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The Intrinsic Factors that Influence Successful College Writing

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The Intrinsic Factors that Influence Successful College Writing

By

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
Gardner-Webb University
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Chapter 1: *Digging into the Insides*

Academic prowess cannot and does not solely determine the success of a student. If it did, students who rank in the top 10% of their classes and scored at a certain benchmark on national tests would always succeed, yet they do not. After twenty years of teaching high school students, I have witnessed a student, with a 35 on his ACT, failing to graduate college and working as a short-order cook. Several other students I have encountered graduated in the top ten percent of their classes, yet they dropped out after only one semester. High achieving high school students deemed ready by college readiness standards (e.g. ACT, SAT, class rank, and GPA), in fact, may lack many of the required components. In *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, Courtney Holles' findings suggest, "The test scores and grades used for admissions cannot reliably predict college performance because academic skill is just one part of college readiness" (121). In other words, simple numerical data is insufficient. Other intrinsic factors play an integral role. Examining collegiate writing is a way to gauge and improve intrinsic factors that will make young people ready for professional lives as adults. In an effort to understand the range and scope of intrinsic characteristics, this study will extrapolate the power of intrinsic traits best displayed through the first-year collegiate writing process and the crucial role high school teachers, college professors, and the students themselves play in it.

Humans often fail. Such action does not end the fight, however. When adverse situations strike, people must choose: either forge ahead, often rising from the ashes of our last debacle or alternatively, quit, move on, take another path. The desire for success motivates people and pushes them to achieve great heights. What this success looks like certainly differs for everyone and comprises a multitude of factors that establish this precedent. One aptitude that requires an extensive amount of time, effort, setbacks, and patience concerns that of writing. The

opportunity for an insightful discussion ensues when scrutinizing writing against the backdrop of a student's first year at an institution of higher learning. Undertaking the writing process is a true, accurate representation of the challenges and setbacks people must encounter as writers and as human beings. My guiding question is: How do first-year college writers characterize and extend the internal traits necessary for successful writing?

Colleges and universities continue to seek the best and brightest minds to welcome into their facilities of higher learning. The nation has attempted to create a common basis of knowledge and instructional practices to ensure that students are ready to meet these challenges. Weighing in additional factors such as GPA and national standardized tests such as ACT or SAT scores provides these institutions with a data framework to determine which students will likely succeed in their postsecondary educational endeavors. Some merit for this system exists; however, many students possess other traits that the current system ignores, leaving some outstanding candidates denied. By including additional elements and considerations that traditional numerical scores already provide, institutes of higher learning can absolutely attract and retain the best potential students. Patrick Sullivan, a college professor in Connecticut stated, "I think these qualities are much more vital to college success than, say, target SAT scores or recommended high school course sequences or even rhetorical knowledge and knowledge of writing conventions" (547). These students are determined to thrive, in part, because of their intangibles that colleges often overlook even if Common Core standards or other numerical data would elide admission. Before delving into the value of intrinsic characteristics, scholars must attend to the relevant history of the U.S. educational initiatives.

Standardizing Success

To help determine college acceptance and a sound educational knowledge base, the government developed Common Core. Common Core evolved after No Child Left Behind in an attempt to pledge that students in each state receive an educational blueprint with grade expectation benchmarks. Taking such Common Core steps will, in theory, help bolster U.S. academic performance, enhance scores against other nations, and provide “college-ready” graduates.

One assumption behind the push for college graduates is that enhancements in U.S. educational improvements can ameliorate the U.S. economy by producing highly qualified college graduates ready to engage in our economy in a meaningful manner. The desire and need for such graduates prompted big business and big government to unite. In early 2016, Rex Tillerson, then CEO of Exxon Mobile (and now the U.S. Secretary of State), staunchly advocated for Common Core and supported his position with significant monetary contributions. He even went so far as to claim that Exxon would stop campaign contributions for those who opposed Common Core. He further bashed the public education system by broadcasting, “We--the business community--are your customer, and you [public school systems] have got to step up your game--you are turning out defective products that have no future [human beings]” (Elkind 57). These harsh words, driven by corporate dollars, helped forge Common Core statutes. After quick implementation, several states balked at Common Core and federal government directives. Opponents of Common Core claim that it is “an immoral, freedom-robbing socialist agenda aimed at turning America’s children into mindless drones” (Elkind 51). Since federal dollars connect directly to state education budgets, something has to give. The current compromise resulted in 42 states using Common Core ideas, although several have changed the name and some aspects of the program (Elkind 60). Regardless of one’s stance on Common Core, school

districts, institutions of higher learning, and the American economy all need quality students who possess an innate desire to learn and become successful members of our society.

Adhering to the corporate-driven Common Core framework establishes grade-level benchmarks and a desired knowledge base, but many students buttress that knowledge with a skill set that is often overlooked because it is not easily quantifiable, intangible intrinsic characteristics. Institutions of higher learning must include students with a burning desire to succeed, an ability to tap into their creative potential, and the skill set to allow them to collaborate with others. Additionally, educational systems must teach students methods to overcome setbacks and implement procedures to fulfill goals. School districts can assist these young people in growing 21st century skills that standardized test scores and GPA's fail to reflect. Considering intrinsic traits students possess, colleges can improve acceptance and first-year writing course placement decisions. The greatest advantage for studying and touting intrinsic characteristics concerns the benefits that students will reap throughout their lives. Writing and its components form the perfect union to allow these traits to blossom. This process will require knowledgeable high school teachers; open, willing students; and college professors who desire implementation of the power of intrinsic traits.

Post Secondary Challenges

Universities face the large problem of the amount of graduates successfully completing their degree of choice in a timely manner. According to Peter Van Buskirk, "Fewer than 50 percent of students who enter college graduate in four years, and barely half will ever graduate from college at any time in their lives" (1). These outcomes can deeply hinder families and the students themselves as they accrue debt and often lack the educational resources to meet their incurred financial burdens. Society also suffers because debt-ridden, non-qualified (at times)

workers attempt to enter the job force lacking the educational prerequisites and knowledge base necessary for employment. Our society and the global economy require an educated populace in order to operate effectively; therefore, a college-educated society proves essential. Universities target and accept the students whom they deem “prepared” for success. They evaluate potential students based upon standardized test scores (ACT/SAT) and high school GPA’s. Charting where the two scores intersect establishes a student level that colleges scale for acceptance. Some institutions of higher learning demand more stringent levels while others express a more relaxed, lower composite evaluation. However, with so many students not fulfilling their goal of graduation or taking a significantly longer time to graduate, new criteria, especially those of an intrinsic nature, warrant further consideration.

A profusion of factors can affect standardized scores and college acceptance. This study will expound upon the intangible, intrinsic factors education often ignores in first-year college student writers. But, other factors also play an integral role in affecting a student’s preparedness and ultimate success. Since this study is limited in scope, several of the factors in this section will not be detailed, though they can directly impact student lives. At the high school level, student expectations include taking and passing specific courses declared appropriate for college knowledge. For example, in Colorado these requirements mandate a certain number of English credits (typically four), math credits (three to four), foreign language credits (two), and other credits district school boards deem important. Some other challenges students face include their community background (rural versus urban), which links directly to socioeconomic status. Mindy Herman et al. concluded, “Rural high school students from agriculturally intensive and socioeconomically distressed counties often demonstrate lower college entrance examination scores than their urban counterparts” (45-6). Often, rural, content students stay in their known

environment because they foresee no real advantages of higher education to change their life situation. Therefore, coupling exorbitant costs with a potentially low desire for a college degree and experiences can play a large role in the success of some students. Colleges and universities also privilege certain groups. Affirmative action programs and advocating for students with disabilities coalesce with the institutional culture and its respective values to fabricate a diverse student body with the potential for success. Discrimination in any form for any reason is not acceptable. All of these elements form the ideology and culture of the prospective university. For student success to occur, incoming students must find an appropriate match. Consequently, some colleges have even moved toward score-optional admissions practices, which allow applicants to forego sharing certain scores in lieu of other criteria for acceptance. Interested humans seeking more knowledge and the associated benefits of higher education face the dilemmas of attending college. These dilemmas include financial considerations, time, opportunity cost, and a suitable skill set from which to begin. If students decide to enroll, colleges will assess their abilities. Separating students based upon skills sets allows students to maximize their potential and start learning at an appropriate course level. For instance, students who already displayed writing proficiency at a level the school deemed appropriate do not need to retake a course designed to teach those skills. They previously demonstrated these skills suitably. If they do not, colleges implement remediation. Then, students must pass classes and hopefully graduate with a useable degree in four years (or bear the financial implications of attending for a longer duration). Despite all of these challenging factors, the importance of intrinsic qualities can unveil positive aspects of students that colleges should consider and students should work to strengthen in themselves. Writing provides the perfect tool for this initiative.

As writing has proven a difficult skill to master, the traits that students possess beyond classroom instruction become vital to student success and, therefore, warrant deeper exploration. “Possession or the lack of the right habits of mind can make or break a young person in graduate school or a workplace, especially when intellectual prowess alone will not suffice” (Hansen 540). These traits, that I am deeming *intrinsic qualities*, provide the opportunity to conduct a constructivist-based qualitative analysis to discover more about these elements that help propel collegiate writers to success.

Examining Intrinsic Qualities

School districts can assist institutions of higher learning by promoting these intrinsic traits often missed through typical acceptance practices. By expanding their qualifications’ criteria to account for additional traits that may not readily appear in the current acceptance process, colleges and universities can aid students and recruit more diverse student populations. Students also can discover and strengthen their individual traits to promote personal success. My qualitative study seeks to enumerate these traits and share experiences, especially those pertaining to college writing performance. College writing experiences serve as a model because they have the potential to entwine students’ curiosity and creativity, their self-discipline, self-efficacy, collaborative skills, reactions to setbacks, and their perseverance/grit levels. As they prepare themselves for 21st century challenges, students can start to understand their own intrinsic traits through their writing. Writing is one of the most daunting, yet essential skills, in all of academia and real-world discourse; therefore, interviewing students about their tribulations and successes could prove very productive to K-12 schools as well as university professors.

