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Laying the Groundwork for Transfer: A Case Study Exploring the Impact of Strengths-Based Pedagogy on Students' Writing-Related Dispositions

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LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR TRANSFER: A CASE STUDY

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STRENGTHS-BASED PEDAGOGY

ON STUDENTS' WRITING-RELATED DISPOSITIONS

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Title: Laying the Groundwork for Transfer: A Case Study Exploring the Impact of
          Strengths-Based Pedagogy on Students' Writing-Related Dispositions

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This dissertation aimed to understand how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing; learn more about what constitutes students' dispositions towards writing; and learn more about the characteristics of dispositions. To fulfill these purposes, the study used a case-study methodology to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension? 2) How, if at all, does Academic Standard's strengths-based approach influence the writing dispositions of students returning to school after being suspended for academic reasons? 3) How, if at all, does Academic Standard's use of Gallup's Strengths program influence the writing dispositions of students returning to school after being suspended for academic reasons? 4) Do individual dispositions influence or impede the growth of other dispositions?

Results indicated that underperforming college students' writing dispositions were most impacted by their dispositions towards *learning,* more broadly. While each participant had a unique disposition profile, self-regulation was the most salient dispsotion in the group. Further, data suggests that both Academic Standard's strengths-based mentorship and use of Gallup's Strengths program may have an impact on students' dispositions towards *learning*. The findings align with existing research on the

interconnected nature of dispositions, and suggests that dispositions may interact across domains.

This dissertation suggests implications for transfer-based pedagogy as well as continued research on students' dispositions. Implications for writing instructors include considering ways to foster students' metacognition about the ways their assignments help build students' dispositions towards learning, teaching successful student habits, etc. Implications for researchers include using dispositional profiles to better understanding the context of the singular disposition they may be studying and to design studies that further explore the complex psychological matrix of students dispositions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The strengths-based mindset, or the commitment to recognize and value strengths rather than weaknesses, has captured the attention of educators and administrators for more than a decade now. For those following popular higher education news sites like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside HigherEd*, these examples will be familiar. Loffredo (2017) and Stoller (2011), for instance, argued for the use of strengths in career assessments and job fairs, respectively. Similarly, Zackal (2018) advised those aspiring to work in higher education to use strengths to secure a position. In policy development, Maimon (2018a) suggested assessment protocols take on a strengths-based design. And for faculty feeling down because of long to-do lists, a strengths-based mindset has been suggested to boost productivity and increase happiness (Houston, 2012).

The strengths-based mindset has also made its way into pedagogy and course design. Though framing his argument in a critique of Duckworth's (2016) concept of "grit," a combination of persistence and passion, Gooblar (2017), called for instructors to prioritize teaching character—a call that Gallup happily answers with their Strengths program. Gallup's StrengthsFinder assessment tool has been used for nearly twenty years in the corporate world to help teams identify individuals' strengths and strategize how best to work together as a team. Not long after permeating the business world, Gallup developed StrengthsQuest (now known simply as Strengths), which is a combination of StrengthsFinder and an undergraduate-focused curriculum. Gallup (2017) boasts that over 600 colleges regularly use Strengths.

Though some of these claims and applications may seem far-fetched, I can't say I'm surprised by the hype. I first encountered Strengths in high school, when my uncle (who worked for a major technology company at the time) bought everyone the book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, with the accompanying StrengthsFinder code. At the time, the results didn't mean much to me. I skimmed the results and the book, but I don't remember thinking about them or how I could use the information in my life. The second time I encountered Gallup's Strengths program was in the context of higher education; I was the resident assistant on the leadership-cluster floor and as such, collaborated with the School of Leadership to design leadership-based programming for my residents. In an effort to make our campus a strengths-based campus, the School of Leadership brought trainers from Gallup to educate key people on campus about Strengths, and I was invited. This time, Strengths was inspirational.

Strengths was an answer to a difficult first year in college. Like many high-achieving high school graduates/first-year college students, my identity as a "gifted" student was challenged by my early coursework. While I had to find new strategies for learning and being successful, Strengths also showed me that I have innate talents I could choose to develop and leverage in all aspects of my life. To clarify, this time I engaged with the curriculum and was in a community of influential people on campus that were endlessly enthusiastic about Strengths and its potential. I was also able to bring Strengths to my peers, as a resident assistant, writing tutor, career specialist, and co-founder of the Strengths Advocates club on campus.

Though my enthusiasm for Strengths tempered, it was still on my mind as I began teaching first-year writing (FYW) courses and tutor, professional-development meetings.

Outside of the enthusiastic environment of my undergraduate strengths-based campus, I

encountered more skepticism and critiques of Strengths. The responses were wide-

ranging: some students (both writing tutors and FYW students) found Strengths to be

little more than a horoscope; some were midly interested in their results, but didn't care

to do the deep reflective work I assigned; and some blossomed in response to their results

and reflections. Through these experiences, I gained a sense that when students engage

with the program, Strengths could have significant and positive effects on their lives.

I am not the only one to think so, either. Governers State has re-designed their

first-year and developmental education programs using strengths-based education and

Gallup's Strengths program, in particular (Maimon, 2018b). President Maimon argued

that the strengths-based model more effectively facilitates education that meets students

where they are by demonstrating what they already know/can do and building from there.

Additionally, their "Mastering College" course takes students through the

StrengthsFinder assessment and Gallup's Strengths program. While Maimon described a

number of factors that could be contributing to the success of their revamped programs,

the strengths-based model seems central to the changes and therefore, is credited for

much of their success. Maimon's report of the benefits their developmental writing

students are getting from a strengths-based curricula is certainly encouraging, but the fact

remains that writing educators have little research on how broader trends towards

strengths-based education impacts students learning to write.

Though not focused on writing education specifically, research on Strength's

effects on students indicates that the program may increase students' self-efficacy and

motivation (Austin, 2006; Christley, 2013; Jackson, 2017) as well as engagement in

school work (Lopez, 2011; Louis, 2008). Transfer scholars have identified such characteristics as dispositions, or "individual, internal [psychological] characteristic[s]" (Driscoll & Wells, 2012, para. 1), and argued that dispositions are an important factor in students' ability to transfer writing knowledge successfully (Driscoll & Powell, 2016; Driscoll & Wells, 2012). Drawing from Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), Driscoll and Wells (2012) identified two general dispositions—generative and developmentally disruptive. While disruptive dispositions manifest in behaviors that impede students' development and potential for successful transfer, generative dispositions guide students towards successful transfer. Though there is evidence that Strengths can be a fruitful intervention to help students develop generative dispositions, more empirical research on college students needs to be done to investigate how, if at all, Strengths influences students' dispositions towards writing.

To address this gap, the current study explores the possible influences of Gallup's Strengths program as well as strengths-based mentorship on underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing. This chapter serves to introduce the study by further developing the exigence for the current research; outlining the specific problem under examination, the purpose of the study, and the research questions; and detailing the methodology.

Transfer of Writing and Dispositions

The first-year writing requirement, originally developed at Harvard in the late 1800s, was, among other things, intended to prepare students for the writing expectations they would face throughout college (Brereton, 1995; Crowley, 1998). Despite the on-going general consensus that one of the goals of first-year writing (FYW) courses is to

prepare students for future writing contexts, research on whether or not transfer is actually occurring is still a relatively new endeavor. Drawing from the Elon Statement on Writing Transfer, Moore and Anson (2016) defined writing transfer as "the phenomenon in which new and unfamiliar writing tasks are approached through the application, remixing, or integration of previous knowledge, skills, strategies, and dispositions" (p. 8). While the research is still on-going, early findings suggest that FYW may not be living up to this goal (Bacon, 1999; Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; Driscoll, 2011; Moore, 2012).

While evidence of transfer occurring successfully is rare, nearly all studies have demonstrated the complex nature of transfer. For instance, research into whether or not curriculum has an impact on transfer has led composition scholars to recognize the importance of threshold concepts (Adler-Kassner, Majewski, & Koshnick, 2012; Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), genre (Beaufort, 2007), and students' prior knowledge (Anson & Forsberg, 1990; Beaufort, 2007; Blythe, 2016; Jornet, Roth, & Krange, 2016; McManigell, 2016; Rosinski, 2016; Wardle & Clement, 2016). Furthermore, many of the studies that examined students' prior knowledge concurrently explored students' transitions between specific contexts. For instance, in a three-phased study, McManigell (2016) explored the transition from high school writing contexts to college writing contexts. McManigell (2016) found that the longer students were in college, the more likely they were to talk specifically about elements of their writing (e.g., evidence, explanation, etc.), have confidence in their writing abilities and knowledge, and experience an "increased sense of success" (p. 151).

Similarly, Wardle and Clement (2016) and Beaufort (2007) followed a single student each in their transitions from FYW to other courses that required writing. While Beaufort's (2007) research followed Tim's journey from FYW to first-year history courses and then on to engineering courses, Wardle and Clement's (2016) study followed Clement's writing and rhetorical development from honors composition II through her honors seminar. Interestingly, Beaufort's findings focused more on implications for curriculum adjustments while Wardle and Clement's findings emphasized students' identities[1] and dispositions[2]. More specifically, Beaufort suggested that composition instructors should more explicitly teach genre and the five knowledge domains[3]; on the other hand Wardle and Clement's findings suggested that students' identities and dispositions may interfere with students transferring their prior knowledge into new writing contexts. Rosinski (2016) came to a similar conclusion based on her study examining the relationship between students' academic writing and the digital writing they chose to engage in outside of school. Rosinski found that even though students tended to demonstrate a more nuanced rhetorical awareness in their self-sponsored writing, they did not view digital writing as "real writing" and were therefore resistant to transfer writing knowledge and strategies between contexts. Though curriculum and prior knowledge are certainly important factors in transfer, Wardle and Clement's and

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[1] Though Wardle and Clement (2016) do not explicitly define identity, they use the term to refer to the construction of self in the context of how learning influences that process. They draw on the work of Bakhtin (1986); Beach (2003); Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner, & Cain (1998); Scollon (1996), and Wenger (1998).

[2] Wardle and Clement (2016) use Driscoll & Wells' (2012) definition of dispositions.

[3] Beaufort (2007) identifies five domains of knowledge: discourse community knowledge, writing process knowledge, subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge. In describing their relationship to one another, Beaufort places the latter four domains in a four-way venn diagram situated within a larger circle labeled as discourse community knowledge.

Rosinski's findings demonstrate that students' identities, dispositions, and perceptions of the writing they're being asked to do also plays a significant role in transfer.

This conclusion is supported through another popular transition that transfer scholars have studied—from college to the workplace. For instance, Beaufort's (1999) ethnographic study of four writers at a job resource center found, among many things, that the writers' success relied on their commitment to the larger value behind the organization's mission—to help their community. Such buy-in speaks to the motivation and value the writers used to help propel their learning. While Beaufort's (1999) participants were all college graduates, both Anson and Forsberg's (1990) and Blythe's (2016) studies followed college students in internships. They examined how students' prior college writing experiences impacted their approach to writing in the workplace. Both studies found that students experience a similar pattern of transition:

> a) **expectation**: students' visualize what writing in their internships would be like;
>
> b) **disorientation**: students' experience conflict between prior knowledge/experience/expectations and reality; and
>
> c) **transition and resolution**: students better understand the company's or organization's expectations, and gain a more balanced perspective of their internship. (Anson & Forsberg, 1990)

Again, students' dispositions—perceived value of the writing, acquisition of confidence towards specific writing, and adjusted attitudes towards the writing—impacted how they transferred knowledge about writing from one context to the next.

While composition studies needs more evidence-based information on all aspects of transfer, research on how students' dispositions impact writing transfer is especially

needed, as dispositions have the potential to interact with all other elements of transfer—curriculum, prior knowledge, genre, etc. Before composition scholars can study *how* dispositions might interact with these other parts of the transfer process, we must first develop our understanding of dispositions. This is no easy task as the term "dispositions" has been used to describe everything from students' attitudes towards learning (generally as well as towards specific subjects) to students' behaviors in the classroom.

Katz (1993) offered this definition: "a disposition is a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal" ("What are dispositions?"). In some ways Katz's (1993) definition is limiting. For instance, he qualified dispositions with three adverbs: "frequently," "consciously," and "voluntarily." Though it is true that Katz (1993) was thinking about dispositions more broadly at this point (given his examples of curiosity and a desire to read as dispositions), he assumes that students are aware and intentional about their dispositions—a notion that fades in subsequent definitions. Furthermore, Katz' definition categorizes dispositions as a pattern of behavior. Future definitions, such as Driscoll & Well's (2012) definition, which will be discussed momentarily, characterize dispositions as the internal element that influences behavior rather than the pattern of behavior itself. For instance, under Katz' definition, a *habit* of reading would be a disposition, whereas in subsequent definitions of dispositions, the *desire* to read or *valuing* reading may be categorized as dispositions.

Though Haskell (2000) used the term "spirit of transfer" rather than disposition, he seemed to be attempting to articulate the same phenomenon. He wrote:

I suggest that significant and general transfer is primarily the consequence of personality and other dispositional characteristics such as attitude, motivation, and feeling. In short, I will suggest that general transfer is the consequence of what I refer to as the spirit of transfer, not simply—nor even significantly—to educational methods, learner strategies, or teaching techniques. (p. 116)

Notice that Haskell included attitude, motivation, and feeling as examples of dispositional characteristics in his definition. He included personality as an element that influences the spirit of transfer. Haskell further described the spirit of transfer as "a psychological, emotional, and motivational disposition toward deep learning" (p. 117). Here we can see Haskell grappling with the complexity of dispositions; they are not bound to just a psychological or emotional plane, but are constructed by multiple aspects of students' cognitive and affective faculties. Still, his definition is evasive and difficult to operationalize. Therefore, Driscoll and Wells (2012), working specifically on transfer of writing, crafted a more specific definition of dispositions.

Driscoll and Wells' (2012) definition of dispositions is central to this study. Similar to Wardle and Clement (2016) and Rosinksi (2016), Driscoll (2009) and Wells (2011) both discovered through their dissertation studies that there was more to the problem of transfer of learning in composition than just curricular or cognitive variables. Examining the similarities between their findings, Driscoll and Wells (2012) developed a more specific definition of dispositions. They described dispositions in the following ways:

1. Dispositions are a critical part of a larger system that includes the person, the context, the process through which learning happens, and time.

