as submitting writing for publication, dealing with rejection, addressing editorial concerns in a timely manner, finding a literary agent, negotiating contracts, networking and promoting writing, money management, and giving public appearances.

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Nicole has not decided yet if she wants to pursue writing as a career. She is also

considering studying medicine. She believes that both writers and doctors make a

difference in society. She says:

> Writers are the ones who really inspire you, and they get ideas across. You see
>
> writers in everything from movies to radio; they're using words to get across an
>
> idea. So, doctors are the ones who keep society going but writers are the ones
>
> who inspire you, and a lot of things happen because of writers. The declaration of
>
> independence was written by a writer (Nicole, personal communication, April 28,
>
> 2010).

Chapter Twelve

Findings, Contextualizing the Study, Implications, and Future Research

The case studies that preceded this final chapter were written with the intent of highlighting what made each student's relationship with writing unique. Different themes stood out for different students. For Charles, values were central to his relationship with writing. For Jane, creativity and spontaneity were of primary importance. In this chapter, I look across the cases for common themes. Instead of many differing portraits, I am trying to paint one portrait that rings true for each of these eight writers. This portrait describes the phenomenon "relationship with writing" from the perspective of a talented young Power of the Pen writer. Researchers acknowledge that students' desires to engage with the domain (their motivation) is an important aspect of talent development (Gagne, 2000; Renzulli, 1984). Motivation to write has been generally studied in very specific, quantitative veins. For example, students have been asked to rate their agreement with statements like "I can write a well-organized paragraph" in order to measure their self-efficacy (Bruning& Horn, 2000). This study attempted to understand students' desire to write through the metaphor of "relationship" using phenomenological methods.

Findings: Relationship with Writing

What does "relationship" entail? Consider how friends and lovers describe their relationship with each other: "I feel happy when I'm with her," "We share the same goals and values," "Being a good friend is important to who I am." Relationships are about

connection and commitment. In this study, the "relationship" construct began as a metaphor. In the data analysis, subtopics emerged that formed the construct. These subtopics are influences on our emotions, values, goals, and identity.

Influences

Relationships develop over time, and are affected by contexts. For example, the experience of being in love for the first few months of a relationship may differ from the experience of being in love many years into a marriage. Similarly, couples might fight under stressful situations, but this may not detract from an their overall commitment. In talking to students about their influences, I wanted to understand how specific people and situations made students want to (or not want to) develop their writing talent further. The majority of the influences that these writers described were positive influences, and most of these writers were able to describe multiple positive influences.

Family and friends.

These writers had proactive parents who encouraged them to join POP and who sought out new opportunities for them. Charles says:

I think my mom encouraged me when she worked at the school as a nurse and she was friends with my science teacher, who was also the writing, the creative writing coach for POP. And my mom heard about this and so she encouraged me to go try out for it cause she knew I had a knack for writing and I really liked it, so I auditioned for it and I got in (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

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Parents took students to libraries, competitions, and author events at local bookstores. Parents volunteered at the Power of the Pen competitions. Students were privileged to have parents who had the time and interest to support students' writing.

Some of these students also had friends who encouraged them by responding positively to their writing. This included Charles's class who liked to laugh when he read his stories, and Nicole's friend who was also writing a novel. Nicole spoke of her writing partner:

> She said that I inspired her, which is really cool. She's writing more of a fantasy novel. And I think she got that idea from Eragon but like the basic idea from Eragon, and so once I found out that she was writing this, I kind of jumped on board, and now we're sending each other stuff, just kind of helped her out, cause she's kind of shaky with character details, but she's stronger with imagery so she helped me with my imagery, and I can't really explain it, but she has a way of like bending words so you know exactly what she's talking about. So she helps me with that, and I help her with characters and plot. We proofread each other's stuff (Nicole, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Nicole found her writing buddy through the Power of the Pen competition. Like Nicole, many of the students found, through Power of the Pen, friendships that were based on a mutual interest in creative writing. Students' friendships often led them to spend social time together outside of Power of the Pen.

Teachers.

Not all these writers' experiences with teachers were positive. Some teachers had personality clashes with students or focused too much on formal rules for the look of a piece. However, most of these students could name at least one teacher who had inspired them. Most often, it was their POP coach. Qualities of teachers who inspired these students to love writing were:

1. open to creativity & individuality

2. provided structure and serious critiques

3. provided positive emotional energy

These teachers had the serious expectations that students use their time well and to turn in assignments. They also gave the students constructive criticism, even when the students did well. For example, Jane described her teacher, saying, "She'd give me like positive critique about my writing, not like 'oh this is really good', but 'oh this is how you could make it better' (Jane, personal communication, February 13, 2010). Memorable teachers were also described as passionate, fun, and reassuring.

Curriculum.

Curriculum refers to school assignments and course of study with respect to writing. The students discussed their high school, middle school, and elementary school curriculum. POP was discussed separately as an extracurricular activity.

High school emphasized academic writing; creative writing was generally neglected altogether. Some high schools included creative writing as an elective or extracurricular activity; but it was mostly absent from the general English curriculum.

Many of these talented writers take advanced, AP, or college courses. Darcy reflected on

her college courses, saying:

> I took all honors and AP English classes which helped prepare me for college.
>
> We were really expected to be able to analyze the literature and not just read it
>
> which was really important especially once you get to college so, you know, I
>
> always appreciated the level of work that was expected from us in my English
>
> classes (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Many of these students' teachers emphasized the procedural aspect of writing,

including surface-level features such as MLA format and grammar and mechanics. Lily

said:

> It [the way my English teach grades] makes sense. I don't know. Sometimes I
>
> don't like it how teachers think that there's only one way to write a paper that's
>
> right, but I guess there is only one way to write a research paper. So, um, but
>
> she's a pretty fair grader (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Like Lily, other students described how their high school English teachers

emphasized procedural rules and the "right way" to write a paper. Some of these students

say that as much as 50% of their grades in high school were allotted to surface-level

features.

Students remember middle school as focusing less on literary analysis and

research papers, and more on flexibility and personal expression. Students spent a great

deal of time in middle school practicing vocabulary and grammar, but when it came to

writing, assignments were more open-ended. Students explored many different genres,

including poetry, science fiction, realistic fiction, and choose-your-own adventures. Mara says:

> Middle school writing, that was a lot of fun. On Fridays we would share like a story we had written or like it was like a free for all, like you could write anything you wanted, and I would write a story, and sometimes she would give us a prompt and we would sit in a circle and I really liked that, and it was really relaxed but we were still getting graded on it (Mara, March 20, 2010).

Students' memories of elementary school were a little hazy, and most did not remember doing much writing in elementary school. For those who remembered writing stories and books in elementary school, these writing assignments were often in the context of gifted programs. Nicole said:

> The only real writing assignment that I remember was in second grade in the gifted program. We were learning about the rainforest, and so we picked a specific animal. I think mine was a gecko, and like, I wrote a little essay about it, like second grader essays (Nicole, personal communication, March 14, 2010).

For those students who did write stories and made books, this was their first experience of authorship. Even though elementary school had passed years ago, it was identifying themselves as authors that really stood out in their minds years later. In their middle school years, the importance of having a writerly identity would intensify, as students used writing to explore questions of who they were and found commonality with other young writers.

Power of the Pen.

