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Chapter 7

“Putting Things into Words” : The Development of 12–15-Year-Old Students’ Interest for Writing

Rebecca L. Lipstein and K. Ann Renninger¹

This chapter addresses three questions: (a) What is the relation among students’ interest for writing and their conceptual competence, goals, and strategies as writers? (b) What is the relation among students’ interest for writing and their perceptions of their effort, self-efficacy, and feedback preferences in their writing? (c) What conditions support students to be effective writers? Portraiture is used to depict students in each of the four phases of interest development identified by Hidi and Renninger (2006): triggered situational interest, maintained situational interest, emerging individual interest, and well-developed individual interest. Data from questionnaires and structured in-depth interviews with middle school students informed portrait development. Discussion centers on the relation among students’ phase of interest for writing and their corresponding motivational strengths and needs as writers. Pedagogical implications are considered.

Dewey (1913) wrote that where there is interest effort follows. He also noted that while teachers cannot make a student interested in subject matter, they can support students’ abilities to make connections between their prior experiences and the materials to be learned.

When students have interest for a particular subject matter, they are likely to be attentive to, able to set goals for, and have effective learning strategies for working with that subject matter (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Moreover, student interest is likely to deepen and develop with reengagement. In the present chapter, the research literature on interest, motivation, and writing is overviewed as a basis for discussing findings from a qualitative

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analysis of 12–15-year-old students' interest for writing. Three questions informed this investigation:

- 1 What is the relation among students' interest for writing and their conceptual competence, goals, and strategies as writers?
- 2 What is the relation among students' interest for writing and their perceptions of their effort, self-efficacy, and feedback preferences in their writing?
- 3 What conditions support students to be effective writers?

Following a review of relevant literature, composite portraits of students representing four phases of interest for writing are presented. These portraits were developed using questionnaire and interview data, and they map onto Hidi and Renninger's (2006) Four-Phase Model of Interest Development. The portraits provide the basis for an investigation of different phases in the development of student interest for writing. Commonalities and differences among the portraits are identified, and their pedagogical implications are then considered.

1 Background: Interest, Writing, and Motivation

1.1 Interest

In everyday usage, interest refers to the topic of a person's engagement (e.g., an interest for writing or math) and is sometimes described as a characteristic of a person (Valsiner, 1992; Silvia, 2001). As a motivational variable, however, interest more precisely refers to *interaction* with particular subject matter content (e.g., writing, mathematics, soccer). In this sense, interest is located neither in the student nor in the subject matter; rather, it emerges and exists in the interactions between the student and the subject matter (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1992; Krapp, Renninger, & Hoffmann, 1998; Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004). Reengagement with particular subject matter provides a student with opportunities for developing stored knowledge and stored value for that content – or interest – as well as opportunities to recall positive feelings about previous engagement (Renninger, 1990, 2000).

In their discussion of interest development, Todt and Schreiber (1998; see also Tracey, 2001) report that students' interests become increasingly focused from birth until about age 15. They suggest that this increase in focus is due to students' social contexts as well as changes in their bodies and gender identification. Initially, according to Todt and Schreiber, the process of identifying interest is influenced by the structure of a person's environment. This is followed by a process of identification that includes gender-typing of interest content and self-assessment of skills.

While existing interests become more stable in adolescence (Marcia, 1980; Vondracek, 1993), new interests can also develop. Moreover, even though drops in interest for school-related subject matter have been observed during adolescence (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan et al., 1993a; Gardner, 1998; Krapp, 2000), adolescents can have as many as five or six interests (Renninger, 1992). Much depends on the conditions of the environment (Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004; Renninger, Ewen, & Lasher, 2002). For example, as Renninger and Hidi (2002) report in their developmental case study, an adolescent may have a well-developed individual interest for soccer and be in a position to acknowledge this interest. The same student may have a well-developed individual interest

for writing, but this interest may not be something he is able to articulate or willing to acknowledge because of gender expectations and other social pressures. He may also have only a passing, or situational, interest for science – until this interest is supported to develop (see case study reported in Renninger & Hidi, 2002).

The connections that students make with content to be learned can lead to serious reengagement, presuming that there is continued content for the student to engage. For example, a student who begins learning how to write in a "writer's workshop" may have positive feelings about writing because this setting affords her choice about subject and genre and the ability to think about the content of her writing with others (Atwell, 1987). However, this student may not continue to feel positively or be led to deepen her appreciation for the possibilities that communicating through text can represent if she does not continue to write under similar conditions (see related discussion in Renninger, 2000). In discussions of adolescence, this situation is often cast in terms of heightened interest or apathy. The heightened interest associated with adolescence usually reflects developing talent (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993). The apathy associated with adolescence is typically attributable to someone else's decision about what should be of interest to the students, without the kind of back-up support that interest development requires (Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Renninger et al., 2004). For example, it is possible that the decline of interest for subject matter during adolescence corresponds to constraints placed on students as learners that impede or interfere with interest development (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Such constraints could be related to what counts as writing (five-paragraph essays) and requirements for form and organization in the secondary school classroom, which differ from expectations and approaches to writing found in earlier grades (free writes, project-based learning, etc.) and again in college (choice of course content, instructors, etc.) (Hoffmann, 2002; Hidi, Renninger, & Krapp, 2004).

The supportive (or constraining) role of educators in determining whether and how students develop interest for a subject, and therefore an understanding of that subject, cannot be overlooked (Pressick-Kilborn & Walker, 2002; Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004). Through their pedagogy, teachers construct learning environments that can contribute to student interest. For example, they can support students to feel positively about their efforts to learn. Students' feelings about involvement with particular subject matter have been found to affect learning outcomes and to mediate the way in which students undertake assignments and questioning (Renninger & Hidi, 2002). Provision of choice (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003) project-based learning (Blumenfeld, Soloway, Marx, Krajcik, Guzdial, & Palincsar, 1991; Marx, Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Blunk, Crawford, Kelly et al., 1994), and group work (Hidi, Weiss, Berndorf, & Nolan, 1998) are techniques that support students to connect to the materials that they need to learn and presumably could provide a basis for interest development.

To date, research that addresses the role of interest in students' writing suggests that teachers should expect variability in student writing, depending on the topic that they assign (Benton, 1997). Students have been found to have an increased motivation to write if topics they are assigned are of interest to them (Hidi & McLaren, 1990). In addition, if the topic about which students are writing is of interest to them, they have more to discuss (Hidi & Anderson, 1992).² Also, students are more likely to write narratives that are well organized

²As Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) point out, having discourse and content knowledge relevant to a writing assignment also increases the likelihood that students have something to write about and that what they write is focused.

and logical (Benton, Corkill, Sharp, Downey, & Khramtsova, 1995), as well as more focused and topic-relevant (Albin, Benton, & Khramtsova, 1996), when they write about topics of interest. Furthermore, if a topic identified as an individual interest for a student is inserted as the context of a passage to be read, that student is likely to write more and attend more to meaning and sense-making (Renninger, Ewen, & Lasher, 2002). However, most studies of interest and writing have focused on the topics about which students write rather than writing as the domain of potential interest (Boscolo & Cisotto, 1997).

1.2 Interest and Writing

As Hidi and Boscolo (2006) point out, research on writing has typically had one of two foci. Either it has focused on cognition to the exclusion of motivation and affect, providing a basis for present studies of self-efficacy and self-regulation, or it has been based in socio-cultural theory in which writing is essential to students' meaning-making. Similarly, research informing the teaching of writing has either centered on supporting students to develop the analytical skills required to write effectively (Durst & Newell, 1989), or emphasized the importance of establishing a context with which a student can identify and through which skills can be practiced (Graham & Harris, 1994a,b, 2000; Harris & Graham, 1992; Simmons, 1991; Stahl, McKenna, & Pagnucco, 1994). Usefully, both approaches to writing require attention, the ability to set goals, and effective learning strategies. However, only a few studies have focused on student interest for writing or students' perceptions about "putting things into words" as support for developing attention, goal-setting, or effective learning strategies (c.f., Boscolo & Cisotto, 1997; Nolen, this volume).

In fact, some teachers (and students) do not think that it is possible for students to develop interest for particular subject matter (e.g., writing). They think that a student either does or does not have interest. Such perceptions logically lead to the conclusion that interest is immutable – a perspective that has no empirical support. A number of studies have suggested that teachers can effectively support students to develop interest (Renninger, 1992, 2000; Renninger Ewen, & Lasher, 2002; Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004). Importantly, these studies indicate that, while interest can be triggered in the moment, it needs to be sustained if it is to have an impact on what students learn. Primarily, these studies have focused on changes that can be made to text to enhance its interestingness (Hidi & Baird, 1986) or concreteness (Sadoski, 2001). Other findings indicate that changes in instructional conditions will sustain student interest, for example, repeated and targeted development of connections between content to be learned and everyday tasks (Renninger et al., 2004); project-based approaches to learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1991); group work (Hidi, Weiss, Berndorff, Nolan, 1998); and provision of choice (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003).