2. Dispositions are not intellectual traits like knowledge, skills, or aptitude, but rather determine how those intellectual traits are used or applied.

3. Dispositions determine students' sensitivity toward and willingness to engage in transfer.

4. Dispositions can positively or negatively impact the learning environment; they can be generative or disruptive.

5. Dispositions are dynamic and may be context-specific or broadly generalized. ("Defining dispositions")

Furthermore, Driscoll and Wells (2012) broke down dispositions into four categories that were prominent in their research: value, self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulation—though it is important to note that they recognized there could be other categories of dispositions beyond the four that were prevalent in their studies, such as Dwecks' mindset theory. In her research on failure and learning, Dweck (2006) discovered that children as well as older students tended to either have a fixed mindset—believing that humans possess fixed qualities—or have a growth mindset—believing that humans possess dynamic qualities that can be developed over time.

Drawing from Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), Driscoll and Wells (2012) identified two general dispositions—generative and developmentally disruptive. While disruptive dispositions manifest in behaviors that impede the student's development and potential for successful transfer, generative dispositions manifest in behaviors that support the student's development and potential for successful transfer. Applying the labels "disruptive" and "generative" are not simple, though. For instance, high self-efficacy has been shown to play an important role in performance (Parajes & Johnson,

1994), and yet in our study of writing tutors' self-efficacies in tutoring and in writing, Hixson-Bowles and Powell (2019) concluded that the quality of self-efficacy is just as important as the quantity. This argument was based on the observation that some cases of apparently high self-efficacy seemed unfounded, while other cases of low self-efficacy appeared to reflect a moment of cognitive dissonance or a learner operating on the edge of their expertise, as Vygotsky (1978) would say. Though it can be tempting to label low self-efficacy as disruptive and high self-efficacy as generative, transfer scholars should be careful to consider how the disposition is impacting the learning environment. Complexities like these make dispositions important, and yet, challenging to study.

Moore and Anson (2016) argued that "we are only starting to explore what such dispositions might be, so pedagogy that promotes transfer needs to be attentive to dispositions research" (p. 10). While we still know relatively little about the ways in which dispositions develop, Driscoll et al. (2017) remind researchers that studying dispositions is complex work. Driscoll et al. (2017) shared lessons they learned in attempting to study dispositions and offered advice such as coding a single disposition at a time and using coders that are well acquainted with the literature on dispositions. Additionally, Baird and Dilger (2017) found that dispositions may influence (positively or negatively) the development of other dispositions and encourage researchers to pay attention to the interactions between dispositions. Despite these challenges, knowledge about dispositions could help teachers and administrators construct curricula and learning experiences that foster generative dispositions and facilitate effective transfer.

Statement of the Problem

The more scholars learn about transfer and its complexities, the more apparent it becomes that students' dispositions play a vital role in whether or not they successfully transfer knowledge into and out of FYW. While transfer scholars have discovered that dispositions impact transfer, we continue to discern the best ways to measure and study dispositions. While we know of at least four elements that make up dispositions—value, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and attribution—there very well could be others. Furthermore, wider trends in higher education like implementing Gallup's Strengths program as an intervention have not been examined to determine what impact they might have on students' development of dispositions towards writing. Ultimately, the problem is twofold: 1) more information is needed about dispositions; what they're composed of and what influences their generative or disruptive development, and 2) more precise ways to measure and study dispositions needs to continue to develop.

Purpose of the Study

The broad goal of this study is to examine how generative dispositions can be fostered. Though many interventions hold promise, this study explores the potential of Gallup's Strengths program on students' dispositions towards writing. Born out of positive psychology, strengths-based education parallels composition's turn away from a deficit approach to teaching and actively focuses on students' and instructors' strengths in the classroom and curriculum (Gallup, 2017b; Linkins, Niemiec, Gillham, & Mayerson, 2014). Strengths-based teaching can manifest in different ways. However, in their Strengths curriculum, Gallup offers a well-established program that combines their validated StrengthsFinder measurement tool with an undergraduate-oriented curriculum

to help students identify and affirm their talents, actively develop them into strengths, and recognize strategic ways to leverage their strengths to overcome their weaknesses. Given their structure and prominence in both colleges and the workplace, it is important to understand how (if at all) Strengths intervenes with students' dispositions towards writing.

Additionally, this research studies a population of students often overlooked in transfer research: underperforming college students. More specifically, the participants in this study are students returning to school after being placed on academic suspension for a semester for earning below a 2.0 GPA in three consecutive semesters. Though the reasons for suspension are surely varied and individual, I suspect that disruptive dispositions played some role in many students' journeys towards suspension. Students must petition to return to school, displaying both persistence and motivation—potentially indicating a shift towards more generative dispositions. The students' history of struggle, combined with their position of hope demonstrated by returning to school, makes this population particularly interesting in terms of dispositions. Therefore, the specific purposes of this study include:

- To examine if and how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing;

- To investigate what constitutes students' dispositions towards writing; and

- To explore the characteristics of dispositions.

Rationale and Significance for the Study

Driscoll and Well's (2012) research helped clarify the importance of students' dispositions towards writing in transfer. While this recognition was a significant step in

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the right direction, in order to apply their discovery in the classroom scholars need to learn much more about students' dispositions towards writing. For instance, how are dispositions formed? Can they change? If so, how can instructors foster generative dispositions and discourage disruptive dispositions? What are the best ways to measure specific dispositions? While this study cannot answer all of these questions conclusively, it does take the field a step closer to understanding:

- if/how dispositions change over the course of a semester;

- the degree to which an intervention like Gallup's Strengths program influences dispositions towards writing;

- if/how dispositions in underperforming college students differ from student populations represented in current research; and

- how best to study specific dispositions.

Gaining a better understanding of these questions will not only help researchers learn more about the characteristics of dispositions, but also give instructors assigning writing a deeper understanding of how an intervention like Strengths impacts students' dispositions towards writing. In other words, the current study tests the value of studying strengths-based education as an intervention for fostering generative dispositions towards writing.

Rationale for the Sample and Focus

The current study was conducted at a large, primarily white, open-enrollment university in Utah. To protect all participants, the identity of the site will remain confidential. When referring to the site, I simply call it "the University." The Academic Standards office at the University upholds the academic standards policy and mentors

students who have fallen below the "good standing" status. The students in this study have petitioned to return after being on academic suspension. In this process, students petition for readmission and most are invited to return on specific conditions, which include stipulations such as meeting with the Academic Standards Director on a monthly basis, utilizing tutoring, meeting with their advisor, etc. Strengths is offered to some of the returning students based on whether the Academic Standards Director decides it would be useful to them. Therefore, the participants in this study were students returning from academic suspension, taking a writing class or a class that requires an equivalent amount of writing, and meeting with the Director of Academic Standards on a monthly basis for grade checks. Half of the participants were exposed to the Gallup Strengths intervention while the other half received strengths-based mentoring without the formal Strengths program.

This site and population were chosen for a number of reasons. First, writing transfer studies need more information about underperforming students' dispositions towards writing. Second, the University's Academic Standards office already uses Strengths in their program, allowing me to study a well-developed Strengths intervention. Finally, I have a good working-relationship with the staff in the Academic Standards office; thus, I was granted access that might otherwise be difficult to gain.

Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Academic Standards use Strengths?

2. What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?

3.   Do individual dispositions impact other dispositions?

Introduction to the Methodology

Utilizing a case study methodology, this study examined the impact the University's Academic Standards office's use of Gallup's StrengthsFinder measurement tool and Strengths program had on underperforming students' dispositions towards writing. A combination of documents, audio observations, and interview data were collected. More specifically, I gathered documents such as students' Strengths results, Academic Standards' intake assessments, and course papers written during the Fall 2018 semester. Audio recordings of each student's grade checks with the Director of Academic Standards were gathered. I also interviewed the Academic Standards Director (ASD), the Academic Standards Counselor (certified by Gallup as a Strengths coach) and each of the students at least once. Though it was originally planned to interview the ASD and each student separately after each grade check, the realities of participants' schedules did not allow for this many interviews. This case study is exploratory and therefore open to discovering whichever dispositions appeared most salient. Data analysis was conducted in two rounds of coding. The first round was exploratory and helped orient me to the data. The second round focused in on the most salient dispositions and elements that answered the research questions.

Conclusion

This study aims to better understand how generative dispositions can be fostered and how Strengths may impact students' dispositions towards writing. More information about how dispositions work helps transfer scholars better understand how dispositions impact transfer. Furthermore, this study design adds to the communal knowledge of how

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best to study and measure dispositions. In what proceeds, Chapter 2 offers a review of the

relevant literature on dispositions in terms of transfer—specifically how they formulate,

change, and develop—and describes strengths-based interventions. Chapter 3 provides

details about this study's methodology. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study.

Chapter 5 discusses conclusions and implications based on the study's findings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purposes of this study are to examine how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing, investigate what constitutes students dispositions towards writing, and to explore the characteristics of dispositions. This chapter builds an argument for why studying Gallup's Strengths program as an intervention for underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing is warranted. A number of assumptions are defended in this chapter. For instance, I will address the assumption that dispositions have the capacity to change and to develop in response to an intervention. To begin, though, this chapter explores what scholars know about how dispositions formulate. Next, I discuss dispositions' ability to change and what causes dispositions to change. A number of interventions, both classroom-based and otherwise, are offered as evidence of the kinds of interventions that can develop students' dispositions. Strengths and the evidence available for its potential to influence dispositions will also be discussed. I end the chapter with a brief discussion about the current conversation surrounding best practices in researching dispositions.

Dispositions Formulation and Development

Scholars in a variety of disciplines, including composition, study how their students learn and have discovered that dispositions play a central role in the acquisition and transfer of knowledge. While a comprehensive and thorough review of all related literature would require a multi-volume book, this section offers a sample of the most relevant strands of research related to the study at hand. One assumption of this study is that dispositions are malleable and can change over time. In this section, I will present

evidence supporting this assumption. However, before addressing how they change, I will first discuss how dispositions are formed. Understanding what influences the development of dispositions from early childhood through young adulthood offers an important context for the work required to help college students develop generative dispositions towards writing.

How are Dispositions Formed?

By the time students arrive in the first-year writing (FYW) classroom, they already have a set of dispositions towards writing informed by 18 or more years of parental, educational, and societal influences. There is still much to learn about the complexities of how dispositions form, especially as scholars are still sorting out what contributes to an individual's disposition (Baird & Dilger, 2017; Driscoll et al., 2017; Driscoll & Powell, 2017; Driscoll & Wells, 2012). Research in childhood development, neurology, and psychology are working to discover how children learn and form dispositions towards learning (Duckworth, 2016; Gunderson et al., 2013; Medina, 2014). Therefore, in order to answer the question of how dispositions are formed, this section delves into the intersection between childhood development and psychology, specifically.[4] Furthermore, it is important to note that much of this research focuses on dispositions towards *learning*, not dispositions towards *writing*. This gap is important and needs more attention. For the purposes of this study, though, it is assumed that students' dispositions towards *learning* influence their dispositions towards *writing*.[5] Finally, to

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[4] While interesting, the research on neurology is outside the scope of this dissertation.

[5] Much more research needs to be done to discover if dispositions towards learning generally and dispositions towards specific subjects differ significantly. Driscoll & Powell (2017) begin to make this connection between mindsets, specifically, and writing in graduate school.

exemplify the kinds of influences that form dispositions, this section offers evidence of how mindsets, persistence, motivation, and grit form in early childhood.[6]

Dweck and her colleagues have studied people's mindsets towards challenging activities since the early 1970's (Burhans & Dweck, 1995; Dweck, 2002; Dweck & Gilliard, 1975; Dweck, Hong, & Chiu, 1993; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Dweck & Master, 2008; Dweck & Wortman, 1982; Gunderson, Gripshover, Romero, Coldin-Meadow, Dweck, & Levine, 2013; Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Paunesku, Walton, Romero, Smith, Yeager, & Dweck, 2015, Yeager & Dweck, 2012). They have found that people tend to have either a fixed or a growth mindset, meaning they either believe traits are static or able to develop with practice (Dweck, 2006). In order to discover how mindsets develop, Dweck and her various collaborators have studied children as young as 3½ years old. They found that even children fell into persistent and nonpersistent categories (Dweck, 2000). The persistent children demonstrated the beginnings of a growth mindset by embracing challenges—such as choosing to try to complete a puzzle they previously struggled to complete—whereas the nonpersistent children demonstrated the seeds of a fixed mindset by consistently choosing to complete tasks they had already been successful in completing and avoiding tasks where they had struggled (Dweck, 2000). When asked to imagine how their parents and teachers would respond to their work with the puzzles, the children who demonstrated persistence, and what Dweck called a "mastery-orientation," imagined their teachers and parents would react with encouragement, praising them for what they had completed and offering suggestions for

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[6] These dispositions have been chosen for this section primarily because there is research on them from early childhood through young adulthood. Mindsets, persistence, motivation, and grit serve as examples of how dispositions can formulate.

how to complete the task and/or fix the error in the future (Dweck, 2000). In contrast, the nonpersistent children imagined their teachers and parents being very critical and disappointed with the children. Some even imagined they would face punishment for the errors and/or incomplete tasks (Dweck, 2000). While persistence is just one disposition, it is interesting that children as young as 3½ are already developing habits about embracing or shying away from challenges.

Dweck and her colleagues findings are echoed in Sommers and Saltz's (2004) large-scale and longitudinal study of 400 students in Harvard's class of 2001. With the aim of discovering how first-year students experience the transition to college-level writing, Sommers and Saltz discovered that students who embrace being a novice fare better than students "who resent the uncertainty and humility of being a novice" (p. 134). Though they do not name them as such, their descriptions of the novice writer are consistent with that of a growth mindset. Consider the following:

> Being a novicec, though, doesn't mean waiting meekly for the future…Rather, it involves adopting an open attitude to instruction and feedback, a willingness to experiment, whether in course selection or paper topics, and a faith that, with practice and guidance, the new expectations of college can be met. (p. 134)

In this quote, Sommers and Saltz emphasize that students who embrace their novice status believe they will get better with practice and are therefore willing to engage in the process of developing their writing. In other words, being willing to be a novice writer takes persistence, a disposition that participants in Sommer and Saltz's study brought with them into their first year at Harvard.

