In order to understand factors that encourage or discourage adolescents’ participation in school writing classes and influence their motivation to become skilled writers, we interviewed high school students about their writing experiences, goals, and processes and analyzed their statements for patterns of goal pursuit. Nineteen students of varying achievement levels and classroom placements (8 boys and 11 girls, 6 African American and 13 European American) who had been previously interviewed in fifth and sixth grades were interviewed again in the tenth grade. Goals arising from developmental and personal life issues were central to these adolescent writers, whose writing motivation was heavily influenced by the extent to which they perceived they were encouraged to write authentic personal texts whose messages were respected by caring teachers. The low achieving and alienated students whose writing motivation had declined from earlier years did not now believe they received respect for their ideas, but that their teacher was interested only in their texts’ basic organization and display of proper grammatical conventions. Methods for teaching writing that enlist and honor the personal goals of adolescents and support their motivation to write are described.

Teachers of composition are often at a loss to understand why their students do not try harder to become proficient writers. Teachers want students to learn the skills of effective communication, and are discouraged by the minimal effort that students put into writing assignments and their lack of progress on papers over the year. In this study, we interviewed a group of high school students about their views on writing, and found a fascinating variety of adolescent perspectives. As writers, these students displayed the same kinds of variations in academic performance that dismay (and occasionally please) teachers everywhere. Some were cheerful writers; others were apathetic or negative. Despite teacher efforts, few students viewed their school writing as part of a long-term effort to become more skilled at expressing themselves effectively in the world beyond school.

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In order to probe the forces beneath these academic behaviors, we asked students for their interpretation of writing, their motivation for writing, and their views of their teachers’ reception of their writing. In our analysis, we looked for underlying intentions, concerns, and issues that are hidden under the surface of the day-to-day activities in a busy high school. We hope that these insights will provide assistance in establishing curriculum priorities among the conflicting and confusing instructional claims for “best practice” that compete for teachers’ attention.

Goal theory research provided a useful framework for theorizing about the student’s responses. Theories relating motivation to goals assert that individual internalized goals are crucial determinants of school achievement behavior and thereby of school success. Much research on students’ goals makes a distinction between performance or ego goals (achieving in order to impress others, sometimes in a competitive sense) which tend to elicit superficial strategies designed primarily to win approval, and more functional mastery or task goals (focusing on self improvement and skill development regardless of the performance or responses of others), which elicit greater intrinsic motivation and strategies more likely to lead to successful skill development.

Findings from goal theory research suggest that students who focus on performing to impress others are less motivated, use less effective strategies, and achieve at lower levels than those who focus on achieving mastery of skills. Classroom practices that emphasized extrinsic outcomes of student performances (such as passing or failing) with few rewards for progress toward achievement were found to promote maladaptive performance goals (Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992). Students avoided completing assignments or focused on discovering short cuts to satisfying external demands. Such attitudes did not encourage an intrinsic investment in growth that leads to greater effort and higher achievement. Recent research suggests, however, that the effects of goal orientation on achievement are not so easily categorized. Performance goals may be positive in some situations and for some students. A focus on a performance (such as an assigned paper) can be positive when it creates strong approach behavior that increases effort (Skaalvik, 1997). Teachers are also familiar with the way performance goals cause students of all ages to increase their efforts as tests and assignment deadlines approach (Harackiewicz, Barron, & Elliot, 1998).

Other researchers have found social and personal goals to be important determinants of academic behavior, pointing out that students’ level of engagement in achievement activities is also motivated by their concern about others views of them and by their individual “life-task” goals (Schutz, 1997; Wentzel, 1996). Students desire to be known as responsible, successful, daring, or cool, and to be liked and accepted by peers and teachers. Adolescent students’ age appropriate focus on their own developmental issues and visions of approaching adulthood present conflicting personal goals that might intrude upon their accomplishing teachers assignments. Teachers are not unimportant, however, since adolescent students are more motivated to achieve when they perceive their teachers to be “caring.” Research indicates that students define caring teachers as demonstrating democratic interaction styles, making the effort needed to teach effectively, and supporting students individually as persons and as learners (Wentzel, 1997). Because students’ texts often reveal personal information and address deeply felt concerns, it is especially important in writing classes that students believe that their teacher values and respects them.

