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"Well, I Have to Write That:" A Cross-Case Qualitative Analysis of Young Writers' Motivations to Write

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Abstract

Hickey (2003), taking a "stridently sociocultural" position on motivation, notes that conceptualizations of motivation must shift to successfully study "motivation-in-context" (p. 401). This study represents an attempt to navigate such a shift. Rather than taking established understandings of achievement goals and motivation orientations as given, this interview-based, qualitative analysis examines three creative writing environments—a secondary classroom, an extracurricular arts program, and an online game community—and analyzes adolescent participants' understandings of their writing goals and motivations to write in particular settings. While such an approach relies on self-report and thus cannot capture implicit cognitions, its goal is to shed light on relationships among writers, contexts, and cognitions—and how traditional motivational paradigms may need to be amended to engage with such questions.

Keywords: writing, motivation, goal setting, qualitative analysis

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"Bien, Tengo que Escribir Esto:" Un Análisis de Casos Cualitativo de las Motivaciones de Jóvenes Escritores para Escribir

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Resumen

Hickey (2003), tomando una "estridente" postura sociocultural acerca de la motivación, señala que las conceptualizaciones sobre motivación deben dar un giro para estudiar con éxito "la motivación en contexto" (p.401). Este estudio representa un intento de llevar a caso ese giro. En lugar de tomar comprensiones establecidas sobre objetivos de logro y orientaciones motivacionales como dadas, este análisis cualitativo basado en entrevistas examina tres entornos de escritura creativa –un aula de secundaria, un programa extracurricular de arte y una comunidad virtual de juegos- y analiza las comprensiones de sus participantes adolescentes sobre sus objetivos de escritura y motivaciones para escribir en espacios concretos. Aunque este enfoque se basa en auto-informes y por tanto no puede capturar la cognición implícita, su objetivo es aclarecer las relaciones entre escritores, contextos y cogniciones –y cómo los paradigmas tradicionales sobre motivación deberían revisarse para poder responder a esas cuestiones.

Palabras clave: escritura, motivación, establecimiento de objetivos, análisis cualitativo

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In the wake of findings that discuss how communities shape language and learning, discussions of situated context have become a central feature of literacy literatures. Conversations around research implications have focused on building more effective environments for literacy learning by designing contexts that appropriate real-world purposes, genres, and tools for writing and creation. Fishman, Lunsford, McGregor, and Otuteye's (2005) research, for instance, describes how performative contexts such as drama and spoken word poetry enhance college-level writing, and Shaffer's (2007) epistemic games show how students acquire professional language and ideas through activities that mirror real-world contexts. The Common Core State Standards (2010) movement in the United States aims its writing standards at career readiness with such elements as multi-genre texts, real-world purposes, and technology-based collaboration with readers. More globally, Gee (1996) and Brandt (2001, 2009) posit that our language and literacy skills are learned and filtered through, respectively, Discourse communities and literacy sponsors, while Kalantzis and Cope (2012) suggest that successful literacy pedagogies must attend to representational and communicative contexts of students' work. Each of these pieces rests on the idea that it is impossible for learning—and, thus, cognition—to escape the topographies of local contexts.

Motivation literatures feature a similarly recurring construct: a taxonomy of achievement goals. While contexts are largely represented as external, students' internal goals and interests are also central to their learning. Early motivation findings, described in seminal papers by Dweck and Leggett (1988) and Ames (1992), continue to shape these empirical and theoretical conversations: Students who hold *learning* as their goal in a particular situation are more willing to persist on difficult problems and to learn from failures. Students who hold *performance* as their goal are eager to prove competence and achieve success by solving problems effortlessly. While conceptualizations of these goal types have grown more nuanced over time (see Senko, Hulleman, & Harackiewicz, 2011; Zusho & Clayton, 2011), what remains stable is an understanding of goals as products of sociocognitive interactions. Learners' internal cognitions combine with the structures of educational environments to produce specific orientations to learning.

When situated learning and motivational sciences literatures are brought together, the contrasts in these frameworks raise important questions. If situated contexts are paramount, what of learning that stretches across several settings, like reading and writing? If goal types are stable, do students hold different goals across settings or tasks? As Hickey (2003) notes, these questions about "engaged participation" and motivations to learn are complex (p. 401), but worth continued attempts at navigation. This qualitative, three-case study brings these perspectives into conversation with each other by examining young people's creative writing and their extended descriptions of motivations for writing in three settings.

In the environments under study, creative writing was embedded within different designs and served as a means to ends including achieving publication, nurturing passion, supplementing school knowledge, and winning in-game prestige. Each environment was based on creative and expressive writing and allowed young writers to make many decisions about their writing and its content. Particularly in the presence of these choices, what moved these writers to write as they did? Interventions in achievement goal research have demonstrated that learners' goals and motivations are a product of the environments in which they participate and the tasks that they complete—Dweck and Leggett (1988) even suggest that teachers can induce such orientations by foregrounding students' mastery or performance. As such, contexts and goals have significant cognitive consequences for how students perceive themselves and their work (e.g. Kumar, 2006; Nolen, 2007). Students' interests, which similarly are affected by contexts and environments, contribute as well (e.g. Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Lipstein & Renninger, 2007). But perhaps neither contexts nor goals tell a complete story.

This study focuses on relationships among contexts, goals, writing, and adolescents' motivations to write, and the analysis explores how participants' descriptions of these learning elements correspond to existing conceptualizations of motivation and goal-setting. I examine two research questions: (1) What motivated these participants to take part in creative writing communities, both formal and informal? (2) What can we learn about how writing environments teach writing by examining students' diverse goals and motivations to write?

Theoretical Framework

Situated frameworks suggest that cognition occurs in everyday events and intertwines with cultures, settings, and tools (e.g. Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996). While many situated theorists focus on how physical and social practices support particular thoughts, actions, and learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), Gee (1996) focuses this analysis on the pervasive tools of language and Discourse. Discourses represent "ways of being in the world" (1996, p. 190), and wrap together individuals and communities with common linguistic, social, and cultural practices. For example, when teachers or mentors establish a common curriculum of workshop and critique practices, they build this Discourse community with students (Gee, 1996) and sponsor students' membership by modeling particular practices (Brandt, 2001).