Persistence not only affects how individuals approach a task, it can also affect their self-esteem and self-efficacy. This can be seen in two examples, one from Dweck's work with toddlers and one from Driscoll and Powell's (2019) research on graduate student writers. Following up on the questions about how their teachers and parents would react to their puzzles, the children in Dweck's studies were asked if they felt they were "good" or "not good" and "nice" or "not nice" (Dweck, 2000; Heyman, Cain, & Dweck, 1992). While 60% of the nonpersistent children said they felt they were not good or not nice, over 90% of the persistent children said they felt good or nice (Heyman, Cain, & Dweck, 1992). However, "the very idea that they should feel different about themselves because they received some criticism seemed very odd to many of them" (Dweck, 2000, p. 103-104). Nonpersistent children linked performance, or perceived performance, with their core identities. These findings demonstrated that failure and criticism can have different meanings depending on the child's mindset, either motivating or undermining (Dweck, 2000)—a situation that continues into college and even graduate school (Driscoll & Powell, 2019).

Driscoll and Powell (2019) report the case study of two writers they followed for over six years, a period that included undergraduate and graduate school for both participants. With interviews, teacher responses, and the students' writing, Driscoll and Powell were able to observe how mindsets impacts writers at different stages of their development. Though the two writers ended up in different graduate programs, they both received similarly critical feedback early in their graduate careers. The student who consistently demonstrated a fixed mindset throughout the study experienced intense stress in response to this feedback and even questioned her abilities and identity as a graduate

student. On the other hand, the student who consistently demonstrated a growth mindset found the feedback accurate and motivating. These observations demonstrate a consistency in mindsets with Dweck's (2000) findings, suggesting that fixed and growth mindsets behave similarly in toddlers as they do in graduate writers.

Another concept that illustrates the development of dispositions is grit, defined by Duckworth et al. (2007) as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (p. 1087). While "grit" has received a lot of attention in the mainstream news in the last few years (i.e., Love, 2019; Martin, 2016; Michelson, 2018; Vedantam, 2016), Muenks, Wigfield, Yang, and O'Neal (2017) found that "grit" overlaps with existing constructs such as self-control, self-regulation, and engagement. I also argue that grit and mindsets share common characteristics (i.e. perseverance and persistence, respectively). All of these concepts relate to having the internal motivation and discipline to manage elements such as time, emotions, and distractions to complete appropriate goals. To help children develop these self-regulatory skills, scholars such as Duckworth (2016) and Medina (2014) argue that parents should adopt a demanding, yet supportive and warm parenting style. The specifics of demanding and supportive can differ quite a bit in practice. More concrete is the advice to allow children the autonomy to make their own decisions about what to work towards, how hard to work, and when to give up (Duckworth, 2016). While Duckworth would say this leads to grittier individuals, scholars such as Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) would likely say this leads to motivated and self-regulated learners.

Though they didn't name it as such, Sommers and Saltz's (2004) study found that students who resisted their novice status struggled with motivation and self-regulation. More specifically, they thought of their writing assignments as merely another form of

evaluation, or worse, a game where they had to decode their teachers' secret rules, and also failed to see that they gained anything other than a grade from completing their writing assignments. In contrast, students who saw a larger purpose in their writing assignments began to understand that writing offered them a deeper learning experience. Sommers and Saltz imply that at least some students developed this perspective and motivation throughout the study. To foster generative self-regulation, motivation, mindsets, and grit in students before they attend college, scholars suggest that positive modeling may be effective given that children mirror adults (Duckworth, 2016; Dweck, 2000, 2006; Gunderson, 2013; Kamins & Dweck, 1999, & Medina, 2014). Modeling may also be a way that university educators could help students develop more generative dispositions.

When considering students' mindsets (as well as other dispositions), providing feedback on students' work gets more complicated. With younger students, it may be instinctive to praise them on their talent and intellect to help build their confidence, but Dweck (2006) argued that doing so can have the opposite effect. Rather than praising the person, Kamins and Dweck (1999) advised adults to praise the "growth-oriented process—what they accomplished through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies" (Dweck, 2006, p. 177). Gunderson et al. (2013) found that process praise as early as 14 months has a positive impact on children's motivational frameworks when they are 7-8 years old. While praise in feedback is not new to composition studies (i.e., Diederich, 2006), praising students' writing process, as these growth mindset results suggest may be useful, is a newer concept that has yet to be tested.

In addition to process praise, Dweck (2006) warned adults to be careful about voicing fixed judgments towards others as it demonstrates a fixed mindset that children will internalize. For instance, if children believe that their parents and teachers are proud of them because they are "good writers," what happens when they run across a writing task they can't easily complete? Dweck's research shows that children[7] will become scared that if they can't complete a challenging task,[8] that means they don't have the skills everyone believes they have; and if they don't have the skills that everyone has praised them for, then they will lose the praise and pride of their teachers and parents. With this kind of logic, of course people with a fixed mindset avoid challenges (Dweck, 2006; Kamins & Dweck, 1999).

Dweck (2006) advised that feedback be "honest and constructive" in order to help students learn (p. 182). If students, especially children, are "protected" from productive constructive criticism, when they encounter it from teachers and coaches, they are likely to hear the constructive criticism as undermining and negative (Dweck, 2006, p. 182). This is exactly the case that Driscoll and Powell (2019) found in their study of graduate students receiving feedback on their writing. The writer with a more fixed mindset took the criticism she received on her writing as an assault to her abilities and identity as a graduate student. It would be easy to assume that one student was just more confident in her abilities (self-efficacy) than the other. While self-efficacy is certainly important for students of all ages to acquire, Dweck (2006) cautioned adults to think carefully about how they build students' confidence. Confidence in what they believe are fixed traits only

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[7] Driscoll and Powell's (2019) study demonstrates that this response is not unique to children.
[8] Note that Dweck is not studying writing specifically.

makes students protect themselves against failure rather than embrace challenges and successfully navigate struggle.

While parents, teachers, and coaches certainly influence the formation of students' dispositions, there may also be systemic forces shaping students' dispositions. Wardle (2012) drew on Bourdieu's notions of "habitus" and "doxa" to suggest that students' dispositions are shaped into two broad categories—problem-exploring and answer-getting—by educational institutions (K-12 as well as college and universities). Wardle ultimately argued that the habitus of educational systems works to create students with answer-getting dispositions; that is, students who "seek right answers quickly and are averse to open consideration of multiple possibilities" ("Problem-Exploring vs. Answer-Getting," para. 1). In contrast, problem-exploring dispositions "incline a person toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can 'work'" ("Problem-Exploring vs. Answer-Getting," para. 1). Wardle suggested that the legislators' regulation of educational activities, including the increase of standardized testing, is an intentional action to constrain students' and citizens' abilities to think in problem-exploring ways.

Problem-exploring dispositions are an indication of student engagement—something that drops each year as students progress through the K-12 education system (Calderon & Yu, 2017). Gallup's student engagement poll asked 5th - 12th graders to rate how strongly they agreed with nine statements about engagement. Examples of the statements include: "at this school, I get to do what I do best every day" and "my teachers make me feel my schoolwork is important" (Calderon, 2017, "Nine Engagement Needs,"

para. 3). Both statements speak to value, a disposition that influences writing, as identified by Driscoll and Wells (2012). Gallup found that while 5th graders are 74% engaged (with only 8% actively disengaged), high school seniors are only 34% engaged and 32% are actively disengaged (Calderon & Yu, 2017). And this is not a new trend. Gallup reported similar results in 2013 when they found that 76% of elementary school students were engaged while only 44% of high school students were engaged (Busteed, 2013). It is clear that something in the educational system is actively contributing to the creation of disengaged students as they grow older.

According to Wardle (2012) and Bourdieu (1990), it is unlikely that educational institutions (including individual fields of study) change their dispositions due to "doxa," a concept similar to Gramsci's hegemony. In other words, change in educational institutions is like a large boulder moving uphill—slow and cumbersome.

While scholars know quite a bit about what contributes to children's disposition development, less is known about how those dispositions carry into college. However, studies that describe high school seniors' dispositions as they transition into college offer a window into what carries into college. For instance, Gallup's (2017) finding that 68% of high school seniors are disengaged or actively disengaged from their schoolwork suggest that first-year college students may not expect their classes to be engaging. Gallup (2017) can be understood differently by considering various dispositions. For example, students with a fixed mindset may disengage from school work because they received negative feedback or were pushed too far outside of their comfort zones, whereas students with a growth mindset may feel limited by an educational environment promoting an answer-getting disposition and end up disengaging from their school work. On the other hand, if

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either set of these hypothetical students also had grit, they theoretically wouldn't disengage despite such challenges.

Wells' (2011) dissertation about students transitioning from high school to college offers another perspective on what dispositions students bring with them into college. Studying students from an all-female, college-prep high school, Wells (2011) examined students' dispositions towards reading and writing during their transition from high school to college. In response to a high school exit survey about their dispositions towards writing and reading, Wells (2011) found the following:

- Students' self-efficacies in writing were generally high, though they varied some depending on genre;
- 38% had high writing anxiety;
- 43% were highly likely to persevere until they were happy with their writing assignment;
- 55% made conscious connections between writing assignments and their other coursework;
- About half indicated an internal locus of self-control, while a third indicated an external locus of control;
- Overall students were less confident in their reading abilities than their writing abilities; and
- The majority of students indicated that they had positive self-regulation habits.

Wells (2011) found that after entering college, her participants struggled with self-regulation because of the fast pace of college as well as the lack of teacher oversight.

Another important finding from Wells' (2011) study is that high school students often connect specific teachers to lessons (either content or dispositional in nature) about reading and writing, thus reinforcing Dweck's (2000, 2006) and Duckworth's (2016) findings that individual adults (parents, teachers, coaches) influence the formation of children's dispositions. While Wells' (2011) participants do not necessarily represent the average incoming college student, her findings still give us a sense of the dispositions high school seniors might have when leaving high school and entering college.

Dispositions begin to develop early in life—at least as early as 3½ years old—and are influenced by individual caretakers (teachers, parents, coaches, etc.) as well as institutional systems. While it is not the purpose of this study to affect parenting choices or wide-spread educational institutions, the context of how dispositions develop in throughout a learner's journey to college ultimately helps transfer scholars understand the characteristics of dispositions and therefore, discern what might help college students develop generative dispositions.

Can Dispositions Change?

If dispositions begin to develop early in life, what is their capacity to change? Though Bourdieu (1990) was more inclined to think that an individual's disposition is difficult to change—claiming that we literally embody our dispositions, Wardle (2012) was more optimistic that an individual's disposition can change.[9] In short, plenty of evidence shows that dispositions, and specifically dispositions towards writing, can and do change (Baird & Dilger, 2017; Bromley, Northway, & Schonberg, 2016; Driscoll & Powell, 2017; Gresalfi, 2009; Hixson-Bowles & Powell, 2019; Mackiewicz &

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[9] It is important to note that both Bourdieu (1990) and Wardle (2012) were making theoretical arguments.

Thompson, 2013; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). This section offers an example of a study that observed students' dispositions fluctuating naturally. The following section ("Developing dispositions") extends the discussion by providing examples of students' dispositions changing in response to particular interventions.

As scholars examine dispositions, it is important to recognize that though dispositions can be broken down into categories and measured individually—as we've seen with self-efficacy, expectancy-value, self-regulation, motivation, mindsets, etc.—they are not just a sum of their individual parts. Rather, dispositions are a fluid construct with potentially conflicting factors interacting and responding to the individual's shifting context constantly. Baird and Dilger's (2017) study demonstrates the complexity of individuals' dispositions towards writing. Baird and Dilger (2017) shared results of two (out of 16 total) participants they interviewed over the course of three years about writing in their coursework and internships. It is important to note that their participants were students near the end of their college educations, and thus, fairly advanced writers. Baird and Dilger (2017) studied students' use of prior knowledge in writing transfer and how students' dispositions towards writing shifted throughout their experiences writing in coursework and in their internships. The two students they featured in this article were Mitchell and Ford. Mitchell was a music major who conducted supervised field work, research, and wrote for a local publication. Ford, on the other hand, studied law enforcement and justice administration; he gained real-world experience through work-to-learn opportunities in high school, community college, and in a full-time internship during his senior year. Baird and Dilger not only found that dispositions change, but they can also influence each other and are context-specific. While they were specifically

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interested in expectancy-value and self-efficacy, they found that ease and ownership were two important dispositions that affected Mitchell's and Ford's writing transfer.

More specifically, Mitchell's expectancy-value changed from generative to disruptive, while Ford's expectancy-value was generative or disruptive depending on the setting (Baird & Dilger, 2017). Mitchell was faced with the challenge of designing and implementing an original empirical research project for an upper-level musical therapy course. While he began the process with enthusiasm, when faced with new pressures, "Mitchell's disposition toward ease cued him to abandon his emerging professional identity and revert to his familiar student identity" (Baird & Dilger, 2017, p. 696). In contrast, Ford's value disposition towards writing depended on the context. Unlike Mitchell, Ford's exposure to workplace writing occurred in two settings—on the job as well as in the classroom (Baird & Dilger, 2017). Ford valued the writing he generated in his internship more than the writing he was asked to do in the classroom (Baird & Dilger, 2017). Therefore, Ford displayed a generative disposition towards writing in his internship setting and a disruptive disposition toward writing in the classroom (Baird & Dilger, 2017). Baird and Dilger's research not only demonstrated that dispositions have the capacity to change over time, they also offer new insights into how dispositions interact and how that interaction affects dispositions' ability to change.

