

LAMBERT, CLAIRE SMITH, Ph.D. Storylines: A Narrative Study of Young Adolescents Making Meaning of their Writing Experiences. (2015)
Directed by Dr. Colleen M. Fairbanks. 249 pp.

This study used a narrative inquiry model to explore the writing experiences of a diverse group of eight middle-school aged participants by responding to three research questions: 1) How do young adolescents experience learning to write?, 2) How do they narrate their writing experiences?, and 3) What meaning do they make of writing and learning to write? Data comprised transcripts of 24 60-90 minute semi-structured one-on-one interviews, or three interviews with each of the eight participants. Interviews were conducted at roughly six-week intervals following these young adolescents' participation in a two-week Young Writers' Camp held at a medium-sized university in the Southeast.

The study design and data analysis procedures built upon Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional model of narrative inquiry, which interprets participants' narratives on three planes: across time, with consideration of the individual within his or her social context, and with attention to place. Analysis and interpretation, conducted within a sociocultural paradigm, yielded three storylines – collections of narratives drawn across participant interviews that resonate with one another and combine to tell a larger story. These storylines elicited the meanings young adolescent writers made of the intersections of family and school narratives around writing; the role of language exposure, appropriation, and use; and the use of writing as a tool for identity negotiation.

Keywords: writing, narrative inquiry, young adolescent, writing identity

STORYLINES: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF YOUNG ADOLESCENTS
MAKING MEANING OF THEIR WRITING EXPERIENCES

by

Claire Smith Lambert

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2015

Approved by

Committee Chair

To my husband, Brad, and my sons, Henry and Tom,
for your company on this journey,
and to my parents, Dale and Jane Smith,
for the many ways you showed me the value of education.

APPROVAL PAGE

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May 1, 2015
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May 1, 2015
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and wisdom of my advisor, mentor, and dissertation committee chair, Dr. Colleen M. Fairbanks, as well as the knowledge and perspectives of the members of my committee, Dr. Jewell Cooper, Dr. Beverly Faircloth, and Dr. Amy Vetter. I also thank the eight participants in this study for generously sharing their stories with me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When I was in fifth grade, I became a writer. Although I remember writing school reports, a few poems, and what we might now consider *Little House on the Prairie* fan-fiction just for fun in my earlier childhood, fifth grade was the first time I remember being motivated to write to accomplish a personal goal. My mother's favorite radio station was sponsoring a letter-writing contest promoting the arrival of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. The task was clear: write a letter explaining why you should ride the lead elephant in the animal parade from the circus train into the arena on opening day. After hours of drafting and recopying, I produced a letter pleading my case—I wanted to know if elephants had hair but none of the pet stores in my town carried elephants, so I needed to take that ride. My letter won. The announcer read it on the radio. I rode the elephant with the morning deejay. My picture was on the front page of the newspaper the next day. At that point, I could not imagine that I would ever have a more satisfying writing experience, but I knew I wanted to try.

As I got older, my writing continued to mature and develop. I remained very motivated to write for authentic audiences rather than just for grades. A poem I wrote was published in my middle school literary magazine about a boy named Wally who played baseball with his feet (everyone agrees, Wally's really neat!) and in high school I wrote human interest stories that were included in the yearbook. In college I minored in

creative writing, then worked as a researcher and writer at a corporate consulting firm after graduation. When I began my career as a middle school English language arts teacher, I faithfully taught the forms and strategies outlined in my curriculum guide. My students and I did the CUCC to Circle, Underline, Count and Check the components of multipart directions. We did the FAT-P to clarify the Form, Audience, Topic, and Purpose of our writing. We did the acrostic poems, the five paragraph essays, and the book reports. We practiced writing in tiny script for the state writing assessment, the Brief Constructed Responses that offered such small boxes for such complex answers. We heard that graders placed a frame around the box so they could only evaluate what could be squeezed onto the lines provided.

I believe my students learned a lot about how to be better writers and I think I often stretched and tweaked our writing work to make it fun and engaging. We were imaginative. We did a lot of sharing and publication, brought our writing to life through scripts, skits, and videos. I kept a costume box in the classroom and it turns out that a matronly purple bathrobe and a long, blonde wig can inspire seventh graders to craft a whole world of characters. What I always wondered, though, about the hundreds of seventh and eighth graders who passed through my classroom over the years, was what kind of writing teacher I could be for them if I had the time, knowledge, resources, or freedom to surface their personal writing goals and help them take steps toward making those goals a reality. What could I do if I understood their elephants?

Framing the Study

To make sense of the theoretical framing and review of the literature, it is helpful to have a quick snapshot of the study in mind. This study used a narrative inquiry model to explore the writing experiences of a diverse group of eight middle-school aged participants by responding to three research questions: 1) How do young adolescents experience learning to write?, 2) How do they narrate their writing experiences?, and 3) What meaning do they make of writing and learning to write? All participants were campers at a two-week Young Writer's Camp at a medium-sized Southeastern university in the summer of 2013. I worked with the middle school campers as a participant-researcher within a larger research team of University faculty and literacy scholars. Of the group of 21 campers, I invited nine students to participate in the dissertation follow-up study comprising a series of three 60-90 minute one-on-one interviews about their writing experiences over the course of the next six months. Eight participants joined the study and all completed the full interview series.

Although I began forming relationships with participants and their families during the camp session, the focus of this study was primarily on the 24 semi-structured interview conversations the participants and I had following the camp. The study design and data analysis procedures built upon Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional model of narrative inquiry which interprets participants' narratives on three planes: across time, with consideration of the individual within his or her social context, and with attention to place. Analysis and interpretation, conducted within a sociocultural paradigm, yielded three storylines – collections of narratives drawn across participant

interviews that resonate with one another and combine to tell a larger story. These storylines elicited the meanings young adolescent writers made of the intersections of family and school narratives around writing; the role of language exposure, appropriation, and use; and the use of writing as a tool for identity negotiation.

Because this study used a narrative inquiry approach, the presentation, like the design, data-collection, and analysis, is narrative. This approach is manifest in the alternative chapter format and the placement of the tools of the study, such as the interview protocols, in the Appendix so that they are available for reference but do not detract from the flow of the story.

Writing Against the Backdrop of Contemporary Public Education

Large-scale writing assessments and surveys of school-based writing instruction paint a dour picture of the writing development of U.S. middle school students. However, despite grim predictions about educational outcomes for our students, I have had many opportunities as a teacher, a teacher-educator working with student teachers in middle school settings, and a Young Writer's Camp participant-researcher to witness countless young adolescents' keen interest in writing and curiosity about how writing might be part of their lives. I also saw the missed opportunities and constraints teachers faced when integrating writing with the other demands of their work. Despite the many barriers, young people seemed to participate in writing instruction, learn to write, and come to think of themselves as writers. In order to understand their writing trajectories, it is important first to have a sense of the backdrop of writing education in public middle schools against which their development takes place. Research reveals that writing is a

vital skill in high demand in a variety of fields, that it serves a gate-keeping function in college settings, that writing instruction overall is minimal, and that access to writing instruction is unequally distributed.

Young Adolescent Writers' Performance

If knowledgeable teachers are using research-based practices and implementing the curricula of their states and districts with fidelity, why, then, do gains in writing seem so difficult to come by? The state of affairs of student writing in the United States, as measured by the most recent administration in 2011 of the Writing component of the National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], is cause for concern, particularly for students who identified as Hispanic or Black. Test results indicated that most 8th graders wrote at a “Basic” level (54%), with 24% “Proficient,” a mere 3% “Advanced” and a startling 20% whose writing skills were deemed “Below Basic.” Results disaggregated by race showed that students identifying as Asian had the highest average score of 165, White an average score of 158, two or more races an average score of 155, American Indian/Alaska Native an average score of 145, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander an average score of 141, Hispanic an average score of 136, and Black an average score of 132 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

Addressing the Need for Improved Writing

Despite poor writing performance, students receive limited practice at extended composition. Most of the writing students typically complete in school amounts to fill in the blank, listing, or short response (Newell, 2006). In a review of thousands of writing assignments offered to middle school students across five states, Applebee and Langer

(2013) determined that only a combined 18% of writing activity across all core content areas was devoted to writing of a paragraph or more, with the remaining 82% being fill in the blank, short answer, and copying teacher notes. The study found that middle school students spent only 4% of class time working on writing of one paragraph or more (Applebee & Langer, 2013, p. 14). Although some writing instruction occurs in America's classrooms, current practices seem insufficient to move most students to proficiency or to meet the writing demands necessary for access to higher education or future employment.

Writing as a “Threshold Skill”

Limited or ineffective writing instruction appears to be a substantial issue in American schools, and one that has a genuine impact on students' opportunities in the workplace and higher education. The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (2003) identified writing as “not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many (p. 11). In a survey of 120 major American corporations employing nearly eight million people, writing was identified as a “‘threshold skill’ for both employment and promotion, particularly for salaried employees” (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges [NCWASC], 2004, p. 3). The survey revealed that half of the companies included considered writing in hiring and promotion; that more than 80% of companies in the high-growth finance, insurance and real estate sectors assessed writing during hiring; that two-thirds of salaried employees had some writing responsibility; and that written communication through technical reports, formal reports, memos and correspondence, email and PowerPoint presentations made effective

writing ubiquitous, necessary, and documented (NCWASC, 2004). The survey determined that the lack of effective written presentation could be a “gatekeeper” that denied access to high-skill, high-wage, professional work disproportionately to English-language learners, the poor, and minority applicants whose written presentation was perceived by employers to lack clarity, accuracy, and grammatical correctness (NCWASC, 2004, p.19).

Writing can be a “threshold skill” in the workplace, as well as for higher education. Writing serves a key role in college admissions through the college essay and the SAT/ACT writing assessments. The ACT debuted a writing section in 2005 although, like its SAT counterpart, the tests have been critiqued for providing a timed, single draft product that may rely on narrow or formulaic scoring procedures (Kobrin, Deng, & Shaw, 2011). Nonetheless, the SAT/ACT writing assessments, as well as the college essay, situate writing as a gatekeeper in the college admissions process.

Once admitted to college, writing continues to influence students’ success. According to a survey conducted by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 44% of faculty members reported that students entering college were not well prepared for college level writing. Only 6% believed that high school graduates entering college were well prepared for the writing tasks they faced (Sanoff, 2006, p. 1). The study also demonstrated a substantial discrepancy between expectations for writing in high school and in college. Of high school teachers surveyed, 39% reported requiring students to occasionally write papers of more than five pages and 61% never asked students to write

more than five pages. In college, more than 70% of professors required writing beyond five pages and only 28% never asked for writing of that length (Sanoff, 2006).

“College and Career Readiness” Influence Curriculum in Middle Grades

Certainly writing appears important in college and career, but these milestones are years away for young adolescents. Nonetheless, these requirements are tiered down to the middle school level in the form of instructional standards. The Common Core State Standards acknowledge the necessity of effective writing as a “threshold skill” for college and career readiness. Middle school students will not apply for college or full time employment for years to come. However, the standards back-map writing skills such that young adolescent students should already be making progress toward mastery in this area. In keeping with the need to prepare students to be “college and career ready” (NGA/CCSSO, 2010), the Common Core State Standards for grades 6-12 indicate that each year students’ writing should “demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and they should address increasingly demanding content and sources” (NGA/CCSSO, 2010). Specifically, by the end of eighth grade, students should write arguments that employ clear reasons and relevant evidence; write informative/explanatory texts that examine a topic and convey ideas/information; write narratives using effective technique, descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences; tailor their writing to particular tasks, purposes, and audiences; with support, plan, edit, and revise work; use technology to publish writing; conduct research drawing on multiple sources evaluated for credibility; avoid plagiarism and use standard citation; and draw evidence from literary or

informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research (NGA/CCSSO, 2010).

The Common Core State Standards continue to demand increasingly advanced performance in these “anchor” areas as students move through high school and prepare for college and career.

Meeting the Challenge of College and Career Ready Writing

Adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia, the Common Core State Standards present clear and complex writing objectives that appear to be in keeping with the desire for more sophisticated writing instruction that adequately prepares students for gaining access to and succeeding in career and higher education. Although the standards set rigorous and warranted “top down” expectations for sophisticated writing performance, little published research investigates the “bottom up” developmental, metacognitive, or social characteristics of young adolescents that enable or constrain their capacity to meet those standards.

Foregrounding Participants’ Voices

Measures such as the NAEP indicate that there is a gap between expectations, instructional practices, and student performance even though widely accepted standards demand attention to writing development. However, the perceptions of young writers themselves seem to be rarely considered in designing more effective or meaningful approaches. When the voices of young adolescent writers were privileged in research, they often yielded meaningful insights into the ways students approached writing and deeper explanations of writing “deficits” that may not be apparent to teachers or assessors of writing (Beck, 2009; Early, DeCosta-Smith & Valdespino, 2010; Tatum & Gue, 2012).

Perhaps common instructional practices intended to support students in mastering grade-level standards are sometimes misaligned with young adolescents' perceptions, interpretations, and uses of the skills they are taught. Foregrounding students' voices and ideas about writing may help researchers, curriculum designers, and teachers to create and present writing instruction that more effectively meets the needs of young adolescent writers.

Despite the difficulty of conducting research that foregrounds the experiences, understandings, and voices of young adolescent writers, research does exist suggesting this is a rich area for investigation. Research that features discussions, interviews, and extended observation with student writers, rather than relying solely on analysis of their written products, yields valuable insights into the ways in which students perceive, engage with, interpret, understand, and make meaning of their experiences with writing. For example, students discussed how their diverse cultural perspectives and lived experiences motivated them to write and to engage with content (Ball, 1992; Beck, 2009; Early, DeCosta-Smith & Valdespino, 2010; Fecho, 2000; Muhammad, 2012; Tatum & Gue, 2012) and how gender, socio-economic status/class, and sexual orientation shaped their written work (Ivanič, 1998; Vetter, 2010). Other studies considered how popular culture influenced writing (Dyson, 2003), how identity performances impacted voice and perspective in writing (Bryant, 2005; Nowacek, 2011), and how peer collaboration influenced students' writing approach (Rødnes, 2012). In these ways, students' writing was shown to be intricately interwoven with their larger perceptions of identities, purposes, motivations, and abilities as they were manifest in the classroom and beyond.

In each of these studies, writers' insights into their own approaches revealed nuanced information that might help teachers look below the surface in order to analyze how students' motivations, perspectives, and experiences play out in the written texts they produce. Such research may inform teachers, researchers, and curriculum designers who wish to reach beyond methods for teaching writing that seek standardized or universally-applicable forms, strategies, and procedures. This type of research suggests ways to incorporate these approaches that normalize variation and capitalize upon diversity as a resource rather than treating it as a deficit.

Brandt (2001) identified the paucity in the literature of direct accounts of how people have learned to read and write, and their motivations and influences in doing so. Instead, she claimed, debates tended to be overly reliant on indirect evidence, such as standardized test scores, rather than on detailed accounts of lived experience. However, the meanings people make of their writing experiences are tempered by time, with their understandings continually shifting and being revised based on the outcomes they experience (Brandt, 2001). With this consideration in mind, it seems important to gather information about writing experiences at various times throughout a writer's development. If we want to understand something of what it means to be a young adolescent writer, then young adolescent writers themselves should be at least one of the sources of that information.

Given that writing is important for college and career, that it is a key feature of the widely accepted Common Core State Standard, and that large-scale assessments show that young people across the board are not yet effective writers, writing research with a

young adolescent population is a rich area for discovery. Extant research reveals that, in addition to measures that analyze written products, analysis of author's experiences, knowledge, and identities sheds light on the ways in which people learn to write (c.f., Beck, 2009; Early, DeCosta-Smith & Valdespino, 2010; Fecho, 2000; Ivanič, 1998; Tatum & Gue, 2012). Despite the emphasis on writing in school, few direct accounts appear in the literature of young adolescents explaining their writing experiences directly. This study seeks to address that gap by contributing rich descriptions of young adolescents' experiences writing and learning to write. Before delving into these stories, we need to consider the conceptual and methodological lenses through which these narratives were gathered and analyzed.

Contextualizing Writing within a Sociocultural Frame

Writing research is a varied and diffuse field with investigation spanning from early childhood to mature adulthood, touching on a broad range of topics, conducted from multiple research paradigms, and employing various methodologies. Some writing research is quantitative and large-scale while other researchers focus on single cases through a qualitative approach (Coker & Lewis, 2008). Although my work may at times overlap with or be informed by writing research that is primarily cognitive in its assumptions or written product analysis that takes a linguistic approach, my interest lies primarily with understanding the nuances of authorship with the author him or herself as the primary focus. Rather than seeking decontextualized or universal findings about writing processes or patterns of linguistic development, the intent of this work is to

develop a rich description of how young adolescents experience learning to write and the ways in which they understand themselves as authors.

The research questions driving the study and the conceptual framework within which I situate the work inform the study's design and narrative methodology in order to promote alignment among the purpose, research questions, methodology, design, analysis, and presentation of findings. This study employs a sociocultural framework and, because the term *writing* can be used to describe so many facets of text production, this section offers a context within which to view writing in this particular study. Rather than drawing on an existing model, I have derived four key characteristics that form the perimeters of writing within a sociocultural paradigm: activity orientation, social and cultural context, dialogism, and identity foregrounding.

Sociocultural Characterization of Writing

Activity orientation. Perhaps in response to earlier research traditions in behaviorism that framed writing as a noun—a piece of text—researchers with a sociocultural perspective tend to focus their attentions primarily on writing as a verb. Not only do they conceptualize writing production as an activity, but also the rules of language and the reading of inscribed texts as sites for active, ongoing interpretation and negotiation. Prior (2006) noted that a sociocultural approach rejects the static view of language as governed by abstract rules or conventions housed in dictionaries and grammar books; as a series of norms or conventions owned by experts or power-holders; or as a cognitive script that dictates actions in certain situations. Sociocultural investigations of writing have pushed back against characterization of language as

abstract, static, and existing outside of its use, instead seeing language as dynamic, negotiated through its day-to-day use, historically continuous, and a ground for human action (Prior, 2006, p. 57).

From a sociocultural standpoint, terms like “language,” “discourse,” and “text” reference communicative activity in social context, with meaning-making being not isolated or denoted in the word or inscription, but actively distributed across the people, social systems, institutions, and other texts that constitute the use of those words (Bazerman & Prior, 2005; Ivanič, 1998). In this study I use the term language resources to capture this layered meaning. Language resources extend beyond denotative vocabulary, but refer to the words, phrasing, style, and social/historical meaning and use of language.

People use language resources to craft texts. Texts are composed of concrete signs-in-use, but these signs are simultaneously “historical, and dialogic, signs formed out of the materials at hand in relation to historical chains of sign use” (Prior, 2006, p. 55). Texts, according to Bazerman and Prior (2005) are “as interactional and social in character as any utterances” and, despite their seeming permanence, can “mediate interactions across space and time” through renegotiation and interpretation (p. 137). Miller (1984) explained, “Because human action is based on and guided by meaning, not by material causes, at the center of action is a process of interpretation” (p. 156). Therefore texts are viewed not as immutable containers of denotative meaning that yield singular understandings, but as sites for action and meaning making between authors and readers across time through the social action of use.

Within the framework of social action, one purpose of text is as a tool of literate practice. A practice is a “recurrent, goal-directed sequence of activities using a particular technology and particular systems of knowledge . . . a coordinated set of actions involved in applying this knowledge in particular settings” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 256) and a literate practice is in turn the “use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 236). In sociocultural writing research, literate practices comprise not only a set cognitive skills, methods, or forms but also an organic “constellation of practices which differ from one social setting to another” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 65). Literate practices are not limited to only observable behavior because they also “involve values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships . . . people’s awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). Authors use language resources to compose texts and incorporate text production, distribution, and meaning making around texts in their repertoire of literate practices. These literate practices are activities, and texts are the artifacts of activity.

Dialogic influences on language resources. Within the sociocultural frame of this study, language resources extend beyond denotative meanings, instead absorbing the flavors of their historical use. Language resources should be understood not only in the context of the current moment in time but also in a historical context comprised of chains of language use and language resources that have become available to individuals. Written language in sociocultural research is connected to individual writers and their experiences and “indexes personal, interpersonal, institutional, sociocultural, and material

histories and [is] charged with affective overtones and motivational trajectories as well as semantic meanings” (Bazerman & Prior, 2005, p. 141). Language, in a sociocultural approach, is *dialogic*—comprised of words that do not directly signify an object but are imbued with the nuances, contexts, and rejoinders of their past and already anticipating their response (Bakhtin, 1981). Dialogism is present in speech and especially concentrated in writing. Prior (2009) built upon Bakhtin’s term *utterance* as the unit of analysis of language to focus specifically on *composed utterances*—written, or written and then spoken aloud—utterances that densely index authorial vision, social identities, historical chains of discourse, authorial interpretation, context of production, co-composition by others in the physical setting, and real or imagined responses (p. 21).

A sociocultural perspective acknowledges and values the many voices present in writing authored by a single individual. The boundary between talk and writing in sociocultural research is highly permeable with words, nuanced meanings or connotations, tone, and ways of ordering and presenting information seeping continuously between these realms and filtered through the experience and interpretation of the author. These other voices may be historically derived, shaping the repertoire of languages and language uses available to an individual, or derived through recent interaction, especially with teachers (Prior, 2006, p. 58) and popular media (Dyson, 2003).

Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism is central in understanding how social and cultural contexts constrain and shape an individual’s access to and interpretation of certain types of discourse. Bakhtin’s dialogism foregrounds context, noting that, “The

context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great" and that "we cannot, when studying the various forms for transmitting another's speech, treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framing" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 340). Language resources may be appropriated from one person to another when language is "drawn into the contact zone" wherein "someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us" and becomes "tightly interwoven with 'one's own word'" (p. 345). In this way, Bakhtin's contribution to a sociocultural approach to language study cements the need for a contextualized approach that promotes study in naturalistic settings, deals with the talk surrounding writing, and acknowledges the conditions under which a text is composed and interpreted. Bakhtin (1981) dealt particularly with language learning and draws a connection between language and identity when he posited that "the ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (p. 341).

Social and cultural context. Building on a sociocultural view of writing as anchored in activity, it makes sense then to consider the participants in that activity and the context within which they act and transact with text and writing. Individuals engaged together in activity and using language resources endow words, phrases, and writing styles with their complex social connotations. These connotations are appropriated from one person by another along with the denotative meanings of words. Russell (2002) has claimed that modern America is a more complex print-based (including electronic print) society than any other throughout history and that writing and transactions with text are

woven into myriad social activities and performed for countless purposes by all sorts of participants. Context, as characterized within a sociocultural view of writing, extends beyond the physical places within which such activity occurs, particularly since writing often is enacted specifically to communicate across time and space unlike face-to-face speech interactions that occur within a time- and space-bounded realm (Ivanič, 1998, p. 59). In addition to physical space, context includes social purposes, social groups, social relationships, community/disciplinary norms and ways of doing, power dynamics, economic circumstances, human artifacts, time and historical circumstances, culture and cultural interactions, and oral and written languages (Brodkey, 1987; Gee, 2000; Ivanič, 1998; Prior, 2006; Schultz, 2006).

Contexts and language, in a sociocultural view, are mutually constitutive, meaning that words and contexts give meaning to one another like “two mirrors facing each other, infinitely and simultaneously reflecting each other” (Gee, 2000, p. 190). Contexts constitute language through their resources, artifacts, and constraints, while language constitutes contexts through the literate activities that take place therein. Contexts do not exist outside of people, language, and action but are “actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment-by-moment through ongoing work” (Gee, 2000, p. 190). Contexts and language, then, contribute to the meanings people make of both.

Placing activity within a social and cultural context. Within a sociocultural view, the activity of writing is “*situated* in concrete interactions that are simultaneously *improvised* locally and *mediated* by prefabricated, historically provided tools and

practices” (Prior, 2006, p.55, emphasis in the original). Literate practices, including writing, are both shaped by the forces, resources, affordances, and constraints of the context and enacted by individuals’ appropriation, manipulation, negotiation, and creative application of what they have at hand in any given context. Context also shapes the individual’s experience and interpretation, which in turn shapes the context. Through this process, “human activity makes worlds, leaving the traces of human projects object-ified in those worlds, and then inhabits those evolving worlds” (Prior, 2006, p. 55).

Written language within this mutually constitutive environment serves as communication between individuals who have social relationships and who co-operate within overlapping contexts (Ivanič, 1998, p. 61). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), this participation, including the participation in creating and interpreting written texts, emphasizes the following: relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing; socially negotiated meaning within the context of activity between people; a view of learning, thinking, and knowing as relational among people within a social and cultural context; an openness to change and renegotiation; and an historically situated view (p. 51).

The social context in which the activity of writing takes place is not unitary, but consists of distributed activity that crosses social, historical, and cultural boundaries and is subject to the varied, and sometimes conflicting, rules and norms of those worlds. Participants are simultaneously players in multiple cultures related to race, gender, religion, politics, and family dynamics, all of which may influence their language resources and choices and contribute to the “complex gestalt” that results from writers’

“ways of stretching, reconfiguring, and rearticulating their resources” (Dyson, 2003, p. 5). Prior (2006) described these overlapping social contexts as being *laminated* such that “multiple fields or frames coexist, relatively foregrounded and backgrounded” in any activity (p. 55). Through activities in social contexts, including writing, individuals draw on multiple resources and practices available to them. People participate in multiple cultures and select, sometimes subconsciously, practices associated with those cultures, foregrounding some while backgrounding others, thereby reinforcing some values, beliefs and practices over others (Ivanič, 1998, p. 43, 67).

Deriving agency from text-as-action. Framing text as a site for action and meaning-making through literate practices, the conventions and institutions that make use of text are consequently also dynamic rather than static. Literate practice “offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded and which they help shape” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000, p. 7). Institutions such as school or government are not constant and immutable, but are recursively formed and reformed through the participation of individuals in activity, including text-based literate practices. Therefore “writing participates in making particular kinds of people, institutions, and cultures, as well as indexing them” (Prior, 2006, p. 58). With that said, however, reshaping language is often performed against considerable resistance generated by the momentum of the institutions which gain privilege from replicating current norms. Because people use literate practices, intentionally or unintentionally, to shape social institutions and conventions, writing in a sociocultural vein may be a site for demonstrating agency.

From a sociocultural standpoint texts are “mediating artifacts” (Bazerman & Prior, 2005, p. 145) that allow people to think about, transact with, and ultimately reinforce, alter, or resist the norms and conventions they encounter. Learning to write within a sociocultural context is not seen as a replication of *a priori* forms, one that depends primarily on individual, cognitive learning. Instead it is a social action that involves “learning to act—with other people, artifacts, and environments, all of which are themselves in ongoing process of change and development” (Bazerman & Prior, 2005, p. 147). Clearly, learning to read, to mechanically produce text, and to use grammatical and syntactical features are some of the tools through which this social action is accomplished, but they are only part of a spectrum of practices. Within a sociocultural view, language, conventions, texts, institutions and genres reorient our thinking away from the static and objective and toward socially contextualized action, negotiation, and agency.

Dyson (2003) noted that young children in learning to write also learn “to negotiate literate participation in complex classroom cultures, children must differentiate not only phonological niceties and textual features, but also social worlds—the very social worlds that provide them with agency and important symbols” (p. 107). In this very real-world sense, social and cultural contexts situated the activity through which writers negotiated, indexed, interpreted, and acted upon the world.

Identity foregrounding. If we understand authors as actors engaged in literate practices and appropriating language resources within social and cultural contexts, then it is important to consider who those authors are (or believe they are or claim to be) within

those contexts. Although sociocultural research on writing acknowledges the influences and constraints of social forces and the historically loaded nature of language that act upon individuals, it seems also to value the capacity of individuals to creatively appropriate and use language resources in their own interests. The individual is an agent, certainly within the constraints of the social context, but not governed completely by outside forces or social limitations.

Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that learning involves the “construction of identities” through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practices and that “identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another.” Participation, in their sociocultural view, is a function of individuals engaging together in activities and tasks that are parts of “broader systems of relations in which they have meaning” and that those systems “arise out of and are reproduced and developed within communities, which are in part systems of relations among persons” (p. 53). By extension, learning to write in a sociocultural view must then attend to identity, knowing, and social membership amongst members of the community in which writing is used and with the acknowledgement that writers continually renegotiate their identities as they interact with both text and the people who use and interpret it.

As individuals use the language resources available to them in their activities within social and cultural frames, they must negotiate their own identities against those of others whom they encounter. Power differentials are often layered in these interactions, and negotiation of unequal power distribution may exert conscious and subconscious forces on writing. Vygotsky (1986) framed language and the signs that accompany it (as

well as other sign systems) as a “mediating system” (p. 7) through which meaning is communicated between people engaged in “social intercourse” (p. 6). Knowledge cannot be transmitted directly between individuals but must be parsed, and in the process, transformed through a system of socially contextualized tools and related representational activities (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). In this transformative process, language becomes infused with messages about power, access, and constraints because “social intercourse” necessarily occurs among participants who either share common status or communicate across various statuses.

Ivanič (1998) has noted that social circumstances provide individuals with the language resources that they deploy, intentionally and unintentionally, in the contexts and situations they will encounter in the future. These “meditational means” are socially constrained, and access to the discourse of powerful social contexts, such as academia, is unequally distributed. As a result, some students enter the classroom, whether in elementary school or as in her research mature students returning to college, with “more statusful tools” than others (Ivanič, 1998, p. 53). Dyson (2003) referenced Vygotsky to explain that young children’s activities are mediated through “symbolically mediated actions, especially ways of talking” (p. 11). She noted that, in keeping with this position, children “come to understand the symbolic nature of written language only if they have some sense of the functional work—the social ends—driving, requiring, and organizing the manipulation of those drab print symbols into speech” (p. 50).

These characteristics of writing framed by sociocultural theories—activity orientation, social and cultural context, dialogism, and identity foregrounding—are

typically layered, intertwined, and interactive within the discussion of writing from a sociocultural standpoint. The purpose of this conceptual framework, then, is to dissect or tease apart these characteristics in order to clarify their meaning, anchor them in familiar educational theory, and connect them to the study of writing as it is undertaken in this research.

Method

As I considered the many pathways through which I could approach this study, I sought a methodology that would help me access young adolescents' direct accounts of their experiences writing and learning to write. I wanted to foreground and amplify their voices as they explained their emerging authorial identities and to use my own experiences as a writer, teacher, and literacy scholar to facilitate their storytelling. It was important to me to be as transparent as possible both with participants and with the audience for this study about this facilitative role. I wanted a methodological approach that allowed me to be visible and active rather than to stand behind a facade of objectivity. In responding to Brandt's (2001) call to increase the quantity and quality of direct accounts of literacy learning, I thought it was important to make clear to whom those accounts were being given, and the filters through which I perceived, interpreted, and represented young writers' experiences. A narrative inquiry methodology offered an approach that aligned with my research questions, data-collection methods, type of data collected, and mode of representation.

Narrative Inquiry

Brodkey (1987) noted, “In principle, if not in practice, all scholarship recognizes that researchers are implicated in their own research” (p. 30). Narrative inquirers are vividly implicated in their research, but this vividness also leads to transparency.

Brodkey (1987) reflects, “more often than not, the method, rather than the methodologist, is cast as the narrator” (p. 27). The purposefully first-person presentation of narrative inquiry makes plain the role of the researcher as the narrator of the research story. In all research the researcher or “narrator” influences what is asked, what is told, how it is represented, and what is foregrounded, but narrative inquiry places that influence on stage rather than behind the scenes.

Narrative inquiry is a strand of qualitative research and as such has an interest in understanding and description rather than prediction and control (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4). “Narrative” refers to the methodology, the data collected, and the phenomenon under study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). In its most straightforward terms, narratives are “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) and “the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). The roots of narrative inquiry lie in anthropology, psychology, social science, literary criticism, and history, specifically collections of oral history (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Narrative inquiry varies in its focus and methods across fields, but narrative inquirers tend to hold the common belief that people recount experiences narratively; that the “reality” of participants’ experiences is influenced by their social contexts, memories,

interpretations, and sometimes imaginations; that narration of experiences can be represented through language by both the teller and subsequently by the researcher; and that narrative/story is valuable because it is one of, if not the, fundamental units of conveying human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

Context, place and timescale. Unlike some forms of qualitative research that feature a latitudinal approach to data, taking a snapshot of what is happening “here and now” or within a timeframe and space bounded by the period and site of research, narrative inquiry takes place across a different time- and place-scale that is anchored in the individual experience, recollections, predictions, and imaginings of the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, extended interviews call upon participants to tell stories recounting events that may have taken place years before the initiation of the research or whose implications participants imagine will be influential years into the future. Narrative inquiry may draw on a timescale that extends beyond the lifetime of the participants as they recount stories of earlier times told to them or events that provided context prior to their births. Similarly, narratives may extend far beyond the physical space of the data collection. While field observation would limit a researcher’s purview to the environment at hand, extended interview allows access to places recollected or even imagined by the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Researchers must consider how the current time and place of retellings might mediate those narratives.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed three planes for defining the inquiry space: personal and social, the context of experience, interpretation, and telling; past, present and future, the continuity of experience, interpretation, and telling; and place, the

situation of experience, interpretation, and telling (p. 50). They envisioned these three elements as being axes of a three-dimensional “inquiry space” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50) that guides the data collected, analysis, and interpretation. Shaafsma and Vinz (2011) built upon Clandinin and Connelly’s concept of the three-dimensional inquiry space to describe a narrative inquiry approach. Unlike a more common linear research design that lends itself to a roadmap across which the research project moves from start to finish, they propose a multidimensional inquiry space in which many potential pathways are in motion simultaneously.

Narrative as a (re)emerging approach. Within the dialogue of educational research, Pinnegar & Daynes (2007) noted that as disciplines become more “professionalized” narratives often fall by the wayside because they are seen as too common, folk-oriented, subjective, or unscientific. As teaching and teacher education march toward professionalization, and funding seems to follow experimental and quantitative lines, narrative inquiry can act as a vital counterbalance to systemization by surfacing and recording the human experiences as they are shaped by societal forces.

Narrative inquiry pushes back against this climate of systemization. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) noted that in many service professions, including healthcare, teaching, social work, and urban planning, narrow standards of effectiveness drain the meaning from both the service providers and those they serve (p. 42). Educational policies have significant, material consequences for adolescents, but I do not find many ways that their voices are heard in these decisions, particularly because they so often occur in places where children are not welcome.

Meaning-centered investigation. Narrative inquiry offers the possibility of coming to see, hear, and more closely know real individuals who are the “embodiment of lived stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Narrative inquiry prompts both researchers and audiences to consider that, within the clamor of assertions about school reform, or standards, or excellence, there are real people who are “composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Hence the contribution of narrative inquiry is not to shape the policies of “what works,” but to open the possibilities for new meanings, new significance, new ways of knowing and being known within our world.

Narrative is primarily a study of experience, and “we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). Narrative is, then, for both the researcher and the participants, a “story of how our representation of the world emerged within a stream of experience [and] how it returned to that experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40). Also implicit here is the notion that experience cannot be directly transferred, like copying a computer file from one hard drive to another, but it must be narrated (Brodkey, 1987). As Ivanič (1998) explained:

The self consists not of a person’s life history, but of the interpretation they are currently putting on their life history. The self is in this way doubly socially constructed: both by the socially constrained nature of the life experience itself, and by the social shaping of the interpretation (p. 16).

I conceptualize narrative as a continuous authoring process that offers continuity forward into the future, shaping future actions, interpretations, and meanings, as well as backward into the past, reshaping/reinterpreting/re-presenting/re-narrating prior experience through the lens of subsequent events. What makes this continuous authoring even more complicated is that a cycle is playing out simultaneously, at different phases, and in different but variously overlapping contexts, for both the participant and the researcher. In effect, when the participant is at the phase of representation/narration, the researcher is simultaneously at the phase of experience, as in the experience of the interview and of hearing these new data. This experience sets off the researcher's chain of interpretation (analysis), narration/representation (presenting research) and meaning-making (what understandings did I draw from this interpretive chain?). These steps in turn influence the researcher's own future actions (new research projects) and reinterpretations of past experiences. In this way, narrative inquiry acts upon and leads to interactions between the participant and the researcher such that they both "act within a stream of experience that generates new relations that then become a part of future experience" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). This complexity lends narrative inquiry its richness.

