Adolescent Writing Development and Authorial Agency

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"I speak two languages so sometimes my writing is difficult." (Lila)

"How do I do it if I don't like writing?" (Carlton)

"I like to write stories. I keep it to myself because it's me." (Hillary)

Above are the responses of adolescents who participated in the National Study of Writing Instruction (NSWI), the most comprehensive US study of adolescent writing conducted in recent years. They were asked to talk about how they see themselves as writers and to describe their experiences with writing in their core content classrooms (i.e., English language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science). These kinds of comments were

not unusual in the data collected across five states and from adolescents in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 (Applebee & Langer, 2013). Their expressions of pleasure and displeasure with writing, sense of confidence in their ability to write well, and motivations or purposes for writing provide a complex picture of adolescent writers as well as the contextual affordances and constraints that relate to their writing development.

These adolescents represent different experiences with writing in and out of school and different personal backgrounds. Some have enjoyed histories of higher performance in school and some have struggled to meet their teachers' or states' standards for writing. Some are learning to write in English as an additional language and others have grown up writing only in English. Still others have had pleasurable experiences writing for different audiences or for themselves in diaries and journals while others have little experience of or affinity for extended writing in or out of school. However, these adolescents also share a commonality. All of them attended schools with better than average student achievement trends on English language arts (ELA) assessments and they all were exposed to teaching staffs identified for exemplary writing instruction. Thus, these students studying in "better-case scenario" contexts have the potential to provide insight into what factors might contribute to adolescent writing development.

In this chapter we focus on the role of authorial agency in adolescents' writing development as represented in the stances (i.e., positions, perspectives, proclivities) adolescents expressed in their interviews with NSWI researchers. Agency, we define, following Ahearn's (2001) "provisional definition," as "the socioculturally-mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). Linked to concepts such as engagement and motivation, agency, in this view, is conceptualized as socially situated and dynamic and thus is best understood by taking into account the ecologies (i.e., environments, contexts, communities) that offer affordances as well as constraints to the developing writer.

Authorial Agency and the Adolescent Writer

Applebee's foundational vision for writing in secondary schools (1981; 1982; 1984; 2000), provides the guiding framework for this chapter. As he noted in an article published following completion of the NSWI, "Generic writing skills—ones that can be learned in English class and applied everywhere else—just won't do. And neither will a curriculum that focuses on knowledge about writing (the conventions of written English and the structures for paragraphs or whole essays) rather than on the issues and ideas that make a subject interesting in the first place" (Applebee, 2012). We base our discussion on findings from several analyses of NSWI data, specifically students' written work and interviews, and we pick up Applebee's concern for subject "interest" and also the issue of what it takes for a writer to transfer writing "skill" from one context to another. Each of our NSWI analyses has been published elsewhere (see Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014; Jeffery & Wilcox, 2016; Wilcox & Jeffery, 2014; Wilcox & Jeffery, 2015), and in this chapter we approach these separate analyses from a lifespan perspective.

As discussed in other chapters in this volume, the roles writers play and are expected to play across their lifespans hold implications for their development. In this regard, adolescence is a uniquely mutable period of life characterized by individuals' keen attention to social cues and solidifying sense of identity, established through participation in activities in and outside of school. Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore (2000), referring to an earlier publication, *Reconceptualizing Literacies in Adolescent Lives* (Alvermann, Hinchman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998), articulated two principles about adolescent literacy based on prior research of import to our discussion:

1. Adolescents want to be viewed as already possessing knowledge and skills and plans for the future, and

2. they want to participate in literacy practices suited to the ways they view their day-to-day lives. (p. 402)

Thus adolescents are likely to present a desire to assert agency and to be in the process of developing more refined stances toward

many activities, including writing, that contribute to the identity work in which they acutely engage daily. For bi- and multilinguals this identity work may be particularly complex as these adolescents are pressed to navigate different cultural and linguistic norms in and outside of school (Kanno & Harklau, 2012).

As adolescents engage in writing they assert agency, which can be understood as a medium for constructing identity wherein individuals are "agents in the production of their own and others' social selves" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 296). Reciprocally, their developing identities can be understood as mediums through which agency is realized, or "social forms of organization, public and intimate, that mediate this development of human agency" (Holland et al., p. 282). Either way, and as Ahearn argued, any attempt to study agency ought to consider how it is constructed through language use within social contexts, arguing for a "dialogic, co-constructed view of language as a form of social action" (2001, p. 111). This way of conceptualizing agency as socioculturally mediated and realized through language differs from definitions of agency as something one has or does not have. Rather, agency is seen as always manifesting itself, but in different ways in different contexts, and in a dialectical relationship with perceived or real affordances and constraints different contexts offer.

In this view, and the one we hold, agency is central to how we conceptualize adolescent writing development. It is therefore necessary to seek to understand how writing experiences offered in school might invite adolescents to see writing as something one does purposefully and strategically and as an assertion of agency, rather than as an ability or talent one has or does not have. It would also be necessary to take into account the kinds of writing tasks and materials or resources used to promote writing in different contexts.

Qualities of Secondary School Contexts for Writing

Since adolescence is a period of life characterized by acute awareness of social cues, here we draw attention to the role of *contexts of participation* (see discussion in the introduction to this volume) that adolescent writers encounter and that are unique

to secondary schools. We do this, however, with a caveat: While throughout this chapter, our focus is on adolescents' experiences with academic school-based writing (as this was the main focus of the NSWI), we are mindful that contexts for writing outside of school may have mutually supportive relationships with academic writing development (see for example, Berninger & Chanquoy, 2012; Brandt, 2001; Rowe & Wilson, 2015). Indeed, we found the adolescents who participated in the NSWI, even unprompted, shared how out-of-school writing affected their understanding of the range of writing and purposes for writing available to them as well as of themselves as writers.