Baird and Dilger (2017) noticed that while Mitchell's expectancy-value and ownership spiked at different points in the research and writing process, his self-efficacy and disposition towards ease seemed to have interfered with the generative direction that value and ownership were going. Baird and Dilger (2017) said, "For us, this suggests a generative turn for one disposition may not be sustained if other disruptive dispositions

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remain powerful: that is, relationships between dispositions can overpower change" (p. 707). This is an important finding—not only to further our understanding of dispositions, but also to develop better ways to study them. Put in context with Driscoll et al.'s (2017) meta-study, disposition researchers have learned two important lessons about studying dispositions: 1) researchers should gather data about multiple dispositions in order to examine how they influence each other, and 2) researchers should take care in data analysis to code a single disposition at a time (Driscoll et al., 2017). Though these conclusions may at first seem contradictory, as coding one disposition's influence on another's seems to inherently involve coding two dispositions at one, I believe the distinction lies in focusing on one disposition and its influencing features before moving onto the next disposition and its potentially influencing characteristics. Still, it is also important to remember that there is still much to discover about dispositions and their characteristics. Therefore, researchers studying dispositions must be prepared to learn not only about their specific research questions, but also more about dispositions and their characteristics more broadly.

There is evidence to suggest that dispositions have the capacity to change over time and in response to different contexts and even in response to changes in other dispositions, though more work needs to be done to confirm these preliminary conclusions. Though this section focused on one example in particular, the following section further supports the assumption that dispositions can change by focusing on examples of dispositions developing in response to targeted interventions.

Developing Dispositions

The research on interventions geared towards developing students' dispositions is widespread across K-12 and college education as well as in various disciplines and populations. The examples selected for this section reflect this diversity, exemplifying both in- and out-of-classroom interventions. It is important to note that though the following discussion cites research conducted with students in middle school and high school, and therefore cannot be directly applied to the college context of the current study, the work is still relevant in two ways: 1) demonstrating that it is within the characteristics of dispositions to develop, and 2) demonstrating the variety of interventions that have successfully moved students' dispositions in a generative direction.

Composition scholarship offers suggestions for interventions that could develop students' dispositions. Though most of these suggestions have not yet been methodically tested, they still warrant mentioning; many of them developed out of individual instructors' experimentation in their own classrooms. Driscoll and Powell (2016), for instance, do not provide evidence of a tested intervention. However, their suggestions for interventions stem from a 5-year longitudinal study on college students' writing transfer. They found that students' emotions around writing have strong impacts on short- and long-term writing transfer (Driscoll & Powell, 2016). Drawing from Driscoll and Wells' (2012) use of generative and disruptive dispositions, Driscoll and Powell (2016) found that emotional dispositions, or how students manage emotions in different learning situations, fell into the same categories.

Perhaps intuitively, Driscoll and Powell (2016) found that "if students like the writing they are doing, if they take pride in it and feel confident about it, they have a much higher chance of carrying that knowledge with them" ("Results," para. 3). In other words, positive emotions surrounding writing experiences helps students learn and transfer writing successfully. Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's (2016) *Meaningful Writing Project* confirmed Driscoll and Powell's (2016) findings. In this study, researchers at three institutions asked students over a two-year period to report what their most meaningful college writing assignments had been. They found that assignments where students could connect personally to the writing and/or explore something they're passionate about with structure and guidance both engaged and motivated them (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016). Not surprisingly, meaningful writing assignments also promoted productive writing transfer (Eodice, Geller, & Lerner, 2016). This is likely due to the fact that meaningful writing assignments paralleled students' generative dispositions— especially value, ownership, and motivation—as well as their generative emotional dispositions.

To help develop generative emotional dispositions in students, Driscoll and Powell (2016) suggested the following approaches:

1. Use Hanauer's (2012) concept of meaningful literacy;[10]

2. Reframe prior negative emotional writing experiences;

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[10] Hanauer (2012) developed meaningful literacy in the context of language learning. Key features of the concept include recognizing the learner's humanity and the richness of their experiences, appreciating the ways learning can expand an individual's ability to understand and express, and valuing the impact that identity and self-perception have on the learning process. Hanauer (2012) uses autobiographical writing, emotional writing, personal insight, and authentic public access to carry out meaningful literacy instruction.

3. Reflect on negative emotional writing experiences and brainstorm strategies students could use if they encountered those situations again; and

4. Respond carefully and with students' emotional dispositions in mind when providing feedback to student work.

Mascle (2013) gave similar suggestions in her address to instructors about the importance of mitigating students' writing apprehension. Writing apprehension, like other negative emotions (Driscoll & Powell, 2016), limits students' abilities to learn and transfer writing concepts (Mascle, 2013). Therefore, Mascle (2013) argued that instructors need to help students overcome writing apprehension by building their self-efficacy in writing. To do so, Mascle (2013) suggested that instructors:

1. Give students many, varied, and meaningful opportunities to write;

2. Provide models (expert and novice models);

3. Offer their own feedback and facilitate access to others' feedback (peers, tutors, etc.);

4. Alleviate mental and physical stress; and

5. Give students the opportunity to succeed as well as to fail.

While I agree with both Mascle's (2013) central claim that building writers' self-efficacy is important and Driscoll and Powell's (2016) conclusion that writing instructors need to facilitate positive emotional experiences around writing, for some writing instructors these suggestions sound too much like coddling. Still, many instructors already employ such strategies and still have students with writing apprehension and other disruptive emotional dispositions at the end of the semester. One reason for this can be explained by Driscoll and Powell's (2017) study exploring graduate students' responses to professor

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feedback through the lens of mindset theory. Driscoll and Powell (2017) offer examples of ways instructors could rephrase their feedback to cultivate a growth mindset for students with either a growth or fixed mindset. While all of these suggestions are sound, we need more empirical evidence of tested interventions, a gap this study intends to address.

Though there are suggestions for strategies instructors could use in and out of the classroom to develop students' dispositions towards writing, scholars have not yet produced evidence-based pedagogies or curricula that foster generative dispositions towards writing. Though the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing may at first appear to be an exception in that they describe habits of mind as well as best practices in composition curricula (CWPA, NCTE, & NWP, 2011), Gross and Alexander's (2016) critique of the Framework rightly pointed out that the connection between the habits of mind and the curricula suggestions are abstract at best. Furthermore, similarities and differences between dispositions and habits of mind have not been thoroughly sorted. Therefore, as scholars learn more about the nature of dispositions towards writing, translating what is discovered into curricula and pedagogy will be an important task.

Though not in the context of a writing classroom, Gresalfi's (2009) study of two different pedagogical approaches to teaching 8th grade math on students' dispositions exemplifies a classroom intervention developing students' dispositions. Video observational data were collected from two 8th grade algebra classes during the 2001-2002 school year. In one class, the teacher actively decentered their power, dispersing authority to the students. In the other class, the teacher maintained the central power.

Dispositions towards collaboration and responsibility for their own and others' learning were measured through observing classroom working style—such as willingness to collaborate, ask questions, help others, etc. In addition to confirming that dispositions can shift over time, Gresalfi (2009) found that dispositions are influenced by classroom practices. For instance, in the classroom where the teacher decentered power and encouraged collaboration, students valued collaboration and spent more time working towards mutual understanding in their group work rather than prioritizing their own need to understand. Of course, when students allow themselves time to help others learn, the act of teaching/tutoring often reinforces their own learning. Therefore, a disposition towards peer collaboration helps facilitate learning for both parties—a sentiment long-known by those in writing centers and other academic tutoring services (Hixson-Bowles & Powell, 2019; Hughes, Gillespie, & Kail, 2010; Hughes & Nowacek, 2015; Jones, 2001, Pleasant, Niiler, & Jagannathan, 2016).

Out-of-classroom interventions have also demonstrated the ability to develop students' dispositions (Bromley, Northway, & Schonberg, 2016; Mackiewicz & Thompson, 2013). For instance, Schreiner et al. (2011) asked 62 high-risk students across the US "who on campus has been most influential in their ability to persist" (p. 321) and found that 54 faculty and staff members were named. Faculty and staff are not the only people on campus who help students develop generative dispositions, though. Bromley, Northway, and Schonberg (2016) found that writing tutoring facilitated transfer in a number of ways, including increasing students' dispositions, especially self-efficacy. Given the research on building self-regulation and self-efficacy in reading and writing using modeling (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007), it makes sense that tutoring—which

often involves modeling—would also help develop students' self-regulation and self-efficacy. Similarly, Mackiewicz and Thompson's (2013) study demonstrated that tutoring builds students' motivation. One possible explanation for this is that students often find writing tutoring intellectually engaging, productive, and important (Bromley, Northway, & Schonberg, 2015). However, it is not only the act of *being* tutored that can develop generative dispositions. The act of *conducting* tutoring can also build students' generative dispositions. Hixson-Bowles and Powell (2019) interviewed nine writing tutors—representing a variety of regions, schools, and tutoring experiences—about their writing and tutoring self-efficacies. We found that, among other benefits, working as a writing tutor can build tutors' self-efficacies in writing and tutoring in a virtuous cycle (Hixson-Bowles & Powell, 2019). Furthermore, we suggested that perhaps more than quantity, educators should be concerned with *quality* of self-efficacy. In other words, the experiences and knowledge that contribute to the sense of self-efficacy needs to be valid and strong in order for the individual to benefit from it. Tutoring creates a situation where both the tutor and the tutee can develop more generative dispositions towards writing.

Another successful out-of-classroom intervention is targeted workshops explicitly about dispositions. For instance, Paunesku et al. (2015) created three online psychological interventions about growth mindsets and sense-of-purpose for high school students. Thirteen diverse high schools participated, resulting in 1,594 students completing one of interventions along with pre- and post-tests. Paunesku et al. (2015) measured growth mindsets, sense-of-purpose, grades in individual core courses (English, math, science, history) and overall GPA. They found that students exposed to either the growth mindsets or the sense-of-purpose interventions (but not the combined workshop)

found mundane academic tasks to be more relevant to their learning (Paunesku et al., 2015). Additionally, students who took the growth mindsets workshop found intelligence more malleable than they did prior to the intervention. Perhaps most impressively, Paunesku et al. (2015) found that underperforming students exposed to the interventions experienced a dramatic increase in completion of and grades in all four core courses. Such attention to underperforming students parallels Duckworth's and Dweck's research, but is sorely lacking in writing transfer studies at the college level—a gap this study addresses.

Dispositions often change in response to interventions both in and out of the classroom. Peer tutoring, especially, serves to promote generative dispositions for students acting as both tutor and tutee. Targeted workshops that explicitly discuss single aspects of dispositions have proved successful. Though other interventions still need to be tested, especially in the context of the college writing classroom. Much of the scholarship in writing transfer has focused on discovering the link between current practices and dispositions as well as continuing to identify exactly what dispositions (don't) include and their characteristics. The time has come to begin examining the implications of such studies by testing proposed interventions as well as commonly used strategies.

Strengths-Based Interventions

Strengths-based interventions developed out of the positive psychology movement and are commonly employed on campuses. There are two commonly used strengths-based interventions, Values in Action (VIA) and Gallup's Strengths, formerly known as StrengthsQuest. Both VIA and Strengths ask participants to take an online

assessment where they are given a list of their top strengths. While the categories and themes differ (see Table 1), both VIA and Strengths intend participants to engage in strengths-based education following their test results. All too often, people encounter character strength assessments such as these two, take the assessment, read their results, and then stop. The benefits of strengths-interventions, however, do not come from merely taking a test. The benefits stem from the education, reflection, and engagement with the material; the results are just the beginning. Strengths-based education follows these five tenets:

1. Developing a character strengths language and lens;

2. Recognizing and thinking about strengths in others;

3. Recognizing and thinking about one's own strengths:

4. Practicing and applying strengths; and

5. Identifying, celebrating, and cultivating group (classroom, school, etc.) strengths. (Linkins, Niemiec, Gillham, & Mayerson, 2014, p. 3)

By learning the language of strengths—for whichever program—participants are better able to articulate their thoughts in the subsequent activities. Identifying strengths in oneself and others is an act of reflection. In this step, students are also taught that there is no "one right way" to do something. They are taught to recognize and appreciate the diversity of approaches everyone has to learning, organizing, or making friends, to name a few examples. After internalizing the language of strengths as well as their own strengths, students are then asked to conscientiously practice applying their strengths in their daily lives. Reflection and learning about common challenges to applying strengths productively are instrumental in this step. The final step, which can occur alongside the

first four, is to help students rethink how they interact with others using strengths as a lens.

Table 1

Values in Action Themes vs. Gallup's Strengths Themes[11]

Values in Action (24 Themes)		Strengths (34 Themes)	
Wisdom	**Justice**	**Executing**	**Relationship Building**
Creativity	Fairness	Achiever	Adaptability
Curiosity	Leadership	Arranger	Developer
Judgment	Teamwork	Belief	Connectedness
Love-of-learning		Consistency	Empathy
Perspective	**Temperance**	Deliberative	Harmony
	Forgiveness	Discipline	Includer
Courage	Humility	Focus	Individualization
Bravery	Prudence	Responsibility	Positivity
Honesty	Self regulation	Restorative	Relator
Perseverance			
Zest	**Transcendence**	**Influencing**	**Strategic Thinking**
	Appreciation of beauty	Activator	Analytical
Humanity	Gratitude	Command	Context
Kindness	Hope	Communication	Futuristic
Love	Humor	Competition	Ideation
Social Intelligence	Spirituality	Maximizer	Input
		Self-assurance	Intellection
		Significance	Learner
		Woo	Strategic

Because the current study examines Gallup's Strengths program, I will offer more context and scholarship on it over VIA. Gallup's StrengthsFinder assessment tool was initially developed out of a qualitative study with nearly 2 million participants. The first version of the assessment was available in 1999 with the intent of helping managers select employees, increase employee motivation and engagement as well as facilitate personal development (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Louis, 2009). Not long after this initial launch, the StrengthsFinder assessment tool was paired with a curriculum for undergraduate college students in a program called StrengthsQuest. StrengthsQuest, now

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[11] VIA and Gallup use the word "themes" to describe the initial results of the assessments. Gallup also calls these "talents." For Gallup, talents become Strengths with intentional development. For convenience, I refer to all of them as Strengths throughout the study.

reffered to as Strengths, was created in a collaboration between Gallup's former CEO, Don Clifton, and researchers from Azusa Pacific University, Dr. Edward "Chip" Anderson and Dr. Laurie Schreiner. The following sections outline Strengths' business model and curriculum as well as relevant critiques of the program and it's positive psychology roots.