Within any community context for learning, too, are the participants and the cognitions and motivations that they bring to their learning. Without understanding what individuals bring to a community, it is difficult to comprehensively understand how learning occurs (Pintrich, 2003). One significant factor is goal-setting, an act that requires building "cognitive representations of the different purposes [they] may adopt in different achievement situations" (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993, p. 176). Environmental structures, such as competence measures or teacher feedback, play important roles in learners' goal-setting (Ames, 1992; Nolen, 2007), as does the framing of learning tasks (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kumar, 2006). Many terminologies have been adopted within this literature, but the findings are comparable: When students set learning goals, they develop sophisticated cognitive processing and study strategies (e.g., Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992) and attempt more challenging tasks (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). When students set performance goals, they value social comparisons, adopt shallow metacognitive strategies, and prefer easier tasks.

Over time, many have questioned this goal dichotomy. Theorists have suggested that a "valence" moderates the influence of goal orientation (Elliot, 1999), and that performance goals are adaptive in situations where competence becomes necessary for success (Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998). In response to these findings, some have called

for the dissociation of performance goal aspects, pushing theorists to examine normative social comparisons separately from competence (Brophy, 2005; Grant & Dweck, 2003). Still others question whether goals are static or fluid. Cumming, Kim, and Eouanzoui (2007) documented multiple goal orientations in a study of English language learners who were applying to North American universities. This analysis notes the importance of social context in these motivations: Students were required to demonstrate content area mastery *and* develop good communication skills so that English-speaking colleagues would understand their speech and writing—and they formulated both performance and mastery goals. Such findings suggest a resonance between situated and cognitive frameworks: It was necessary for these students to successfully learn the curriculum *and* to join a disciplinary Discourse community.

Hickey (2003) has called for motivation scholars to focus on these instances of "engaged participation" within social contexts (p. 401), arguing that cognitive activities like goal development are inseparable from situated settings. We cannot understand the goals or achievement motivations of Cumming, Kim, and Eouanzoui's (2007) university-level students without understanding the English-speaking university. We cannot understand learners' goals without understanding the spaces in which they are participating and the ways in which they demonstrate learning.

Similarities to the authentic writing literature exist here, as well. Cohen and Riel (1989) and Freedman (1994) showed that middle school students wrote stronger compositions when they composed letters to overseas pen-pals than when they discussed similar topics in classroom writings, and Nolen (2007) described strong relationships between students' developing interests in writing and in-class publication of their stories. Such findings persist across studies: Students more effectively learn content and maintain motivation to write when they communicate with readers and when teacher feedback focuses on strengthening their writing to this end (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). In each of these studies, young writers had a social context for their work beyond school, where "knowledge telling" tends to be the norm (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). While none of these studies focused on goal orientation, it seems possible that the presence

of an audience was a defining factor in helping students to set goals and complete written performances (Magnifico, 2010a).

To sum up these linkages between contextual and motivational literatures, Boscolo and Hidi (2007), like Pintrich (2003), highlight the changeable, dependent nature of learners' motivations and goals. Writers' understandings of their communicative context, self-concept, and self-efficacy mediate their learning and influence their general "will to write" (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007, p. 2). Or, as Hickey, taking a more "stridently sociocultural" position puts it, the field's conception of motivation needs to profoundly shift if we are to successfully study "motivation-in-context" (Hickey, 2003, p. 401). This study represents an attempt to navigate such a shift. Rather than taking established understandings of goals and motivation orientations as given, I adopt a qualitative approach, examining writers' own understandings of contexts and feedback and how these elements contribute to their goal-setting, motivation, and learning to write. While such an approach relies on participants' self-reports and thus cannot capture implicit cognitions, its goal is to shed light on relationships among writers, contexts, and cognitions—and how traditional motivational paradigms may need to be amended to engage with such questions.

Method

Data Collection

In order to address these questions, I collected data from three creative writing environments and built distinct *instrumental case studies* (Stake, 1995, 2005). While the creative process, writing process, pedagogical methods, and audiences were different across the cases, the idea of writing for an audience remained constant. Each environment allowed for open-ended interactions with readers. The cases were chosen both for accessibility (since centers for creative writing are uncommon), and to exemplify three common arenas in which young people write: an English classroom, an extracurricular writing camp, and an online game-based writers' forum.

There were two primary similarities among these three creative writing environments. First, each of these spaces was primarily populated by adolescents—or, in the online case, adolescents and emerging adults (Arnett, 2007). Second, the writing tasks were similar: In each community, participants worked primarily in the media of poetry and fiction and chose the content of their writing. In order to build "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of these designed writing communities, I captured participants' and mentors' activities through qualitative research methods including participant observation, semi-structured reflective interviews, online (Hine, 2009) and affinity space ethnography (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012), and artifact collection. Table 1 details data collection in each site.

Table 1
Data Collected

Site	Observation length	Production cycle length	Data collected
Classroom	10 weeks (~ 2.5 hrs / week)	3 weeks	Field notes, interviews, small-group workshop conversations, drafts of stories and poems, students' final creative writing portfolios, project syllabi, assignment handouts.
Blue Willow writing camp	1 week (~ 6 hrs / day)	1 week	Field notes, interviews, writers' circle workshop conversations, drafts of stories and poems, exercise handouts, camp promotional materials, final anthology magazine.
Neopets online game	6 months	Variable: 1 day–3 weeks	Field notes, interviews, screen shots, Neomails (on-site email), IM chat logs, Neopian Times (NT) editorial documents, drafts of collaborative stories.

This analysis draws primarily from the two interviews that I conducted with each participant, denoted in the results as interview 1 and interview 2. The first interview, inspired by life history methodology (Tierney, 2000), documented the writers' experiences with and attitudes towards creative writing. These interviews helped me to contextualize the participants as writers and community members. The

second interview focused on events that occurred during observation and asked writers to reflect on the creative writing processes. The day-to-day writing activities rarely included space to discuss participants' goals or motivations—and, as such, the post-participation interviews allowed them to explicitly reflect on these larger questions.

Limited observational data are included here to contextualize participants' comments. In each of these sites, I observed and participated in one full *production cycle* of work (Halverson, 2010), although the timeframe and level of detail were defined differently in each (see Table 1). Including such activities as planning, drafting, receiving feedback, and revision, the production cycle represents the duration of activity for a particular written piece.