Presumably, changing the task and/or instructional conditions will enable students to do that they can undertake assigned work that they do not enjoy (Sansone, Weir, Harpster, & Morgan, 1992). If students do not have positive feelings about a task, however, it is not likely that they will connect to material, ask their own questions of it, or choose to return to it. If it is not assigned (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). This does not mean that a teacher should prevent everything students do or simply allow students to do what they want. Rather, students need to feel a sense of possibility about themselves as writers (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and about the utility of writing (Wigfield & Eccles, 2002b). Willing as well as recalcitrant students

to see that they can "get" it. They need to understand that learning anything is a process that takes time, and they need to find the value of that process for themselves.

1.3 Interest and Motivation

The educational psychology literature has focused on two types of interest: situational and individual interest (Krapp, Hidi, & Renninger, 1992; Hidi, Renninger, Krapp, 2004). Briefly, situational interest refers to the shifting of attention to some content in the moment. Thus, loud noises, a topic that one does not know too much about, or a topic that a person does know something about could trigger a situational interest. Situational interest may last only a short period of time or it may be sustained – meaning that a person will continue to attend to the subject matter and may be led to set goals and/or explore possible strategies for working with it. Even if a person has positive feelings, however, a situational interest for a particular content, such as writing, is not typically sustained unless there are multiple instances of triggered situational interest (Renninger & Hidi, 2002) and encouragement of continued engagement (Hidi & Baird, 1988; Hoffmann, 2002; Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004; Sadoski, 2002; Schraw & Lehman, 2001; Wade, 2001).

Individual interest, by contrast, refers to the likelihood that a person will reengage with particular content over time. Individual interest has been variously discussed as including both affective and cognitive components (see discussion in Hidi & Renninger, in revision). Importantly, support from other people and the environment is also necessary to sustain individual interest. While students with an individual interest for particular content are predisposed to return to that content over time, this predisposition can be supported or constrained by environmental conditions. These conditions include whether students are (a) given time to work through and revise ideas, (b) provided with alternate approaches for problem solving, and (c) offered opportunities to interact and think with others about ideas (Krapp & Lewalter, 2001; Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Shumar, 2002).

Situational and individual interest may mediate attention, goals, and learning strategies with respect to particular content, but this mediation occurs within a larger culture (e.g., family or school) (Hoffmann, 2002; Järvelä, 2001; Pressick-Kilborn & Walker, 2002; Renninger, Ewen, & Lasher, 2002). This context can, but may not, support interest development.

Recently, Hidi and Renninger (2006) suggested that, taken together, situational and individual interest describe a Four-Phase Model of Interest Development. The four phases are:

Phase 1: Triggered situational interest.

Phase 2: Maintained situational interest.

Phase 3: Emerging (or less-developed³) individual interest.

Phase 4: Well-developed individual interest.

Each phase of interest is characterized by both positive feelings and cognition. In the first phase, *triggered situational interest*, a person perceives the content of interest, even if only fleetingly, and the positive feelings associated with this experience command his or

³Where emerging individual interest has been discussed and studied as less-developed individual interest (Renninger, 2000). The phase of interest being discussed is the same. The label was changed in order to acknowledge that in terms of interest development, the less-developed individual interest is an emerging individual interest (Hidi & Renninger, 2006).

her attention in the moment. In the second phase of interest, *maintained situational interest*, a person re-engages with content and is typically supported by others to find ways to relate the content of interest to prior experience, other information, etc. In this phase of interest, a person also begins to develop value for content. In the third phase of interest, *emerging individual interest*, the person seeks repeated engagement independently, and he or she begins to pose curiosity questions about the content of interest. This questioning process leads to self-regulated activity, increased valuing, and the accumulation of discourse knowledge and more content-specific skills. In the fourth phase of interest, *well-developed individual interest*, a person continues to seek repeated engagement independently. This engagement is informed by curiosity questions, the self-regulation necessary to address these questions, value, and the ability to attenuate frustration and sustain creative thinking.

Based on their review of the literature, Hidi and Renninger (2006) suggest that interest emerges and continues to develop in relation to other motivational variables. It might be expected that, as interest develops and students begin to identify with and generate their own curiosity questions about writing, their (a) feelings of self-efficacy improve, (b) goals are modified, (c) ability to spontaneously self-regulate is heightened, and (d) sense of possibility is enhanced. Of particular importance here is the possibility that interest is not simply an outcome of self-efficacy, goal-setting, and self-regulation, but rather a mediator of attention that supports the development of self-efficacy, goal-setting, and self-regulation. In this sense, interest – or, more specifically, deepened interest – is an outcome of a developmental process. Thus, even though interest and motivation are often used in everyday discussions to describe student involvement, not all motivated behavior is interested behavior. Interested behaviors, however, are always motivated behaviors. If interest for writing does develop, that interest is likely to support students to attend to content, set goals, and employ learning strategies that should enhance their writing.

2 Students' Perceptions of and Interest for Writing

In order to consider the relation among interest, writing as a domain, and student motivation, a combined questionnaire and interview study was conducted (Renninger & Lipstein, forthcoming). A familiar adult distributed an open-ended and forced-choice questionnaire to 178 (79 boys, 99 girls) students during their English classes. She explained that she was asking them to complete a questionnaire that would help her to help teachers know more about student writing. The last item on the questionnaire asked each student if he or she would consider participating in a follow-up interview. Follow-up interviews were in-depth, structured interviews that were recorded, transcribed, and coded. A total of 72 students (38 boys, 34 girls) participated in the follow-up interviews. Data from students' questionnaires and the interview responses are the focus of the present analysis.

Students were purposefully sampled for interview participation based on their identified phases of interest for writing, gender, and year in school. Because gender and age did not distribute evenly across interest groups, students interviewed included 7 students (6 boys, 1 girl) identified as having only a triggered situational interest for writing, 36 students (21 boys, 15 girls) identified as having a maintained situational interest, 28 students

(10 boys, 18 girls) identified as having an emerging individual interest, and 1 student (1 boy) identified as having a well-developed individual interest for writing.⁴

2.1 Method: Portraiture

The present chapter draws on questionnaire and interview data from 12–15-year-old students at a selective, K–12, suburban, preparatory school. Portraiture is used to report and further examine students' responses to open-ended questions assessing their (a) interest for writing, (b) conceptual competence, (c) goal-setting and strategy use, (d) effort, (e) self-efficacy, and (f) feedback preferences.

Portraiture is an interpretive and descriptive methodology that draws on participants' accounts to provide an ethnographic narrative (Lightfoot, 1983). As adapted for this chapter, portraiture is a method of creating case descriptions that reflect the responses of a like group (e.g., all students with a maintained situational interest for writing). Unlike case studies, which single out a particular student and can be idiosyncratic, portraiture draws on commonalities across a group of students, providing validation for all reported characteristics. The portraits developed for this chapter present an informed, but fictitious, narrative of students who exemplify the characteristics of the group under examination. The portrait preserves the real students' words and anecdotes; however, the narrative that presents them is written from the perspective of the researcher and not from the perspective of the student being described. Moreover, the researcher's reporting on each group of students is informed by the questions of the study.

In this chapter, portraits of students identified as being in different phases of interest for writing were developed using a six-step procedure informed by discourse analysis (Gee, 1999). First, students' responses to the questionnaires were used to identify them as being in a particular phase of interest for writing. Second, all questionnaire and interview data were reviewed to identify content relevant to the questions and variables of this study. Third, patterns that emerged were identified for review. Fourth, all questionnaire and interview responses of students in a particular phase of interest were reviewed, and discourse analytic techniques were employed to identify patterns specific to that phase. Particular attention was paid to students' ways of describing their experiences, including phrasing and anecdotes. These data provided the basis for portrait development. Fifth, portraits were developed that addressed the questions of the study. Each variable of the study was addressed in each portrait. Finally, the reliability of the portraits was established, and the validity of the portraits was checked against experience working with students in two similar school settings.

⁴Because only 4 students (1 boy, 3 girls) in the population could be identified as having a well-developed individual interest for writing, their data were initially combined with students who are now identified as having an emerging individual interest. Students were selected for interviews based on the assumption that there were three phases of interest identifiable in the population (Krapp, 2002b). The process of reviewing data for the composition of the portraits, however, revealed substantive differences between students with an emerging individual interest and those with a more well-developed individual interest for writing. As a consequence, four phases of interest were identified, and four portraits are presented.