Some research studies suggest that providing students with assignments that target specific, proximal goals more effectively motivates and guides improvement than giving less focused tasks (Locke & Latham, 1994; Mac Iver, 1993). For example, students who were given a large task to complete were more successful if the general goal of finishing the assignment was broken up into smaller segments, because this kind of structure enabled them to focus their efforts and chart their progress. (Schunk, 1991). Research on writing as a task, however, provides some evidence in conflict with the value of this kind of segmenting of instruction. When students approach writing as a task of correctly completing discrete elements such as sentence
construction or verb choice the result is rarely an effective text (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987). The qualities of good writing are more effectively taught as a series of problem solving decisions related to the overall purpose and audience of the writing task (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987; Bizell, 1997; Flower & Hayes, 1981,1984). Real audiences and authentic purposes serve to strengthen student motivation toward effortful striving (Atwell, 1998).

In summary, the research on student goals, while underscoring the strong role of goal orientation, sends conflicting messages to teachers. Performance goals, social goals, personal life goals, and audience-related goals carry their own implications for practice, but the ways in which goals actually operate in the writing lives of high school students have not been closely examined. In our interviews, we asked a group of high school students in seven different English classrooms about their current goals and motivation and about the differing classroom expectations they had encountered over the course of their school careers. Because we had interviewed these students when they were in fifth and in sixth grades, we were able to see their development over time. We present a series of student “portraits” to show how different kinds of personal goals interact with school expectations to either augment or inhibit literacy growth.

Method

Nineteen students (8 boys and 11 girls) were individually interviewed by the researchers in fifth, sixth, and in tenth grades. Six of these students were African American and thirteen were European American. All of the eight high achievers in fifth grade (in the upper five deciles on the fourth grade CTBS language subtest and in the highest homogeneously grouped class in fifth grade), were in college prep or honors English classes in tenth grade. All of the eleven low achievers in fifth grade (lower five deciles of the fourth grade CTBS language subtest and “lowest” class), were assigned to tenth grade English classes that focused writing assignments on remediation for the state basic writing test. None of the students were identified as having learning disabilities.

During fifth and sixth grades all students had experienced instruction in the processes of revision and editing, with deliberate identification of qualities of good writing and language conventions. Teaching approaches, however, varied widely. In fifth grade all students were taught writing every day by the same teacher who emphasized personal commitment to a text that reached an audience, and a group of the lowest achievers were in a special block language arts program designed to increase their confidence and personal involvement in reading and writing. In sixth grade, some teachers emphasized the basics of writing while others worked with more literary qualities. In the tenth grade, these students were taught by six different teachers, all European American. Remedial writing classes for the lowest achievers were part of a special district-wide program based on a discrete list of “objectives” drawn from criteria from the state basic skills assessment essay test. Weekly practice test-like compositions were assigned, and each student received specific feedback on the number of “objectives” they had mastered, but teaching approaches and other writing experiences varied from teacher to teacher.