Composition theorists have questioned the practice of timed writing assessments and high stakes writing tests (Gregg, Coleman, Davis & Chalk, 2007; Simmons, 2009) and for struggling writers' writing quality is adversely affected by time limits in at least one study (Albertson & Marwitz, 2001). However, for these talented young writers, timed, competitive creative writing was a positive experience. Students enjoyed the challenge of writing practices and tournaments, and adjusted their writing process to fit the constraints of the context. POP changed students' relationships with writing for the better. In POP, some students realized their talent for the first time, grew from peer and reader feedback, and began to feel part of a larger community of writers. The ingenious tournament structure of POP offered an intellectual alternative to a sports team, and showed the students that they were not alone in their academic interests. Darcy describes the culture of Power of the Pen and its impact:

> Just getting together with a whole bunch of other writers. You don't know anybody you're in the room with. Everybody's nervous, which instantly makes everyone friends because you know you're all going through the same thing. And it's just a lot of fun to be around other writers, especially at that age when everything is like peer pressure and everybody is at that awkward stage. It's just nice to see 150 or 200 kids, or how every many people there who all have a shared interest with you. That's a really good confidence booster (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Reading.

Uniformly, all eight young writers are also readers. They read outside of school on a regular basis. Most learned to read at a very young age, and have reading tastes that are accelerated. Of special note is Lily, who read college level texts in fourth grade. Darcy said:

> I started reading when I was 2 ½ or 3 years old and I've always been a complete
>
> bookworm, my boyfriend built me a bookshelf for Christmas and it was one of the
>
> best gifts I've ever received, so I think the borderline obsession I have with
>
> reading and language and words I want to contribute something to that (Darcy,
>
> personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Furthermore, students' reading interests fuel their writing. They play with writing styles, often modeling their style off of an author they recognize. When revising they are able to put themselves in the position of the reader and decide what would be most interesting to read about. Some of the students hope to become published authors, and are inspired by authors who were published in childhood or adolescence, such as Gordon Korman, Nancy Yi Fan, and Mattie Stepanek.

> Nicole spoke of the inspiration of child authors:
>
> I've gotta say I wasn't really sure if I could do it. It seemed like such a big
>
> project, but there's a girl called Nancy Yi Fan. She was 12 years when she wrote
>
> her first novel, and it became a best seller. And that really inspired me, like I can
>
> do this. If she can do it, I can (Nicole, personal communication, April 21, 2010).

Negative Influences.

Negative influences are contexts that discourage the development of writing talent, or in some cases, a negative influence may be the absence of a positive influence. For example, some writers felt that the lack of a POP program in the high school discouraged them from continuing to write. Four students found other contexts for continuing instruction in creative writing once POP had ended; Charles and Darcy enrolled in high school creative writing courses, Mara and Lily, after-school writing clubs. However, these experiences were not as motivating to these writers as the POP experience. For the most part, this was because although these experiences provided freedom, in terms of open-ended assignments, they did not offer challenge. Students desired peers who were as serious at writing and as skilled as they are. They also desired serious critique and challenging structure, including guidance from teachers. This was only offered in varied levels from these extracurricular activities. An exception may be Madison, who enrolled in an online creative writing course at the college level.

Other negative influences included personality conflicts with English teachers, or teachers' over-emphasis on low-level assignments and surface-level concerns.

Conflicts with other scheduled extracurricular activities also distracted some students from writing. Many of the students in this study had varied interests, which is certainly not a bad thing, but does tend to interfere with the development of one talent. Chelsea said:

I would like to write more. I don't write as much as I used to because obviously we do a lot of essays now and we don't do as much personal narratives writing. But I always thought it'd be fun to write a book, maybe when I'm older, but I

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haven't had time with sports and everything (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Emotion

Emotion plays an important role in relationships between people. In relationships with friends, lovers, and coworkers, we strive for positive emotions, although we realize that conflict and negative emotions are par for the course and present us with learning experiences. The scholarly interpretation of motivation generally does not consider emotions; yet attempts to achieve positive emotional states that certainly guide our behavior; for many people, happiness is the ultimate goal. The student writers I interviewed found that writing brought them happiness. But they also understood that along the road to happiness, there would be periods of anxiety and frustration. Madison, Nicole, and Chelsea mentioned nervousness in conjunction with the tournament competitions. Madison describes her nervousness:

> I didn't place at districts but I was still in the top percent so I made it to regionals and I placed 7th at regionals so I got to go to state, and at first I was like, OK this is going to be crazy because I didn't really know what to expect because I've never been there before, and you get there and there's like a gazillion kids there too, and … They made you think a lot to get a creative way to put it into a story, and I wrote 3 rounds first. The time was shortened at state. You only had 35 minutes instead of 45. I wrote 3 stories first and the top 50 or 25% made it on to a power round. And I went to my power round because I was nervous and I didn't expect to place at state. I was really nervous, it was a really cool feeling, I was like

shaky and everything. And so I wrote there, and I had to wait an hour for the

awards ceremony (Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2010).

Notice that Madison says, "I was really nervous; it was a really cool feeling." The

nervousness is not debilitating. It is exhilarating and anticipatory.

Students experienced other emotions that might be interpreted as negative;

students were often insecure about their writing. Unlike the anticipatory nervousness,

this insecurity may interfere with students' writing. Jane described how insecurity

interferes with her ability to revise her work:

> I don't know, I just throw something down on paper and hope it's good. 'Cause
>
> whenever I go over my writing, I really hate it. 'Cause when I write it, I'll be
>
> like, "This is a really great story!" and then I read it and it's like "This is terrible"
>
> and then I make revisions and it ends up being worse and worse. Then I'll run out
>
> of time. I just can't read my own writing. It's painful (Jane, personal
>
> communication, February 13, 2010).

Even Lily, who had placed at the top of her grade in Power of the Pen, described

herself as "mediocre" and, at times, doubted her own talent. Lily, like some of the other

writers also experienced frustration. It was difficult for her to adjust to the expectations

of new English teachers, especially when she had developed such a strong sense of

personal style. Talented writers experience nervousness, insecurity, and frustration.

However, for these talented students, the "highs" of the positive emotions justify the

"lows" of negative emotions.

One positive emotion was pride, or a sense of accomplishment. Pride was evident when the winners of the competition were announced. Madison, especially, was proud of representing her small school so well. A couple students also spoke of the desire to appear smart, or to have a talent that they could call their own, which also reflect pride.

Students also seemed generally happy and excited about writing, both in competition, and on their own. When Nicole and Lily spoke of this feeling, it seemed almost transcendent. For Lily, the feeling of writing, especially under the constraints of time and prompt, made her feel as if no time had passed, and as if she was in a separate space, apart from day to day stressors. This is similar to the experience of flow (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990). Nicole described having a good writing idea as "just the greatest feeling in the world" (Nicole, personal communication, April 14, 2010). For Darcy, happiness was not the appropriate term. She talked about having a love affair with writing.

In addition to positive and negative emotions, it is possible to express indifference to writing. To express indifference would be to "go with the flow" and exert minimal effort, without developing a strong opinion towards writing. The writers in this study generally expressed positive emotions towards writing, even their academic writing. They were a bit more dispassionate and indifferent towards academic writing than towards creative writing, but in general, writers expressed little indifference.

Positive emotions justified the effort spent writing. Emotions also fueled the development of writing talent in two other ways. Writing served as a conduit for emotions, and as a mediator of emotions.