Considering young adolescent participants. Many adolescents are just becoming capable of participating in narrative inquiry, and of this sort of narrative sense-making in their own lives. During adolescence, young people become increasingly capable of bringing thematic coherence to their experiences. This development of "autobiographical reasoning" (Habermas, 2013) allows adolescents to recall and describe

experiences and to contextualize events within larger thematic narratives of their development as writers. As Dewey (1938) suggested, learning experiences are characterized by the notion of *continuity* such that current experiences and the meanings assigned to them shape an individual's motivations, beliefs, and possibilities for learning from future experiences. He explained that "only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future" (Dewey, 1938, p. 51). Drawing on this notion of continuity, young adolescents can apply autobiographical reasoning to articulate narratives of their pasts, presents, and imagined futures experiences.

These thematic links between stories constitute "narrative coherence" (Caine, 2013, p. 579). Narrative coherence differs from chronological coherence—an ordered telling of events—because it bonds together experience, narration, and the teller's interpretation and draws on narratives that extend across time and place. Through narratively coherent stories or collections of stories, the tellers seek to make meaning of their experiences and to explain why things happened as they did and how these events shaped the teller's self-understandings or identity.

Of course people who make educational policy, design curriculum, plan writing instruction, and teach were all once adolescents themselves and remember their experiences, but there is particular value in interviewing people who are currently adolescents. Their social experience of school aligns with the contemporary instructional setting of school, unlike teachers who may have been students themselves before the Internet age or prior to high-stakes testing. Also, as Brandt (2001) pointed out, "people

reflect on—indeed refashion—a memory in terms of its significance for how things have turned out, whether in terms of personal circumstances or shared culture” (p. 12).

Therefore talking to someone about their experiences and interpretation of writing at age 13 will likely yield very different perspectives than the same person would hold 10 years later. Narrative is the unfolding of stories across time, so timing is important.

Developmentally-appropriate data collection. Working with a young adolescent population presented some special considerations as I planned to respond to Brandt’s call to increase the direct accounts of learning to write in the literature. Author-centered writing research with young children seems to have been conducted primarily through observation, such as Dyson’s (1989, 2003, 2005) extensive work with children in the primary grades. Interviewing participants seemed to be an accepted practice with high school students (Beck, 2009; Tatum & Gue, 2012) and adults (Brandt, 2001; Ivanič, 1998). However, within the field of writing research, I did not find other studies that relied primarily on extended interviews and that were conducted with a young adolescent population.

I believe, like Craig and Huber (2007), that curiosity about children’s lived experience is a form of respect. With young participants in mind, I designed interview protocols (see Appendix A) and asked clarifying follow-up questions that helped me engage in “generous listening” (Salmon & Riessman, 2008, p. 79). This generous listening includes a tolerance for some ambiguity, a willingness to wait for meaning to emerge, and appropriate scaffolding to support young people in understanding what is being asked of them (Salmon & Riessman, 2008). Brandt (2001) called for interviews

that ask participants to recall and describe specific events, actions, and people who influenced their writing experiences in order to activate the teller's sense of time and place and to alert them to changes in their interpretations of an event's importance in light of their continued experiences. As I designed and implemented the interview protocols for this study, I did so with generous listening and attending to specific events in mind.

Representing young adolescents. During my extended interviews with young adolescent participants, I took great care in negotiating relationships and purposes within our partnership (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). In the interpretive phase, I worked to compensate for my "blindness" of context or experience by checking interpretations with my advisor, who also served as a member of the larger research group exploring writing identities during the Young Writers' Camp. In the presentation and reporting phase, I foregrounded the voices of participants while at the same time representing them carefully so as to protect the confidentiality of participants who may be presented with such detail as to be recognizable to those who know them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The "reality" of experiences revealed in narrative inquiry is the reality of the participants, bounded by their experiences, social and cultural context, language/s, interpretations, representations, and meaning-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Unlike the role of narrative in journalism or criminal investigation, it is not vital to the implications that events be exactly accurately placed in time or space or that they be corroborated by outside witnesses or through archival resources (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Rather than triangulating experiences or the participant's interpretations, I worked

to clarify data with participants themselves and to check my interpretations against other possible interpretations. Although validity is not a relevant term in narrative inquiry, I pursued transparency, clarity, and plausibility throughout the data collection and analysis.

Limitations. There are several constraints to narrative inquiry, some related to the methodology itself and some related to the way it may be perceived in the field of educational research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out that narrative inquiry may be critiqued within the field as “not theoretical enough” (p. 42). I address this limitation by offering a detailed sociocultural framework for writing and writing inquiry based in accepted educational theory and highlighting the continuity between that framework, the research questions, and narrative inquiry as the methodological approach that most closely supports the collection of data to address those theoretically-founded research questions.

Researchers who pursue quantitative and even other qualitative methodologies may also critique narrative inquiry as too subjective and too interpretive, particularly since researchers’ stories tend to be nested together with participants’ stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Therefore, it is important in this project to avoid implying that findings are generalizable or that participants are emblematic of gender, race, or socioeconomic groups whose characteristics they share. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted that effective presentations of narrative inquiry “offer readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42) rather than drawing recommendations or implications that exceed the scope of the data.

Participants

During the initial Young Writers' Camp phase of this project, I met 21 young adolescents who participated in a two-week summer camp experience. These young people were enrolled in a Young Writer's Camp sponsored by a medium-sized university in the Southeast. The camp was housed in the School of Education. University literacy faculty and doctoral students conceptualized and planned the camp, as well as serving as participant-researchers with the elementary, middle school, and high school groups. Two instructors, both of whom were certified middle grades English Language Arts teachers, facilitated the camp sessions. For one hour per day during eight of the sessions, young writers were also supported by writing coaches. These coaches, all of whom were graduate students enrolled in a summer New Literacies course at the university, were either current or former K-12 teachers.

The camp session lasted from 9 a.m. to noon each day for two weeks. Campers typically began the day with a guest speaker who was a working author or other professional who used digital writing in his or her work. Following the guest speaker session, the middle school group transitioned to a computer lab where they spent the remainder of the day working on self-selected digital writing projects. Participants chose the format and topic for their work and had the freedom to work independently or to collaborate with other campers. Some of these young people had learned about the camp through flyers distributed in their schools and had actively wanted to come, others were registered by parents and seemed to have more mixed feelings about being there. However, all of the campers in this group wrote willingly and, with support, crafted texts

of their own design. On the final day of the camp, the young adolescents presented an excerpt from their work in a coffeehouse-style reading for friends and family.

During the Young Writer's Camp, I spent each session working alongside the young writers in the middle school group. I responded to students' questions, read and discussed their work with them, and conducted short audiotaped interviews about their writing experiences as part of the larger research project investigating writing identities. I got to know this group of young people as we worked on writing and talked together, as well as through casual interactions during breaks or while we waited for parents to pick them up after camp.

Relational Living Alongside Participants

At the end of the first week of the two-week camp, I extended invitations to nine students to participate in the second phase of the research consisting of a series of three individual 60-90 minute follow-up interviews throughout the fall semester. The invited participants were representative of the overall camp group and, within that group, of diverse age, gender, race, and economic identifications. All were young adolescents who had been willing to talk with me during the first week of camp. Some were more outgoing or reserved than others, but all nine appeared open to talking about writing. Even in this early stage of soliciting participants in my doctoral research, I began to experience "relational living alongside" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 23) with not only the eight young adolescents who joined the study but also their families. I met parents as they picked up and dropped off their children at camp, encountered siblings who were part of the high school writing camp, and realized that the younger brother and sister of one

participant had attended preschool with my son several years earlier. We began to make sense of each other as we lived alongside one another through the camp experience.

In the letter I sent inviting campers to participate in the research, I introduced myself as a former middle school English teacher, a helper and researcher in the camp sessions, and a doctoral candidate at the university interested in understanding how young adolescents experience learning to write. By using the camp as a venue for connecting with participants for this study, I hoped to align myself with the positive reputation of the university and with the trustworthiness the other adults and I built with families as we organized and facilitated the camp. As participants and their families began living alongside me as a researcher, I believe they saw me as affiliated with the university, as an experienced teacher, and as a trustworthy adult with whom their child had interacted during the camp. In the conversations I had with parents and participants as we completed the consent and assent documents required for university IRB approval and arranged the logistics of the interviews, I often mentioned my teaching at the university, work with student teachers, previous work as a middle school teacher, and my own children. In this way I attempted to position myself as a knowledgeable researcher and caring educator but not as a person who was affiliated with or reported to participants' schools or school systems.

When I first envisioned this project, I had considered recruiting participants by observing in English Language Arts classrooms at a few middle schools and extending invitations to participate to some of the students I met there. However, I believe that coming into relational living alongside participants and families through a camp that

parents had selected and by becoming known to participants and families outside the institutional constraints of school, I was more easily able to foster trust and openness between myself as a researcher, the young adolescent participants, and their families. Over the months of the study, I conducted many of the interviews in participants' homes. We typically talked at a dining room table or quiet spot in the family room while the life of the household, such as parents preparing meals or younger siblings playing nearby, went on around us. These opportunities allowed me to become a guest in family spaces and to sense, at a surface level, the multiple contexts in which these young adolescents became writers.

Rather than understanding my role as a researcher as being objective or outside the inquiry, a narrative approach opened a space for me as a "relational inquirer," described by Clandinin (2013) as "attentive to the intersubjective, relational, embedded spaces in which lives are lived out" and in which stories are "co-composed in the spaces between us as inquirers and participants" (p. 24). One participant, Nicole, reflected at the end of our final interview that our experience of talking about writing together "really just made me think about writing in a totally different way, like, I never really thought about, oh, what writing do I actually like to really write? I just kind of did it. Like, writing didn't really mean as much until I thought about it." Apparently for Nicole, the act of narrating her writing experiences, of co-composing with me, fostered a sense of narrative coherence in her life as a writer that she had not considered previously. Although the three interview protocols I developed offered the same starting points for the conversations with participants, the stories they told, follow up questions and

clarifications I pursued, and paths we picked up together led us to markedly different destinations.

These co-constructed narratives of course pulled at only a few of the threads of these young people's complex lives, leaving others unattended to. Even within the field texts I collected, there are other storylines I could have highlighted or other narratives that would have appeared more salient if I were approaching the work from a different discipline, with a different set of research questions, or with perspectives or prior experiences different from those that I brought to the project. In representing these eight young adolescents' narratives, I see us as meeting "in the midst" of multiple, on-going, unfolding experiences in our individual lives, as well as the many "nested lives of institutional, social, cultural, familial and linguistic narratives" that we both were living out at the beginning of the research and have continued to live out since (Clandinin, 2013, p.44).

Participant Overview

Of the nine invited participants, eight joined the study and completed the full interview series. The table below offers an overview of participants and self-reported information about their gender, race, grade in school, and the type of school attended. In two instances, participants changed schools during the course of the study, so this change is reflected in the table. I did not gather specific economic information from students or families, but I have included whether or not the participant received a need-based scholarship to attend the camp. All names are pseudonyms selected by the participants.

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Participant	Gender	Race	Grade	School Type	Scholarship
Anastasia	Female	African American	7 th	Public	Yes
Andrew	Male	White	8 th	Charter	No
Avery	Female	White	7 th	Magnet	No
Bella	Female	White	6 th	Charter	Yes
Candace	Female	African American	7 th	Public, Charter	No
Katherine	Female	White	8 th	Public, Homeschool	Yes
Nicole	Female	Multiracial	8 th	Charter	No
Ryan	Male	African American	6 th	Public	No

Co-composing

The Young Writers’ Camp concluded at the end of July and I began the first round of interviews with participants in mid-September. Because I had met participants during the summer, I wanted to give them time to get acclimated to their new teachers and classes, as well as for school-based writing to potentially begin after the introductory weeks of the school year. I met with participants one-on-one at roughly six- to eight-week intervals and concluded the final interviews in January. I offered parents several possible meeting locations for their convenience, and conducted some interviews in a conference room in the same School of Education building where students had attended camp, some at a coffee shop near campus, and others in participants’ homes.

I developed an interview protocol to guide each meeting (see Appendix A) but largely let the participants’ narratives and the pathways they took lead our conversations.

For each question on the protocol, I asked additional questions to clarify or to ask them to extend or explain their responses. Bella and Ryan, the two sixth grade participants who were 11-years-old at the time of the study, sometimes needed additional scaffolding or support to understand abstract questions or to redirect them to the initial question. Older participants were often able to offer more abstract, complex, and lengthy responses with less prompting. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes depending on the course of the conversation and outside constraints, such as a parent arriving to pick up the participant. The complete data set comprises 24 interviews or three interviews a piece with each of the eight participants.

The first interview asked young adolescents to recall their early writing lives, the second interview to share their recent writing experiences, and the third to imagine their writing futures. In this way, we moved through time from past to future. However, even within a single question from any of the protocols, participants often thematically linked temporally distant events to make their points. Within each interview, I prompted participants to consider place by discussing writing in school, out of school, and in general. I asked them to consider the personal/social spectrum by asking how they saw themselves and how they believed others saw them as writers. In these ways, I attended to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry model within the research design. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

Following each interview, I listened to the audio recording and made notes about my initial responses, as well as noting clarifying questions I wanted to pose to participants during our next interview. For each participant, I sketched out a chronicle

(Clandinin, 2013) in which I tried to roughly chart the overall chronology of the events they shared both to help me consider their development and to surface clarifying questions I wanted to ask. Because many of the writing experiences students shared took place in school, they were able to provide concise details about chronology because it was easy for them to remember the teacher or classroom and to identify events that took place in second or sixth grade based on these external cues.

Analysis

Because the data set was extensive, I transcribed some interviews myself while a professional transcriptionist completed others. In the initial phase of analysis, I consolidated all three interviews from a participant and placed the transcript in a table so that I could record notes side-by-side with the participant's narratives. After several passes through the combined three-interview transcript and a review of my notes, I wrote a memo detailing my analysis. In this way, I employed Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model of moving from field texts – the interview transcripts and notes following each interview – to interim texts. I used these interim texts as a way to step back from the immediacy of participants' experiences and retellings and to transition myself from my role as an interviewer living alongside participants to a researcher reflecting on their stories.

Storylines

By crafting analytical memos and making repeated passes through the data for each participant, I came to see three central narrative patterns of meaning through which these young adolescents made sense of their writing experiences. Participants arranged

stories thematically to bring narrative coherence to their writing experiences and to communicate that coherence through their stories. In a similar fashion, I work to bring narrative coherence to the array of stories about writing these young adolescents offered by drawing their broad patterns of meaning into three storylines. Each storyline seemed to me a collection of narratives that, taken together, offer a rich description of the ways that young adolescents experience writing, the ways they narrate those experiences, and the meanings they make. Each of the following three chapters takes up one of the storylines, exploring both the narratives students told and their significance in relation to their sense of themselves as writers.

Storylines of Family and School

In Chapter II, I explore how participants narrated their writing experiences in two primary spaces: school spaces and family spaces. Literacy activities within families shaped participants' views of who they were as writers from early childhood to the present and who they imagined they might be the future. As parents and siblings told their own literacy narratives, they helped participants understand and imagine their family's historical writing experiences, the value they placed on writing activities, their expectations for these young writers, and the ways they imagined participants' writing experiences would play out. Family narratives acted as filters through which these young adolescents made sense of their writing experiences.

The second space of writing, school, was the central place in which participants were asked to write. School settings and writing experiences varied greatly among these young writers with social and institutional forces coloring the boundaries of the writing

experiences these participants were offered. The understandings participants brought from family experiences intersected with the ways writing was enacted in school and the messages about writing and themselves as writers that they perceived from teachers and peers. In some instances, family and school narratives aligned with similar values and expectations guiding young writers in common directions. In other instances, the intersections between family and school narratives were sites of tension, spurring participants to develop outsider perspectives on the types of writing valued in school. One participant's family narratives were at odds with school narratives and school became a millstone against which she ground an activist writing persona.

Storylines of Language

In Chapter III, I discuss the ways that participants, through their writing narratives, revealed the multiple and layered contexts in which their writing experiences took place. The people with whom they engaged in writing activities shaped the language resources to which they had access. Family members, teachers, authors, even cartoon characters became sources for the language resources available to participants and they demonstrated active and purposeful appropriation of language resources in the various contexts they moved through.

Participants learned and used language to accomplish their literacy goals. Through language, they both made meaning of their contexts and worked to shape those contexts. Writing was a form of social action through which participants appropriated not only the dictionary definitions of new vocabulary words, but also the social, cultural, and historical connotations of the words they came to see as their own. Young writers

appropriated language resources within contexts shaped by complex social forces. This chapter unpacks the nuances of students' language exploration, language use, and language appropriation.

Storylines of Identity

Storylines of family and school and storylines of language built toward considerations of identity. Young writers developed and narrated the self-understandings that comprised their authorial identities. Their identity-related narratives made clear that when they undertook writing for various purposes, their activity included but far exceeded issues of strategy use or knowledge of discrete writing skills. They resisted forces of standardization that seemed to privilege objective or generic writing, preferring instead to endow their work with performances of authorial identity that ranged from subconscious to subversive. Chapter IV brings together the storylines from the previous two chapters and provides an entrée to the study's conclusions and implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER II

STORYLINES OF FAMILY AND SCHOOL

At the time of the Young Writers' Camp and subsequent interviews, the participants were aged 11 to 13 years. We met in the summer before they began sixth, seventh, or eighth grade and continued meeting to talk about writing throughout the fall semester. As they situated themselves and their writing narratives within their stories of family, I found that many participants included events and people who had influenced their writing lives years and even generations before their birth and that they imagined events far into their futures. These family storylines were one way in which participants built narrative coherence in their retellings, situating their writing lives as part of a storyline that could not be confined to the six months during which the study actually took place, or even to the 11 to 13 years during which they had been alive.

As I pulled on the thread of family storylines, I found that these were entangled with other storylines, particularly narratives about schooling. In some instances these other threads ran parallel to family storylines, strengthening and reinforcing participants' experiences in complementary patterns. In other instances, school stories were knotted together with familial stories, revealing sites of tension, confusion, and competing narratives.

A Snapshot of Family Storylines

Consider the juxtaposition of two participants, Avery and Katherine, as they both discussed an interest in psychology and counseling. Throughout the interviews I asked young writers to imagine their writing futures, and the realm of higher education and career often came up. Both girls told me stories about family, about lived experience, and about their motivations for possibly pursuing work in a counseling-related field. Both drew on their lived experiences as resources and rationales, but the contexts within which their stories played out and the social forces that shaped the experiences they lived and told yielded dramatically different narratives.

Avery, a seventh grader attending a public magnet middle school for advanced academics, expressed an interest in becoming a psychologist, and drew on writing experience with her father, a university professor and her mother, an educator working in both K-12 and higher education. She envisioned how writing might intersect with her desire to be a psychologist in this exchange:

Researcher: What kinds of writing do you imagine yourself doing in your college years? Or even in your career or just your life in general as an adult?

Avery: I'm probably going to be doing a lot more research papers. I, well my dad's a college teacher and my mom's been a college teacher before, so I know that, like, you have to write a lot of papers.

Researcher: Because they made their students write a lot of papers?

Avery: I guess, well, and I know. I know a lot of college teachers so, and like, they do too, so.

Researcher: So you're really not guessing, you have first-hand experience.

Avery: Probably, yeah. Because I might be, I could be getting, like, my doctorate or something ... Probably depends on what my job is, like if I'm doing psychology I'll probably, well this is, like, something really weird about me but I really like—because my dad always has to go to all these conferences and my mom does too, I love going to conferences because they're just fun and I'll probably be going to those and I'll have to do, like, some writing for that.

In this vignette, Avery drew on her lived experience of attending conferences with her parents and observing the scholarly writing they produce in preparation. She seemed to look forward to the social experience of an academic conference and the ways in which her writing might enrich her work there. As she drew on her family narratives of academia and writing, she imagined the nature and purposes of the writing she might compose as a psychologist.

Katherine also drew on her lived experiences as she described why she might like to one day pursue work in counseling, specifically her desire to write a book for teenagers experiencing grief. Katherine was a White eighth grader who attended a recently reconstituted middle school that served a high percentage of low-income students. Although both girls imagined writing within similar fields, the narratives they constructed based on family experiences came into existence in remarkably different contexts. In the dialogue that follows, Katherine explains her desire to write and to counsel others.

Katherine: You know how I feel about that. It's because that happened to my dad.

Researcher: I don't -- that's not a story that I know.

Katherine: Oh. Well, my dad committed suicide with a gun.

- Researcher: Oh. I'm really sorry. That is not a story that I knew. Do you - hm.
- Katherine: And - that's why I said I write - I write about that.
- Researcher: That is something that you write about? Why do you think you're drawn to write about that?
- Katherine: I don't know. I think about all the other kids that don't have my mom to comfort them, and their mom—their parents don't take them to a guidance counselor or something. And I want to write a book about that, so that's, um, a book that I would—might like to write.
- Researcher: That sounds like a really important book to write. What kinds of things do you think you would want to tell kids? Like, what—what kind of advice do people need in that situation? That's—I don't know.
- Katherine: Well, grief is—grief is okay. Crying is okay. Suicidal feelings, well, you need to talk to people about that, because I went through that.
- Researcher: Yeah.
- Katherine: And, um, I would think—because there's, like, six stages of grief.
- Researcher: Mm-hm. I've heard about that.
- Katherine: Denial, because when my mom told—first told me about that, I felt, like, all dizzy and stuff. And I felt like she tricked me ...
- Researcher: Okay. That's an important book for you to write. One day, I hope that you're able to do that. [...]
- Katherine: Because there'd be me out there—actually about me. It'd be, like, “Hey, this is Katherine,” but in another form.

Like Avery, Katherine's interest in counseling-related work fit within a larger narrative of multiple generations and extended family, one that she shared over the course of our

interviews and that often included stories of volatile relationships. Katherine told me that her parents had divorced when she was small and that her father's interaction with she and her brother was sporadic. His suicide had occurred a little more than a year before our interviews. Although I asked all participants the same starting questions and all of those questions were about writing, their responses narrated their lives as whole people and the roles and purposes of writing wound through their experiences in unique ways.

I pair Katherine and Avery's stories not to highlight the relative merit of either of their experiences, but to bring into sharper focus the very different paths by which young writers may arrive at what appear, on the surface, to be similar places. Just as their pathways to this point have traversed very different terrain, their discussion of family storylines suggests that their journeys will continue to be quite different from one another in the coming years.

Storylines of Family Intersect with Storylines of School

As I worked through the field texts from each of the eight participants, narrative patterns began to emerge around the subject of school. Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) model of the three-dimensional inquiry space, the place of school became a central context around which to consider stories about writing. Some participants told stories in which family experiences and values worked in cooperation with stories of writing for school. In these stories family and school mutually reinforced one another. Other participants shared narratives in which family stories about writing and school stories about writing intersected in ways that produced tension. As these young writers move through school, some of their writing is likely to be valued, some

devalued, and some ignored or left undiscovered by their teachers. The educational settings participants experienced varied in terms of the instructional approaches and expectations for students. Social class played a vivid role in the opportunities students were able to access and the meaning they made from their writing experiences within these varied contexts.

Narratives of Cooperation between Family and School Writing

Ryan and Anastasia: Navigating writing lives with a family team. Ryan and Anastasia both wrote quietly and diligently during the time I worked alongside them in the Young Writers' Camp. Ryan produced an informational website about Mexico, beginning with his personal knowledge acquired during a favorite vacation there and supplementing with information he discovered through Internet research. Anastasia worked on a novel that she had begun prior to camp. Both Ryan and Anastasia spoke about their families as loving and supportive groups from which they drew encouragement for their writing, a high value for education, and guidance, particularly from older siblings, for navigating school writing and school in general.

Ryan's mother had completed undergraduate and graduate-level programs, his father had completed high school and some college. Anastasia's parents also had completed some college. Both Ryan and Anastasia seemed confident that they would complete high school and college and that some writing would be required of them in order to do so. Anastasia anticipated attending law school, possibly becoming "a businesswoman with corporations and stuff, like, big corporations." She also dreamed of becoming a published author. As Ryan and Anastasia narrated their writing experiences,

they remembered family interactions that had occurred during their early lives and at present, looked to family to help them envision the coming years, and sometimes imagined their families in the more distant future once they were adults themselves.

Anastasia, a twelve-year-old African American female, was a middle school student entering seventh grade at the same public middle school she had attended the previous year. The school served students from a range of socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Her older brother was a 14-year-old attending ninth grade at the neighborhood high school she planned to attend in a few years. She lived with her mother, a homemaker, and her father, who worked for the city doing what Anastasia described as “strong work” requiring physical labor with maintaining buildings.

Anastasia relied on her family to help her navigate school, particularly on her brother’s guidance and experience to help her envision her own possible future as a high school student. “I think that [high school] won’t be that hard for me,” she explained, “because I’ll see it. I’ll experience it from my brother. I think that I’ll do fine, like how he’s doing right now.” She did express some concern about the demands of high school assignments, noting that “I’ll have to do all this work, because I see his work. His work is hard. I’m like, ‘Oh, man!’”

Several participants mentioned that they tried to hide their writing from parents or to keep it a secret, but Anastasia explained that she enjoyed sharing her work with her family noting that, “I’m much more comfortable with them because, I, that’s my family. I love them very much, and you have to, your family is people that you trust. People that you care about. People that care about you.” The family appeared to be close and to

offer one another support and encouragement openly. Anastasia explained that the role of family was “that they help you, you help them. That’s how family goes. They’re there for you.” The solid connections of family seemed to anchor Anastasia, whereas she described herself in more disconnected ways at school, as focused on education and often reading at lunch rather than socializing. Although her friends still attended the same school, she shared that “It’s just that I don’t talk to them much anymore. I don’t know, it just went out. It’s gone. It’s how life goes, you know? You have friends, you get new ones, and they just go past.”

Although friendships might come and go, Anastasia seemed rooted in solid relationships with family. Anastasia’s family supported her literacy development by offering encouragement on her work, as well as by connecting her with literacy opportunities such as going to the library and bringing her to Young Writers’ Camp. She spoke about frequent trips to the public library where she read voraciously, sometimes checking out new books from both the school and public libraries every few days. She described how she was unable to find the next books in the *Babymouse* series at the public library and asked the librarian for assistance. “I was like, ‘Where are these books at? I need to have this book.’” She recalled that the librarian explained, “I’m sorry, honey, but you can’t because all the girls love this book too. They take all of ‘em.” The librarian showed Anastasia how to put a hold on a title and said, “Twenty girls put a hold on all these books. All right. It’ll come to you.” Her mother kept taking her to the library every few days to check out other books and finally, after she had waited “like, all the way ‘til wintertime, and then I get the [*Babymouse*] books. I’m, like, ‘Yes!’” When

Anastasia shared that she would like to be a published author, I asked if she thought she might one day walk by a shelf at the library and see her own book there. “I think. Yeah. I hope, too,” she responded. Anastasia’s mother continued to take her to the library often, and within this physical space it seems that Anastasia envisioned her future writing life within this literate space.

Anastasia learned about the Young Writers’ Camp through a flyer distributed by the university through her middle school. In order to afford the camp fee, her mother applied for and received a scholarship to cover the tuition. In the application, her mother explained that “Anastasia’s goal is to complete her book, and to be able to learn anything she can that will help her improve her writing skills. I think she will love this camp!” Despite financial barriers, her mother made an effort on Anastasia’s behalf to foster her writing development by connecting her with the writing opportunities the camp offered. As her mother had anticipated, the camp was a setting in which Anastasia did make progress toward completing her novel, engaged in many conversations with instructors to support her writing craft and skill development, and interacted with professional writers to learn more about writing and publishing.

Anastasia’s family’s encouragement and pride was clear to me as a researcher when I happened to sit beside her mother and brother during our coffeehouse-style reading on the last day of camp. During one interview I recalled to Anastasia that “your mom had a smile up to her ears while you were reading.” Anastasia remembered that she had been extremely nervous to read in front of a group of roughly sixty people and was afraid that she would make mistakes, but she reminded herself “You know what? My

mom, my brother's on my side. My family's on my side. And I'm like, you know what? I'm gonna do it. I'm gonna get this done." She explained that on the way home she felt that the reading was "Cool. That was amazing!" Her mom told her she had done well, and she recalled that even her teenaged brother told her "Yeah, man. You did a good job. Good job."

By Anastasia's accounts her daily activities were facilitated primarily by her mother because her father worked long hours, but she explained that she learned many of the "morals and lessons" she included in her fiction writing from her father. She identified several important concepts she had learned from her father that she wanted to share with her readers, including how to "be good people when they grow up, have a good education, go to college, don't try to follow another person but be your own self, be your own leader, be honest to your family and be honest to yourself as well." She explained that at dinnertime her father liked to "just give me speeches." Anastasia said that she listened carefully to her father's speeches and took his advice because "he wants to teach me, and he wants to teach my brother how life goes, and how I need to be aware of things in life. He'll want to teach me how to be aware – how there's danger in the world, and how the world is." In addition to offering his perspectives on the world and the "morals and lessons" he had for his children, Anastasia also shared that her father encouraged her to advance in education. She explained, "If I want to be a lawyer, then I have to achieve a lot of goals and do a lot of hard work to achieve that goal." I asked if Anastasia thought her father would be proud when she became a lawyer she replied, "Yes. He always – he always say that."

Anastasia drew on her family's support as they helped her access new literacy opportunities, offered her advice and encouragement, and provided context for her literate practices as tools that helped her move step-by-step toward accomplishing her educational and career goals. Although neither of Anastasia's parents had completed college, they expected that she would graduate from college and even attend law school. In addition to their support and encouragement, Anastasia drew concepts for her fiction writing from the oral stories she experienced at home. Her father's "speeches" seemed to guide Anastasia's understanding of the world she lived in and she explained that she incorporated those morals and lessons in the fiction she composed.

Like Anastasia, Ryan often mentioned the support with writing he received from his immediate family, as well as the encouragement of his extended family. Ryan, an African American male, was preparing to transition from elementary to middle school at the time of the camp and was in his first semester of sixth grade during our interviews in the fall. He attended a racially diverse middle school with roughly two-thirds of students identified as economically disadvantaged. His elementary school had also been racially diverse but with a lower proportion of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Ryan lived with his mother, a university professor, and his high school-aged sister, who also attended the Young Writers' Camp. Although his father, who worked in food service, did not live nearby Ryan seemed to maintain contact with him. He also mentioned connections to aunts and cousins in the area with whom he socialized and spent holidays.

Ryan sheepishly admitted that initially he had not been enthusiastic about attending the Young Writers' Camp. "At first, we both didn't want to go," he explained, "and so we just ended up, I guess, liking it." When I asked why he thought his mother had registered him for the camp, he reflected, "Mmm... because I wasn't, uh, I was always making Cs and Bs in Language Arts, and she wanted me to get an A." He did note that he found the camp valuable and his grades had improved in the new school year. "I think it kind of worked," he admitted.

Not only did Ryan's mother connect him with writing opportunities outside the home, she also created writing opportunities for him within the home. Ryan recalled how he and his mother had worked together to type a story on the computer during the summer after his second grade year. "It was raining that day, and we were supposed to go to the pool. So she was typing and she finished her document, and so then she asked me over to the computer and we typed up a document." Ryan dictated a short story about "a cat and a monkey, I think" and his mother typed it for him on the computer. He remembered that at Christmas that year he and his mother had printed several copies of the story and included it with gifts for his aunts and grandfather. I asked about their reaction and he responded, "They were surprised, because they didn't—they—because they didn't know I was writing, like, that much." He noted that the story probably changed his family's opinion of him as a writer because "there are, um, a couple of big words in there... like, um, astronomer... yeah, because the, um, the monkey wanted to be an astronomer." Ryan's mother supported and encouraged his writing for in-school and out-of-school purposes.

Ryan's mother also praised Ryan's work and highlighted his achievements. He noted that when he brought home writing from school "she usually ends up typing it up and putting it on the wall." Ryan recalled his mother being particularly proud of an essay he wrote in second grade about his family that won the Best Writers Award for his grade level at the end-of-year school assembly. He read his essay aloud for the class as well as bringing a copy home to share with his family. "They were impressed," he noted.

Ryan highlighted his mother's and his extended family's contributions to his writing, as well as identifying his older sister's writing advice as a valuable resource. He explained that his sister "helps me with writing sometimes and she says, 'You have to be more descriptive.' She said the teachers like it." Ryan worked to incorporate this advice into his writing. Ryan's sister was a high school student at the time of the interviews and he reflected, "I kind of trust her, because she's basically been through middle school already. She's probably written the same papers as I have and so she knows what the teacher wants and is looking for." Before he turned in writing assignments, Ryan explained, "I always call her up [to my room] and say 'What do you think about the paper?' and stuff." Ryan explained that he preferred to ask his sister's advice than taking his paper to his mother:

Ryan: My mom would probably just, like, try to go straight to the solution and stuff.

Researcher: Mmm. What do you mean by that, "go straight to the solution?"

Ryan: Um, she'd try to find out just - what's just wrong with it or somethin' like that.

Researcher: Mm-hm. And how's that different from what your sister usually does?

Ryan: She tries - she'd wait a little bit more to see - to see more, um, to hear my stuff about it.

In this exchange Ryan appeared to prefer his sister's style of asking him questions, soliciting his ideas and input, and giving advice rather than his mother's style of identifying a specific weakness in the writing and proposing a solution. Although he preferred his sister's style, Ryan reflected that sometimes her interest in helping him refine his writing resulted in more work than he wished to take on. "It's like, you could get a B or a B+, something like that, but you'd save a lot more time to do other stuff. Or you could get an A and take up the rest of your free time on that project."

In vignettes such as this one, it became clear that Ryan's family acted as a positive presence in his writing development, offering encouragement, resources, and inspiration for his stories. Ryan contemplated one day being a father himself and shared that he would like to be able to help his future children with writing. He explained, "I went through the same thing and I needed help so if they need help, I could help them. [I would feel] kind of good now that you could help them out with something you couldn't help yourself with earlier on." In these ways, text became a way to share ideas or information, as well as an artifact through which the Ryan's family expressed care for and pride in one another.

Both Anastasia and Ryan communicated the sense of support, encouragement, and guidance they experienced. Family members took an active interest in the writing

they produced and offered them advice and suggestions, as well as providing experiences through which they might expand their literacy knowledge and skills. Within their diverse middle schools, Ryan and Anastasia appeared to navigate writing experiences competently and to appreciate the support and encouragement they received from family as they progressed through school.

Nicole and Avery: Narrating writing experiences with an insider perspective. Nicole and Avery both positioned themselves as high achieving students who took their writing for school very seriously and worked hard to exceed their teachers' expectations. Nicole described writing only occasionally outside of school and homework, such as emailing distant family or sometimes writing diary entries or song lyrics, whereas Avery counted fiction writing as one of her favorite out-of-school activities alongside other creative outlets including music, theater, and dance. Although these two young adolescents enjoyed and engaged in different types of writing, both included family attitudes, values, and knowledge in their narrations of writing experience. Both young adolescents described their families as valuing education and as parents as having high educational attainment that positioned them for success.

Nicole and Avery rarely mentioned asking for or receiving advice from parents about specific pieces of writing or their composition processes. Instead, Nicole and Avery's stories focused on the ways in which their parents used writing professionally and the traits or approaches they viewed as similar in their own writing styles, as well as the cooperative interplay between messages about writing at home and those at school. Avery was the oldest child in her family and Nicole was an only child, so neither had an

older sibling to act as a guide as Ryan and Anastasia experienced. Both families had strong links to education, and Nicole and Avery often situated themselves as insiders who understood how to use writing to work effectively in the school setting. Nicole and Avery both attended schools recognized for their academics and participated in advanced-level coursework. Nicole and Avery seemed to have few tensions between their narratives of family and those of school.

Nicole, a multiracial 13-year-old, was an eighth grader at a charter school where she had enrolled at the start of seventh grade. Although she reported having good experiences in sixth grade, the Title I public school she had attended was struggling to improve test scores and Nicole and her family hoped to access a more academically rigorous environment at the charter school. She lived with her mother, whose work included business analysis, and father, who was a district manager in the restaurant industry. Her mother came from a large family, all of whom still lived in another Southern state, while her father, who immigrated to the United States from a Middle Eastern country as a child, had family spread around the world.

Nicole described her mother as influential in her school writing “because of her genes,” noting that education “runs in the family, because almost all the girls in our family are teachers, educators, like one of my aunts is a principal now.” Coming from a family of educators seemed to lend narrative coherence to Nicole’s family storyline, and she mentioned several times the unique perspective she had on writing for school as a result of having family members who work in schooling. She attributed some of her success in school to the generations of teachers in her family, noting, “Maybe my blood

or whatever, being from educators, maybe that helps.” She explained that, “I think I get [my writing style] from [my mother], and she gets it from her family, so I think it ... sort of makes me, like, think things through differently than maybe like somebody else.”