Data were drawn from transcripts of individual student interviews conducted once each year during fifth, sixth, and tenth grades. Transcripts from the fifth and sixth grade interviews were reviewed to inform this analysis but the majority of the data were drawn from the tenth grade interviews. In order to remind students about the study, each one was contacted during the ninth grade for an individual conversation. By the time of the tenth grade interview, in most cases, the interviewer was known to the student from a prior year’s interview. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and followed a semistructured procedure (described in McCormick, Busching, and Potter, 1992) similar to a teacher conference but with a uniform presentation of questions. Interviewers first asked students to rank for quality a few texts they had recently written and which had been provided by their teachers, as well as a group of texts written by the researchers, and then to give reasons for their evaluations. In order to address issues related to motivation, students were also asked questions about their writing experiences (e.g., How much writing have you done this year in English? Have you liked any
of these assignments? Do you write outside of school? How do you feel your writing has changed this year?), goals (e.g., “What have you been trying to work on this year? What do you change when you revise?”), processes (e.g., “Tell me about working on a paper. How do you go about doing it?”), and strategies (e.g., “What advice to other students do you have, to help them do better writing?”). Each student was asked at least eleven such questions, and follow-up questions were asked as appropriate. Interview transcripts were analyzed by three judges for statements regarding goal orientation toward writing, and for responses to questions that revealed students’ motivation and volition to write. Each judge analyzed the transcripts independently, and the few differences between judges were resolved through discussion.

Results
What did the students tell us about why they wrote and how they approached the task of writing? As mentioned earlier, some students expressed enthusiasm for and personal motivation to meet the demands of school writing, while others described their more or less grudging compliance, but in almost all cases, developmental and societal concerns interacted with assignment-related goals. The relationship between personal goals, school standards, and student intentions and actions varied greatly, and in ways that have critical implications for secondary teachers of any subject.

Grades as a primary goal of students. As students looked over their papers and described the goals that influenced their writing, virtually all of them reported that the goal of completing an immediate assignment was central in their thoughts, and that they met this goal by complying with the requirements and standards set by their teacher. This was true of both high and low achievers, and of both highly motivated and less motivated writers. Without prompting by the interviewer, most students also mentioned grades, and interestingly, most of them thought that they understood what they needed to do in order to obtain the grade they wanted from their current teacher. Some aspired to a high grade; others sought a passing grade. While an over-emphasis on grades is undesirable because grades do not provide useful information on individual learners’ strengths and needs and because they lead students to over-focus on their teachers’ responses rather than on internalized goals (Thomas & Oldfather, 1997), successful students do use grades as a way to monitor and regulate their effortful striving to complete academic tasks, a strategy associated with receiving higher grades (Wolters, 1998).

One must not assume, though, that because students were highly conscious of their teachers standards, their self-regulatory efforts as writers were primarily influenced by a desire for a certain grade. Almost all of the students viewed grades as the “bottom line” in the determination of school success and as important representations of themselves, but most of them also retained a sense of themselves as writers that was independent of school definitions.

Independence and Mastery Goals. A sense of awareness of, but independence from school standards pervaded the interviews of George and Ward, two high achieving boys. Both were well established as excellent students on the basis of test scores and teacher assessments across the years. When asked about what good writing is, and when they described the strengths and weaknesses in their papers, they articulated confidently and in some detail the ways that good writing is crafted for an audience. For example, Ward said, “Well at the very beginning and the very end I like to have some kind of irony in it, just to make it sound a little bit better,” and mentioned the importance of reading to develop a good vocabulary so that one’s texts could display “good word usage” and “better adjectives”. George was critical of a paper he had written in sixth grade: “My sentences were usually very short and that made it really choppy.” When asked what features of good writing he tried to incorporate in his texts, he said: “Your thoughts…and then…that’s the most important thing, what you are trying to tell the reader and then you have to decide how you are going to write it. It is basically your thoughts first and then how you structure—the sentences and the paragraphs — that make it good.”

This kind of detailed articulation of criteria is typical of students who hold a “mastery” orientation, and high levels of attainment typically result from mastery orientations because the
conscious awareness of internalized criteria provide effective guides for effortful striving. Indeed, these two boys had consistently been successful school writers in earlier grades.

George saw his writing as more than a text with a crafted message. He saw it as a presentation of self, and thought about how to shape the text to convey an impression of himself as well as a message. He intrigued the interviewer by answering a question about "the most important thing" about writing as "what the person gets out of it about you," and he later talked about his intention of going into politics. Ward was also highly aware of his writing as a performance for an audience, but in a more self-critical way. He described, for example, one of his papers as sounding "like an idiot wrote it."