Writing as a conduit for emotions.

Writing was a way to express and preserve emotional states. Students were motivated to see their emotions on the page in front of them. Their writing often reflects their emotional state at the time of writing. Madison said:

> Usually, if I'm in a good mood, then I can write about anything, but if I'm sad or I'm tired or something, I don't think much. I'm not as creative because I'm not exploring as much as I should be. When you're mad, you seem to make the story in a threatening way, like when you're mad, it has lots of conflicts in it and everyone's mad in the story because that's how your mood is (Madison, personal communication, April 12, 2010).

Similarly, Nicole says, Oh, you can usually tell what emotion I was in when I was writing at that point in time because that's what I'll write about" (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010).

Writing as mediating emotions.

Not only can writing express a writer's mood, but it can also alter a writer's mood. Students can channel their emotions through the medium of writing, and through the act of writing, change their emotions. Writing can bring comfort and relief in difficult times and help process intense experiences. In her essay, Lily writes:

> When I write, the paper never tells me I'm wrong and never talks back. It doesn't walk away when I'm mid-sentence and is always there no matter what time it is. I write because it lifts me up from my depression and sits me in the world I create on paper. For those forty minutes or so while I scribble down a short story, I don't exist.

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I'm in another world, another universe, billions of miles away from me at my

desk. This feeling of nonexistence is what brings me back with a pen in hand and

a notebook in front of me every time (Lily, personal communication, April 11,

2010).

Darcy discussed writing a piece about her sister's mental illness, and struggling

through the emotions of anger and fear and struggling to work through those emotions

herself while also moderating the tone of the piece. Chelsea discussed how writing

helped her feel comfort and pride in the midst of her parents' divorce:

My parents got divorced when I was like four, and I wrote a lot mostly because I

thought it was fun, but it was also kind of nice to write little stories and I wouldn't

have to worry about it as much and I think that kind of impacted it a lot as I had

problems with it when I was younger and up through middle school but writing

was kind of a nice way to sort of kind of relive stress a little bit and I really liked

because it was kind of a confidence booster cause when my parents and my

friends really liked what I wrote, they would ask me to write more so that was

kind of nice (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010).

Nicole and Charles also spoke of using writing to deal with the frustration of not

being able to express themselves in words "in the moment. " They could use writing to

sort through complex arguments and express emotions that were difficult to express in

the situation.

Values

Strong relationships are thought to be built upon shared values. When employers search for employees, for example, they search for people who will align themselves with the company's primary values, whether these values are efficiency, achievement, competition, or intellectual inquiry. Conflicts such as political disagreements are sometimes explained in terms of competing values: liberal vs. conservative values. However, values are nebulous constructs, which means that understanding how each person in a relationship interprets these values becomes important. Many agree that "freedom" is an ideal; but they differ on how to preserve it.

Similarly, writers may feel that the values of structure and creativity may complement each other, but they may also view them as conflicting.

I asked students directly about their values. After defining a value as an abstract with a positive connotation, I asked students to list values associated with creative writing, values associated with academic writing, and personal values. Two themes emerged in relation to values. The first was a subtle conflict between values associated with creative writing and those associated with academic writing. The second theme was that students shared the personal value of openness and this related to their writing.

Conflict between the values of academic and creative writing.

The values that students associate with creative writing include creativity (or originality), freedom, emotion, love, truth, and fun. Students associate academic writing with different values: knowledge and structure. Some students also listed values for academic writing that had mixed connotations: perfection and obedience. It is easy to see

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how these values might come into conflict with the values that students perceived were held by creative writers, such as freedom and fun.

In her third interview, Lily discussed this conflict:

Well, I'm more for individuality and freedom and stuff like that. I don't like the structure and obedience of school writing, because I like being myself and I don't like changing that, and I like how people can show themselves in writing (Lily, personal communication, February 13, 2010).

Two of the writers viewed academic writing as "writing for someone else" and creative writing as "writing for myself." Students also felt that there were fewer rules and boundaries in creative writing than in academic writing. This suggested to me that students' identities and passions were more connected to creative writing than to academic writing.

Value of "openness" and its relation to writing.

Students also talked about their personal values, both directly, and indirectly in the course of the interviews. The primarily personal value shared by the majority of the students was "openness."

Openness refers to the ability to forestall judgment, and embrace the experiences and emotions of others. It is similar to empathy. Students referred to this value throughout their interviews in a variety of ways. Charles referred to it as "being relaxed" when confronted with new or contradictory opinions (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010). Jane disdained authors who were "preachy" in their fiction by forcing their values through the story (Jane, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

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Most of the writers referred to the value of openness/empathy, but in different ways. Chelsea mentioned that she particularly enjoyed an assignment in which she was asked to write an argument from a position that she disagreed with. She also discussed "being brave enough to explore other perspectives" (Chelsea, personal communication, April 25, 2010). In her third interview, Nicole said "I try to be very open, like I really hate prejudice, so I try to be open to everyone" (Nicole, personal communication, April 28, 2010). These are all ways in which students referred to openness. In her essay, Lily referred to it this way:

> Writing is so powerful. Not only can it reduce a reader to tears, but it can hold the memories of a person's entire life. The way I look at it, every person experiences life differently. Unique feeling and thoughts. By expressing what I feel and experience, I look at it as a gift to my reader. My work is the gift of understanding and acceptance. If people look at events from every viewpoint, acceptance in encouraged. With acceptance comes a greater earth we live on. It may seem silly, but I feel that I'm making the earth a better place (Lily, personal communication, April 11, 2010).

The value of openness is certainly important to creative writers as it allows them to take on the perspectives of their disparate characters. Openness is also important when writing a first draft. One must allow the ideas to flow without judgment. The value of openness also applies to academic writing. Students are very open to learning from constructive criticism and school assignments. Even though they experience conflicts between the values of academic and creative writing, they express this in only subtle ways.

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An example of this is found in Madison's first interview:

Jill: And how do you feel about the writing in your English class?

Madison: I like it. I think it would be cool … I'm used to doing creative writing now, and I think it'd be cooler to do more of that, but it's good to get a range of creative and serious writing in that class too (Madison, personal communication, April 7, 2010).

Notice that Madison qualifies her statement so that she is saying she both likes and dislikes the assignments in her writing class. This is characteristic of the students in the study. They have a positive outlook on education and are reluctant to criticize their teachers or the curriculum, so their preference for creative writing is expressed in subtle ways.

Goals

Goals explain why we expend effort, and in a general sense, what we want to achieve. In relationships, goals provide hope for the future and a reason to expend effort. According to current goal theory, goals are categorized as performance, mastery, extrinsic and social. My analysis considered, but did not limit itself, to goal theory. I assessed students' writing goals in three ways: 1. Students talked about goals of specific pieces, and how they came to try new strategies in these pieces, 2. Students listed five general goals for writing, and ranked these in terms of importance, and 3. Most students also wrote essays on the theme, "Why I write" and discussed their goals indirectly through the course of their interviews. Students' discussions of their goals differed according to which of the three responses they were giving.

Ranking Exercise.