The study of adolescent writing development in secondary school contexts is relatively new. The focus of early writing scholarship, reflected in still-prominent journals such as *College Composition and Communication* (which dates back to 1950), has often focused on the challenges students face in their first encounters with college writing (e.g., "first-year composition"). Initially, little research was conducted within secondary settings, and much early work in adolescent writing drew heavily from the theoretical perspectives of college composition—an imperfect fit given fundamental differences in secondary and postsecondary writing demands as well as differences between adolescents and young adults. For example, while college composition scholars who often work within English literature departments have resisted the term "literacy" to describe their goals for student learning, literacy learning is an assumed focus in K–12 school settings. However, literacy researchers have traditionally focused on reading more often than on writing (Graham & Perin, 2007), and until quite recently literacy researchers have focused more on elementary, rather than secondary, settings (Applebee & Langer, 2013). This indicates a notable gap in the area of adolescent writing research, a gap that has only begun to be addressed in the past few decades.

Qualities of Multilingual Writers

Another gap in scholarship, which we seek to address in our research, is the study of bi- or multilingual (L2) adolescent writers in secondary school settings. Research that explicitly examines

both native English speakers' (L1) and L2 adolescent learners' academic writing experiences has inhabited a relatively under-theorized and under-researched area (Silva & Matsuda, 2010). Within college composition studies, the field of L2 writing grew from an awareness of the need to understand college classrooms as linguistically and culturally heterogeneous spaces that require differentiated pedagogies and research designs. Reflecting this growing awareness, scholarship regarding L2 writers became more prominent in, most notably, the *Journal of Second Language Writing* (which began publishing articles in 1992).

Though there is much overlap between the concerns for developing writers in the fields of L1 and L2 writing, analyses of scholarship situated in these two fields suggests that they have typically drawn from distinct bodies of research (Jeffery, Kieffer, & Matsuda, 2013; Tardy, 2006). Acknowledging this disconnect between scholarship on L1 and on L2 writers, adolescent-writing scholars have begun to pay more attention to the contextual factors that relate to the development of writing competence among bi- or multilinguals in middle and high schools (Harklau, 2011; Ortmeier-Hooper & Enright, 2011). Given the growing cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of students engaged in academic writing in secondary school classrooms around the globe, scholars have noted that research that avoids the "myth of linguistic homogeneity" (Matsuda, 2006), which characterized early composition scholarship, is needed. This research considers urgent questions regarding how best to differentiate writing instruction for all adolescent learners, whether characterized as L1 or L2, while avoiding stereotypical representations of these writers that inevitably fall short of capturing their uniqueness (Enright, 2011).

Overall, this overview of the emerging field of adolescent writing suggests some unique qualities of adolescence and secondary school settings that present both affordances for and constraints to adolescent writer development. Chief among the affordances is the wider variety of disciplinary genres adolescents are exposed to and asked to craft in their secondary core content classrooms as opposed to in the elementary grades. This variety can build awareness of the ways that genres of writing are culturally and historically rooted in different domains of knowledge and discourse

communities (Applebee, 1981; Monte-Sano & Miles, 2014). However, with regard to constraints, if these genres are limited to those tested on high-stakes exams or presented to adolescents as prescribed patterns for them to follow, they are unlikely to see such writing tasks as opportunities for them to engage agentively as writers. Further, constraints in writing opportunities may be more acutely experienced by bi- or multilingual adolescents who are working simultaneously with new academic content and new language structures, and who are more likely to experience what Applebee (2012) described as "a curriculum that focuses on knowledge about writing (the conventions of written English and the structures for paragraphs or whole essays) rather than on the issues and ideas that make a subject interesting in the first place."

Adolescent Writers under Empirical Study

As mentioned at the outset, this chapter presents the overarching patterns identified in a series of NSWI-embedded analyses of student interview and writing-sample data. In these analyses, we examined L1 (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014) and L2 (Wilcox & Jeffery, 2015) students' perspectives on writing separately. We also compared L1 and L2 interview and writing sample data (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2016; Wilcox & Jeffery, 2014). In this section we describe the NSWI study and how we conducted our embedded analyses.

The Study Background

Informed by a social-constructivist understanding of adolescent writers and their development, the NSWI sought to investigate adolescents' experiences with writing in a variety of contexts (see detailed methods and procedures report: Applebee & Langer, 2011). California, Kentucky, Michigan, New York, and Texas were selected to represent a range of approaches to large-scale writing assessments, including substantial variation with respect to genre demands on high-stakes exams. For each of the five states, two middle and two high schools were selected that served larger-than-average populations of low-income students and had above-average literacy achievement outcomes compared with schools

serving similar populations of students. Sites with a demonstrated commitment to implementing schoolwide literacy initiatives and those identified by literacy experts as having enjoyed a history of exemplary ELA assessment performance were targeted for selection so as to highlight exemplary practice.

The students included in the NSWI sample were identified for participation by virtue of having attended one of these twenty "exemplar" schools. Three groups of students participated: (1) L2 writers, who were of intermediate proficiency based on English language tests used within their schools, (2) L1 higher-achieving students based on prior history of school writing performance, and (3) L1 lower-achieving students, again based on prior history of school writing performance. In total, the NSWI included 95 L1 writers and 43 L2 writers. In our series of analyses, we selected a subset of 66 from the larger NSWI sample so as to balance the representation of students across achievement levels and language backgrounds, and also across gender and grade level categories (see Table 6.1). Students from Michigan were not included in this subset as there were no L2 student participants from there, and Texas is most strongly represented in the sample as a larger number of students participated in that state than in the others.