My study attempts to reveal the intrinsic traits of students who display an aptitude and garnered success in first-year collegiate writing courses. Each student brings his/her own unique

experiences to the qualitative study, yet interviews targeted student definitions of *preparedness* and *success* regarding writing. Specifically, my research delineates the impact of the traits of curiosity, self-efficacy, reaction to setbacks/successes, self-discipline (including time management and goal setting), collaboration, and perseverance/grit and the mindset these factors share with successful collegiate writing. Additionally, my study extends the conversation to include various purposes and types of writing to distinguish how the aforementioned elements affect the outcomes for the students. In other words, do certain elements better assist students in successful completion of a specific writing prompt/style? Moreover, I included how the role of mentors or writing guidance influenced these students in their writing endeavors.

To detail the importance of writing and cognition, I synthesized several cognitive theories as a heuristic to develop a framework that incorporates social development, cognitive theory, self-efficacy, and perseverance in the face of adversity. From these expansions, the role metacognition and intrinsic elements inside individuals utilized in writing and life emerged. Writing is a bridge that crosses subject-specific curriculum to further communication and enable writers to address an array of genres including, but not limited to, persuasive, informative, research-based, and creative. As writers undertake their processes, instructors charge them with many directives and steps in their respective processes. Some of these involve “students in seeking, evaluating, and integrating information” (Donham 6). After this, students submit a work for perusal and feedback. This feedback can come from writing labs or professors. In a study with an on-line writing lab (OWL), the largest complaint from students arose from a “lack of specific, critical, clear feedback” to which instructors claimed one of their biggest desires for students includes “learning how to understand and act on feedback” (Formo and Neary). Both sides, students and instructors, value the integral role that feedback can play in the process.

Behind the Curtain

Rather than focusing on data driven by standardized notions of success, examining evidence of learning theories will reveal a more applicable connection to the power and connection of intrinsic characteristics. I incorporated some metacognitive theorists to provide a framework to test against my participants' responses. These theorists, detailed more in depth later, expand upon how students learn in conjunction with their environment and mentoring. Additionally, my study includes the following other factors: curiosity levels, perseverance, and reactions to setbacks. Each of these elements can severely elicit varying levels of cognition and academic confidence. The importance of finding and using one's own voice to advocate for understanding and preconceived injustices is also a critical topic. Establishing a voice, especially toward an authority figure, to clarify or gain a new perspective resides at the heart of this notion. Adding feedback into the discussion elicits participant responses that display grit and long-term goal setting. Ultimately, the study encapsulates how mindsets form and how the writing experience can enhance student and teacher mindsets. From these theorists and thinkers, the application and methodology can coalesce with practical stories and information gleaned from interviews that will lead to potentially better methods of assessing prospective college students and better ways of helping them grow and improve.

The Significance

Conducting interviews allowed me to understand student experiences in their first college English/writing course. Through an examination of their language as they relayed their experiences, I seek to understand their perceptions of their internal characteristics, their preparedness for writing success across multiple genres, and their experiences with writing mentors who assisted in their writing endeavors. From their interviews, my study compared their

stories and experiences against the ideas of the social cognitive theorists mentioned earlier. Additionally, I learned about how these internal traits help constitute students and how they underpin a successful writing process. Compiling my findings discloses methods of bolstering my students' skills and the power of intrinsic intangibles. Hopefully, this conversation can extend to the university level and to reconceptualizing the acceptance process for incoming students. Institutions of higher learning risk forsaking many crucial elements if they opt not to review the inner workings of students. Writing, its processes, and all of its daunting challenges establishes a very suitable platform for this discussion because it entails all of the elements students are subjected to ranging from an actual, tangible score to the hidden, intrinsic components that this study helps to illuminate.

My student interviews, morphed with cognitive theoretical framework, can assist school districts and universities in promoting these intrinsic qualities to create better critical thinkers capable of exacting a meaningful impact upon 21st century societies. Moreover, as K-12 schools imbue students with these traits and value this individuality, colleges and universities will reconsider other characteristics of applicants and welcome a new wave of students and thinkers.

Chapter 2: *Cognitive Theorists*

One of the most compelling aspects about life is the people one meets. Each individual exudes traits unique to him/her based upon environment, life experiences and knowledge, and personal reactions to the vicissitudes life throws at us all. From this conglomeration of life, people forge their own set of reactions and coping mechanisms that enable some to merely survive and others to thrive. How people react to setbacks, face adversity, accept the assistance of experienced mentors, and set themselves up for success relies in no small part upon the internal, intrinsic components. Coupling cognitive skills with personal attitude and ever-developing intrinsic characteristics generates a recipe for success.

First-year writing courses provide a forum for students to acquire the skills necessary for successful collegiate writing across an array of fields of study and to comprehend college-thinking skills. Pushing our human limits and exposing ourselves to new educational pursuits enhances and strengthens our cognitive abilities. This is the scenario for all students entering a university, but other extenuating factors also play a huge role. Since one of the drawbacks to higher education is the cost, proper placement and optimizing educational opportunities prove to be extremely significant both financially and through time. Additionally, acquiring knowledge requires enhancing all human faculties, not just skills and facts but internal growth as well.

This internal growth stems from the enhancement of intrinsic traits as high schools finish with students and colleges begin to work with them. How do students learn and expand these capabilities? Do these intrinsic elements change concerning the task, especially regarding that of a writing nature? A symposium in 2010 addressed some of these issues where various members from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP) collaborated to structure the

skeletal necessities for postsecondary writers (O'Neill et al. 520-23). The symposium convened because of the concern that a vast amount of incoming students lack essential skills in various genres of writing, specifically research writing. Jean Donham extensively studies the preconceived notions of both high school and college teachers regarding the skill set that writers possess. Ranging from writing a thesis to finding and evaluating a source and its credibility produces varied results about the accepted competence levels (Donham 3-8). The challenges encountered in the writing process allow students to reveal some of their unique intrinsic elements that foster success.

Ultimately, students of any age develop internal characteristics that help constitute our individuality. These traits also help us navigate the treacherous waters of learning and especially of writing. It remains uncertain how these elements exist and the extent to which education can manipulate them; however, one absolute permeates the discussion--student writers across varied backgrounds and genres must extend these traits and move beyond mere numeric data.

Since my study reflects the power of educational psychology and seeks to understand more thoroughly the thought processes and cognitive development of late teens, gaining a better understanding of the human brain is paramount. I turned to some researchers who spent their entire lives studying mental cognition; however, my study will also move beyond some of their findings because most of the theorists dealt with early adolescent cognitive formation. I am more interested in late teen development, which the writing process will help reveal, and enhancing the skills of these collegiate writers.

I entered the teaching profession, in part, to assist young people in honing their skills as writers and critical thinkers. I wanted to be there to guide them in their journey. As with many

aspects of life, having a guide or mentor can prove invaluable. People seek the advice of parents or more experienced veterans in hopes of not making the same mistakes and learning from past failures. The writing process is no different. Writing requires putting oneself on paper for judgment and evaluation--a scary proposition. Professors and college writing labs serve as a bridge between the known expectancies of high school and the new frontier of collegiate composition. Universities should consider theories of cognitive development as they attempt to understand what impacts learning such as the role of mentors in student development and lend more credence to internal characteristics.

One of the forerunners of cognitive theory, Lev Vygotsky, postulated that humans pass through several stages of learning and development. Vygotsky's concept of socio-cognitive development centers primarily on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky's theory states, "Cognitive development occurs essentially as a result of interacting with more knowledgeable and competent others, who are willing to provide guidance and support in problem solving situations" (Schaffer 1). As people progress through the stages of learning, the inclusion of a knowledgeable mentor to serve as a guide reaps huge benefits. The mentor assists and moves learners to the next level from where they currently reside. As students learn and achieve at the current level, the next challenge and endeavor arises. This cognition occurs through social channels where the mentor and student actively engage with one another; thus, development moves from *intermental*, where the student keeps the knowledge inside, to *intramental*, where learners integrate ideas with others (Schaffer 1). Essentially, the "I" becomes a "we" in the acquisition of understanding, resulting in the creation of a new "I" who can better interact with more facets of the world. Vygotsky's acknowledgement and value of a mentor dovetails harmoniously with the struggles first-year college writers face. Someone else to aid the

student in his/her quest proves very valuable. The writing becomes more sophisticated and more audience-driven, especially through applying the wisdom of mentors. Yet, often students do not seek advice from writing labs or conference with professors about their writing, choosing instead to undertake the struggle for writing proficiency on their own. Though Vygotsky wrote on many elements of cognition, his belief in mentors connects with my teaching philosophy and the power of the team.

For everyone, the writing process and journey differ. Some writers are comfortable receiving comments as constructive criticism, but others take feedback as a personal affront, which decimates their confidence. The writing process takes on many forms, and so do the cognitive theories involving mentors and the learning process. Vygotsky rose to fame in the early 1980s after years of obscurity in Russia. As educators continued to seek new and potentially better ways of understanding and reaching students, different theorists' ideas entered the conversation. Some scholars exposed flaws with Vygotsky's theories because of their overall vagueness. They fail to explain how the mind produces learning, how to account for student individuality, how to consider alterations over time in the roles of the mentor and the student, and essentially how to expound upon the process as a whole (Schaffer 3). The entire writing process entails a multitude of elements and steps that chart a separate path for every student writer. Using tutors and mentors, writing can improve, if students are willing to listen and seek additional counsel.