Students listed five reasons why they write. Some example answers were "I write to express my emotions" or "I write for fun." Students then ranked their responses from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important to them. After all the interviews were completed, I read over the students' lists. If students had listed similar concepts, such as "express my emotions" and "get my emotions out," I grouped these together under one heading, such as "express emotions." At this point, I had a list of all the goal types that students had come up with. Then, I wanted to rank all of the students' goals to find out which goals were most important to the students in general, rather than which goals were important to individual students. In order to come up with a general ranking, I assigned points to each goal according to how important students had described it. A goal that was listed as a 1 was the student's most important goal, so it would be assigned the most points (5 points). A goal that a student ranked as 2 would be assigned four points, and so on. I added up the points to determine a combined ranking for the students' goals.

For example, here is Madison's list, as well as how I coded it.

Madisons's List:

1. to become better at writing so hopefully I can write a book someday (develop talent – five points)

2. to make a non-interesting subject interesting by putting it into a detailed story or essay (fun – four points)

3. to express how I feel towards certain subjects/events (express emotions – three points)

4. to get anger or sadness out (express emotions – two points)

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5. just for fun (fun-one point)

I added the points for similar goals together. For example, if one student ranked "develop talent" as 1, and two other students ranked "develop talent" as 2, then "develop talent" would receive a total of thirteen points (5+4+4). This allowed me to develop the following general ranking of students' goals:

Ranking of Students' Goals

1. Express emotions (20)

2. Develop talent (18)

3. Mediate/process emotions (11)

4. Fun (9)

5. Expression in a different social world (7)

6. Self-reflection (7)

7. Extrinsic (6)

8. Express truths (6)

9. Seem smart (2)

10. Express self (2)

11. Control (1)

Table 2. Ranking of students' goals.

Two of the top ranked goals centered on emotions. "To express emotions" simply refers to getting them out and getting them on the page. "To mediate emotions" is to alter one's emotions through the process of writing them down, usually in the sense of changing negative emotions into positive ones. These two goals may be related, as the

process of expressing emotions may also alter them. These goals do not really fall into the categories of extrinsic, mastery, performance, or social. I would term them "intrapersonal goals."

The second most popular goal, with 18 points, is definitely a mastery goal as it focuses on becoming a more competent writer. A student whose goal was to write a book would fall into this category.

"Fun" is a nebulous goal that might be explored further in future studies. My understanding of fun in the context of this study was that students experienced an ideal confluence of freedom, challenge, acceptance of self, and connection with others.

"Expression in a different social world" refers to the idea that communication via conversation is not always ideal. Conversations may be rushed and therefore not allow for reflection. Face to face social interactions may also be accompanied by a variety of social pressures. For example, in face-to-face situations, students may be judged on their gender, age, race, etc. Writing allows students to express themselves uninhibited by social conventions. This might be considered either an intrapersonal or social goal. Self-reflection refers to reflecting on and processing one's experiences. Extrinsic goals are money and grades.

Analyzing Writings

When asked why they initially tried specific writing techniques, students referred to the role of instruction and practice, as well as reader feedback. Because they had received feedback from their peers, their coaches, and judges, students were very comfortable with reader feedback and, indeed, sought it out. The freedom to experiment

and make mistakes through practice and feel comfortable doing so is important these writers. Darcy describes the impact of practice:

> I think Power of the Pen did make me focus a lot more on my word choice because it is something that I know the judges looked for. I've judged so I know we look for that, but that is something I notice in the writing that I've read for Power of the Pen also (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

The domain served an important role in motivating students to try new skills. In this case, motivation for the development of new skills was context dependent. It was difficult to interpret these findings in terms of an achievement goal theory, as students' responses to instruction could be motivated by their desire to develop relationships with the readers, to get better at writing, or to achieve a high ranking at competitions.

Other interview and essay data.

Students discussed multiple goals in their interviews and student essays. The most important of these was intrapersonal goals. These involve relationships with the self -- understanding, appreciating, and living comfortably with one's self. They also include processing one's emotions, and developing personal values. All students discussed intrapersonal goals, and the majority of Nicole's essay, for example, dealt with intrapersonal goals. She writes:

> Sometimes I'll just have one of those experiences that leave me breathless in their wake. It could be as simple as five minutes in a summery field or as long and harrowing as the hardest race of my life, but they all leave behind such an impression in my mind that there's no question of if I'm going to write it, but when. I'm so filled with emotions

that give birth to words that give birth to stories that I can't not share it. That's when I write to show the world who I am and what I've done (Nicole, personal communication, May 9, 2010). Social goals were apparent as well. For Jane, it was the feeling of being part of a community of writers. Tyler liked making his peers laugh when he read his stories aloud. Lily simply liked pleasing people. Many of the students mentioned finding writers who became friends or already were friends on the Power of the Pen team.

Performance goals were not mentioned as much as I might expect, given that all the students were competitive writers. However, Jane and Lily did speak about being proud that they had something they were best at. They compared this to others who were talented at sports, and I think this comparison allowed them to feel proud about their accomplishments without feeling "stuck up." None of the students actually used phrasing that suggested that their goal was to be better than other students, although they all were trying to advance in the competition. More importantly, when students spoke about being the best at something, they were being honest. In all, it seems that while performance goals played a role in some students' thinking, they were among the least important type of goals.

Students viewed extrinsic goals as both conflicting with and supporting the development of intrinsic goals. Darcy specifically mentioned a conflict between extrinsic and intrinsic goals when she spoke about her creative writing and her for-profit writing. Other students seemed to experience this conflict to some extent, as they spent much of their energy on academic writing, while also being wistful for the time when creative writing was valued.

Extrinsic goals also created a supportive structure for writing, and more than one student made an explicit connection between extrinsic structures and the development of intrinsic motivation. For example, Lily was looking over some quotations by famous writers about why they write. Lily commented on the quotations.

> I like, "I didn't want to write a book, they made me do it" because sometimes it seems like I write better under pressure when I don't want to do it. And "writing eases my suffering, writing is a way of reaffirming my existence" because writing is therapeutic for me and I really identify with that. And "the desire to write grows with writing." I feel the more I write, the more I want to (Lily, personal communication, February 27, 2010).

Like Lily, the writers in this study evidenced both extrinsic goals and intrinsic goals.

Identity

Part of how we define ourselves as people is in relation to others. We may pride ourselves on being a good older sibling, a trustworthy friend, or a respected teacher to our students. In this way, part of our identity is tied up in our relationships; yet, in healthy relationships, we are not defined solely by our connections. We are our "own person." Similarly, students in this study defined themselves in part by their connection with writing. They called themselves "writers" and believed they would continue writing as they grew older. Yet being a writer was only one aspect of their identity.

Factors that led students to consider themselves writers varied according to the student. Factors included participation in POP, recognition by peers, their perception that they had an "odd" or "outsider" identity, spending time writing, and being able to preserve their emotions and perceptions in writing. Charles discussed his identity as a writer.

It's important to who I am because it's one of the ways I can express myself. I can talk to other people and tell them certain things, but when I write things down, it's always there. So it's kind of like I'm taking a part of my beliefs, values, things, how I feel and putting it on paper and it's permanent there, and it's kind of like I'm taking a part of myself and putting it on the writing because it's always going to be there, so yes I would consider myself a writer because I hold that view of writing (Charles, personal communication, February 28, 2010).

Relationship with Writing: Synthesis

If we were to describe the perfect relationship, what would we describe? The best relationships offer a paradox: the chance to be accepted for who we are, "warts and all," along with the opportunity to grow and become better than we are now. This is also true for students' relationships with writing. In this section, I offer an overall interpretation of the interplay between students' goals, values, and emotions as these related to writing, and the qualities of their relationships with writing.