TABLE 6.1. Sample by State, Language Background and Achievement History, Grade, and Gender

	CA	KY	NY	TX	Totals
Language Background and Achievement History					
L2	7	3	5	11	26
L1 low-achieving	1	5	2	11	19
L1 high-achieving	4	3	6	8	21
Grade					
6th grade	3	1	4	9	17
8th grade	4	2	3	10	19
10th grade	3	3	4	7	17
12th grade	2	5	2	4	13
Gender					
Female	9	8	6	14	37
Male	3	3	7	16	29
Totals	12	11	13	30	66

The Analysis

We focused our analysis in the embedded studies on two NSWI data sources: (1) interviews in which adolescents described their experiences with disciplinary writing and (2) these same students' writing samples gathered from their core content classes over one school term (~eighteen weeks). In the interviews students were asked ten questions ranging in focus from their processes of writing to types of writing they do for tests. In alignment with our interest in authorial agency we focused on the following questions: (Q.1) Tell me a little about yourself and how you see yourself as a writer; (Q.2) Tell me about the kinds of writing you do in the different classes you are taking; (Q.5) What were your favorite writing assignments this semester? Why? Which assignments did you like least? Why? (Q.10) How much do you feel that you've been helped to understand the kinds of writing you need to do in each subject and how to do it better? Tell me about it.

Like Du Bois (2007) and Ochs (2004), we were chiefly interested in stances (i.e., verbal expressions of perspectives, positions, and proclivities), as these stances can be taken as important linguistic representations of agency. In our analyses, we became concerned with both affective and epistemic stances—affective being related to attitudes, feelings, and emotional dispositions, and epistemic being related to knowledge and understandings. We focused on these types of stances since prior scholarship has pointed to their reciprocal nature and relationship to student engagement in academic work (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). We were also concerned with students' perceptions of others' (e.g., teachers', peers', family members') assessments of writing quality or value since such assessment has been found to function in a dialectical relationship with personal stances (Martin & Rose, 2007). Accordingly, our analyses focused on adolescents' stances toward themselves, others, and particular kinds of writing tasks and the contexts in which they were assigned.

Since we sought to reveal the relationships among the affordances and constraints for writing in different school contexts and adolescents' stances toward writing, we used a stance analysis procedure similar to that of Du Bois (2007). This procedure entails indexing a subject, a context, an object, a stance or position, and

an attribution of a stance. For example, in response to the question "What is your favorite kind of writing?" one sixth-grade student from Texas, "Roberto" (all student names are pseudonyms), answered "In history, when we chose four cities to travel to, what the weather was like, why do people go there, why do I want to go there, what kind of food, and compare currency, it was my favorite because we got to look stuff up on the Internet." We mapped Roberto's response in a matrix (see Table 6.2) that facilitated identifying his stances by (1) context (history class), (2) object (travel essay), (3) stance and directionality of stance (was my favorite: positive affective), and (4) attribution (because got to look stuff up on the Internet).

After we analyzed each interview as in Roberto's example, we then constructed a consolidated matrix that included all participants' responses organized in the same way. Next, we checked for patterns across this matrix and kept memos in which we discussed ongoing interpretations of patterns, noting, for example, whether stances were epistemic or affective in nature and whether they were positive or negative (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). We relied upon both investigator triangulation (i.e., comparison of two investigators' stance matrices and investigators' ongoing

TABLE **6.2.** Roberto Stance Matrix Excerpt

Interview Prompt	Stance Subject	Context	Stance Object [Genre]	Stance/ Position	Attribution
Q5. Favorite and least favorite assignments	[I]	in history	when we chose four cities to travel to, what the weather was like, why do people go there, kind of food, and compare currency [travel essay]	was my favorite (+ affect)	
		Because			
	[We]				got to look stuff up on the Internet

shared interpretive memos) and source triangulation (examination of the patterns among different student interview data sources that used the same data-collection and analysis procedures) for our interpretations (Patton, 2001).

Our analyses revealed a great deal of variation in adolescents' stances, yet we also noted some unifying patterns among lower-performing L1, higher-performing L1, and L2 writers that contribute to our understandings of adolescent writers' experiences more globally. Specifically, we identified three overarching themes in the data. The first relates to adolescents' stances toward different types of writing they do in their core content classrooms; the second relates to their perceptions of themselves as writers and their writing abilities; and the third relates to the variable constraints and affordances they encounter in developing their writing.

Patterns in Adolescents' Stances toward Writing

Pattern 1: Although adolescents' stances varied by grade level, language background of the student, and disciplinary context, adolescents in the study expressed many positive feelings toward writing assigned in school.

Even though school-based writing tasks can pose challenges for adolescent writers' experience of pleasure in writing, overall the adolescents in this study, notably attending schools with histories of exemplary writing instruction, expressed many positive feelings about it. For example, approximately two-thirds of them (68%) indicated that they enjoyed some writing experiences in school. Older students in our study in particular, specifically those in tenth and twelfth grades, expressed more positive feelings toward writing overall than their younger peers, who were more likely to express negative feelings toward writing (see Figure 6.1).