Table 1: Phases of interest for writing and conceptual competence, goals, and strategies

	Phases of interest for writing			
	Triggered situational	Maintained situational	Emerging individual	Well-developed individual
Conceptual Competence	Most articulate a purpose and/or a process for writing. Interview data suggest a disconnect between what they articulate and how they use writing	Most conceive of writing as a means toward some other end (e.g., emotional expression, success in school); many articulate that writing has a purpose (e.g., communication) and/or that writing is a process	Most articulate a purpose for writing; some demonstrate an understanding of writing as a process in addition, or instead	All describe a purpose for writing, and most also demonstrate an understanding of writing as a process
Goals	Most want to "get it done" or focus on grammar and other details	Most want to do things well (according to standard set by teacher)	Most want to do things well (according to a personal standard); may opt for work that exceeds level of readiness	All want to do things well (seem to embrace both personal and universally accepted standards for writing); more aware than those in other phases of interest about the level of work that they are able to do
Strategies	Most do not employ strategies	Most employ strategies that allow them to meet standards set by their teacher	Most tend to focus on phrasing and other stylistic concerns	All employ their own strategies as well as strategies suggested by others (e.g., outlining); they all seek feedback and/or help from others

2.2 Variables Assessed

Tables 1 and 2 summarize information from study participants (see also Renninger & Lipstein, forthcoming). Student responses to questionnaire and interview items were used to identify students' (a) interest for writing, (b) conceptual competence for writing,

(c) goal-setting and strategy use in writing, (d) effort, (e) self-efficacy as writers, and (f) feedback preferences. Reliability was established for all reported variables. Because the only significant gender difference in the present study was the disproportionate number of girls in the small group of students identified as having a well-developed individual interest for writing, gender was dropped from the analysis.

Interest Interest for writing was assessed using a set of Likert ratings and open-ended questions paralleling those employed by Renninger, Ewen, and Lasher (2002). Specifically, students were asked to rate their knowledge of and feelings about writing. In addition, they completed open-ended questions that addressed the types of writing in which they engaged outside of school. Based on these methods and this population of students, four phases of interest could reliably be identified: triggered situational interest (Phase 1), maintained situational interest (Phase 2), emerging individual interest (Phase 3), and well-developed individual interest (Phase 4). Importantly, just as students with little or no interest for writing can experience a triggered situational interest, so students in all phases of interest development respond to triggered situational interest(s) (Renninger & Hidi, 2002).

Conceptual competence Students' conceptual competence for writing was assessed using a modified version of Renninger and Lehman's (1999) questions. Students were asked to describe what writing is, the types of writing that they do, and the ways in which they imagine using writing in the future. Of interest in coding student responses was whether these students conceived of writing as a process and an activity with a definite purpose. Students who understood that writing is a process and that there are structures and forms for communicating their ideas more effectively were expected to be metacognitively positioned to engage writing differently than students who only thought of writing as an assignment. Similarly, students who conceived of writing as a purposeful activity were expected to engage that activity differently than students who thought of it only as an assignment.

Four levels of conceptual competence were identified. Students who defined writing in terms of their feelings about writing rather than the nature of the task (e.g., "a very boring exercise") were identified as having a low level of conceptual competence (level 1). Students who listed genres (e.g., "stories, poems, newspapers...") were identified as having some conceptual competence (level 2). Students who described writing as either a process or as a purposeful activity (e.g., "a way to communicate") were identified as having more conceptual competence (level 3). Students who described writing as both a process and as a purposeful activity (e.g., "writing is communication which is recorded") were identified as having the most conceptual competence (level 4). As shown in Table 1, conceptual competence was not necessarily correlated with a student's phase of interest for writing. Even students with only a triggered situational interest for writing could articulate a sophisticated understanding of what writing is. However, interview data suggested that, while some of these students offered more developed definitions, they were not yet applying them to their own writing. In addition, distribution of these data suggested that students in grade nine were likely to have high levels of conceptual competence (level 3 or 4). While many students in grades seven and eight also had high levels of conceptual competence, a number of students in these grades had lower levels of conceptual competence (level 1 or 2).

Goal-setting and strategies Questions assessing students' goal-setting and strategies as writers were informed by Hidi and Anderson's (1986) discussion of summarization techniques, Zimmerman and Kitsantas' (1999) discussion of revision and self-regulatory skill development, and Linnebrink and Pintrich's (2000) discussion of the development of student goal-setting. Students were asked about the role of planning for writing, their efforts to edit or enlist the help of others to edit their work, and advice that they would offer younger students about writing. As depicted in Table 1, findings from students' responses to these questions revealed that, the more developed a student's interest for writing was, the more sophisticated his or her goals tended to be. Students with only a triggered situational interest for writing focused on "getting it done" or making small grammatical corrections with little idea of how to meet these goals. However, students with a well-developed individual interest worked to achieve personal and broadly accepted standards of excellence and enlisted the help of others. Students' strategies for achieving their goals did not always increase as their interest for writing deepened, however. Students with only a triggered situational interest and those with an emerging individual interest for writing did not typically appear to make use of effective strategies for achieving their goals as writers. By contrast, students with a maintained situational interest and those with a well-developed individual interest for writing appeared generally to utilize effective strategies to meet their writing goals.

Effort Student effort in writing was assessed using two questions on the questionnaire and students' follow-up discussions of these questions in their interviews. Based on Renninger (2003) and Renninger and Hidi (2002), students were asked to evaluate the effort that they generally put into writing assignments. Then, they were asked to compare the effort that they expended on writing assignments with their effort on other school assignments (e.g., math homework). As depicted in Table 2, students with only a triggered situational interest for writing felt that all writing tasks were arduous and required a high degree of effort, whereas students with a maintained situational interest felt that writing tasks demanded only a moderate degree of effort. Students with an emerging individual interest and students with a well-developed individual interest for writing said that they were likely to exert a great deal of effort on writing tasks, but their efforts did not feel like hard work.

Self-efficacy Students' feelings of self-efficacy about writing were assessed using a modification of a scale developed by Renninger and Lehman (1999) that built on those used by Eccles and Wigfield (1995). Students were asked how well they thought they usually did on writing assignments, how successful they would be in a career that required writing ability, how they had been doing on recent writing assignments, and how hard writing was for them. As depicted in Table 2, findings from the questionnaires and follow-up interviews indicated that students' feelings of self-efficacy corresponded to their phases of interest for writing. For students in less-developed phases of interest for writing, feelings of self-efficacy appeared to increase as interest deepened. Students with a well-developed individual interest, however, were more likely to have more complex feelings of self-efficacy than students with an emerging individual interest for writing. While the latter tended to be confident about their abilities, students with a well-developed individual interest had

Table 2: Phases of interest for writing and student perceptions of effort, self-efficacy, and feedback

	Triggered situational	Phases of interest for writing		
		Maintained situational	Emerging individual	Well-developed individual
Effort	Most feel that writing takes a lot of effort; perceive even small tasks as arduous	Most do not feel that writing takes an overwhelming amount of work; do not invest more effort in writing than other school assignments	Most expend a lot of effort by choice and keep working until they are personally satisfied; do not feel that the work they put into writing is arduous	Most expend a lot of effort by choice and keep working until they and others are satisfied; do not feel that the work they put into writing is arduous
Self-efficacy	Most feel that they are poor writers (this perception is often reinforced by low grades)	Most are generally comfortable with their abilities as writers (this perception is often reinforced by high grades)	Most are confident in their abilities as writers (often, but not always, this perception is reinforced by grades)	Most are confident in their abilities as writers; have a realistic sense of their abilities relative to peers and published authors; do not need to have their abilities confirmed by others
Feedback preferences	All want to be heard; want comments that require few changes and feel manageable; afraid of audience censure and being thought of as "stupid"	All want to hear positive feedback and specific directions to improve their work; look to teacher for standards of performance	All want their ideas to be heard and have their work appreciated; want audience reactions that are open-ended; do not want to hear specific directives or questioning of their decision making	All want their ideas to be heard and want honest feedback in any form, whether reactive or constructive criticism; prefer initial feedback on content, followed by feedback about technique

confidence as well as an awareness of the need for and benefit of feedback that could help them to improve their writing. They appeared to have a more realistic sense than their peers of their place in the larger community of writers and to understand that it was possible to further develop their writing skills.

Feedback preference Fish and White (1978–1979) found that students with more developed interest are positioned to benefit most from feedback. They also found that students with less developed interest for a content area are more receptive to positive feedback. In the present study, students were asked about the types of feedback that they received, the types of feedback that they preferred, and their use of feedback. As depicted in Table 2, students with only a triggered situational interest sought affirmation of their writing and had little interest or ability to work with feedback that asked them to rethink their efforts. They needed to feel “heard” and respected. Feedback needed to fit into their frame for thinking about writing. By contrast, students with a well-developed individual interest for writing also wanted to be heard, but they preferred feedback from which they could learn and develop as writers.

3 Portraits and Discussion

As noted earlier, a portrait of a student in each phase of interest was developed as a tool for further examining the relation among interest, writing, and motivation. The anecdotes and examples included in the portraits were drawn directly from student responses to the questionnaire and interview questions. Unless otherwise specified, student age and gender for each portrait were arbitrarily assigned. Discussions that follow each portrait address the relation among the student’s phase of interest, other motivational variables, conceptual competence, and feedback preferences.