Although Nicole reported that her extended family members who worked in education “stay on top of how I’m doing in school in general,” she said they did not “usually ask me about particular subjects” or assist with specific assignments. However, she did feel accountable to them for her academic performance, noting “I know if I don’t really pull my weight I have, like, several people that are going to ask. I mean, I know to expect they’re going to ask me how I’m doing.”

At her new charter school, she described how she quickly adjusted to the more demanding academic work at her new school. She often mentioned feeling supported and cared for at the new school, particularly by her English language arts teacher who taught her seventh and eighth grade accelerated Language Arts class. She noted how this teacher engaged with her students through opinion-based writing, which was a daily activity in her course, and used it as a tool to support their learning. Nicole noted:

I think that she like actually goes through each person’s paper and analyzes it . . . because she takes the time to do that she gets to know, like, our types of writing and I think she can sort of tell what we do, what we’re, our weaknesses and strengths are, and I feel like if we were to do, like, more boring topics that it would be harder for her to figure that out.

In this supportive environment marked by a sense of personal attention to and care for her work, Nicole appeared to thrive. She described her excitement about her writing assignments and how she often sought the teacher’s advice. She explained that she and a

friend in class “might as well just scoot our desks up to Ms. Cameron’s desk, we’re just asking 50 million questions because we want to make sure we understand it. But Ms. Cameron, she just smiles.” In this productive classroom, Nicole felt not only appreciated by her teacher but also successful in her frequent writing assignments.

Nicole frequently referenced her mother’s analytical skills and work in business analysis as influencing her own writing style. She explained that her mother was “an analyst, so she’s the one that finds mistakes. So I guess I got that from her, which kind of converts to me.” She also linked her writing style to an analytical perspective by paying attention to detail, reading assignments carefully and asking her teachers clarifying questions, and seeking out sophisticated evidence to support her arguments. Nicole explained that she has “always kind of like, paid attention. . . . Like in my past I didn’t really realize how much I actually noticed things, but I did . . . maybe because my mom’s an analyst and I come from this kind of background, that could affect my writing.”

In addition to Nicole’s sense that she had developed analytical thinking and writing skills from her mother and family of educators, she attributed her acceptance for diversity and ability to collaborate with others in part to her parents’ cross-cultural marriage. She mentioned that her charter school enrolled many international students and explained, “Because I’m from two different cultures or whatnot, I’m just really easy to work with . . . I guess coming from [my mother and father] it’s like maybe a reason why I’m so open to it, because my two cultures are very different.” Nicole appeared to welcome the exchange of ideas across cultures using writing as a medium.

Collaboration and writing with others seemed to come easily to Nicole, and she indicated that she moved comfortably between the worlds of school and home. She explained that in her writing she always seemed to adopt a tone and content that teachers welcomed and found appropriate for the classroom. She believed that the norms for behavior and interests fostered in her household were similar to those valued at school. “I’m not raised to where my mom is like just letting me roam on the Internet to random sites,” she explained, noting that the ideas and language she heard at home and at school were in alignment. She did note that some students brought ideas from home that were less welcome at school, explaining “like depending on where the person comes from or whatever, I feel like it—the school doesn’t even give a person the idea, it would have to come from some other source,” she explained. Although others might have to negotiate between home and school language or ideas, she rarely thought about how to write appropriately for school, it just came naturally to her. “I really don’t know exactly how I know not to [include material to which her teachers would object], I just do, like—I’m really not sure, honestly,” she said. This overlap between what was considered appropriate content at home and appropriate content at school made it easy for Nicole to determine the norms and parameters for her written work.

Like Nicole, Avery seemed to excel in an academically rigorous environment and to benefit from school and home expectations that reinforced one another. Avery had attended a magnet elementary school before transitioning to a selective public magnet middle school for academically advanced students. At the time of the study, Avery, a White female, was a 12-year-old beginning seventh grade.

In the earlier vignette, Avery shared her interest in the field of psychology and built on her knowledge of higher education to imagine her future as a writer there. She said that her parents often discussed their professional work at home and that they frequently socialized with other families whose parents worked in academic fields. During the months of our interviews, her family moved from one part of town to a new house in another area closer to her parents' colleagues. It appeared that Avery's family pursued both a social and a geographic community with other scholars who shared their interests, and discussions of higher education were a commonplace part of Avery's life. At one point she laughed at herself as a young child, saying "When I was little, I called 'dissertations,' 'dis-rotations!'" I asked if she thought most small children knew about dissertations, she said, "No, but since my parents, they taught college, so I knew people working on 'dis-rotations.'"

Not only did Avery have proximity to conversations about higher education in her home, neighborhood, and social settings, she also frequently visited the university where her father taught. The university building housed a rarely used music practice room located near her father's office and Avery explained, "I'm there all the time and I do a lot of writing there." Rather than taking her stories and drawings home with her, Avery simply kept them in a folder behind the piano. She said she had quite a lot of work there and had been keeping her writing there for five years, since she was a third grader. I asked if she ever worried if she would go in one day, look behind the piano, and discover that her work was gone and she explained, "Well, for that purpose, I don't put my name on stuff, so I guess it won't really do any harm." Avery not only wrote at home and at

school but created her own spaces, such as the unused practice room, as locations for her writing work.

Drawing on her experiences as a seventh grader at a middle school for advanced academics, Avery often shared stories of collaborative, engaging, and authentic writing assignments that were frequent components of her language arts and other courses. Similar instructional activities had also been part of her Academically Gifted (AG) enrichment sessions at a magnet elementary school. Many of these activities and classes were facilitated by beloved teachers that Avery characterized as humorous, kind, and engaging. For example, she described her elementary AG teacher by saying:

She was a really good teacher . . . she knew how to teach kids so that they'd actually take something from it . . . it was fun for me to learn it and so then I retained that knowledge. Like we could, with most of the stuff we could decide what we wanted to do and like there's a lot of creativity with it.

Like Nicole, Avery appeared engaged, happy, and at ease with her teachers and the classroom climates they fostered. Both mentioned how much they learned through their courses, especially instructional activities that included writing as part of performance-based assessments, such as debates, skits, videos, or “wax museums” in which students researched a historical figure and presented in character.

Avery had many opportunities to write stories in school and recalled assignments such as a creative writing activity in which all students started with the first and last lines of O. Henry's “The Gift of the Magi” and composed their own stories before reading that text. She also had written a fantasy tale of a glowing plant that uprooted and walked

around at night; a collaborative writing “chain” activity in which a minor character from one student’s work became the main character in another student’s piece; and a year-long independent writing activity in which she and a friend wrote and illustrated a story.

This high value for storytelling and creative writing at school dovetailed with the interest in writing stories that Avery developed at home. She remembered that when she was around five years old she liked writing stories, but “every three words I had to yell downstairs, ‘Dad, how do you spell this word?’ so it took forever to write one page.” Despite the time it took to produce text this way, both Avery and her father persisted, and she created many children’s stories. She enjoyed reading these to her younger siblings and explained that even as an elementary school student she thought “I want to read to you! Because, like, my mom, she read little stories to them.” In this way, Avery became an early participant in her family’s literate activities.

Both Avery and Nicole described their frequent writing for school and the many constructive connections between family writing experiences or messages and school writing activities and expectations. For both girls, similar norms and day-to-day family experiences with education overlapped and aligned with the values, expectations, and teacher personalities they experienced at school. Their families’ ongoing access to higher education and knowledge of K-12 settings positioned Avery and Nicole as insiders, and they seemed to be enculturated with similar home and school values without necessarily being aware that others’ experiences navigating the two might differ. In Nicole’s case, it seems noteworthy that she left a low-performing public middle school after a year to seek a charter school setting that was both higher performing and appeared to serve a

population with less poverty than did the public middle school. Although Nicole and Avery did not discuss social or institutional factors such as poverty and school choice, both seemed to have benefitted from their parents' navigation of school options. Writing seemed to be a tool for self-expression, a way to connect with others, and a shared interest with family that also privileged these young adolescents in their academically-rigorous classrooms.

Narratives of Tension between Family/Cultural and School Writing Storylines

Whereas Ryan, Anastasia, Nicole, and Avery all described cooperative messages from home and school about writing, Bella's, Andrew's and Candace's narrations of the intersections between home and school featured some tensions or competing narratives. Each of these three young adolescents seemed to recognize these tensions and to integrate the tensions within their larger narratively writing stories. However, these tensions did give Bella, Andrew, and Candace a way to step outside their own experiences and to view institutional narratives about schooling with a critical distance or outsider perspective that was not apparent in the stories told by Ryan, Anastasia, Nicole, or Avery.

Bella: Balancing achievement and skepticism in writing for school. Bella enjoyed writing stories, poems, and songs in her free time and was enthusiastic about writing in general. However, Bella's perspective on school and school writing seemed to be more complicated. She sometimes expressed skepticism about the way writing was used in her classes and the games students and teachers played as they transacted with writing in the classroom. Competing narratives around writing and school seemed to give Bella a distinct, and often humorous, perspective on the purposes for her writing.

Bella, an 11-year-old White female, was beginning sixth grade during the time of this study. She attended middle school at a charter school that she had joined the previous year after transferring from her neighborhood public elementary school. She lived with her mother, who had returned to a university to pursue a degree in elementary education, and her father, who worked in food service. Her older brother and younger sister were important players in her literacy stories, as were her grandparents who also lived in the area.

Bella enjoyed writing both in school and out of school and shared that she would like to study fiction writing in college. Bella's mother told me she thought Bella might grow up to be an author. Narrating her writing experiences during our interviews seemed to have further increased the time and attention she devoted to writing outside of school. She explained, "Ever since I started doing these classes with you, I've been writing everywhere except for on the bathroom doors." Although our interviews were conversations more than classes, simply having the opportunity to discuss her writing life seemed to foster Bella's interest in writing.

Throughout her childhood Bella had written stories and poems both in and out of school. She recalled a particular poem entitled "Scars" about her soccer team. She explained that her coach's son was on the team and that, "I really didn't like his son. He was a showboat . . . I had the ball and he shoved up against me and he kicked me with the ball while I was on the ground and then he kicked it in the goal!" The poem "Scars" recounted the physical and emotional scars of this event, and the injustice she felt playing alongside the coach's son. She mentioned also dealing with injustice when writing a

more recent “autobiography about my love life that failed.” Bella explained that a boy she liked in class had secretly begun dating her friend and that she set out to expose them in a book that would “become a national bestseller at Barnes and Noble.” Unfortunately, she had to suspend work on that piece before it was complete because “my glittery purple pen ran out of ink . . . I was too busy shading in the ripped-apart heart.”

At one interview Bella shared a Halloween story for young children she was working on about a kitten named Pumpkin. “Now note that I didn't use big words,” she told me, “because [my readers] are six.” Bella explained that she had become very familiar with the children's book genre because she was an avid reader as a child herself with a particular interest in the *Fancy Nancy* series, and that she also repeatedly read books such as *Pig at Work* and *Princess and the Frog* to her younger sister when her sister had been potty training. These reading sessions were so extensive that at one point her sister began reciting the words on each page of her favorite books. Bella recalled, “I'm like, 'Daddy, Daddy! [My younger sister] is reading!' and he's like, 'I don't think she's reading, I think she's memorizing what you said.’” This everyday literacy activity within Bella’s household provided opportunities to engage with her family around reading.

Sometimes writing became a way to cope with her emotions. Bella recounted that she used the leftover pages at the end of school notebooks to journal “usually when I get really angry or ticked off with someone.” She sometimes wrote in the journals when she was upset as a way to calm down, but that she never intended to show the writing to anyone, particularly not the people she was writing about. Once she and her mother had

an argument and Bella let out her anger by describing the altercation in her journal, as well as adding some illustrations. “I was very mean to my mom in drawings,” she explained, “I gave her pointy teeth and Medusa hair.” After writing and drawing about the incident, Bella regained her composure. She noted that a few days later she forgave her mother and went back and “scratched out all the pictures.”

Coping with emotion was a purpose for which Bella used writing, and she shared that her grandfather used writing for similar purposes. He was writing about his experiences in the Army during the Vietnam War and told her that writing was a way to remember more details, but also that by writing something down “he can get it off his mind.” Her grandfather did not share that writing with Bella because he did not think it was appropriate for her and she wondered if she would ever be able to read his work. Bella seemed to recognize that her grandfather had intense emotions surrounding his experiences in Vietnam that had remained with him for many years and that his writing had a therapeutic quality.

Bella was an avid writer at home, but seemed more skeptical about the purposes of writing for school. She sometimes looked for ways to conserve effort or questioned teachers’ instructional purposes. She had written a report about Elvis Presley in third grade and, in fourth grade, she was assigned to complete another biography project. She spotted a book about Elvis in the school library and remembered she said to a friend, “Ooh. Elvis is up there. This will be an easy project for me. I’ve already done it!”

In Bella’s sixth grade social studies class the teacher assigned each student to prepare a current events report every Friday. Bella enjoyed reading her summaries aloud

to the class but described these assignments as her least favorite type of writing. She appeared skeptical of her teacher's requirements for the form:

Bella: I don't know why it is, but he likes the number four. We have to have at least four complete sentences on our test. We have to have at least four complete sentences on our current events. He says that you get everything you need done in four complete sentences.

Researcher: Do you agree? Do you think four sentences does it?

Bella: No. I say one.

Bella was strategic in her writing choices for school, expending significant effort when she found a project engaging or worthwhile, but devoting less energy to work that did not interest her. She explained that much of the writing at school felt like a waste of time, noting "if it's long and boring, I've probably done it at school." Bella shared that some projects teachers assigned bordered on absurdity, and that she believed they had motives beyond supporting their students' writing development. For example, her English language arts teacher assigned the class to "write a letter, to pretend we were the kidneys of someone, and we had to write a letter to our human body we were in, saying you need to take care of us." I asked why she thought the teacher had given this particular assignment and Bella explained, "She had to hurry up and get rid of the science part of Language Arts."

The kidney letter surfaced again in a later interview when Bella contrasted that assignment to the more purposeful work she believed she had done when she wrote a

screenplay at the Young Writers' Camp for a short video her team produced about avoiding Internet scams. She explained her perspective:

Bella: I like the writing that we did this summer, where we actually got to play with video cameras and walk around the building, because we wrote a screenplay, for Pete's sake. How many kids do that?

Researcher: Why do you prefer that over a letter from your kidneys?

Bella: My kidneys don't talk and I don't think they're pretty, and I don't think I'll get a million dollars for them.

Researcher: But you could see writing a screenplay as being like a career or something you could build?

Bella: People get money from that. People don't get money from getting letters from their kidneys.

Bella was an enthusiastic young writer who both drew ideas from her family interests and literacy experiences and shared her work with her parents and siblings. She willingly took on writing tasks that served her personal literacy goals, such as entertaining children with creative stories, exploring topics of interest, or processing and reflecting on her emotions. However, she sometimes approached school writing with less excitement and wondered if the advice teachers gave or the work they assigned carried meaning in the real world.

Andrew: Incongruous images of adulthood. Like Bella, Andrew exhibited some critical distance on the work he crafted for school. He often described his competitive nature and how he pushed himself to perform better than his classmates, but at the same time he appeared not fully to buy into the norms of school writing as he

experienced them. His life outside of school as a contributing member to a family farm and small business gave him what he described as a more mature perspective on middle school and the independence his family promoted at home appeared to carry over into his classroom persona.

Andrew was a 13-year-old White male who was beginning eighth grade at the time of our interviews. He attended the same charter school as Nicole, having transferred there from his more rural public school at the start of fourth grade. Andrew's family owned and operated a specialty livestock business on around 20 acres of land in a rural area. Andrew had three older siblings who were already adults, so he had lived most of his life as the only child in the home with his parents. He mentioned his father and older brothers from time to time, but his mother and older sister, in her late 20s at the time of the study, were the primary players in his family literacy stories.

Andrew noted how his home experiences involving caring for animals were quite different from those of his peers at the charter school. He said that his mother wanted him to be independent and that sharing the real-world responsibilities of caring for the family's livestock was one way she had fostered that independence. Sometimes classmates would complain about having to complete chores or take care of pets, but Andrew noted that having responsibilities for a large number of animals differed. He explained his view:

It sets me apart because, like, everyone, like, is kind of like, "Oh, we have a dog and we have to clean all this up, and I'm like, "I have 47 [animals]." One year there was a kid in our class he was like, "I only get paid \$3 a week and I have to

do all this!” And I’m like, “I get paid nothing and I do a whole lot more than that!” I’m just like, “You don’t get it.”

He had come to appreciate the routines of life on a farm and the ways his family depended on the animals for their livelihood and the animals depended on his family for their care. Taking on adult responsibilities seemed to shape Andrew’s perceptions of himself as more mature than his typical classmates. “Some people can skip out, like watch TV or something, but I can’t skip out. I have to be there.” Despite the time demands of being part of a farming family, Andrew seemed to embrace his work and contributions to their livestock business and to appreciate being included. His exposure to textual products related to a small business were evident and his future professional writing potentially included “sending emails and making progress reports, like how the business is going for that quarter or something.”

Andrew’s mother promoted his independence in caring for the family’s livestock and taking on more adult responsibilities in the business operations, and this preference for independence carried over to schoolwork as well. Andrew noted of his experience:

My mom really wants me to be independent. One of her pet peeves is someone at, especially at my age, someone whose parents still, like, check their homework every night. She’s just, like, “That’s crazy! You’re old enough to do your homework by yourself.”

Maintaining the website for the family business was an area in which Andrew’s mother enlisted his help. This real-world literacy activity offered opportunities for Andrew to understand his family’s business and to practice writing for audiences

interested in their livestock and products. Sometimes when the family attended trade shows, buyers mentioned that they liked recent changes in the design of the website. Andrew educated himself in how to use web design tools and templates and took on responsibility for updating the content and design of the site, such as refreshing the background or adding photos of new baby animals. He described his technology skills as more advanced than those of his mother who “has trouble turning on her phone, basically, so I kind of have to help her with all that sort of stuff.”

During the Young Writers’ Camp, Andrew supported his group with creating a website. His prior experience with the business website “made it a little easier because I didn’t have to become accustomed to any of the features and I could really just move stuff over and kind of make it the way it needed to be.” Although Andrew enjoyed maintaining the website, he did not anticipate doing web design professionally. He thought he would probably grow up to be “an engineer or something, because I’m really good at mathematics, so I’m thinking something along mathematics.”

By middle school, mathematics had become Andrew’s primary academic interest and he reported being enrolled in high school-level math in eighth grade and participating in a competitive math league. However, he remembered that in kindergarten his favorite activity had been writing. He recalled of his experience:

My teacher, she had these little cards, like purple was for writing, yellow was for the puzzles. She had different colors for different stuff. And my favorite was the purple; that was the writing. I remember the color. Every Monday I would always use my writing because I was, that’s what I was looking forward to She would sometimes let us trade, like some weeks, like the week of Christmas, she would let us trade to see what we wanted. I would always trade someone the

play thing for the writing There was a corner for the writing, there was the bookshelf and then there was a table and then there was, on the bookshelf, the paper that was like a long paper and the top half was for drawing. I never drew because I can't draw. And the bottom half was writing . . . most of my stories were maybe ten of those big pages put together.

This vivid image of the writing center in Andrew's kindergarten classroom stood out in his memory. He described how he often wrote stories featuring his older sister, a competitive equestrian who participated in several high-level national and international competitions. "I want to say she is like, she has always, like, been the inspiration for the family because she's the oldest and in a way she's made it the farthest in life, so to speak," he explained. Although Andrew remained somewhat interested in writing, "After kindergarten, the writing part of it kind of took a nose dive." Later in elementary school and into middle school the opportunities for free writing diminished and were replaced by "schoolwork, but not writing as much, like studying for tests and creating projects and stuff like that . . . just kind of studying." Andrew reported that during these years he rarely wrote either for school or at home and, although he remained involved with his sister's riding competitions, he no longer wrote stories about her.

In eighth grade Andrew joined his school writing club in which students posted their work to the *Teen Ink* website, an on-line literary magazine by and for young writers. Andrew credited his English language arts teacher as "the one that got me back into writing." He appreciated the element of choice in the *Teen Ink* writing prompts, explaining that "it's still a broad writing when you can go whichever way you want with it, it's not like a set in stone topic or anything."

In addition to writing stories and informational pieces for the *Teen Ink* club, Andrew seemed to be highly motivated to write informational texts that demanded technical language and sophisticated content. He seemed to associate this preference with the independent and mature persona he had developed at home. Some tensions around school writing surfaced as he pushed himself to perform at a level beyond his peers. He remembered working very hard on a sixth grade project for which he chose to research NASA. Although the requirement was for a three-page report, Andrew crafted a report that “took ten pages worth of typing.” He noted that most of his classmates had searched for just enough information to get by but that his project “really stuck out because [I] had put forth the effort to get the end result. And most people put forth the effort, but the amount of effort was not what I put forth.”

Andrew enjoyed doing rigorous work and felt his efforts paid off with high grades and recognition of his achievements. Andrew pushed himself to produce sophisticated work, even if that was out of line with the expectations of his teachers and peers. In his family and family business, Andrew seemed to maintain relationships with adults and to see himself as trying to move from the periphery of childhood into an adult world. This preference for disciplinary or professional knowledge intended for an adult audience influenced Andrew’s approach to school work. Andrew valued effort both in the quantity of the information he presented and in the quality of the sources he included. In discussing the STEM fair project about an eco-friendly battery, he dismissed some sources as being “for kindergartners” and noted that the he and his partner,

Really want to go to, like, the college stuff because that's where you're going to find the most information I've read some college textbooks that would make a lot of people cry, but I think I can understand a lot of the stuff like that because it just takes patience and sometimes you have to read back over it a few times.

Tensions also appeared when Andrew's interest in technical terminology he associated with the real world of adults intersected with the vocabulary lessons typical in his school. "My vocabulary is really small, so I just kind of just use simple words all of the time," Andrew claimed. In the few minutes preceding this comment, Andrew had used the words *tone*, *context*, and *genre* in discussing his writing, so I pressed him to clarify what he meant by having a small vocabulary. "I don't use big words like 'exquisite' or 'excruciating.' I'd rather use five small words than one big word . . . some people use big vocabulary [from the vocabulary lessons] and to me there are words that really don't make sense where a simple word would fit." Andrew explained that he did not want to "look like you're trying to show your own vocabulary off" preferring instead to "just kind of keep it simple." In this way, the teacher's attempts to introduce more sophisticated vocabulary did not mesh with Andrew's beliefs about the sort of vocabulary adults used in the real world. Although Andrew worked to exceed his teachers' rigorous expectations, he was also purposeful in how he positioned himself through his language choices.

Candace: Changing teachers' expectations through family and cultural narratives. Candace, a 12-year-old African American female, was entering seventh grade at an academically-oriented charter school to which she was admitted from the

waitlist just before the school year started. She had attended her neighborhood Title I public middle school the previous year, and we remembered seeing one another when I had spent time in her sixth grade English language arts class observing an undergraduate student intern I supervised. Candace explained that although her experiences in the public middle school had been generally positive, she applied to the charter school because she was seeking an educational setting with peers who were more engaged in class and more focused on academics. Candace lived with her mother, who worked in corporate training, and her father, a former professional athlete turned coach and youth athletic program leader. She also had a sister who was several years older and no longer lived at home but who maintained close contact with the family.

In addition to her immediate family, Candace's grandmother was featured prominently in her literacy stories as a loving teacher and mentor. She also applied lessons about high expectations handed down by a beloved coach who had been a father-figure to her parents. Candace intertwined stories of this grandfather-figure's family with those of her biological family to craft a more inclusive cultural story of African Americans in the South, striving for access to education and achieving excellence by standing on the shoulders of those who came before them. Candace described the coach as "my grandfather" and explained that "I see characteristics of him in myself." While other participants narrated their writing experiences with reference to members of their families with whom they interacted directly, Candace narrated her story over a much longer time period that included several generations. Candace explained of her grandfather:

Was always pushed to be somebody because he grew up . . . when segregation was going on, he wanted to be a dentist and he went far, far from that. He ended up coming here and making sure that his whole family knew, you know, get your education and don't settle for something. He taught my dad don't ever settle just because you're different than somebody else and don't let anybody's expectations fall because of your appearance. If anything, try to raise them. He always said something like, "Raise [your expectations] to the clouds, and if the clouds break then it'll rain on them and not you."

Several of Candace's family members had been involved as students, instructors, and coaches at Historically Black Colleges and Universities over two generations and their keen commitment to education stood out in her narratives. Her stories were not delineated by her own lifetime but stretched forward and backward through the continuity of family.

Candace frequently discussed her family's academic and writing expectations for her, as well as the ways in which she worked to raise what she often perceived as teachers' low initial expectations for her intellectual ability and achievement. She reported feeling greater tensions between social and educational/personal values at her previous middle school, a diverse Title I school with substantial disparities in End of Grade test performance between African American students and their White peers. She found social and educational expectations more closely aligned at her new school. Despite the significant tensions throughout her educational career, Candace seemed to draw on family and cultural stories of resistance, resilience, and overcoming to bring narrative coherence to her school contexts and to view them as strength-building rather than detrimental.

Both of Candace's parents and her grandmother acted as role models for her, offering advice and guidance about the knowledge, values, and dispositions that engender academic success. "My mother's whole line of women were teachers," Candace explained. Her mother had also worked as a teacher for a decade before entering her current profession. My family members "have always been the ones to tell me, you know, 'Education is important.' And my dad would ask me every day what college I want to go to."

Candace observed her mother preparing presentations and noted her exacting approach, making sure even the margins and indentation in her work were precise. Her mother gave her the advice, "If you just keep that work ethic you're going to do a great job. Don't do everything because you're trying to get it done. Do things to the fullest like the president is going to read them." At her new school, Candace undertook a long-term research project about Jack London. The teacher helped students tackle the project by providing a timeline and description of each stage of the project. However, Candace explained that she already used similar strategies that her mother had taught her. "My mom's been teaching me about planning for a long time," she reflected. "Like, if you have this due, you know, in a week, you should probably gradually work on it, and sometimes you have to come down to, okay, what's due tomorrow. But she always taught me not to procrastinate."

As her mother worked, she often showed Candace how to use word processing and presentation programs on her computer, pointing out specific functions such as how to highlight text or manipulate the formatting. "I would always just be an observer

because I like to see how things are done and how to do them correctly, things that will get me further,” she explained. Candace was interested in technology and enjoyed introducing her peers to new web tools and formats. “I’ve always wanted to use the skills I’ve learned over the years to help other people instead of just keeping them to myself and having other people struggle with everything,” she said.

As a professional athlete and coach, Candace’s father had developed focus and resilience and worked to support Candace’s athletic and academic success through these characteristics. She explained how many of the lessons her father taught her on the basketball court transferred into her approach to school work, social interactions, and life in general. Her father taught her to practice hard, to “let stuff roll off your back” and when she made mistakes to correct them but “don’t let that stuff, like, make you feel like you’re any less knowledgeable.” They frequently played sports, particularly basketball, together and this was a time that he shared family stories, offered advice for being successful in life, and discussed her schoolwork and current events. He also taught Candace to stay true to her beliefs rather than trying to gain favor with peers by telling her “at the end of the day, it’s not about what people think of you just because they don’t know what to think of themselves.” Candace explained how her mother’s precision and her father’s resilience helped her to perform well in school but also to weather setbacks.

Candace and her grandmother maintained a close relationship that included a great deal of written correspondence. Her grandmother had taught in elementary school, high school, and an Historically Black University. When Candace was in elementary school, her grandmother had experienced a prolonged illness, and Candace would send

her letters and stories to keep her spirits up. They exchanged letters often and developed a pattern of Candace writing, her grandmother editing her work, and Candace making corrections. She recalled sending her grandmother a story she had written about birds.

Candace explained her experience:

I would always write her stories and send them in the mail. And she would always send them back with, like, red pen all over it. And then I'm like, what is this? I thought this was for your pleasure. I didn't know that you were going to be editing my paper. She always would send it back with like grammar and everything, and I would send it back in, like, a typed copy.

Engaging with texts and writing was not only a way to develop Candace's skill set but also helped Candace and her grandmother develop a close relationship. Her grandmother often called and asked about her homework and classes, and she talked with Candace about the importance of presenting refined work without grammar errors.

Everyday interactions such as visits with family often took on an educational focus in Candace's household. Her parents and grandparents would remind her that "your great grandparents didn't get the chance to go to high school and do all those things, so it's very important for you to do as much as you can to get a good education." She noted that when she was small her parents and grandmother would quiz her on spelling words when she was playing basketball, riding in the car, or waiting at a restaurant. Someone might "knock on the bathroom door and say, 'spell Christmas!'" Her father sometimes made a game of spelling for Candace when they played basketball together, prompting her to take a free throw for each letter of a word.

Candace enjoyed doing some writing outside of school, but more often discussed her writing as it related to school assignments. Even as a young elementary student, Candace preferred to give a polished, complete response in her work rather than showing her work in progress. Like her mother, Candace claimed “to this day I’m the most, like, I am the highest form of perfectionism ever.” She found her primary grades teachers supportive and encouraging, but by mid-elementary school began to encounter teachers who did not expect her to perform near the top of the class. In third grade she resisted showing her work in math and, after completing the problem, would erase all her computations and leave only the correct answer. What she viewed as perfectionism, showing only the completed response rather than the messy process of working the problem, was interpreted differently by her teacher. Where other students showed their work, on Candace’s paper only “the little remains” of pencil marks were visible. Her teacher would sometimes hold her work up to the light and say “Now class, can you see any work on this?” Candace noted, “I would get the right answer, but I didn’t have any work.”

Candace reported that she did not like being singled out or having her work held up for the class. “I kind of felt both ways about it,” she explained, “It’s kind of embarrassing, but then again I got the right answer. So it’s a little bit embarrassing for the teacher if she didn’t really prove anything with having, you know, I didn’t get the wrong answer.” Although she found the correct answers to her math problems, Candace did not earn top grades at first because she erased her work. She remembers her mother

telling her, “Okay, if you want to keep getting this grade, then just don’t, just don’t show your work.”

Candace eventually decided to stop erasing her work, and her scores improved. However, by that time, she felt that the teacher and her classmates had developed low expectations for her and underestimated her academic potential. When the first quarter honor roll assembly was held at her school, Candace reported that her classmates “expected me to not, like, even get close to honor roll. Everybody is like, ‘Mmm, oh, she’s going to be the only one left on the floor.’ And it turns out I was the first one to go up.” Ever since this experience, Candace noted that she “always kind of wanted to go outside of all the expectations and then, you know, prove people wrong about what they think.” Candace continued to encounter teachers with low expectations as she moved through elementary and middle school. “I think my teachers, some teachers, I’m not saying all my teachers, expected me to be like the lowest person on the totem pole, but I think I definitely raised their expectations very, very high.”

Candace’s narratives of family intersected with those of school in ways that sometimes produced tension. Whereas she saw herself as part of a multi-generational narrative of educational excellence, teachers who held low expectations positioned her differently. Despite some teachers’ misperceptions of her abilities, Candace remained an engaged and dedicated student who worked to exceed academic expectations.

Narratives of Conflict between Storylines of Family and Storylines of School

Whereas Bella, Andrew, and Candace narrated stories that revealed some tensions at the intersection of family narratives and school narratives, Katherine’s stories showed

outright conflict. Katherine struggled to reconcile the two and seemed to reject school narratives and to circumvent school in her writing development.

Katherine: Missed opportunities for home/school connections. Katherine was a 13-year-old White female beginning eighth grade at the time of the study. She lived with her mother, a cash applications analyst, her step-father, an automotive technician, and her high school-aged brother. Although her parents separated when she was young, Katherine had maintained intermittent contact with her father until his death several months before we met at Young Writers' Camp. Katherine explained that she had attended her neighborhood public middle school as a sixth grader. This Title I middle school was experiencing district intervention following years of poor test scores and in seventh grade Katherine attended a nearby opt-out school while her neighborhood school was restructured. In eighth grade, she returned to the neighborhood middle school, which had been reconstituted with new administrators hired and all the teachers reapplying for positions. The school continued to serve a high percentage of minority and economically disadvantaged students.

“The teachers all got fired,” Katherine said, “Except for the mean ones. Reconstituted everyone, but they kept all the mean teachers.” Although Katherine began her eighth grade year there, by our final interview in late November she had withdrawn from school and her mother had left her job to homeschool Katherine full time. Katherine explained that she had experienced several confrontations with teachers and that on her final day she witnessed, as she described, a teacher insinuating in front of the class that a male classmate was homosexual and then, when he became upset, cursed, and

kicked a trashcan, she wrote him an office referral. “It’s getting really bad,” Katherine explained, “So I was, like, ‘I’m out.’”

As Katherine recalled elementary school, she often told stories of being misunderstood by teachers and of becoming increasingly disengaged with formal education. I interviewed Katherine at her home, and she showed me her room, featuring shelves and a nightstand crowded with books. At the time of our interviews, she was reading the challenging text *The Other Boleyn Girl* by Philippa Gregory and using Wikipedia and other websites to build her background knowledge about Henry VIII and the other historical figures in the book. Her writing was sophisticated and suggested deep familiarity with the structure and organization of novels. She talked about author Richelle Mead and how she had first learned about fan-fiction, now one of her primary hobbies, through Mead’s website. As a teacher and literacy researcher, Katherine appeared to me to be a capable and enthusiastic reader who was unintimidated by complex texts as long as they were of interest to her.

However, Katherine’s stories about reading in school were contentious. She was extremely anxious about reading in public and described how reading aloud had been very stressful for her as a child. Even as an eighth grader she appeared to have some speech issues that made reading aloud difficult, which she described by saying “sometimes my tongue gets tongue-tied” and noting that “my mom says my mouth can’t keep up with my brain.” In first grade, Katherine remembered having to read aloud one-on-one with the teacher in a standardized assessment. “I got so scared.” Katherine explained. “I was scared that I would mess up, and I did most of the time. I guess it

turned out [in the test score] that I didn't know how to read. Well, I've been reading since I was three."

As a result of the reading assessment, Katherine was placed in a remedial reading class, which both she and her mother thought was unfair. "I do know how to read," Katherine asserted, "I just can't read out loud." She continued struggling with reading assessments that were linked to oral reading and remained in the remedial reading group through third grade. She explained that she sometimes tuned out because the answers to questions were obvious to her, but that then she got in trouble with the reading teacher who told her not to stare up because "the answers aren't on the ceiling." Sometimes she was sent out of the reading class for inattentive or off-task behavior and said she "hid in the bathroom because I was scared."

Katherine explained that in the remedial reading group, "I felt stupid. I felt like I was wasting my time. I could be learning something else." In middle school, her anxiety about reading aloud persisted, she avoided it, spoke in a muffled voice, and became flushed whenever she had to read aloud in class. On one occasion in middle school a teacher tried to compensate for her quiet reading by having her read aloud into a microphone in a technology-enhanced classroom, which she found embarrassing because it "made my voice sound dumb." She did not recall ever being tested for speech issues or receiving support with speech. "They [teachers] never asked me," Katherine explained, "They never asked me if I could read in my head, if I read better in my head."

In addition to what Katherine viewed as inappropriate reading instruction, she reported very minimal writing instruction at school. "I hate writing for school," she

declared, “because they’re not fun, like, you don’t get to make up your own stories.” She said that she had never studied argumentative or persuasive writing and did not recall learning how to do research, but had recently been working on an essay with a “thesis segment” and had learned about first, second, and third-person point of view. In science class students’ writing primarily included copying definitions for science terms, which Katherine said “wasn’t fun because I don’t like copying definitions in the book, and I don’t really like science much.” Although Katherine did have some writing experiences at school, she struggled to make either personal or instructional meaning from these activities. She explained that if she could learn something more valuable in school, she would like to learn “how to really write a book and how to survive in real life.”

Although she recalled minimal writing instruction in school and struggled to conceptualize the purposes of school writing, Katherine was a voracious reader and writer who pursued several out-of-school pathways for accessing information about how to write. She enjoyed reading fantasy novels about vampires and werewolves and used these novels as mentor texts for her stories on similar topics. On-line fan-fiction was one of Katherine’s favorite hobbies, and she enjoyed posting her own stories, reading and responding to others’ work, and engaging in discussion about writing with other participants on the website. She reported that her teachers were unaware of her writing outside of school, and she rarely recalled getting feedback from a teacher on her writing beyond a letter grade. She appreciated the constructive feedback she received from other fan-fiction writers, however, because it “makes my writing better. I follow all their advice.” She particularly respected feedback from strong writers on the site whose work

got a lot of attention. Some of these writers had read Katherine's work and given her suggestions such as re-reading texts several times to eliminate mistakes, using a thesaurus to increase variety in word choice, adding detail, and avoiding crafting "Mary Sue" characters who are flawless heroines. Katherine explained that her approach to creating villains in her writing had shifted as a result of her participation in fan-fiction forums. "If you're going to have a villain, you have to give them a bad background, like they've got molested and they want revenge on everybody that molests people." She explained that adding this nuance and depth made her characters more believable.