Nevertheless, neither of the boys had a comfortable relationship with the expectations of their current writing class (they had the same teacher). In fact, they described their teacher's writing standards as too simplistic and cynically tried to give her what she wanted, without valuing those standards. Ward said, "they try to get you to write ... like a third grader, it just didn't fit the way I wanted to write." He also criticized his history teacher's insistence that a paragraph must have more than one sentence: "I figure a sentence that takes three or four lines. I consider that a paragraph. I look at the State [newspaper]... and a lot of their paragraphs are one sentence, they're just like that long (Ward gestures about two inches) and I figure 'Hey, if they can do it, I can do it.'" Both boys noted with pride high grades on papers to which they had given little effort. George specifically mentioned a "kiss up" piece of writing he wrote "just to get a good grade."

Both boys enthusiastically described occasional writing done outside of school, in contrast to classmates who at most wrote letters or kept diaries. Both reported starting serious writing at home ("stories"), but rarely finished any. Ward said that he tried to write like Piers Anthony (an author of science fiction novels) but found it difficult: "...Yeah, and I'd like to write like him, but it's awful hard."

It appears that being a good writer was a strong long-term goal for these boys — George as a politician and Ward because of his interest in good writing — but they did not perceive their school writing class as instrumental in helping them to reach this goal. Their long-term goal of mastery of the craft of writing was thus virtually dormant. At the same time, they more or less complied with school writing requirements with a "performance" orientation, doing just what was needed to get by. It is significant to note that, although neither boy was effectively pursuing the goal of creating authentic, high-quality texts, this life goal nevertheless is what they felt defined themselves as writers rather than the more present classroom standards.

Karim was a more extreme example of a high achieving student distanced from school writing. He was also critical of the same teacher, who he described as having "the wrong ideas about writing" in her insistence on a formalized prose style. A capable student who was so in conflict with school goals that he sometimes didn't even start assignments, Karim stated, "If they give me something to write about and I don't like it, I don't do it." He compared his current inability to write with his earlier fluency: "...see I could write on anything back then, anything. I can't write on anything now.... I know more now, but my writing was better then because I think I was more creative then, and, um, as far as structurally it's better now, but content was better then." Karim also appeared to be hindered from completing his writing by an internalized demand for absolute correctness, perhaps related to parental or previous teacher expectations (Cleary, 1991): "I like it neat ... I like the mechanics to be perfect, you know, like punctuation and spelling."

One can view the willingness of these three boys to be in conflict with school requirements as related to their identity concerns. A central developmental task of adolescence is the construction of a workable identity, a sense of sameness and continuity that authentically defines who one is and that will serve as a guide for one's adult life (Erikson, 1959). Because identity concerns include the pursuit of autonomy, the establishment of identity often results in problematical relationships with those in authority. These students had a strong urge
to develop as writers and as people on their own terms, and were thwarted by what they saw as the misguided requirements of their teachers.

**Student Goals Congruent with Classroom Requirements.** Three high achieving girls in honors English classes illustrate how the mix of personal and school goals can operate comfortably in the intentions of student writers. Helen, Leslie, and Lee all expressed an interest in becoming good writers in ways that appeared to emerge from an internalized sense of personal self. They all referred to the importance of meeting criteria for high grades on assignments, and they cheerfully complied with teacher expectations. Writing, like the rest of their school work, was relatively easy and was congruent with their life plans, which included college. All three girls were popular members of the school’s dominant culture and had nonacademic interests that consumed much of their time. Thus their goals for writing achievement appeared to be derived from school influences, and their personal goals matched those of their teachers and their school.