3.1 Phase 1. Triggered Situational Interest for Writing: Ethan

The bell rings as Ethan skulks into English class with a binder and pencil case slung under his arm. As the more gregarious seventh grade girls choose seats toward the front of the classroom, Ethan selects a desk off to one side, not too close to the teacher, but not too far away from her either. Rarely one to speak up in English class, he is particularly concerned to blend in today: today, they are working on their essays.

Writing has never been one of Ethan’s favorite things. When he was younger, he did not mind it so much; in elementary school, they had written stories and poems, which had sometimes even been fun to write. They were simple and short. In recent years, however, his teachers have made him analyze stories instead of letting him write them, and he has had trouble getting the hang of it. What he considers analysis, his teachers deem paraphrasing. Increasingly frustrated and unable to see the difference, Ethan has all but given up on writing. In conversations with friends, he denounces English class, claiming that it ruins perfectly good stories by forcing students to “pick them apart.” Outside of school, it would never occur to Ethan to write for fun; the only writing he regularly engages in after school is instant messaging and e-mailing with friends.

Ethan slouches low in his chair and, at the teacher’s instruction, removes his essay from underneath his binder. He smooths a ruffled corner, the result of having shoved the paper haphazardly into his backpack that morning. Today’s assignment had been less

terrible than some; the teacher had asked them to write an essay on a topic of their choice. Initially, this task had proven daunting for Ethan: while his classmates had seemed to be brimming with ideas, he had stared blankly at his computer screen, unsure of where to begin. Concerned about his recent grades in English, his parents made an effort to brainstorm with him. With their help, Ethan had finally come up with what he thought was a brilliant topic: basketball.

Basketball is Ethan’s greatest passion in life. He plays on the team at school, practices with friends on weekends, and eagerly looks forward to returning to the sports camp he has attended for the past two summers. While Ethan lives and breathes basketball, it had never occurred to him to write about it. When his father suggested the idea, Ethan became excited. His fingers flew across the keyboard, trained for speed by hours of computer games and instant message conversations.

Looking down at his paper, Ethan feels a strange mix of pride and apprehension. While he is confident that he knows more about basketball than anyone in the classroom, he also feels unschooled in writing, at least in part because he tends to shut down whenever writing is discussed in class. He worries that his lack of skill may cause him to earn a poor grade. This fear has been nurtured by past experience – assignments that he felt good about but were returned marked with Cs and Ds.

At the teacher’s instruction, the students prepare for peer conferences. During these activities, Ethan always works with his friend Sam. While Ethan enjoys playing with Sam outside of school, his talent for writing makes him a daunting partner for peer conferences. As Ethan reads Sam’s paper on global warming, a number of thoughts run through his head: “This is really good Is basketball a stupid topic? Should I have written about something more important like Sam did? I don’t feel like I have anything to say to him about this paper. I mean, maybe he’s messed up commas and stuff, but I wouldn’t know if he did.”

Turning to Sam, Ethan says, “Cool paper, man. I really liked it.” Excited, Sam begins to rehash his points, asking Ethan if he agrees with some of his more controversial assertions. Relieved that he no longer has to run the conference himself, Ethan nods at the appropriate times, inserting the occasional “yeah” and “uh-huh.”

Then, it is Sam’s turn to provide Ethan with feedback. As Ethan waits for his friend to finish reading, watching him scribble notes to himself in the margins, his thoughts are a complicated mix. Hope that Sam will be able to fix his grammar mingles with doubts that any seventh grader’s feedback will ever be as valuable as the teacher’s. Sam looks up, ready to address his classmate. Ethan draws a quiet breath and awaits Sam’s verdict.

“You say a lot of cool stuff about basketball,” Sam begins.

“Thanks,” Ethan replies, relaxing slightly.

“I’m thinking, though, that it seems kind of random. See, there’s stuff here about professional players and there’s stuff over here about professional players, too.”

Instantly, Ethan bristles. This is not the kind of feedback he wants. Comments on organization overwhelm Ethan, making him feel like he has to rewrite his entire essay, a thoroughly unappealing prospect. Just fix my commas, he pleads silently. When teachers correct his rough drafts, he makes minimal revisions. He fixes the commas and other minor errors, but he leaves the broader issues unaddressed. His lack of enthusiasm for revision is

not due to laziness so much as uncertainty: what does the teacher mean by "awkward?" How can I make that paragraph "stronger?"

Rather than admit his confusion and risk seeming stupid to his friend, Ethan nods and pretends to make note of Sam's suggestions. While his actions indicate that he is absorbing his partner's feedback, something absent in his eyes belies this apparent engagement. Mentally, Ethan has shut down. Convinced that he will never "get this stuff" the way that Sam does, he has simply stopped trying.

The bell rings, and Ethan saunters gratefully toward the door. That evening, he takes out his essay, wrinkled beyond recognition, and thinks about it but does not know what to do. He decides to change one word and two commas. Several days later, the teacher returns his paper, marked with another C-.

Discussion Ethan's tendency to disengage from writing tasks was characteristic of the responses of students with only a triggered situational interest. They reported almost no positive feelings or value for writing. They also expressed little confidence in their writing abilities and reported little to no engagement in writing activities outside school. They said that they turned in papers to meet deadlines or because "I have to;" however, they felt little investment in their work, and they had little will to improve.

While students with only a triggered situational interest for writing sometimes gave sophisticated definitions of writing, they rarely demonstrated visions of writing as a process or a purposeful activity. Many students dismissed writing outright as "a pain" or "a boring exercise." Other students described it as an expressive or communicative tool, but they did not appear to use writing for these purposes. These students also indicated no goals to improve their abilities as writers.

Interestingly, students like Ethan typically reported engaging in hours of e-mail or instant message conversation. Convinced that writing must require effort, however, these students did not conceive of these activities as writing. In addition, these students held uniformly low feelings of self-efficacy as writers; they felt that they were not equipped to handle writing tasks as well as their more interested peers. As one student stated, "I have no idea [what advice I would give a younger student about writing] because I don't know much about writing." Another student said, "Help with spelling is all I can do." Students manifested their low feelings of self-efficacy in two ways: by claiming that they had had inadequate writing teachers in the past, or by dismissing themselves as "bad writers."

Not all students who had only a triggered situational interest for writing indicated that they had always disliked writing. Like Ethan, several students reported that they had liked writing more in elementary school, but, with the changing demands of middle and high school, they lost their interest for writing (Renninger & Lipstein, 2006). As one student said, "Once I started middle school, and we started having to actually analyze things, it just got really hard ... and [at my old school], they don't really teach you how to write, they just kind of assume that you know." A diminished interest for writing appeared to be accompanied by a decrease in the student's perception of its utility. While this student once saw a purpose for writing, she indicated that she does not find it useful now.

Possibly because they felt ill equipped to handle writing tasks, students with only a triggered situational interest conceived of writing as "work." Some factors, however, appeared

to influence the perceived arduousness of the task. Although the paper on basketball felt like work to Ethan, he would likely admit that it took less effort than some of the other essays he had written. Once his interest was triggered, writing the paper became relatively painless: his ideas just started to flow. In interviews, several students in this phase of interest development suggested that a paper felt "easy" to write when it was based on a "good idea" or a "good topic." In fact, when asked what made them want to write, these students indicated that "choice" and "a good topic" made a difference above all else (Flowerday & Schraw, 2003; Wade 2001).

Students like Ethan also typically disliked peer conferences, although this opinion was not characteristic of all students in this phase of interest development. Students reported that they wanted feedback that was manageable and specific (e.g., "You need a comma here"). Also, they reported disliking more general or seemingly daunting comments (e.g., "You should structure this paper differently"). In addition, in interviews, students indicated fears of audience censure. They worried that readers might think their work was poorly executed and might therefore assume that they were "stupid;" not surprisingly, these students were generally wary of sharing their work with others.

3.2 Phase 2. A Maintained Situational Interest for Writing: Jackie

As her teacher explains his expectations for the upcoming essay, Jackie nods attentively, making notes on an assignment sheet that is neatly placed in the "writing" section of her binder. Uncertain about one piece of the assignment, she raises her hand to ask for clarification. Throughout her teacher's response, she continues to annotate the assignment. Soon the margins of the page are filled with careful lines of metallic purple notes, each written in the same meticulous hand.

Mr. Banks finishes his explanation and asks the students to begin brainstorming in pairs for the remainder of class. Obliging, Jackie removes a fresh sheet of paper from her binder and turns to her neighbor. The assignment sheet in front of her says she is to write an opinion essay on an issue of her choice. Jackie raises her hand. When Mr. Banks makes it over to her desk, he asks how he can help.

"What should I write about?" Jackie asks.

"Well, what issues do you feel most strongly about?" he responds, answering her query with another.

"I don't know," she replies, hoping he will give her a topic.

"How about something related to issues in school? Maybe the dress code? Or, maybe something about politics, or what's going on in the world right now?"

Jackie's eyes light up. "Could I write about what's happening with the war right now?" she asks suddenly.