Participants and Settings[1]

Classroom Case

The classroom case describes the experiences of nine 11th grade students (six female, three male) and their teacher, Miles Caswell (all names in all cases are pseudonyms), during the course of a ten-week creative writing unit in their International Baccalaureate (IB) English class. Their school, a K-12 college preparatory school that emphasizes its writing program, is located outside of a medium-sized Midwestern city. Participant observations of the in-class "creative writing workshops" totaled fifteen hours, with additional time spent interviewing the participants. I observed and recorded field notes when students were writing individually, but they often asked me and Mr. Caswell for advice as their small workshop groups met. In a typical week, the schedule called for two workshop classes (which I observed) and three literature classes (which I did not observe).

Here, creative writing was a means to a specific evaluative end: As part of their IB examination in English Literature, the students were required to orally analyze an unfamiliar piece of prose or poetry. Mr. Caswell included creative writing in his curriculum so that students would gain experience with making stylistic, figurative, and linguistic choices in their own work. He hoped that this expertise would help his

students better understand and analyze the work of other authors. He emphasized that "forms create meanings," a concept that the students frequently took up in their own small workshop groups, as well as in whole-group discussions (field notes). This idea meant that language choices are consequential for reader understanding; for example, an author's choice to write in formal English rather than dialect or slang contributes to the meaning of the piece and how it will be read.

As a result of this focus on writing as a means to understanding literary forms, Mr. Caswell structured classroom evaluation to rely on process. Students' grades depended on the completion of benchmarks rather than the quality of their writing. During each of the first two three-week sections of the unit, students wrote and revised either a five-page story or several poems, working in small rotating groups to discuss and provide feedback on each others' writing. They then chose five literary techniques from their work to analyze. Students created portfolio packets of these drafts (often covered in handwritten comments) and analyses and submitted them for teacher feedback. In the final section of the unit, students engaged in a "major revision" of one of these packets, again analyzing five literary techniques and turning in a portfolio of final work, drafts, and analysis. As Mr. Caswell explained, this grading scheme was designed to avoid evaluating students on their creativity; it aimed to motivate students towards deep engagement in *writing, revision*, and *analysis* (assignment documents, field notes).

Extracurricular case

The extracurricular case describes the experiences of seven high school students (five female, two male) during a one-week creative writing summer camp run by a non-profit arts organization in a large Midwestern city. Rather than "students" and "teachers," camp participants identified themselves as "writers" and mentors as "writing coaches." Kathy, a professional writer and the director of "Blue Willow Young Writers," served as the head of the camp program, but collaboratively planned each day's activities with three other coaches, an assistant, and me. Participant observations totaled thirty hours over five days; additionally, participants were interviewed outside of camp. I

served as a secondary coach, participating in writing, reading, and critiquing work along with the campers and coaches, although Kathy explained my researcher role and dissertation study to the young writers on the first day.

The primary purposes of camp were to provide the time and "sacred space" for the young writers to pursue the "passion" of creative writing ("Blue Willow" website), as well as to provide ongoing critique and mentorship. As such, each day's activities fell into three major categories: whole-group writing exercises to experiment with new skills, small-group "writers' circles" to read and critique writing, and "sacred writing time" to write silently and individually. At the end of the week, each participant prepared a 750-word piece for a "showcase reading" presented for a local audience. Later, these works were anthologized in a magazine and mailed to the families of all participants (field notes). Participation was voluntary—the writers who participated elected (or were elected by their parents) to join.

Camp was set up in opposition to school writing. Creative writing, at Blue Willow, was a "passion" that required a "sacred space" in which young writers could express their ideas freely, rather than within the constraints imposed by classroom environments, and the participants were guided by local professional writers rather than teachers' evaluations.

Online case

The online case describes the experiences of five players of the game *Neopets* (all female), who range in age from 15–24. Observations focused on the written elements of *Neopets* play, including players' written and multimodal presentation of themselves and opportunities for publication offered by the site: weekly writing contests, poetry contests, and the *Neopian Times* newspaper (NT). No direct mentorship exists on the site, although all of the participants described soliciting collaboration, "beta-reading" (critique of a draft), or mentorship from more expert writers at various points in their play.

Observations took place over the course of six months, and I interviewed participants through instant messaging technologies (e.g. Google's Gchat). I participated fully in the site throughout my

observations, shared a 80-member "guild" space with the five participants, and worked towards publication of two NT stories. Much of the existing research on *Neopets* focuses on the site's "immersive advertising" (Grimes & Shade, 2005; Wollslager, 2009), although Lu (2010) provides an in-depth account of long-time *Neopets* play, and Magnifico (2012) conducts a broader analysis of how player-crafted writing constitutes play. The *Neopets* audience is diverse, ranging from elementary school students through grandparents. Quantcast (2011) demographics reported that in February, 2011, 59% of site users were female, 36% of site users fell into the 13-17 age group, and another 24% were 18-24. My study participants, who ranged in age from 15-24 and had been playing *Neopets* for between five and nine years at the time of the study, are consistent with these demographics.

There is no central system of quests or game narrative. Without a central mission to guide gameplay, it is common for users to specialize in areas of personal interest. Common site activities include collecting, buying, and selling virtual items; designing and coding social-networking content, layout, and graphics; training pets to fight in a player-vs-player arena; playing flash games; and producing writing and art about *Neopets* and the world of Neopia. Players can earn achievements in each of these areas. Rewards include virtual currency (Neopoints), virtual trophies, and chatboard avatars, each of which confer different kinds of prestige on the site.

Data Analysis

Drawing an analysis from these *instrumental cases* (Stake, 1995), I focus on participants' reports of their motivations to write, their writing goals, and how these goals and motivations changed throughout the time of the study. In my first round of qualitative "open coding" or "initial coding" (Charmaz, 2006; Saldaña, 2009), I used a mixture of provisional codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) developed from the literature and descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2009) to identify passages that mentioned participants' reasons for engaging in writing. I coded for participants' discussions of their broad experiences of writing within different *settings* or *writing environments*. Additionally, where participants discussed particular pieces of writing, I noted the *meanings*

participants were working to express, *reasons why* they wrote that particular piece, and *motivations* for writing that particular piece. During this round of coding, I developed subcodes, such as "figuring out a character," "writing for an assignment," or "trying something new" to describe these reasons or motivations more specifically.