Strengths' Business Model

Gallup uses multiple streams of income in their Strengths' business model including codes, books, additional information from the assessment, on-campus and off-campus trainings, traning materials, coaching certifications, materials to facilitate coaching, and an annual convention. While individuals can buy codes or books separately (currently $19.99 each), Gallup's intent is for departments, colleges, or universities to buy codes in bulk for students and/or employees as demonstrated in Figure 1 (codes/books currently available for $11.99/each as the educator price). The assessment allows customers to see their top five talents. Recently, Gallup has allowed customers to purchase their "premium CliftonStrengths 34 Report" which provides customers with their full rankings (currently priced at $49.99 for individuals or $39.99/each for educators buying in bulk). This move is noteworthy as the company has previously justified only offering the top five most salient themes to customers, arguing that it helps them focus not on weaknesses, but on strengths. Gallup has even gone as far as listing the original 5-theme report as "partial results" ("Choose the Right Solution").
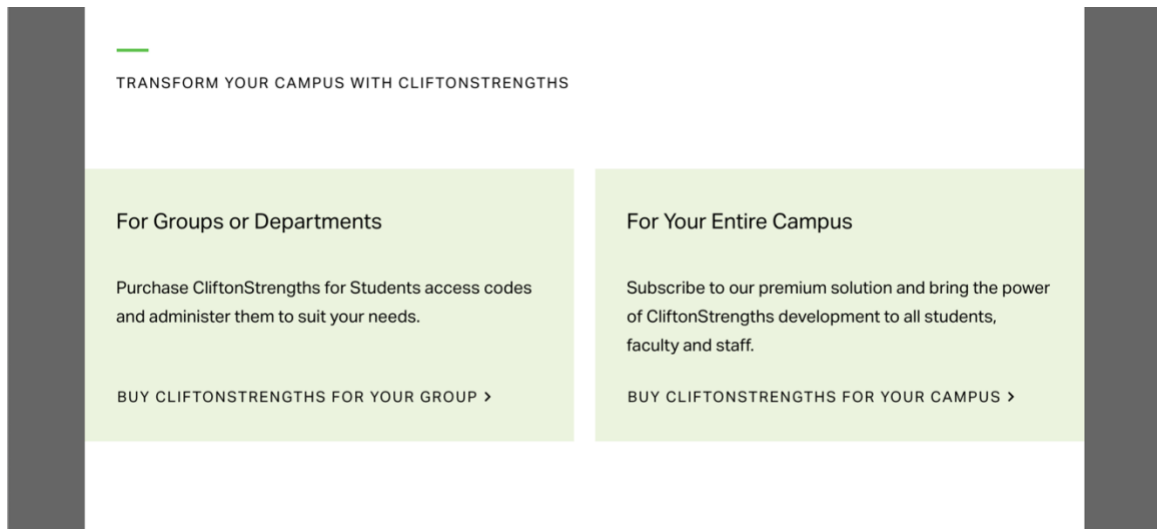
Figure 1. Image from Gallup's website demonstrating their recommendations for purchasing codes in higher education settings. Screen shot taken from CliftonStrengths for educators. (2019). *CliftonStrengths for educators: Develop thriving students & schools with CliftonStrengths.* Retrieved from: https://www.gallupstrengthscenter.com/home/en-us/cliftonstrengths-for-educators?_ga=2.204204565.428186326.1513006787-605369112.1502301252

There are other tools available to help facilitate a campus-wide Strengths movement. Though they don't list the price online, campuses can also purchase a "premium solutions" package which includes:

- CliftonStrengths Assessment & Personalized Reports

- Online CliftonStrengths Resources

- User Management Tools

- Basic Team Strengths Grid

- Automated Group Team Talent Map

- Universitywide Detailed CliftenStrengths Reporting

- Centralized Access Code Distribution

- CliftonStrengths Action Planning Tool

- Customized Branding Integrations

- CliftonStrengths Mobile App

- Group Management & Permissions Controls

- Dedicated Gallup Account Success Manager

Additionally, Gallup offers interested parties both on- and off-campus trainings. Pricing for these also not readily available online. However, individuals interested in becoming a Strengths Coach can purchase the Digital CliftonStrengths Coaching Starter Kit for $495.00. To facilitate coaching, Gallup offers Values Cards ($20.00), Motivation Cards ($20.00), Resource Guide ($15.00), Quick Reference Card ($5.00), Theme Insight Cards ($15.00), Discovery Cards ($15.00), Team Activities Guide ($99.99), and many other products ("Store"). Educators can also attend Gallup's annual CliftonStrengths Summit, which often sells out, for $595 at the Exclusive Rate, $695 at the Early Bird Rate, and $795 at the Standard Rate ("CliftonStrengths Summit 2019").

Gallup's marketing focuses on Strengths as a *movement*, as a *culture* for campuses to adopt. In doing so, Strengths enthusiasts spread the "gospel" of Strengths to their colleagues and students. As momentum builds and more staff and faculty join the Strengths movement, Gallup's roots push deeper into the soil of the university. When campuses choose to invest in Strengths, they purchase codes/books for each student, training for key faculty and staff, and countless support materials to ensure that it is successful. As new students and employees enter the institution, Gallup receives more orders. It is in this way, that Gallup builds repeat business at over 600+ campuses in the United States.

Strengths' Curriculum

Whether campuses choose to adopt Strengths for the entire institution, single departments choose to utilize it for specific students, or professors incorporate it into their classes, there is usually some form of Strengths Curriculum that follows the initial assessment. In many cases, students receive the code to the take the StrengthsFinder assessment in a book. The original edition was called, *StrengthsQuest,* first published in 2001. Though now, students receive *CliftonStrengths for Students*, a significantly condensed version of it's predecessor. *StrengthsQuest*, though longer (312 pages), included eleven chapters that guided readers through the framework of Strengths; process of understanding and affirming their Strengths; developing their Strengths; and learning how their Strengths impact relationships, education planning, being a successful student, being a leader on campus, career planning, etc. In contrast, *CliftonStrengths for Students* 100 pages shorter and includes an introduction to Strengths as part of the readers' college journey; then lists each Strength, describes it, and offers 13 action items to develop and leverage that Strength. For example, under the Futuristic Action Items, Gallup (2017) states:

> You may be able to see and describe the future and what you will be doing, but you might not know exactly how to get there. Partner with someone who has strong Deliberative or Achiever talents to help you plan the steps you need to take to reach your vision. (p. 132)

The accompanying books help students gain a deeper understanding of the five (or more) Strengths the report gives them. Both versions of the book also provide students with concrete action items they can implement immediately to utilize and

develop their Strengths. Students can also learn more about their Strengths through the online Strengths Center, where they receive their results. In addition to their top five Strengths, Gallup offers two free reports: Strengths Insight Guide and Signature Themes Report. The latter describes each of the user's five Strengths in more detail while the former describes how the user's five Strengths may express themselves given their unique set of Strengths. Consider how my Strength of Input is described differently in these two exerpts:

- Signature Themes Report: "You are inquisitive. You collect things. You might collect information—words, facts, books, and quotations—or you might collect tangible objects such as butterflies, baseball cards, porcelain dolls, or sepia photographs."

- Strengths Insight Guide: "Driven by your talents, you approach your studies or work with dignity and in a businesslike manner. It makes perfect sense, therefore, that you possess a vocabulary rich in complicated, technical, or subject-specific words. You habitually take time to carefully think through whatever you are going to say or write before you begin."

Similar to the books, these reports help students get to know their Strengths better. The Strengths Insight Guide also tends to be more specific, with less "hedging" language. All of these tools work as independent guides to understanding the results of the assessment.

Understanding and affirming Strengths are the first steps in the Strengths Curriculum,. As educators guide students through the curriculum, many activities suggested by Gallup serve to achieve both understanding and affirming Strengths. For instance, when I participated in an on-campus StrengthsQuest Educators Seminar in

2009, we completed an activity that asked participants to go around the room and complete quick interviews with people who had different Strengths from our own. We gathered their name, one Strength, and one benefit of that Strength. In this activity, we both learned about others' Strengths as well as practiced articulating the values of our own Strengths. In a similar activity, students are asked to define their Strengths in their own words, list what it empowers them to do, and identify when and how they used that Strength recently. Students practice internalizing the language of Strengths and reflecting on how they have embodied that Strength subconsciously.

There are several activities that help students move into the next step of the curriculum—developing their Strengths. Many of these activities shift the focus from reflecting on the past to imagining the future. Some ask students to identify key roles or responsibilities they have and writing out which Strengths will help them be successful in these aspects of their lives. Other activities introduce the concepts of "barrier labels" and the "shadow side" of Strengths. These concepts explore when and how it may appear that a Strength is getting in the way. For example, possible barrier labels to the Strength, Activator, may be impatient or impulsive. Similarly, the shadow side of Activator could look like jumping into a project without properly planning or getting exasperated with co-workers that take a long time accomplishing a task. By identifying the barrier labels of Strengths, students are able to see that qualities they may not think are special could turn into assets; and by identifying the shadow side of their Strengths, students can see how it takes work and intention to successfully develop their Strengths.

Leveraging Strengths strategically is the final step in the curriculum, though one could argue that all steps are recursive. To help students learn how to leverage their

Strengths strategically, Gallup guides students to think about how their Strengths work with other people's Strengths. One popular tool Gallup offers is a map of a team's Strengths organized by the four domains: Executing, Influencing, Relationship Building, and Strategic Thinking (see Table 1). These maps can help students see where they may have Strengths that others on their team don't have. For example, by looking at a team map of their class, a student may realize they are the only one in the class with Competition and many of the students they usually pair up with have Harmony. This may explain why there was tension in the Jeopardy game they played to practice their vocab words. However, seeing that their peers have Harmony may help the student with Competition value Harmony as a Strength and be less upset when they choose not to get too competitive in group activities. Similarly, the students with Harmony may learn to value their peer's Competition and lean into the energy that student offers the team in game-like activities.

Each educator has the freedom to customize the Strengths Curriculum for their particular students; therefore the specifics of the curriculum are going to manifest differently on each campus, department, classroom, and office. For instance, I have taught Strengths for residence assistants' and writing center tutors' professional development as well as in a research writing class. Though the curriculum varied given the context and needs of the students, in all cases students completed activities to learn one another's Strengths, reflect on how they have used their Strengths, and how they can strategically use their Strengths to complete the work asked of them in that situation (residence halls, writing center, or classroom). In some cases, I had more time to talk about the shadow side of Strengths. In staff situations, I also spent more time discussing

team dynamics than I did in the writing classroom setting. Despite the specific context, most educators engaging in Strengths coaching will address each of the steps outlined in this section: understand, affirm, develop, and leverage.

Critiques

Though strengths-based interventions have important differences from the broader positive psychology movement, because of their inherent connection, it is worthwhile to take a moment to address positive psychology's critics. For instance, Gross and Alexander (2016) argued that positive psychology over-emphasizes a direct link between happiness and success as well as devalues experiences of failure or struggle (Gross & Alexander, 2016). As writing and learning to write is fraught with struggle, pathologizing it would be detrimental to students of writing (Gross & Alexander, 2016). The point about happy feelings leading people to success is also critiqued by Miller (2008):

> We have here simply a description of a particular personality type together with a particular definition (all be it, a commonly accepted one) of the word happiness. The problems begin when this particular account of happiness is held up as a model of mental-health that can be achieved with the necessary re-crafting of people's attitudes. (p. 605)

The definition of happiness and what positive psychology suggests one has to do to achieve it was called into question by Gross and Alexander (2016) as well. Both Gross and Alexander (2016) and Miller (2008) suggested that positive psychology leads folks to abandon critical thinking, blindly accept the status quo (despite its countless injustices), and guard themselves against ever feeling a negative emotion lest it lead to failure.

Though certain figures in the positive psychology field are certainly culpable for giving these impressions,[12] Gallup's Strengths may not fall prey to all of these critiques. In the preface to *StrengthsQuest*, Edward "Chip" Anderson tells the story of discovering positive psychology and how it changed his research trajectory. He had spent most of his career focused on students' deficits and trying to remedy them. At a conference in 1978, he learned that deficit-based, remediation programs were largely ineffective, and was exposed to the idea that "to produce excellence, you must study excellence" (Clifton et al., 2001, p. xv). In this way, Gallup's Strenths program aligns with positive psychology.

It is true that strengths-based interventions tend to focus on the individual rather than systems, however this does not automatically mean that the program promotes turning a blind eye to systematic oppressions. In fact, strengths-based education encourages fostering effective group dynamics that could facilitate social change. Furthermore, the notion that happiness or optimism leads to a loss of critical thinking or that critical thinking must result in negative emotions is unfounded. Critical thinking is a skill that can be developed in people with a variety of emotional states. Though Gallup's Strengths do not preach that one set of emotions is better than any other, it does imply that success can be achieved if one adheres to the program. Like many other self-help books, the implication is that if one does not find success after following the relatively simple steps they've provided, there must be something wrong with the user. That being said, we do have empirical evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of strengths-based interventions.

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[12] Miller (2008) spends considerable amount of time critiquing Seligman (2006) on this front.

There is evidence to suggest that Strengths or a strengths-based approach to education may work as an intervention to develop generative dispositions in students (Austin, 2006; Christley, 2013; Jackson, 2017; Lopez, 2011; Louis, 2008; Macaskill & Denovan, 2013). For instance, Macaskil and Denovan (2013) found that university students exposed to the VIA experienced an increase in self-efficacy. Improvements in self-efficacy have also been linked to Gallup's Strengths intervention (Austin, 2006; Christley, 2013; Jackson, 2017). While Austin (2006) and Jackson (2017) studied high school students (Jackson, 2017 focused on African American tenth graders), Christley (2013) worked with underrepresented first-year and sophomore TRiO students. Jackson (2017) and Austin (2006) also found that Strengths increased students' motivation. Finally, Louis (2008) and Lopez (2011) also showed that exposure to Strengths positively influenced both high school and college students' engagement in their school work. These studies demonstrate that Strengths has had success in developing generative dispositions in students, specifically self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement. At the same time, none have studied Strengths as an intervention to develop generative dispositions towards *writing* in students—a gap the current study intends to address.