Katherine had recently forayed into persuasive writing, presenting a letter to the School Board protesting the district dress code policy or Standard Mode of Dress (SMOD) in which students at some schools, including hers, were required to wear solid color polo shirts and khaki pants. She wanted to highlight in particular that the policy was enacted in schools with a high percentage of working class and poor students but not in schools with wealthier student populations. Katherine had looked at newspaper articles or letters and searched for other people's work protesting dress codes. "I looked at how [the authors] built their structure, and how they did it." Following the School Board meeting, she was interviewed by a reporter from the local newspaper and had maintained contact with her, even asking her for advice and mentoring on how to become a professional writer.

Despite Katherine's interest in writing, the ample time she devoted to writing, and her capacity to refine her work based on constructive feedback, Katherine rarely wrote for school and said that teachers did not know she wrote outside of school. She explained

that her teachers likely thought she was “more talented” than other students, but went on to explain, “the kids at my school are kind of ghetto. They don’t like to write.” I asked if she would like more feedback from her teachers, but she responded saying, “I don’t trust them.”

Katherine often talked about being sent out of the classroom for infractions such as laughing, not having a pencil, or not tucking in her shirt in accordance with the dress code. In our final interview, when Katherine had transitioned to homeschooling, she noted, “It’s pretty cool. It’s nice not having the teachers yell at us all the time.” She added that although her mother could be strict and did get angry at times, she preferred working with her to working with teachers. Her mother understood the challenges Katherine faced in school and noted that “teachers are mean. My mom doesn’t really like teachers a lot.” After a pause she seemed to remember that I was a teacher and added, “You’re okay.”

Katherine’s stories about writing in school seemed to conflict with the stories she told of her out of school experiences. She mentioned her mother more than 70 times in our interviews, and it appeared that Katherine viewed her mother as an advocate and protector, a person who saw her true potential even when teachers did not. In Katherine’s stories her mother helped tell and retell the narrative of her young life not as a story of loss or victimhood, but as one of strength, of standing up in the face of oppression, and of overcoming life’s challenges. Katherine and I completed all of our interviews in her home with her mother working in the next room, and at one point she peeked in and

handed us a paper with a child's scrawling writing and crayon colored hearts in the margins. "I love my mommy," it read, "I like my mom. I love you."

Katherine's mother explained that she had saved this letter, written by Katherine when she was around six or seven years old. She said the letter was a kind of apology Katherine wrote to her during a time of intense stress for the family as Katherine's mother worked to raise two young children on her own. Her mother entered our interview briefly not only as a character in Katherine's retellings but as a participant herself. She explained the saved letter saying, "I was a single mom for a long time, and it got to the point where I was, like, 'Look, guys. We're a team. We've got to work together as a team, and if you're not going to listen to the things that I say to you, you can address me in writing.'" After what she remembers as a couple of days of silence, Katherine brought her this note and worked to be a better listener.

Katherine's mother advocated for her children's education. Katherine seemed to perceive her mother as someone willing to confront school officials and stated, "The schools are afraid of my mom." Katherine's mother met with teachers and administrators, worked as a parent organizer, petitioned the School Board, and shared her opinions with journalists who covered school issues. She was particularly vocal about unequal distribution of resources between schools in wealthy versus working class/poor areas of the district, inadequately maintained or dangerous school facilities in disadvantaged neighborhoods, unjust application of discipline against poor students, and lack of access to qualified or effective teachers in schools serving low-income students.

Katherine also participated in advocacy work, explaining that her mother “encouraged me to stand up for other kids.” For example, Katherine overcame her anxiety about reading in public in order to protest the dress code in a letter she read aloud before the School Board. Katherine explained her perspective and showed familiarity with the specifics of her argument, asking me if I knew about Title I schools and free and reduced lunch and the way schools with these markers often had the restrictive dress code not applied at schools in affluent areas. “They’re making us feel bad about being poor and stuff,” Katherine explained. She commented that after she read her letter to members of the School Board, none of them commented or acknowledged her thoughts. I asked how they might respond to her idea that the restrictive dress code was required only in schools serving disadvantaged students. “They’re hard to read, but I think they would deny it. I guess they just don’t like poor people,” she said.

Katherine appreciated her mother’s advocacy on her behalf and on behalf of her classmates. I asked if teachers ever supported students in using writing for advocacy or teaching them how advocate for themselves. “No,” Katherine explained, “They tell us off for standing up for ourselves. And you can’t, well, you have to stand up for yourselves, because you don’t want to get mistreated.” Throughout her schooling, Katherine seemed to encounter situations related to reading and writing in which she was misunderstood or silenced. Although she did not find much meaning in the writing she completed for school, she actively sought out other venues for learning to write and for using her writing.

Reconciling Storylines of Family and School

All eight participants in this study recounted stories about their families when asked about their writing experiences. Family members served as influential characters in the stories of how these young adolescents learned about writing, purposes they found purposes for writing, and how their writing lives intersected with their school lives. Drawing on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) concept of the three-dimensional inquiry space, the place of school, in which many of these narrated writing experiences originally took place, surfaced as important. The types of experiences participants had, the ways that they were positioned and socialized, and the compounding effects of repeated experiences over time lent complexity to their experience of writing in school.

The participants' parents often worked to help their children access educational opportunities in which writing and learning would be valued and developed. Keeping in mind that all of these participants were recruited through a writing camp, another literate setting that they and/or their parents had pursued, it seemed notable that many of these parents attempted to change their children's experiences and outcomes by changing the settings in which they learned.

Of the eight participants, only two—Anastasia and Ryan—attended their districted public schools. Both of these schools served an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body. Anastasia and Ryan's parents may have been purposeful in selecting these schools when they acquired housing in the district, but neither participant mentioned considering magnet, charter, or private school options for their education. The remaining six students all had some movement in their schools

toward settings they perceived as more rigorous or offering higher quality instruction. Avery had attended a magnet elementary school and then qualified for and attended the public middle school for advanced academics. Nicole, Bella, Andrew, and Candace all attended charter schools. Nicole and Candace left lower performing public schools in search of more rigorous schools where they had an easier time fitting in with peers and experienced higher teacher expectations. Andrew reported having enjoyed his more rural public elementary school, but his family believed the charter school offered broader academic opportunities. Katherine attended the opt out school, also a Title I school, during seventh grade while her neighborhood school was reconstituted and then withdrew from district schools altogether in order to be homeschooled. Family members invested effort not only in gaining admission to these schools, but also in the daily maintenance of this access, such as driving sometimes more than 30 minutes each way to drop off and pick up students at charter or magnet schools. Despite financial constraints, Katherine's mother left her job to homeschool her daughter. Purposeful movement from school to school to gain what families perceived as better educational opportunities resulted in shifts in the type of writing experiences students lived and told.

Although information about family financial situations was not requested in this study, participants appeared to come from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Of the students whose families changed and selected their schools, most seemed to move not only toward more rigorous academics but also away from schools that served predominately high poverty student populations. The socioeconomic status of the

individual child making the move seemed less salient than the general population they were leaving behind.

Students who attended schools serving few economically disadvantaged students, or those that served students from a broad range of socioeconomic statuses, seemed to experience writing instruction that was markedly different in quantity and quality than their peers attending schools that served primarily economically disadvantaged students. For example, at the magnet elementary, Avery remembered frequent opportunities for research, writing, and presenting her work. Ryan discussed multiple types of writing opportunities, from reports to stories to comic book creation. Andrew and Nicole both mentioned writing daily, researching controversial topics, and engaging in debates in English language arts class at their charter school. Candace had experienced some writing opportunities during sixth grade at her public middle school but reported having more engaging, rigorous, and long-term writing projects once she moved to the charter school. Katherine recalled rarely being asked to write in her schools that served high poverty populations and often had to look beyond school for writing opportunities and instruction.

Although the small number of participants in this study does not constitute a sample size that would warrant generalizations about certain schools or types of schools, participants' experiences do seem to illustrate larger trends in writing research. When Nicole and Candace discussed making the transition to charter schools and away from lower performing public middle schools, both noted changes in the type of writing

instruction they experienced. Candace worked on a multi-week research project about Jack London at her new school and reported:

I don't know what [the public middle school] is doing, but I never really had done anything like [this research project]. It was work, but it didn't really feel like, ugh, I've got to do a research paper. I was a little bit more excited It was my first thing that I actually get to do at a new school to show everybody, you know, I didn't just drop in here and not know what to do. I caught on.

Similarly, Nicole described wanting “some more independence” and found writing at her new school rewarding because she “got deeper into thinking” and “got challenged more at this school.” At the charter school, her teacher invited students to express their opinions and engaged them with thought-provoking topics such as racism, plagiarism, and the relative merits of laws that promoted good health but infringed upon personal freedoms. At her public middle school in sixth grade, Nicole recalled that writing typically consisted of short responses:

We were doing a lot of stuff in our books; they'd have all these questions and it'd just sort of be boring . . . it was just not really fun at all. . . . Pretty much, like everybody should have the same answer and it wasn't really, I don't think really anybody liked it. I think that's really why some people don't like writing because they haven't gotten exposed to maybe a different teaching of writing.

At her diverse public middle school, Anastasia talked in great detail about how her English Language Arts teacher worked with her students to extend their reading and writing abilities by building “metacognition and using thinking stems” to tackle challenging text. Her teacher welcomed students' ideas and opinions and used writing as a tool to solicit their in-put, such as by asking students to complete “buzz books” to share

the novels they were reading and to make connections to their own experiences and ideas. Although Anastasia described herself as a quiet student who preferred to work alone, she enjoyed the opportunities her teacher provided to express her opinions about classroom texts in writing and in discussion with her peers.

In contrast, Katherine had attended low performing schools throughout her educational career and the writing experiences she narrated revealed the constraints of this environment. It is unclear from this study whether or not Katherine's teachers were bounded by restrictive curriculum, lacked resources or support, struggled with management, or were less qualified than the teachers of other participants. However, the experiences through which Katherine's understanding of school writing were forged were marked by minimal writing learning, disengagement, and disconnection with or a sense of being disliked and misunderstood by teachers she encountered. Encouraged by her mother's advocacy work, Katherine pursued venues beyond school through which she might make her voice heard, such as presenting in opposition to the dress code before the School Board, being interviewed by the local newspaper, or crafting her own articles that highlighted her lived experiences and questioned the inequalities present in her school experiences.

The contexts within which these young adolescents experienced writing and understood themselves as writers varied, and social and institutional forces seemed to be at play in both family and school narratives. The types of writing experiences in which these young adolescents recounted varied greatly between school types, with schools serving primarily low-income student populations having limited writing instruction and

writing instruction that valued standardized responses over individualized responses. Despite their differential experiences in school, these young adolescents shared an abiding interest in language, which is the focus of Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

STORYLINES OF LANGUAGE

As young adolescent participants narrated their experiences writing and learning to write, they paid particular attention to issues of language exposure, appropriation, and use. They were exposed to and appropriated language—both the language that formed the content of their writing and the words they used to talk about writing—in physical contexts, i.e. the places they went and people they interacted with in those places. They also were exposed to and appropriated language through what I will call textual contexts, i.e. the imaginary spaces of written texts such as novels, and scripted/spoken texts such as television programs. Textual contexts were often shaped by physical contexts. For example, a participant might experience the textual context of a scientific article within the physical context of a science classroom. In this example, the language students appropriated was dependent both upon the printed language available in the article and by the talk among students and teachers that constituted the use of that article. Perhaps in more subtle ways, physical contexts were also shaped by textual contexts. For example, in a fan-fiction community, the language of the genre also informed the discussion among members of the community. Because the conceptual frame of this study views writing, text, and talking about writing all as forms of social action, participants' language exposure, appropriation, and use was influenced by the people, cultures, purposes, and

expectations with whom these young adolescents interacted within both physical and textual contexts. The boundaries between physical and textual contexts were permeable.

Through the physical and textual contexts in which young adolescents encountered language, they took up not only denotative meanings but also connotations of new vocabulary. By interpreting the norms of physical and textual contexts, participants gathered language as well as senses of the how and why one might use particular language within a context. In this way, participants' growing language resources encompassed both word meanings and the social action that accompanied their exposure to language and their use of language. These language resources, i.e. the words, phrasing, style, and social/historical meanings of language that participants appropriated, constituted both individual knowledge and knowledge distributed across the people they encountered in their various worlds. As participants expanded their language resources, they often transferred language appropriated in one context to use in another context. For example, a student might collect language from a character on television, but then apply the words, style, or phrasing of that language to her academic writing.

Language is the raw material of writing, but it is also the conduit through which these young adolescents learned and communicated about writing. Therefore, exposure to, appropriation of, and use of language resources comprised both the content of their writing and the ways in which they described or made meaning of their writing.

Language and Context

The middle school years appeared to be a period during which participants became increasingly attuned to the ways language may be targeted for different audiences, such as at parents, peers, or teachers. They described how they also varied language use when writing for different purposes, such as fiction versus nonfiction writing, writing for academic assignments in general, and writing for specific disciplines. Participants made decisions about language use based on both explicit rules, such as grammar lessons or writing requirements taught in school, and on unstated guidelines, such as avoiding overly emotional or opinionated statements in school writing, that they inferred through interaction in the social worlds of their classrooms.

The context of these activities was central for these young writers because it shaped the language resources to which they were exposed and had the opportunity to appropriate, as well as providing purposes and opportunities for language use. They were influenced by their experiences and the opportunities they had to participate in writing communities, both in and out of school. The language they appropriated and the ways they chose to use their language resources varied depending on the communities with which they interacted. Moreover all participants attended publicly funded schools (either traditional or charter) in the same state, all of which claimed to use the Common Core State Standards. Their writing experiences and writing communities were, however, starkly different. In some school contexts, young adolescents had the opportunity to appropriate and use language rich with literary terminology, genre-specific vocabulary, and words used to discuss the craft and structure of writing. In other classrooms that

featured little writing or discussion of writing, students had minimal access to those language resources.

Reading and Language Appropriation

Reading, both in and out of school, was often cited by participants as their greatest source of information on how to write. From these textual contexts, young adolescents were exposed to and appropriated language resources and expanded their vocabularies. They drew on mentor texts including novels, newspaper articles, science magazines, textbooks, and fan-fiction and described how they not only replicated the language in these exemplar forms but also synthesized or repurposed those words for other writing tasks. Participants read for pleasure and for school assignments, but they also read as collectors of language and ways of writing, scavenging useful words and ways from the texts they encountered. As Andrew explained, “after you start writing, you read stories a little differently than you did before.”

Language Appropriation and Use between Textual Contexts

Ryan used language resources he collected from reading comics and superhero stories and from viewing superhero movies to inform his writing of a superhero story for school. In this way, he transferred language resources from one textual context to another. Ryan completed an assignment in which students were asked to write a story about a superhero that featured five characters. He created a hero named “No Name” who could fly, had laser vision, and possessed super strength. No Name battled a villain who was “an underwater, like, lizard kind of a thing, kind of like in *Spiderman*, like the green lizard, like he lived in the sewers.” The hero, who was very serious, was assisted

by a wisecracking sidekick who Ryan described as “like Robin, but not athletic, just smart and skinny” while the villain’s sidekick was “kind of dumb” and the villain “always had to correct him . . . like in *Pinky and the Brain*” [an animated Warner Brothers show]. Superhero books and comic books were some of Ryan’s favorite things to read, and he was able to use language resources for his school assignment that he appropriated in his out-of-school reading. He did not mention exact vocabulary that he transferred between the two textual contexts, but he did draw on genre conventions such as the serious language used by the hero and the wisecracking language used by the sidekick. He liked the assignment but thought it was a little unfair because “the boys did [know more about superheroes], except there’s a couple of girls that, like, they’re big *Wonder Woman* fans and they like a couple comics.” In this situation, Ryan clearly recognized his outside interest in comics and superheroes as giving him an advantage in tackling this type of writing because he understood the language type and phrasing that belonged in a superhero story.

Like Ryan, Avery also drew from multiple textual contexts and used those language resources to craft a text of her own. During the Young Writers’ Camp, Avery wrote a children’s book entitled *Mistaeks Happen* [sic] about a girl who lived in a perfect world but who one day made a mistake during math class. As Avery explained, “They took her into scientific testing and everything to see what was wrong with her, but then they realized that mistakes help people learn, and if there are no mistakes then people don’t learn anything.” Avery explained that she wanted to model her work on rhyming children’s books, but that she also “likes *The Hunger Games* a lot and wanted to do like a

utopia/dystopia. Then I thought, why don't I put them together?" She looked for common ground between the genres and realized that in "most children's books, there's a moral, and so in most dystopias there's one thing that's specifically wrong with that world and so that can kind of be the moral." Avery synthesized the language resources she brought from the textual context of rhyming children's stories and the textual context of dystopian literature, deploying those resources to craft a text that used the language of both. Given the freedom to create a text of her choice in the camp setting, Avery effectively combined these two genres familiar from her reading into a single written product.

Although Avery's synthesis of language resources was effective in writing her children's book, she also explained that appropriating language resources from one textual context and applying them in another textual context could be complicated. She had recently checked out *Brandwashed* by Martin Lindstrom from the adult nonfiction section at her library and was learning how corporations manipulate consumers through advertising. She was interested in trying her own nonfiction writing that persuaded readers through analysis and critique but noted that before she tried it, "I think I'd have to know a lot about the topic." Avery seemed comfortable applying surface features of nonfiction texts and language of argumentation, but she was constrained by novice-level content vocabulary. These examples suggest that students need layered language resources in order to craft texts of their own. Although Avery felt comfortable using the language of argument or words that signaled an author's attempts to persuade, she also needed language to describe and explain the topic at hand.

Like Ryan and Avery, Katherine also worked to transfer language resources from one textual context to another. Katherine had a particular interest in vampire novels and was able to appropriate language resources from her reading and apply them to her writing of vampire stories. She especially liked Richelle Mead's *Vampire Academy* series and explained that, in addition to reading those, she searched for other information about vampires from books and websites. She collected words to describe vampires' appearances and habits to indicate to the savvy reader that a character just might be a vampire. Katherine had many language resources for writing about vampires consisting of genre-specific vocabulary and norms of language use within that textual context.

Katherine's robust knowledge of the textual context of vampire stories was clear in her work at the Young Writers' Camp. Katherine wrote a vampire story that featured a strong and independent female protagonist modeled on Rose Hathaway, the main character in the *Vampire Academy* series, who "knew how to beat a bad guy's butt." She preferred strong female protagonists like Rose Hathaway to the virginal Bella Swan from the *Twilight* series and explained that when she wrote fan-fiction and vampire stories she modeled her protagonists on Rose. "I make them not weak and know how to defend themselves. And actually care about their friends, unlike Bella Swan, and not all up in the hot guy's face and stuff." she said. Because she had deep understanding of the textual context of vampire stories, Katherine was able to notice nuances in the ways language was used to characterize female protagonists and to make choices about the language she would apply to her own characters.

At the Young Writers' Camp, Katherine wrote the opening chapters of a novel about Rosalie, a girl dealing with her parents' divorce, her move to a different town, and her first day at a new school. In the excerpt below, Rosalie meets another student, Adrienne, who introduces her to the new school – and to life as a vampire.

Adrienne looked around and then looked back at me and sighed, “Do you want me to show you to your room?”

“*Room?* As in homeroom?”

Adrienne gave me a weird look. “Well, no. This is a boarding school.”

“*Boarding school?*” I screeched. Mom never said anything about a *boarding school*. Was this morning my last time with my mom and little brother and sisters? What about dad and my brother, Oliver? Did they know about this?

Adrienne rolled her eyes. “Well, yeah. It’s an immortal boarding school. Didn’t you know that?”

Then I noticed something I hadn’t before. Adrienne had *fangs*. I could’ve sworn that Victoria had wings poking out of her back. And was that a cattail peeking out of Caterina’s pants?

The last thing I saw was Adrienne’s fangs before I blacked out.

Not only does Katherine demonstrate content knowledge about vampires in this story, she also showcases her familiarity with writing dialogue, building suspense, and using a first person narrator within a textual context. Although these are generic skills that students might learn and practice in school, Katherine did not recall writing narrative in school and explained, “I get it from reading a lot of books, of course.” Katherine’s exposure to the textual context of vampire novels and the language relevant to this context allowed her to appropriate language resources and to use them to produce similar writing.

By reading, participants were exposed to and appropriated language resources available in the texts they read. Like Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of legitimate peripheral participation, these young adolescents were novice readers interacting with expert authors through reading, appropriating some of the language resources offered by those textual contexts, and using language resources they had appropriated in new textual contexts to construct their own writing.

Language Appropriation and Use between Textual and Physical Contexts

In addition to those text-to-text transfers, participants also brought language resources from textual contexts into physical contexts in which they interacted with others to write or discuss writing. For example, Katherine drew on the language resources she needed to write vampire stories from the textual context she accessed. However, in her quest to become an author, she realized that she needed to augment her language resources by also engaging in physical contexts. She needed to transact writing with other authors and teachers in order to get feedback on her work and to find an audience. Katherine noted that another writer she admired, Christopher Paolini, began working on his popular *Eragon* series when he was 15. "Sometimes I think he has one too many details, but okay. When I get 18 and move out, I might be too busy to start writing." Katherine reported that she did not receive meaningful writing instruction at school, but she was unwilling to delay her work toward becoming an author. Like Paolini, she wanted to be a writer now rather awaiting future opportunities. As an alternative to school writing, she found and joined an on-line fan-fiction community and

within this physical context she was able to read, publish her work, and interact with other writers. This setting offered an authentic audience for her work.

Although Katherine replicated the practices of the textual context of vampire novels independently, through her involvement with the physical context of the fan-fiction community she became better able to communicate about writing. Katherine noticed that fan-fiction authors who presented polished, professional work earned higher reviews than those that did not. She recalled one author who “didn’t know how to spell, she was using text[ing] things, you know text writing?” That author’s reviews were poor, so Katherine was motivated to proofread her work and refine her word choice in order to earn better reviews from her readers. Reading these mentor texts and interacting with writers and other readers helped Katherine make sense of the norms for writing within this community. She explained that the experience “gives you something that you do not do, and [something] you do do.” Through this experience, Katherine navigated the boundaries between textual and physical contexts with the language resources she appropriated from each context informing her work in the other.

Misalignment between contexts. These young adolescents were alert to the language resources they encountered in textual contexts they experienced outside of school and often brought those resources both to the physical contexts of their classrooms and the textual contexts of their school writing. Although Ryan’s genre knowledge of superheroes had been recognized and validated in the classroom in the form of a good grade on his assignment and positive comments from the teacher, he and other participants sometimes applied language resources from out-of-school reading to school

assignments in ways that teachers overlooked or misunderstood. Ryan had recently written a report about mummification during a unit on Ancient Egypt. He explained that he did not know much about mummies before the project was assigned, but that he used books from the school library and Internet research to learn more. He gave a vivid and detailed description of the mummification process during the interview. Reading supplied Ryan with relevant content vocabulary about mummification, however some of the language resources he attempted to bring from his out-of-school reading to this assignment were overlooked by the teacher. At home, Ryan enjoyed reading informational books produced by *National Geographic Kids*, and he explained that these mentor texts often included silly jokes or “fun facts” to hook young readers and “get kids involved in learning, because kids would say, ‘Can we go in the books for some more jokes?’ like, um, ‘Let’s read a little bit about the lions, and then see what jokes we can get in there too.’”

Ryan organized his paper on mummification into short, high interest sections similar to the *National Geographic Kids* books and reported that he “put a few jokes in there” to draw the teacher’s attention to important information. However, when I asked if the teacher liked the jokes and “fun facts,” Ryan responded, “Um, I don’t think so.” He explained that the teacher had been dissatisfied with the work of his class as a whole and gave them the feedback that they needed “more unit words.” Although Ryan attempted to use language from his research, which is what he understood “unit words” to be, apparently the quality or quantity of words he brought was insufficient. The teacher did not comment on his use of jokes or fun facts, suggesting that this tool for hooking readers

into nonfiction text that he had appropriated from the textual context of *National Geographic Kids* was either unwelcome or unnoticed when he wrote for school. Through his narration of these reading and writing experiences, Ryan demonstrated how he appropriated language resources through reading and repurposed these resources for his writing. Although some of his choices based on mentor text knowledge were rewarded, such as the well-developed superhero story, others were overlooked by the teacher.

Katherine also experienced language resources she appropriated in one textual context being misunderstood or devalued when she attempted to apply those resources for school writing. When her social studies teacher asked students to write about the eruption of Mount Vesuvius from the perspective of an inhabitant of Pompeii, Katherine again employed the strong female protagonist she had refined in her vampire stories, a character who was the ghost of a young woman who, after the eruption, “haunted everybody” and “kicked some male butt.” Katherine received a poor grade on the assignment. The teacher did not think this story met the requirements of the assignment because “she said that nobody survived. But, well, ghosts *don't* survive; they haunt people.” As Katherine explained, the teacher wanted students to portray the people of Pompeii as frightened. However, “my character wasn't terrified. She was laughing at everybody and then she died and became a ghost.” Although Katherine's character made sense to her and built on a familiar genre, this attempt to appropriate and apply knowledge from the textual context of vampire stories to a school writing task was a misfire. Katherine's teacher overlooked, misunderstood, or devalued the genre knowledge she brought to this assignment, and it seems that Katherine either

misunderstood the purpose of the assignment or lacked language resources that would have been more appropriate for the task. In these examples from Ryan and Katherine, it seems that students sometimes struggled to appropriate language resources from one textual context and use them in another textual context when they had to pass through the social dynamics of a teacher as arbiter. There was nothing inherently wrong with Ryan's use of jokes and fun facts in a report about mummification or in Katherine's imaginative construction of a strong female protagonist haunting the ruins of Pompeii. Their issues arose when they needed to negotiate this language appropriation and use through the expectations, values, and requirements of the teachers who sponsored those assignments.

Instructional Implications

One instructional implication for students' use of mentor texts as sources for language exposure and appropriation arose in my interviews with Nicole. She also acknowledged building on mentor texts such as novels and informational texts when crafting school assignments in similar forms. However, when challenged with an extended writing assignment in which students were asked to analyze a TED Talk and to write an essay about the organization and message of the presenter's speech, Nicole realized that she lacked a useful schema for an analytical essay. "It was kind of hard for this project because it wasn't just like an essay where . . . you do your own research and write whatever you want about it, and it wasn't just like answering the questions" she explained. She had prior experience with research-based essays and short answer responses, but she struggled to envision what this analytical essay product would look like. The assignment directions "asked for . . . I think it was like a verbatim?" and told

students to “also answer the questions [about the author’s organization and message] but be in third person and then make it an essay, so mixing it all together was a little difficult.” When encountering this new genre, the text-based analytical essay, Nicole could read and understand the directions but could not envision a model for the product she was being asked to create. She lacked a textual context for the product demanded by this assignment. Although Nicole had knowledge of the content, she lacked the language resources necessary to craft an analytical essay because she had not read analytical essays and therefore had no exposure to those language resources. Nicole was resourceful and compensated by searching on-line for relevant mentor texts, essentially searching out the textual context she was missing. Nicole explained her strategy to accomplish an unfamiliar writing assignment:

Google is my best friend, so Google and I together, we searched how to write essays . . . I got onto YouTube and tried seeing other things on YouTube including essays and writing and introductions and all of that. And eventually I think I just kind of figured it out. . . . They had a lot of examples, and I just, I sort of tried to, yeah, tried my best to use them.

Finding relevant mentor texts supported Nicole in crafting her essay, particularly using third person point of view and determining the level of internal referencing required. Once she gained exposure to the textual context of analytical essays, she was able to appropriate the language resources she needed. However, without support from the teacher to help her interpret that textual context, she sometime struggled to reconcile the textual context of the analytical essay with the physical context of her classroom. Nicole knew that her teacher was familiar with the TED Talk because they had watched it in

class, but based on her review of mentor essays, she “started off by stating [the author/presenter’s] background. I took a chance anyway and I just wrote the background information.” In this way Nicole mimicked the norms of the analytical essays and the way they begin with references to the text, such as the name of the presenter and a short summary, rather than relying on the reader’s existing knowledge. She selectively deployed her language resources from the textual context of the analytical essays she read, even though in some ways that choice seemed illogical since Nicole was well aware that both she and her teacher were familiar with the TED Talk.

Based on Nicole’s experience, teachers might consider not only supporting students in analyzing text such as the TED Talk but also in analyzing the textual context of the products they ask students to create in response. Nicole was resourceful enough to seek out her own mentor texts, but many students would benefit from direction and scaffolded interpretation with making sense of unfamiliar textual contexts.

School and Language Appropriation

Participants frequently discussed school and teachers as influential in the ways they made meaning of writing and learning to write, probably because school was the space in which most of their writing occurred. Although participants gained exposure to and appropriated language resources through the textual contexts of their independent reading, school was a vital physical context through which they learned to name and discuss literary elements and text features. Through participation in school writing communities, participants were exposed to, appropriated, and used language resources of craft and criticism. Independent reading supplied students with mentor texts and imitable

forms, but teachers appeared to be the key players in guiding students' noticing, in helping students organize the knowledge they inferred from reading, in orchestrating reading and writing experiences that promoted literacy growth, and in attuning students to the norms and practices of academic writing communities. In these ways, teachers acted as *sponsors* (Brandt, 2001) for participants, or those who "lend their resources or credibility to the sponsored but also stand to gain benefits from their success" and "those who deliver the ideological freight that must be borne for access to what they have" (p. 19). These sponsors, operating within their own set of institutional resources and constraints, largely dictated the types of writing opportunities students did or did not experience.

Pairing Writing Skill Instruction with Meaningful Writing Experiences

Teachers presented students with content knowledge and helped them learn writing skills as well as engineering and facilitating experiences through which students were engaged with language learning. Teachers orchestrated the physical contexts in which young adolescents were exposed to, appropriated, and had the opportunity to use language resources. Some of the contexts participants experienced were productive, rich with language resources, and encouraged them to continue writing. Other classrooms were physical contexts in which little writing took place and language resources of craft and critique were unavailable. In these contexts, students had little exposure to the language resources that helped them to become writers and consequently could not appropriate valuable language resource or practice them through use. Those physical contexts did not support students' progress toward becoming more sophisticated writers.

Continuity of experience. Dewey's discussion of the continuity of experience in relation to growth and learning provides a lens on the writing experiences teachers offer. Dewey (1938) writes of continuity:

Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into. The greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. . . . All human experience is ultimately social: that it involves contact and communication. (p. 31)

The social experiences around writing that teachers facilitated acted as that “moving force” for their students. Participants told stories of some teachers who maximized that “ultimately social” element of experience to foster language exposure, appropriation, and use. Participants endowed writing experiences with meaning and identified continuity between past and upcoming writing experiences when they had the opportunity to craft original, extended work and to interact with classmates and teachers in their physical context to discuss, refine, or present that writing.

In other narratives, teachers missed opportunities to anchor writing practice in purposeful social experiences. These experiences, such as writing rote responses to comprehension questions or copying vocabulary definitions, were seen as busy work that did not promote learning and held little meaning for students as writers. Although participants identified these drills as reasonable classroom activities, these experiences were not part of the continuity of experience through which students saw themselves developing as writers.

Participants identified as meaningful writing experiences that contributed to their development those learning activities in which teachers orchestrated opportunities for students to produce, discuss, and share their writing. Writing experiences that put purpose first seemed most meaningful to participants and were the touchstones through which they described their development as writers. Writing experiences, such as copying definitions from a textbook, completing grammar drills, or completing fill-in-the-blank responses, were not cited by participants as particularly meaningful or as key points in their development. Given Applebee and Langer's (2013) finding that 82% of all middle school writing falls into the latter category, we should question whether the bulk of writing students do actually contributes, in their estimation, to their development as writers.

Connecting purposeful writing with skill instruction. With that said, participants did not reject writing skills instruction. They just found skill-based instruction meaningful when it could be applied in the moment to improve the writing task at hand. When writing skills instruction helped participants accomplish their writing goals, they seemed not only to remember what they learned but also to connect this information to their larger writing knowledge base. For example, Ryan recalled working on his superhero story and including dialogue between his five characters. He appreciated humor in the books he read and worked to build humor in the writing he produced. He explained that he “knew it was going to be, like, kind of funny. So I was putting dialogue, the citizen [of the town in which the story took place] was, like, a teenager, so he was always telling jokes.” With multiple characters, Ryan's teacher gave

him the feedback that it was unclear who was speaking. He remembered that the teacher assisted him:

She helped me, like, with dialogue because I didn't really get it at first, like, you had to put the little markers in there [quotation marks], and you had to end it with, in quotation marks too. Like you had to show who said it and all that.

Learning about quotation marks for the purpose of making his story more readable seemed to help Ryan integrate and retain this knowledge. Rather than being a decontextualized drill, the instruction Ryan received about quotation marks was immediately applicable and made his writing better. He also stated that he had continued attending to quotation marks in writing assignments that followed. Ryan began with a purpose, writing a superhero story, and applied his learning to that purpose. Having the superhero story experience seemed to give Ryan a way to mentally organize his learning about quotation marks, to file it away in a place he could find and access again in the future whenever he undertook a writing that featured multiple speakers.

Within the physical context of his classroom, Ryan interacted with his teacher around text. Through this social action, Ryan not only learned to insert quotation marks in his work, but how to talk about this practice. Note the shift in his description above from “you had to put the *little markers* in there” to his use of the technical term *quotation marks*. Although he might have been able to discern from reading mentor texts how quotation marks function, he needed the instruction and discussion with his teacher to know what they are named so that he could then discuss his writing practices more succinctly with others. In this way, participants relied both on textual contexts and

physical contexts for language exposure, appropriation, and use. Participants narrated their writing experiences using abundant and specific terminology and nearly always credited teachers with supplying those words.

Teachers Supply Disciplinary Language

Thinking back to when my own children were learning to speak, they were curious about the world around them. Not only did they want to touch, taste, and test their surroundings, they also wanted to know the names for everything they encountered. Naming gave them the power to talk about things when they were not immediately present or to draw my attention to things that they wanted me to notice. In a similar way, participants seemed very curious to learn about their textual surroundings. They seemed proud when they were able to talk with me about metaphors, dialogue, paragraphs, or genre. Through use of writing terms, these young adolescents and I were able to communicate using our shared language referencing the craft and critique of writing. We could talk about similes in the abstract, when no similes were present. They could use that language to draw my attention to particular elements of their writing when we looked at it together. In the narratives participants told, they almost always identified teachers as the people from whom they learned to name the elements of writing.

Disciplinary terminology was a language resource that enabled participants to talk about their writing and that terminology was abundant with many participants. Avery used discipline-specific vocabulary to discuss her work, noting that she had compared two novels from her summer reading assignment using a Venn Diagram, and that she had written about theme and setting. Candace explained the concept of “dramatic irony, like

when you know something that the character doesn't like in a horror movie when you know they immediately go to the closet and you're like, 'Don't go in there!'" Andrew used the terms *genre*, *plot*, *paraphrase*, *finale*, and *cross-reference* as we discussed his writing. These are a handful of what could be pages of examples. It appeared that, although participants might appropriate from textual contexts language resources that helped them execute writing, it was the physical contexts of writing-rich classrooms that provided them the language resources to talk about their writing, and that talking about writing was a central way in which they both understood their practice and made meaning of their experiences.

An absence of disciplinary language resources. Whereas Avery, Candace, and Andrew were exposed to, appropriated, and used language resources to talk about writing at school and through their interactions with teachers and peers, Katherine reported rarely having those opportunities. Thus, the nature of students' classrooms and their teachers' knowledge, values, and resources appeared to shape the ways participants learned to talk about their writing. Despite being an eighth grader and having more exposure to middle school in general than most participants, Katherine reported very limited discussion of writing format, structure, content, or norms. Unlike participants who reported talking about writing often and used literary terms with ease, Katherine seemed to lack much of the discipline-specific terminology she needed to talk about her work. In the example given previously in this section, Katherine used quotation marks accurately to denote dialogue and separated paragraphs to show a change in speaker. Although her skills were

well developed, she was less able to discuss her work with me than other students who said they talked about writing in class more often, as evidenced in this exchange:

Researcher: Your story this summer had a lot of good dialogue, so what do you know about dialogue in a narrative?

Katherine: What do you mean by dia, uh, dialogue?

Researcher: Dialogue? Like when the characters talk out loud.

Katherine: Oh yeah, um, I know that they do it in, um, the little quotation marks or something, and in one book they didn't do that. It was really confusing.

Researcher: Oh, okay. So do you think that you learned about those quotation marks at school, or you just saw it in a book and then thought, oh, that's how you do it?