"Sure!" Mr. Banks responds. "Just be sure that you have something to say about it. You need to argue something specific, not just talk about the war in general."

"OK," Jackie acknowledges, adding a few more notes to the sea of purple writing. "But that's an OK topic?" she asks anxiously, wanting his approval before she begins to write.

"It's a great topic," he assures her.

Mr. Banks thinks of Jackie as a model English student, though he is often at pains to recall stand out moments that capture Jackie's personality and contributions. Her report card comments reflect generic praise: she is simply an all around "good student." In class discussions, she is a focused and active participant. Her written work is always neatly typed, generally well organized, and presents her ideas in a clear and coherent manner.

Enthused by the topic of the war and bolstered by Mr. Banks' reassurance, Jackie turns to her partner and asks her what she plans to write about. After sharing their ideas, both girls set to work outlining, and occasionally trade inspiration as it strikes. Periodically, one will get stuck and ask the other for help. Although Jackie is capable of outlining the paper on her own, she is grateful to have a partner to help her through the tough spots. By the end of the period, Jackie has managed to complete a rough outline of her ideas.

The bell rings, marking the last period of the day, and Jackie heads off to volleyball practice. Several hours later, freshly showered and fed, she sits down to work on her essay.

She settles cross-legged into the computer chair and begins to type. At first, her typing is slow and deliberate; she is simply plodding through the assignment so that she can be done with it and focus on preparing for her science test at the end of the week. As she completes the third sentence of her introduction, a friend sends her an instant message. Deciding to take a quick break, Jackie pauses to chat with her friend. Fifteen minutes later, her friend is called away, and Jackie reluctantly returns to work.

Despite her initial reluctance, as Jackie continues to type, she finds herself increasingly absorbed by the topic. Forgetting her outline, she races ahead, expressing a complex mix of feelings. She has been following the war closely and has developed strong views on this subject. Writing an opinionated piece allows her to vent her frustrations and gives her a sense of control in a situation that she feels otherwise powerless to affect. While Jackie began writing the essay for her teacher, she ends up writing it for herself.

An hour later, she is curled up inches from the computer screen, reading back over what she has written. Her focus is so intense that she does not hear her mother enter the room and is startled when she tells her it is time for bed. Glancing incredulously at the clock, Jackie wonders where the evening has gone.

As she crawls into bed, Jackie continues to think about the issues she discussed in her essay. The fact that this essay has stuck with her is unusual; normally, she does not get so invested in her writing.

When she returns to revise the essay the following afternoon, she becomes absorbed in the content and focuses mostly on wording, breaking away from her usual focus on the paper's organization, spelling, and mechanics. Much to Jackie's dismay, Mr. Banks is not so willing to disregard these formal aspects of her writing; he gives her a "B-", citing the uncharacteristically scattered nature of the paper as his primary concern.

Discussion Like other students with a maintained situational interest for writing, Jackie typically earns As because the form and organization of her writing are superior. She rarely develops her own perspective on the topics about which she writes, however. She is also very literal in her understanding of her teacher's comments, and often does not fully understand why he has asked her to make certain revisions. As a result, she may, for example, try to include more quotations in her writing but choose quotations that do not necessarily support her thesis.

Compared with students who had either an emerging or a well-developed individual interest for writing, students like Jackie with a maintained situational interest were not passionate when they talked about writing in their interviews. Instead, these students described writing as "okay" or necessary to their current careers as students and the careers they hoped to pursue in the future. When asked to describe a particularly positive writing experience, however, many students described an experience like Jackie's in which they got momentarily swept up in an assignment. Because the war is of interest to Jackie, she becomes more personally invested in her writing than she normally would (Hidi & Baird, 1988). In this moment, her priorities shift: no longer focused on writing for a grade or to please her teacher, she is concerned with expressing her opinions on the topic. One student described a similar experience: "My essay was not good. It was terrible. I really liked the topic I didn't get a good grade on it, but I still really liked it. Just because, I don't know; it was just cool!" Many students with a maintained situational interest for writing described this type of experience, but they also commented that it was something out of the ordinary for them. In general, their perceptions of writing appeared to be related to the conditions of each writing experience, including the topic they were assigned, the nature of their teacher's feedback, and the clarity of the assignment.

When the student quoted above said that her essay "was not good," she implied a definite idea of what constitutes "good writing." Questionnaire and interview responses of students with a maintained situational interest for writing indicated a sense that "writing well" involved following a prescribed writing process to generate a well-organized and clearly structured final product. These students described their writing processes algorithmically, as following a series of steps to achieve a desired end. For many of these students, that end was success in school; when asked what motivated them to write for class, these students indicated a strong performance-orientation, mentioning "grades" noticeably more often than students in other phases of interest development. Their goals tended to focus on "doing it right," where "right" was a standard of performance set by the teacher. Sometimes they spoke of improving their command of grammar or vocabulary, but they did not indicate a desire to improve their overall abilities as writers.

A part of Jackie's desire to achieve good grades is a desire to please her teacher. When Jackie asks Mr. Banks which topic she should choose for her essay, she has not even made an attempt to come up with a topic on her own. Instead, she hopes that he will give her an idea of what *he* thinks is a good topic. In their interviews, students with a maintained situational interest for writing often expressed frustration with assignments that were too open-ended, claiming that such assignments made it difficult to figure out what the teacher wanted them to write about. They preferred to be given a topic because they thought that their teachers would enjoy their papers more if they were written about topics of the teacher's choosing. As one student put it, "If I have to write something for someone else or for a class, then I need some guidance on what they want. I'm not writing for me - it's not what I want - it's about what my English teacher wants. I'm writing it for my English teacher."

Unlike students with only a triggered situational interest for writing, students with a maintained situational interest reported that they sometimes chose to write on their own, outside of school. These students drew a distinction between the writing that they did for school and the writing that they did for themselves, however. They said they felt differently

about the two types of writing and approached them in very different ways. Similarly, when Jackie gets swept up in her essay about the war, she approaches a school assignment as personal writing. She uses a different writing process and employs different criteria for revision.

In general, Jackie's desire to please her teacher and to receive good grades means that she pays close attention to directions and asks questions for clarification. This reliance on her teacher also means that she does not use peer conferences as effectively as she might; she turns to her teacher rather than her peers. Because Jackie wants to write as Mr. Banks would like her to write and about topics that Mr. Banks might enjoy, she does not typically become invested in her writing. Thus, while Jackie is more highly self-regulated and self-efficacious than Ethan, she is only able to follow the rules of writing. Students like Jackie appeared to have largely mastered writing conventions; however, their limited understanding of the possibilities that writing might afford meant that they were unable to take their writing to the next level and explore new ways of organizing, developing, and expressing their ideas.

3.3. Phase 3. An Emerging Individual Interest for Writing: Patrick

It has been a long day at school, and Patrick breathes out a sigh, relieved to finally be back in the sanctuary of his bedroom. He grabs his journal off the nightstand and settles in to write. While Patrick still hangs out with many of his middle school friends, he talks with them mostly about school, books, and video games – not anything personal. His journal allows him to vent his more private thoughts. In fact, he prefers writing about his thoughts to speaking about them; writing allows him to say what he really means without having to worry about being misunderstood. Unlike his classmates, Patrick's journal does not judge.

Today, Patrick needs to vent about English class. He thinks that his teacher graded his essay too harshly, and he feels frustrated because he worked so hard on that piece. "A B," he thinks. "A lousy B! If she thinks that's all it is worth, then she clearly didn't get what I was trying to say." He had tried to stay after class to explain his argument to her, but she was pressed for time and had just repeated the comments she had written on the paper. Convinced that she still did not get it, Patrick had left class frustrated and bewildered. Even worse, he had had to bottle up these feelings all day because his friends would never understand why he was so worked up over a B.

The essay had felt great to write. The assignment had been to write an essay on how people define themselves. Because the topic was one that he cared about and was general enough to give him some freedom, Patrick had taken the assignment seriously. Drawing on his vast reading repertoire, he had cited examples of character development and discovery from numerous novels. He had also looked through his old journals and spent time thinking about how he defined himself. Each time he reread what he had written, new connections had occurred to him and he had carefully woven these into his argument. Finally, he had reviewed his word choice and sentence structure until each sentence sounded professional when he read it aloud. The final product had been six pages long, a full page beyond the suggested limit.

Whether he is writing for himself or writing for school, writing is one of Patrick's favorite pastimes. He especially likes to write stories. Sometimes he bases them on legends

or his favorite science fiction novels, and sometimes he just lets his imagination roam free. For essays, he chooses topics about which he feels strongly. He is especially fond of fiery rhetoric and works to make his writing sound passionate as well as professional. When he is assigned a topic that he finds unappealing, he usually tries to twist it in some way so that he can make it into an argument about which he feels strongly. Above all, he loves the process of writing: fashioning sentences, developing characters or arguments, and polishing his work for a reader. He thinks of himself as a writer, and he has even thought about pursuing a career as a playwright or a novelist. Patrick is also strongly invested in what he writes, presumably because he puts so much of himself into his writing.