Furthermore, Strengths has not been examined alongside mindsets, two theories with interesting tensions. While mindsets research has shown that an emphasis on inherent traits can lead to a fixed mindset, Strengths starts by identifying participants' inherent talents. Therefore, Strengths could promote a fixed mindset in students. At the same time, Strengths *education* teaches that what the assessment gives you are talents, which are not strengths until one does the work to develop them into strengths. With this emphasis on development, Strengths could promote a growth mindset. The education

component is key here, and also varies widely in execution. Some employ the Strengths curriculum in a classroom setting, some in one-on-one sessions with students, and others receive the education through residence halls or campus organizations. Furthermore, strengths education can be taught by trained peers, staff, or faculty; and the education could be mandatory or voluntary depending on the situation. The current study will not compare the effectiveness of different methods of Strengths education. The current study also offers a starting point for identifying how, if at all, Strengths could (or even should) be used to develop generative dispositions in students.

Studying Dispositions

With each study about students' dispositions towards writing, transfer scholars learn a little bit more about how to best study students' dispositions towards writing. For instance, Driscoll et al. (2017) described challenges they faced in coding dispositions. From their "failed" study, we learned that it may be wise to focus on one disposition at a time or two or break dispositions down into smaller codes that may be applied more easily (Driscoll et al., 2017). If studying more than a couple of dispositions at once, as this study intends to do, Driscoll et al. (2017) suggested coding one at a time to allow for focus and mastery of the nuances inherent in each disposition. At the same time Baird and Dilger's (2017) study found that students' dispositions could influence each other. For instance, a student's self-efficacy in writing may begin to grow but due to a fixed mindset and some negative feedback, they lose the progress gained in their writing self-efficacy. Therefore, Baird and Dilger (2017) encouraged researchers to explore the interactions between dispositions. Furthermore, while Baird and Dilger (2017) intended to study self-efficacy and expectancy-value, they found that additionally, ease and ownership were

two other dispositions that played a significant role in the dispositional lives of their participants. Without being open to discovering new dispositions, they may not have found the importance of ease and ownership. Based on these discoveries, the current study aims to allow salient dispositions emerge from the data.

Conclusion

Though dispositions formulate throughout students' lives, they are still capable of changing once students arrive in our writing classes. Specific interventions—both in and out of the classroom—have demonstrated that interventions can help develop generative dispositions. However, more research needs to study the potential of interventions' impact on students' dispositions towards writing. Strengths, in particular, offers promise as an effective intervention. Because of this and its broad application in universities across the US, we need to explore how Strengths affects students' dispositions towards writing.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In order to discover how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming

college students' dispositions towards writing, learn more about what constitutes students'

dispositions towards writing, and better understand the characteristics of dispositions, this

study will use a qualitative case study approach to answer the following research

questions:

1. How does Academic Standards use Strengths?

2. What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they

   return to school after being on academic suspension?

3. Do individual dispositions impact other dispositions?

The current study employs a case study methodological approach to answer these

research questions for several reasons. Yin (2003) defined case study as "an empirical

inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context

especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident"

(p. 13). As the current study seeks to understand the Academic Standards office's

strengths-based approach on returning students' writing dispositions, an unknown number

of variables may be influencing students' reception of the strengths-based approach,

writing assignments, process of returning to school, etc. Therefore, the phenomenon

under study (students' dispositions towards writing) is inextricably linked to the context

(Academic Standards Office's strengths-based approach, students' external support

system, students' mental, emotional, physical health, etc.), making the case study an

appropriate methodological approach. Furthermore, Yin (2003) argued that case studies

are particularly appropriate when the goal is to explore an intervention that may yield a number of unknown outcomes. The current case study explores Gallup's Strengths program as an intervention, though it is unclear what the extent of possible outcomes could be on students' dispositions towards writing.

Furthermore, Merriam (1988) argued that the qualitative case study, in particular, is a useful methodological design for studying educational phenomena. To discover how and/or why a particular intervention is having a certain effect in an educational setting, it is beneficial to examine the phenomenon in its real-life context (generally in a bounded system such as a program, event, or social group) rather than recreating and attempting to control the variables—at least not until the phenomenon under study is understood enough to design a valid experiment. To this end, Merriam (1988) described three kinds of case studies: descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative. An interpretive case study uses inductive reasoning in pursuit of anything from "suggesting relationships among variables to constructing theory" (Merriam, 1988, p. 28). As the current study seeks to understand how, if at all, Gallup's Strengths program impacts students' dispositions towards writing, an interpretive case study is the most appropriate approach.

Data were collected during the Fall 2018 semester, from October 2018-December 2018. To be eligible for the study, participants needed to meet two primary criteria: (1) be in their first semester back after being on academic suspension and have petitioned to return to the University, and (2) be enrolled in either an English course or one that requires a similar amount of writing. Half the participants were assigned to participate in Gallup's Strengths program as a condition of their return while the other half were not in the Strengths program. Audio recordings were collected of the Academic Standards

Director's monthly grade checks with each participating student. Audio from interviews with each student as well as interviews with the Academic Standards staff were also collected. Furthermore, documents such as students' Strengths reports, written projects for Fall 2018 courses, Academic Standards' in-take assessments, transcripts, etc. were collected. Data analysis began as the data were collected to allow for member checking and included two rounds of coding. Table 2 shows alignment between the research questions, methods, and analysis.

Table 2

Alignment of Research Questions, Methods, and Analysis

Research Question	Methods	Analysis
How does Academic Standards use Strengths?	- Observations of grade checks - Interviews with students	- Two rounds of coding - Thick descriptions
What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?	- Interviews with students - Relevant documents	- Two rounds of coding - Thick descriptions - Code co-occurrences between dispositions and writing
Do individual dispositions impact other dispositions?	- Observations of grade checks - Interviews with students - Interviews with Academic Standards staff - Relevant documents	- Two rounds of coding - Thick descriptions - Code co-occurrences between dispositions

This chapter provides further details of the research participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness, limitations, and delimitations. In what follows, I also offer justification for my methodological choices.

Research Participants

The current study was conducted at a large, primarily white, open-enrollment university in Utah. The University offers access to Gallup's Strengths program to students in specific situations, such as taking a career exploration course or returning from academic suspension. The student participants in this study were recruited from those returning to school after being suspended for at least a semester due to poor academic performance. The following describes the site context, participant selection criteria, and justification for these decisions.

Site

The current study was conducted at a large, primarily white, open-enrollment university in Utah. To protect all participants, the identity of the site will remain confidential. When referring to the site, I will simply call it "the University."[13] The University primarily offers Associate's and Bachelor's degrees; however, a number of certificates and a handful of Master's degrees are also offered. Including full and part-time students, Fall 2018 enrollment was just under 40,000. While not faith-based, approximately 70% of students identify as members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Excluding concurrently enrolled high school students, the median age of a University student is 24. Most students work 20-30 hours a week, and many students are married and may have children. Given these demographics, the University has embraced its commuter-campus status and has no (public) plans to build on-campus

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[13] To this end, all citations that would reveal the University's identity have been withheld.

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residences. Still, walking the halls of the University makes it clear that there is a vibrant campus life, for those who choose to participate.

Placement into the first-year writing courses (FYW) is primarily determined by ACT and SAT scores. To get into English 1010, incoming students must have scored 19 or better on the ACT English and Writing sections or 500 or better on the SAT. If students scored lower or did not take the ACT or SAT, they must take the CollegeBoard Accuplacer test and score a 65 or higher in Reading or an 85 or higher in Sentence skills to place into English 1010. If students do not place into English 1010 or 2010, they may be placed into one of two "remedial" courses, administered by a separate department that teaches composition and literacy skills. Table 3 shows the most recent enrollment information (Fall 2016) for the various FYW courses.

Table 3

Fall 2016 English Course Placement for all Entering Students

Course	n	Percentage
English Advisement	20	0.8%
English 0890	182	7.0%
English 1000	410	15.8%
English 1010	1,496	57.8%
English 2010	330	12.7%
English MET CC	151	5.8%
Totals	2,649	99.9%

Students in the current study were recruited through Academic Standards' suspension program, meaning each student had reached academic suspension status and spent at least one semester away from the University. All participants had completed the required petition-to-return process and were enrolled in their first semester back at the University. The Academic Standards office attempts interventions at three stages before students reach academic suspension. Table 4 quotes the University's Academic Standards

policy and Table 5 displays the frequency of students on continued probation, suspension, and petitioning to return since Fall 2016.

Table 4

University's Academic Standards' Policy

Academic Standing	Definition	Notes
Good Standing	When the most recent semester GPA and the cumulative GPA are 2.0 or higher.	The student will continue to maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or higher in order to remain in good standing.
Warning	When the most recent semester GPA is below 2.0 and the cumulative GPA is above 2.0.	The student must complete the online Warning Workshop and print a workshop completion certificate. If it is the first time on warning the hold is lifted after completing the workshop quiz. If it is their 2nd time on warning the student must meet with his/her department advisor to have the hold removed.
Probation	When the semester and cumulative GPA both fall below 2.0. Includes a registration hold.	To clear a probably hold, a student must complete the Academic Success Probation Workshop, and then meet with his/her major advisor and develop a success plan to repair his/her GPA.
Continued Probation	When on probation, the subsequent cumulative GPA is again below 2.0. Includes a registration hold.	A student on Continued Probation must develop an academic success plan, and meet with the Academic Standards Counselor before the student will be eligible to register. The student may also be required to complete another Academic Probation Workshop and meet with his/her major advisor. All students on Continued Probation will be required to submit an In-Progress Grade Report to the Academic Standards Counselor before registering for a subsequent semester.

Suspension	When cumulative grades are below 2.0 for a third semester. Includes a registration hold.	A student who is on Continued Probation and subsequently receives a semester and cumulative GPA below 2.0 is placed on Suspension status. A student who has been suspended from the University must sit out for at least one semester. In order to return to the University, he/she must submit a Petition for Suspension Review to the Academic Standards Office by the deadlines outlined on the petition form. The Academic Standards Committee will review the petition and determine whether or not and under what conditions the student may continue to study at the University. As long as the student complies with the committee's guidelines he/she may remain at the University. Any student who returns to the University after being suspended will be placed on Continued Suspension and will be required to follow the guidelines that are given to him/her by the Academic Standards Committee.
Dismissal	When a student fails to comply with the Academic Standards Committee conditions.	A student is dismissed from the Univeresity when he/she is on Suspension status and fails to comply with the conditions set forth by the Academic Standards Committee. A student who has been dismissed from the University must sit out for at least one full calendar year. In order to return to the University, he/she must submit a Petition for Dismissal Review to the Academic Standards Office by the deadlines outlined on the petition form. The student may also be required to complete credits at another institution before being considered for re-admission. The Academic Standards Committee will review the petition and determine whether or not and under what conditions the student may continue to study at the University. Any student who returns to the University after being dismissed will be placed on Continued Suspension and will be required to follow the guidelines that are given to him/her by the Academic Standards Committee.

Table 5

Number of Students on Continued Probation, Suspension, and Petitioning to Return

	Fall 2016	Spring 2017	Summer 2017	Fall 2017
Continued Probation	633	877	203	
Suspension	256	198	40	
Actively Petitioning to Return	62	58	91	68

After being suspended, students may petition to return to school. The Academic Standards staff works with academic advisors and faculty to make recommendations about the conditions of the students' return to school. These recommendations are individualized and typically include mandatory monthly grade checks with the Director of Academic Standards, taking the Meyers-Briggs (MBTI) career test and the Strong Interest Inventory (SII), meeting with their major advisor, visiting resources like tutoring or accessibility services, as well as recommendations for what courses to take the semester they return. In addition, students may be asked to take one of five student success classes (University Student Success, Library Research, Stress Management/Hardiness, Power Reading Strategies, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, or Career and Major Exploration), meet with an academic coach or learning strategist, or participate in Gallup's Strengths program. Therefore, a typical list of recommendations for return may look like this:

1. Meet monthly with the Director of Academic Standards for grade checks

2. Take MBTI and SII and meet with Academic Standards to discuss results

3. Take University Student Success

4. Take Introduction to Writing or College Algebra, but not both in the same semester

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5. Visit the Writing Center, Math Lab, and Academic Tutoring to discuss how they can help you be successful

6. Participate in Gallup's Strengths program

Though the number varies each semester, anywhere from 15-30 students may be invited to participate in the Strengths program. In the letter to students outlining the conditions to return, the language is intentionally strict to motivate students to do everything on the list. At the same time, Academic Standards views these items as suggestions for their success. Academic Standards' goal is for students to explore these resources. Therefore, there is no formal punishment for not meeting one of these conditions.

This site was chosen for a number of reasons. The University is open enrollment, attracting a diversity of students with a variety of education goals. Serving such a wide-ranging population means that offices, such as Academic Standards, must be flexible and have a breadth of strategies to help students be successful. Examining the strategies they employ may offer insights into what works for a diverse student body. More specifically, the Academic Standards program was chosen over courses that offer Gallup's Strengths program because they work with underperforming students. Writing transfer studies needs more information about underperforming students' dispositions towards writing. Much of the research on writing transfer examines students' transitions from college to the workplace or from FYW to writing in their major courses. In contrast, the current study examined students at the moment they attempted to recommit to higher education. Therefore, this study site offered an opportunity to address a gap in the literature.

The University's Academic Standards office was also chosen because Gallup's Strengths program is not required of all students. Therefore, the current study was able to

observe students exposed to strengths-based mentorship without the formal program as well as strengths-based mentorship with Gallup's Strengths program. This comparison offered some insights into the cost and value of employing Gallup's Strengths program. Furthermore, Academic Standards has used this strengths-based method and Gallup's Strengths program for a number of years now. They have a sense of what works with their students. For instance, they have found that Gallup's Strengths program does not work well with all students, therefore participation in Gallup's Strengths program is recommended for students who the committee feels would benefit from the additional mentoring. This study benefits from the opportunity to study a previously developed Strengths intervention.