Through consolidation and pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2009), I refined these codes into major themes (Boyatzis, 1998). For instance, the codes and subcodes for *reasons why* to write and explicit mentions of *motivations* led to themes that described the reasons for writing adopted by participants in different settings (setting-level motivations). The range within and across these themes is captured in the tables of representative examples that appear in each results section; themes will be further described in each section.

Results

To focus this study on individuals and their experiences within particular creative writing environments, each student serves as an individual unit of analysis. The motivations and reasons for writing that they describe, however, bunch together in two distinct themes. Each of these themes comprises a major section of this chapter:

- *Theme 1*: Individuals' motivations to write are affected by the environment in which they are writing (single-case analysis).
- *Theme 2*: Individuals' motivations to write are affected by personal and functional reasons for working on specific pieces of writing (cross-case analysis).

The first theme is typical of case study work. Intended to give the reader a window into the social experience of each case, this section explores the ways in which the writing environments set expectations for writing and genre, and supported motivations to write—or, in some cases, motivations not to write. The second theme, a cross-case look at motivations and reasons for writing, reflects sociocognitive work in motivation and goal-setting, although the motivations and goals examined here do not neatly align with the learning and performance orientations that are typical in this literature.

Theme 1: Individuals' Motivations to Write are Affected by Settings

Unsurprisingly, each setting set forth distinct purposes and norms for writing. These norms varied across the three environments, leading to different participation structures and incentive structures that supported distinct motivations for the individuals who participated. As such, while participants' reasons for writing individual pieces varied substantially within and across settings (as will be discussed in Theme 2), individuals who participated in each setting shared several broad reasons to write. Summed up briefly in the bullet points below, and with representative examples in Table 2, these motivations may be described in the following ways:

- Individuals wrote in order to achieve good grades in the classroom case.
- Individuals wrote in order to get feedback in the extracurricular case.
- Individuals wrote in order to accomplish game objectives in the online case.

Table 2
Code Examples: Within-setting Motivations and Reasons to Write

Motivations	Examples
Classroom motivation: Writing to achieve good grades.	Part of it [my revision] was the fact that it was an assignment to sort of make it better, although he [Mr. Caswell] didn't specify how. I thought of the different aspects of it that you could potentially pursue, and I thought, well maybe I like this one more (Hazel, interview 2). This is, like, a huge portion of our English grade (Henry, interview 2).
Extracurricular motivation: Writing to get feedback.	Just being with other writers and listening to their approach to it and then just giving their feedback to you on it, is... it helps you improve... it does. It really does (Tristan, interview 2). The feedback [is why I like writers' circles]. I mean, sharing what I've written, and also the feedback I get from it is always the best part (Rodney, interview 2).

Table 2
Code Examples: Within-setting Motivations and Reasons to Write (continued)

Motivations	Examples
Online motivation: Writing to accomplish game objectives.	Can I say [I started writing to get] the avatar (Rosa, interview 1)?
	Writing for the NT got me closer to a related goal on *Neopets*, another avatar (Kay, interview 1).

Writing for grades and evaluations: The classroom case

As mentioned in the setting description, the creative writing in Mr. Caswell's classroom was open in terms of subject and form, but constrained in terms of process and evaluation. Students were required to work on both poetry and prose writing, to preserve drafts and comments, to periodically submit these documents for evaluation, and to complete at least one major revision. While the students had varying opinions of the creative writing as a whole, all of them spoke about how this assignment structure affected their writing process. In order to become comfortable with sharing their writing with their classmates and teacher, some students chose to see the writing as a simple requirement of their English course. As Eleanor put it, "I got this done because it needs to be handed in... now you're getting a grade for this, just do it" (interview 2).

Many students (6/9) mentioned revising extensively as a result of process requirements. These students described themselves as grade-motivated, but also discussed what they liked and how they wanted to refine their work. They used feedback from Mr. Caswell and their classmates as guides for revision. Many of the students asserted that this revision and analysis work improved their stories and poems, even if they would not have revised without the external grade motivation. Jared described revision in this way: "I got to keep a lot of the elements that I liked but I was able to change individual parts [of the poem] around and make them better so the whole meaning was kept, but the poem got the meaning across much better" (interview 2). Revisions may

have been compelled by the process-based evaluation, but helped many students to recognize, refine, and clarify the meanings that they wanted to express.

Writing for feedback in the extracurricular case

Young writers attended Blue Willow's writing camp because of their interest in creative writing. Most of these writers—including all of the seven participants who took part in this study—had attended at least one writing camp or school-year writers' circle in years past. On the first day of camp, coaches shaped the sacred writing time and writers' circle activities using suggestions and ideas from the campers (field notes). These discussions suggested that many participants came to camp prepared with writing work to accomplish; most described being motivated to do so, but needing the time, structured writing activities, and intensive critique provided by writers' circles. In her final interview, Melanie told me that, in retrospect, she had "definitely saved [an] idea" for camp because this space would provide her with focused time to work on the story idea (interview 2).

6/7 of the Blue Willow participants described enjoying their participation in a writers' circle, noting this particularly "helpful" element of their camp experience (Katrina, interview 2), even if it was sometimes "nerve-wracking" to share new writing (Rica, interview 2). While many of the young writers wrote on their own during the school year, the chance to speak with other writers and solicit critique was a rare opportunity. As Sara noted, "I put everything into it [writing at camp] so I know I'll get something out... I don't get that when I'm writing at home cuz there's no one I'm sharing it with" (interview 2). Many (4/7) writers felt isolated at home and school, and lamented the difficulty of getting good feedback in these settings. They worked to complete writing for each day's writers' circle and welcomed the chance to hear critique that was unavailable elsewhere.

Writing to accomplish game objectives in the online case

Neopets is an open world with little central narrative, significant interaction with other players, and several achievement paths that

involve writing or publication. Many players describe being motivated to write because *Neopets* makes writing a highly visible, sometimes lucrative element of play. Successful writers' profiles are decorated with trophies for NT articles, poetry contest wins, and storytelling contest wins, and each week, the site news announces the NT by featuring player-written articles (field notes). By highlighting these achievements, site developers call attention to Neopian writers' work. As a direct result, such players are well-known and respected.