Like the boys, these girls had a well-developed sense of what good writing entails, and were motivated to put energy into creating texts that exhibited those qualities. Helen said, “I like writing. Usually once I start writing, I can think of a lot to write about, most of the time.” When Leslie was asked what she was concentrating on to make her writing good, she said, “Describing things a lot. And trying to make it interesting, I guess.” Unlike the boys, they did not view school writing as a “performance” that one could accomplish merely by completing immediate detailed instructions from their teacher. Instead, they applied personally constructed standards to each new assignment. Their energetic comments about their papers appeared to be a result of personal assessments rather than repetition of teacher comments, but they viewed their own standards as congruent with, and even augmented by, their teacher.

None of their electives or extra-curricular activities, however, involved writing. In fact, they showed no interest in any writing outside of assignments, not even letters or other personal writing. Although they readily discussed the importance of writing well in order to do well in college, none of the girls stated any specific uses for writing or future personal satisfactions as writers. As Cleary (1991) notes, when an enthusiasm for success is motivated by meeting school requirements, students rarely use these skills in other areas of their lives. It is ironic that the boys displayed negative attitudes toward classroom writing, yet appeared to have a strong personal desire to continue to develop as writers, while the girls exhibited less interest in continued development.

The strongly differing stance toward writing exhibited by these high achieving boys and girls is consistent with research findings on gender differences in receptivity to others’ evaluations, which finds males more likely than females to favor self-evaluation over those of others (Roberts, 1991). Rose (1990) observed a similar pattern of gender differences. In their autobiographical essays, Rose’s male students described their development of literacy skills as an avenue to autonomy while her female students saw their literacy skills as an avenue for pleasing their audience, the teacher.

**Self-expression and identity concerns of African American students.** For minority youth in the United States, the task of developing a workable identity that defines one’s self-necessarily requires an integration of ethnicity into the view of self. Not surprisingly, the African American students in our sample varied greatly in how they connected their overall sense of self to their sense of self as writer. For some students, there was little or no relationship between the adolescent self and the writing self. Writing was a school assignment, nothing more or less, and their interviews touched only on how well they could meet what was expected of them, with no reference to self-identity or developmental concerns. Crystal, for example, did not refer to any dimensions of self-expression as she discussed herself as a writer. In fact, she appeared to define writing success narrowly as the elimination of errors in order to meet school expectations. As she discussed her texts, she spoke mostly of the number of “mistakes” she made. Critical of the teacher’s error-oriented check-off approach to writing, she expressed little interest in her writing class. Other African American students clearly did view writ-
ing as an expression of self; for example, a boy who felt that he was overlooked as an individual, a girl who felt that her messages about racial issues were overlooked, and a girl who gained great satisfaction from her writing as a presentation of her personality to others.

Ron used writing outside of school to express his private thoughts and feelings, and described writing several pages of his thoughts during a train trip to Detroit, but he was very discouraged about his current school writing. Critical of his teacher's methods for teaching writing, he held the disturbing perception that his writing had gotten worse rather than better over the years. He described a former teacher who cared about him as a developing writer. In contrast, he believed his present teacher was more interested in surface features of finished products. He said, "I turn it in and then she tell me I've got mistakes on it and stuff... I don't think she really care about the writing, she just care about the grades." The personalized mastery orientation fostered by the earlier admired teacher had been replaced by error-oriented performance goals in high school, and his motivation has declined: "I think it, you know, like last year I thought it was better than this year because this year I'm not too much into writing... I don't know what happened to it, it just stopped". Ron also repeatedly conveyed his former favorite teacher's personal interest and supportive nurturing of his skill as a writer as he struggled to express himself: "She just like, she just sat down and talked to you about your writing... she'd look at the writing first, and then she'd like just get everything straight that you did, and then she'd let you go back and write the final draft." He drew a contrast between her and an unhelpful teacher who "just let you write the first draft then the final draft and just turn it in and let it get a grade."