Finally, though I am not an insider in the Academic Standards office, I have a good working relationship with staff in the Academic Standards office, which offers me access that might otherwise be difficult to gain.

Criteria for Sampling

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, a purposeful sampling strategy was employed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Students had to meet specific criteria to be eligible for this study. Students had to be enrolled in a writing course (such as Introduction to Writing) or be enrolled in a course that required about the same amount of writing (such as a Philosophy course). They also had to be in their first semester back from being on academic suspension and working with the Academic Standards office.

Though underperforming students are not common in the current scholarship on writing transfer, they are common at every institution. By studying the dispositions of students coming back from academic suspension, this study is poised to learn new things

about students' dispositions towards writing. Returning from suspension not only indicates a history of academic struggle, but a positioning of hope, interest, and motivation to succeed; therefore, this group of students is particularly interesting in terms of dispositional development.

Recruitment

Despite having access to the Academic Standards office, recruitment of this population was difficult. Initial recruitment strategies yielded no participants. This included sending emails to all eligible participants through the Academic Standards office. Additionally, the Director of Academic Standards and the Academic Standards Counselor hosted an evening event introducing the strengths-based mindset used both in their mentorship and in Gallup's Strengths program. This event was advertised via email. Despite the promise of food, only one student attended and did not sign up to participate in the study. After filing a change of protocol with the IRB, two more recruitment techniques were employed. First, a flier was created and copies were given to the Academic Standards Director as well as the Academic Standards Counselor to give to eligible students when they dropped by. Second, I spent two days in the Academic Standards office during the first round of monthly grade checks with suspension students. I joined the student and the Academic Standards Director at the beginning of their meeting to introduce the study to the student. In this conversation, I determined if they were eligible. If they were, I used the flier and the recruitment script to describe the study and ask if they wanted to participate. If so, they signed the consent form, and I set up the

recording equipment for the first observation. All six participants were recruited with this final method.

Research Design Overview

This section describes the original conceptualization of the study as well as how it evolved. While designing this study, my goal was to follow this group of students through their transition back to school by not only asking them for their perceptions of Strengths and college writing in interviews, but also by observing their behavior and writing (see Table 6 for the data collection plan). For several reasons, I chose not to observe students in the classroom; although doing so might have offered additional insights into their dispositions as writers. Similarly, I did not include observations of students as they wrote, though doing so might also have illuminated patterns in their dispositions towards writing. Instead, I chose to collect audio recordings of students' meetings with the Academic Standards Director as this allowed me to observe, to a limited extend, their dispositions as well as learn how Academic Standards utilizes strengths-based mentorship and Gallup's Strengths program.

Table 6

Data Collection Plan

	October	November	December
	On-going collection of students' writing assignments		
Gather documents	Academic Standards in-take information, career test results, Strengths results (if applicable)		
Grade check observations	Audio recordings of all 6 participants' grade checks	Audio recordings of all 6 participants' grade checks	Audio recordings of all 6 participants' grade checks
Student interviews	Audio recording of in-pereson interview with each student	Students' choice— in-person interview (audio recording) or email interview	Email follow-up
Academic Standards staff interviews	In-person after all 6 grade checks	In-person after all 6 grade checks	Email follow-up

Another goal I had was to interview the Academic Standards team each month to gain their insights and observations about each participant. My hope was that by viewing students through their eyes, I might gain a better understanding of how they use Strengths/strengths-based mentorship. I was also curious to see if they picked up on different aspects of students' progress through the semester than I could from the audio observations of their grade checks. The other way I was hoping to find evidence of students' dispositions "in action" was through Academic Standard's documentation and the assignments students wrote throughout the semester. Academic Standards collects students transcripts, Meyer's Briggs assessment results, Strong Interest Inventory results, an in-take form with questions about their goals, students' petition-to-return letters, and Academic Standards' list of requirements for each student to complete as they return to

school. Some of this information provided basic demographic information such as how many credits they had taken and when. In addition to these items, I wanted to collect students' written assignments because I was open to the possibility that in the context of all the other data, students' written work might reveal something new about their dispositions towards writing.

Unfortunately, this plan was not fully realized. One hurdle I encountered was the more flexible and less rigid approach of the Academic Standards office. I had not expected this as the language of the policies and in the letters to students returning to school is firm. What I found instead was a relatively laid back office and students who learned that "required grade checks" were not, in fact, required. This led to not being able to collect the audio from the monthly grade checks for each student. Additionally, one participant regularly missed scheduled appointments, but dropped in at other times, which meant I was not there with the recording device when he had his meetings with the Academic Standards Director. Similarly, many of the students chose not to complete each of the montly interviews with me. I offered both email and face-to-face options for two of the interviews to try to accommodate their schedules. This resulted in some students reply to the mid-semester email at the end of the semester when they had more time. While it was interesting to read their responses at that point in the semester, this meant I did not have access to their perspectives mid-semester. Finally, most students did not submit their written assignments to me and of the few who turned one or two in, little to no information about their dispositions could be extracted from them.

Though the data collected is only a fraction of what I had intended to gather, it nonetheless tells a compelling story about how an Academic Standards program uses

Strengths, the dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension, and the relationship between dispositions themselves. The following two sections offer detailed description of data collection and analysis.

<center>**Data Collection**</center>

Data were collected in the Fall 2018 semester, from October 2018 – December 2018. After obtaining IRB approval, I recruited participants using a variety of methods described above (see "Recruitment" section). Participating students signed up for the study during their first grade-check meeting with the Academic Standards Director. They signed consent forms and gave me their contact information. Students who consented to participate received a $10 gift card to the campus bookstore after their first interview with me. Those who completed the study received a $20 gift card to the campus bookstore, sent in the mail after they completed the final follow-up email interview.

The collection of documents was ongoing throughout the semester and included the following: Academic Standards' intake assessments, results from StrengthsFinder, document outlining their conditions for returning, transcripts, and students' writing assignments (either the draft they turned in or the draft the professor returns). A secure, cloud-based file system was set up so that Academic Standards staff and myself shared a secure folder where they uploaded materials. Students emailed me their papers, which were stored in a secure cloud-based file system.

In order to minimize distractions and maximize the natural setting of the grade checks between participating students and the Academic Standards Director, audio recordings were collected. I did not attend these meetings in person. After listening to the

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recordings, I interviewed both the student and the Academic Standards Director separately. All post-observation interviews with the Director were in-person. However, the students had the option of an in-person or email interview after the second observation. This decision was made in an attempt to manage the time demands of the study and increase retention of participants. Finally, all students and the director received a post-semester follow up email with a few additional questions about how the semester wrapped up.

Data Collected

Though the intention was to gather three grade check observations per student, three interviews with each student, and three interviews with Academic Standards staff over the course of the semester, participation ended up being lower than I anticipated (see Figure 2 for the observations and interviews completed by each participant). For instance, most students only completed one or two grade checks and one or two interviews. One student regularly missed his pre-arranged meetings with Academic Standards and instead opted to drop in on them when he had time. This resulted in his grade checks not being recorded. I was able to interview the Academic Standards Director once towards the beginning of the semester and once towards the end. I was also able to interview the Academic Standards Counselor once towards the beginning of the semester. Though the Academic Standards Counselor does not work with the suspension students, she works with students on continued probation (the step before academic suspension) and was recently certified by Gallup as a Strengths Coach.

		First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
		Observations			Interviews		
Strengths	Shelby	Oct. 8th	Oct. 29th	Dec. 5th	Oct. 24th	**Dec. 6th**	
	Guillermo	Oct. 8th	Dec. 6th		Oct. 26th		
	Jordan	Oct. 8th			Oct. 29th	**Dec. 12th***	
Non-Strengths	Ted	Oct. 8th			Oct. 24th	Nov. 29th	
	Alfred	Oct. 8th			Nov. 5th	**Dec. 18th***	
	Megan	Oct. 8th			Oct. 24th		
Academic Standards Staff	Director				Oct. 31st	Dec. 11th	
	Counselor				Oct. 30th		

Figure 2. Observations and interviews completed by each participant. Bolded dates indicate the interview as conducted via email. Dates with * indicate that these interviews were in response to the end-of-semester follow up questions.

With these observations and interviews as well as the documents collected, I was able to gather both contextual and perceptual information. The interviews with Academic Standards staff, for instance, provided contextual information about the typical patterns in underperforming students returning to school. I was able to learn more about the intentions behind their policies and strengths-based approach to mentoring the students they work with. At the same time, I gathered perceptual information from students about their own development as writers and learners, primarily through their interviews with me. Students' letters to Academic Standards petitioning to return was an opportunity to learn how students contextualize and perceive their journey to academic suspension, or at least how they craft the narrative for an audience judging whether or not to allow them to continue studying at the University.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis was ongoing and recursive (see Figure 3 for a summary of the data analysis process). All data was pre-coded using exploratory coding methods. More

specifically, I coded large chunks of data to get a sense of the most salient dispositions. At this level, codes were broader. For instance, "time management or self-regulation" was a preliminary code that was developed into "self-regulation" with nine sub codes in the second round of coding. Analytic memos were written throughout the pre-coding process. After coding all the data, I constructed thick descriptions of each participant's academic history, journey with Academic Standards, and writing experiences. These thick descriptions along with the preliminary codes and analytic memos helped me focus on the parts of the data set that were most relevant in answering the current study's research questions. For instance, in the second round of coding, I did not include students' writing assignments, transcripts, or career test results. Rather, I focused on the observations, interviews, and petition-to-return letters as these pieces of data were most relevant in answering the research questions.

The second round of coding used what Saldaña (2009) describes as elemental, hypothesis, and affective coding strategies (see Figure 3). Though it was my intention to follow Driscoll et al.'s (2017) advice that researchers studying dispositions code for one disposition at a time, I found it was difficult to focus on one at a time when I noticed multiple codes at once. Rather than code for one disposition at a time, I used the first round of coding to narrow and define the codebook and then considered each data segment for each disposition. This slow, methodical process allowed me to recognize the interconnectivity of dispositions expressed in each data segment.

Coding Stage	Coding Strategy	Description
1st Round (Pre-coding)	Exploratory	Preliminary coding used to become familiar with the data in order to build a more refined coding system for future rounds of coding.
2nd Round Coding	Hypothesis	Application of pre-determined codes based on the researcher's hypothesis about the data. In the case of this study, I used hypothesis coding to examine the salience of dispositions known to influence writing. These included: self-efficacy, self-regulation, value, locus of control, and mindsets.
	Elemental	Codes are based on the content and/or concepts represented in a portion of data. This strategy is used to both code and categorize data.
	Affective	Specifically code for emotions, value, conflicts, or judgments. In this study, exploratory coding revealed a number of emotions present in the data. Therefore, emotions were coded in the second round.

Figure 3. Description of coding strategies used in first and second round coding.[14] All descriptions are based on definitions provided by Saldaña (2009).

While findings are described in Chapter 4, the data were further synthesized into analytic categories described in Chapter 5. The process of synthesizing the findings into outcome statements and then into analytic categories is based on Bloomberg and Volpe's (2012) syntheses process, and described in Chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations

Every attempt has been made to maintain an ethical approach in every stage of this study. The study was approved by the University's IRB as well as Indiana University of Pennsylvania's IRB. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study as well as the benefits and risks. While the Director of Academic Standards was aware of who participated and who did not participate, this knowledge could not impact students'

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[14] Though emotions were coded in the second round, they were not included in the results. While interesting, I felt this particular result did not directly answer the current research questions. However, I plan to return to this dataset to more closely examine the intersections of emotions, writing, and dispositions.

success in the program or in their progress of returning to good academic standing. The Academic Standards policy states that returning students must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA in the semester they return and complete the recommendations of the committee in order to successfully return and move into good academic standing. Students can be dismissed, but only if they fall below a 2.0 GPA or fail to complete the committee's recommendations. The Academic Standards Director does not have the power to simply dismiss students based on her own judgement. Therefore, her knowledge of who participated in the study could not be used to influence the students' success or progress.

During the data collection process, I worked to disrupt the site as little as possible. For instance, rather than observe meetings between students and the Director of Academic Standards in person, I collected audio recordings. To disrupt the power dynamics inherent in the researcher-participant relationship, I conducted interviews in private and student-centered spaces on campus. Furthermore, participants had access to me both during and after the study for support as needed. Though this study did not expose participants to questions or interventions outside of what they would typically encounter in a college classroom, some participants may have experienced mild discomfort while reflecting on their relationship with writing and writing for academic purposes. Students had access to a number of support services on campus, including counseling services, additional support from the Director of Academic Standards, tutoring, and additional support from myself as well.

Additionally, the identity of the institution as well as all participants will be kept confidential. To this end, pseudonyms are used for the institution and participants. All data were stored on both password-protected computers and password-protected cloud

drives. Any paper copies of the data were secured in a locked cabinet in a locked office on campus and shredded at the end of the study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A number of steps were taken to increase the credibility and dependability of the current study. First, the study's design utilizes multiple sources and methods of data in order to confirm emerging findings. For instance, I gathered the students' perspectives on their own dispositions towards writing, the Academic Standards Director's perspective on each students' dispositional development, observations from their meetings to observe the students' engagement with the program, and documents including Academic Standards' intake assessment and the students' writing assignments. Each of these data sources will help inform the overall picture of students' writing dispositions and development of their writing dispositions throughout the course of the study. Furthermore, data analysis was also designed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Beginning to analyze the data as it was collected allowed me to member check emerging findings with the participants in subsequent interviews.