Most (4/5) study participants mentioned these publication rewards as motivations to engage in this kind of play. The weekly NT is the best known of the venues for writing, and ten successful publications result in not only ten trophies, but the NT-themed "secret avatar" for use on the chat boards. Winning this prize is regarded as one of the most difficult challenges in the game, but the general presence of these rewards lead many Neopian writers to write for multiple site publications. Rosa describes "At times, it felt like even the writing was a competition because of the avatars... [but] the trophy aspect got me writing poetry and [into trying] the ever-frustrating storytelling contest" (Rosa, interview 2). Some players additional tied their motivations to writerly identities outside of the game. Kay wanted to collect the NT avatar and trophy achievements, but also shared personal reasons for seeking NT publication:

> I felt (and continue to feel) like an idiot for not pursuing the NT since my chosen profession is writing... I feel embarrassed whenever I tell anyone on *Neopets* this, and do not have more publications in the Neopian Times (interview 1).

Competition is fierce, however. Between the large number of submissions and the small amount of generic feedback that NT editors and contest judges provide, NT publication and writing contest wins are challenging goals.

Additionally, like most publications, writing for *Neopets* means conforming to content guidelines. These strict limitations include: "if it isn't about *Neopets* in some way, it will not be published," and "avoid sensitive subjects such as death. If your story is too controversial, we will not be able to publish it" (*Neopets.com*, n.d.). 3/5 of the writers

noted that these guidelines were de-motivating. Kay explained that "I feel forbidden from exploring situations I normally would... I write fantasy because I like to toy with all aspects of a world—politics, religion, geography, etc... I can't do that with *Neopets*" (interview 1). Scarlet, however, described enjoying the challenge of learning how to write in this restrictive environment: "I've always favored things that were quite grim... I've gotten better at still including some of the things that are... on the borderline of acceptability. As I write more I get better at hedging that line of violence or relationship" (interview 1). While Neopian writers like Scarlet thrived, many players in this study described frustrations with such obstacles to publication and recognition.

Theme 2: Individuals' Motivations to Write are Affected by Personal Experience and Interest

Moving beyond individual contexts, each of the interviews elicited information about participants' goals and motivations for writing particular pieces. Participants rarely articulated these broader ideas about a piece of writing during observations; rather, larger goals for a particular form, genre, or topic seemed embedded in pre-writing or planning processes. Once the writing had begun, particularly in the classroom and extracurricular cases, writers and mentors worked with existing drafts rather than reflecting on plans or goals. Similarly, in the online case, few participants spoke with others about larger goals for their writing outside of direct collaborations (for discussion of *Neopets* collaborations, see Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, in press, and Magnifico, 2012).

Summed up briefly in the bullet points below, and with representative examples in Table 3, motivations from across the cases may be described in the following ways:

- Individuals wrote stories and poems to explore themes or ideas that interested them.
- Individuals wrote stories and poems to express identity, emotion, or personal experience.

Table 3
Code Examples: Cross-setting Motivations to Write Individual Pieces

Motivation for writing individual pieces	Examples
Interesting themes or ideas	Well I was thinking about how it would feel, like she [Sandra Day O'Connor] gave up all her time for him [her husband, who developed dementia]. He might not even remember who she is, maybe she visited him every day, and then he falls in love with someone else... And I was thinking what she was thinking then, and how she dealt with it, and so I thought, 'well, I have to write that' (Melanie, extracurricular case, interview 2).
	A lot of times Bishop will look at something in nature and sort of compare it to like a human item, like in *The Cold Spring* she compares fireflies to champagne bubbles, but I wanted to do sort of the opposite, and I wanted to look at a person and describe them as nature (Kira, classroom case, interview 2).
	I mostly identify with the characters I've created that are the "rescuers." I guess at heart a piece of me wants to save everyone from their own pain. It's an impossible task... but I can at least write stories where someone discovers for themselves that they don't have to suffer (Scarlet, online case, interview 1).
Expressing identity or understanding personal experience	"I reflected [my main character], like reflected myself to him, so like I'm on the way but I'm trying to find some way to go. That's why I'm studying abroad now, I'm trying to find a way" (Dae, classroom case, interview 1).
	Well, me and my little brother and my older brother, we always go out on the roof, and I was just thinking about... that, I guess. I was inspired by a lotta conversations that I've had with my little brother" (Rica, extracurricular case, interview 2).
	I first got the idea [for my story] when I wanted to play 20 Questions with a friend and she refused. She's a bit mysterious and has a traumatic past, which I wanted to help with. I wrote *Questions* to express my frustration that she was unwilling to open up to me... *Questions* ends with the side character accepting that you cannot force people to get help, which I had to accept for myself... She plays *Neopets* too, so this was a way of discreetly expressing to her through my characters what I wanted to tell her (Addie, online case, interview 1).
	I felt that sometimes it was almost too much of myself that I was showing people... but with the very experiential way that I took poetry, I think it was kind of an approach to certain things in my life that aren't really out there as much... I think it allowed my writing to be less for me and more for the understanding of the experience (Henry, classroom case, interview 2).

Motivations to write individual pieces of creative writing.

Individuals wrote stories and poems to explore specific themes or ideas.

In each writing environment, participants described their work as rooted in their exploration of a particular idea. Some of these inspirations represented long-standing, personally-relevant themes or interests, while others arose after exposure to a particular author or poet. The majority of these responses take the form of 'I had an idea about (a topic), and that made me want to write (this piece of writing).' Table 3 provides three representative examples of different aspects of this motivation—writing from inspiration, writing to practice a technique, and writing to express personal interest. The examples mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs are described in quotations by Melanie, Kira, and Scarlet at greater length in Table 3.

Melanie spent the full week of writing camp working on a short story that was inspired by her family's dinner table discussion of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's struggle with her husband's dementia. Melanie became interested in Justice O'Connor's story because she couldn't imagine "what she was thinking then" as her husband's personality slowly slipped away, and decided to write a story to better understand these feelings. Similarly, Scarlet describes her identification with "rescuer" characters, and her desire to save characters "from their own pain" in her *Neopets* writing, even if this task is impossible in her real-life dealings with people. Finally, in the classroom case, Kira described her shifting interests as she started considering poetry as a way to experiment with new techniques. As she grew to appreciate Elizabeth Bishop, whose work was assigned by Mr. Caswell, she adapted similar metaphorical structures and topics.