Katherine: Saw it in a book.

Having multiple, on-going opportunities to write and talk about writing with teachers and classmates appeared to promote appropriation of discipline-specific vocabulary.

Katherine was able to replicate practices she saw in textual contexts, but her lack of exposure to language resources of craft and critique in school left her less able than her peers to talk about her writing in the abstract. During our interviews, Katherine often pulled up documents on her laptop or showed me passages in books rather than naming and discussing writing techniques. Although she had curiosity similar to other participants, Katherine appeared to have had much less exposure to or opportunities to appropriate and use disciplinary language resources in school. Katherine's teachers did still sponsor writing experiences, but, as she reported, they often consisted of worksheets

and practice tests. She came to see writing as a talent and an enjoyable activity in the form of her fan-fiction work but as divorced from the rote or assessment-oriented literacies valued in school. Her school-based writing experiences did not appear to promote continuity of experience, and when she described how she had become a writer, her touchstone experiences were largely outside of school.

Teachers Encourage Language Use

In addition to supplying particular vocabulary, teachers also provided direction and encouragement for producing more sophisticated content, a practice that appeared most effective when students perceived text products as meaningful or purposeful. Candace recalled how many years earlier in kindergarten her teacher had pulled her aside to read a daily journal entry Candace had written and to help her add detail to her work. She remembered her teacher's encouragement:

She would always pull me out from class and she would say, you know, "I think you did really good with this, but instead of saying, 'I went home,' you know, say, "I went home and I played my video games and walked my dog." [I learned to] take it one step further.

When this targeted instruction was applied to Candace's writing about her own experiences, she took the feedback to heart and prided herself on having become a writer who included rich detail in her work.

Both Avery and Anastasia discussed the way teachers not only facilitated writing experiences but also gave them the structure and language to help them make sense of their writing experiences. Anastasia reported experiencing explicit instruction to help her

connect her reading and her writing. She said her teacher taught students to use “thinking stems” to reflect on their reading and to approach writing with sentence starters including, “I see, I wonder, I think, I feel, I understand, I relate . . . then just say what you have to say. [It’s] like, metacognition.” Through her experiences in English language arts, Anastasia learned that “your background knowledge plus your schema equals inferences,” and seemed to understand that not all students reading a passage would make meaning of it in the same way because the prior knowledge they brought was unique. The writing activities Anastasia’s teacher orchestrated encouraged her to think and write about her own writing processes. Anastasia predicted that when she was asked to write about challenging text in high school, “Yeah, I’ll apply those strategies.”

Participants repeatedly identified teachers as valuable sources for knowledge on how to write, how to talk about writing, and how to make sense of writing instruction. Teachers provided discipline-specific vocabulary and support in using those language resources. When teachers designed opportunities for students to craft extended writing, to discuss their writing, and to share their writing with teachers and classmates, young adolescents were exposed to language resources, appropriated language, and were prompted to use that language.

Participating in a Writing Community of Practice

The storylines of language participants shared were layered and complex, particularly since language was the raw material they were appropriating, the mode through which they appropriated that material, and the mode through which they narrated their experiences. As I interpreted their stories, I found resonant narrative threads

describing their language exposure and appropriation through textual and physical contexts, as explored thus far in this chapter. Another more subtle narrative thread also emerged as they explained the ways they made decisions about using the language they appropriated. Despite their status as relatively novice writers, these young adolescents used various strategies to sense the needs and desires of readers in their audiences, even in imagined future audiences, such as college professors or colleagues. Their curiosity led them to be context detectives, seeking clues to the norms and registers of immediate physical and textual contexts and those they might encounter in the future.

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), participation emphasizes the following: relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing; socially negotiated meaning within the context of activity between people; a view of learning, thinking and knowing as relational among people within a social and cultural context; an openness to change and renegotiation; and a historically situated view (p. 51). Although Lave and Wenger's theoretical perspective may be applied to practices that are not language-based, such as their work in which novice participants observed, practiced, and replicated experts' production of complex textile patterns, application of this perspective to the language-centered activity of writing both enriches and complicates this notion. Participants appropriated words, the building blocks of their writing, through peripheral participation with more experienced teachers and authors. They also appropriated the language resources to talk about their writing, sometimes from the same people. Thus, the boundaries between language as a means of producing writing and language as a means of discussion writing were permeable.

Although participants were not being directly apprenticed by professional writers, the writing communities they experienced in their classrooms offered opportunities to negotiate the norms associated with academic writing at a level appropriate for young adolescents. These young writers appropriated new words as well as new registers or norms of language use through discussion of the mentor texts to which their teachers offered exposure. Teachers acted as the guides or interpreters in this supported apprenticeship who helped young writers understand how expert authors used language resources through text.

Exposure to author-experts and teachers' scaffolded support with understanding and interpretation allowed participants to imagine and prepare for future contexts for their writing. For example, Andrew imagined the writing he might one day do in his future-career as an engineer. He sought opportunities to read technical texts, such as those he researched for reports on NASA and eco-friendly batteries, and to replicate the language styles he saw there. He explained that he preferred a direct writing style with technical terminology to flowery description. By orchestrating reading/writing opportunities through reports and science fair projects, his teachers encouraged him to appropriate these language resources and offered an immediate purpose for him to use that language to construct extended writing.

Presumably participants' academic writing experiences will become increasingly differentiated by discipline as they move through high school, college, and/or career. Nonetheless, these young adolescents shared stories highlighting both explicit lessons about norms of academic writing and unspoken guidelines they inferred from their

interactions with texts, teachers, classmates, and others during their learning. In these storylines of language the young writers demonstrated agency as they made choices about which language resources to deploy to yield the outcomes they desired. However, executing these choices was sometimes challenging or confounded by their attempts to write for audiences in contexts that they did not yet fully understand.

Constructing Academic Writing

Nearly all participants used the terms “appropriate” or “professional” when describing the types of writing they crafted for school. Bella noted, “When I’m writing outside of school, it can be as weird or as witty as I want it to be.” However, she viewed in-school writing as serious with little room for playfulness, telling me, “Obviously I use a different kind of language for school.” Nicole, who frequently discussed using social cues from her teachers to determine the parameters for her writing, also described a different kind of school language. She describe school-appropriate writing:

You can’t exactly express how you *feel* feel [for school writing], like you couldn’t be, like, really violent or anything, you’d have to keep it, like professional, like, well I, instead of saying like, well, “I hate this,” you could maybe just say, well, “I don’t really agree with the way that this happened or that happened.” So I mean it’s like we kind of have to translate it in like maybe a school version. . . . Now if you were at home and you’re just, like, writing in your diary about how much you love this person or dislike this person, then I mean you can do whatever you want to there, you can include whatever you want, but in school it’s like another language almost.

Writing in “another language almost” for school, one that was sanctioned and valued by her teachers whom she held in high esteem, was also important to Nicole. In her writing for school, she explained that she found it most effective to be “friendly, but firm. So

you want to get your point across, but you also want to be, like, nice about it.” She did not recall any explicit lessons in which she learned to restrain her emotions, opinions, or assertions in school writing, but determined based on her teachers’ writing prompts and feedback, and by reading school-sanctioned texts, that these were important norms for academic writing.

Nicole anticipated that future academic writing would move even further in this direction toward a tone of objectivity and third-person presentation that, in her opinion, obscured her as the author. She explained that she felt she had already left personal narrative writing behind in elementary school and lamented that when she moved into high school she thought she would have few opportunities to write the opinion-based pieces she currently enjoyed. However, she imagined a future-audience in high school, college, and career that would value academic writing that maintained formal language and an objective tone. Because she wanted to gain access to and succeed in these communities, she was willing to shape her writing to the norms and registers she believed would be valued in these contexts.

In eighth grade, Nicole encountered her first extended writing assignment in which the teacher required third-person point of view. This presented a new challenge as Nicole negotiated how to remain “friendly, but firm” in her academic writing while also effacing herself as a first-person author. She was sensitive to the value for formal language that she anticipated future-audiences would hold for her academic writing, but she was also sensitive to her relationship with her beloved teacher in her present physical context. She seemed to want to write to please her teacher and to acknowledge herself as

a novice compared to her teacher's higher intellectual status, but she found it difficult to do that while assuming the expert tone associated with third-person. Her standard practice of restraining her academic writing so that it was not "too upfront" or "too aggressive" became complicated by the third-person requirement. She reflected, "It's hard to, like, follow those guidelines and also try and kind of put your own input on it, but then it's like you're kind of torn." In this instance, Nicole struggled to reconcile the actual social relationship she had with her teacher with the relationship implied by a third-person academic writing directed to a generic reader. She found it hard to simultaneously position herself as an expert in the text and a novice in the classroom. These young adolescents were keenly intuitive as they determined norms of academic writing, but their practices were complex and at times problematic.

Behavioral norms for academic writers. Like several other participants, Nicole was thoughtful and agentic in deciding when and for which audiences to deploy certain language resources. Just as Nicole distinguished between the type of writing acceptable for a diary versus for school, Avery drew similar distinctions. Avery described school writing as "a little more serious and more, like, focused . . . there's not a right way to do it and a wrong way, but, er, well, there is a wrong [way]." She further explained that the "way" or tone could be right or wrong. She made this comparison between academic writing norms and norms for polite behavior to illustrate her thinking:

It's kind of like social guidelines, I guess. Like you can, I guess, like, if you're home alone and, like, no one's there but you, you can burp all you want. But if you, but if it's, like, Thanksgiving dinner and you're in the middle of grace

holding hands with all your family, and you're like nodding your head, and you're like, "buuuuuuuuuuuuurp," then it's not the right time.

Avery seemed to correlate expectations for proper adult behavior she encountered at home with social expectations for how she should act as a writer for school. This comparison stood out to me as being potentially a unique way of thinking that was applicable to young adolescent writers but that might fade over time. Children and young adolescents seem to frequently receive explicit feedback from parents and teachers on their behavior and behavioral expectations for various contexts. Several participants seemed to extend this way of thinking to their writing as they made decisions about which language resources to deploy in order to meet with approval as they entered more sophisticated writing communities. Acting like grown-up writers seemed important to many of these young adolescents.

Interpreting and navigating these norms of school writing shaped the ways participants tailored their writing for their teachers in order to earn good grades and meet their teachers' social expectations. Although they reported very little specific instruction in norms of school writing, participants seemed to draw on their rich understanding gained throughout childhood of behavioral norms and to apply that sensibility to their writing. Participants were purposeful as they chose the spaces where certain language resources were welcome versus those where they were not. Katherine explained that when she wrote for school she tried to "make it PG. You can't do anything, like, you know, not make it uncomfortable for teachers. No cussing. I cuss in my fan-fiction. It's, like, good dialogue. Don't tell my mom." Not only had Katherine appropriated the term

“dialogue” from our earlier discussion, she also captured in this short exchange the ways she navigated three different communities—home, school, and fan fiction—in terms of the norms for language use.

Explicit instruction in academic norms. When participants mentioned explicit instruction in norms for academic communication, they most often highlighted grammar lessons. Candace received grammar instruction in school as well as through written correspondence with her grandmother, a retired teacher. When Candace wrote letters and her grandmother responded with suggestions and corrections, Candace found this guidance useful because it helped her more accurately communicate her message. She explained that when her grandmother called to catch up, she often asked, ““Do you have language arts homework? Read me your Daily Oral Language [exercise] and how you corrected it.’ And she explains it to me. I’m like, ‘I don’t even need grammar and spell check because I can call you!’” Candace viewed this supplementary support positively, explaining, “I’m going to have to do this one day, you know, and it’s not going to be any easier, so why not, you know, learn now so I can be ahead of the game?” For Candace, being “ahead of the game” seemed to mean that she could use language resources to position herself as a more sophisticated writer than her peers. When Candace was able to learn grammar principles before they were taught in school and to use those in her writing, she believed that these language resources acted as a commodity in the classroom both to earn strong grades and to improve her reputation as a writer.

Andrew also believed grammar could be a powerful commodity, both within and beyond his classroom. As he imagined audiences for his writing, he used the language

resource of grammar knowledge to appeal to members of these communities and others he might encounter in the future. He drew on a memory of his sister's application and admission to a competitive early college high school program. He reflected that perfect grammar could act as a ticket into exclusive academic settings, whereas if an application lacked proper grammar "you wouldn't get in because they wouldn't want you . . . if your grammar is wrong it's going to be hard to correct at this age, but . . . if it's right now then it'll be right forever." Andrew saw ways of using text to gain access to high-status academic contexts and communities. Both Candace and Andrew drew on grammar as a norm for communication in academic settings that could be gained both in and out of school and that opened the possibility for real benefits in terms of grades, respect, and access to educational opportunities.

Teachers operating within the institutional constraints of the various schools these participants attended acted as sponsors, providing writing knowledge that that was value-laden and that likely provided some students with "more statusful tools" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 53) than others. Drawing on Dewey's notion of the continuity of experience and its essentially social nature, participants learned language not as discrete parcels of transferable knowledge but as language resources intertwined with beliefs, historical connotations, and social practices.

Words Becoming "One's Own"

As participants engaged with mentor texts and classroom writing experiences, they also negotiated dialogic language. These young adolescents navigated their various worlds and worked to determine the norms for communication in those spaces.

Participants crossed boundaries with their language resources, often appropriating language in one context and deploying it in another, suggesting that the resources they brought to diverse settings were laminated (Prior, 2006, p. 55) and relatively foregrounded or backgrounded rather than separate. As participants “appropriated the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) they narrated socially situated stories of language learning and use, with spoken and written language sometimes being overlapping and other time reserved for only one medium or the other.

When participants had exposure to and appropriated language, these words became what Bakhtin (1981) would term “one’s own.” Once words belonged to students, they made choices about how to use those words to meet their goals and purposes. Bella mentioned learning the word *drones* at home and hearing it in the news. Through repeated exposure, she appropriated the word *drones* and then used it in her social studies class discussion and writing. I asked how she felt about moving words from place to place and she reflected, “I say [to the words], ‘Yeah, I own you!’ Then I take them to school.” This portability of language seemed to be one way participants understood when language resources had been internalized, allowing words to be used for an author’s own purposes beyond the social setting through which they were acquired.

Using Language Resources to Mature as Authors

All participants described in their own ways the changing language expectations they were in the midst of experiencing as they progressed from childhood to adulthood. As Katherine explained, what she wanted to learn about writing was “how to not make it

seem like the writing of a 12-year-old. Because people made fun of me for being 12 and writing, because they say that 12-year-olds are bad writers. It's probably true." Like the other participants, Katherine was motivated to mature in her writing and to take it from childish writing to adult writing by appropriating and using more sophisticated language resources and by moving words from one context to another. However, while some participants embraced a direct replication of the adult academic texts they read, others pushed to mature their writing on their own terms.

Popular culture as a conduit for adult language. Several participants mentioned how they appropriated sophisticated vocabulary through popular culture and used that language in other contexts. Popular culture informed these young adolescents' language resources, giving them exposure to words that might perform well in school. Ryan reported learning the word "despicable" from Daffy Duck in a *Looney Tunes* movie. Daffy Duck's catchphrase, "That's despicable" stuck with Ryan. He remembered that in the movie, Porky Pig had been eating bacon and Daffy Duck told him, "That's despicable," which Ryan understood to mean disgusting and low. He remembered that once while walking the dog with his mother, he had to clean up after the dog. He said to his mother, "That's despicable." Ryan reported that his mother was surprised because "she wouldn't think I would know a kind of a word like that word." Once he was comfortable using the word aloud, Ryan reported that he would use it in his writing if the need arose.

Similarly, Bella read to me a short story about a bystander stepping in to protect someone from being beaten up by a bully. The final line of her story was, "I finished off

the fight for him. It ended with his nemesis running off and crying.” I asked her how she knew the word *nemesis* and she responded, “I’ve watched plenty of *Phineas and Ferb* episodes” [an animated Disney show]. In the interview I mentioned that I also knew the show *Phineas and Ferb* because my children watched it. Bella replied, “You gotta love that blue platypus,” building on our shared knowledge of Agent P, a blue platypus and secret agent on the show, who battles his *nemesis*, an evil scientist, in each episode. I mentioned how interesting to me it was that she had gotten a word from a television show and used it effectively in her writing. She held up her story and remarked, “We thank *Phineas and Ferb* for the making of this production.” This playful exchange around a word and source material that was familiar to Bella and to myself allowed me to see how repeated exposure to a word through use, even on a television show intended for children, could inform the vocabulary young adolescents brought to their writing.

Language substitution. When these young writers encountered contexts for which they had few language resources, they sometimes improvised by substituting the language resources they thought were the closest match. For example, Bella and Ryan, both sixth graders, reported that they had not yet studied argumentative or persuasive writing in depth in school yet. However, Ryan drew on his knowledge of another persuasive genre, commercials, as he described how he might undertake a persuasive writing task, suggesting that a writer might supply reasons that would convince the reader to take an action. “You could tell them that, if they have problems with math, like, ‘You should buy this calculator. Not only is it cheaper than the calculator you bought that’s not working, it comes in a more fashionable style!’ or something.” Ryan used language

resources appropriated from commercials and applied them to what he perceived as a similar situation. He adopted a positive and confident TV announcer voice as he pitched the cheaper and more fashionable calculator using words and phrasing he learned from commercials. Bella also drew on commercials for language resources. She explained that persuasive writing featured vivid images paired with words. She recalled a commercial where “a heavyweight dude” was sitting on top of plastic food storage containers to demonstrate their solid construction. She explained that he said, “This is strong. They can hold me up!” which stood out in her recollection. In addition to creating a vivid image, Bella thought an important feature of persuasive writing would be that it encourage people to take action right away. Thinking back to the food storage container commercial she said excitedly, “If you call now, then you’ll get two free!” Although the actual demands of persuasive writing extend beyond what Ryan and Bella brought from television commercials, they improvised with the resources they did possess to approach new contexts.

Ryan also drew on television to fill in the gaps in his knowledge about argumentative writing. He remembered that on ESPN he had seen commentators support their arguments about which teams and players were more likely to win a game by “stating facts, like, ‘They had this many touchdown passes’ or ‘They’re this fast.’” Although Ryan had not yet studied persuasive and argumentative writing extensively in school, he was not a blank slate. He filled the gaps in his school knowledge by drawing on other language resources, drawing on prior exposure to lay the groundwork for future learning.

Authorial Positioning

All participants mentioned learning new words and completing vocabulary instruction in school, as well as noticing new words in their reading. They made choices about when and how to repurpose those words to position themselves within their various worlds. Anastasia drew on words she learned in school and used them at home. She explained that when her father talked to her about life lessons, she sometimes used words she had learned at school such as “ambitious,” “reluctant,” or “insufficient” when she responded to him. She felt proud when her father would remark, “You’re saying some smart words!” In English language arts class, Anastasia reported that students would say, read, and write vocabulary words as well as creating images to represent them. Words, definitions, and images were posted on the wall, and the teacher prompted students to use them often. Through this repeated exposure, Anastasia was able to appropriate language. She explained that she used these words at home and in class and included them in her writing, but would probably not use them with her friends. “When it’s for friends, I don’t think about those words,” she explained.

Avery mentioned that when she crafted informational writing for school she tried to use “smart words” which she defined as “big long words that make you sound like you know so much about the topic.” She gave the example of the word “vernacular” which she recalled learning in English language arts class. She had used it not only for the vocabulary study but remembered later using it in a Social Studies project about the Renaissance and in a short story she wrote, when an assistant told a fashion designer he knew she “wasn’t from around here because of her vernacular.” Avery actively pursued

“smart words” and looked for opportunities to use them. She mentioned that her friend gets a “word of the day” email that she shared during their lengthy carpool each morning and that she tried to remember and use these words. By pursuing exposure to and appropriating *smart words*, Avery used language resources as tools to position herself as a writer or to signal her sophistication for readers.

Andrew also reported learning new words in English language arts and, although he remembered their definitions, he hesitated to use words like “exquisite” that he found too flowery or inauthentic-sounding to take up in his speech or writing. Instead, Andrew preferred learning technical vocabulary. He mentioned picking up new words while researching NASA for a school project and believed that his report sounded more sophisticated than his peers’ work because he included language from sources written for adult audiences. He also explained that in his family’s farm work he often used technical vocabulary. Andrew offered the example of a *skirting table*, a mesh table used to remove debris from the shorn fleece of an animal before making it into yarn. He explained that someone outside the business could not “piece together” the meaning of *skirting table* from conversation away from the farm but that by using one “you know, like after a minute or two, you would figure it out.” Andrew told me how he might use these terms when talking to insiders, such as his family or the large animal veterinarian, but that he would not use technical terms outside that audience. He explained his thinking:

Your vocabulary changes when someone comes [to the barn] that’s never been there before. You know that they don’t know everything so you kind of have to change what you’re talking about. Instead of saying *skirting table*, you would say this is where this happens [and show the table in use]. I think you kind of decide,

if you start talking and they start asking questions, then you know you need to tone down your vocabulary to make it easier for them to understand.

This sensitivity to audience marked not only the words Andrew experienced and took up, but also the situations in which he chose to use the language resources he had. Andrew told me how he used small words for his English language arts debate assignment, preferring a plainspoken tone that had appealed to him when he watched televised presidential debates. I wondered if his experience being immersed in the working world of his family-owned farm, where he indicated he encountered adults who embraced this plainspoken tone, influenced the language resources he chose to deploy in the classroom as well as on the farm. When we had discussed vocabulary words he learned in English language arts, Andrew made quotation marks with his fingers when he mentioned the word “exquisite.” Like the adults returning to university studies in Ivanič’s (1998) work, Andrew acknowledged that he knew the word *exquisite*, but cordoned it off by placing it in quotation marks to indicate that it was not truly his own. Other words that he experienced, such as *skirting table*, did seem to be his own, although he was purposeful in when and how he used those words. Avery and Andrew were exposed to and appropriated a variety of language through their physical contexts of school and home as well as through the textual contexts of their reading; however, they were strategic in how they used those words to position themselves within other contexts.

Authority and Access in Language Appropriation

Appropriating language became more problematic when participants were faced with issues of authority and access to the language of authority. Participants faced

difficulty evaluating language sources and anticipating how they would be perceived in school. This became particularly evident when participants discussed writing research papers for school. They found it difficult to write about unfamiliar content in an authoritative voice. They believed they had to avoid plagiarism, but they had few relevant language resources of their own when writing about unfamiliar topics. As Nicole explained, “You have to be able to find your own research and state it in your own way and not plagiarize,” which she found difficult when she had limited content knowledge or relevant vocabulary from which to draw. Bella explained that, when writing reports, it was important to use “real quotes” from experts. She thought it would be inappropriate to quote her mother as a source in a research paper or to write “according to my mom” but was unsure if she could quote her if the information she had was accurate. She explained that her mother was often the first person she asked for real-world information and that she was a reliable source, but not a source of “real quotes.” Bella suggested that she could use the information her mother gave her and state it as fact, but not include it as a quote. In this way, Bella struggled to reconcile someone who was both a source of accurate information and an authority in her life with academic notions of authority and whose words were credible or sanctioned to be considered “real quotes.”

Several other participants also struggled with issues of credibility, particularly if language was accurate and applicable but from a source not sanctioned as credible by their teachers. Using Wikipedia for research seemed to be a particularly active space for negotiating issues of credibility and was mentioned by nearly every participant.

Wikipedia was a valuable source for students to use for building their language resources around a specific topic but quoting from Wikipedia was not sanctioned by their teachers. Students knew that much of the information on Wikipedia was indeed accurate, but that inaccurate information could be introduced because it was communally edited rather than being curated by a single or official authority. This presented problems for them in terms of what constituted authority and which language they might take up. Although much of the information on Wikipedia was factual, the source was not deemed credible in participants' classrooms. Candace explained that, "at Patriot Academy, Wikipedia is absolutely out of the question, which I didn't know until it was on [the teacher's] PowerPoint in big, bright, bold letters." Katherine stated that when she wanted to know more about an unfamiliar topic, she went straight to Wikipedia "even though that's not credible." Although her teachers taught her Wikipedia was not trustworthy, Katherine was unsure what qualified other sources as trustworthy. She explained, "I mean, I don't know if I could get a book that's really true, or [trust] somebody else's thing on another website." Participants struggled to tease out what made some language resources more worthy of appropriation than others and how to reference sources of language exposure and appropriation when they were not sanctioned by school.

Participation in unsanctioned language. Although the use of unsanctioned language for school purposes was problematic, participants eagerly appropriated and used other unsanctioned languages in their informal or out-of-school writing. Their appropriation of unsanctioned language fell into two main areas: language they

perceived as youth-only such as texting and slang and language that was a marker of the adult world but was taboo such as profanity and sexual language.

For example, Bella explained that, although she did not have a cell phone, she used “texting language” when she emailed her friends. She noted, “I can use LOL, and BRB, and hashtag” because her friends are “not 40-year-old men” like her teachers. Bella explained that using texting language was a simple way to communicate with other young people. She said she often typed “BRB, because then you don’t have to go B-E space R-I-G-H-T space B-A-C-K.” Nicole also used texting language to communicate with friends both in actual texts, in emails, and in hand-written notes. She explained, its “like abbreviations, numbers, and letters to spell. It’s just your own little language, I guess.” Nicole stated that she had learned these shortcuts for informal peer-to-peer writing from friends who “starting texting me, and they’d say, like, ‘IDK,’ and I’m like, ‘What’s IDK?’ and they’re like, ‘I don’t know.’ I’m, like, ‘Okay,’ then I start using that.” Nicole said, “I don’t really know how my friend discovered it, or how it first came to be . . . I don’t know. That would be good to research.” This informal language appropriated from and used with peers seemed off-limits to adults as far as they were concerned. Nicole explained that parents probably would not understand texting and recalled, “I’ve seen on TV, like some shows when somebody’s mom learns about texting. They start making abbreviations for everything they say, that’s not really what it’s used for.”

The youth-only language of texting was similar to youth-only slang that participants used. Avery stated that she might use slang terms with friends, but would

never include them in school work. She might write, “Heyyyy Guuuuurl” in a note to a friend but would not do so for a teacher. Katherine expressed a similar sentiment, saying, “Teachers don’t like slang.” Bella explained that people her age might use slang, but not adults. “I don’t think parents would be saying ‘cray-cray’ [for crazy]. That’s what I say.” These youth-only language forms were viewed as insider talk among friends as a performance of youth culture. As Bella explained, “My mom does not go around going ‘LOL’ or ‘BRB.’ Sure, she says ‘peeps’ because it’s on Facebook. That, yeah, I worry about her.” These informal youth languages were among the language resources participants’ possessed and used, but they were deployed purposefully only for audiences of their peers.

Several participants also noted an awareness of the unsanctioned adult language of profanity. Most claimed that they did not use these words personally, but wanted me to know that they were aware of them as a form of adult language they had heard and seen. Bella mentioned that her mother restricted the movies she could view based on profanity in this exchange:

Bella: No, my mom won’t let me [watch R-rated movies]. It’s too much cussing.

Researcher: Oh. You seem kind of excited about the possibility of too much cussing.

Bella: I know! For Pete’s sake, it’s nothing new.

Researcher: No?

Bella: My dad gets mad at us all the time. I don’t know why our parents won’t let us watch these movies!

Researcher: So your dad is teaching you these very same words that you're not allowed to . . .

Bella: Mmm. No, my brother mostly.

Researcher: Oh, your brother teaches you these words?

Bella: He's in the eighth grade.

In addition to her brother and father, Bella also identified graffiti in the school bathrooms as a rich source for profanity. She explained that she expanded her vocabulary “from the bathroom walls. It might be a little disturbing. Not exactly the best way [to learn new words], but it's the most exciting.” Katherine also shared that she knew these words, and that she did not understand why adults treated them as off-limits to adolescents. “Kids cuss all the time,” she told me, “Teachers hear them cuss. The teachers cuss themselves. They know they do. They can't be a hypocrite. You probably cuss too!” Despite her awareness that everyone knew taboo or profane words, Katherine recognized that using profanity in speech or writing directed to teachers would result in bad grades or suspension. This power differential around language seemed particularly unfair to Katherine. “It's tyranny, man. It's tyranny,” she concluded.

Katherine also recognized ways in which sexual language was an open secret, but she connected this type of talk and writing to maturity. She explained that she did not include sexual language or scenes in her fan-fiction work, although some writers did. “I don't really read it, though,” she told me. “It doesn't matter how old you are, it matters if you're ready for it. If you feel comfortable or not to read it. It's not, it doesn't mean you're going to do it.” Katherine was aware of sexual language but chose not to engage

with it until later on. Bella expressed a similar discomfort about sexual language, explaining that she once “accidentally knocked down some, like, high school love novels. I was disturbed. I was, like, younger than I am now. I was, like, eight. So I just go, ‘Eeee!’ and I threw it back!” Just as participants were eager to gain language to describe and engage with their experiences, it seemed they were curious about, but not interested in appropriating, adult language that exceeded their experiences.

The Importance of Language Exposure, Appropriation, and Use for Young Writers

The analysis in this section continues to draw on a narrative inquiry model methodologically, but the interpretation is closely guided by theory related to language appropriation and learning as part of a community. These theoretical lenses situate language appropriation and learning to write as primarily social rather than purely cognitive, which is appropriate considering that the research questions driving the study relate to experience, story-telling, and meaning-making rather than to participants’ facility with particular writing skills.

Writing as Social Action

As participants narrated their experiences of writing and learning to write, they often discussed their learning as social, emphasizing where and from whom they learned certain things, their status or position in relation to these people, and the activities in which they were mutually engaged that promoted or constrained learning. When these young adolescents talked about writing, they seemed to view the text they produced less as a demonstration of knowledge and more as a tool for communicating knowledge and ideas, although it was not always valued as such by their teachers. When discussing

writing, participants typically anticipated a reader for their text, whether that reader was a peer, a teacher, or an imagined or distant audience for whom the work was intended. In this way, writing was a mode of communication between individuals who have social relationships and who co-operate within overlapping contexts (Ivanič, 1998, p. 61).

Writing across contexts. The physical context in which the activity of writing took place constituted distributed activity that crossed social, historical, and cultural boundaries and was subject to the varied, and sometimes conflicting, rules and norms of those realms. Participants were simultaneously players in multiple cultures related to race, gender, social class, age, family dynamics and school setting, all of which influenced their language resources and contributed to the “complex gestalt” that resulted from writers’ “ways of stretching, reconfiguring, and rearticulating their resources” (Dyson, 2003, p. 5). Prior (2006) describes these overlapping social contexts as being *laminated* such that “multiple fields or frames coexist, relatively foregrounded and backgrounded” in any activity (p. 55). Through activities in physical contexts, including writing, these writers drew on multiple resources and practices available to them. They appeared to select, sometimes subconsciously, practices associated with their various cultures and knowledge bases, foregrounding some while backgrounding others, thereby reinforcing some values, beliefs and practices over others (Ivanič, 1998, p. 43, 67). Dyson (2003) noted that children learning to write also learn “to negotiate literate participation in complex classroom cultures, children must differentiate not only phonological niceties and textual features, but also social worlds—the very social worlds that provide them with agency and important symbols” (p. 108). Similarly, these young

writers navigated physical contexts in order to negotiate, index, interpret, and act upon their worlds through the use of language.

Movement from social to individual. As these young writers traversed multiple physical and textual contexts, they collected various words, language styles, and genre-specific norms through their activities. Vygotsky (1986) described a similar notion of development in which learners experience a “transformation of socially shared activities into internal processes” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192). In this internalization process, spoken language, symbol systems, and socially-situated activity yield shared conceptual understanding between individuals, particularly between teachers and learners. In the same vein, Ivanič (1998) draws on Vygotsky’s (1986) notion that language begins in the social realm and is appropriated and repurposed by the individual in a system of language that is at first intermental and then intramental, not as higher order cognition, but as a widening repertoire of discursive resources.

These young adolescent writers engaged in literate practices within social and cultural contexts that shaped the resources available to them as they learned to write. These contexts also informed their purposes for writing, the meanings they made from their experiences, and the texts that they both encountered and produced. Building upon Vygotsky’s notion of socially rehearsed intermental language use that becomes an individual’s intramental repertoire of language resources, participants’ language resources were not decontextualized or denotative only, but dialogic – layered and laden with meanings from the socially and culturally framed activities through which they were appropriated.

Ivanič (1998) noted that social circumstances provide individuals with the discursive resources that they deploy, intentionally and unintentionally, in the contexts and situations they encounter. These mediational means are socially constrained and access to the discourse of powerful social contexts, such as academia, is unequally distributed. As a result, some students enter the classroom, whether in middle school or as in her research mature students returning to college, with “more statusful tools” than others (Ivanič, 1998, p. 53). In Dyson’s (2003) research she references Vygotsky as she explores how young children’s activities are mediated through “symbolically mediated actions, especially ways of talking” (p. 11) and points out that, in keeping with this position, children “come to understand the symbolic nature of written language only if they have some sense of the functional work -- the social ends—driving, requiring, and organizing the manipulation of those drab print symbols into speech” (p. 50).

Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism was central in understanding how social and cultural contexts constrained and shaped these participants’ access to and interpretation of certain types of discourse. Bakhtin’s dialogism foregrounds context, noting that, “The context embracing another’s word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great” and that “we cannot, when studying the various forms for transmitting another’s speech, treat any of these forms in isolation from the means for its contextualized (dialogizing) framing” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 340). Participants actively and purposefully collected language, tried it out in speech and writing, and took up some words while rejecting or distancing themselves from other words. They also made more subtle choices, such as using academic language in writing that only the teacher would

see but avoiding academic language when speaking in front of peers in order to avoid negative social outcomes. As Bakhtin (1981) noted, a word “become one’s own only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (p. 293).

Movement from individual to social. Ivanič’s (1998) notions of *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity* and the ways in which they mold an individual’s writing (p. 48) were useful in interpreting these participants’ narratives. Ivanič highlights instances of *actual intertextuality* in which writers directly quote and often explicitly signal quotation of authoritative sources. In this form of direct reference, authors use the words of others either to intentionally align themselves with the original author, or to set off in quotation marks words from which they wish to distance themselves. When participants wrote about unfamiliar topics for which they lacked well-developed language resources or when they attempted formal research-based writing requiring quotation and attribution, they appeared to struggle with balancing actual intertextuality within their own language. Ivanič also dealt with the more fluid and subtle *interdiscursivity*, or the use of recognizable text types and patterns that are simultaneously one’s own and referential to the language one has experienced. Interdiscursivity also presented challenges for young writers, particularly as they navigated their position as novices against writing assignment requirements that seemed to demand a tone of expertise.

Social implications of language use. Despite their youth, participants were very intentional in their language choices and their decisions were narratively coherent, i.e., they made sense within the story participants were telling themselves about who they

were as writers. Participants seemed quite aware of this collection and integration of new words during young adolescence and how once unfamiliar words might become “one’s own,” perhaps because they were encountering so much disciplinary language for the first time and learning new concepts for which they previously lacked relevant terminology. Learning new words and making choices about when or if to use them held both academic and social consequences that sometimes put participants in difficult situations when they tried to reconcile competing norms or expectations.

When participants were called upon to simultaneously navigate physical and textual contexts, they sometimes struggled with how to deploy their language resources. For example, Candace explained that she routinely used sophisticated vocabulary that she learned from reading in her writing for school. When she was navigating the physical context of the classroom and transacting writing with teachers, she chose to use the language resources she appropriated from textual contexts to accomplish her goals. However, when she needed to act within the physical context of the classroom to transact writing with teachers and with peers, choices about how to deploy her language resources became more complex.

In the vignette below, Candace was considering using the word *geosynchronous* in a group writing assignment with peers. Although she possessed useful language resources that likely would have been valued by teachers, she often chose to remain silent in class. She would willingly write words like *geosynchronous* for her teacher’s view, but was unwilling to say words like that around her peers due to negative social consequences for acting too smart. Candace improvised a response to reconcile the two

worlds -- rather than “dumb herself down” in order to avoid ridicule from her peers, or to “act smart” to impress the teacher, Candace simply did not speak at all. Candace explained her thinking:

I have a huge vocabulary that I don't always use. And I like to tell people, you know, Shakespeare had, like, a working vocabulary of over 4,000 words, but the average middle schooler has, like, 200. And half of those are like “bro,” “dude,” and you know everything like that. But I always like to just, just like I said, we learned “geosynchronous” and I went . . . and said “geosynchronous.” And everybody's like, “What?!” Peers don't really like to hear you say the big words or anything, but if you use them with a teacher, it's like, “Oh, I get what they're saying. I understand!” [I] just kind of make sure that people know that I am, you know, I'm not just brain dead. I just, like, prefer not to like give everybody too much because then it just seems like you're overconfident. Then, yeah, I learned the hard way, if you reel it back so far, then people do think that you're brain dead.