While Patrick loves to write, he hates peer conferences. His prior experience with these conferences has led him to believe that his classmates will offer only two types of "help;" either they will try to correct his grammar or they will make suggestions about the content of his work. He considers the first type of suggestion to be a waste of his time. In his mind, grammar is the icing on the cake, not a crucial part of his writing. In fact, Patrick has sometimes written entire pieces without regard to punctuation or capitalization until his second or third revision. While suggestions about grammar irritate him, he particularly dislikes suggestions about content. For him, the ideas of his peers are unwelcome invasions. Each piece to which he signs his name should be uniquely his.

Frustrated, Patrick begins to recall his most recent experience with peer conferences. His teacher had required them for the essay on self-definition, and, he notes angrily, she had clearly penalized him for not incorporating his partner's feedback into his revision. It was not that he did not want to revise the essay. He just figured that he knew how to do it better than his partner did. Because the essay had been so personal, Patrick had been frustrated by his partner's comments. He had wanted a reaction to what he said, but he had not been prepared for a critique. As a result, he had not listened to what his partner had to say and had not used this information in his revision.

Instead, he had confidently made his own revisions and felt sure of the quality of his work. His teacher, however, was not as impressed. She said his ideas were wonderful, but that there were so many of them in the paper that it lacked a cohesive structure. In addition, she noted that his tendency to disregard grammar had resulted in several glaring errors, and these had caused him to lose credit.

As Patrick recalls these comments, his temper flares. Why can't he write in his own style? Professional writers do not have to adhere to a five-paragraph-type format, so why should he? He is particularly frustrated that she did not mention any of his favorite parts of his essay, especially the connections he drew between real-life examples and those from various novels. He is proud of these points and cannot understand why she did not give him credit for them.

A call from his mother interrupts Patrick's thoughts. Hurriedly, he finishes his sentence.

Discussion Like Jackie, Patrick is confident in his ability to write. What sets him and other students with an emerging individual interest apart from students with a maintained situational interest, however, is his investment in what he writes. Students with an emerging individual interest for writing described themselves as writers and considered writing to be part of their identities. Like Patrick, these students reported becoming personally attached to much of what they wrote; they thought of their papers as expressions and extensions of

themselves. Although many students in this phase of interest indicated that they had always loved to write, several students spoke of having become more interested in writing because of a positive writing experience (Renninger & Lipstein, 2006). For example, one seventh grader explained, "In third grade, kids said they liked my story about a space-ship and a little kid," and he attributed his increased interest for writing to that moment.

Unlike Jackie, Patrick does not draw a strong distinction between writing for a class and writing for himself. Instead, he tries always to write for himself. Students with an emerging individual interest for writing reported that they wrote each piece to their own standards of perfection. While they acknowledged that some of their writing was done for an audience (like writing for class) and some was done for personal purposes (like Patrick's journal entries), they did not indicate different levels of investment in these two types of writing.

These students reported that they rejected "the writing process,"⁵ preferring to employ their own processes instead. Almost all of them preferred not to plan essays in advance. Instead, they spoke of wanting to "see where a paper will take me," and they enjoyed developing pieces without knowing what would come next. When asked to describe times when they had been required to submit outlines, some students with an emerging individual interest said that they had found the process of outlining helpful. Still, they chose not to outline unless an assignment required it because it was not part of "the way I write." Students with an emerging individual interest for writing were particularly keen on their own versions of the writing process. Although they were metacognitively aware of their own limitations as writers, they did not usually view these as shortcomings, but rather dismissed them as "just the way I write."

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of students in this phase of interest were their heightened feelings of self-efficacy. Students with an emerging individual interest for writing were very confident about their writing abilities, and some students even considered their own understanding of writing to exceed that of their teachers. However, students with an emerging individual interest for writing did not like peer conferences any more than students with only a triggered situational interest for writing. Like these students, they were either not able to or not inclined to work with peer feedback. Their dislike of peer conferences appeared to be linked to their heightened self-efficacy and investment in writing.

While Patrick dislikes peer conferences as much as Ethan, he is not reluctant to revise his writing. Students with an emerging individual interest were very willing to revise their work. They did not conceive of writing and revising as arduous, and they reported that they happily spent hours working on individual writing assignments. After polishing a piece, such students were often eager to share it with an audience. While these students claimed during interviews that they desired feedback from their audiences, further discussion revealed that they only wanted comments of a reflective or laudatory nature. They did not like feedback that was specific and critical. They indicated that more prescriptive comments would infringe upon their own creative roles as authors and might go against their preferred ways of writing.

For some students with an emerging individual interest for writing, doing things "their own way" appeared to earn them high marks on writing assignments: many spoke of earning As.

⁵Students in this study used "writing process" to refer to the standard "outline, rough draft, revision" formula.

However, many students also mentioned that their teachers often commented on the lack of cohesion in their work or their lack of attention to grammar and other writing conventions. It seems that these students' passionate investment in their work prevented them from stepping back from a piece. While the students spoke of making revisions until they were personally satisfied, they did not seem concerned with objective standards. In addition, while their intentions to produce excellent writing were evident, they preferred to work "their own way," and did not necessarily employ strategies or suggestions from others.

Students with an emerging individual interest for writing typically indicated preferences for assignments that gave them as few restrictions as possible. Without a set genre or topic to limit them, these students enjoyed a sense of freedom and power. When they were confined to a particular topic, many students indicated that, like Patrick, they found ways to make this topic more appealing. These students generally spoke of this strategy in a confidential tone and indicated that they felt they were "tricking the teacher."

3.4 Phase 4. Well-Developed Individual Interest: Maria⁶

Exhausted from a long day at school, Maria flops on her bed and lets her overstuffed backpack fall to the floor with a thud. Blowing the hair out of her eyes, she stares absently at the poster of Orlando Bloom on her wall and begins running through homework assignments in her head, a habit that has become part of her daily routine. That English paper on Homer's *The Odyssey* is due Friday. "I have three more days to put the finishing touches on it," she thinks. Rolling off of her bed, she hoots up her computer and opens the essay that she outlined and drafted last week.

An outgoing and vibrant person, Maria is a focused student who loves to write. In fifth grade, she wrote a short novel, which earned her teacher's praise and sparked her ongoing love of writing. Although she might not admit it to her friends, she actually enjoys writing essays. She likes that writing helps her to develop her ideas. She also likes the fact that it allows her to share these ideas with others. Aware of her compulsion for rewriting and revision, Maria always tries to get a head start on assignments, so she can scrap as many drafts as she needs to and still turn out a satisfying product by the due date.

When Ms. Jennings said that she could design her own topic for the essay about *The Odyssey*, Maria got excited and instantly began brainstorming. She likes topics that allow her to develop her own ideas. If she is not invested in a topic, she feels like she has to approach the assignment as an actress, rather than a writer, adopting the voice that she thinks her teacher wants to hear.

Because she had not actually enjoyed *The Odyssey* very much, Maria employed a strategy that she discovered in the eighth grade for coping with books she disliked. She picked her least favorite aspect of the story and wrote about that. This tactic always gives her a lot to say because she feels so strongly about the topic. She began by brainstorming about Odysseus, a hero in whom she saw few redeeming qualities. As a modern-minded young

⁶Maria's gender and age were purposefully chosen. Out of the population of 178 students, only four were identified as having a well-developed individual interest for writing, and all four of them were in the ninth grade. In addition, three of the four were female.

woman, she found his infidelity offensive, especially since Penelope just waited at home for him all those years. As a result, she had written an essay arguing that Odysseus was not a hero at all. She had enjoyed hashing Odysseus while she wrote, and she hopes it will be as much fun to reread what she wrote about him now. As she reviews her draft on the screen, however, she thinks her words read more like a diatribe than a well-planned argument. Her essay is not as coherent as she would like it to be, and parts of it sound a little silly. Worst of all, her conclusion seems to contradict everything that came before and suggests that maybe Odysseus is not as bad as she originally thought. Despite the fact that this draft has already been through several revisions, she decides that she should scrap it and start over.

This process of drafting and then starting again from scratch is one in which Maria regularly engages. Although she sometimes finds it frustrating, she usually needs a few drafts to work out her ideas. Often there is at least one great sentence in the original, and she builds her new draft around that idea. In the case of *The Odyssey*, she zeros in on the idea of Odysseus not being so bad. "Where the heck did that come from?" she wonders. Reading through the old draft, she suddenly has an idea: maybe heroes do not have to be likeable. Maybe he is still a hero even though he is not a very good husband!