While these writers drew on different kinds of inspirations—from others' stories, from their own lives, or from techniques or ideas—writers in each setting described personal interests as key jump-starts for their writing work. For participants across the three settings, an open, productive idea spun images, techniques, backstories, characters, or themes that became catalysts for story or poem development.

Individuals wrote stories and poems to express identity, emotion, or personal experience.

Autobiographical writing was not encouraged in any of these environments. In the school case, Mr. Caswell asked the students to think carefully before divulging secrets in their writing (field notes), but three students spoke at length about the tension between their desire to write from their own experiences and not to reveal personal details to their teacher and schoolmates. To skirt similar difficulties in the extracurricular case, coaches instructed writers' circles members to assume that all pieces were fictional (field notes). Finally, in the online case, NT content restrictions forbade discussion of real-life situations, likely to avoid connections between *Neopets* users and their real-world identities. Despite this ban, two Neopian writers spoke about how their stories typically connect to personal experiences in some way.

Several participants across the settings chose to write about their lives in one or more of their stories or poems. Additionally, a few participants mentioned "venting" (Henry, classroom case, interview 1) or writing for an "emotional outlet" (Kira, classroom case, interview 1) in journals or blogs that they kept for themselves. None of the writers who completed such pieces directly revealed that their writing told personal stories, but in their interviews, they discussed trying to understand questions about their lives, experiences, and identities through story and writing. The four representative examples mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs are described in quotations by Dae, Rica, Addie, and Henry at greater length in Table 3.

Dae, an Asian exchange student, used her classroom writing to consider her life's path and to imagine the advice that she hoped to receive during her travels. Her story followed a young man on a long journey that mirrored her time abroad in many ways, and "reflected myself to him." Similarly, Addie used a *Neopets* story to help herself understand a difficult conversation with a friend and, ultimately, accept her friend's decision. Somewhat differently, Rica described finding inspiration for stories in real conversations. The second piece she brought to writers' circle was "inspired by a lotta conversations" with her brother and told the story of a girl who was working to come to terms with a sibling's accidental death. Rather than thinking about

literal experiences, Rica considered alternate possibilities.

Henry, too, used classroom writing as a tool for understanding and resolving his own emotions. But differently from Addie, Dae, and Rica, whose stories reflected their experiences but were not explicitly personal, Henry wrote emotional poetry about a variety of topics including his religious beliefs. He described developing a better understanding and expression of his thoughts and emotions, but because the classroom design compelled him to workshop the poems with his classmates he felt uncomfortable after "showing people... too much of myself."

Even while these writing environments placed safeguards around students' personal lives, either through conversations between mentors and writers (in the school and extracurricular cases) or outright content restrictions (in the online case), several participants found personal understanding or solace through writing. They wrote stories that were important to them, grappled with how others would "[understand] the experience," as Henry explained, and shared—even published, in Addie's case—this emotional work, despite the potential discomfort of explaining their meanings, situations, and personal inspirations to their readers.

Motivations to write genres of creative writing

In addition to particular *pieces* of writing, participants in all three spaces described reasons for choosing *genres* of writing, most often discussing how a genre matched the style of an idea or their personal interests. Although some young writers discussed their desires to extend their skills and try new things, many described themselves according to an archetype: some writers are poets, some are novel writers, and so on. Two related themes were represented in these responses. Summed up briefly in the bullet points below, and with representative examples in Table 4, participants wrote *within genres* for the following reasons:

- Individuals chose genres based on personal preferences.
- Individuals chose genres based on perceived limits or affordances.

Table 4
Code Examples: Cross-setting Motivations to Write Genres

Motivation for writing genres	Examples
Personal preferences	With poetry you can play with your language more so. You can say things that are just totally random and abstract, and they would still be okay because it's poetry (Elizabeth, classroom case, interview 2).
	Well, with fantasy, I just feel freer. Like, the thing that I like about fantasy is that like, like, I get, I get characters... I don't even try to do that with poetry. I sit down and write a poem and I realize that, as free and emotional as it can be, I just don't get the joy from it that I get from making a world (Tristan, extracurricular case, interview 2).
	I actually prefer to write articles for the NT. They seem to come more easily to me. There's always an edge of humor, and I find I can stay within the confines of the world more easily than when I try to write short stories (Kay, online case, interview 1).
Perceived limits or affordances	I felt motivated to work on the poetry... I felt like it was a way to kind of get in touch with my emotions, initially, and then kind of refine them [in] a way that's approachable for a lot of people as opposed to just a way that's approachable for me (Henry, classroom case, interview 2).
	Most of the time they [my stories] are, admittedly, moral based because that's what gets in [to the NT]... Every one of my stories has some sort of character revelation or every day "truth" to it. For example my most recent publishing explains how everyone has self worth (Rosa, online case, interview 1).
	When I read them [short stories], I feel like I don't have as much time, the time that I'd like to connect with them, and when I write them... I feel like I'm cheating my readers or something. I feel like there's more to tell, and I could tell it better in a longer piece of work (Rodney, extracurricular case, interview 2).

Individuals chose genres based on personal preferences.

The most common motivation for genre choice was personal preference. Participants noted various characteristics of different genres that made them more or less desirable, including levels of description, personal affinity, or acceptability of characteristics like humor or drama. The representative examples mentioned in the subsequent paragraphs are described in quotations by Elizabeth, Tristan, and Kay at greater length in Table 4. Tristan, a fantasy novelist, and Elizabeth, who preferred

poetry in her classroom writing, both describe their genre preferences in terms of affinity, which was a common theme in these responses—styles in which participants enjoy writing. Elizabeth described the free possibilities of "play[ing] with language" that are acceptable when writing poetry, while Tristan noted a different kind of "freedom" in fantasy, that of world-making.

In the school case, genre choice was fraught for many participants because the assignment dictated the necessity of attempting both prose and poetry, and many students were intimidated by this requirement. In the extracurricular case, mentors encouraged participants to try something new in a "writer's stretch" (field notes), and several participants declared a genre outside of their comfort zone as their stretch for the week. On *Neopets*, genre was significantly limited by the content restrictions and publication norms. Across cases, writing outside of their preferred genres pushed writers' boundaries and comfort levels, regardless of the environment or context.