Erik Erikson (1988) famously proposed a theory of human development that described life as a set of eight stages. At each developmental stage, we negotiate specific conflicts in order to (hopefully) arrive at a virtue that successfully resolves that

developmental stage. In adolescence, young people must negotiate between a sense of identity and a sense of role confusion as they seek to understand who they are and how they fit into the world. The virtue at this stage is fidelity. In this stage, the challenge is for young people to develop an identity. They do this, not by rejecting their history and culture in an attempt to be "original," but in interacting and negotiating with their culture, both changing and being changed by it. As in a healthy relationship between friends or lovers, individuals are both recognized for their unique strengths, and accepted as part of a shared bond. This is fidelity. Erikson writes:

> In youth, ego strength emerges from the mutual confirmation of individual and community, in the sense that society recognizes the young individual as a bearer of fresh energy and that the individual so confirmed recognizes society as a living process which inspires loyalty as it receives it, maintains allegiance as it attracts it, honors confidence as it demands it (Erikson, 1988, p. 8).

In interpreting students' relationships with writing, Erikson's crisis of adolescence, and the struggle to develop an authentic identity was to me, central to understanding these talented writers. Emotions, goals, and values were all components of identity. Students spoke of "writing for myself" and "writing for someone else." Creative writing, for these eight students, was a very personal endeavor.

The students' attempts to negotiate academic and creative writing, and their understanding of academic and creating as coming into conflict, was connected to the development of identity. Through academic writing, students presented their "outer selves."

Writing academically was writing for the "other" because it is presenting the self you perceive others want you to be – polished, congenial, intelligent, and perhaps somewhat generic, the model student. Academic writing is a positive experience, but it could also become stressful if attention is not paid to the development of the "inner selves." Students understand that they have another, equally valuable side to their personality. This includes their emotional side; their inner selves may be flawed, silly, dark, or simply empathetic. The "inner self" can be expressed in creative writing in a way that brings positive attention. Through POP, students can explore their emotions and their personality in a way that is still consistent with their academic self-image. These students' relationships with writing may wane if they find other ways to express their inner selves, or if creative writing becomes an extra stressor. In Charles's case, his attention turned to his sermons. In Lily's case, her success in creative writing led her to develop an "outer self" of "talented creative writer" and living up to this persona provided her with some stress. She felt best writing when she focused on her "inner self" reasons for writing.

I have diagrammed the connection between the constructs that I explored throughout the dissertation, and especially how these constructs are all tied to emerging identity and the very personal nature of creative writing.

Students' "inner identity" includes all their personal emotions (positive and negative) along with students' general life goals and values. Through creative writing, students can express their personal emotions, goals, and values. They can achieve social recognition that corresponds to authentic representations of themselves.

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In the diagram, the arrows representing creative writing point in both directions. This is because, through the process of writing fiction, students can change their emotions, goals, and values. Creative writing is intrapersonal (self-reflective). The arrows labeled "academic writing" are weaker lines, and they point in only one direction. They are lighter lines because academic writing (at least from the students' perspective) cannot communicate their inner identity with as much authenticity as creative writing. There may be conflicts between their personal goals and values and the goals and values they associate with academic writing, so the connection is weaker. The lines point in one direction because students do not perceive that their academic writing changes who they are as a person in the way that creative writing does. It is writing for the "other." Furthermore, you will see that there is no arrow at all running from "emotions" to academic writing. This is because students' perceive that there is no place for the expression of personal emotions in academic writing. For this group of students, emotions are a very strong motivator of writing, which explains in part why academic writing is not favored. Note that this graphic represents the students' perceptions only, and not the possibility that academic writing could be a vehicle for the expression of personal emotions. Finally, the graphic includes two arrows labeled "contexts" acting upon the arrows indicated by "academic writing and creative writing." This is to indicate that students' relationships with writing are influenced by context. It is context that causes students to begin writing at all, and context affects the development of their writing skills and processes.
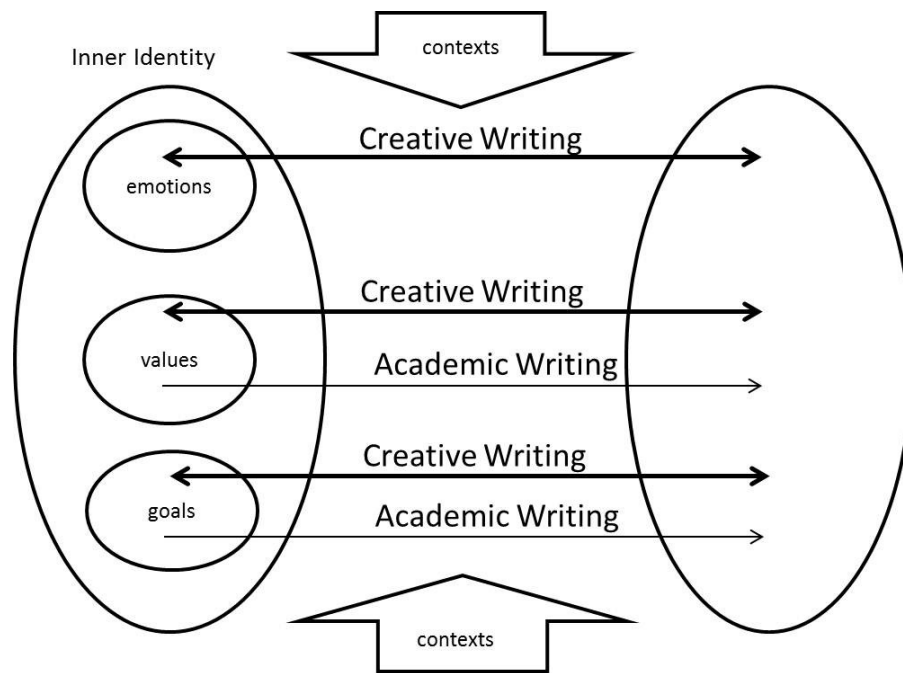
Figure 1. Diagram of students' relationships with writing

Context affects development of students' writing skills. All the students in this study had established a baseline set of creative writing skills as a result of their Power of the Pen experience. Students all used sensory imagery, metaphor, and simile. They are able to write from multiple perspectives, including different genders, different ages, and personified objects and animals. They are able to pace their plot appropriately, usually with rising action, climax, and resolution. Students are able to choose very specific adjectives, and perhaps more importantly, specific verbs. Students use dialogue to add interest, and often deliver a surprise or twist ending. They are also all able to offer a creative interpretation of a general prompt. Each of these skills is tied directly to the structure of timed, competitive creative writing provided by Power of the Pen.

Context also affected students' writing processes. When writing in a competition setting, students budget only two to three minutes for coming up with an idea. One

strategy they often use is to think of three to five ideas, and automatically discard the first one or two ideas they come up with. The reasoning for this is that one's first ideas are thought to be the most common interpretations of the prompt, and a primary goal of POP writing is to come up with a creative interpretation of the prompt. Ideas often come from personal experiences, or "seed incidents" (Doyle, 1998), which morph into imaginative storylines. Characters may be modeled after people in the writers' lives, as was Charles's character of an annoying cousin, modeled after his younger brother, or Jane's poem, inspired by her experience working with her mother at a yard sale. Writers sketch out a general plot diagram, and may have broad caricatures of characters in their mind. Then, as they write, the story becomes fleshed out with description. Stories written for competition may be published in the *Book of Winners*, but they are rarely revised. Students enjoy the challenge of the writing assignment; the time limits and the openness of the prompt make POP writing harder than academic writing at times, but more rewarding.