When comparing this finding with the kinds of writing these same students reported doing and those that were collected, it is notable that the students in the lower grades engaged in a larger variety of writing tasks than the students in the higher grades, yet many of these tasks were mechanical in nature (e.g., note-taking) and those same mechanical tasks are ones associated with generally negative stances.
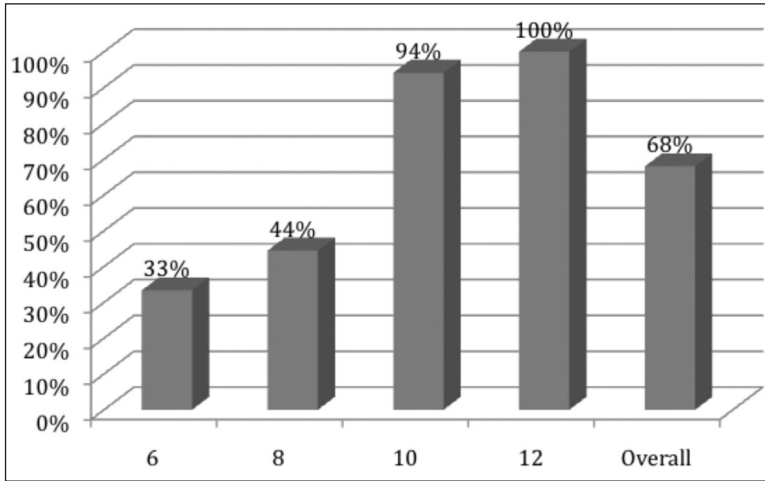
FIGURE 6.1. *Adolescents in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 who expressed positive affective stances toward writing.*

When analyzing contrasts by language background, students differed with regard to what kinds of writing they felt positive about. For example, though L1 writers were more likely to voice positive stances toward writing in ELA, where they could be "creative" or express their subjective positions as compared to writing in other disciplines, L2 writers were less likely to view writing occurring within the ELA disciplinary context favorably. Instead, L2 writers held generally positive views toward source-based writing (i.e., writing in which academic texts provided source material) in disciplines other than ELA, particularly when assigned in the forms of research reports in science or document-based essays in social studies. We also noted that L2 adolescent writers tended to refer to negative feedback from their teachers when describing negative feelings toward writing more often than their L1 peers. In addition, some of these L2 writers mentioned literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) specialists as mitigating negative experiences with writing in their content classrooms. Further discussion of this finding is presented in the portrait of an L2 writer ("Lila") in the next section.

Pattern 2: Adolescents hold different perceptions of their writing abilities and knowledge of writing and these perceptions are related to their prior achievement histories, language backgrounds, and supports for writing in and outside of school.

The patterns we noted with regard to self-perceptions of writing ability and knowledge of writing were varied across grade levels and also between higher-achieving L1, lower-achieving L1, and L2 writers. Overall, slightly more adolescents in this study expressed negative epistemic stances toward writing (51%) than positive ones (47%), with the twelfth-grade students voicing the fewest positive epistemic stances overall compared to their younger peers, indicating relatively less confidence in writing ability (see Figure 6.2).

Not surprisingly, higher-achieving L1 writers expressed the greatest confidence in their writing abilities (i.e., a pattern of greater positive versus negative epistemic stances). This distinction for higher-achieving writers was even more pronounced when they discussed writing in social studies, which lower-achievers generally tended to describe in terms of negative perceptions of their abilities. Overall, fewer lower-achieving L1 writers in our study expressed positive stances regarding their abilities to
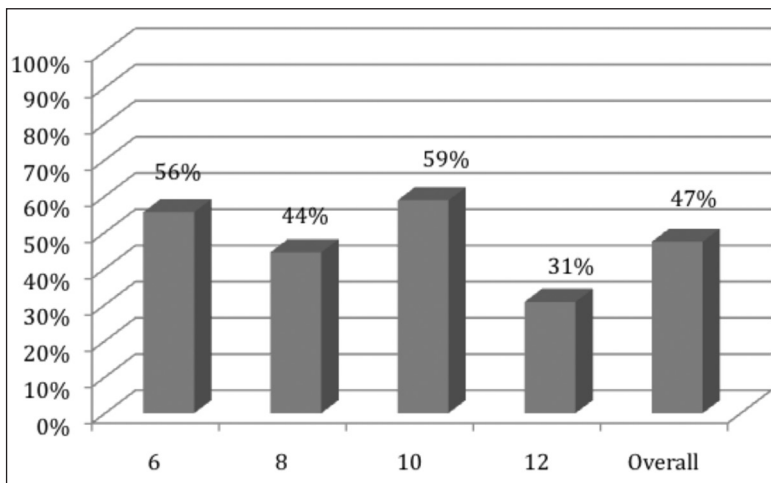

FIGURE 6.2. *Adolescents in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 who expressed positive epistemic stances toward writing.*

write well and more expressed negative epistemic stances than higher-achieving L1 writers and even their L2 peers. Social studies writing in particular evoked both negative affective and negative epistemic stances for lower-achievers; a combination that signals a less agentive positioning that will be discussed in more detail in the portrait of a lower-achieving L1 writer ("Carlton").

Pattern 3: Adolescent writers' understandings of the purpose of writing and what makes for good writing are related to the qualities of the opportunities they are offered.

In comparison to other content areas, writing in ELA contexts was seen by most adolescents in this study as providing greater opportunities to develop their writing. Patterns in their responses, however, demonstrated varying degrees of alignment with a conceptualization of writing competence centered on understanding writing as something one does purposefully and strategically to fulfill particular aims in particular contexts.