Individuals chose genres based on perceived limits or affordances.

Participants described selecting genres based on their perceptions of a genre's boundaries and how these limits aligned with their ideas. For instance, Rodney noted that novels are particularly good for "connecting" with stories, and Henry believed that poetry is particularly good for "getting in touch with emotions" and "refining" ideas. Finally, some participants described favoring a genre but only in certain contexts. For instance, Kay described fictional fantasy as her usual preferred genre, but she preferred writing descriptive articles for the NT because she found it easier to "stay within the confines of the world" and conform to content restrictions.

Particularly for the experienced *Neopets* writers, genre and theme choices were often related to publication possibilities. As Rosa described, "most of the time they [my stories] are, admittedly, moral based because that's what gets in." As described in the first results theme, Scarlet tried to challenge herself to write stories of personal interest while remaining within the NT content restrictions. Differently, Kay and Rosa took a more functional approach, choosing genres that aligned with their understanding of "what gets in" to the NT. This

functional writing for publication seemed typical among Neo-writers who were motivated by awards or achievements. Similar to the above discussion of themes and ideas, genres can provide a first step or a challenge for writers in search of a place to begin writing. While some writers stretched themselves by stepping outside of their preferred genres, situations that forced writers into less comfortable themes and genres led to difficulty and loss of flow and motivation.

Discussion

While many of these findings are consistent with existing studies of achievement goals and motivation, the interviews and observations presented in this study suggest that participants held multiple simultaneous goals that were situated within their written participation, but rarely suggested a straightforward pattern of learning or performance goals. The young writers described some of their motivations as developing in concert with the social context of the three settings and some as developing separately, rooted in their views of themselves as writers, students, *Neopets* players, or a combination of these roles and identities. As such, these findings present a complex, context-entwined picture of why young writers write, and they lend support to a "universalist" or "person-in-context" (Hickey, 2003) approach to the continued "culturalizing" of the motivational sciences (Zusho & Clayton, 2011). Such a conclusion is perhaps to be expected from a qualitative, multiple-case design (Magnifico, 2010b) whose primary aim was to document relationships among individual writers, motivations to write, creative writing communities, and available audiences in creative writing spaces.

Caveats and Limitations

Given the descriptive, qualitative nature of this research, it is possible that these findings occur primarily as a result of the methodologies employed. While much of the work on achievement goals, motivation, and interest has employed highly-structured survey or experimental designs, this study explored observations and interviews. Such methods

focus on extended self-reports of participants' interests, goals, and motivations—one that was designed to elicit elaborations of experiences. Participants had many opportunities to characterize their reasons for writing, and other than a semi-structured interview script, no attempts to standardize their language were made. Instead, these young writers constructed and reflected on narratives of their writings and practices that captured their motivations, emotions, and experiences over time.

Different Goals for Different Contexts

Hickey (2003) argues that researchers in the motivational sciences must better consider the role of setting and context in the development of students' motivations and goals. This conversation has begun fruitfully with studies that examine the role of context and feedback in the development of students' motivations to participate in classroom activities (e.g. Kumar, 2006; Lipstein & Renninger, 2007; Nolen, 2007). Such examinations show that the person-in-context construct is a useful way to theorize sociocognitive factors. As Hickey (2003) puts it, cognition is a result of, not a precursor to, participation in an environment. In this study, young writers articulated writing goals as they engaged in creative writing. Their settings supported these goals and motivation orientations through design elements such as achievement structures and evaluations—and the consequences of these choices are present in participants' descriptions of their goals and their reasons for working on particular pieces of writing.

The most complex case of contextual design choices, goals, and participation occurred in Mr. Caswell's classroom, where students undertook process-oriented creative writing to prepare for their IB examination. Students chose writing topics and critiqued each others' work with little teacher intervention, and motivational research would likely predict that this "de-centering" of the classroom would be associated with a mastery-oriented environment. One of Nolen's (2007) writing classrooms was a space where "writing was an important social act, where being a writer was an important identity, and where all students could become writers" (p. 254). The creative writing in Mr. Caswell's class was designed in similar ways, and several students

slipped easily into authorial roles and described drafting and revising in order to clarify the meanings that they wanted to express.

At the same time, Mr. Caswell's design did not remove the students' attention to evaluation and assessment. Many students discussed their performance-focused orientation: They expressed concern about sharing unpolished drafts, asked for clarification of requirements, and worried about their English grades. This finding reflects Kumar's (2006) observation that teachers' perceptions of their classroom design as mastery- or performance-oriented may not mirror students' experiences of the same space. Mr. Caswell developed a curriculum that evaluated students on their incremental progress, but many students focused on the final outcome. It was unclear whether taking up this performance-focused orientation affected students adversely, however. Students concerned with their grades mentioned that they might not have revised as extensively without Mr. Caswell's requirement for "significant revision," but noted that their stories and poems improved with this additional work.

Neopets players described more consistent motivations, likely because the setting presented one clear path to success. Some Neo-writers wrote solely to make a space for themselves and their pets within the broader game, but the emphasis on achieving publication in the NT or writing contests reinforced a orientation to performance and held consequences for young writers' perceptions of themselves, their goals, and *Neopets* more broadly. As Dweck and Leggett (1988) demonstrate, when tasks are demonstrably difficult and performance becomes central, many learners lose their motivation to learn beyond the assignment at hand. Two participants' descriptions of working quickly and sacrificing story quality embodied such performance-oriented characterizations. These categories did not hold true for those who had already achieved significant *Neopets* writing achievements, however. Others described challenging themselves in mastery-oriented ways, attempting to write real-life experiences into *Neopets* contexts or treading a line between publication requirements and personally-interesting topics. While these achievement structures played a role in the development of these young writers' goals, their experiences suggest complex interactions among setting, writerly identity, interests, and reasons to write.

In the extracurricular case, the community-based nature of Blue Willow's writing curriculum supported mastery-oriented approaches to writing. Experimentation and expression were encouraged by open topic choice, daily feedback, and diverse writing exercises. These constructs did not stop many young writers from feeling nervous about others' opinions, but they described positive feelings about writers' circles because this critique consistently helped them improve their stories and poems. Even while sharing early drafts made them uneasy, the Blue Willow young writers described trusting in the processes of a community that they regarded as a safe space for experimentation and feedback.