Excited by the idea of a thesis that would be a challenge for her to argue, Maria writes this new idea at the top of a clean computer screen and begins searching through the book for support for this thesis. She finds what she considers to be a good definition of a hero in the introduction to her edition, and then she begins making a list of the ways in which Odysseus fits that definition. As she works, she jots down ideas in rough paragraphs on the computer screen, making an outline of her thoughts. Satisfied that she has enough information to prove that Odysseus is a hero, she then begins work on shortening her points about Odysseus' less heroic qualities from the previous draft of the paper. This time, as she reviews incidents from the text, she decides that Homer really does not make a big deal out of Odysseus' infidelity. In fact, she decides that it does not seem to bother him at all. He *does* make a big deal out of Penelope being faithful, though. Maria gets another idea. She spaces down the page to make notes for a conclusion about the double standard between what makes a man heroic and what makes a woman heroic. Now she is really interested. This much better than her original draft.

Eagerly, she scoots closer to the screen and begins to reread what she has written. "This is good!" she thinks. She reads it through a few times, making changes as she goes. After dinner, she will come back upstairs and worry about things like style, sentence structure, and flow. Right now, she just wants to make sure her ideas make sense. Before she prints out her final copy, she will ask her parents to read it over. Maria typically uses her parents as a gauge for the effectiveness of her written work; she finds their comments about her organization and ideas helpful. She also seeks feedback from her teachers and peers. She loves to discuss her writing with others because it pushes her to grow as a writer.

Discussion Students with a well-developed individual interest, like Maria, shared a love of writing with students like Patrick. They also shared a developed understanding of what writing is. There are several important differences between Maria and Patrick's approaches to writing, however. First, Maria holds her writing to an objective standard, and she understands that style, structure, and other aspects of writing are not just about personal expression: they are about making writing accessible to an audience. Students with a

well-developed individual interest for writing all shared this awareness. As one student in this phase of interest remarked, "[even if] in my mind it's a key part of my argument, I need to not worry about it so much and make sure it makes sense to someone objective." All of the students in this phase of interest for writing reported seeking outside support from parents or respected others to confirm the clarity of their writing. Like Patrick, Maria thinks of herself as a writer, and she believes that she is good at writing. Unlike Patrick, however, she also demonstrates a willingness to critically examine her own writing. She admits that sometimes what she writes is poorly argued, even if she has worked hard on it and enjoyed the process of writing it. In fact, students with a well-developed individual interest for writing simultaneously demonstrated feelings of self-efficacy about their abilities to write and an awareness of their own shortcomings as writers. They understood that, though they were talented, there was room for improvement, and they often mentioned things that they would like to keep working on in their writing.

Like students with an emerging individual interest for writing, students with a well-developed individual interest strove to improve each piece, often revising or rewriting numerous times before they were satisfied. Students in both phases of interest expended effort willingly, viewing it as a necessary part of writing. However, students with a well-developed individual interest seemed to focus more on procedural aspects of writing in their later drafts than did students with an emerging individual interest. In addition, these students reported a desire to improve their abilities as writers. When asked what makes her want to write for class, one student with a well-developed individual interest stated, "I want to write to improve my skill and ability to convey what I want to in words." This comment contrasted strongly with a typical response from a student with an emerging individual interest: "I enjoy voicing my opinion or ideas in a piece of writing. It allows me to free my mind and let my thoughts loose."

Perhaps because of their desire to improve as writers, students with a well-developed individual interest for writing were more receptive to critical feedback than students with an emerging individual interest. They appreciated comments on all aspects of their writing. However, they did prefer to receive comments in a particular order: they wanted initial feedback to focus on their ideas and the paper's content, and they preferred to address more technical revisions in subsequent drafts.

4 Phases of Student Interest for Writing and Implications for Pedagogy

Data from the present analysis suggest that the pedagogical choices a teacher makes (e.g., whether to assign work with peer partners, how to provide students with feedback, what types of assignments to give) have a critical influence on whether students are likely to develop and deepen their interest for writing. The analysis presented here indicates that students who had difficulty thinking about and receiving feedback about their writing were not likely to work well with peers to get feedback. They were also likely to have only a triggered situational interest for writing. Conversely, students who could independently envision the possibilities that writing affords them were willing to work hard on their writing and seek feedback. These students were likely to have a well-developed individual interest for writing.

4.1 Conditions That Support Interest Development

Each portrait in this chapter depicts a student engaged in or reflecting on writing and conditions that could support the development or deepening of that student's interest for writing. In addition, the portraits illustrate each student's willingness to think seriously about writing. For Ethan (triggered situational interest), the opportunity to write about basketball temporarily triggers an interest for writing. This situational interest allows Ethan to become more involved in his writing and makes the process of writing his essay seem easier. To maintain his situational interest for writing, however, Ethan must continue to feel positively about writing. Unfortunately, the comments that he receives from his peer partner only reaffirm his existing feelings of inadequacy and negative feelings about writing. Had the comments that Ethan received been phrased so that they seemed manageable, this might have bolstered his self-confidence, and his positive feelings about writing might have been sustained (see Eccles et al., 1993a). Then, they might have evolved into a more developed interest for writing over time. Several students described this type of shift in their interest for writing; once their confidence in their own knowledge and abilities increased, their interest for writing deepened.

By contrast, students who received feedback that was too discrepant (e.g., too abstract, or requiring a lot of work) often spoke of becoming less interested in writing as a result. For these students, as for Ethan, the key to sustained interest for writing was the context or topic about which they wrote (Hidi & Baird, 1986, 1988). The content of basketball triggers Ethan's interest for writing and may be a tool for engaging him in further discussion and thinking about writing (see Renninger et al., 2002). Engaging Ethan through the content of his piece could appeal to what he found interesting and enjoyable about this writing experience, which, in turn, could lead to more positive engagement with writing in the future.

For Ethan, triggered situational interest creates a temporarily positive engagement with writing. Similarly, Jackie (maintained situational interest) also experiences positive interaction with writing that stems from triggered situational interest. As Jackie's interest is sparked by the topic of her writing, she takes on the appearance of a writer in the next phase of interest development; she discards her outline, becomes invested in the content of her piece, puts more effort into her work than she originally intended to, and enjoys herself in the process. The excitement of writing for herself leads her to write more like a person with an emerging individual interest for writing.

Whether Jackie is able to develop an emerging individual interest for writing depends on the quality of her continued interactions with writing. The excitement of being swept up in her writing about the war is a situational interest. Just as basketball might provide Ethan's teacher with a way to engage him in further discussion about writing, so Jackie's passionate engagement in this assignment might provide her teacher with a way to engage her in further discussion about writing. In each case, the topic of interest is not the exclusive focus of discussion; rather, it serves as a vehicle for engaging students in necessary discussions about their writing.

For example, assuming that Jackie's heightened enthusiasm has resulted in a disorganized essay, there are three ways in which Mr. Banks might respond to Jackie's paper: he might (a) comment that this paper is much more disorganized than her usual work; (b) praise her for the newfound passion she exhibits in this piece and not pursue questions of organization for

fear of stifling this level of engagement; or (c) acknowledge Jackie's newfound passion and then phrase his comments about organization as ways to increase the impact of this already passionate piece. Data from the present study suggest that only the final approach is likely to foster the development of interest for writing. In interviews, students made it clear that classroom instruction had an impact on their interest for writing. One student reported liking a recent poetry unit so much that her interest for writing changed: "I like it more now than I did when I did the questionnaire ... It's now one of my favorite things."

For Patrick (emerging individual interest) and for Maria (well-developed individual interest), the source of their investment in writing is not limited to a particular writing experience and its conditions. Unlike Ethan, whose interest for the topic of his writing sparks a situational interest for writing, Patrick has an interest for writing itself. What distinguishes his interest for writing from Maria's, however, is his limited understanding of writing. Patrick perceives writing as a purely personal experience, and he has little if any regard for more objective standards. The key to supporting Patrick's interest for writing lies in increasing the sophistication of his understanding of writing as opposed to nurturing his positive feelings for the writing he needs to do.

As Patrick's rejection of his teacher's feedback makes clear, it is not enough to simply tell him that he should conform to an objective standard. Like Jackie, Patrick needs to feel that the teacher understands why his work is meaningful to him before he is in a position to be receptive to other feedback. In the same way that interest could provide scaffolds for both Ethan and Jackie to engage writing, interest could also provide a scaffold for Patrick. Patrick needs to hear his teacher's comments about grammar and structure. As his portrait suggests, however, Patrick is not likely to be receptive to these comments if he feels that the teacher is missing the point of his writing. If the teacher presents her comments about grammar and structure as ways that Patrick might increase the impact of his piece, however, she provides Patrick with a set of powerful tools for expressing his ideas – an approach that supports and makes use of his interest for writing.