Another aspect that drastically influences writers is that of environment. The methods of learning and the components that assist in the process compose our cognitive skills as writers. Some of the vague areas of Vygotsky's work opened the door for other scholars to extend opportunities for their perspectives. Vygotsky's ideas invited others into the discussion because

learning does not occur in isolation. Additional scholars acknowledge the level of cognition crucial for independent critical thinking and comprehension. Jean Piaget, a world-renowned educational psychologist, differs from Vygotsky by believing that the environment can help produce this cognitive enhancement, not mentoring. Piaget applied a constructionist approach to delve into the process of acquiring knowledge and the steps required. Piaget spent the bulk of his life studying the metacognition stages and formation of understanding in humans, starting with preadolescents. These formal stages reflect shifts in a learner's ideas and knowledge. Humans start with *intelligence* and use this to adapt and interact with their environments. As they evolve and learn, *schemata*, the constructed mental organizations, allow humans to further interact with their environments and act in accordance with new acquisition of knowledge (Huitt and Hummel 1-2). For instance, people are born with a brain, yet outside stimuli cause this complex organ to strengthen and improve. Recall learning about 'hot' and 'cold' for the first time. The stove was 'hot', and after touching it, we learned. For some, it may have taken repeated attempts, but it did eventually happen.

Thus, environmental interaction produces mental *schemata*, which enables humans to construct understanding. When students compose a draft of writing, they use their schemata to ascertain and fulfill the assigned criteria for the piece. After submission, feedback results. If the students accept it, changes occur to the draft and the view writers take of the work. These steps closely link with the next portion of Piaget's theories. The inclusion of the *assimilation*, where the environment applies itself or transforms, and *accommodation*, which changes the cognitive structures to accept outside elements from the environment, propels learners through the various stages. The final stage Piaget coined "formal operational," which occurs from late adolescence to adulthood. During this stage, appearing during the primary focus of this study, intelligence

evolves through combining symbols logically to convey abstract thoughts and ideas. This stage proves problematic for some as only 35% of high school graduates in industrialized countries attain a level of effectively implementing formal operations. Some never reach it at all (Huitt and Hummel 3). Simply because a person ages, he or she is not guaranteed to move through this level. The ability to quantify abstract thought and morph writing into an improved form is a direct extension of Piaget's theories. These ideas join to lead into patterns of growth.

Combining repetitions with external reinforcements builds a hierarchy of habits from which humans are able to assimilate reality into structures and tangible materials (Piaget 26-9). For instance, when students submit writing--after years of education at a K-12 level--to a college professor, they rely upon their "hierarchy of habits" (Piaget 27) to produce a draft. Piaget advocates that, "Knowledge is derived from action" (28), and the action of creating and submitting a paper will result in more data to assimilate and transform into higher operational structures. The feedback will determine if the students comprehended and conveyed their knowledge. If not, writers must adjust their cognitive structures. To conceptualize this idea, Piaget used an example with amphibians. When Piaget discussed a tadpole and a frog, he clarified that, "Though the function of the mind is the same at all levels, particular mental structures are susceptible to variation with growth. The brain of both the tadpole and the frog worked, but at varying levels. These same results vary in accordance to the environment in which the child lives" (159, 172). The student writers are not the same in college as they were in elementary school, but they still produced writing. Changes in their environments have aided in different levels of writing, yet writing happens at both levels. The change and enhancements occur via practice, repetition, and responding to feedback from instructors and environment.

Institutions of higher learning could serve as an environment to accelerate this cognitive growth and transform writing prowess.

After considering guidance and the environment in which writers compose, the next element absolutely essential is the individual writer. Personal confidence and the level of desire people possess to improve dictates the actions and responses student writers follow. One option for a student is to readily accept the comments and score given for a piece of writing and be content. Another student will react differently. Questioning and seeking to comprehend in hopes of performing better at the next opportunity, some students directly inquire and meet with instructors. Some students advocate more staunchly for their writing and education, expressing more desire to know and learn from mentor feedback. Bandura, another theorist, lends his thoughts to this aspect of the conversation.

Rather than focus on mentoring or environment, Albert Bandura, whom many deem the most notable living psychologist, avers the essential role of the individual. Bandura related the ideas of Piaget and Vygotsky to a degree. *Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory* video in part says that people learn by observing other people in a connected environment. Younger people tend to observe, imitate, and model the behavior of others. So, if student writers emulate their professors' writing models, then they can receive feedback. Bandura extends his ideas into some of the intrinsic traits that compelled this study. Students who intentionally seek out professors to gain a higher level of understanding are advocating for their own knowledge and genuine desire to improve (Bandura). Discussing a writing assignment with a professor and advocating for oneself extend upon Bandura's concept. The level of confidence a person has in his/her ability to perform a task Bandura termed "self-efficacy" (Yiu et al. 2-3). This belief professes that an individual's self-confidence will correlate with the level of success and

achievement for a given endeavor. As humans, we tend to stray toward the comfortable and resist the uncomfortable elements of a task or an entire task itself (Yiu et al. 3). When students enter the realm of higher learning at a college or university, they bring varying levels of self-efficacy with them based in part upon past performance and experiences. Certain skill sets, such as writing, could be areas of comfort and confidence for one student, and, conversely, an area of low confidence for another. Ironically, these two students could have earned the same GPA's and standardized test scores. The choice to seek guidance from a mentor, to learn and apply those lessons from an environment, and to advocate about those writing choices unify the above theorists and my writing project study. My limited study in no way represents all of the discussions influencing the world of metacognition or of writing, but it does extend some of the theories into a later stage of development (late teenagers) that often gets pushed aside in the conversation, as do the internal characteristics that truly separate students from one another.

Several theorists have attempted to compile these internal traits into a more comprehensive bubble that infuses multiple categories of elements with classifications that depict the hidden, internal aspects of humans. As such, scholars continue to articulate this discussion and introduce terminology such as “metacognitive,” “non-cognitive,” or instigate their own classification systems of essential intrinsic qualities. Regardless of their jargon, researchers seek understanding about curiosity, collaborative abilities, and the tribulations of students as they attempt to construct meaning. Meera Komarraju and others helped formulate the “Big Five” system that espouses the following five elements: Conscientiousness (self-discipline), Neuroticism (emotional stability), Extraversion (sociability), Openness (intellectual curiosity), and Agreeableness (helpfulness and cooperation with others) (472). These elements correlate directly with learning styles, specifically *reflective* and *agentic* (474). *Agentic* learning focuses

primarily on immediate retention and performing well on an exam. *Reflective* learning intends to build depth and retain long-term understanding. Each of these elements is also present in the writing process. Some students write merely to finish and obtain a grade. Others attempt to build upon past endeavors and mistakes and hone their craft continually.

David Conley proposed another potential system, which California implemented, that touts the 4 C's (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity). The key is to help students, especially those struggling, to develop these 21st century essential skills (3).

Though many scholars are weighing-in on the conversation, no absolute answers exist. However, these folks all concur with the idea that humans possess some intrinsic skills that enable them to overcome setbacks, view challenges differently, and persevere through the tumultuousness of learning. Educators and writers need to embrace the beauty of intrinsic factors and promulgate their positive influences.

Intrinsic attributes that warrant further consideration include self-discipline of which goal setting and time management help comprise. Other factors such as intellectual curiosity, collaborative abilities, and the ability to persevere (some label as grit) through setbacks and challenges extend the conversation currently facing academics. Angela Duckworth extensively studied *grit* and has even developed a grit test that measures and applies participants' levels of perseverance, long-term focus, and goal setting. Groups including the US Army, Stanford, and Fortune 500 companies all solicited her help and expertise. Her findings concluded that we could measure and determine grit; thus, universities can learn more about their potential students. Talent does not make a person gritty; in fact, often the two are unrelated or share an inverse relationship. Ultimately, two essential ideas that expound upon her philosophy are as follows: the ability to learn is not fixed, and failure is not a permanent condition. Duckworth also

discusses “living life as a marathon” and promotes the ability to see and obtain long-term goals (Duckworth). Writing is nothing if not an exercise in perseverance. Multiple drafts after layers of feedback and extensive opportunities to generate a work one can be proud of require intestinal fortitude and grit. New ideas about student self-reflection continue to evolve as well.

During my research about Angela Duckworth, she also praised Carol Dweck. Earlier in the school year, my principal gave me a copy of Dweck’s book *Mindset*, which conveniently rested at the top of my “to-read pile.” Since I thoroughly enjoyed Duckworth’s grit philosophy and I value my principal’s guidance, I read it. Dweck’s concepts take the intrinsic characteristics inside all of us and morph them into the power of the mindset. She terms mindset as “the view you adopt for yourself” (Dweck 6). The two primary mindsets are the fixed and the growth. A fixed mindset explicates our qualities as being predetermined and that believers of this mindset must continually prove their ‘greatness’. Conversely, a growth mindset advocates that our “basic qualities are things we cultivate through our efforts” (Dweck 4-6). Dweck’s book shares experiences of students, athletes, and business people who exude one mindset or the other, but one thing is certain according to Dweck—we can all change our mindset. “The brain forms new connections and “grows” when people practice and learn new things” (Dweck 219). The mindset shift coalesces with this growth if students seek it. Student writers experience no end of failure, or no end of opportunity, depending upon how they view the assignment. Dweck’s growth mindset joins Bandura’s self-efficacy, Piaget’s environment, Duckworth’s grit, and Vygotsky’s ZPD in conjunction with mentors to illuminate intrinsic, intangible characteristics that all humans have and can develop. Overlaying the writing process on top of the growth mindset provides traction for my study and an opportunity for students, high school teachers, and college professors to all glean the importance of intrinsics.