Our analyses revealed that in general, higher-achieving L1 adolescents' conceptions of writing were more closely aligned with an understanding that good writing differs by disciplinary context, such as in this excerpt from higher-achieving tenth grader "Tessa." Here Tessa notes both intra- and interdisciplinary differences in her comparison of the types of writing she does in different subjects.

> Good writing seems to vary from subject to subject. Good writing can vary within one subject, too. In English, it's the interest of the writer in her subject that makes good writing; English writing allows more time for the individual to be involved. In history, good writing is related to having specific facts. We use a rubric that emphasizes facts. In mathematics, good writing has to do with spelling out the steps and processes used in solving problems and equations. In science, good writing deals with relating things, relating and describing processes.

Tessa's sense that writing in science and math involve explaining one's thinking suggests an agentive view as illustrated in her final comment that this writing is "a way to express myself." Such conceptualizations were rare among lower-achieving and L2 writers, in contrast. For example, statements like this one,

from one twelfth-grade L2 writer, "Christiano," illustrate limited understanding of how the aims of writing might differ in different genres and in different disciplinary settings.

> English is a writing class. Writing a poem vs other kinds of writing, for example. Mathematics and physics are formula type writing and number writing. Social studies is formula type writing too. We can revise in English, but not for other subjects because the writing is usually not long enough to revise.

These contrasts are perhaps not surprising considering that higher-achieving L1 students in the study produced more extended writing such as essays and reports than mechanical writing in the forms of short-answer or fill-in-the-blank compared to their peers (see Wilcox & Jeffery, 2014). This pattern will be discussed in more detail in the portrait of a higher-achieving L1 writer ("Hillary") in the next section.

Portraits of Three Adolescents

Here we dive deeper in presenting brief portraits of three adolescent writers to illustrate the patterns discussed above. We highlight an L2 writer, "Lila"; a lower-achieving L1 writer, "Carlton"; and a higher-achieving L1 writer, "Hillary."

Lila: "I speak two languages so sometimes my writing is difficult."

The stances of Lila, an eighth grader from California, provided an illustrative case of the patterns we found in the larger L2 writer data set. Lila attended a middle school with a relatively large proportion of students identified as Hispanic or Latino.[1] Her school was chosen for the study because it had a history of exemplary performance on ELA state exams (taking into account the student population served), and because the district had launched a program of interdisciplinary learning communities focused on using culturally responsive pedagogies in core content classrooms.

The L2 writers who participated in the NSWI, such as Lila, differed from their L1 peers in how they described themselves as writers and what experiences contributed to their stances toward writing. They differed from higher-achieving L1 writers most starkly regarding the greater prevalence of negative epistemic stances overall (indicating a sense of not knowing how to write well) and from their lower-achieving L1 peers in their relatively more agentive positioning toward improving their writing.

Lila characterized herself as a writer who is capable of doing well in school and of writing well with encouragement and opportunities to write about things she has researched or finds personally meaningful, as did her L2 peers in the study. She identified her support teacher's help ("The literacy support class really helps me") as the most important affordance available for her writing development. However, she also expressed facing many challenges, particularly in relation to how to advocate for herself and how to maintain motivation in the face of her teachers' sometimes negative feedback, particularly in her mainstream classrooms.

An important finding was that Lila expressed a sense of responsibility for her school achievement. For example, regarding a relatively weak assessment she had received on an ELA writing assignment, she explained, "I feel it is my fault because I should ask more things and ask for more help." She also said that she was "happy" when she had opportunities to share what she knew in her writing because she identified herself as being "shy" in class, and therefore did not feel teachers always knew what she was capable of doing. Writing provided her with an opportunity to express her knowledge and share something of herself that may not have been clearly expressed orally in class discussion.

In one example (Figure 6.3) of writing that she described as engaging, we see Lila's source-based essay, in which she is tasked to provide facts from texts she has read to explain causes of the Civil War. While Lila generally expressed liking source-based assignments such as these, social studies was particularly challenging for her; as she explained, "Social studies [writing assignments] were my least favorite assignments because it's easy but also hard to explain what I'm saying. It's hard for me to make sentences." For this assignment, Lila composed several paragraphs and was

able to perform the task to the level of what was assessed by her social studies teacher as a "C." She expressed her opinion in a thesis statement, provided detail on the topic in the supporting paragraphs, and provided a conclusion restating her thesis. However, the teacher's feedback indicated that Lila needed to provide more explanation based on her thesis statement and that the teacher had partly based the evaluation on identified errors in spelling, mechanics, and tenses.

Nonetheless, overall Lila revealed an agentive, resilient stance toward writing—the development of which was apparently both facilitated and challenged by the learning contexts she experienced

FIGURE 6.3. *Lila's essay.*

in school. Lila's interview reveals an L2 writer who faced challenges she encountered in her writing, and who worked "really hard," in her own words, to overcome them. She repeatedly emphasized the relationships between challenge and pleasure in learning, for example, by identifying her science research project as her favorite "*because* it was hard" (emphasis added). However, we also see a negative-positive stance interaction throughout her interview, one that begins with her characterization of herself as someone whose writing "isn't excellent" but who tries "really hard" to improve. This juxtaposition is perhaps best illustrated in the repetition of "really hard," which works simultaneously as a negative and as a positive stance indicator to describe both the challenges she encounters and her determination to overcome them.

Carlton: "How do I do it if I don't like writing?"