When writing for school, students were accustomed to the much more structured writing process advocated by teachers. Darcy said:

> I have a lot more structure with my academic writing than my creative writing. I think the structure… you know, I have a clear outline and a framework to work in and that helps me really organize my thoughts but with creative writing I like to kind of throw it all out there and go back and find the framework later (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Power of the Pen affected students' perceptions of revision. Most students did not revise their Power of the Pen writing, because the competition is structured as a one-shot event. In their academic writing, much of their rewriting focused on editing, or making surface-level changes. This was due to the influence of school contexts, with as much as 50% of the grade allotted to surface-level features.

In Sommers' (1980) research, deep revision is what separated the good writers from the great writers. In my own model, discussed in the literature review, the practice of making conceptual revisions was necessary for moving from Stage 2 to Stage 3. I was very curious to see what these writers' perceptions of revision were. I found that the writers who wrote longer works were the ones who were most invested in revision at the conceptual level. All but one of the writers valued revision, and most discussed, at some point, making conceptual-level revisions. However, these writers' use and perception of revision differed, with some making mainly surface-level edits.

Contexts also affected students' understanding of the final phase in the writing process, publication. All of these students had pieces published in the *Book of Winners*; however, with the exception of Darcy, these students were not knowledgeable about publishing contexts or processes. These students might enter the occasional school contest or post poems on their Facebook page; however, they were not a part of the adult world of writing careers. They did not have experience giving formal readings, submitting writing to publications, finding agents, or selling writing. Neither schools nor Power of the Pen had emphasized the need for these skills.

Students' relationship with writing can be described as both personal (related to identity formation) and contextually influenced. Finally, the students' relationships with writing can also be described as positive. Students enjoy writing, are very open to new experiences, including writing challenges and constructive feedback. They phrase their goals in very positive terms. They value forestalling judgment and experiencing life through multiple perspectives. This positive, accepting outlook aids in the development of new skills.

Interpretations

This study provides evidence that students' relationships with writing are personal, positive, and contextually influenced. How do these findings fit with the current literature on talented writers, the suppositions I proposed in the literature review, and the study's theoretical orientation? Much of the literature regarding talented creative writers aims to profile the "creative personality;" I did not specifically set out to ascertain common personality traits, only common ways in which students related to writing. My study did not echo the many studies that profile creative writers as "tortured artists" with childhood traumas and mental illness, but this may be simply because this was not the topic under investigation. I was reluctant, perhaps to the detriment of the study, to ask overtly personal questions like this to the students. Yet, these students did emphasize the emotional, "therapeutic" reasons for creative writing. This can be seen in the subtext of Lily's essay:

> Writing is the guiding star when my life is a vast stretch of darkness. When I
>
> write, the paper never tells me I'm wrong and never talks back. It doesn't walk

away when I'm mid-sentence and is always there no matter what time it is. I write because it lifts me up from my depression and sits me in the world I create on paper (Lily, personal communication, April 11, 2010).

Notice the dramatic phrasing of "my life is a vast stretch of darkness." Lily's "inner self" contrasts her social identity as a put-together, high performing student, and these times of contrast draw her to creative writing. This study neither confirms nor denies Kohanyi's model of the "creative personality" as a tortured, yet resilient soul. However, it is important to remember that the students in the study were of a different generation than the students in the previous literature, and they were not the established authors profiled in previous literature. Yet these students did share one quality with the authors profiled in previous studies; they were avid and advanced readers.

In addition to profiling the personalities of accomplished creative writers, some of the literature touches on writers' motivations: how they feel about writing, and what their goals are. From this literature, I developed a stage model describing how different motivations propel writers to develop their talent. In the first stage, writers are enamored by language and story. This description certainly matches the eight writers in this study, who all grew to love reading at a young age.

In the second stage, I described writers as writing for personal reasons; writing for themselves. In the third stage, writers came to realize the importance of writing for the other; that is, the importance of audience. I supposed that most of the POP writers I interviewed would be in this third stage of the model; they would develop a sense of audience and an understanding of the importance of revision.

What I found was that these talented young writers reflected qualities of both the second and the third stage. While most of them engaged in revision, their understandings of revision as a conceptual-level process were somewhat limited by context. POP does not require revision, and school requires only a small amount. In addition, these writers were very focused on their personal reasons for writing. This can be seen in their descriptions of their goals. My findings may lead me to modify my stage model in the future. Perhaps writers who write "for themselves" can be just as talented as those who focus on the importance of their particular audience.

I proposed that the fourth stage of writing talent development is writing as a career, and at this stage, writers are motivated by publication and production. It becomes important for them to develop career skills. I supposed that my Power of the Pen writers would still be at stage 3 in their writing development, and that they would not have developed the skills necessary for a writing career. I was correct. Only one of the writers in this study, Darcy, really had the beginnings of career skills or a broader understanding of the publishing context. Her university creative writing program taught these skills, while high school does not.

In the fifth stage of my model, values are of primary importance. I was unable to find studies specifically examining the role of values in writing, though Berlin has proposed that values should be of primary importance in writing instruction. I surmised that advanced writers are also motivated by values; implicitly or explicitly they tackle value conflicts about the purpose of the craft and the nature of the world.

I believed this quality to be especially true of stage five level writers, who are at the highest level of achievement and are considered masters of the craft.

The extent to which the writers in my study tackled larger philosophical, aesthetic, or value issues in their writing varied according to the individual writer. Darcy's interview provided some small bit of evidence that this quality is something that develops over time. She said, of her writing:

I hope it's matured. I'm a lot more focused on social issues or philosophical concepts. I think I've deepened my interests. I still do write in the same formats or genres. I still write science fiction and fantasy for fun. My novel was that, where I'm using that for a vehicle for a larger message, whereas for POP, I was just telling a story. I've grown in that way. I've learned to take bigger risks with what I'm writing about. I'm less worried about offending a reader with something they don't want to hear for a character or a plot might not end like the Disney tale happy ending, so I'm experimenting with how far I can take readers before I lose them, so that's something. It's harder to do that with POP because you're such a young writer. I don't think most writers are experimenting with that sort of stuff but you're writing for a specific judge, and it's a competition and you don't want to be pushing your readers away at that moment (Darcy, personal communication, March 28, 2010).

Stage five is also the stage in which I proposed that writers demonstrate the most creativity. Before stage five, I believed writers would not understand that the conventions of writing were malleable.

I found that the writers in this study were able to describe the differences in conventions amongst different contexts. In the POP context, they believed they had the freedom to challenge all conventions except for the ethical convention of presenting an original work. In the academic contexts, students felt less free to challenge conventions. I was pleasantly surprised by the students' understanding of creativity and their belief that they could shape the domain (or at least some small subsection of the domain) at a young age.