Though my research focuses more on how students succeed in their first collegiate writing course, initial class placement has crept into the discussion. This placement can also entwine with some of the aforementioned theorists and the steps some are implementing toward the acknowledgement of intrinsic traits. One way some universities teach and espouse the value of self-efficacy is through student-driven placement. Presently many universities are relinquishing some of their decision-making power and allowing students to direct their own self-placement in first-year writing courses. According to Dan Royer and Roger Gilles from Grand Valley State University, using “External indicators such as SAT/ACT scores, the TSWE, or high school GPA...do little in the way of convincing students and teachers that everyone is in the right place for the right reasons” (3). One preference is a diagnostic essay or portfolio, but these writing samples are often “incomplete snapshots” and also require additional time and budgets to evaluate. Furthermore, they “assert that the placement contexts and resulting documents are unacceptably pale” (Royer and Gilles 3-4). Therefore, the proposal of direct self-placement (DSP) evolved. Incorporating DSP requires colleges to explain individual class expectations and then allows the students to select the appropriate course based upon, in large part, work ethic and the ability to handle one’s life situation (intrinsic qualities). In order for DSP to have even the chance to succeed, pedagogical program components must be clearly in place and evaluation aspects must extend across the staff in a uniform capacity. Students have more voice and control of their education from the onset, which also limits parent and student complaints. This option is still in the implementation stage because colleges have not fully measured its effectiveness (Royer and Gilles 4).

My study gives voice and specificity to the power of intrinsics and the cognitive process by sharing the successes and tribulations students have experienced as first-year college writers.

Moreover, it describes and analyzes how intrinsic factors form and how these factors influence student perceptions of success. The intrinsic factors I detailed in my study centered on curiosity, determination (grit), self-efficacy, goal setting, organization, and a growth mindset. These traits (and others) propel some students to success and expand their cognitive growth and abilities. For each student, his/her journey is unique and personal because of the intrinsic make-up.

Chapter 3: *Methodology & Steps*

As a high school English teacher of over twenty years, I have been blessed to work with so many amazing students, but challenges definitely remain. One of the hardest skills to teach and for students to grasp and demonstrate competency occurs with writing. With this difficulty, several other questions arise that pertain to the challenges these young writers face. Are high school teachers doing enough to prepare students for collegiate writing? Do universities accurately place students in their writing classes to ensure writing comprehension and enhancement of the necessary skills to write successfully in college? My study does not directly answer either of these questions, but both share relevance with understanding something that is often overlooked in high school classrooms and probably undervalued in collegiate ones— intrinsic qualities. Writing is one of the most subjective and tumultuous endeavors for writers to embark upon. In college, writing is a new game for a different audience. Typically, the first papers students write at the college level score rather poorly, especially when compared to high school writing. Now, I am not suggesting that high school teachers do a poor job. On the contrary, they are charged with teaching writing, organizational skills, time management, and hopefully some inner strength and fortitude tips that will allow students to persevere and succeed. College professors face the daunting task of instructing student skill sets from vastly different backgrounds and quality levels to infuse their charges with the abilities to write successfully in college. They too must be aware of and help foster the growth of these intrinsic traits because successful writers and solid citizens illuminate these elements on a daily basis. Sharing these stories can make a significant difference for teachers, students, and professors.

Since I desired to capture student stories, a qualitative approach was the best fit. The qualitative approach does not focus on numerical data, rather the individual stories will allow for

research and findings from an inductive framework to extend into some generalities that could prove beneficial for the entire spectrum of people involved (the teachers, students, and professors). The worldview for this project was that of social constructivism because I want to understand the subjective meanings of individual students (Cresswell 1-4) as they relayed their collegiate writing experiences. Though my interviewees all graduated from the same high school, their personal, complex, and varied background environments coupled with vastly different college experiences serve as a terrific backdrop for social constructivism.

Writing has proven a difficult skill to master. The traits that students possess beyond classroom instruction can prove vital to student success and, therefore, warrant deeper exploration. Kristine Hansen, a writing professor at BYU has staunchly advocated for a framework for establishing elements that can help determine college readiness. In part, she espouses that critical thinking, rhetoric, and the writing process will actually allow for more accurate measurements and determinations (541). She also professes that college teachers, not bureaucrats, AP readers, or IB readers are qualified to determine this level of knowledge and expertise proclaimed through tests. At the core of her convictions are elements beyond mere grades or scores. “Possession or the lack of the right habits of mind can make or break a young person in graduate school or a workplace, especially when intellectual prowess alone will not suffice” (Hansen 540). These traits, that I am deeming intrinsic qualities, provide the opportunity to conduct a constructivist-based qualitative analysis to discover more about these elements that help propel collegiate writers to success.

In designing interview questions, I used Vygotsky’s ideas because he was one of the forerunners in studying cognitive thought. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) details where and how we as humans learn best (Vygotsky xi). As students and writers,

we cognitively evolve from constant regulation to self-regulation based in no small part upon the influence of outside mentors. Instructors generate opportunities for students to demonstrate their prowess and adhere to the assignment mandates. Thus, writing does not happen in isolation because an audience is required to create a reader and an environment in most cases. “Vygotsky was convinced that children’s potential is best demonstrated when working with a more competent person than working on their own” (Schaffer 1). The feedback and tutelage mentors provide develops first-year college writers as they start to grasp the difficult nuances of higher-level thinking and writing. Student writers almost function as apprentices under the direction of writing mentors.

The writing environment and expectations teachers establish for their students are paramount to the growth of student writers. While mentoring is a critical aspect of the conversation, the brain’s ability to join words into coherent thoughts is also of extreme importance. Enter Jean Piaget, who provided the educational psychology background that continues to initiate many discussions. Piaget disagreed with some of Lev Vygotsky’s cognitive elements because Piaget focused more on the impact environments can have on students as they attempt to climb to “formal operational” brain stage where logical symbols relate to abstract concepts to relay intelligence (Huitt and Hummel 3). This is exactly what writing, successful writing, attempts to accomplish—the solidification of those abstract ideas. Not everyone can achieve this proficiently, but my study will help explicate part of the struggle.

As a teacher, I constantly push my students to advocate for themselves and use their voices to rectify wrongs or perceived wrongs. Albert Bandura coined his term “self-efficacy” for such actions. One of the hardest parts for younger students occurs when they realize mommy and daddy are not there to do it for them. They are now, or should be, responsible for their

performances and accept the consequences of their actions. Some students never realize this, or perhaps they do in retrospect. I wanted to know why some student writers would conference, question, and seek understanding while others just accepted their grades. This idea coalesces with the indomitable spirit of humans to get back up and try again.

As I continued to research intrinsic traits, one person perpetually appeared in my efforts—Angela Duckworth and her Grit Test. Duckworth is a professor at the University of Pennsylvania and the founder of Character Lab which studies and advances character development. After quitting a high paying job to become a 7th grade teacher, Duckworth, whose father pointed out her lack of genius, studied her students. Student motivation and response to adversity deeply intrigued her. She continued to study mental make-up and published *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* in 2016. Her ideas resonated with Fortune 500 company CEO's, professional sports teams, and the U.S. military (and others). They have all employed her Grit Test to learn more about the ability of perseverance (Duckworth). Similarly, writing epitomizes a series of getting knocked down and often trampled. What, however, constitutes the need to rise again and the desire to forge ahead? Duckworth's dedication to these ideas opened up an entirely new area of study, which harmonizes with my study's intent.

From two outside sources, I found my missing piece for my study. Duckworth mentioned Carol Dweck in her grit discussions, and my principal provides a book each year for growth and improvement. I found Dweck's *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* sitting in my bag waiting to share its powerful message with me. Dweck articulately writes, "Remember, test scores and measures of achievement show you where a student is, but they don't show you where a student could end up" (66). In detailing the growth mindset, Dweck espouses that abilities can expand, so growth is possible, and success is a path people can choose (39).

Research Design

My empirical study allowed for both evidence and observation to unite to examine students' writing experiences. My research questions attempted to unravel their stories while being able to delve deeper into the cognitive thoughts of recognizable scholars. The research questions that directed my project are as follows: How do first-year college writing students characterize "preparedness" and "success"? How do first-year college writers characterize the internal traits necessary for successful writing at the college level? How do first-year college writing students integrate their internal traits into a variety of writing assignments and prompts? How has the use and tutelage of writing mentors, if utilized, impacted the intrinsic development of first-year college writers?

Methodology

Adhering to the process outlined in my GWU approved IRB, I interviewed six students who were previous graduates of a public high school. I diversified my subjects by selecting both males and females who followed the traditional track as well as those students who graduated with honors and have completed the AP college track. I invited the participants via email, which I obtained from the high school database that keeps addresses for surveys and reunions, to be involved in the study. Since some of the students scored well on their AP tests, they received credit for freshman composition classes; therefore, some participants enrolled in higher level writing classes. I selected participants based upon enrollment in a college level English or writing course during 2016-17. My data includes transcripts from personal interviews conducted with my interviewees. I also asked the interviewees to share writing samples with me regarding instructor feedback they received. After participants signed the consent form, which they scanned (or took a photo of) and emailed back to me, I scheduled interviews with them. I

conducted all interviews in person and recorded them for transcription purposes. I stored the video recordings on my private computer with a thumb-drive back up. I also emailed participants Angela Duckworth's Grit Test (see Appendix A), which they completed and emailed back to me or brought to our interview.