As participants navigated various contexts, they expanded their language resource repertoires. They were exposed to language, chose to take up some language as their own, and used language resources both to construct writing and to interact with other players in their various physical and textual contexts. However, decisions about how to deploy language resources were often complicated.

Conclusion

As participants told narratives of writing and learning to write that implicated language, they did so in ways that attended both to denotative knowledge and to social connotations that trailed the words they learned. They revealed that they were exposed to, appropriated, and used language that they encountered both in textual contexts and in physical contexts. Although they might be able to imitate writing practices they inferred

by reading mentor texts, they benefited from teachers to help them name those practices. Text and talk about text were both areas for language exposure and appropriation, and the boundaries between text and talk were porous. As young writers used the language resources they appropriated, they were sensitive to social norms, registers, and interpersonal relationships that surrounded their language use.

As participants were exposed to, appropriated, and used language resources, it became clear that they did so in different ways that were shaped by social, institutional, and family forces. Participants were agentic in making use of the language resources to which they had access and used language not only to write, but also to communicate through speech and writing who they were as authors. These performances of authorial identity are considered more closely in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

STORYLINES OF IDENTITY

The previous chapters investigate participants' intersecting storylines of family and school and the various ways in which they gain exposure to, appropriate, and use language. Although presented independently, each of these sections leans toward and offers a lens through which to view these young adolescents' identity negotiation as it relates to writing. Considering again the research questions guiding this study, 1) How do young adolescents experience writing and learning to write?, 2) How do they narrate these experiences?, and 3) What meaning do they make of their experiences writing and learning to write?, each begs the unique perspective, voice, and understanding of these young adolescents as writers. There is an underlying assumption in these questions that people experience learning to write in various ways, that they draw on a range of language resources and methods to articulate their experiences, and that the meanings they derive are shaped not only by curriculum or instructional practices but also by who they understand themselves to be.

Building on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional inquiry model, interview protocols were structured to elicit narratives about writing that moved back and forth across time, that were situated in particular places that shaped the tellers' experiences, and that offered individual/internal perspectives as well as those that situated

participants as writers within their external/social contexts. Through these narratives, participants presented themselves as writers. As Holland, et al. (1998) propose:

People tell others who they are, but more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities (p. 3).

This chapter highlights the ways in which this group of young adolescents told me who they were as writers, as well as the actions they had taken and anticipated taking to spin those stories into reality. In other words, it attends to their identities as writers.

Theoretical Framing of Identity

The term *identity* lacks a singular definition and has been used with multiple related meanings across fields. This study draws upon a sociocultural framework and it is vital consider what is meant by identity from this viewpoint and how identity is implicated in writing before undertaking a discussion of how it was evidenced in this work.

Connecting Writing and Identity

Ivanič (1998) conceptualized writing not as a neutral set of cognitive skills but as a “socio-political act of identification” (p. 345) that is rooted in social action. When viewed as a form of social action, writing is “embedded in and influenced by a community” and therefore “local, context specific, [and] dependent on a community for its existence and its meaning” (Russell, 2002, p. 12). As Englert, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2006) suggest, sociocultural theory with regard to writing “views meaning as

being negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture, and activity” (p. 208).

Therefore writing is a form of distributed knowledge and an action that serves to communicate with, position, and index the communities within which it is enacted.

Prior (2006) adds that a sociocultural perspective “rejects the simple equation of writing with material texts or acts of inscription, seeing writing as chains of short- and long-term production, representation, and distribution” (p. 58). As described in preceding chapters, participants’ opportunities and purposes for production, language resources deployed for representation, and modes of distribution vary greatly and are highly dependent upon the individuals, cultures, activities, and communities through which they transact their writing. Given these variations, it follows that participants’ meanings around writing also vary and that the ways they write and see themselves as writers are not uniform. Participants’ “self-understandings” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 3) of who they are as writers are shaped by these varied experiences and the meanings they derive from them. Despite the pressure in contemporary education to standardize instruction and evaluation, the observations of this study instead propose to “normalize variation” (Dyson, 2003, p. 5) in young people’s literacy experiences and to uncover the many pathways through which they become writers.

In this study, “self-understandings” are the foundation for conceptualizing identity. Self-understandings or identities are simultaneously individual and shaped, but not dictated, by external factors. Though singular, *identity* does not connote an essential self but instead a continuously negotiated meshing of identities, identifications, and resources that constitutes a rich, dynamic, and, at times problematic or conflicted, sense

of self. Although this study uses the term *identity* for simplicity, it implies plural terms such as *identities-in-practice* (Tan & Calabrese Barton, 2008) or *identities* (Ivanič, 1998) to reflect a sociocultural acknowledgement that identity is dynamic, porous, and layered.

Through the activity of writing within a social and cultural context, individuals are simultaneously socialized to become more congruent with others in their contexts, and individuated as their distinctive mesh of cultural and language resources, experiences, and interpretations contributes to unique and individual perspectives (Prior, 2006, p. 55). In this way, writers negotiate their identities within their social contexts and participate in mediated activity occurring on three interconnected planes: *externalization*, or producing and distributing speech, writing, or objects; *co-action*, or use of those objects in the social-material environment; and *internalization*, or perception and learning accrued to the individual (Prior, 2006, p. 55). The social world of individuals is *personalized* as they, consciously or subconsciously, represent themselves in writing and interact through texts with readers and with their past, future, and imagined selves (Prior, 2006).

Ivanič's (1998) three components of socially constructed identity detail the ways in which identity is both constructed and conveyed through writing. First, values and beliefs about reality impact an individual's ideational meaning of writing—or what writers write about. A person's sense of their relative status with their readers (real or imagined) influences the interpersonal meaning—the tone they build, forms they choose, and ways they attempt to position themselves in relation to the reader. Finally, a person's orientation to language use influences how they write and the way they construct their

message, which constitutes textual meaning. In this way, ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings conveyed by language reveal, construct, and index authors' identities. Language is the primary tool for constructing and interpreting writing, and it is also the primary tool for constructing and communicating identity (Dutro, 2009, p. 90). Because writing within a sociocultural view is active and context-dependent, and because writing and identity are mutually constitutive, considering identity is essential in understanding how participants made meaning of their writing experiences.

Narrating Authorial Identity

Given that identity is laminated, i.e., that “multiple fields or frames coexist, relatively foregrounded and backgrounded” in any activity (Prior, 2006, p. 55), it is important to remember that this study and the interview protocols that guided conversations with participants were designed to foreground writing experiences and identities that related to writing as these students understood it. Participants' responses centered on descriptions of who they were as writers and how they made meaning of their experiences as writers. Participants told stories that drew upon aspects of their identities that also extended beyond their writing lives such as gender, race, culture, social class, family structure, values, etc. as they narrated their writing stories, and these often played important roles in how they understood or represented themselves as writers. Had I interviewed the same group about their health, relationships, or experiences as mathematicians, surely the stories they told would have been focused somewhat differently. Therefore it is important to note that this study does not attempt to capture a well-rounded view of participants' identities or to represent the significance of their

identities as writers in relation to any other elements of identity. For clarity, then, I use the term *authorial identity* to describe participants' understandings of themselves as authors and as a reminder that their dynamic identity work may be robust in many areas beyond the scope of this study.

Authorial Identity from a Social Perspective

The three-dimensional inquiry model (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) prompts analysis of the individual/social dimension of participants' narratives. This dimension asks researchers to consider that participants are always both individuals directing their own actions and players in larger social and institutional narratives. As young adolescents narrated their authorial identities, some stories invoked individuation while others attended to social context, so this section divides analysis and interpretation accordingly, looking first here at authorial identity in social contexts.

Attending to Social and Institutional Silences

What participants said about their authorial identities within social contexts was vivid, but what they did not say is perhaps a more interesting place to begin. Consider first that most studies that attend to authorial identity group participants whose social or external contexts are perceived to be similar by the researchers who orchestrate the studies, for example Lee's (2007) work with inner-city African-American students, Tatum and Gue's (2012) investigation of young African-American male student writers, or Tardy's (2012) and Early, DeCosta-Smith and Valdespino's (2010) research alongside low-income students pursuing higher education. Part of the purpose of these studies is to better understand the perspectives and experiences of participants with at least some

social or institutional characteristics in common. This study was different in that participants were assembled first by affinity for writing (either their own or the parents who registered them for the writing camp) and either adequate financial resources to pay for camp or the parental wherewithal to obtain a scholarship. As such, participants were all willing writers, but had a greater diversity in race, social class, gender, and school-type than did the participant groups for other similar studies.

Although this study investigates a small number of students and is not intended to be representative, participants positioned themselves across a broad spectrum of social identifications including gender, race, social class, family educational attainment, and school-type. Despite these identifications and the fact that participants readily drew on these elements of identity in their narratives, few ascribed their authorial identity as being substantially shaped by social or institutional forces. For example, no participants described themselves as being African-American Writers or Female Writers. During the data analysis phase I often looked back at the interview transcripts and wondered if discussion of social and institutional forces was largely absent from the data because I did not ask the right questions to evoke those answers, or whether participants' age, maturity, or real world experiences just had not yet equipped them with the perspectives, concepts or vocabulary to discuss those issues as they intersected with their personal experiences.

Intersections of Authorial Identity and Social Forces

Two participants, Candace and Katherine, came closest to articulating how social and institutional forces shaped their authorial identities. Many of Candace's narratives drew on her African American identity, while many of Katherine's stories dealt with life

in a low-income area. In Candace's narratives, she often mentioned her parents and grandparents telling stories about race and overcoming adversity, stories of how she was responsible for taking advantage of education because previous generations had been denied those opportunities by social and institutional constraints. Katherine described how her mother advocated for low-income students and how she in turn used writing for advocacy purposes. In this way, both Katherine and Candace had on-going access to adult role models who talked about how social and institutional forces shape experience and opportunity. They had experiences through which to appropriate the language resources and structures to give form to their narratives and had opportunities to use those resources in conversation with their families.

In contrast, none of the other participants included in their narratives explicit discussion of how social and institutional forces shaped their ideas, experiences, or writing. Perhaps some students, like Avery, who had always attended academically-oriented magnet programs and experienced high alignment between school and home values, could not yet perceive the social or institutional affordances impacting her experiences. Other students, like Nicole, who had transferred from a Title I middle school to a charter school, described the work at her new school as being more engaging and rigorous and the students as having better behavior. She explained, "At my old school, it wasn't really like the best school. It had, like, some discipline issues. I just feel like I, at this school, I have, like, more opportunities." As a researcher and teacher educator who has worked in a variety of school settings, I suspect some of the "opportunities" she noted correlated with social and institutional forces. However,

Nicole did not describe her experiences using those terms. Ryan never talked about what it is like to be an African American male student or a child in a single-parent home.

Andrew did not say that his involvement with adults in a farming community led him to be a bit suspect of the flowery language of academia. Anastasia was passionate in her discussion of equal access to education for girls in unfamiliar and far-away places she had read about that she called “Pakistan, or Librya, or Afghaniskan, or Mongol,” but she did not bring up how girls at her school or she herself might experience differential educational access. It is difficult to analyze what is unsaid or to represent absence, but these silences are worth mentioning

Intersections of authorial identity and race. When Candace and Katherine talked about social and institutional forces that impacted their authorial identities, they demonstrated emerging, but not fully formed, narratives in these areas. For example, Candace often discussed her African American identity and her family’s pursuit of access to rigorous educational opportunities, as well as how her grandfather had worked to raise expectations for African American students in the face of segregation through his work at a Historically Black University. She also discussed how many of her teachers seemed to have low expectations for her performance. Publically available end-of-grade test data shows that in the schools she attended, White students far outperformed their African American peers. As vivid as these connections seemed to me, Candace never stated that the same social and institutional forces that restricted her grandfather’s opportunities might be restricting her opportunities or that the expectations for African American scholars that her grandfather had to overcome might have persisted into present day. At

this time in Candace's life as a seventh grader, those two storylines do not yet appear to have intersected.

In the stories Candace told, she both represented her storyline of racial identity as an asset and countered the low expectations she described many teachers holding for her with this narrative of exceeding and raising expectations through academic achievement. However, she attributed the teachers' initial low expectations to her choice to remain quiet in class rather than to expectations related to her ability as an African American student. Based on this study it is not possible to determine whether or not teachers would confirm Candace's perceptions that they believed she had little academic promise, and if they did, to what factors they might attribute these low expectations. Nonetheless, it was notable that Candace herself linked low expectations to her individual behavior (remaining quiet) rather than to social or institutional forces.

Regardless, this narrative of access and achievement seemed to be a powerful force driving Candace to excel in her academic work, and I wondered how or if she made this resource visible to her teachers as she worked to raise their expectations. Consider this extended exchange during our final interview.

Researcher: You mentioned the idea of sharing personal stuff. Does personal stuff usually fit in to school writing?

Candace: Not really, I mean if it would be about your birthday party, that's something that teachers ask you to write about all the time, but then if it were to be like, oh, I went to the African American Museum of History or something like that then it would kind of be different. If you expressed a lot of thoughts about that certain period of time and it kind of conflicted with somebody else's writing or the teacher's opinion, it would be a little bit, oh, am I

going to get an A for expressing my extreme opinion or am I going to get an F?

Researcher: So do you think, you mentioned the African American Museum, do you think that you have to restrain your cultural knowledge or values in the classroom?

Candace: I try to restrain everything because you never really know. Certain teachers can just grade you for your grammar, some teachers, I've had that case like in third and fourth grade when they grade you because they agree with you or they like what you're saying, or they don't really like what you're saying. Because then, in elementary school, everything that your parents think is what you're supposed to think, allegedly. But that's one of the things that, I remember a kid wrote about something in politics and [the teacher] is like, "Where did you get this?", and he's like, "My parents said it." And that got him in a lot of trouble just for expressing his opinion.

Researcher: Do you feel like you hold opinions that shouldn't be expressed in classrooms?

Candace: Yeah.

Researcher: About what? I'm interested from your point of view... Like do you think there are political opinions that might be fine for you to talk about at your dinner table with your family but you wouldn't repeat those same words in the classroom or write those same words in the classroom?

Candace: Probably.

Candace then went on to discuss conversations with her grandmother debating the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy about homosexual people serving in the military and how she heard of a teacher in the area being suspended for playing the song "Same Love" by Macklemore that promotes acceptance of people who are gay and lesbian. I was curious how she had at first drawn on an example that was clearly relevant to her own

experience, visiting an African American history museum, and how it might be perceived as an “extreme opinion” in the classroom. Rather than maintaining this topic when I pushed further, she shifted to a discussion of homosexuality which may or may not have been personally relevant but which appeared to be more distant and far less salient in her narratives.

From a research perspective, I wanted to know more about why Candace, who prided herself on her African American heritage, thought it would be better not to mention going to an African American history museum. When I asked the follow up question, “Do you think that you have to restrain your cultural knowledge or values in the classroom?”, I had hoped Candace would bear witness to the ways social and institutional forces related to race impacted her personal experience, but instead she changed the subject and responded giving an example that did not appear to entail her personal experience. I wondered if Candace was using that same strategy with me as a White researcher that she reported using in school of trying to “restrain everything, because you never really know.” I remained curious about the ways Candace perceived the role of race in her own educational experiences and whether she had an answer that she chose not to disclose to me or whether, as a seventh grader, she yet had the depth of experience or critical distance to even perceive these possible effects.

Intersections of authorial identity and social class. Like Candace, Katherine also drew on social and institutional factors as she narrated her writing experiences in her Title I middle school with high minority enrollment, a growing population of English Language Learners, and widespread poverty. At the time of the interviews, she lived

with her mother, step-father, and brother in a home in a working-class neighborhood but recalled that she, her mother, and brother had experienced homelessness in the past. During one of the interviews conducted in her home another family was staying there as well and Katherine explained that her mother sometimes welcomed friends to stay with them, particularly if women and families were trying to remove themselves from domestic abuse. She told me several stories about family friends who were navigating relationships with abusive partners or partners whose activities and companions made their homes unsafe.

Katherine described her family as “helpers”— people who drew on their on-going lived experiences with hardship to provide direct assistance and advocacy for others who might lack knowledge or resources to take action themselves. Katherine explained that her mother had been involved in community organizing to petition the school board for safer physical conditions in the deteriorating neighborhood high school her brother attended, improved instruction in neighborhood schools, and school discipline policies that would interrupt rather than further what she saw as the “school to prison pipeline.” Katherine’s mother often spoke during the public comment time at school board meetings and Katherine had also written and presented a speech concerning the district dress code which, at the time, was implemented on a school-by-school basis and which was prevalent in schools that served low-income populations but rarely implemented in schools that served a majority of higher-income students. Both Katherine’s mother and step-father advocated for her, routinely participating in parent-teacher conferences and

encouraging her to speak out when she experienced or noticed inequity (even though this tendency appeared to land Katherine in trouble at school).

In an article Katherine was working on for her after school journalism club she wrote, “Have you ever wondered that the poor side of town has to have SMOD [standard mode of dress] and the other side doesn’t? How do you think that it makes the kids feel?” I asked her to tell me more about that line and she explained, “Well, these are the Title I schools, that have the free lunch, so, well, they’re making us feel bad about being poor and stuff, while the other side of town doesn’t have to wear SMOD.” Katherine appeared to build on her mother’s advocacy narratives to construct her own storylines and to make sense of the discipline measures she experienced as a result of even minor non-compliance with the SMOD policy. Katherine noted the injustice of the policy and the embarrassment she experienced as a result of it. She described herself as “a larger girl” and particularly disliked having to tuck in her polo shirt, which she found unflattering. She explained that one teacher who had enforced the tucked-in shirt policy was “really big around the middle, so she don’t have to tuck in her shirt, and she kept telling me to tuck in my shirt!” Katherine felt injustice in the way the dress code policy was enforced and was aware that it was not enforced equitably across the district. She also routinely claimed that her teachers were mean, that she and her family did not like or trust them, and that she learned very little in school. By our final interview she had withdrawn from public school to be homeschooled and was delighted to tell me that, at home, “my SMOD is pajamas.”

Although Katherine noted and discussed the differences in the ways the dress code was applied across the district, she did not discuss the ways schools across the district might also have differences in teacher quality, instructional practices, or classroom climate. She appeared to believe that her issues with teachers would be similar at any school she attended and did not seem to imagine that there might be schools she could attend happily where she could meet her learning goals. I wondered if Katherine might have thrived in a school where instructional practices that engaged her as a learner were more common or where authoritative discipline was less prevalent in the school culture. I wondered if teachers working in less stressful environments or with more resources might have sparked less animosity or distrust from Katherine and if, in turn, she might have experienced a sense of belonging in school that would have made it easier for her to learn. Katherine sought positive writing experiences outside of school through her on-line fan-fiction work and her participation in the writing camp, and she was honing the unique skill of using writing as a tool for advocacy—a purpose never mentioned by other participants. In these ways, the school experiences she found to be largely negative had positive side-effects suggesting that, even in the absence of writing instruction that young adolescents find accessible or relevant, there still are pathways to constructing meaning and developing authorial identity. Indeed, Katherine’s authorial identity seemed to be largely forged and focused in opposition to school and teachers, offering her a unique voice that she might not have developed in school settings where she experienced less adversity.

As I conducted each round of interviews with these participants, I often met with multiple students at close intervals and used the same interview protocol with each. I recall how striking it was to hear Katherine describe her school experiences and interactions with teachers and then to meet with Anastasia or Ryan, who also attended their neighborhood public middle schools, although ones that served more economically-diverse populations, and hear the differences in their stories. Anastasia and Ryan never mentioned being disciplined, described their teachers as being kind and their classrooms as calm, productive places where they enjoyed learning. Their mothers also were very involved with their children's education and worked to support their learning, but neither seemed to feel the need to advocate for their children beyond the occasional conference or call to a teacher.

Authorial Identity Role Models

Several participants discussed the influences of role models in their negotiation of authorial identity. Role models were sometimes people participants knew and with whom they interacted, but they also were authors or other public figures whose content, voice, or style they admired and tried to emulate in their own writing. In narratives about role models, participants explained how they modeled their writing on the writing of a role model or how they tried to portray their authorial identity to others using characteristics similar to their role models.

Avery, Nicole, and Bella looked up to particular teachers who shaped their approaches to writing. Avery credited her elementary Academically Gifted (AG) teacher whose class she had participated in for several years as someone who “really helped me

become the writer that I am today.” She described the teacher as “amazing” because she gave students interesting and thought-provoking writing assignments, as well as encouraging them to collaborate with one another to share ideas and co-compose stories. Avery had continued creative writing and collaborative work even after moving to middle school. Even after moving on to middle school, Avery performed the authorial identity this teacher fostered and valued. She continued to produce creative work and to look for opportunities to collaborate. In this way, the characteristics of an author that this teacher had encouraged became part of who Avery was as a writer.

Like Avery, Nicole looked up to a teacher and tried to produce writing that the teacher would enjoy and validate. Nicole had joined this teacher’s class the previous year in seventh grade as a new student at the school and was in her class for a second year as an eighth grader. She explained her connection to the teacher:

Mrs. Cameron was really open to helping me, like some teachers, I think they’re open, but . . . not really that welcoming, exactly. They just sort of push it off a little bit, maybe, but she was just really welcoming and she offered help and everything . . . as the [writing prompts] got deeper into thinking and stuff, I think that’s when she sort of, you know, well we both sort of realized I was actually starting to like this.

Mrs. Cameron often asked students to write pieces that included their own opinions and experiences, which Nicole found engaging and meaningful. By including notes in the margins such as, “I was thinking the same thing!” the teacher seemed to position Nicole as a young person who shared her ideas and perspectives. Nicole felt validated by Mrs. Cameron’s feedback and described how she would often write far more than the

minimum required for the writing prompts because she wanted to richly communicate her ideas to the teacher. “We’re so compatible,” Nicole explained, “we just understand each other, I don’t know, we’re just, like, perfect.” Nicole attributed her renewed interest in writing to this positive relationship with Mrs. Cameron. She noted, “You’re probably going to think it’s weird when I say this, but when I was in sixth grade I didn’t really like writing that much.” At the Title I public middle school Nicole attended in sixth grade, she had not particularly enjoyed the writing transactions with her language arts teacher, which often included reading stories in the literature book and writing short responses. Those previous writing experiences “just weren’t really, like, something I would get, like, really into or, like, opinionated about.” In contrast, “when I [got] Mrs. Cameron, it’s like she really made it in a way that I could, like, understand because she likes the type of writing I happen to like.” Nicole credited Mrs. Cameron with her success in writing and explained, “At another school . . . I’m pretty sure I would have liked writing, but I don’t think I would have liked it as much if I didn’t have her.” Nicole’s interactions with Mrs. Cameron seemed to shape and refine her authorial identity because she tried to perform in a way that earned Mrs. Cameron’s praise.

Bella explained that she looked up to singer/songwriter Laurie Berkner and imagined how she might write similar songs one day. “When I was little, I loved Laurie Berkner, and I loved . . . listening to her songs on *Jack’s Big Music Show* [a Nick Jr. show that used puppets to teach music fundamentals].” Bella enjoyed creative writing and often worked on crafting song lyrics, some of which she shared with me during our interviews. She explained that if she could write songs like anyone, “I’d be a Laurie

Berkner.” Bella was most familiar with Berkner’s songs for children, and, although she was concerned about the quality of her singing voice, she imagined that she might write songs for children as well. Looking up to this role model gave Bella a template for what her future as a songwriter might look like and she took steps in the present, such as writing silly songs with a friend at lunchtime, to mimic her role model.

Candace also used television role models to narrate her authorial identity. She and her father enjoyed watching political analyst Rachel Maddow on MSNBC and Candace explained that “I really like the way she speaks in that sarcastic tone and that’s something I kind of took on in class.” In addition to adopting Maddow’s tone in her academic speech, Candace noted how she tried to replicate her style in writing too. She explained that Maddow “speaks in metaphor and speaks so people can say, ‘Oh, this is what it really *is*,’ and that always comes into my writing. Not beating around the bush, you just get to the point.” Candace explained that taking up a Rachel Maddow-inspired writing persona was one way she followed her father’s advice that she should not be “afraid to color outside the lines . . . don’t be afraid to be the only one at the table who doesn’t think the same way.”

Other participants cited authors whose work they enjoyed and discussed ways they wanted to write like these role models. Katherine looked up to Philippa Gregory whose book about Henry VIII she was reading and imagined that she might be a “mythologist, an author, or a historian” like her. She also looked up to Richelle Mead and crafted strong female characters in her own writing like those she admired in Mead’s work. Katherine was introduced to the idea of on-line fan-fiction through a Mead’s

website. She explained, “If I didn’t know about [Mead], I would’ve never found [fan-fiction], and then I wouldn’t be as good as I am now.”

Whether these role models were familiar people in participants’ lives or more distant public figures known through books and television, they offered useful ways for these young adolescents to describe their own writing and authorial identity. As they described their various purposes for writing ranging from creativity and self-expression to analytical or opinion-based work, role models offered a conduit through which to imagine and negotiate their own writing identities.

Negotiating Status and Authorial Identity

Considering writing as a social action means that writers necessarily interact with others when they write. Participants offered copious narratives to explain how writing fits in with the social relationships they navigate with teachers and peers, as well as the ways they position themselves as writers in relationship to both known readers, such as teachers, and generic readers, such as the imagined reader of an academic essay.

Being a beginner in an expert world. In their middle school journeys as readers, writers, and students, these young adolescents were plunging into a world of more complex texts intended for adult audiences. Many of them remembered writing primarily narrative and informational texts for elementary school assignments but experienced a shift in middle school to more value being placed on tasks that demanded argumentative or persuasive writing. As Nicole, an eighth grader, explained, “I feel like [narrative writing] is going away for me.” Bella, Avery, and Anastasia all expressed an interest in writing books for children, perhaps as a way to build upon their sense of

expertise with fictional narratives. Participants also seemed to view themselves as beginners at adult writing, with the expertise they had felt as elementary school writers melting away. This status as beginners presented several challenges for young adolescents as they negotiated their authorial identities against assignments that seemed to demand expertise, as well as against their desire to be more sophisticated writers than their knowledge and experience allowed them to be.

Some participants, such as Andrew, seemed to confront these challenges to authorial identity as problems to be solved. He explained that in his language arts class students prepared and presented a debate about whether or not smoking should be banned. He noted that most classmates relied on emotional assertions or presented minimal information following the teacher's format for the assignment. Andrew suggested that his approach to the debate was more sophisticated, he described his experience:

I think a lot of people were kind of just like, "Well, [smoking is] bad," and I was the only person to talk about why it's bad. I think it improved the argument because, like, it added a different zest to the argument. Everyone was just kind of talking, and I mean I was, like, changing my voice to make it work, and, like, I was using examples and all this. Everyone was like barely two minutes and I was like ten minutes, so like if you have supporting details, then you can finish it the way it needs to be finished. I had it – I had to think about what I was saying and I didn't stutter, so, yeah, just confidence.

Andrew mentioned that watching televised presidential debates had provided him with a model for adjusting his volume and pace to emphasize his points. He suggested that reading more extensive and sophisticated source material than his classmates allowed

him to build arguments that would hold up to scrutiny. He prepared extensively so that he would not need to read from his notes and used these tools to build a sense of expertise and to demonstrate that sensibility in his classroom as what he termed “confidence.”

Other participants seemed either less capable of appropriating the more adult markers of expertise that Andrew exercised or less comfortable performing these expert roles for peers and teachers. Katherine, who wanted to appear older and more sophisticated in her writing than her 13 years, positioned herself as a beginner rather than an expert. She explained that when she posted her work to the on-line fan-fiction site, she did so with the understanding that “I’m a beginner, so there might be some criticism. But I welcome that because, you know, I want to be better.” During the coffeehouse-style reading for friends and family on the final day of the writing camp, Katherine asked one of the instructors to read her story aloud while she retreated to the restroom across the hall. Her well-written story was very positively received by the audience, who gave her an extended round of applause. I asked if she could hear the applause and how she felt about it. She replied, “I wanted to bury myself.” Despite the sophisticated authorial voice evident in her writing, Katherine did not yet feel she had the social presence to read her work aloud or to come face-to-face with her audience. By contrast to Andrew, she felt awkward, embarrassed, and anxious.

Katherine found it much easier to post work on-line when she could maintain a level of anonymity by using a screen name and interacting with other writers at a distance. Nonetheless, she still positioned herself as a beginner whose work might not be as sophisticated as that of other writers. I asked Katherine how she would describe

herself as a writer outside of school and she explained, “I have to criticize myself. I would say ‘Katherine, you’re the worst writer ever. Look over your story.’ I want to see my story on there and see everybody’s feedback. If I want some good feedback, though, I’d better wait.” She also told me that she would hesitate, checking and rechecking her work for spelling errors or other mistakes. Even when she posted the work, she said she often lingered over the final click before making it public. “It’s really bad,” she explained, “I won’t [click] ‘confirm’ when it’s telling me to do it, but I like writing, so I have to.” Katherine did eventually click “confirm,” posting her stories to the fan-fiction website, where she received helpful feedback and encouragement from other fan-fiction writers.

Katherine explained that she needed to keep her writing secret and to shield her authorial identity from critique by those around her until she had gotten better at writing. She showed me how, once she uploaded her work to the fan-fiction site, she would place her cursor at the end of her completed work and hold down the “backspace” key as the story was erased letter-by-letter leaving only a blank document in her files. The stories only existed anonymously on-line once she had deleted them from her computer. “I have to keep my stories a secret, because Mom checks [the computer]. Don’t tell Mom or I’ll have to save it,” she told me. Even though she found her mother supportive, Katherine explained that she was not ready to share her writing in person. She said, “I don’t know [my on-line readers] to my face, and when they make me mad, I can just ignore them. I can’t ignore her, she’s my mother.”

Anastasia also described a need to keep her authoring work secret while she refined her writing. She explained that she had only showed her novel, probably around 75 pages in length at the time of our last interview, to her family and to me. I asked if her language arts teacher whom she liked a great deal knew about the book and Anastasia explained, “Nobody knows about my book. It’s a surprise.” Although she was proud of her work and appreciated her family’s encouragement, Anastasia chose to keep her writing a secret from her teachers or friends. She explained that when her book was complete she would share it, and she hoped that readers would, “think that I’m trying my best to be an author, and that I’m trying to be a good author in the future.” Anastasia seemed to want her book to be perceived as a strong work for a young author, one that suggested to readers that she held promise that would be realized with future works. I asked Anastasia if any of the characters in her book were like her or if she ever did autobiographical writing, but she explained that her life experience was too limited as a seventh grader to warrant this type of work. She said, “I won’t make a story out of me, because I’m my own story. I have to keep living on for my life. So I have to do that first, then maybe I’ll tell a book about me.” Both Katherine and Anastasia seemed to recognize that they needed to find ways to share and get feedback on their writing in order to develop it but that they also needed to shelter their authorial identities while they worked toward greater levels of experience and expertise.

Both Anastasia and Katherine expressed interest in becoming professional authors and both narrated their experiences sheltering their authorial identities with writing projects they undertook outside of school. Ryan, a sixth grader, was less certain what

type of career he might like to pursue, but he also described protecting his authorial identity within the context of school writing. He noted that in school, if students needed help or felt stuck with their writing they had to go to the teacher's desk to ask for help, signaling to the teacher and classmates that they were uncertain or having problems with writing. By contrast, at the writing camp he liked how instructors and writing coaches circulated and checked in with all campers, asking questions about their work and offering suggestions. He explained that "the whole time you were there, you had help. You could ask questions when you needed to. It was, like, no big deal." He explained that at school he did not want to draw attention to himself or make others think he needed help, but at camp "everybody was focused and doing what they were doing, and at school, most of the time, [teachers] won't come to you or ask you, and [students] won't do it themselves." Ryan seemed to acknowledge that he was a beginner, but in school he chose not to seek support if it meant drawing teachers' or peers' attention to his lack of expertise. In this way, sheltering his authorial identity from critique or negative attention constrained his opportunities to enhance his skills.

Teacher to student writing interactions. When students wrote for school purposes, they identified their teachers both as supporters and evaluators. Their relationships with teachers were complex because they needed to maintain parallel relationships with them. They needed to interact as writers and readers, relationships that for these students sometimes demanded a tone of expertise in argumentative or persuasive writing. However, they simultaneously needed to interact as novices and compliant students with teachers who held both expertise and authority. Although these

young adolescents were adept at inferring norms and guidelines for academic writing, their approaches were sometimes muddled by the competing demands placed on them as emerging writers and as middle school students.

A capable writer outside of school, Katherine reported that she restrained herself as a student writer because she was fearful of teachers she perceived as authoritarian. She shared a story about a teacher who often demanded respect from students, but who, in Katherine's estimation, did not demonstrate respect for her students. Because Katherine believed strongly in using writing for advocacy purposes, I asked if she would consider writing a letter to the teacher with suggestions for making the classroom a more mutually respectful space. "Oh, no," she replied, "I'm too scared. No, no. I'll just let my mom deal with that." She noted that, on the infrequent writing assignments given to students, teachers rarely gave feedback beyond a letter grade. However, even on the limited occasions in which she recalled receiving comments from the teacher, she explained, "my teachers give me feedback, but I don't trust them." In Katherine's narratives and my interactions with her family during our interviews at their home, this sense of distrust for teachers and schools was evident and threaded through their narratives of school. Katherine explained that at school she did her best to comply with the rules simply to avoid trouble but that she did not really believe in the values those rules reflected. She told me that she and her family "are a band of rebels ourselves" and that they remained true to themselves rather than buying into systems that tried to silence them. Katherine described herself as a shy and quiet student, but one who could be outspoken when she perceived inequity or injustice. As a result, she seemed to be on the

receiving end of disciplinary measures somewhat routinely and, for her, difficult teacher/student relationships precluded meaningful reader/writer relationships. She withheld her authorial identity at school, sharing it through outside writing activities instead.

Although Nicole reported congenial and encouraging relationships with her teachers, she also struggled to navigate the parallel relationships of reader/writer and teacher/student. She expressed confusion about trying to write an argumentative essay for a generic reader when she knew that the actual reader was her teacher. “Am I supposed to be writing it for somebody else to be reading that maybe doesn’t know about this? Or is it somebody that’s seen it and just has questions? Or is it just my teacher?” she wondered. Unlike Katherine, Nicole was willing to negotiate her authorial identity through school writing but found the task confusing as she worked to reconcile these parallel relationships and to position herself simultaneously as a writer and as a student.

Peer to peer writing interactions. Teacher to student writing relationships were complex, but at least they had predictable dynamics in which the teacher held higher status than the student. Peer writing relationships lacked the element of navigating official authority structures, but social dynamics were easily as complex if not more so. Young adolescents reported writing experiences that were collaborative, competitive, and discordant, and the social implications for their interactions extended far beyond the words inscribed on the page or the grades they earned for their work.

Some students experienced positive and constructive collaborative writing endeavors. Avery, for example, who had experience writing collaboratively in

elementary school under the guidance of her AG teacher, very much enjoyed the practice. She enthusiastically told me about a year-long collaborative writing project she and a friend had undertaken in preparation for a school fair that allowed students to showcase extended independent work. Avery and her friend were co-authoring and illustrating a book for children about a “flamango” – a flamingo who turned orange from eating too many mangoes but who was unafraid to be different and stand out as unique. She described the project as “really fun, because we’re best friends . . . one morning I came over to her house to work on it and we just wrote about it, we got a lot of stuff done for it and it was just, like, fun doing it with a friend.” Although the girls began crafting the story for a school project, they had begun to envision an additional purpose for the work. A third friend’s family had recently moved to Seattle, and Avery and her friend hoped to self-publish the book and sell enough copies to fund a visit to their friend.

During another collaborative writing project, Avery and her partner disagreed about the direction for their work. She explained their process:

We weren’t sure what to do about that because, like, my partner, both of us, we’re not really argumentative people, so we didn’t want to argue, but we didn’t want the other person to get their way. So we would just, like, try to figure out which idea would be best for the story and we would try to compromise on it.

Collaborative writing served as a tool for Avery to negotiate authorial identity along the three planes Prior (2006) proposed—*externalization*, or producing and distributing speech, writing, or objects; *co-action*, or use of those objects in the social-material environment; and *internalization*, or perception and learning accrued to the individual (p.

55). Avery externalized her work by composing and interweaving it with her partner's writing. She participated in co-action as she and her partners used the writing for graded work, to share with a school-based audience, and possibly as a marketable publication for a wider audience that might enable their visit to Seattle. In the process, she also accrued learning, coming to describe herself as creative and collaborative, and deploying her language resources and interpersonal skills to practice writing skills in a project that she found meaningful.