In addition to proposing the stage model, I made some preliminary suppositions in my literature review about the role of goals, emotions, and identity in the development of writing talent. The literature on goal theory suggests that high achievers phrase their goals in positive, approach-language rather than negative, avoidance language. I supposed this would be true of the talented young writers in my study, and it was. The literature on goal theory also suggests that high achievers rely on mastery goals and intrinsic goals. When students listed their goals and ranked them for me, it was clear that most of these goals were intrinsic, and not related to reward or punishment. The second highest ranked goal, "to develop my talent" was a mastery goal. Extrinsic goals such as performing well in school or earning money were ranked low on the list in importance. These findings fit with what one would expect from the literature. In addition, this study examined the importance of intrapersonal goals and social goals. These goals relate to understanding one's identity, and to finding a place within the community of writers. These are goals not typically examined in the literature of the achievement goal construct, and they deserve more study.

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In my model, I suggested that goals were cumulative. That is, that advanced writers are able to draw from both extrinsic and intrinsic goals. This was true for the writers in this study. While they phrased and perceived their goals in their lists and essays as intrinsic, their actions showed that they values extrinsic goals as well. Students' actions suggested that they were motivated by grades (as many of them devoted more time to their school writing than their out of school writing) and competition (as students had achieved high rankings in POP). At times, extrinsic and intrinsic goals were seen to conflict, but, in the context of POP, extrinsic goals complemented the development of intrinsic goals.

My suppositions on the role of emotions in writing were drawn from personal experience and from the work of Fox (1988) and Flaherty (2004). I supposed that these talented writers would be able to use both positive and negative emotions to their advantage, and that they would develop a daily discipline of writing that is not free of emotion, but not dominated by it. I was correct on the first count, but not so much on the second. Many of the writers in the study hinted at an understanding that "the desire to write grows with writing," but in action, few had developed a daily writing regimen. Their emotions and their extra-curricular commitments often determined their writing habits.

I proposed that as writers progress in their development, they will increasingly express their identity in connection with the domain. I found that identity was even more important than I expected. The young POP writers viewed themselves as writers, and believed that they would continue to write.

Furthermore, they viewed creative writing as a way to translate their inner selves into authentic social identities.

The theoretical orientation I referenced (Feldman 1997, 2003) described talent as developing through an interaction of individual attributes and the influence of a field of study. According to this theory, writing is a specialized field of study that requires both general skills and specialized skills. Writers need access to specialized contexts in order to develop these specialized skills. In this study, I found that the culture of Power of the Pen helped develop these eight students' writing talents, while also serving a winnowing function. At every level of the competition, fewer students were allowed to compete. Many students had to try out just to be on the team, and furthermore, many schools did not offer teams. The context shaped students' understanding of what it meant to be a successful writer. For example, some students were not invested in revision because revision was not emphasized in Power of the Pen. For students to be successful, not only did they have to have a strong commitment to writing, but the experts in POP had to recognize these students as talented as well. Feldman's theory explains why students' relationship with writing was somewhat dependent on context. The culture of POP shaped these students' talents in a very different way than they might have been shaped in other cultures or contexts.

Practical Implications

This study provides evidence that the desire to write develops in the context of structured, supportive contexts like Power of the Pen. When POP ended, students struggled to find contexts that valued emotion and creativity. POP was not the only

positive influence in these students' lives; they also benefitted from teacher support, family support, peer support, accelerative curriculum, and rich reading habits. However, there was still room for improvement when it came to supporting these students' writing talent.

First, elementary school. Composition theorist Peter Elbow has described a shift that he hopes will happen in elementary education. He hopes that schools will begin to teaching writing *before* reading, and not after it. He explains his rationale:

> First graders are not well positioned for reading; they can read only the words they have learned to read or sound out—a fairly small lexicon. But they are beautifully positioned for writing; they can *write* all the words they can *say*. Even younger children who don't know the alphabet can write if they have seen other people write; they just scribble, scribble, scribble—but with meaning, and they can "read" their writing back to you (Elbow, 2004, p.9)

Elbow (2004) describes how writing has typically been viewed as a servant to reading in elementary school. Students are expected to absorb information, not produce it. Writing assignments are generally brief, and require students to demonstrate knowledge of what they have read and heard. Elbow advocates for assigning writing alongside reading, or even before reading, as a way for students to explore what they know and how they feel about the topic they will be reading about. Emphasizing writing in elementary school sends children the message, "Yes, you have something important to say" and it helps them develop their writing skills earlier.

Most of the students in this study did not participate in "writing first" in elementary school classrooms, what little writing they did was on their own or in the context of gifted education programs. Imagine how talented these already talented writers would be if they began writing when they began reading. Elementary school teachers can nurture students' writing talent by encouraging them to participate in all stages of the writing process at a very early age. Even as young as first grade, students can begin to develop "writerly identities" as Darcy did when she bound her first books and gave them as gifts to her family.

Next, middle school. Middle school, with the possible exception of a college creative writing program, was the context that most seemed to nurture creative writing talent. Perhaps the middle school model's emphasis on personal development may encourage the development of creative writing talent, while high school, at least for talented students, is entirely college preparatory. Charles describes writing in middle school:

> I know I had a really good teacher in middle school, and we kind of worked with a lot of language in that class and vocab, so there was a lot of writing. I remember that's where I started to really develop writing and like writing. I remember fifth grade, when I really liked to write humor stories, because I think that's it really great that the teachers there would let you present stories in front of the class, and everybody would get really excited to go up and read their story that they'd done in the class.

Yeah, I think that was really good, that kind of thing that the teachers did, and so I remember going up there and reading my stories and everybody laughing and I think that encouraged me to keep writing, so I think that I don't exactly how their teaching was but I remember that they really gave you good opportunities to develop your writing (Charles, personal communication, February 21, 2010).

Most students recalled the personal nature of writing in middle school and the freedom they had to explore different topics and genres. In addition, they had POP in middle school. This specialized program catapulted their writing skills through the combination of extra practice time, peer and teacher critiques, and the challenging goals that a statewide competition provides.

Even in middle school, though, there was room for improvement. Students were not exposed to contexts that emphasized revision or publication, which are both important stages in the writing process. Middle school teachers can help talented writers by encouraging them to submit their writings to national teen publications such as *Stone Soup* or *Merlyn's Pen*. Revision can be encouraged by allowing talented writers to tackle long-term projects, such as National Novel Writing Month. Writing a novel requires a great deal of conceptual-level revision as well as attention to career skills like goal-setting and time management. Middle school teachers can also inspire students by reading the works of child authors like Gordon Korman, Christopher Paolini and Nancy Yi Fan.

Finally, high school. High school, for the most able students, is designed to be college preparatory. There is a problem with this. High school students are still adolescents, and a major task of adolescence is identity formation. College preparatory classes encourage the development of the outer self. They emphasize the importance of the domain. But there is no relationship there, no give and take between the individual and the domain. A history class, for example, might emphasize remembering historical developments, but not the importance of these historical developments on the students' current situation. Furthermore, there is too much emphasis placed on the ability to *look domain* rather than to *be domain*. To *look domain* means that students' can produce work, which has the external markings of the domain. For science, these external markings might be the organizational structure of a lab report. For math, it's knowledge of formulas, symbols, and mathematic vocabulary. And for English, it's standard grammar and MLA formatting. But what about *being domain*? What about thinking as a scientist thinks, or writing as an author does? Academic writing was challenging in the sense of "I must remember all these MLA rules and get them correct," but often could be more intellectually challenging. For example, students discussed doing original research only twice. Once was in the context of a science fair experiment, and the other was an interview with a classmate. These students are probably capable of much more extensive and original research projects. Some students described assignments that required them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate references. However, it seemed just as common for students to describe assignments that expressly prohibited the inclusion of student opinions, or called only for comprehension of reference material.