Conducting interviews allowed me to capture their experiences in their first college English/writing course. Through an examination of their language as they relayed their experiences, they revealed their perceptions of their internal characteristics, their preparedness for writing success across multiple genres, and their experiences with writing mentors to assist in their writing endeavors. From their interviews, I compared their stories and experiences against the ideas of the social cognitive theorists mentioned previously. From my study, I have learned about the role of these internal traits and their interconnectivity with the writing process. After compiling my findings, I have started to ascertain methods of bolstering my students' skills and the intrinsic intangibles. This knowledge about intrinsic elements will help me do a better job of preparing high school students for the rigors of collegiate writing. Similarly, students can dig into themselves through self-reflection to understand how they deal with adversity. Finally, college professors can begin to understand intrinsic traits and infuse their teaching of writing to expose and strengthen such traits in their writing students.

Interview Elements

I conducted interviews in a variety of places based upon participant scheduling allowances. These interviews ranged from 20-36 minutes even though participants received the same questions. Some of the responses covered specific classroom and instructor examples that interviewees chose to share. The specificity of their stories revealed a great deal about the intrinsic factors these participants imbue as writers, students, and people.

Though I used the primary research questions, I also attempted to allow participants the opportunity to expound upon their experiences, so what follows is a list of questions that I asked in all interviews:

1. How would you define “preparedness” regarding your first college English/Writing course?
2. Do you feel as though you were prepared for your first English/Writing course? Why/not? Explain.
3. How do you define “success” regarding writing?
4. What internal factors do you possess that make you a successful writer?
5. How did you develop these traits? Which are your strongest? Why?
6. How is writing in college different from writing in high school?
7. Are there specific genres of writing (research, persuasive, creative, etc) you excel at more than others? Which ones? Why do you believe this to be the case?
8. Has anyone assisted you in developing your writing skills? If so, elaborate.
9. How do you react to a writing setback, difficulty, or a poor grade?
10. How did you score on the grit test? Do you feel that this is an accurate portrayal of your grit and perseverance?

From these questions, interviewees delivered a rather comprehensive picture of their writing experiences as first-year college writers. I recorded the videos using my iPad and then uploaded the footage to my computer. Then, I transcribed the footage verbatim. I did experience a few technical glitches that I will expound upon later. After transcribing all of the interviews, I coded student responses against the questions above. For each main question (labeled 110, 120, 130, etc), I coded responses that linked directly to that question. For instance, any response that pertained to question 120 (Defining Success) was labeled as 121, 122, and so forth for each various answer. To clarify, if a student’s response was “Success is based upon grades,” I coded

it as 121. A response of “Pride in the writing indicates success” received a 122 code. From the numbers, I was able to organize responses and observe patterns. Most students shared multiple responses to several questions, so I needed additional codes. Then, I compiled the responses and discussed the findings (see Chapter 4 for more specifics).

This method exposed several patterns and the power of individuality. Based upon many of Piaget’s concepts about environment and the “formal operational” stage of cognitive development, differences clearly arose. Similarly, the use of mentors and outside assistance greatly differed, but when joined with responses to feedback, the overlap and significance of the intrinsic factors started to become readily apparent. The use of Duckworth’s Grit Test (maximum quantifiable score of 5) could have synthesized a qualitative and quantitative mixed study; however, I used the numerical data more as a type of feedback students would receive from their instructors in a writing assignment. The Grit Test presented students with a chance to receive, ponder, and then discuss information that evaluated them and one of their intrinsic traits. What they did with this information and how they handled the comments directly corresponds to who they are and how they see themselves. The empirical stories from my qualitative analysis provided a forum for both the interviewees and me to converse about the results and generate an opportunity for self-reflection and an assessment of the mindset students employed.

Limitations

However, my study did have several limitations. For one, I only interviewed six students who all came from the same rural high school with a similar English background and me as their teacher at least once. Some of their accounts, therefore, I could probably predict because I helped them reach their conclusions as high school writers. I did try to vary my selected students, so my study included two general course track students and four AP students. Of those four, two

“passed” (score of 3 or above) and two did not. However, I did only interview one male and five female participants. This was primarily due to the female students accepting my invitation to participate. I really had no prerequisites on interview subjects except for taking a college English class in the students’ freshmen year of study. But, my study did require volunteers, so I used those who accepted.

Another limitation that hindered my study was technology. I attempted to video record every interview on my iPad; however, technical difficulties derailed part of this. Initially, my iPad worked great, but I could not upload the first few videos to a transcribable format because they were too lengthy. Then, my iPad’s storage memory became too full. Instead, I tried my phone, shorter video segments, and my computer as recording devices. One interview had parts on three different devices. In all, the endeavor proved somewhat frustrating, especially during iPad transcription that would not allow for the implementation of additional helpful software. By using a bit of grit (thank you, Angela Duckworth), I did prevail. Linking my interview responses with those of the cognitive theorists, I certainly found existence, implementation, and growth of the intrinsic qualities expressed in the student writers. I will expound upon these specifics in the subsequent chapters.

The largest shortcoming in my study actually covers a couple of aspects. First, I wanted colleges and universities to rethink their placement and admissions protocol to address intrinsic traits. I should have asked more questions about my participants’ placement process. Second, I want to delineate the power of intrinsic components to both high school and college instructors. This may entail more interviews from a wider, more diverse audience and an extended review of current collegiate selection practices. Perhaps I should even include a writing prompt for my

participants where they detail their writing process and their feelings concerning feedback. To actually witness their writing could provide more insight for me as a researcher.

Future Lessons

Organizing the interviewees' responses and categorizing them lead to some insightful conclusions. Hopefully, this conversation can extend to the university level and reconceptualize the acceptance process for incoming students. Perhaps varied writing prompts will allow prospective students the chance to specify their writing processes and articulate learning elements and moments as they traverse the paper. A paper from the student about the student could provide colleges with new insights about the potential incoming student. Becoming more aware of the intrinsic elements should drive high school teachers to stretch these elements and urge students to develop more stringently their own hidden treasures. Students more aware of their own internal traits will compose writing for college professors that extols these virtues in their writing. Educators and students alike must share and consider the power of intrinsic factors in order to enrich the teaching and learning experiences.

Chapter 4: *Data Collection*

The intrinsic factors that make students successful collegiate writers play a prominent role in their development as writers, yet as students enter the university for the first time, many other factors and new experiences come into play. Students are possibly unaccustomed to the schedule of classes meeting only two or three times per week. Courses designed around only a few papers and tests make performance on pre-determined dates critical to success. The additional challenges of being away from home, often in a new place, with a new roommate, and distanced from a known support system generate many burgeoning challenges as well. Often the new excitement and exuberance dampens when students entertain their first writing assignment. This feeling occurs even more extensively when students receive their first piece of writing back after a graded submission. Now the real opportunities start.

Introduction

Currently, colleges have various methods for placement in first-year writing courses. Combining a table that measures GPA and SAT/ACT scores creates a placement score. Some universities use this score to determine if students require a remedial writing course or if their skill set is satisfactory to warrant placement in a standard 101 freshman composition course. Students earning a 3 or above on the College Board AP English exam will typically pass out of a beginning course. Their specific level of success on the AP test and the college's stipulations will determine overall placement. Some universities administer a writing exam or version of their own placement test to generate a placement profile. Tests such as Accuplacer or a college specific writing test also aid in determining student placement. Other universities solicit a response from the applicants requiring directed self-placement (DSP) by the students themselves. Regardless of the placement path universities opt for, most do not evaluate other characteristics

that help distinguish students from their peers. As students begin their academic journey in college, the rigors of college academia will test their internal fortitude.

From this moment, students may feel as though they have little control because of their various classes requiring specific criteria with individual professors each with his/her own agenda and desired method of accomplishing the assigned tasks. The institution or professor places students at their mercy, so the students' reactions to their environment and instructor feedback can and will determine their success. After the initial placement, students work through the prescribed writing assignments. In these initial writing classes, the focus is on the steps they undertake as writers and most importantly how they react to their received feedback. Some students merely resign themselves to completion and submission of the assignments. If they pass, they are content. For other students, however, the desire to learn, grow, and improve upon the initial writing submission creates a unique opportunity to showcase latent talents that education often obfuscates.

My Study

My study focused on a component that warrants further consideration—intrinsic elements that help drive students in the face of adversity and new challenges. These traits, which include perseverance (grit), self-efficacy, curiosity, time management, goal setting, organization, and mindset (either fixed or growth), must receive acknowledgement as additional measures of student worth and gauging future success. My study recounted the experiences of how students felt upon initially entering their first writing class. By examining the process, frustrations, and successes of students enrolled in first-year collegiate writing courses, I discuss the importance of the aforementioned intrinsic qualities. Universities should allow for the reconsideration of initial

placement because what is valued in determining student placement is not always what is paramount in determining success. More importantly, high school teachers must imbue their students with intrinsic qualities. College professors must consider these traits and promote intrinsic excellence through writing as well. My study fills in the gaps for some of the missing elements that future students and educators can contemplate to ensure that all students are receiving a fair opportunity and the best scenarios for growing as writers and as people.

The Participants

My study expounds upon the first-year writing experiences, detailing the journey of six students who graduated from a public high school. I altered the names appearing in the study to allow the participants to retain anonymity. Though the study only involved six students, I did attempt to obtain multiple experiences and some randomization by selecting students with diverse academic backgrounds and experiences. Since students earned various levels of credit in high school due to performance on the AP English exam, results and experiences for the participants differ. Two students took a general academic course of study in high school and received a regular diploma (Erin and Anne). Two students took the college prep high school track and took the English AP exam, but neither received a “3” (College Board’s score indicating passing or attaining a level of success that would indicate demonstrating a “successful” skill set for college composition). These two students I called Kendra and Sarah. The last two students completed both the college prep high school track and earned a score of “3” or above on the AP English exam, indicating an acceptable level of proficiency. These two students I named Adam and Heather. These students also study an array of majors ranging from Undeclared to Nursing to Kinesiology to Engineering. From this small sample size, I could not form broad, far-reaching

conclusions; however, their stories do lend keen insight into the power of intrinsic traits through the tumultuous adventure of first-year collegiate writing courses.