Andrew also narrated experiences co-authoring projects with a friend. The two had worked together as science fair partners for multiple years and, as part of the projects, had to undertake research, plan and implement an experiment, present their findings in written text, visual representation, and oral presentation. Unlike Avery, Andrew did not discuss having guidance from a respected teacher about collaboration. Perhaps this lack of instruction, gender differences, or personality differences yielded a very different power dynamic in his collaborative work. Andrew explained that his friend "doesn't have the traits of a leader . . . I keep [the projects] going and I think that's what keeps us motivated . . . You don't sit back and let someone else take the lead, you take the lead." Andrew reported that he selected the topic, designed the work flow, monitored progress, and took responsibility the final project. At one point his partner produced work that Andrew felt did not meet the quality he wanted, and he recalled how he had balled up his partner's work and thrown it in the trashcan.

During the writing camp, Andrew worked collaboratively with Nicole and Bella to produce several projects. He took the lead on a website the group designed, while the

girls took the lead on a script for a video. Andrew explained that “no matter where you are on the totem pole, so to speak, you kind of have to let someone take control and you have to, like, realize you cannot take control of everything.” Unlike Avery, who negotiated with her co-author to reach a compromise, Andrew found it more effective to establish a chain of command with a project and to craft collaborative works by having a lead author and subordinates. He was willing to shift the role he played depending on the situation, but he seemed to have a harder time relinquishing control when work counted for a grade, as at school, than when the work was part of an enrichment experience, as at camp.

Avery modeled a compromise-based form of collaboration whereas Andrew modeled a command-and-control version. Having the opportunity to observe Andrew and Nicole as collaborators in the camp and to hear their separate accounts of how they also interacted together in their language arts class helped me understand the complex social dynamics at play as they transacted with one another through writing. In the camp setting, they both served as project leaders with Bella acting as a subordinate. This model seemed to work well for them and they produced work that satisfied them both. Their interactions in the camp were upbeat and friendly. At school, they both discussed how they maintained a friendly rivalry. Nicole described them as being good friends, particularly in their afterschool writing club, while Andrew appeared to like her but to see himself as friends only with the other boys in the group. He noted that the girls usually sat together on one side of the room and the boys on the other. Perhaps differences in their maturity and openness to friendships across gender lines informed the way they

described one another. Andrew described how he and Nicole had been on opposite sides of their language arts assignment debating whether or not smoking should be banned. He explained of their rivalry:

I think it plays out by us trying to better each other, and Mrs. Cameron has actually noticed it. She can just see that we're constantly in competition with each other and I would have to say [Nicole] is probably better than me in the language arts aspect but I'm probably better than her in math. But I mean, at the end of the day, we're probably both the exact same.

Having this friendly rivalry seemed to drive both Andrew and Nicole to research and prepare thoroughly and to attend the quality of their written work and presentations. Trying to outdo one another appeared to be a meaningful tool for negotiating authorial identity, allowing them to see themselves as raising the bar for one another and both performing as authors whose ability exceeded many of their classmates.

Each of these models, compromise, command-and-control, and competition, were productive pathways through which peers interacted to produce writing. However, middle school also appeared to be a space in which teachers tried to facilitate peer-to-peer writing experiences that were not very functional in their implementation. Students' maturity and development, as well as their interpersonal skills, seemed to interfere with some of their writing endeavors. For instance, Bella, a sixth grader, described her frustration when her teacher repeatedly paired her with a male classmate. She explained that when she was writing alone, "It's just creative . . . But when I'm working with [the boy], what he'll do is add in flamethrowers. Not my idea of a sensitive story when someone gets hit all the time." As Bella tried to perform an authorial identity of

sensitivity and creativity, she was constrained by her partner's desire to write violent action stories. The two students had a shared task, but their purposes, language resources, and the mentor texts they valued were out of alignment. Bella reported that she accomplished very little when paired with this student who tried to take over their stories with violent twists and spent a great deal of time circulating around the room talking to his friends about sports. "He's a really bony, rude boy," Bella claimed, "That's the nicest way I can describe him, seriously." In this way, interpersonal social dynamics constrained Bella's actual writing production. In terms of negotiating her authorial identity, having to partner with this classmate prevented her from being sensitive and creative, but it also provided an oppositional force against which she could define herself as an author.

Like Bella, Anastasia and Katherine also preferred to write alone rather than to try to negotiate collaborative practices with peers. "I'm an alone worker," Anastasia explained, "I'm much more, like, focused on my work when I'm more independent. I wanted to do it on my own, and I did good on my own." Anastasia preferred to control the content and pace of her writing but noted that she was pushing herself to try connecting with groups more now that she was in middle school. "I like helping others, and I like others to help me." Katherine expressed relief at being able to work by herself as a homeschooled student. "I love it," she explained, "I'm shy and I don't really like working with kids." Navigating social interactions around writing in school seemed to have been taxing for Katherine. As she noted, "These kids these days, you just don't know how to talk to them. Even I don't know how to talk to them, and I'm one of them."

For Katherine, writing independently minimized the stresses of negotiating social relationships allowing her the needed attention to focus on the work at hand.

Andrew's peer-to-peer interactions with Nicole, whom he viewed as an intellectual equal, inspired him to work harder as he competed with her. However, when partnered with students he viewed as less academically capable than himself, Andrew struggled to reconcile his authorial identity with his social identity. During a writers' workshop activity, Andrew recalled working with a partner whose work he believed had significant room for improvement. He explained his dilemma:

There's a fine line between being nice about it and being mean about it, so I don't like editing that much. It's kind of hard because I'm friends with a lot of people in the class so you can't, you've got to kind of watch what you say because, like if you say something that could hurt someone else, it's kind of just a domino effect in there. I mean, it's kind of just something that came through experience, like you see someone get yelled at [by a classmate who did not appreciate the criticism] and then it's just watch what you say from there.

Andrew explained that, although he might have ideas that would improve a classmate's work, he rarely shared them because he did not want to hurt the classmate's feelings or spark conflict. He mentioned that students learned all the time at his school not to hurt someone's feelings, seemingly as part of lessons on avoiding bullying and that he had extended this sensibility to offering feedback on writing. Although these young adolescents were very alert to norms of communication, they sometimes seemed to blur the lines between behavioral rules and academic rules or to draw generalizations from one realm to the other that sometimes were useful but at other times constrained their writing interactions.

Performing authorial identity in mixed teacher/peer groups. Participants' narratives shed light on the complexity of their authorial identity work as they transacted with teachers and with peers separately. Candace described the ways her interactions became even more layered when she was called upon to perform authorial identity for an audience that included both teachers and peers. She had reflected that in her old school she typically remained silent in class. She did not want to draw negative attention from her peers by acting smart, but she also did not want her teachers to think poorly of her if she pretended to be less intelligent than she was. She chose to remain silent, but noted that an unanticipated outcome of that choice was that teachers assumed she was less intelligent and peers sometimes thought she was standoffish.

At her new school, an academically-oriented charter academy, Candace was pleased to find that showing her intelligence was validated by both teachers and peers, and as a result she was becoming more vocal in class. At the new school, Candace explained that when she used sophisticated vocabulary, "I would say 85-90% of the time I get a positive response, but I wouldn't say the same for [my former school]." In her first major writing assignment of seventh grade, before she fully understood the norms and climate at the new school, Candace learned that she would have to submit a copy to the teacher and provide a copy to the class. She felt uncertain how to proceed and recalled thinking:

You know, peers don't really like to hear you say the big words or anything, but if you use them with a teacher it's like, "Oh, I get what they're saying!" So that's why I was thinking, well, do I make a teacher's copy with all the, you know, like the good, the better sounding words? And then just make the student copy with

the synonyms, the easier ones? I asked Mr. Everett, my current language arts teacher, and he was like, “No, I don’t think that’ll be a problem with your group.” And it wasn’t.

Drawing on her prior experiences of peers having more limited vocabularies and demonstrating negative social responses to performances of intelligence, Candace improvised the innovative solution of having separate texts for her two audiences. As she came to better understand the norms of authorial identity performance with her new peer group, she revised her plans and produced only one text. This narrative demonstrated Candace’s attention to the needs and desires of her audiences but also highlighted the choices she confronted in performing authorial identity in a mixed peer and teacher group in which social expectations and consequences came into conflict.

Building on the three-dimensional inquiry model (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), participants narratives identified and provided insights into the ways they, as young adolescents, perceived the social and institutional forces that impacted their authorial identities. Students identified with some authorial personas while resisting others and made choices about who they were as authors based on their skills, contexts, and purposes.

Authorial Identity from an Individual Perspective

The three-dimensional inquiry model (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) prompts researchers to consider ways in which participants look outward to their social contexts and inward to their individual or internal perspectives. As this group of young adolescents narrated their writing experiences, they revealed how their authorial identities

layered their unique mesh of social, institutional, and family factors, along with their language resources, to create a personalized authorial perspective.

In the Mirror and Under the Microscope

As young adolescents narrated their writing experiences, they often made distinctions between how they saw themselves and how they imagined others saw them, as well as their differing approaches to writing they undertook for personal reasons versus writing they undertook for school. Through these stories, participants offered their perspectives on the authorial identities they saw when they looked in the mirror and the authors they believed those around them saw when they put participants under the microscope.

Avery explained that when she wrote for school she checked her work carefully to be certain she had followed directions and completed assignments thoroughly. She explained that her writing for school tended to be “a little more serious, because then I know other people are going to be seeing it.” When she wrote to express her creativity for an audience of friends and family, she explained, “I’m more comfortable with [friends and family] so I can be more free with what I say, and they know me better so I can tell them personal stuff, but it will also be funny stuff and silly stuff.” Nicole described her authorial identity for school writing versus out of school writing similarly, noting that when she wrote for enjoyment outside of school

It’s something that you want to do for you or you like to do for fun, or to learn more about it, but it’s not . . . as serious, not like you have to sit here and make sure everything is right and everything is just the way how [teachers] want it. But then, like, when it’s for school, I think it’s taken way more seriously for me

especially, and I really try to make sure I do exactly how she wants it done, especially if she asks for specific things to be done because it's a grade . . . and, like, I usually don't try and go, like, way outside of the instructions.

On the other hand, Nicole explained that in her out-of-school writing, "I get to sort of experiment on my own, so it's like experimentative, or, is that a word? Maybe like daring or even just, I guess, like, just free." Avery and Nicole, both of whom valued top grades and positive teacher comments, worked to tailor their in-school authorial identities to teachers' requirements, but used out-of-school writing to experiment and play with language. Their in-school writing seemed focused on the teacher as audience, but out-of-school they wrote for friends and family, or sometimes simply for themselves.

Despite the need to be a serious writer for school, neither Avery nor Nicole seemed constrained by those demands. They appeared to appreciate their teachers' support as they performed authorial identities that were valued and validated in school. Similarly, Ryan explained that he benefited from some of the constraints of school and appreciated the guidance and structure teachers put in place. "I like writing in school because most of the time they'll give you a certain type of topic you can write on. Like they'd say 'Write about your family.' You'll know what to write about. Yeah, I like that." Although Ryan appreciated that his teachers narrowed the field of topics or forms for his writing, he did feel that they sometimes lacked a well-rounded perception of his authorial identity. Ryan said that he would describe himself as "a hard, deep thinker" but that teachers might perceive him instead as a slow writer. I asked if teachers might describe him as a deep thinker too, but he replied, "I don't think so, because I don't think

they always know how long it took me to think of an idea.” Ryan did believe that his family would describe him as a deep thinker because they could see how hard he worked at home to research, edit, and revise his final products.

Other participants narrated this inside/outside perspective on their writing identities less extensively. Candace considered herself free and independent as a writer, and imagined that her teachers saw her in a similar light. Anastasia saw herself as a “multitasking” and efficient writer. She thought her English language arts teacher would describe her as a good writer, because she always completed writing assignments thoroughly and on-time. Katherine described herself as “very free and creative” and thought her teachers would consider her “more talented” than most of her classmates who she claimed resisted writing at all. She said her on-line readers were encouraging and thought of her as a good writer. She explained, “Sometimes I tell them, when they’re being too sweet, I tell them that they’re giving me cavities.” Andrew prided himself on his thorough and comprehensive writing and thought his teachers would describe him as “informative.” I asked how peers would view him as a writer and he responded with a sigh, “Longwinded would probably be a common word.” Bella considered herself a writer both in and out of school. She explained that for school writing she would describe herself as “making myself sound smart . . . using big words, using titanic words.” She imagined that her teachers would describe her as “writing excessive pages.”

As participants undertook in-school and out-of-school writing, they worked to develop different facets of their authorial identities. When they attended to teachers as the audience for in-school writing, some students like Avery and Nicole could get

teachers to see them as they wanted to be seen, but other students like Ryan found a disconnect in the way he interpreted his writing practices and the ways his teachers made meaning of those same actions.

Writing as a Tool for Communicating Authorial Identity

Participants differentiated writing from other types of assessment and evaluation they experienced in school. Anastasia explained that “writing is fun, but multiple choice is easy. Multiple choice, you don’t have to put your answer together, don’t have to do extra stuff.” Ryan noted that “with multiple choice, if you know one thing’s wrong, you can always X that out, and you can always find the right answer eventually, and I’d just rather test that writing sometimes.” Participants seemed to perceive writing as somewhat of an academic risk, an explanation that they had to assemble from available information that might or might not be the “right answer” teachers were hoping to find. Ryan noted that “on the ones you have to write, you have to make the answer yourself.” This process of making answers for school writing was challenging, and sometimes left students feeling exposed to criticism or negative feedback more so than selecting the right answers on a multiple choice test.

Writing as a demonstration of effort. Although writing could be risky, it could also be a method for participants to demonstrate their effort to their teachers. Anastasia explained that she usually far exceeded the minimum requirements for her writing assignments, preferring to write “more. A lot more.” She explained that sometimes peers “would look at me all crazy and stuff. It’s like, ‘What? I’m writing.’” When Anastasia had to complete group work, she always took responsibility for the writing. “If

there's a job for writing and reading and doing all that, then that's the job for me. I'll get it done quickly." Anastasia believed her efficiency at completing writing made her group look good in the eyes of the teacher. "We have a big project due in, like, four weeks. I get it done first." When confronting complex writing assignments, Anastasia described herself as "an early person" who broke down tasks and completed them thoroughly and efficiently. I told her that I needed to learn her secrets for completing my dissertation and she suggested, "No, just think about it . . . this is what you do. Think about everything right on task. I'll do this and this, and then I'm done." Writing more than expected and turning in work early were both ways Anastasia used writing to demonstrate her effort to teachers and to perform an authorial identity in which she took pride.

Like Anastasia, Andrew also prided himself on being the type of writer who could break down complicated assignments and deliver work on a schedule that met or exceeded teachers' expectations. He also typically wrote far more than the required minimum to demonstrate his work ethic to his teachers and was often rewarded for his extra effort. However, in his social studies class, Andrew encountered a teacher who "wants it just like half a page, end of conversation." He had marked Andrew's grade down when he exceeded the length requirements. Andrew felt frustrated when he used a practice that validated his authorial identity in one class but that yielded the opposite effect in another class. He described how he would comply with the social studies teacher, but he did not plan to alter his authorial identity by being brief rather than elaborating on a topic. "I'm just like, forget it, just keep your two points. I mean, I make good grades in his class but he's just, like, it just gets aggravating after a certain point.

When confronted with a teacher who challenged his authorial identity, Andrew opted for surface-level compliance with the teacher but did not change his focus to producing concise or minimal work.

Writing as a tool for self-expression. Both in school and outside of school, writing served as a tool for self-expression. Crafting original works gave participants the opportunity to make their ideas visible and to communicate with those around them. As Nicole explained her experience in English language arts class:

Constantly all day I'm writing a lab report or a math equation or in social studies taking notes. So by the time I get to language arts and I have that free time where I get to write what I want to write, it's, like, a good feeling. You're like, "Oh, finally!"

Composing original works and open-ended writing activities, even when they were in response to a prompt or question, appeared to generate the greatest meaning for participants. They described these writing experiences as ways to interpret the world or to put their stamp on things. When participants had opportunities for self-expression, they enacted their authorial identities by providing unique or personal perspectives. In this way they hoped to have some effect, no matter how small, on the worlds they inhabited. As Holland, et al. (1998) explain, "humans' capacity for self-objectification – and through objectification, for self-direction – plays into both their domination by social relations of power and their possibilities for (partial) liberation from these forces" (p. 5). When participants made sense of academic content or of their own experiences using

writing, they engaged in what Holland, et al. (1998) frame as, “In the making of meaning, we ‘author’ the world” (p. 170).

Katherine remembered positioning herself as an author as a young child when she would line up her stuffed animals and read children’s books aloud to them. Although she liked her collection of books, she explained that she often used the pictures to reimagine the stories. “I took a book, and then I imagined how it would be if I wrote it. So I said things I wanted to say, and not what was written in the book.” Saying the things they wanted to say seemed quite exciting for these young adolescents, particularly when their individual perspectives were taken seriously or validated by teachers or others whose opinions they valued. Andrew explained that Mrs. Cameron, the language arts teacher he and Nicole shared, accepted and encouraged his outspoken authorship. “A lot of people come up with these bland answers,” he explained, “but mine are normally off the wall, and the same with Nicole’s. [We find an angle] that’s something people overlook, like mine are sometimes really basic, but the way I put them makes them sound complex.”

Candace also valued opportunities for self-expression and wanted to stand out as possessing a unique authorial identity. She noted of her approach:

I’ve always been the person really outside of the box . . . that’s always kind of been my writing style, like going outside, coloring outside the lines is how I am. Just going way outside of what everybody is expecting you to do and then just have people raise their eyebrows like, “Wow!”

Candace also reported that she had, particularly in her former school, been very reserved and rarely spoke in class. However, she saw her writing as a place where she could

practice an independent authorial voice even if she was not yet confident enough to use that voice to speak about her opinions.

Bella also believed she benefitted from opportunities to express herself in writing both in and out of school. She valued humor both in our conversations and in her writing and seemed particularly alert to wordplay in language. She shared several acrostic poems with me that she reported having written during “a boring part of science class” such as “GLUE: Good Luck Undoing Elmer.” During our interviews in the university conference room, she constantly raised, lowered, and spun around in her office chair while we talked. At one point she had lowered the chair to its lowest setting and then pulled the release so she suddenly rose about a foot while answering a question. I said, “You’re hitting a growth spurt.” Bella replied, “I know, ‘Growth Spurt in Room 458.’ That should be a book. Why don’t we start that book today?” We agreed that “Growth Spurt in Room 458” did sound like the title of a book she might find in the Scholastic book order she brought home from school and that it might be part of a series about mysteries at a haunted school. Bella explained that using humor in her writing, or manipulating language in ways that other people might not expect, gave her the opportunity to show others that, “I got brains. I got crazy brains, but I got brains.” Using her “crazy brains” gave Bella a way to personalize her world and to author her experiences from a quirky, witty perspective.

Like Bella, Andrew also valued opportunities to demonstrate his unique authorial identity in his writing, particularly the way he took on sophisticated topics for school

reports or looked for less obvious claims to support his arguments that other students might not consider. Andrew explained how his approach differed from that of his peers:

I like branching out. I don't like doing it the way everybody wants me to do it. It's a little hard for [some classmates] because they don't have the creative mindset, they really don't know how to expand on [their arguments]. I think it's just the way I've been raised, like I've been raised not to follow everybody else, to do something different. I think it's kind of like my own special way . . . not cookie cutter. Yeah, I like to be different. I think it's mainly because, like the way I've always come up with stuff, it's always been different.

Other participants described the ways they expressed their unique authorial identities through their out-of-school writing. Ryan enjoyed writing stories, such as a short story about travelers who fell into a magical river, in a composition notebook in his room. He described himself as a creative person and categorized his writing alongside other creative activities such as drawing imaginary factories or using LEGO blocks to design robots. Avery also paired her writing with other creative activities. She explained, "Both of my parents are in the arts, so I guess they've always been really supportive of me. They'll always listen." Whether reading stories aloud or practicing hitting high notes for her chorus performance, Avery had a willing audience with her parents. Her younger brother and sister sometimes complained about her singing, but her parents would say, "It's okay, Avery's just practicing." Having this willing audience who supported her as she practiced her creative voice (authorial or choral) appeared to serve a similar function as Candace, Andrew, and Nicole's teacher audience for their academic writing. Each provided an opening and a more knowledgeable supporter to help young adolescents practice their authorial identities.

Not only did Avery's writing allow her to be more unique or individual, she reported that it also connected her to others. She considered her writing as a way to express herself, as well as a way to put herself in someone else's shoes, a skill she imagined using in a future career. She explained her perspective:

When you write about things it can give you a different perspective and you can kind of like think about how somebody else would think, and that can, if you're writing in first-person in a character's point of view, then you're that character for a while. You're writing how, like, they are seeing the world and so that helps me I guess. I can understand what others like or even, like when I grow up I want to be a therapist . . . so if I can understand someone it can help me learn to understand different points of view, like in ten different brains.

As I listened to the enthusiasm participants had for writing that encouraged opinion or argumentation, thought about Nicole's earlier discussion of how she disliked reading stories and answering questions in the literature book at her previous school. It seemed that not only did participants find those assignments tedious, but they also pushed back against the standardizing effects they had on writing. They seemed to find little meaning in writing assignments in which all students were expected to produce a single right answer. Instead, the writing work they found meaningful both encouraged them to deal with course content and to activate the elements of their own identities and experiences that gave them an individual perspective.

Building on Prior's (2006) notion that writing within a sociocultural framework simultaneously socializes and individuates writers (p. 55), I wondered if typical writing instruction and assignments were designed to balance both or if the balance was weighted too heavily toward socialization. Clearly, these young adolescent writers drew on norms

for academic writing and communication, but they craved assignments that prompted and allowed for individuation or, as Dyson (2003) suggested, “normalized variation” (p. 5). Students seemed to hold sophisticated goals for their writing, even if their skills were not yet developed to the point that they could realize those goals. As a frequent observer in English language arts classrooms, I saw a great deal of skills instruction that seemed to be undertaken with the idea that students need to first master basic skills before they are promoted to more purposeful or individuated work. I wondered if students’ engagement with skills-based work would improve if they first had a meaningful purpose and then worked to develop the skills to realize that purpose.

Performing Authorial Identity Across Time

Participants seemed to find the most vivid meaning in writing opportunities that allowed them to negotiate who they were, whether in terms of their position on a topic, their engagement with a content area, or their creative perspective on an idea. These “self-understandings” (Holland, et al., 1998, p. 3) undergirded participants’ authorial identities. This study prompted participants to engage in “self-telling,” or organizing memories thematically into a life story in such a way that it both provided coherent insights for me as a researcher and served as a mediating tool for adolescents to order, negotiate, and make sense from their own experiences (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 183). Self-telling has been identified not only as an internal thinking tool but also as a way to represent self to others by marshaling autobiographical reasoning into stories with temporal coherence, using social conventions to organize and communicate stories, drawing thematic coherence through multiple stories organized around a unified topic,

and employing a sense of causal coherence (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 183). Self-telling, then is a tool both for identity negotiation and for representing an authorial persona to listeners or readers. Both writing experiences themselves and the shifting storylines or self-tellings participants constructed to order and make meaning of those experiences appeared to develop over time through on-going identity negotiation.

Several participants recalled their earliest experiences with writing as being both skill-based (inscribing letters, connecting letters to speech sounds) and acts of self-representation. Avery recalled that in kindergarten, the teacher had written each student's name on the overhead projector and students watched as she wrote their names and then copied the letters. Learning to write her name was memorable for Avery because it was a statement of who she was. She told me that her mother had saved a paper from preschool that they believed was the first time Avery had written her name. She explained, "You can barely make out my name because . . . I'd drawn flowers all over, but you could kind of see my name." This paper had become a family keepsake not because Avery could form letters but because she could use text to represent herself in the form of her name.

She also remembered that in kindergarten the class had engaged in self-representation through text when each student created an "All About Me" book that included details about their lives. Every Friday the class explored one student's book. Avery remembered that she showed that she could write her name and that the class celebrated getting to know each week's All About Me student by drawing a picture of him or her. In this way the concepts of telling who she was, representing her name in

print, and receiving drawings that represented her from her classmates were seeds of Avery's authorial identity from a very early, even pre-literate stage.

Although Avery began representing herself as an author—a girl who could write her name and use words and pictures to tell who she was—in kindergarten, it is not surprising that her authorial identity negotiation had progressed in the years between kindergarten and seventh grade. In that seven-year span, Avery had grown from someone who represented herself by writing her name to a writer that enacted her authorial identity by producing book critiques, dramatic scripts, short stories, children's books, and speeches. As she encountered new purposes and audiences and collected resources in the form of language, style, and structure, the ways she understood herself as a writer and represented herself to others changed accordingly. During our interviews she recalled with some embarrassment that in elementary school she had an assignment that asked her to describe her ideal invention, and she had created a baseball cap that held a bowl of ice cream on top and had mechanical spoons that would feed the wearer. “Looking back I just thought, why did I? How did I? How did I think of that as an invention I wanted? Because that's kind of weird.” Because these young adolescents were developing so rapidly, they often looked back at work completed a relatively short time earlier and felt somewhat ashamed of the content, organization, or presentation. However, Avery took a longer view of her writing identity negotiation. She explained of her thinking:

I just remember hearing somebody say it that, like, when you think about yourself a year ago you think, did I really do that? Then you think, in the future am I going to think about myself now and think, did I really do that?

Avery seemed, in this statement, to accept the fact that her authorial identity was a work in progress and that change and variation were normal, even if she did find her ice cream hat invention a little juvenile.

Ryan also acknowledged that his writing ability and the ways he understood and represented himself as a writer changed over time. He noted that he did consider himself a writer because “I was writing a lot of stories younger, and my mom taught me how to write at a young age.” However, his authorial identity shifted as he had new experiences. He explained, “I passed through different writing teachers, and they all taught me how they like to write.” This “passing through” seemed to be central to the way Ryan understood his authorial identity, as a collection or accumulation of learning over time that shaped the writer he was at that moment. Nicole also used the framework of accumulation to describe how she had become the writer she is today. She identified parents, her mother’s relatives who were educators, reading, schools, teachers, her surroundings, classmates, and “just my life in general” all informed how she perceived herself as a writer and how, in various contexts, she represented that authorial identity to others.

Candace mentioned over the course of our interviews how she had revisited her earlier authorial identity and renegotiated its meaning in light of her ongoing experiences. Candace explained that, in third grade, the teacher had given an assignment in which

students had to tell a story that included a heroic act to save the classroom. She wrote a story about a class of students who always failed their tests, but then the hero “Supernerd” swooped in to “get an A++ to keep the teacher’s job and everything. And everybody [in the story] is like, ‘Oh yay!’” She noted that she was in the Academically Gifted program and felt that most of her fellow students who were pulled out for AG classes “would act like they were so great because they were in AG, and they would pick on the kids in our classroom who were just in the classes that you were supposed to be in for the grade level.” She said that she tried to stick up for the students in the regular courses, but unexpectedly, “to tell you the truth, the people who I stuck up for, they, like, turned on me immediately. Everybody was like, oh, that matches her perfectly so we’re going to start calling her Supernerd.” For the rest of elementary school, Candace reported that the “Supernerd” nickname stuck with her. A character she had created as a hero instead became a persona used to tease or ostracize her. Despite the fact that she neither felt a sense of belonging with the AG students nor with the students in the regular track, Candace reported that she “just took [Supernerd] and ran with it . . . I just took it and made a joke out of it.” However, as a sixth grader, when Candace was asked for another assignment to write about bullying, she wrote about this experience and how she had to keep changing the way she imagined or responded to the “Supernerd” moniker.

Performing Authorial Identity through Physical Manifestations

As participants came to think of themselves as authors, they collected physical tools and materials through which they created writing and that they used to represent themselves as writers. Katherine took pride in her laptop as a tool for writing. “This is

my own computer. I got Microsoft Word on it,” she told me while hugging her laptop. The laptop was the conduit through which she accessed her on-line fan-fiction community and later became the tool she and her mother used for homeschool learning as they emailed assignments back and forth to one another.

Avery also kept physical manifestations of her authorial identity. She kept a notebook in her room and explained, “If I have an idea for a story or something, I’ll just write it down. I have a list of ideas. Or like if something happens in real life, like if I tweaked it in this way, it could be a good story.” Maintaining a designated place to capture her writing ideas was one way Avery made her authorial identity visible. She also noted that she kept all of her school journals and pieces that she wrote in language arts class and AG and so that she could monitor her development as a writer by looking back through those files. Similarly, Bella maintained a computer file entitled, “Bella’s Mix of Everything” where she logged her ideas in categories such as “Poems, Kids’ Stories, and Scripts.”

Performing Authorial Identity through Public Presentation

In addition to these private artifacts that assisted and represented authorship, these young adolescents also valued experiences in which they enacted their authorial identities for others to see. Ryan explained that during the coffeehouse-style reading on the final day of writer’s camp he was “nervous, I got a little scared” when he presented and read aloud from his informational website about Mexico. However, after he presented, he felt “relieved, and proud.” He explained that presenting for an audience made his work seem more real than his typical transactions at school in which “you just turn it in and you get

your grade back in like a week or two.” He preferred presenting his work and stated, “I was a little bit nervous about presenting it, but I liked it.” Similarly, Avery recalled writing and memorizing a speech as a historical figure from the Renaissance that she performed as part of a Wax Museum assignment. Students dressed up as their characters and stood very still around the room until an audience member approached and then they “came to life” and delivered their speeches. “It made me work harder for it to know that all these people would be seeing it,” she noted.

At the end of our final interview, Bella revealed that she had prepared “a finale” for our time together. Her mother had arrived a few minutes early to pick her up, and as we tied up loose ends, Bella made this announcement:

Bella: And now for my big finale!

Researcher: I didn’t know there was a finale. Let’s hear it.

Mother: You should have known, you’ve met Bella.

Bella: It’s a song, and I call it “Moved On.”

Bella sang a song she had written about two young people who had been in love but who were growing distant. She sang:

Now all of that’s done ’cause you’ve moved on
I’d sit down, you’d stand up
I’d laugh and you’d just moan
Baby, why does this world keep crashing down just like my relationships?
It had ups and it had downs, when I was up you were down
It went up, then it hit the ground
But now all of that’s done ’cause you’ve moved on

Throughout our interviews Bella had told me how she hoped to become an author or a singer/songwriter as an adult, and performing this song seemed to be her way of making her steps toward that goal visible to me. She had written the song for our last interview and explained that she wanted to perform it for me because she knew I was interested in her as a writer.

Anticipating On-going Authorial Identity Negotiation

When I asked participants if they thought of themselves as writers, each of them said yes, but with some qualifiers. Avery replied, “In a way that like physically I’m able to write and I do write, yes. But, like, not professionally.” Her response was representative of most of the participants who wanted to both acknowledge that they can and do write at present but also to position themselves as beginners. They did not want to suggest that they were writers in the same way that published novelists or professional authors were writers. Nicole clarified, “Do you mean like if I consider myself a writer just like in general or like a professional?” I rephrased the question to ask if, compared to a field of other eighth graders, she would consider herself a writer. Her response was more confident when she stated, “I believe that I am a writer and I say that because I really enjoy to write and I do write a lot whether it’s my free time or for homework and I do enjoy it . . . so I would consider myself a writer.” When I asked Anastasia if she considered herself a writer she said, “I’m doing it. I’ve been trying to go full author.” I asked when she would know that she had gone “full author,” and she explained that, for her, the threshold would be publishing a “worldwide book. I want it to be a hard-

covered, real book . . . I want [my novel] to get finished. That's why I think if I get finished with it, then I could be an author.”

Conclusion

As these young adolescents narrated their writing experiences, storylines of authorial identity vividly emerged. Participants' self-understandings of who they were, had been, and wished to be as authors were shaped by their writing experiences and by the ways they were positioned as writers by family, peers, and teachers. In navigating their writing experiences, they also navigated the laminated social contexts in which they enacted their authorial identities.

The process of participating in this study appeared to provide an impetus and structure for these young adolescents to consider their authorial identities. As they engaged in autobiographical reasoning and sought to bring narrative coherence to their writing trajectories, they demonstrated that young adolescents are quite capable of organizing and narrating experiences thematically. Their storylines of identity were nuanced and narratives drew from disparate times and places to bring meaning to their writing experiences by explaining who they were as authors. Although participants acknowledged that their authorial identities were works-in-progress and noted changes over time, those identities were already well developed. These young adolescents knew who they were as writers, even if they were open to revising those self-understandings in the future. Authorial identities appeared to be guiding forces in participants' writing lives, influencing the writing experiences they pursued or resisted and the meanings they made of those experiences.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

When I began analysis of the set of 24 interviews comprising this study, roughly 32 hours of audio recordings with eight participants yielding combined transcripts hundreds of pages in length, I felt disheartened by a lack of cohesiveness in the responses between participants. I wondered how these interviews had produced such a seemingly chaotic diversity of discussion when I had anchored each round of interviews with the same protocol, asking every participant essentially the same questions in the same order. How was it that the question, “How have you become the writer you are today?” prompted one participant to tell me that her mother comes from a long line of educators and another participant to tell me that her father had committed suicide? As I wrote for an audience of English language arts teachers and teacher educators, how could I interpret the instructional implications of either of those statements? Neither narrative directly addressed writing instruction, grammar lessons, research paper assignments, or any of the myriad other things that fall within a teacher’s purview.

I listened to the recordings and re-read the transcripts closely over the course of several months. I tried to find the commonalities in these stories by coding at the sentence level. I tried to find commonalities by separating in-school writing from out-of-school writing. I tried to find commonalities by discerning major themes. What I found, as one after another of these analytical attempts crumbled, was that these stories would

not come apart. The more I attempted to parse this data out, to separate narrative components and categorize their parts, the less sense it seemed to make.

I stepped back and thought about my own experiences. How would I respond to that same question, “How have you become the writer you are today?” The roots of my interest in writing and the ability to write, the ones that would have been under construction when I was a young adolescent like my participants, might have been found in the many hours I spent at the library with my father. We went to the library together at least once a week during my late elementary and middle school years. We went because we both liked to read, but we also went because we did not have money to spare on the lessons and activities that kept many of my friends busy on their evenings and weekends. At the library I was independent, spending time in the young adult and then adult fiction sections while my father explored non-fiction on the other side of the building. I read constantly and as far as I can remember neither of my parents ever monitored what I was reading or made rules about what I was allowed to read. Through reading, I accessed a world of grown-up ideas and the narrative structures to convey them.

On the unused pages of old school notebooks in my room at home, I tried to write stories or scenes like the ones I read. I could tell they were not nearly as good as what I read and I threw them away because they were too embarrassing. Usually I took them to school and threw them away there so my mother would not find them in the trashcan. Trying to write like my favorite authors was my pathway to becoming a writer and to thinking of myself as capable of authorship, even if I was not satisfied with my early efforts. I found those authors I wanted to emulate during the countless hours I spent at

the library, and one of the reasons I spent so much time at the library was because it was free. If my family had been better off, maybe I would have been an ice skater or a pianist, something a little more expensive, instead of a writer.

As I reflected on my own response, I realized that the question I was actually answering might have been better phrased as “*Why* have you become the writer you are today?” I thought back to participants’ data through the lens of why, rather than how, and the unifying elements of the data I had gathered came into focus. The interpretations and implications did not lie as much in the whats or the hows, but in the whys. Rather than trying to break their narratives apart, I began keeping them whole and drawing them together with the other narratives that offered another facet of the same issue.

The third research question guiding this study asks, “What meanings do participants make of writing and learning to write?” This union of experience and meaning guides my interpretation in highlighting the three storylines presented here. Storylines of Family and School draw out the two primary spaces in which young adolescents appeared to write – home and school – and consider the ways that the experiences, narratives, and meanings of these two realms intersect. Storylines of Language elicit the experiences through which young adolescents were exposed to and appropriated language resources and the purposes for which they chose to use those resources. Storylines of Identity tease apart the narratives of authorship these young adolescents told themselves and others. As they negotiated and narrated authorial identity, they made meaning of the interwoven storylines of family, school, and language and brought narrative coherence to their stories lived and told. Knit together, these

storylines gave a picture of the complex *gestalt* of emerging authorship in young adolescence with a focus on why young adolescents write the way they do and what meanings they derive from their work.

The quote from Nicole used in the opening chapter, “Writing didn’t really mean as much until I thought about it,” suggests that the act of narrating one’s writing experiences can be a tool for bringing coherence and meaning to the sundry actions entailed in students’ writing activities. This process of thinking about writing, and talking about it, are at the heart of this work as a narrative inquiry piece. A narrative inquiry approach offers a different angle on writing research than studies that are intervention-based, classroom-bound, or limited by time. Rather than studying the written product or the writing process, this study instead considers the authors themselves as the primary focus of analysis. In this way it is a complement to those studies that do seek to understand the whats and hows in that it unpacks the whys—whys that are active, dynamic forces influencing the writing young adolescents produce and that may remain undetected by other measures.