I recall reading Madison's report on Thomas Jefferson. It was stylistically perfect, but called for only the comprehension and organization of facts. Furthermore, there was her grade of 100. What's wrong with a 100? 100 is perfection, however, 100 offers no room to grow. There was no feedback on the paper to indicate that the teacher had any interest in Madison's ideas or her growth as a writer. High school teachers can promote writing talent by focusing less on what a paper looks like, and more on the thought involved in writing the paper. They can provide challenging assignments congruent to what real practitioners do in each domain. Interdisciplinary assignments graded by both content teachers and English teachers would help students perfect their content writing skills. Teachers can also give substantive feedback to encourage students to get better at writing, even when they feel the student is already "good enough."

The problem of high school college preparatory writing is further compounded by that third quality of talented students' relationships with writing. Students are positive about their writing, and they value openness to new experience. This in itself is generally a strength of student writers, but like any strength, when pushed to the extreme can become a weakness. For example, it may lead to hesitancy to express personal preferences. Students did not overtly express distaste for academic writing, they were very positive about it. This may be because they generally enjoyed writing of any kind, and enjoyed mastering the formal elements of academic writing. Yet it may also be due in part to their outer identities as "good students," and their hesitancy to critique their teachers. If students lack the ability to express preferences, this can lead to educational situations that are a bad fit for talented students.

To use Madison as an example again, I remember how she amicably practiced writing a new five paragraph formula essay each week in school, even though she had already passed the state writing achievement test at the highest level. She could have used this time more productively. High school teachers can encourage students to speak up by using anonymous course evaluations, as college teachers do, and by asking students to take some role in the design and assessment of their own assignments.

In addition, there was a third problem with high school academic writing. Simply, it was not creative writing. It did not play to these particular students' strengths. Because academic writing is college preparatory, and because college does not value creativity and emotion, there was no room for creative writing in the high school curricula. Creative writing, when it was a part of the high school, was presented as a diversion that did not require advanced skills. Students struggled to find serious critiques for their creative writing when they entered high school. I am not advocating that high school change and add creative writing to the general educational curricula, but high school teachers can support creative writing talent by supporting specialized programs such as summer camps and literary magazines, and by connecting their talented high school creative writers with university creative writing programs. Universities often host readings by novelists and poets that are open to the public, and some universities sponsor informal writers' workshops and critique groups that high school writers might be eligible to join. For those talented creative writers who did not plan to become authors, high school teachers can make connections between the skills and dispositions learned in creative writing and those required for other careers.

If there is one suggestion that I could give that would be above all the others to teachers in the elementary, middle, and high school levels, it is that the contexts they provide make a difference. These students had talent but they also had opportunities. Accelerate the context, and you will accelerate the development of writing talent.

If there is one suggestion that I could make to the students, it is that they have a role in shaping their contexts. The writers that will continue past Power of the Pen are those who will shape their surroundings to suit their talent by speaking up for themselves and seeking out the support of other talented writers. Like Nicole did, they will find buddies to critique their writing. Like Darcy did, they may start their own publications or social networks to publicize their writing. They will make time for writing outside of the times that the teachers have scheduled for them. This one quality will help them most as they grow in their relationships with writing.

Future Research

Talented young creative writers relate to writing as an expression of identity and a way to process emotions. Would this same portrait ring true for young scientists or mathematicians? Are our relationships with our chosen fields connected more closely to our developmental stage (such as the need of the adolescent for fidelity) or with the influence of the domain itself? Conducting similar phenomenological studies with cohorts of students who are talented in other fields would shed some light on this topic.

Furthermore, each of the categories under the heading "relationship with writing" could be studied in more depth. In reference to the goal construct, intrapersonal goals were proposed in this study. Social goals also played a large role in students'

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relationships with writing. Goal literature is dominated by studies of mastery and performance goals. Adding intrapersonal and social goals to goal studies may give a fuller picture of what drives academic achievement.

In reference to values, there has been almost no study of the values held by talented adolescents (Piirto, 2005). This leaves the opportunity to study the relationship between students' personal values and the values held by the domain. In the socialization process from novice to expert, how do values fuel talent development, and do values change as talent develops?

This study indicates that emotions play a central role in the development of adolescents' creative writing talent, however the study provides only preliminary exploration of emotions. Talented students experience negative emotions when writing, just like other students do. What is it about how talented students manage their negative emotions that allow them to keep writing, while less talented writers give up? Large-scale studies could be conducted to determine what emotions talented writers most commonly experience when they write, and what techniques they use to manage emotions. The role of emotions in other field of study could also be explored. Larger scale, survey research, could also be conducted to investigate writers' goals, emotions, and values.

In order to understand how the desire to write fuels development from novice to expert, studies would need to be conducted with less advanced and more advanced writers. Qualitative studies might establish comparison groups between talented writers at different stages in their careers, or between talented writers and struggling writers.

These studies would help test the stage model I proposed in the literature review. This study provided both tentative support and tentative refutation for this model's descriptors of stage three writers, but left much of the model's suppositions untested.

Finally, one of the major limitations of this study is that it did not include the experiences of ethnic minorities, students from urban schools, and the study included only one male. Creative writers who are males and from minority groups need to be specifically sought out because their experiences will make interpretations of writers' inner lives richer and more valid. Whether it be understanding what propels writers to expend the effort to develop their talents, or understanding the role of emotions, values, goals and identity in a variety of domains, there is much left to understand and much room for the development of new theories.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions

Interview I. Life History related to writing

- Can you describe for me some of the experiences you have had that involve writing?

    - Probe: What sort of writing experiences do you remember from grade school?

    - Probe: What are some writing experiences from your middle school years?

    - Probe: What are some experiences in school? Outside of school?

Alternate: Can you describe the experience of sitting down to write something (walk me through the experience).

Probe: Does this experience vary?

Interview II: Concrete details connecting to research questions

- Let's go back to talking about the memorable experiences with writing

    - What were the biggest challenges you faced? How did you face them?

    - Who or what has had an impact on your relationship with writing (either positively or negatively)?

- Let's look at your POP winning writing.

    - What aspects of this work made it successful?

    - Why did you make those decisions in this piece?

- Let's look at some past writings.

- What do you like about this piece?

- Why did you make the decisions to write it that way?

- What have you learned since writing this?

- Is there anything else that you think is important to talk about in regards to your relationship with writing?

- How do you feel about revision? What is your revision process like?

- Do you do anything to publicize your writing or get it out there? Do you sell what you write?

Interview III: Past with present-meaning making

- How has your relationship with writing changed (or stayed the same) since you were a small child?

  - Could you think of a metaphor to describe this progression?

- How would you describe your relationship with writing now?

  - What is a metaphor for this?

- Can you brainstorm a list of reasons why you write?

  - Can you rank these in terms of most motivating to least motivating?

- What are values involved in writing? Creative writing? Nonfiction writing? Can you list values in writing and rank them from most important to least important?

- Are there rules or boundaries in writing? To what extent can you bend or break these rules?   Do these rules vary?

- In the future, what skills will you need to learn to continue your writing success?

- What do you think will motivate you to master these skills?

- What does writing mean to you?

- What advice would you give to other aspiring writers?