Preparation

After a brief introduction of my study and inquiring as to their respective colleges and primary course of study, I jumped into the interviews. Since I wanted a starting place for each of the participants, regardless of their past performances or course of study, I inquired as to their level of preparedness upon entering their first collegiate writing class. As with most late teens, they always feel prepared for anything. Of my six participants, four felt extremely prepared (those who took the honors college track an AP course) because of their ability to write high quality essays in a quick amount of time. They also touted their skills in analysis. The other two (Erin and Anne) felt “confident and prepared, but still had some apprehension.”

High School and College Differences

Through the course of my interviews, I also tried to establish clear differences between high school and college courses and discern how these differences could affect the college experience. A few of the students (all of the AP track) felt that the professors had very different expectations because the professors coached the students to simplify and almost decrease their skill sets by altering their writing styles. Part of this frustration stems from not knowing their audiences or their expectations fully, I imagine. The largest difference from four of the six students was the requirement of using APA for citations as opposed to MLA, which they all learned in high school. This change vexed some of them, but they ultimately dealt with it and moved forward. Some of this need for APA resulted from writing concerning the social sciences. One of the ironic findings that students recounted differently was that of academic freedom.

Students often say they want to select everything for themselves; however, when the reality of the assignment arrives, their opinions can change. Heather and Erin (AP and regular track respectively) both appreciated the opportunity to select and drive their own projects, but Anne balked at the chance for academic freedom. She preferred to receive clear and absolute direction from her professors regarding her writing assignments. Though AP students are more accustomed to writing that adheres to a strict format, I found their considerations to randomly fall across both categories of student self-directed or teacher-driven. The ultimate consensus that all six interviewees shared was the importance of understanding and adapting to their respective professors' preferences. Every one of the students conveyed frustration and a brief explanation of how they modified their methods of doing things to conform to their professors' alterations. A couple of them referred to this as "playing the professor's games," yet once they discerned the rules of this game, they started to forge ahead and be successful. If they recall, they had to do the same in high school; however, since they all graduated from a relatively small high school, they had the same teachers for many classes thereby learning their high school teachers' expectations and idiosyncrasies over a longer duration of time.

Success in Writing

Students and teachers alike all possess their own definitions of success, and this concept absolutely affects students' self-esteem and their perceptions of the learning experience. The largest debate between the students was the value of a grade versus self-satisfaction and the actual process of learning and improvement. Adam stated, "If I'm writing for a class or a teacher, then success is based largely upon the grade for the teacher because if you're trying to accomplish some goal with your writing that was laid out for you, then it can be argued that the grade is a measure of your success toward achieving that goal in a certain sense." The other

students, including Adam, all stressed understanding, hard work, and pride in their writing endeavors as more worthwhile to them than the grade. Kendra put it simply by proclaiming, “Grades are nice but not everything.” Erin, a regular education track student, really focused on effort and her self-satisfaction when she advocated, “Even if you have a C, you can still be as successful as somebody who has an A, if you are putting forward your best effort.” Every one of the participants to some degree touted the desire for pride of accomplishment and personal growth and enhancement with their writing as the true measure of “success.” Success, for this group, depends primarily on self-satisfaction with a piece and effort expended to produce a work of which the author can be proud.

Intrinsic Factors

As I delved further into these students, the cornerstone of my study was about to reveal itself—those elusive intrinsic factors that distinguish students from one another. The elements that conceptualize differences between students and establish perceptions about life truly do separate folks. The idea of intrinsic qualities was especially difficult for Anne, Erin, and Heather to grasp. They all paused for a minimum of four seconds before responding. Erin needed additional prompting and questions to help her internalize exactly what an intrinsic factor could be. Perhaps they were just deeply pondering their response, but I had the distinct impression that the concept was one they did not often contemplate. The one common characteristic all six students shared was that of a growth mindset. They viewed writing as a never-ending struggle for improvement of skills and conveyance of ideas. Their reactions to setbacks, which the study will subsequently discuss, demonstrated the value of learning and ameliorating their writing prowess.

Sarah is an interesting case because she professes to enjoying several intrinsic traits but none more heavily weighted than another. Her self-accountability really seems to be at the heart of all of her discourse as she explained her desire to complete her homework and score well from a young age without her parents forcing her to take action. Organized goal setting and self-efficacy also became apparent as she consulted with her professors after each writing assignment. Erin and Heather believe their strongest intrinsic trait is organization although Erin's explanation of her organization was central to time management and getting a large-scale plan established. Heather took organization to a priority level. By using the syllabi professors presented and a planner, Heather could start large writing assignments two weeks early and allot extensive time for revision. Their systematic approaches produced a roadmap to writing success.

Kendra selected the route of self-efficacy and advocating for what she needed. As a student with a processing disability because of childhood visual impairment, Kendra fought for understanding by using her voice throughout her elementary and high school educational experiences. Her mantra of "If you need something, you go up and you figure it out" served her well in her first year of college writing. Adam and Anne named grit or perseverance as their most dominant trait. Part of Anne's determination stems from her education being primarily dependent upon her own financial resources, so she does not want to waste her time and is therefore more motivated to achieve. Her maturation is evident from her comment of, "I'm definitely a much different person than I used to be when it comes to school!" Adam lauds the value of perseverance with his comment, "In any [activity], not just writing, I would say determination is vital to success because in any thing you do in life, parts of life are going to beat you down. You just have to get through. And when you do, you accomplish something in growing and in the struggle." Multiple intrinsic elements exist in all of these students, yet their outlook and their

process for completing the journey result from different emphasis. Regardless of how their goals are reached, the growth mindset of continuing to view writing and learning as a positive experience which teaches people who desire to learn promotes the value of intrinsic elements.

Writing Processes and Genres

After interviewing each of the students, it became evident that their processes for writing varied greatly as did their preferred genres. The most intriguing aspect of their responses occurred because of their given expectations and parameters. Both Heather and Sarah preferred research-based writing because of the specific structure format prescribed by their professors. Conversely, Adam and Erin desired creative writing because of the lack of constraining requirements set forth. They instead touted their freedom of choice and wish for variety. Anne and Kendra both enjoyed narrative writing that could tap into their passion and personal experiences. Regardless of preferences, students must be adept at a myriad of writing genres and prompts, thereby making choices to aid in their success.

They also shared their thoughts about organization and their writing methods. The explanation of their writing processes and the steps they each followed also conveyed some unique attributes. Anne openly admitted to procrastinating, especially first semester, with her writing because she had a difficult time starting, and when an assignment failed to excite her, her motivational juices waned. After some self-reflection, Anne altered her approach to resemble, in part, that of the other participants. All claimed for a large essay assignment due roughly two weeks from now that starting early was a key to their success. Various plans from outlining to free writing to research and contemplation formed the next step. Then the students wrote their rough drafts. This timeframe ranged from 2-6 days before the final draft was due. Anne said that

her first paper without this approach was “abysmal.” Upon completion of the rough draft, the process really differed for the students. Some just edited and revised on their own while others relied upon peers for feedback. Both Sarah (an AP student) and Erin (a regular high school track student) utilized the writing centers at their respective universities extensively. Often they would complete their paper a week prior to the due date, share it with the writing center, revise it, and then share it again with the center before final composition submission. Kendra used her classroom graduate assistant before large submissions. Regardless of the high school track completed, students used the writing center to varying degrees. Those that did utilize it found the help to be very worthwhile. All of the students did express some frustration in learning some of the expectations and nuances each professor desired, especially when it came to writing. Adam and Sarah chafed at the directives of “use simpler sentences” and “use simpler vocabulary.” Both felt that they were taking a backwards step in some regards because of these stipulations. After learning what individual professors wanted and making wise use of their time through preplanning, organizing, and drafting, students did feel as though they had generated a successful piece of writing. Employing various steps and traversing the pitfalls of any genre of writing, each student expressed the ability to perform well, when given clear directions and formatting by the professor. Success was achievable!

Mentors

Mentors provide guidance, suggestions, and feedback as writers clamber through the writing process. Professors and other experienced professionals from writing centers can prove an invaluable resource for writers, especially those new to college campuses. Since professors create the assignments, they are familiar with formatting expectations and possess first-hand knowledge of the desired final paper. All six students paid acute attention while professors

explained writing prompts and guidelines, but they did not share drafts with them until after they received feedback, which the subsequent section will detail. Neither Heather nor Adam (the two students who passed the AP exam) utilized any outside assistance from peers or writing center workers. Sarah, Erin, and Kendra all relied heavily on the writing center or a graduate assistant. Sarah said that she also worked with a peer writing mentor which entailed her meeting at a set appointment time where she [Sarah] “would read it aloud, and then the peer mentor would read it aloud, and then we would go through it together and see what worked or didn’t. It was so helpful.” Sarah felt “super self-conscious” about her writing, so she did not share any of it with her peers. In fact, both Adam and Sarah said that peer feedback would potentially be helpful because it provides another set of eyes, but if it did not happen, it was not a big deal.

Anne shared a completely different experience. She started with, “When I write essays, it takes me so long to do because I’m so bad at writing.” Her professor altered the writing environment by requiring students to undergo several different methods of constructing essays, planning, and starting them. Every student completed each method. From this exercise, Anne found a system that allowed her to find support and evidence in the middle and then branch back to her thesis at the end. Here the professor provided many tools for her to experiment with and tweak to suit her needs. From this, Anne gained much more confidence in her writing. Mentors significantly aid fledgling writers in their endeavors by providing reassurance, constructive criticism, and a sounding board for the thoughts that writers attempt to conceptualize.