Veronique, a serious student whose goal was to become a nurse, expressed concern about being distracted from the effort required for school success because of racial and interpersonal issues created by her African American peers. "I could do my work better in middle school... and when you get to high school you have more distractions and people bothering you and getting in trouble." Veronique herself was greatly upset by a school incident that she felt put down African American students, and she carried this concern into her writing class. A piece of writing that she chose as one of her best described the school as making a fuss (providing a counselor, etc.) following the suicide of a white student while virtually ignoring the shooting death of an African American student. Although this text was written only as "practice" for the state basic skills test, her strong commitment to its message led Veronique to rank it as among her best.

Her alienation was also evident as she described how her teacher evaluated her texts. Veronique said, "...She just calls us and tells us what we made on our papers, if we made a 2 or a 3. If we made a 2 she tell us we could do better, if we made a 3 she tells us it good.... And, uh, she tells us we can do better, or, she tells us what our grade is and the errors that we made and tells us to make sure that we won't make them again." She felt her current teacher was "only interested in the objectives," not the content of her texts, and she reminisced about a former teacher who had helped her more with her papers, showing caring and support as she insisted that Veronique meet high standards.

It was especially disheartening to listen to Veronique's discouraging view of herself as a writer in light of her continuing interest in writing as a personally enhancing activity. As a fifth grader, Veronique had spoken proudly of being recognized for making the honor roll at her school. She reported that she wrote letters and kept a diary at home, and said that her mother fussed that she was "always in a book." Veronique wanted to succeed, and felt that she knew how to do so. Her goal was to "try and make my paper better and improve my writing so when I take these exams, the writing part, I'll make a 'three' and I won't have to take it over."

Teara, another African American student, viewed writing in a more positive light. She planned a career as a model, saw writing as an opportunity for positive exhibition, and she seemed pleased with all her writing. She focused on the impression she made rather than on her grade, and was unique in the zestfulness with which she described writing. Her personal performance criteria often focused on
the appearance of her papers, and she was self-assured about sharing her self-focused texts: "I just like to describe myself, it's what I like to do." She also appeared to be motivated toward increasing mastery of writing proficiency, although she defined this narrowly in terms of mastering mechanical and appearance aspects of writing rather than content quality. Teara's view of writing illustrates the positive value of "approach" performance goals (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; Middleton & Midgeley, 1997): she sought out opportunities to write in order to present herself in a way that would favorably impress others, an attitude which is associated with high motivation and positive self-perceptions, especially among African American students (Urdan, 1997).

Diverse goals among marginalized European American students. African American students were not the only group to feel marginalized by the dominant school culture. Two European American students also felt themselves to be in the minority, and as such, not valued as writers by their teachers.

Sam, a low achieving European American student who was the only one of the students to drop out of school, viewed writing as authentic communication; that is, he used writing to express his views. He defended his choice of a text on the seat belt law as his best based on its expression of the opinion of "a lot of people right now" (a minority opposed to the mandatory use of seat belts). When asked what advice he would give other writers, Sam was unique in giving an affective strategy, one that emphasized autonomy, for dealing with failure: "Try to do your best... don't let other people discourage you or anything...just block out everybody else and do your thing." He appeared to be struggling to maintain a sense of self-efficacy in the face of rejection of his societal views.

Another low achieving European American student, Kip, expressed similar goals of communicating authentically rather than merely meeting school achievement standards. He admitted he didn't always try his best at his school work. This was a new development of his adolescence. Although he remembered good teachers and enjoying writing earlier in his school career, he now saw his teacher as focusing only on mechanics, and he didn't like to write on topics she assigned. He now wrote letters and raps out of school, never showing them to his teacher. (When asked why not, he said, "I ain't thought about it"). Kip described a growing concern for his role in society: "Now I write about things that's truth, you know...trying to put a message in it". He selected his text "Police" as his best because he was trying to say something important in it, "since you hear a lot about polices beatin' on other people" and he had been "hassled" by the police himself. To Kip, as to Sam, authenticity required that he express his autonomous values that were not promoted by the school.