Carlton—a lower-achieving native-English-speaking tenth grader—attended high school in Texas. His school, with a relatively high poverty rate as compared to the national average, included a fairly large number of Latino and African American students. The school was chosen for the study based on relatively good performance on state ELA exams and on its inclusion of a fine arts academy with a particularly strong emphasis on writing in ELA and in social studies.

Carlton represented the stances of other L1 lower-achieving writers in several ways. First, when we examined Carlton's responses to the interview questions, we noted that at times he expressed negative stances toward academic writing tasks, but also expressed that his stances toward writing have been variable and dependent on the audience for and topic of his writing. For example, when asked to reflect on his experiences with writing, he discussed how his brother encouraged him to complete journals for his ELA class and how this encouragement in turn spurred him to engage more fully with these assignments.

> I know the one [assignment] I was complaining about to my
> brother when I was doing it. He said "do your work." I was

talking to him about my journal and said "I do not like this" and he said "boy, be quiet and do your work." I said "I am."

Carlton is like other L1 lower-achieving NSWI participants, in that his most negative experiences with writing occurred in social studies. In social studies, Carlton reported that his teacher used writing for punishment on occasion. He explained,

> In World History, my class got in trouble and we had to do a 600 word essay, or was it 300? One of those. We had a sub [substitute teacher] and my class was the worst. I already knew we were going to get the essay because of people in my class, so I was expecting nothing different. The teacher came back and she said "I've got some good news and bad news. First, you all won the essay. . . ." We won the essay—that is not a prize. We had to write about some Ghandi thing— the movie that we watched. We had to write about that and it was front and back page.

This example of "punishment writing" is displayed in Figure 6.4.

The counterweight to such negative experiences came from some of his teachers and his family in the form of tasks that allowed Carlton to use writing to express his personal thoughts
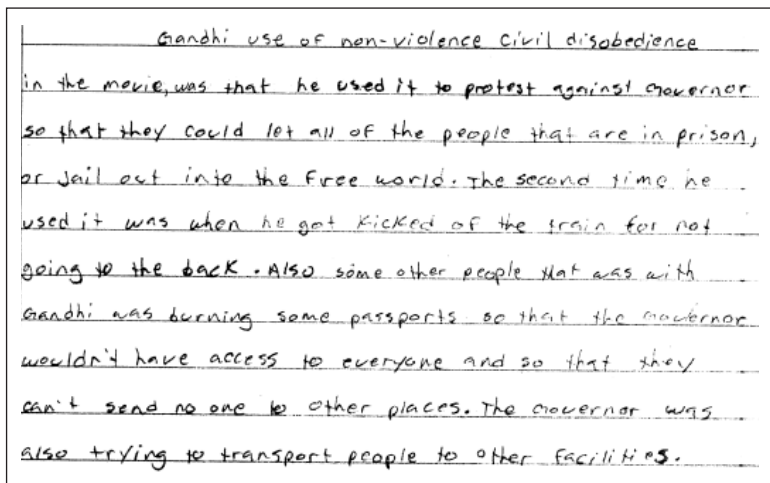

FIGURE 6.4. *Carlton's punishment writing.*

and experiences. He shared how engaging in a writing assignment with the intended audience of his mother seemed to have purpose.

> I didn't feel important for nobody, so I wrote about how my mom made me feel important to myself and made me feel how school is important for your education, so that later in life, you can have something to look back and tell your kid about this and how education is good for you and to be successful in life.

He further explained that his most positive experience with writing was when he wrote in his journal about his time in an alternative school for at-risk adolescents. He associated that writing with feeling "free." He also associated writing out of school, particularly for his grandfather, as "fun." He explained, "When I'm writing stuff for him, I'm thinking about what I want to write. He made writing look fun the way he was doing it and when I was doing it for him."

Such responses suggest how out-of-school writing experiences, writing tasks of intrinsic interest, and different audiences for his writing helped mitigate more negative experiences such as in the "punishment writing" example.

Hillary: "I like to write stories. I keep it to myself because it's me."

Next we discuss eighth grader Hillary, a higher-achieving native-English speaker from Kentucky. Hillary attended a middle school serving a lower percentage of children growing up in poverty than Lila's and Carlton's schools. Hillary's school was chosen for this study based on its history of students' good writing performance on state exams, high academic standards, and the use of the "Different Ways of Knowing" model that promoted a whole-school use of thematic units that integrate writing across disciplines.

Hillary's responses to interview questions illustrated a larger pattern among the higher-achieving L1 students in her emphasis on the relationship between enjoyment of writing and having opportunities to be "creative." For example, Hillary explained that her most positive experiences with writing were in ELA because in tasks like a persuasive essay she "got to vent," and in a poem (see

Figure 6.5) she could express herself in a way that "comes from my mother like music and acting." Hillary provides an illustration of the importance she and many of her higher-achieving peers place on being afforded writing opportunities to be creative and to go beyond purely mechanical tasks, as illustrated in her poem.

(I used AABB rhyme scheme)

The Pre-K Nightmare

Mommy screams and gasps what is this???
She looks so mad she is starting to hiss
Every brick and all the mortar covered in marker
All the drawing down low is darker and darker

Oh My God is that a drawing of Mickey Mouse?
There must be a graffiti artist in this house
A little boy curse word written in bold
Shut Up Doodyhead it says in gold

A fireplace covered in color and scribbles
The ink running down the hearth in dribbles
Momma is starting to feel really sick
The truth is he wrote on every single brick

SpongeBob Squarepants colored in yellow
Ben thinks he is an artistic little fellow
We sent him to preschool to learn to read and write
And now Mommy sees the fireplace with fright

She grabs the phone and calls up Daddy
She tells him come home Ben is a Baddy
He even wrote a toddler's swearword
He colored it on the wall- how absurd!