Because of the nature of well-developed interest, it might be expected that Maria's interest for writing is more stable and self-sustaining than those of Ethan, Jackie, and Patrick. Maria willingly involves herself in writing, seeks out challenges (defending a protagonist that she dislikes), and employs strategies to ensure positive writing experiences (building a thesis upon a topic in which she is invested). However, it is important to recognize that, while Maria's interest for writing may be more stable than those of her less-interested peers, it remains a dynamic interaction. Continued challenges in writing are essential for her interest to continue and deepen. Students like Maria often only receive affirmation of their work because their strategies and conceptual competence enable them to write in a more sophisticated fashion than most of their peers. Affirmation alone, however, is not sufficient to support their interest to continue or deepen. They must also be challenged to grow as writers. If this condition is not in place, it is conceivable that their interest for writing could wane (Renninger, 2000; Renninger & Lipstein, 2006).

4.2 Shifts between Phases of Interest

Findings from the present study contribute to the literature that indicates that interest can shift and that, given supportive instructional conditions, students can develop or deepen

their interest for particular content (Hoffmann, 2002; Hoffmann & Haussler, 1998; Pressick-Kilborn & Walker, 2002; Renninger, 1992, 2000; Renninger, Ewen, & Lasher, 2002; Renninger & Hidi, 2002; Renninger, Sansone, Smith, 2004). As the portraits suggest, the conditions surrounding any writing experience have the potential to influence students' interest for writing. The degree and direction of this influence appears to be impacted by the students' experiences with generating text, their discussions with peers, and the assignments, support, and feedback provided by their teachers. Findings from this study further suggest that interest for writing and opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of writing contribute to students' abilities to write more effectively. These findings also suggest that knowledgeable others, such as teachers, help to shape the conditions surrounding students' engagement with writing.

The present chapter underscores the importance of meeting students where they are as writers and also supporting them to stretch – recognizing that the stretch may not immediately support them to look like the student with a well-developed individual interest for writing, although that is a possibility (c.f., Dewey, 1913; Bruner, 1966; Renninger, 1998). The portraits further indicate that simply matching instructional practices to students' current phases of interest is not likely to be effective pedagogy. Instead, it appears that pedagogy should be structured with an awareness of students' needs and preferences based on their current phase of interest for writing. This does not suggest that students should simply be told what they want to hear. For instance, only instructing Ethan to fix his commas would not advance his understanding of writing. In addition, Patrick's understanding of writing would not be enhanced by praise without criticism. Rather, an awareness of students' current needs and preferences may provide teachers with information about how best to help students tackle the challenges that they face as writers.

The portraits in the present chapter contribute to what is understood about how teachers might support students to shift their phase of interest in at least two ways. First, interest exists in the interaction of a student and writing. If the "writing" component of this interaction shifts because the student develops skills and feels positive about his or her experience, then interest for writing should grow. Second, interest is both a cognitive and affective motivational variable. As Bruning and Horn (2000) suggest, teachers can work to change students' affect by providing a classroom environment that provides emotional support. Whether this type of support results in developing and/or deepening interest is an open question. Certainly the context for students to shift their phase of interest should be primed. Data from the portraits further suggest that teachers can support students to change their knowledge about writing, which may resonate with and/or result in changed affect and, in turn, lead to a deepened and/or developing interest for writing.

Earlier in this chapter, adolescence was described as being characterized by either heightened interest or apathy. It also was suggested that constraints on interest for writing might be cast in terms of what counts as "writing" and writing requirements. The portraits lend confirmation to students' needs to develop an understanding of writing if they are to have interest for it. They also suggest a need to determine what developing a knowledge of writing involves.

Perry's (1968/1971) model of adolescent development describes shifts in interactions that parallel and provide support for the present suggestion that interest for writing can

be supported to develop and that knowledge development serves as a vehicle for this. Indeed, Perry's "positions" of adolescent development appear to map onto the four phases of interest development. Briefly, Perry draws on Piaget's (1966) use of the terms assimilation and accommodation to link development to meaning making and interaction. He suggests that, initially a person's understanding of content shows a basic duality: something is either right or wrong. For example, students with triggered and maintained situational interests might be expected to approach writing in terms of *dualism*: they assume that there is a "right" way to write – the way the teacher wants them to write. In Perry's model, this position is followed by a verbal appreciation of *multiplicity*, in which students may acknowledge that there are alternative approaches to writing, but they also lack clarity about what this really could mean and do not feel entitled to generate something different. Students with maintained situational interest for writing may be on the cusp of this type of awareness when they describe a difference between writing for class and writing for themselves. Perry describes *relativism* as the next position. Relativism is marked by the complete rejection of dualistic thinking in favor of a worldview in which all approaches are equally valid. Students with emerging individual interest for writing may have shifted to this position: they reject their teacher's way as the only right way to write, and they acknowledge a wide range of options. According to Perry, students sometimes seize upon one option as more valid than others in an effort to make sense out of the seeming chaos of relativism. The personalization of the writing process by students with emerging individual interest may be understood in these terms. What makes it valuable to them is that they have chosen it. Finally, Perry suggests that students may emerge from relativistic thinking or arbitrary commitments to a position in which they recognize that certain approaches are actually more valuable than others. This view characterized students with a well-developed individual interest: they acknowledged the importance of appealing to a more objective standard, not just their own personal preferences.

It is important to note that in Perry's scheme, students may progress from one position to another, but they may also remain in a position for an extended period of time. In fact, students may even regress to a former, less sophisticated way of thinking. As the Hidi and Renninger (2006) review suggests, the same may be said of interest development. While certain conditions may foster a student's interest for writing to develop or deepen, others may cause a student's interest to remain constant or lessen. It appears likely that the way in which others support the development and deepening of students' interest for writing will have a significant impact on whether interest develops and the type of attention, goal-setting, and learning strategies that students have as writers.

4.3 Relation among Interest, Writing, and Motivation

The portraits in this chapter provide detailed illustrations of students' perceptions of their engagement with writing. They also provide support for Hidi and Renninger's (2006) description of four distinct phases in the development of interest. In particular, the portraits reveal that each phase of interest development has a different set of relations with other motivational variables. They also suggest that interest is best described as both a mediator and as an outcome of motivation for writing.

As summarized in Tables 1 and 2, with the development of interest, students are likely to

- understand that writing is a process and has purpose,
- exert effort that does not feel effortful,
- experience increased self-efficacy about writing, and
- seek feedback that makes connections to ideas and form.

Prior studies of writing have not considered the conceptual competence of students as writers. Without a vision of what writing is and can involve, why should a student exert effort to write? (Bruning & Horn, 2000). Interestingly, with age, students seem to acquire higher levels of conceptual competence. This is consistent with the findings described by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987).

The portraits further suggest that students in different phases of interest are each influenced by and concerned about the perspectives of other people. These valued perspectives include their teachers', their peers', and, in the case of students with well-developed individual interest, the larger writing community's. The portraits also describe the excitement that writing can provide and the potential that situational interest has to scaffold students to stretch the ways in which they engage writing. In addition, the portraits point to the importance of the feedback that students receive in sustaining and deepening their interest for writing.

This chapter has focused on the use of portraits to explore the interaction between students' interest for writing and other motivational variables. Students can be expected to develop and deepen their interest for writing when given conditions that meet their strengths, needs, experiences, and interests. What students need to learn about writing will vary (Sansone & Smith, 2000). Knowing more about the likely characteristics of writers in each phase of interest development should allow people who work with students on writing to better predict what might work and what complications might arise from their pedagogical decisions (e.g., choosing to use peer conferences or to provide students with feedback about grammar before acknowledging content). It is important for educators to recognize that interest for writing can develop, and that this process is likely to have stops and starts as students are supported to put things into words.

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Chapter 8

Writing Self-Efficacy and Its Relation to Gender, Writing Motivation and Writing Competence: A Developmental Perspective

Frank Pajares, Gio Valiante, and Yuk Fai Cheong

The purpose of this study was to provide a developmental perspective on students' writing self-efficacy beliefs using data obtained from cohort groups of students ranging from age 9 to 17 (N=1266). Writing self-efficacy beliefs diminished as students moved from elementary school to middle school, and then remained at that level during high school. Girls reported higher self-efficacy at each level of schooling than did boys, but these differences were rendered nonsignificant when students' gender orientation beliefs were controlled. Instead, femininity was associated with writing self-efficacy. Writing self-efficacy was positively related to adaptive motivation variables such as writing self-concept, self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, perceived value of writing, and task goal orientation, as well as to writing competence. Conversely, self-efficacy was negatively related to writing apprehension and performance-avoid goals. Findings are interpreted within the framework of A. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory.

Historically, researchers in the field of composition have focused on the processes in which writers engage as they compose a text (Faigley, 1990; Hairston, 1990). Cognitive aspects have received particular attention, as investigators have attempted to understand the thought processes underlying the compositions of students (e.g., Flower & Hayes, 1981; Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Goelman, 1982). Hull and Rose (1989) noted that the more the researchers learned about the relationship between cognition and writing, the more complex the relationship seemed to be. During the past decade, researchers have attempted to address this complexity by investigating the motivational factors that influence writing. Students' self-perceptions of their own writing competence, or *self-efficacy beliefs*, offer a particularly promising avenue of research for informing writing instruction. As a

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