We will end this presentation of low achieving students' reactions to school writing expectations with a success story. In contrast to some other students, Robbie, a student who still struggled with the most basic elements of writing, was cheerfully committed to mastering the skills highlighted in his basic writing class, and also retained a personal sense of mastery of writing ("I'm...trying to figure it out on my own, find out where I need the punctuation and...the story, how should I begin it, explain it, and then end it.") Robbie also saw writing as related to his life concerns; he knew his planned career as a bookkeeper would require writing, and at home he wrote letters to his girlfriend. Robbie appeared to find the clarity of the writing objectives provided by his teachers motivating; he believed he was making progress and was optimistic about his writing potential. He liked hearing the teacher's feedback, and cited several teacher-prescribed strategies he found useful. We marveled at Robbie's lack of discouragement with his low achievement in writing when he told us that he might not pass the exit exam and graduate. For Robbie, the specific and proximal goals provided by his caring teacher apparently provided him with what he trusted would be a clear path to success. It was; he did graduate from high school with the other students.

Summary of Findings
The interviews revealed that students' individual patterns of goals, influenced by developmental and personal life issues, were a major
force that interacted with teacher criteria and
guidelines to influence how students re-
sponded to school writing assignments. Only
a few students disassociated their personal
goals from their school writing. Most students
talked about their writing within a framework
of interlocking goals related to their emerging
views of themselves as adults, to school and
classroom pressures, and to individual feelings
of self-confidence and self-consciousness. A
few boys even viewed writing as so strongly
connected to identity, autonomy, and authen-
ticity that they refused to cooperate if school
standards or requirements were in conflict
with self-identity. The opportunity to be one's
"true" self rather than presenting a phony dis-
play influenced student response to writing
assignments (Harter, Waters, and Whitesell,
1997). Both performance and mastery goals
were present in each student's intentions to a
greater or lesser extent, rather than being op-
posite ends of a continuum (Anderman &
Maehr, 1994).

Believing that a teacher cared about them, not
only as a person, but also as a developing writer,
had been a strong motivating force for some
students in their earlier writing careers. These
students described former safe and caring rela-
tionships with teachers whose individualized
constructive feedback had helped them to use
writing to express their ideas. Now, as adoles-
cents they were experiencing a tension between
the need for autonomy and the need for such
support from adults, even as the importance of
using writing to explore and develop their views
and goals had grown. As Brannon & Knoblach
(1982) describe, the most useful motivation for
adolescent students to improve their writing
skills comes from their need to express them-
selves as autonomous adults, and for this they
must believe that their texts will be read ear-
nestly, with understanding and respect for who
they are.

Ethnic concerns permeated the academic life of
our minority students. Veronique, for example,
was not able to keep from confronting "politi-
cally charged borders" between herself and the
norms, values, beliefs, expectations, and actions
of the school. She occupied a "different world",
and resisted "transitions to the world of school,"
to the detriment of her educational progress
(Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). She displayed
"academic disidentification", described by
Osborne (1997) as a self-protective response of
African American students to the negative ste-
reotypes which they encounter in schools. Stu-
dents who disidentify in this way divorce their
self-esteem from their academic performance
and are more likely to have low grades, in-
creased truancy, and to drop out.

Implications for Educational Practice
The qualities of good writing are not rules to
be learned, but are strategies used by effective
writers to convey important ideas to an audi-
ence, as demonstrated in a variety of research
studies, (for example, Bereiter and Scardamalia,
1987; Bizell, 1997; and Flower & Hayes, 1981, 1984). This truth about writing is
also a vehicle for reaching high school stu-
dents. Many teachers have found that teaching
the qualities of good writing as problem-solv-
ing decisions of authorship has a way of wak-
ing up the positive energies of resistant
students, high and low achievers alike (Myers
& Gray, 1983). Why is it that students who
"couldn't" or wouldn't write suddenly begin
to produce better texts, and begin to participate
in class discussions? We suspect that the an-
swer lies in the individual's feelings of efficacy
and authenticity. Our students saw writing
assignments as more "real" when they had an
idea they wanted to communicate to an audi-
ence, especially when tied to their career as-
pirations and their emerging beliefs about the
world. They found energy to write.