He'll need some soap, water and a sponge
His Momma watches him clean, ready to lunge
She thinks he ruined every inch of the den
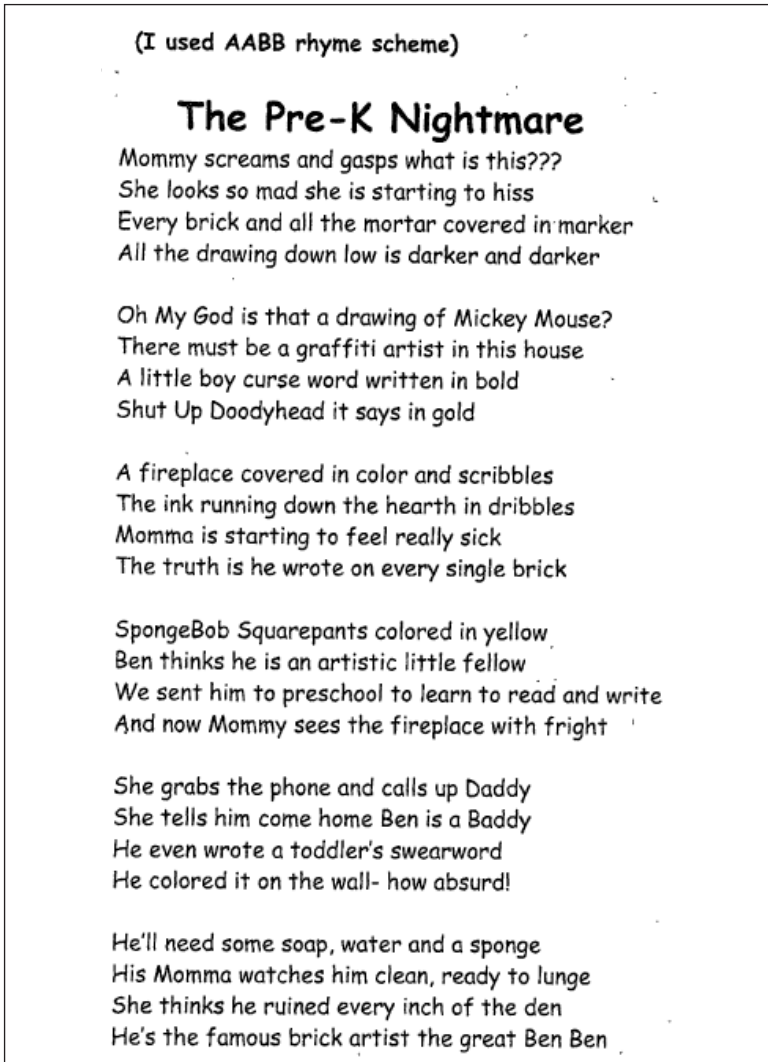He's the famous brick artist the great Ben Ben

FIGURE 6.5. *Hillary's poem.*

Hillary explained this perspective on creativity when discussing the constraints of a social studies writing task, which did not afford her such expressive possibilities. She described textbook responses as her least favorite writing assignments because, as she explained, "We have to answer the questions at the end of the chapter. It's not the kind of creative writing I like to do."

An example of a social studies writing task was collected in Hillary's portfolio, which included her teachers' acknowledgment of receipt represented with a check mark, as displayed in Figure 6.6.

Marbury vs. Madison

By

Marbury vs. Madison was a court case filed in 1803. William Marbury verses James Madison.

It starts with John Adams. It was nearing the end of his one and only term as president and he felt the need to appoint men of his choise to different positions in the federal government before he left office and turned the keys to the country over to a Democrate-Republican, which, ofcorse, was a different party than the Federalists. (Adams being a Federalist.)

At the time of his presidency, Adams had John Marshall as his Secritary of State. One of the main jobs of the Secretary of State back then, was to seal commisions. They were the keepers of the seal and validated the commisions that were warrented.

Just before Adams left office, he appointed William Marbury to Justice of the Peace. President Adams signed it and John Marshall sealed it. Everything had been taken care of. The only thing left out of place, was the fact that the commision (or proof that the person had been appointed) had not yet been delivered to Marbury yet.

Well John Adams left office soon after Marbury had been appointed and Thomas Jefferson moved in as president, bringing with him James Madison as his Secritary of State.

Since the commision had not been delivered to William Marbury by the time John Adams left the presidency, he felt that even though Marbury had his paperwork signed and sealed, he didn't have proof in his posession that he was appointed, his appointmenship should have been voided.

This is where Marbury desided to sue James Madison because he refused to send out his signed and sealed commision.

They came up with the three questions that they had to deside on. (in other words)
- Does the plantive have the right to his commision?
- If so, does the government afford him a remedy?
- If the goverment affords him a remedy, who has the power to decide the verdict?

The answer for number one, was yes. The commision had been signed and sealed. It was valid.

The answer to number two was yes again. They gave him the choise to take the job that he had been appointed to by Adams.

The answer for number three was very important. They ruled that the Supream Court should be in charge of the power of desiding the verdict.

Even though William Marbury never took his job as Justice of the Peace, his court case was important to American history.

FIGURE 6.6. *Hillary's social studies homework.*

While most L1 higher-achieving students held generally positive stances toward social studies, these were more epistemic in nature, indicating that they felt confident they could do this writing well, even if they didn't enjoy it. Overall, the L1 higher-achieving adolescents in the NSWI, while expressing the view that that in-school tasks posed constraints for developing their writing and themselves as writers, nonetheless still mainly reported liking such tasks and doing well at them.