Making Sense of Narratives about Writing

As I gathered stories of participants’ literate lives, I became interested in the ways that authorship accumulated to individuals over time. Although writing experiences were ongoing, they did not seem to be sedimentary, meaning that sixth-grade experiences did not layer over or make invisible a participants’ fifth-grade experiences or first-grade experiences. Teachers with high expectations in seventh grade did not erase teachers with low expectations in third grade. All of these participants’ memories seemed equally

alive, although their interpretations of their remembered experiences might shift as they accumulated new experiences or ways of understanding.

As Brandt (2001) suggests, “people reflect on—indeed refashion—a memory in terms of its significance for how things have turned out, whether in terms of personal circumstances or shared culture” (p. 12). This refashioning was vivid in stories such as Candace’s multi-year narrative of the “Supernerd” character she created, the Supernerd nickname she carried throughout elementary school, and her reflection on the Supernerd experience with her middle school assignment about bullying. Candace’s narrative suggests that reflecting and refashioning is not a phenomenon that begins when people reach adulthood or some other plateau of maturity, it has already started by young adolescence and perhaps even earlier. As participants worked to tell narratively coherent stories about themselves as writers, they were able to marshal a complex assortment of stories that occurred over time and in disparate places in order to make their points. These narratively coherent discussions were the foundations of the storylines told and interpreted here. I found that what these young adolescents talked about when they talked about writing was family, school, language, and identity and that, despite their youth, they were assembling and interpreting their experiences in complex ways to find meaning in the writing work they undertook.

Writing as Social Action

At 13, the age of the oldest participants in the study, their entire literate lives had spanned little more than a decade. It is really an incredibly short period of time to go from learning to write the letters of one’s name to composing a short story or a persuasive

essay. In the stories they told of that decade or so during which they had negotiated their authorial identities, the idea that writing for these students was a form of social action became very clear. For these participants, writing was, as Russell (2002) suggests, “embedded in and influenced by a community” and therefore “local, context specific, and dependent on a community for its existence and its meaning” (p. 12).

Participants could not tell the stories of their writing lives without also telling the stories of the places, people, institutions, and purposes through which they learned to write. Teachers, family members, friends, authors, TV personalities, even cartoon characters spoke and wrote the words they collected and organized as their own. Englert, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2006) frame a sociocultural perspective of writing as one which “views meaning as being negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture, and activity” (p. 208). In keeping with this view, the ways participants narrated their writing experiences and their interpretations of those experiences suggested that an individual’s unique mesh of family, cultural identifications, schooling experiences, and writing activities laid the foundation for the ways they made sense of writing as a whole. This uniquely laminated authorial identity acted as a filter through which future writing experiences would be interpreted.

Writing requires a synthesis of many skills and knowledge bases that are deployed simultaneously. To write, even the most novice practitioners need to be able to read, to think through the topic they wish to discuss and to produce the vocabulary appropriate to their task, to apply language in a way that is understandable to their audience, and to mechanically produce writing using pencil and paper or other technology. Certainly

there is a wide body of writing research that effectively addresses the cognitive, sensory and motor-skill demands of writing and that draws on various epistemological stances to do so (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2005). With that said, this study is anchored in a sociocultural perspective to provide rich description of the ways in which young adolescents undertake writing as a process of “learning to act—with other people, artifacts, and environments, all of which are themselves in an ongoing process of change and development” (Bazerman & Prior, 2005, p. 147).

Revisiting Storylines of Family and School

Storylines of family and school were vivid components of these young adolescents’ narratives of writing and learning to write. The chapter surfaces the varied storylines of how students were positioned as writers and the writing activities they participated in with family and how these storylines intersected with the ways in which they were positioned as writers and the writing tasks they undertook at school. Some family storylines overlapped with school storylines. Similar values and experiences between home and school supported and reinforced students’ perceptions of themselves as writers. Some participants, such as Anastasia and Ryan, had parents and siblings who were engaged encouragers, helping them complete writing tasks and navigate the writing expectations of school. Other participants such as Nicole and Avery, whose parents were educational insiders, gained an understanding of approaches to writing that would likely be valued and validated in school.

Other family storylines pulled against school storylines, introducing sites of tension that allowed participants to view their writing development with an outsider

perspective while still writing in ways that were valued in school. The humor and skepticism Bella developed at home sometimes led her to question teachers' purposes for assigning writing tasks. Andrew's experiences participating in his family-owned livestock business placed him in contact with an adult world that seemed to value plain spoken conversation and technical know-how, which he seemed to prefer to some of the academic language he encountered in school. Candace situated herself within family traditions of access and achievement as an African American counter-narrative to historically limited opportunities and low expectations, using this storyline to push her achievement in school. Katherine, whose family narratives embraced advocacy for low-income communities, often came into conflict with the narratives of who she should be as a student and writer that she encountered in school.

Through these diverse storylines it became clear that participants understood and talked about writing by talking about experiences—and the people with whom and places in which those experiences transpired—rather than by talking about acquisition of discrete skills. For example, when Ryan recounted crafting a superhero story for a language arts assignment, he discussed how his uncle, who loved comic books, had given him a stack of his old comics, which Ryan read and talked about with him. He told me that he was well prepared to write about heroes, villains, and sidekicks because he understood the language used to describe those character types and the ways superheroes spoke from his experiences reading comic books and watching superhero movies. He did mention writing skills, including adding descriptive details and using quotation marks, and the way his teacher had helped him use these tools to enhance the clarity and impact

of his work. Therefore it appeared that Ryan made meaning of this writing experience by making meaning of the purpose and the people who supported him, with writing skills being tools those people employed to help him achieve his purpose. Essentially, skills were important, but they were secondary to purpose and relationships in terms of the ways young adolescents constructed meaning.

Participants learned to write by writing. Writing experiences that engaged young adolescents in crafting extended texts offered a way for them to make meaning of the skills they were learning. When skills served a purpose, participants found ways to organize their learning and to remember instruction. When skill instruction was not perceived as connected to purposeful work, it seemed to be easily forgotten or more difficult for young adolescents to apply. As they discussed their writing development, the stories they told were about writing extended pieces that demanded individual ideas and perspectives. No one mentioned worksheets or grammar book exercises as the ways he or she had learned to write. However, many did mention specific skills that might have been practiced through worksheets and exercises as being helpful in executing their writing. For example, Ryan and Katherine both mentioned how they used their knowledge of the plot pyramid in writing effective stories. Andrew discussed how eliminating grammatical errors helped him demonstrate his competence in public writing. These skills became meaningful when they served a greater purpose for communicating ideas effectively.

These findings align with Gee's (2000) assertion that "actors, events, activities, practices and Discourses do not exist in the world except through active work" (p. 193).

In order to retain and understand isolated skills, these participants seemed to need to be engaged in the active work of applying them by writing or by reflecting on and talking about their writing. Texts, for these participants, were not only static products to be evaluated by teachers, but “objects [that] come to embody human activity as they register its consequences” (Prior, 2006, p. 55). Their texts “served as a flag to signal activities in the ongoing stream of behavior” (Scribner & Cole, 1981, p. 258). In this sociocultural view, text was not a thing, but an afterimage of activity. Texts, and the experiences of crafting them, sharing them, and talking about them, seemed to function like a net that captured activity and learning to hold it in the writer’s memory.

As participants described their experiences it became clear that their narratives were shaped not by a few monumental writing activities, but by the day-to-day accumulation of small experiences. For these particular young adolescents, the supports for and messages about writing they experienced at home seemed to propel them towards seeing themselves as writers. However, it is easy to imagine how inverse accumulated messages might lead other young people to see themselves as non-writers. When these participants narrated stories of how their families had influenced their writing lives, they mentioned myriad small, repeated events: parents telling stories at the dinner table that recounted a family’s literacy through the generations, trips to the library, receiving books as gifts, receiving writing tools such as computers or glitter pens as gifts, giving their stories to family members as gifts, parents typing up children’s stories and hanging them on the refrigerator, siblings offering advice on school writing assignments, emailing extended family, parents spelling difficult words for children, parents reading to children,

children reading to siblings, family members discussing how they use writing to think through their problems, children meeting local authors, parents and children reading the newspaper together, parents registering children for camps or on-line writing groups, parents suggesting writing as an activity for bored children, parents communicating their expectations that children will go to college, parents helping children break down complex writing assignments, parents helping children find resource materials for writing assignments, and parents saving children's writing as family keepsakes. In isolation, none of these activities would necessarily account for how young people become writers or understand themselves as writers. However, in combination, the power of everyday support for writing and positive authorial identity negotiation at home produced a literate culture in the home.

In school, participants' experiences and the messages they received about their authorial identities were more mixed. For some young adolescents, school experiences reinforced their authorial identities. Some school experiences introduced tension. Others positioned participants as non-writers and served as the oppositional force against which their authorial identities were honed. The key difference between students' experiences seemed to be consistent exposure to classrooms where students had the opportunity to write, to share their writing, and talk about writing with a focus on both idea development and writing skills, versus schools in which writing was rare, discussion was limited, collaboration or sharing was minimal, and skill instruction far outweighed idea development. Classroom observation was beyond the scope of this study. However, students' self-reports and publicly available school data align with earlier findings

suggesting that extended, complex writing tasks and advanced writing forms receive more explicit and higher-order instruction in advanced courses, the very courses that disproportionately exclude low income and minority students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Early, DeCosta-Smith, & Valdespino, 2010).

As is evident in the cumulative examples of Katherine's school writing experience, her Title I middle school did not appear to offer writing instruction that promoted her development as an author. She reported writing rarely, never having opportunities to discuss writing in class, receiving very minimal feedback from teachers, and offered no instances of extended writing work such as assignments that might span multiple class periods or include presentation. At the Title I middle schools Candace and Nicole had attended as sixth graders, they reported a handful of writing activities and some discussion of writing. However, they both described their engagement with writing instruction coming alive when they transitioned as seventh graders to academically-oriented charter schools where complex, extended writing opportunities supported through instruction, discussion, and collaboration were commonplace. Andrew reported that following kindergarten, writing virtually disappeared from his experience in his rural elementary school but became an instructional focus again when he transitioned to an academically-oriented charter school. Ryan and Anastasia attended middle schools that served economically-diverse elementary and middle schools and both reported an ongoing focus on writing with support from teachers. Avery attended a magnet elementary and selective public middle school for advanced academics and in both

environments was immersed in creative, collaborative, complex, and frequent writing activities, discussion, and presentation.

Drawing on these examples, it seems that schools that served predominantly low-income students offered little writing instruction that participants found meaningful. What writing students in these settings did report was typically anchored in decontextualized skill instruction, drills and worksheets, or reading response activities designed to elicit standard responses from all students. There was little room for creativity, imagination, opinion, or individuality, and there seems to have been a routine inattention to developing students' authorial identities or, in Katherine's case, to even permitting individual voice in writing at all. It is unclear whether teachers lacked preparation or resources for teaching writing, whether the classroom management practices of the schools precluded writing instruction because having students moving and talking might be too unruly, or whether teachers were mandated to teach decontextualized skills that might appear on the End of Grade tests rather than prioritizing meaningful writing instruction. This study does not reveal why writing was devalued in those schools that served predominately low-income populations, but it does make plain that students attending those schools were systematically denied the writing experiences, exposure to the language of writing, or opportunities for positive authorial identity negotiation granted in abundance to their peers attending schools less burdened by poverty.

In summary, participants' storylines of family and school, and the intersections between the two, suggested that writing was an active and social experience and that text

became an artifact of those experiences. Participants highlighted the day-to-day writing supports and messages from family that, taken together, positioned these young adolescents as writers. Those positioning were sometimes challenged and sometimes reinforced by their school writing experiences.

Revisiting Storylines of Language

As participants narrated their writing experiences, they attended to language exposure, appropriation, and use. In order to write, young adolescents needed the building blocks of words, and their experiences dictated the types of words to which they were exposed. Through exposure, they appropriated some words as their own. Young adolescents used their appropriated words as language resources to communicate both within the communities in which they appropriated language originally and in other contexts or situations in which the words served their communicative purposes. Their narratives of language appropriation align with Bakhtin's (1981) notion that

Until that moment of appropriation the word exists not in neutral or impersonal language (after all it's not from the dictionary that the word is taken by the speaker!) but in the mouths of others, in the contexts of others, in the service of others' intentions: it is from here that one has to take it and make it one's own (p. 294).

The textual and physical contexts participants accessed as they learned to write were rich terrain for the language appropriation Bakhtin described. Participants revealed that, along with word definitions, they also constructed social/historical understandings of words' connotations, value, and usability through the social interactions surrounding their language appropriation. These young adolescents were ravenous word collectors. They

seemed to be experiencing a period in their development and schooling during which they gained access to new communities, genres, and content areas. Perhaps this recent language appropriation explains why they were often able to remember and describe the circumstances in which they had found certain words. It is possible that, because young adolescents are expanding their vocabularies at more rapid rates than adults might, these new contexts for learning are still fresh in their minds.

When these young adolescents discussed their sources for the language of writing, they identified reading as an important conduit for content language but school as the primary location for learning how to name and talk about author's craft. For example, by reading, Katherine learned all about vampire mythology and the language used to tell vampire stories. She also gained understanding of how quotation marks and paragraph breaks are used and replicated their use appropriately in her own writing to signal dialogue and change in speaker. However, seemingly due to her limited opportunities to discuss writing in school, she did not recognize the term "dialogue" until we talked about it in our interviews. This capacity to name components of writing allowed participants not only to replicate what they read but also to discuss writing concepts outside of their original context. In keeping with previous sociocultural research in writing, language is appropriated through communicative use in social context with meaning-making being not isolated or denoted in the word or inscription but actively distributed across the people, social systems, institutions, and other texts that constitute the use of these words (Bazerman & Prior, 2005; Ivanič, 1998). Texts themselves are neither set nor static,

instead they are the dynamic and distributed “physical manifestations of discourse” (Ivanič, 1998, p. 38)

This portability of language resources, the ability to move words from one context to another, allowed participants to bring nuance to their writing. As Bakhtin (1981) points out, language appropriation does not “purge words of intentions and tones” (p. 299) that were part of their original context but allows authors to “play with the boundaries of speech styles” (p. 308). Appropriated language, still endowed with its source connotations, enabled participants to make purposeful choices about which words to deploy for their school writing. They told multiple stories of the ways in which they inferred and interpreted the norms of school writing and the language resources their teachers would most value. They applied the words they appropriated from multiple contexts to school writing to produce positive results both in terms of grades and how teachers perceived them as writers.

Participants were often adept at interpreting norms of communication in various settings and making decisions about which language resources to use to meet their needs and purposes in a particular context. However, decisions about when to use certain words could, at other times, be tricky and confusing. When participants lacked sufficient language in an area, they sometimes substituted language that they felt most nearly matched the need. For example, Ryan was uncertain what types of language teachers would value in persuasive writing but improvised by using language from commercials or from debates about sports he saw on ESPN. Several participants struggled with how to avoid plagiarism by “putting things in their own words” when they had limited exposure

to a concept and needed to borrow very closely from source material to have anything to say. Nicole experienced confusion about which language resources to use as she tried to navigate her status as a writer when composing an essay in the third person for a generic reader when she also knew that her teacher was the actual reader. When making these decisions, students navigated not only word meanings but also the connotations of their language choices and how those connotations might play out within the social contexts of their writing.

Revisiting Storylines of Identity

Building on a definition of identities as “self-understandings” (Holland, et al. 1998, p. 3) influenced by an individual’s lamination of cultural and language resources, experiences, and interpretations (Prior, 2006, p. 55), writing appeared to be a tool through which participants negotiated, communicated, and indexed their authorial identities. Social and institutional forces influenced participants’ experiences, access to language resources, and the meanings they constructed of writing in relationship to their contexts. Role models offered templates for the types of writers these young adolescents might like to be and language appropriated from role models crept into participants’ writing.

As participants imagined their writing futures and told others who they were as authors, they had to navigate complex social relationships and to make sense of sometimes contradictory expectations. Students needed both to defer to their teachers and to develop a tone of expertise for readers but encountered confusion when the teacher played both roles. These subtle displays of authorial identity and social identification seemed to pepper the texts they described, and research suggests that such positioning is

interpretable to readers through language use, structure, rhetorical patterns, orientation toward the reader, and the selection of evidence (Ball, 1992; Colyar & Stitch, 2011; Tardy, 2012). These markers can shape readers' perceptions of the author's credibility, expertise, and social/cultural affiliations (Tardy, 2012).

All of these young adolescents wanted to develop sophisticated authorial voices, but they sometimes lacked the experience or maturity to comfortably embody the personas they communicated in writing. Social interactions with peers and teachers and participants' sense of their relative status in a particular context shaped the type of writing they undertook and the texts they produced. These findings coalesce with Ivanič's (1998) notion that writers' beliefs about their social or cultural status in relation to their readers—particularly their evaluative readers, such as teachers—influence the choices they make about how to represent their authorial voice in the text and are “nurtured or constrained by their anticipation of known or imagined readers” (p. 215).

Despite the challenges of navigating social contexts around writing, participants seemed willing to engage in writing for a variety of purposes. Writing not only communicated knowledge and ideas, it also demonstrated effort, offered a venue for self-expression, and served as a tool for authorial identity negotiation and self-representation across time. As participants narrated their writing experiences, they offered a lens through which to view their authorial identity work in progress. Weaving together these strands of identity negotiation and storytelling hints at the particular power of language to serve both as a mediating tool for processing who we are (or think we are, or wish to be) and as a way of indexing those identities and social or cultural affiliations. Envisioning

oneself as a character in a story opens the door to imagining a new twist, possibility, interpretation, or ending for that story. Holland et al. (1998) note that, “humans’ capacity for self-objectification—and through objectification, for self-direction—plays into both their domination by social relations of power and their possibilities for (partial) liberation from these forces” (p. 5). They assert that, in addition to improvisations made in creative response to navigating conflicting social constraints, “self-directed symbolizations” are a means to agency (p. 278). We tell stories about ourselves, and to ourselves, and try to make meaning from our experiences to fit into those storylines. According to Holland et al. (1998), “In the making of meaning, we ‘author’ the world” (p. 170).

Instructional Implications

Although this study took place outside the classroom, the findings suggest several important implications for middle school teachers who want to support their students’ writing development. The study does not claim to assess the merits of any particular curriculum or instructional materials but instead seeks to better understand how young adolescents experience learning to write and how they make meaning of those experiences. Keeping that in mind, these implications and recommendations draw on young adolescents’ direct accounts to suggest features of writing instruction young adolescents perceive as meaningful, memorable, and applicable.

Increase Quality and Quantity of Extended Writing Opportunities

It seems obvious that this would be the case, but participants revealed that they learned to write by writing. Participants who had frequent and well-supported opportunities for extended writing in school identified those experiences as being the

primary pathways by which they had learned to write. Given Applebee and Langer's (2013) finding that middle school students spent only 4% of class time working on writing of one paragraph or more and that only 18% of writing assignments across middle school core classes called for writing of one paragraph or more (p. 14), it seems that the first and most important implication for teachers would be to increase the quantity and quality of writing opportunities for young adolescents.

Young adolescents mentioned a wide variety of school-based extended writing projects they found meaningful and that helped them develop their writing skills. Writing tasks included journals, reading reflections, informational reports, persuasive essays, letters, short stories, speeches, research papers, science fair projects, poems, opinion pieces, comic strips, book reviews, persuasive essays, debates, and scripted skits. Students seemed to be particularly motivated to engage in extended writing when they had choices in their topics, when their ideas or opinions were incorporated, when they had opportunities to collaborate, and when they somehow presented or published their work for an audience beyond the teacher.

Connect Writing Skill Instruction to Application and Purpose

When participants described skill instruction that was isolated, such as grammar practice or memorizing vocabulary, they seemed to struggle to integrate those discrete skills with their overall writing knowledge. However, when they talked about extended writing projects they had undertaken, they often identified component skills that were important in their success. Therefore, teachers should consider integrating skills instruction with extended writing opportunities that facilitate application of those skills.

Writing skills appeared to be meaningful when they were used to accomplish a larger writing goal.

Several participants mentioned that their teachers wanted them to learn writing skills for high school or college. However, even participants who seemed to be savvy middle school writers had little concept of what kinds of writing they would be asked to do in high school or college. They had a vague sense that they might be asked to write papers, reports, or analyze texts, but they were uncertain about what skills those assignments might require or what form they might take. Instead, young adolescents seemed to attach greater meaning to skill instruction when they were able to identify and understand the more immediate communicative purpose for the writing skills they were taught in school. As Dewey (1938) suggests, “the central problem of an education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (p. 17). By attending to present writing experiences in both application and purpose, educators may strengthen students’ preparation for and openness to future writing endeavors and the strategies they internalize for navigating future writing demands.

Talk About Writing

In addition to writing, participants explained that they made meaning of their writing by talking about it. Teachers were the primary source through which these young adolescents learned the terminology they needed to name and describe literary elements and author’s craft. Teachers whose lessons were memorable to these students both talked about writing with their classes and facilitated opportunities for students to talk with one

another about writing. In addition to writing itself, this discussion of writing also appeared to constitute use, specifically as it necessitated students' repeated exposure to disciplinary vocabulary around writing. Discussions about writing offered the literate experiences through which young adolescents appropriated the language they needed to analyze and communicate with others about writing. Participants who claimed to benefit from teacher feedback on their writing pointed to teachers' willingness to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to provide guidance on idea development in addition to error correction.

These young adolescents also seemed to find value in having the opportunity to narrate their writing experiences through participation in this study. Nicole noted how her writing had taken on new meaning once she thought about and described her work. Bella explained that, since she began participation in this semester-long study, she had begun writing more and more. Offering opportunities for positive authorial identity negotiation through one-on-one teacher-student conversations might be too difficult within the time constraints of school, but students could still benefit similarly from crafting autobiographies of their writing lives, communicating about their authorial identities through journal entries, or interviewing one another about their writing experiences. This identity work could serve as a tool for "self-telling" (Baddeley & Singer, 2007, p. 183), allowing young adolescents to bring narrative coherence to their writing experiences and to negotiate authorial identity by representing themselves as authors to others.

Prepare and Support Teachers for Equitable Writing Instruction

Students attending schools that served predominately low-income populations wrote less, received decontextualized skill instruction rather than extended writing opportunities, and rarely discussed writing with teachers and peers. In order to attend to the preceding instructional implications, it is vital to recognize and consider the inequitable distribution of meaningful writing instruction across school types. Opportunities to become a capable writer were conveyed more often and more richly to students who were already privileged. Those same opportunities were systematically denied to students who already experienced social and institutional disadvantage, seemingly promoting even greater discrepancy in the quality and quantity of educational outcomes. In order to address this inequity, teachers working in schools that serve predominately low-income students need access to the knowledge, resources, support, instructional freedom, and professional development that will improve educational opportunities for students in their classrooms.

Mine Narratives of Authorship for Instructional Pathways

As participants revealed their literacy narratives, I considered how such information might have informed my instruction when I was a middle school English language arts teacher. Although I taught hundreds of students over several years, I never had the opportunity to talk in such great depth about writing with any of them. Some students did communicate aspects of their authorial identity to me through journaling activities, personal narrative assignments, or by asking me to read and help them with creative writing pieces they were preparing outside of school. When I did learn about

who students considered themselves to be as writers, I could often use this insight to motivate them, to make connections, or to clarify how in-school writing might support their out-of-school work.

As I reflect on these participants, there are so many stories I know that I wish their teachers also knew. I wish Katherine's teacher had understood how she tried to use the strong female protagonist from her vampire stories in the assignment about Pompeii. Perhaps instead of giving feedback only in the form of a poor grade, the teacher could have worked with Katherine to employ the characterization she valued while also accomplishing the project requirements. I wonder if Candace's elementary school teachers had understood the home narratives of African American pride and her drive to gain access to and to demonstrate high achievement in her educational endeavors Candace told, and if her teacher might then have held higher expectations for her. I question how Andrew's social studies teacher might have explained taking off points for his writing that exceeded the page limit if he had known that Andrew was validated in his English language arts class for the same action. I ponder how Anastasia's teacher might have provided her even more nuanced instruction in characterization if she had known that Anastasia was writing a novel.

As teachers implement writing instruction that encourages students to narrate their writing experiences, they may come to see variation as something other than a deficit. The findings of this study suggest that even at a young age, these young adolescents were already whole and purposeful authors. Although they lacked advanced academic experience and were sometimes still at a novice level with their writing skills, they

imagined the types of writers they wanted to become and marshaled their available resources to move themselves forward.

Implications for Teacher Educators

As I analyzed and interpreted participants' narratives, two key considerations for teacher educators emerged. These considerations would be applicable both to university professors tasked with preparing pre-service teachers to teach writing, as well as school-based or outside professional development instructors who support in-service teachers with developing their students' writing.

Engage Pre-service Teachers with Author-Centered Instructional Practices

Just as the participants in this study valued opportunities to narrate their writing experiences and negotiate authorial identity, these practices seem likely to also benefit pre-service teachers. Many young people entering teaching today experienced their own K-12 schooling in the so-called era of accountability under the mandates of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. If pre-service teachers have had limited opportunities to compose extended writing themselves or to consider the meaning of their writing experiences, they will require considerable learning and support to comfortably implement these practices with their own students.

Present Theoretically-defensible Sociocultural Perspectives on Writing Instruction

Although Prior (2006) identifies sociocultural theories as the dominant writing research paradigm (p. 54), much of the material included in English language arts curricula and instructional resources appears more cognitive in orientation. The ways in which writing research is reified in school standards and curriculum is problematic. The

“research based” writing instructional practices sanctioned by the federal government through publications such as the influential report *Writing Next* (Graham & Perin, 2007) draw practices from experimental and quasi-experimental studies only. Experimental and quasi-experimental research tends to be quantitative, decontextualized, and cognitive in its orientation, and the findings from these studies are the ones typically enacted in school curricula (Coker & Lewis, 2008; Tatum, 2012).

The federal mandate for experimental and quasi-experimental research excludes a great deal of qualitative research from consideration of what constitutes effective instruction or promotes competent writing. The resulting cognitive, individualistic undercurrent in curricula and curricular materials limits the possibilities that meaningful socioculturally oriented teaching will take place in schools (Beach, 2011; Tatum & Gue, 2012). Coker and Lewis (2008) further problematizes the field of writing research by pointing out a bifurcation between methods and findings in large scale, quantitative writing research and research in the qualitative and descriptive realm (p. 233). The literature presents parallel areas of research that define writing differently and do not necessarily converse with one another. As a result, it is challenging to draw conclusions that attend both to the product- and mechanics-centered quantitative arena and the writer- and meaning-centered qualitative realm (Coker & Lewis, 2008).

In this light, pre-service teachers may experience instruction in their university courses that supports strengths-based writing instruction; writer’s workshop; or other instructional techniques that surface, value, and build upon young writers’ authorial identity negotiation. However, once they enter the classroom they are less likely to see

these practices because the strategies enacted in schools are drawn from a different research base. A cognitive, quantitative research-base may be more likely to promote instruction that has its roots in analysis of text products and processes, rather than in analysis of students as authors and meanings. Given the pressures to standardize and conform, teachers may abandon the author-centered practices they learned in their teacher preparation programs.

Therefore, teacher educators should look for opportunities to engage pre-service and in-service teachers with author-centered theory and research conducted from a sociocultural perspective and to help them contextualize the absence of those practices in the curricula and instructional materials they may find in schools. Rather than seeing author-centered instruction as theoretically indefensible or outside of the “real world” of public schooling, this type of instruction would help teachers take a critical stance on educational policy and to question why some research-bases are silenced in favor of others.

Implications for Future Research

This study responds to Brandt’s (2001) call to enrich the literature base with increased direct accounts of how people have learned to write and their purposes for doing so. My research offers a unique perspective by soliciting direct accounts from young adolescents, a population underrepresented in the already scant literature in this area. Moving forward, there are several areas for rich research both for myself and for other writing researchers.

Longitudinal Accounts of Writing Development

Given that authorial identities are subject to ongoing negotiation as textual and physical contexts as well as writing experiences change and as the interpretation of those contexts and experiences evolve, research that follows young writers over time could reveal patterns or touchstones in their trajectories. Although this research was conducted with young adolescents who considered themselves writers and who wrote willingly and, for some, avidly, tracing authorial trajectories for a greater range of students would also be informative. In my own future research, I hope to re-interview these same participants during high school and beyond, offering a more nuanced and longitudinal perspective on how notions of authorship change over time.

Narrative or Case Study Accounts of Writing Opportunities Across Educational Settings

Although the sample is small in this study, participants' accounts suggest dramatic differences between the quality and quantity of writing instruction offered in schools serving low-income students versus those that serve diverse student bodies. Differences between schools serving students of diverse achievement levels and those serving only high-performing students were also clear. Both areas suggest the larger trend seen in educational research, that greater advantage is conveyed to those who are already advantaged and greater disadvantage is reinforced with those who are already disadvantaged.

Larger scale studies that incorporate direct accounts from students, direct accounts from teachers, and classroom observations of writing instruction across diverse

school settings would enrich understandings of the affordances and constraints exerted by schools on both teachers' practices and young people's writing development.

Intervention-based studies comparing classrooms employing instructional practices that privilege development of authorial identity versus those that implement skill-based approaches could inform our understandings of how school-based experiences shape students' learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Drawing together these storylines of how young adolescents experienced writing and interpreting the meanings they made of those experiences has reoriented my thinking about what it means to teach and learn writing. I think about my years as an English language arts teacher in the middle school classroom and the paraphernalia of writing instruction with which I surrounded myself—the worksheets and warm-ups, the grammar books and graphic organizers. I started each year with a pack of purple pens which I exhausted one after the next as I filled the margins of my students' work, having been advised in my teacher preparation program that using red ink would cause irreparable harm to their self-confidence. I thought these were the things that made me a writing teacher. Looking back I do think there was some magic there, but it seems unlikely that its source was my transparency of a hamburger that prompted students to sandwich three details between the buns of topic sentence and conclusion. I think maybe what was actually powerful in my classroom was the ways that the students and I were readers and writers together, and the ways, on my best days, that I used these tools to edge young

writers closer and closer to the boundaries of what they believed they were capable of thinking and doing with language.

In her collection of autobiographical essays entitled *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard (1989) said of the writer, “He is careful of what he reads, for that is what he will write. He is careful of what he learns, because that is what he will know” (p. 68). As I gathered and wove together these young adolescents’ writing narratives, I realized that their reading and learning, whether in school, out of school, or in spite of school, did shape what they wrote and the ways they came to know themselves as authors. Teachers were vital because they orchestrated the experiences through which students read and learned. At their best, teachers offered complex, engaging, purposeful writing opportunities and contributed to the language resources through which students executed, understood, and narrated their writing lives.

In the same essay, Dillard said to the writer, “You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment” (p. 68). So much of writing instruction seems to comprise the minutia of completing assignments and filling in the blanks, activities that weigh down teachers and students alike, with so little attention to the power of writing to give voice to one’s own astonishment. Despite these constraints, however, young people are becoming authors. They are mining the texts and social worlds that surround them and discovering the resources they need for authorship, or the ones that will do in a pinch. They are writing and learning to write. In the process, young writers are navigating what Holland, et al. (1998) termed the margins and interstices and, in making meaning, they author their worlds.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview One

Today we will talk about your experiences writing and learning to write during your childhood. I want to understand your life history as a writer.

1. Think back to when you first learned to write. Tell me about some of your earliest memories of writing.
2. Think about later in elementary school. What writing do you remember doing then? Tell me about it.
3. Think of something you've written in middle school that was particularly interesting or challenging. Tell me about it.
4. Tell me about writing you have done outside of school.
5. Tell me about times you used writing with friends or just for fun.
6. Tell me about times you remember sharing your writing with another person or people. How was that experience?
7. Tell me about the kinds of writing you like best? Least? Why?
8. Who has influenced your writing or the kind of writer you are now?

Interview Two

Last time we met we talked about your memories of learning to write as a child. Today we will focus on the writing you have done since you have been in middle school.

1. Tell me about any writing projects you have been working on so far this year in school. What have you learned in this particular class that helps you with this writing? What did you already know about writing that has been helpful?
2. Why do you think your teacher assigned this writing project? What is he/she hoping to find out by giving this assignment?
3. Remind me about what you wrote during Young Writers Camp this summer. How is this similar to or different from the kind of writing you're doing in school? Which do you prefer? Why?
4. Think about a time in middle school that you have written narrative – either using real or imagined events written like a story. Tell me about it.
 - a. What do you think makes a good narrative? Why?
 - b. What do you think your teacher believes makes a good narrative? Why?
 - c. Why do you think your teacher assigned this project? What was he/she hoping to find out by giving this assignment?
 - d. Did you share your narrative with anyone? What did they think of it?
 - e. How have your teachers helped you write narrative? What have you learned about narrative outside of school? What do you still want to know?

5. Think about a time in middle school that you have written a text that gives information or explains something, such as a report or even a poster or presentation that you used writing to prepare. Tell me about it.
 - a. What do you think makes a good informational or explanatory text? Why?
 - b. What do you think your teacher believes makes a good informational or explanatory text? Why?
 - c. Why do you think your teacher assigned this project? What was he/she hoping to find out by giving this assignment?
 - d. Did you share your informational or explanatory text with anyone? What did they think of it?
 - e. How have your teachers helped you write informational and explanatory text? What have you learned about it outside of school? What do you still want to know?

6. Think about a time in middle school that you have written a text that presents an argument, like a debate, persuasive paper, or an argument using evidence to back up your claims. Tell me about it.
 - a. What do you think makes a good argumentative text? Why?
 - b. What do you think your teacher believes makes a good argumentative text? Why?
 - c. Why do you think your teacher assigned this project? What was he/she hoping to find out by giving this assignment?

- d. Did you share your argumentative text with anyone? What did they think of it?
 - e. How have your teachers helped you write argumentative text? What have you learned about it outside of school? What do you still want to know?
7. Which of these types of writing – narrative, informational/explanatory, and argumentative do you do most often for school? Least often?
 8. Which of the three are you most comfortable with? Why? Least comfortable with? Why?
 9. Do you use any of these three types of writing outside of school? Tell me about it.
 10. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you're writing for school? How do you think your teachers would describe you? How would your friends or classmates describe you?
 11. How would you describe yourself as a writer when you're writing outside of school? How would others who read your out-of-school writing describe you?
 12. Next time we meet I will ask you for a pseudonym, just a first name that you would like to go by when I write about our interviews. It should not be your real name or part of your name. Think about the name you would like to use.

Interview Three

In our first interview we talked about your writing as a child. In our second interview we discussed your writing in middle school. Today we will talk about your perspectives on writing and your writing in the future.

1. Before we get started, do you have a pseudonym you would like me to use when I write about our interviews?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a writer? Why? Explain?
3. This summer I got to see you writing at camp and in our previous interviews we talked about your memories of writing and the writing you're doing in middle school now. Thinking about all of these things together, how have you become the writer you are now?
4. Imagine I was making a movie of your life as a writer, what are the important scenes that I should be sure to include? What influential people should I be sure to feature in the movie of your life as a writer? Why?
5. In what ways has writing influenced you and the kind of person you are? Are there other parts of your identity or personality that go together well with being a writer? Are there other parts of your identity or personality that conflict with being a writer?
6. We've talked about how you write for school in general, for particular classes in school, and outside of school. All of those kinds of writing have certain rules or guidelines that help you decide what to say and how to say it. For example, you

would probably use different kinds of words for a paper in English class versus in a text message to your best friend. Some of those guidelines are taught in school and some of them you figure out on your own.

- a. What are some of those guidelines or rules for writing in school? How do you think you have mostly learned the rules or guidelines for school writing?
 - b. For your own writing outside of school?
 - c. For informal writing like emailing or texting friends?
 - d. How do you decide what kind of language or what kind of words to use in those various situations?
7. Think about the first day of Young Writers' Camp this summer when you didn't know yet what to expect or what you would write. How did you feel that first day? Over the course of the camp, how did you figure out the rules or guidelines for the ways you would write and the kinds of writing you would do?
 8. What kind of writing do you imagine yourself doing during high school (in school and out of school)?
 9. What kind of writing do you imagine yourself doing in college or in your career? In your life in general as an adult?
 10. If you could write one dream piece, what would it be?
 11. Imagine that someone your age who you've never met before finds a piece of your writing. What would you want that piece to be? What would you want that person to understand about you based on that writing? Why?

12. For you, what makes writing meaningful?