Feedback

After students receive their graded essays, feedback and the intrinsic factors collide to present students with a proliferation of opportunities. Many students receive their graded essays,

look at the score, and if it meets a passing result, they simply accept it and move on to the next one. Other students gnaw on the feedback, contemplate the messages, and even conference with their professors in hopes of honing their writing skills. The attitude about and reaction to feedback delineates many of the intrinsic traits as well.

A few generalities regarding feedback revealed that students do look at and appreciate professor comments because it does provide a forum for learning and growth. Without the feedback, students feel their efforts diminished and their time not valued. According to Adam, who experienced frustration with some comments, said, “A lot of things are just persnickety. I don’t feel they are real writing criticism.” Upon receiving graded papers, the students (even Anne) reviewed the comments with an eye toward improvement. Most were initially sad or frustrated, but as they read the comments through, they spent more time chastising themselves for silly mistakes. They also realized that between some of the harsher comments resided some positives, which buoyed their confidence. The paper became a stepping-stone for growth in their next essays. As they shared their feedback and adversity experiences, their intrinsic qualities also divulged their values and coping mechanisms.

Classes also seem highly dependent upon how professors incorporate feedback and demonstrate the value or lack thereof for their students. In another class, Adam received a 77% on his first essay, far below his desired result. After meeting with his professor and accepting her comments, he (and all other students) obtained the opportunity to rewrite the essay. He took it. In his words, “She allows rewrites so you kinda take your lumps and wounded pride and go nurse it while you rewrite the paper...and come up with another product you can be proud of and turn that in. Without the rewrite, it would be a lot more difficult to take some of that.” Adam’s “lumps” mattered to him because his growth mindset pushed him beyond mere completion. He

concluded that the feedback and writing experience did teach him a tremendous amount, and he truly felt his skills burgeoned. His perseverance revealed itself, as did his self-efficacy and open mindset to seek improvement.

Erin's experience revealed her self-efficacy as well. After reviewing her professor's comments, she set an appointment to visit with her professor. She lobbied for points in one case and inquired about rewriting in another. But, her typical process involves "usually just taking it back and using whatever they wrote to grow in my next essay or writing prompt." Again, the growth mindset is evident as the comments designate teachable moments.

Kendra's initial feedback devastated her because of a low C on her first writing assignment. Three written papers and three tests comprised her overall class grade, and in order to remain in the program, she must earn and retain a minimum GPA. Her first thought was, "I'm going to fail my first class—end of the world. But, I had to take a step back and go in and talk to my teacher." Midway through her response, I saw her smile and directly gaze at me in a very collected manner. She displayed her maturation and growth mindset right in front of me. Her next essays extol the value of self-efficacy as she earned a B, then an A, and an A on the final test. Not only did she maintain the growth mindset, her advocacy and perseverance paid huge dividends.

Even Anne, who classifies herself as a "bad writer," did not rest on her laurels. Upon receiving her feedback, she was disappointed and sad, but she did review the comments (something she said did not happen in high school) and set an appointment with her professor. She shared her thoughts of, "Getting a paper back and seeing a lot of writing always scares me. I'm like Ohhhh not good, but after I read it through, I felt ok because it wasn't all bad." Anne's

actions and attitude moved her first C paper to an A on her next attempt. Pretty good for a self-proclaimed “bad writer.”

Heather’s experience depicted a different realization. In one class, the professor’s lack of feedback frustrated her immensely. This was an on-line class where she really missed the chance to converse one-on-one with her professor, although she acknowledged his availability via email (which she did not utilize). Upon reviewing her feedback, she was primarily upset with herself, but in a couple of instances she expressed frustration with the professor for getting docked on areas she felt the professor under-explained or failed to specify. She later admitted, “I could have-- maybe should have--went to visit him about that.” Though Heather’s self-efficacy was minimal, she did persevere and continue to improve her efforts and her end result.

Perhaps Sarah’s reaction to feedback was most revealing. She reviewed the comments and met with her professors like the other participants. Her reaction to a poor performance was very telling when she said, “If I do poorly, then I’m not going to blame it on the professor. I’m going to blame it on me and figure out what’s wrong. Then, I will prepare for next time.” I did not include self-accountability as one of the intrinsic traits, but the more Sarah expressed her beliefs and motivation for her actions, it certainly merits consideration in the conversation.

Each student receives writing feedback, but the subsequent attitude and reactions build a roadmap for success or destruction. The graded papers that interviewees shared suggested improvements for the students. Even comments that some students might perceive as harsh (“No! Don’t do this!”), students accepted as constructive criticism, not as a personal attack. As a teacher, I spend hours writing comments and feedback because its instructional value has merit. These students also valued the feedback because it helped them evolve as writers. Confidence

and self-esteem joined with a growth mindset can generate new opportunities to enhance one's writing skills. Conversely, a fixed mindset or general apathy leads down a different path.

Grit

One of the intrinsic qualities that Angela Duckworth has touted and even tested for major U.S. companies, the U.S. military, and Stanford University appeared frequently in my research. Her Grit Test (see Appendix A) asked several questions about goal setting and sticking with certain projects to help determine an individual's score with a maximum top score of 5. Perseverance, determination, or grit (however one labels it) enables students to traverse the pitfalls of writing and of life. My interviewees all took Duckworth's Short Grit Test (see Appendix A) and shared their results. Duckworth has also developed a longer version (12 questions). Having taught all six students in high school, most for multiple courses, I had some ideas about where they would each fall. Some of the results truly surprised me.

Adam was disappointed with his score of 3.4 on the test, but he did feel it was an honest reflection of his current status and added (as is his *modus operandi*) that we can always grow. He was also one of the students who claimed determination as his strongest intrinsic trait. Some of this seemed at odds with his score (second lowest of the group) but he articulated it like this, "You know we are only given 70 odd years on Earth. It is obvious you are not going to become a master in everything. Try what you like and stick with what you want. The real grit is valuable in the things that are worth fighting for." To clarify his message, he used an example. In middle school, he experimented with origami but gave it up due to a lack of interest. Did that make him less gritty because he quit origami? He then compared that example with his future desire to become a good father. The latter concept he postulated would require tremendous grit and was

not something to give up on—ever. His scoring of the Grit Test did leave some parts open for interpretation. Erin (scored least gritty), Anne, and Kendra (scored most gritty) all felt the test was quite accurate as it reflected the amount of effort and perseverance they applied, especially to their writing. Erin closely linked her writing perseverance to her interest level in the writing assignment. When writing about areas more aligned with her major, she displayed much more writing grit. Anne chafed at the wording on the test about “obsession” and was content that her best effort was sufficient. Kendra, who also has a processing disability and championed her own self-efficacy proclaimed, “I’m really intense with my academics.” From our high school encounters, I would have ranked her at the top of the grit test, but I would have placed Adam second, and he finished second to last. From Adam’s elaborate examples of origami and fatherhood, it is clear that interpretation of the questions opens the door for variance within Duckworth’s Grit Test (see Appendix A).

Sarah’s response was quite insightful. She felt the test was a “pretty accurate” reflection of her grit. She conveyed her self-awareness when she said, “There are parts in my life where I am not as gritty. I know when I get distracted that can hinder me from finishing something. My score was high enough to show I care about things I’m working on.” This awareness demonstrates that people prioritize differently and value certain aspects over others. Heather’s responses really clarify these ideas. Initially, Heather was upset at not scoring a perfect 5 (her score was a 3.8). Part of her disagreement mirrored that of Anne about the obsession piece. Heather felt like she lost interest periodically because she had other areas that required her focus; she could not devote herself solely to one project. She did not see change as something bad insisting instead that she often changed her mind or her tactics to figure out something better. Contemplating her future, she also said, “[Change] maybe lowers your grittiness, but I would

consider that change and experimentation make the perseverance which correlates with your grittiness as you spend time figuring out what works for you and where you want to go. You are not giving up, but continuing to explore.” Heather’s ability to continue to attempt new things and seek better solutions demonstrated grittiness to her.

Conclusion

To recap this section, the interviewees shared their trials and tribulations of their first-year college writing courses starting from a point of preparedness and what successful writing looks like. From there, they described the intrinsic qualities they possess that aided them in their journey as writers. Next, they elaborated on specific types of writing and their process for achieving successful writing. This discussion expanded to include the value and assistance mentors can provide as well as the daunting feedback piece. The feedback and student reactions to it coalesce with the intrinsic qualities that generate invaluable information to students and teachers alike, if we are willing to listen.

Throughout this entire study and process, I have also learned a few pertinent fundamentals that will improve my teaching. Students do truly value feedback even if it is a bit harsher. I, however, must remember to interject some positives and mandate a verbal conference of some sort. The discussion about the writing provides a valuable tool for clear communication and expectations; plus it promotes self-efficacy in students. High school students especially need to learn to voice their own concerns and advocate for themselves. Assigning such a requirement will definitely help my student writers. Assigned rewrites also present an opportunity for students to bolster their skills and strengthen their grit levels.

This section also revealed the interconnectivity between some of the intrinsic elements and offered a new element, self-accountability, which I had not considered earlier as a trait. The opportunities writing affords showcase the attitudes and latent characteristics that students and teachers should acknowledge and help flourish through extended exercises, observation in the heat of the writing fight, and conversations about the feedback and desire for improvement. The next section will detail the implications of the interview observations and present a course of action and recommendations to follow for students, high school teachers, and college professors as the buried world of intrinsic elements acquires more of the spotlight.

Chapter 5: *The New Frontier*

This study has definitely indicated the power of intrinsic traits that students and educators alike need to continue to acknowledge and enhance. In a study about strengthening student-learning strategies, Julie Pelton states, “Intrinsic motivation leads to deeper learning” (279). Students who are motivated and seek to learn for learning’s sake can catapult themselves above the rest of the crowd. The world is a very competitive place, and educators must broaden their teaching perspectives to include opportunities for students to gain pedagogical knowledge and personal insights into their internal composition. Knowing more about oneself and pushing preconceived mindsets to no longer accept just the status quo opens new doors. Detailing and developing intrinsic characteristics does just that. Bolstering the intrinsic traits in students also buoys their confidence, which leads into many other positive avenues.