In sum, although we noted commonalities among the adolescents who participated in NSWI, we also identified contrasts between them and their variable stances as represented in these three portraits. Their different stances are related to different life histories, affordances, and constraints they experience to write in different genres, for different purposes, and for different audiences. Together, these factors hold implications for their writing development over the lifespan.

Adolescent Authorial Agency in a Lifespan Framework

In this chapter we focused our attention on the concept of authorial agency as it is represented in adolescents' affective and epistemic stances toward writing. We were interested in the affordances and constraints for writing development that adolescents experience in their secondary school classrooms.

What we found from our multiple analyses is that although these adolescents attended relatively "better-case scenario" schools with regard to ELA achievement and teachers' writing instruction, they nonetheless experienced few opportunities to develop an understanding of writing as an agentive act. Although these writers generally expressed resilience when confronted with challenges to their experience of pleasure in writing or to their sense of confidence in their abilities to write, they often did not see writing assigned in school as offering opportunities for expressing their ideas in meaningful ways or for participating in a discourse community.

Our analyses speak to the importance of several considerations for adolescent writers regarding choice, audience, and task constraint. As discussed in the previous section, the adolescents

who participated in the NSWI expressed some positive stances toward writing tasks that offered opportunities to choose topics and in some cases genres for the expression of their ideas (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014; Jeffery & Wilcox, 2016; Wilcox & Jeffery, 2015). In addition, some students, particularly in the lower-achieving sample, were notable with regard to the importance they placed on having audiences for their writing outside of school (e.g., family members and peers) and on having access to opportunities to engage with writing that was more personal or open-topic in nature (e.g., diary or journal writing). These opportunities provide spaces for adolescents who may not meet the relatively narrow norms for what counts as good writing in school to be agents in their writing.

Our analyses also point to the link between adolescents' sense of feeling pleasure in writing and their sense of being able to write well, a link that contributes to an adolescent's motivations to write and growing sense of identity as a capable writer. We identified evidence of this link most notably among higher-achieving L1 writers, as one might expect. Although they, like their L2 and lower-achieving L1 peers, faced challenges in maintaining agentive stances toward writing in the face of high task constraint, they also expressed having experienced positive feedback on the quality of their ideas as well as their expression in writing, fueling their sense of authorial agency. Such a scenario was not as evident among L1 lower-achieving writers and L2 writers. However, L2 writers, unlike their L1 lower-achieving peers, reported reaping the benefits of ESL teachers and other literacy specialists who tended to mitigate negative experiences by providing emotional support, advocacy, and cognitive scaffolds for their learning.

Finally, although the adolescents who participated in the NSWI mentioned some opportunities to write in social studies, and many fewer in science and math, classrooms other than ELA were reported to offer exactly what these adolescents—regardless of achievement history or language background—need and want: opportunities to engage in writing that they see as purposeful and about subjects of interest. So while teachers in classrooms outside of ELA may not see themselves as writing teachers, some genres that are quite appropriate assignments in their classrooms (e.g., research reports) were reported to have

been received by the adolescent participants in the NSWI as more accessible than others that require particular cultural, historical, and linguistic understandings (e.g., literary-analysis essays). This is particularly true for L2 and lower-achieving L1 writers. For these adolescents, writing opportunities offered beyond the walls of ELA classrooms not only align well with recent US trends toward standards emphasizing writing in the disciplines (Wilcox, Jeffery, & Gardner-Bixler, 2016), but also provide potential for adolescents to experience pleasure in writing, a sense of purpose in writing, and accomplishment.

Our analyses demonstrate the impressive complexity and variety of students' experiences with writing across disciplines in secondary school settings. Students who reported disliking source-based writing tasks such as literary analysis essays in ELA also reported enjoying other types of source-based writing such as reports in science and social studies. The differences in their reactions had less to do than one might think with the particular disciplinary context within which they were working and more with the way they perceived writing tasks as affording them agency—or not—in those contexts. From this, we take three valuable lessons. First, students' responses provide articulations of agency as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act," a capacity that varies for individual writers across time and space. Second, authorial agency, as we have argued elsewhere, is essential to social-constructivist understandings of what it means to develop as a writer, and also to students' motivation to write and to their developing sense of themselves as writers. From this we infer that authorial agency is crucial for writing development, perhaps particularly in adolescence. Third, given the importance of authorial agency for adolescent writing development, students need far more frequent, and more varied, opportunities to use writing to express not only their understandings of, but also their feelings about, different topics, and for varied audiences including themselves. Such experiences will ideally extend across disciplines as well as into the home and community. A challenge is, however, how teachers are to exert their own agency as instructors of writing to provide this affordance, in the face of US policy trends that emphasize single-task standardized test performance as the most important measurement of writing development.

While Applebee's seminal book *Writing in the Secondary School* (1981) opened the door for many scholars of adolescent writing to explore what contributes to writing development, there is much yet to do. Applebee's vision for writing pedagogies that enable students to engage in the essential conversations of secondary curricula still circulates and informs how we might respond to such questions as "How do I do it if I don't like writing?," such challenges as "I speak two languages so sometimes my writing is difficult," and such opportunities as "I like to write stories."

Acknowledgments

Note

1. Some states, like New York, combine Hispanic and Latino into one subgroup and since these performance data were used in the process of identifying schools these terms are also used in combination here.

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