Sharing the assessment process with students
is another way to capture students' motivation.
Hillocks (1982) found, in a meta-review of class-
room research on writing instruction, that teach-
ers who merged frequent writing opportunities
with frequent examination of writing samples
elected better student writing than those who
gave assignments with rule-based prescriptions
or just writing opportunities alone. When stu-
dents and teachers analyze pieces of writing
together in an exchange of views, students can
retain a sense of individual authority as authors
and teachers convey standards of writing in an
authentic context. Individual, group, and peer
conferences are a time-consuming but neces-

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sary activity for looking at the writer’s experiments with diverse styles and purposes through the lens of both basic and enhanced visions of good writing.

The long-term outcome of these reflective sessions is an internalized sense of good writing that goes beyond the basics and serves as a vision for growth. As Spandel and Stiggins (1997, p. 5) assert.

Self-assessment is the foundation of revision. Without it, nothing changes. Without change, writing withers. Students who depend solely upon teacher-directed assessment will always view revision as a chore, someone else’s idea. Students who self-assess view revision as an extension of individual power; it is the writer’s right and privilege to revise.

Atwell (1998) suggests periodic portfolio reviews — looking at a student’s writing over time with the student — so that the teacher can better understand how the student has approached the task and what the student has accomplished so far. Then the teacher can make thoughtful decisions about how to guide the students in their next steps. Many excellent sources provide ideas for coaching students as they write for authentic audiences and purposes, such as Atwell (1998), Fletcher (1993), and Lane (1993). For increased responsibility and independence in editing, teachers can give students a handbook such as WriteSource 2000 (Sebranek, Meyer, & Kemper, 1995).

Allen (1995), Ball (1999), and Krater, Zeni, & Cason (1994), speaking from years of firsthand experience with the most difficult students, point out that the same principles guiding any good writing program are also appropriate to guide instruction for alienated and struggling students. Teachers, however, need to provide an extra measure of encouragement and support. Praise for strengths in the writing of even the lowest achieving students should be as frequent or even more frequent than attention to errors and weaknesses, even though it is difficult for teachers to see strengths as they read error-ridden texts. If real world texts such as magazines and newspapers fill the classroom, they can be used to demonstrate the authentic value of writing. Students seeking authenticity in their academic life will respond as teachers teach about good writing through these real-world texts. Struggling students also need to have frequent opportunities to reach a variety of audiences through letters, anthologies, and on-line exchanges (Garner & Gillingham, 1999).

Kirsch (1988) describes a basic student who slowly moves from his narrow representation of the writing task as discovery of the teacher’s list of “ingredients” to the more flexible and autonomous strategy of “having authority” over decisions specific to the particular type of communication. Once his interpretation of the task changed, the student’s writing began to improve. Once his teacher treated him as someone who could internalize a sense of good writing, she devoted energy to helping him make effective decisions about his writing. Teacher caring is important to all writers, but it is particularly important to basic writers, since they struggle, not only with the task of understanding good writing, but with the belief that they are permitted to do so.

The life goals of high school students, in all their personal and ethnic variety, place heavy demands on the high school curriculum. Adolescents have a strong need to be respected for their emerging ideas, and they want schools to assist them in communicating these ideas effectively. It is unfortunate that, when life goals are so dominant in students’ lives the high school environment, with its extensive requirements and fast-paced schedules, is more rigid than in the earlier years of schooling. Nevertheless, it is crucial that schools and teachers find the time and energy to express genuine caring for students, and create curriculum that is responsive to students’ struggles to establish personal and ethnic identities.

References

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