Intrinsic Power

My study revealed that students often have a hard time conceptualizing and verbalizing internal traits, yet every one of my participants possesses and utilizes them in several capacities. Placed against the backdrop of writing, the process for self-discovery abounds. Being able to advocate for themselves and displaying enough moxie to converse about educational feedback truly empowers students and builds relationships with the mentors. This self-efficacy also improves communication avenues and allows students to exhibit their grit as they persevere through the writing process. In examining Angela Duckworth’s philosophies, Helen Rumbelow concluded, “Failure was embraced as an opportunity to show how tenaciously you could overcome it” (3). Humans make mistakes and errors, but making students aware of intrinsic traits and teaching them to embrace setbacks and move forward puts a positive slant on taking risks and learning from decisions. This should be what education touts. Students in my study attacked

their writing experiences, but not as a list of flubs and mistakes. Rather, these assignments presented chances for personal growth and self-discovery as they discerned the professors' objectives and strove to attain them. Regardless of how interviewees scored on Duckworth's Grit Test, they all pondered the ideas, reconsidered themselves and their view of failure, and evaluated their own perseverance levels. By implementing a growth mindset, writing and all of its seemingly insurmountable challenges becomes a quest for self-awareness and improvement, which should be a goal for anyone.

High Schools

Whether people move from high school directly into the workforce or attend college, intrinsic traits prove beneficial. Vera Jacobson-Lundeberg studies college readiness extensively. She advocates for an "intentionally taught cluster of personality traits" that she terms 'soft skills' for increasing productivity and profit for businesses (84). Working from the goal of entry-level success in the workplace, Jacobson-Lundeberg touts communication and collaboration as 'gateway skills' that all young people need to develop for personal success and societal benefit (84-5). The cornerstone of these ideas is beyond simply graduating from high school or college; clear communication and collaboration skills set up success for all involved. Improving credibility heightens an individual's personal empowerment and attracts others as well.

It would behoove high school teachers to embrace the intrinsics and establish assignments that make students aware of them and to aid in the growth of said traits. Requiring students to generate an organized plan with measurable and attainable time markers can build some self-discipline and goal-setting habits. Mandating a meeting to converse about written feedback provides an opportunity for students to self-advocate. Taking this feedback and rewriting a paper tests a student's grit. Most importantly, if teachers will build cultures of risk

taking and praise failure as an opportunity to learn more and bolster aptitudes, then the growth mindset will prevail. High school teachers can lay the foundation for postsecondary successes.

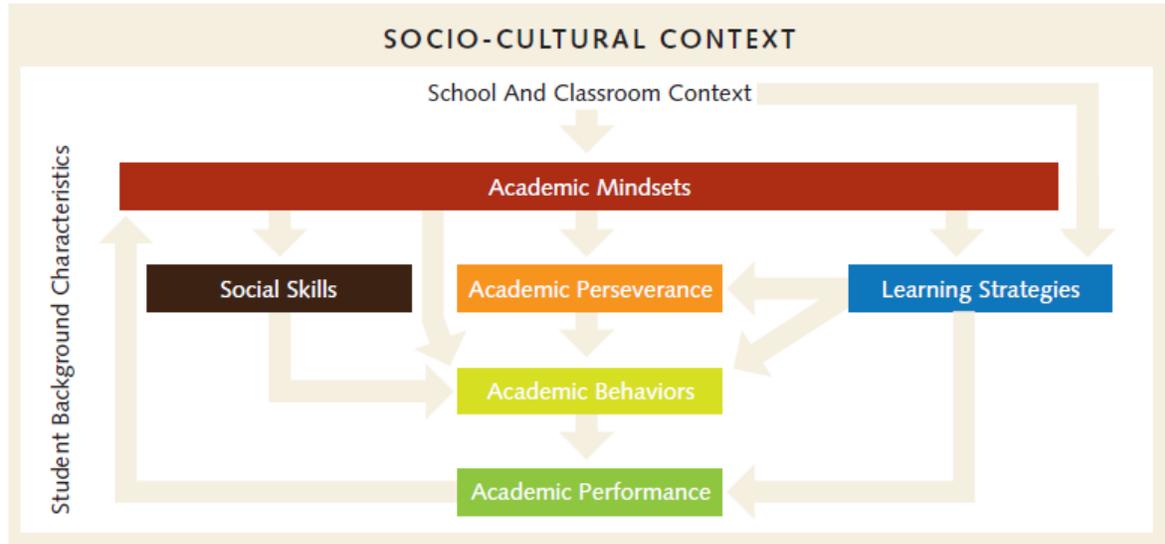
Colleges

From the article, “Readiness for College: The Role of Noncognitive Factors and Context,” colleges have witnessed an increase in enrollment, yet the completion rates have barely changed. Since current students are not graduating, today’s retirees have a greater level of education than young adults do entering the workforce (Nagaoka et al. 45). The need, now, certainly exists for new considerations. James Heckman termed the internal traits this paper has discussed as “noncognitive” because they move “beyond academic knowledge and technical skills. These noncognitive factors such as motivation, time management, and self-regulation are critical for later life outcomes” (Nagaoka et al. 46). This situation affords colleges the chance to make a marked impact upon the people they serve. Colleges must be cognizant of the environment they establish and the multitude of factors facing incoming students. Jenny Nagaoka is deputy director of the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR). She extends some of the noncognitive notions shared earlier to provide a framework that can assist students in transitioning from high school to college (see Figure 1 below).

This framework considers the entire collegiate environment (the socio-cultural context). This includes educational practices and the values of both universities and individuals. Incoming students also bring their own traits and background experiences to the equation. In order to forge a harmonious union, the two sides must work together to exact the best for each student. Starting with the academic mindset (especially a growth one as Carol Dweck explored), college delivers

opportunities for students to grow socially and academically. By applying various learning strategies and bolstering their intrinsic characteristics, students learn about themselves in an

Figure 1. Noncognitive Framework



educational environment (see Figure 1). Their behaviors, perseverance, and performance are tested. “In a college context, where students are being asked to do more challenging and often unfamiliar tasks, often with less support, academic perseverance becomes particularly important” (Nagaoka 49). With passion and perseverance, students can triumph in their educational pursuits. Colleges can help make their dreams a reality by including more comprehensive educational challenges that demand acknowledging and strengthening the intrinsic elements of all students. Professors should mandate writing meetings and embrace a growth mindset in their students. These steps will challenge students to develop their intrinsic elements more profoundly.

Future Extensions

My study could produce more far-reaching implications if I had interviewed a wider pool of candidates from more diverse high school backgrounds. Additionally, my research did not delve into the individual procedures colleges used in placing students in their first college writing

course enough. Taking a more concerted effort in that regard could also indicate some needed changes at the introductory placement level. Eric Hoover expounds upon the need for such consideration in his article “Colleges Seek Noncognitive Measures of Applicants.” He states, “Elsewhere, proponents of noncognitive assessments say such tools will become more necessary as applicant pools grow more diverse: Many underrepresented minority students struggle on the SAT but excel in other ways” (1). Jon Boeckenstedt, an associate vice president for enrollment at DePaul University, pronounced, “So many places miss out on good kids, and, in turn, so many good kids rule themselves out, based on test scores alone. We have to break out of the traditional way of evaluating what makes someone capable or smart or talented. Universities are supposed to evolve” (Hoover 1-2). As nontraditional methods of evaluating students and their respective placement continue to emerge, the power of intrinsic traits moves even closer to the forefront of educational practices.

To Boldly Go

Now the onus falls on students and educators alike. High school teachers can help develop intrinsic traits such as goal setting, organization, time management, self-efficacy, and grit. Writing teachers specifically can encourage curiosity to take risks, embrace failures as learning opportunities, and mandate meetings with student writers to discuss feedback. Students can apply these lessons and accept the comments as constructive criticism to aid them in growing their mindset and skills simultaneously. Patrick Sullivan, college professor, echoes my sentiments with, “If students can bring curiosity, openness, engagement, creativity, persistence, responsibility, flexibility, humility, and metacognition with them to college, then I believe very good things will happen” (551). Colleges can establish environments of acceptance and promote personal growth for diverse college populations. College professors can elevate the critical

thinking skills of these students by engaging them in assignments demanding self-reflection and perseverance. Together all involved parties can reveal the inner strengths of students and push students to excellence—both academically and internally.

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Appendix A
Short Grit Scale

Directions for taking the Grit Scale: Please respond to the following 8 items. Be honest – there are no right or wrong answers!

1. New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones.*
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

2. Setbacks don't discourage me.
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

3. I have been obsessed with a certain idea or project for a short time but later lost interest.*
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

4. I am a hard worker.
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

5. I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one.*
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

6. I have difficulty maintaining my focus on projects that take more than a few months to complete.*
 - Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

7. I finish whatever I begin.
- Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

8. I am diligent.
- Very much like me
 - Mostly like me
 - Somewhat like me
 - Not much like me
 - Not like me at all

Scoring:

1. For questions 2, 4, 7, and 8 assign the following points:

5 = Very much like me

4= Mostly like me

3= Somewhat like me

2= Not much like me

1= Not like me at all

2. For questions 1, 3, 5 and 6 assign the following points:

1= Very much like me

2= Mostly like me

3= Somewhat like me

4= Not much like me

5= Not like me at all

Add up all the points and divide by 8. The maximum score on this scale is 5 (extremely gritty), and the lowest score on this scale is 1 (not at all gritty).

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