All in all, setting-level differences in individuals' self-described motivations to write were expected and present. As many studies from this area of study have suggested, pedagogical and design-level choices significantly affect learners' cognitions and experiences, including their development of goals, interests, and self-efficacy (e.g. Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kumar, 2006; Lipstein & Renninger; 2007; Nolen, 2007). This work concurs with sociocultural studies that show how communities dictate acceptable forms of communication, interaction, and participation (Gee, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Overall, each setting in this study had distinct objectives, which in turn supported different goals for the participants—primarily, writing for grades in the classroom case, writing for feedback and critique in the extracurricular case, and writing to achieve game objectives in the online case.

Similarities Across Goals and Contexts

Additionally, however, participants described goals and reasons to write that were common across the three settings. Young writers in all three environments *shared* many reasons for choosing particular genres for their pieces and directions for their work: They wrote to explore personal interests, to reflect on life experiences, and in response to their perceptions of genre constraints and affordances. In short, participants reported that many of their goals were linked to their ideas about, interests in, and inspirations for specific pieces of writing.

All three groups of writers focused on smaller goals for individual pieces or genres. Participants chose to write particular pieces because of

personal interest or affiliation with a particular form or topic. While genre was more conflated with environments (particularly in the classroom and online cases), they chose genres for reasons of affinity and function, as well. For example, writers chose novels when their ideas were long and rambling—because the genre suited the story. Others wrote poetry because they enjoyed poetry—because the genre suited their interest. These piece-level and genre-level reasons to write did not align well with individual mastery or performance patterns; rather, the two were typically mixed. For instance, Addie's experience of writing a *Neopets* story to help herself accept that she could not force a friend to seek help suggests writing for understanding. Ultimately, though, she submitted it to the NT, a venue that reinforces performance with trophies. Cases like this do not appear—as Cumming, Kim, and Eouanzoui's (2007) studies of ESL students' evolving goals do not—to conform easily to traditional motivational categories, patterns, or analyses.

Implications

These findings carry implications for writing teachers and researchers in the areas of literacy and the motivational sciences. In the school context, students focused on getting good grades. This pre-set performance context is a significant hurdle to overcome for teachers who seek to emphasize the communicative nature of writing and literacy. Similarly to Nolen's (2007) study of elementary literacy classrooms, students can learn how to write for the sake of writing, and many develop interest in writing as a result, but this process may require un-learning of typical school contexts.

The remaining two cases present counterpoints to the writing classroom. While Mr. Caswell worked to change his classroom's culture and context by employing workshop-based writing, the Blue Willow and *Neopets* contexts remained stable. At Blue Willow, experienced young writers accepted writers' circles as beneficial, audience-driven spaces to receive formative feedback on the writings that they valued. The *Neopets* writers, on the other hand, reported a variety of responses to their evaluative, publication-based context. While some questioned their writerly identities on the basis of unsuccessful performance, others

seemed to treat the content restrictions as part of their play, attempting to blend site content and personal experience to achieve publication.

Aside from evaluation contexts, taken together, these three cases additionally confirm Nolen's (2007) findings around creative participation and reveal a central implication for writing instruction. While situative theories note that participants do learn to conform to particular contexts through participation (Gee, 1996), young writers in all three contexts described subverting norms to explore their lives through writing, like Dae, Henry, and Addie—or losing motivation when this task seemed impossible, like Kay. Even in contexts that placed safeguards around autobiographical work, young writers persisted in writing for themselves. Young writers need support to use writing in these ways, however: Mentors must establish writing communities that are open to expression, as well as reasonable limits to help young writers consider what emotions and experiences to reveal in their work.

Conclusions

This study shows that adolescents' writing goals and motivations respond to their settings but are additionally tied to their individual writing identities: their ideas about, interests in, and inspirations for particular works. As such, these findings raise questions about the broad generalizability of goals and motivations, and about the necessity of examining the multiple, complex—and sometimes conflicting—reasons that lead adolescents to participate in writing communities. Researchers in the fields of literacy and motivation must continue to experiment with methods and observe settings in order to reach more thorough understandings of how writers think and learn through writing, sharing, and getting feedback from readers and mentors. We must work across paradigms, bringing together sociocognitive factors like motivation, rhetorical concepts of audience, and sociocultural understandings of writing as social discourse to do so. These findings argue that we must complicate conceptualizations of writing and motivation, and that we must seek these new understandings by studying adolescents' writing cognitions and communities in context, continuing to learn about how these factors combine to cultivate learning.

Notes

[1] A table detailing all participants' characteristics may be found in Appendix 1.

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Appendix
All Participants (all names are pseudonyms)

Pseudonym	Setting	Grade	Creative writing experiences
Dae	classroom	11th	none prior to Mr. Caswell's class
Eleanor	classroom	11th	none prior to Mr. Caswell's class
Elizabeth	classroom	11th	none prior to Mr. Caswell's class
Hazel	classroom	11th	English class creative writing (middle school)
Henry	classroom	11th	personal poetry & journaling; English class creative writing
Jared	classroom	11th	none prior to Mr. Caswell's class
Kira	classroom	11th	personal poetry & journaling; English class creative writing
Nasha	classroom	11th	English class creative writing
Noah	classroom	11th	none prior to Mr. Caswell's class
Katrina	writing camp	9th	3 years writing camp; school creative writing course
Leanne	writing camp	10th	2 years writing camp
Melanie	writing camp	9th	3 years writing camp
Rica	writing camp	10th	2 years writing camp
Rodney	writing camp	12th	6 years writing camp
Sara	writing camp	10th	4 years writing camp; English class creative writing
Tristan	writing camp	10th	4 years writing camp; English class creative writing
Addie	online	10th	4 years NT writing; 4 years of Fanfiction.net writing
Kay	online	MFA (age 23)	2 years NT writing; online role-playing; original fiction novel
Rosa	online	college (age 19)	2 years NT writing; 5 years online journaling; school creative writing courses
Scarlet	online	college (age 20)	4 years NT writing; original fiction; in-process original fiction novella
Sheena	online	college (age 19)	4 years NT writing; original fiction; short story collection for young readers; self-published fantasy novel; 2 years reporting for college newspaper