It is my hope that the first two chapters have thoroughly explained the assumptions I am making as well as my theoretical position. What has not yet been discussed is my position in relation to the site and participants. While I have insider status at the University, my contact with students—especially the students eligible for the study—is limited. Therefore, it is unlikely that any participant will know me from another campus experience. That being said, participants were informed about my relationship to the University. Though my insider status at the University gives me general hope that the students involved with Academic Standards and this study will be

successful, nothing about my position with the University is connected to the findings of the study. Finally, it should be noted that I have used the Strengths program in my roles as a writing center administrator and writing instructor—though I was not teaching the program in any capacity while collecting data.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, my relationship and orientation towards Strengths has changed over time. While I find value in the Strengths program, I also recognize that it is not perfect. Having a deeper understanding of various dispositions has made me see potential flaws in the program, such as the possibility of Strengths reinforcing a fixed mindset as it teaches that everyone has innate talents. At one point in my education, I was invested in growing my community's investment in Strengths. However, now, I am not actively growing a Strengths program. In my own work as a writing center administrator and writing instructor, I view Strengths as a tool that works for certain situations. As a researcher, I am curious to find out how Strengths interacts with students' dispositions towards writing.

Finally, a note on external validity or transferability. In presentation, my goal is to offer thick descriptions that allow readers to gauge the similarity and differences of the case study to other contexts. Though this study is limited by only observing one site, it can contribute to other case studies on students' dispositions towards writing. Furthermore, this study serves as a starting point for examining Gallup's Strengths program as a potential intervention to develop generative dispositions towards writing in students. Results from this study will offer guidance on the viability of continuing this line of research.

Limitations

Like all research, this study is limited in a few ways. As this population was hard to reach, I was not able to collect as much data as I had planned. Additionally, some data was not collected due to misunderstandings and timing. For instance, in the first round of grade check observations, the Academic Standards Director turned off the recorder after she had described Strengths and before they had had a conversation about the students' grades. There was also one student who did not show up for his scheduled meetings with the Acdaemic Standards Director, but did drop by at other times. The mentoring that occurred was, therefore, not recorded. These gaps in the data collection plan limit the study's ability to discover salient patterns that closely align with reality.

Throughout the study, I learned about another key support role in the Academic Standards' office: an academic coach. While students returning from suspension met occasionally with the director, they worked more closely with their academic coaches. From what I understand, the coaches did not conduct any official Strengths coaching, they likely did offer the strengths-based mentorship that the office values. As I was unaware of their role when designing the study, I did not include observations of meetings between students and coaches. Therefore, this study is limited in that the data does not capture the role academic coaches play in students' development and transition back into school.

Another limitation of this study lies in the difficulty of studying dispositions. Driscoll et al. (2017) noted the challenge some of their coders faced in sorting out the differences between what a student *perceived* and what the coder *observed* in the same statement. For instance, a student might express that they are confident in writing because

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they have always been a naturally good writer. According to the student's perception, this piece of data could be coded as "high self-efficacy." However, given what I—as the coder—know about mindsets, I would want to code this as "fixed mindset." In cases like this for the current study, I coded both for what students seemed to perceive about their dispositions as well as what I observed about their dispositions. Though more complex, I did this because both are relevant in determining the characteristics and composition of students' writing dispositions.

Delimitations

To limit the scope of the study, I chose to narrow the study to a single program in a single office at a single university. This choice was made in part due to access and opportunity. Limiting the study in this way also ensured that I worked within my available resources. Still, narrowing the study in this way was a tradeoff, as I explained in the previous section. Similarly, another delimitation of the study was the choice I made to limit eligible participants to only students returning from being suspended. While the Academic Standards program is expanding their Strengths program to students on continued probation, I decided to maintain the focused population. This choice was made for a few reasons: 1) I wanted to study an established Strengths program; 2) I did not want to include students from both populations as comparison would be harder; and 3) the Strengths program would be administered by two different people, again making comparison more difficult. Still, by limiting the population, transferability may also be limited, and I risked lower participation in the study.

Conclusion

The current study utilized a qualitative case study approach in order to understand how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing, learn more about what constitutes students' dispositions towards writing, and better understand the characteristics of dispositions. Observations of mentoring meetings between students and the Academic Standards Director, interviews with each participant following the observations, and relevant documents were collected. Data analysis included two rounds of coding. Findings from this study 1) offer insights into how (if at all) Gallup's Strengths program influences students' writing dispositions, and 2) add to writing transfer scholars' understanding of the composition and characteristics of writing dispositions.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to understand how strengths-based mentoring and Gallup's Strengths program impact underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing, to learn more about what constitutes students' writing dispositions, and to better understand the characteristics of dispositions. Using a qualitative case study approach, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does Academic Standards use Strengths?

2. What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?

3. Do individual dispositions impact other dispositions?

In this chapter, I present the results of these research questions based on analysis of the grade check observations, interviews with participants, and their petition-to-return letters. Though some student papers were collected, not enough of them were collected to draw meaningful conclusions from them. Additionally, Academic Standards provided participants' Meyer's Briggs and Strong Interest Inventory results as well as their trascripts. While these documents were reviewed and coded in the initial round of coding and in the creation of thick descriptions of each participant, they were not included in the second round of coding and therefore do not have much of a presence in the findings presented here.

I begin with the findings for research question 2. One of the most salient findings is that students' dispositions towards *learning* were most present in the data and seemed to have had a noticeable influence on their dispositions towards *writing*. More

specifically, data showed that self-regulation—both broadly generalized and within the domain of writing—was the most common occurring disposition. At the same time, data suggest that dispositions may be interdependent and influence one another. Therefore, reports of one disposition often references other dispositions that appear to be influencing them. Examples of this finding will be reported under both the "Participants' Writing Dispositions" and "Dispositions Impacting Dispositions."

Findings for research question 1 were more elusive, in part because this student population was difficult to reach. As discussed in Chapter 3, several factors limited the data collection plan. For instance, three participants took Gallup's StrengthsFinder and met with the Academic Standards Director (ASD) for Strengths coaching, but one participant often missed scheduled appointments, opting to drop by when he had time. Therefore, his meetings were not recorded. Similarly, though all students were required to meet monthly with the ASD for grade checks, most only met once or twice during the semester. Still, I was able to observe some effects of Academic Standards' (AS) strengths-based mentorship as well as their use of Gallup's Strengths program on students' dispositions towards learning. These findings, along with examples of Academic Standards' strengths-based mentorship, will be presented under "Strengths-Based Mentorship," while examples of AS' use of Gallup's Strengths program and it's impacts on students' dispositions will be presented under "Gallup's Strengths Program and Writing Dispositions."

Before diving into the results, let me first introduce the participants. Table 7 summarizes the participants' pseudonyms, the semester they reached academic suspension, whether or not they participated in Gallup's Strengths program, the course

they took during data collection that required at least one writing assignment, and their

status at the end of the data collection period (Fall 2018). The academic suspension

semester indicates the third consecutive semester in which they earned a GPA below 2.0.

Therefore, the following semester(s) would be the one they had to sit out. For instance,

Jordan and Shelby both reached academic suspension status in Spring 2018 and spent

Summer 2018 "suspended" from taking classes. The other participants chose to take a

longer break from school. Half the participants took the StrengthsFinder assessment and

participated in Strengths coaching with the ASD. Additionally, while three participants

were in a first-year writing course (Alfred, Ted, and Shelby), the other three took courses

outside the English department that required writing (Megan, Jordan, and Guillermo).

Megan and Guillermo reported having two courses that required writing assignments.

Finally, the "status at the end of data collection" represents the outcome of participants'

first semester back after being on academic suspension, as reported by the ASD.

Table 7

Summary of Participants' Fall 2018 Semester

	Academic suspension semester	Strengths-based treatment	Writing course taken during data collection	Status at the end of data collection
Alfred	Fall 2015	Strengths-based mentorship	Intermediate Writing for Humanities and Social Sciences	Good standing – Fall 2018 and cumulative GPA were above 2.0
Megan	Fall 2017	Strengths-based mentorship	Introduction to Music, Community Emergency Preparedness, & Foundations of Human Nutrition	Dismissal – Fall 2018 GPA was below 2.0, must spend one year out and attend another institution to return. Had trouble with financial aid.
Ted	Fall 2017*	Strengths-based mentorship	Introduction to Writing	Continued suspension – Fall 2018 GPA was above 2.0, but cumulative GPA was still below 2.0
Jordan	Spring 2018	Gallup's Strengths	Introduction to Logic and Critical Thinking	Dismissal – Fall 2018 GPA was below 2.0. He is applying for official withdrawal due to extenuating circumstances.
Guillermo	Fall 2017	Gallup's Strengths	Foundations of Computer Science & University Student Success	Continued suspension – Fall 2018 GPA was above 2.0, but cumulative GPA was still below 2.0
Shelby	Spring 2018	Gallup's Strengths	Intermediate Writing for Humanities and Social Sciences	Good standing – Fall 2018 and cumulative GPA were above 2.0

Note. *Ted was allowed to take a student success course in studying strategies during the Spring 2018 semester.

Regarding end of semester standings, after analyzing the data in search of a

noticeable pattern in the dispositions of students who moved into good standing vs.

students who did not, I found that there was not a significant difference. While Alfred and Shelby both took Intermediate Writing during the data collection process and had the most instances of "strategies to achieve goals" codes, their dispositions are otherwise not all that similar. Furthermore, dispositionally, Shelby shared more in common with Guillermo and Alfred shared more in common with Ted. Jordan and Megan—the two who were dismissed—are similar in that neither engaged with the study as much as the other participants. Ultimately, this just means I don't have enough data on Jordan or Megan to draw conclusions about the relationships between their dispositions and their dismissal status.

More relevant in understanding these standings is each participant's transcript and strategic plan to rebuild their GPA. For example, when students retake a class and get a higher grade, the previous lower grade is replaced by the higher grade, so the cumulative GPA raises significantly. This was the case for both Alfred and Shelby, who retook some classes, and in passing them, saw a dramatic increase in their cumulative GPA. Ted and Guillermo were not retaking as many classes, so while their Fall 2018 semester GPAs were above 2.0, the improvement in their cumulative GPAs was more incremental. This GPA calculation is also why Jordan is being considered for withdrawal due to extenuating circumstances. Academic Standards was worried about him only taking one class in Fall 2018 because a low grade in it would significantly decrease his semester and cumulative GPA (in a semester where GPA building was really important), and they knew that his philosophy class was going to be challenging.

As described above, the findings are organized by the research questions into four primary sections: Participants' Writing Dispositions, Strengths-Based Mentorship and

Writing Dispositions, Gallup's Strengths Program and Writing Dispositions, Dispositions Influencing or Impeding Dispositions.

Participants' Writing Dispositions

Results from the first research question—what are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?—will be discussed in this section. There were two primary findings: 1) Students' most salient writing dispositions were self-regulation and self-efficacy, and 2) Students' *writing* dispositions were not as prevalent in the data as their *student* dispositions.

Many of the dispositions that influence writing—locus of control, emotions, mindsets, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and value—were present in the mosaic of these six students' writing dispositions. Figure 4 displays the frequency of disposition codes in each student's data set. As this graph shows, self-regulation was by far the most salient disposition present in the data. Due to the regularity of dispositions towards *learning* in the data, dispositions specific to *writing* were coded with the disposition code and the code, "writing specific." To determine writing-specific dispositions, I examined the code co-occurrences of dispositions and writing codes. Code co-occurrences indicate when codes overlapped in the data. Figure 5 displays the frequency of writing-specific dispositions as determined by the code co-occurrences that represent the most salient intersections between students' dispositions and writing experiences. Though each student's disposition profile differed, as a group, the most common writing dispositions were self-regulation (39) and self-efficacy (32), followed by value (23).
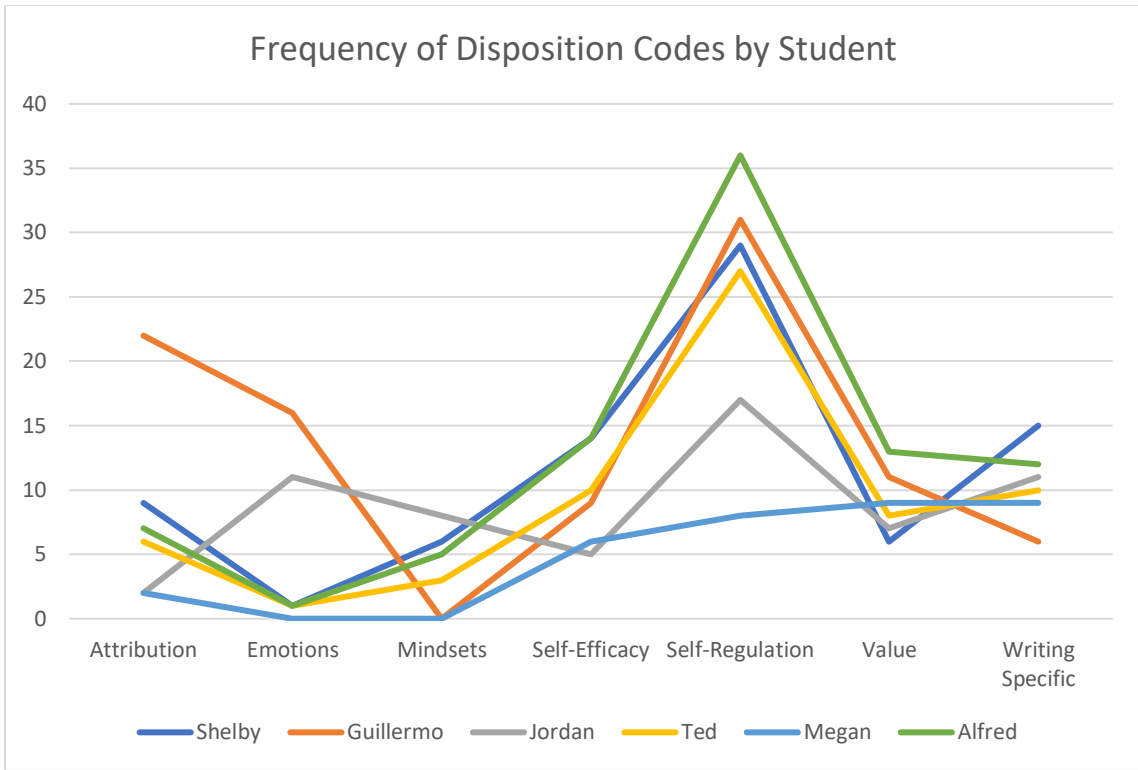
Figure 4. Frequency of disposition codes by student.
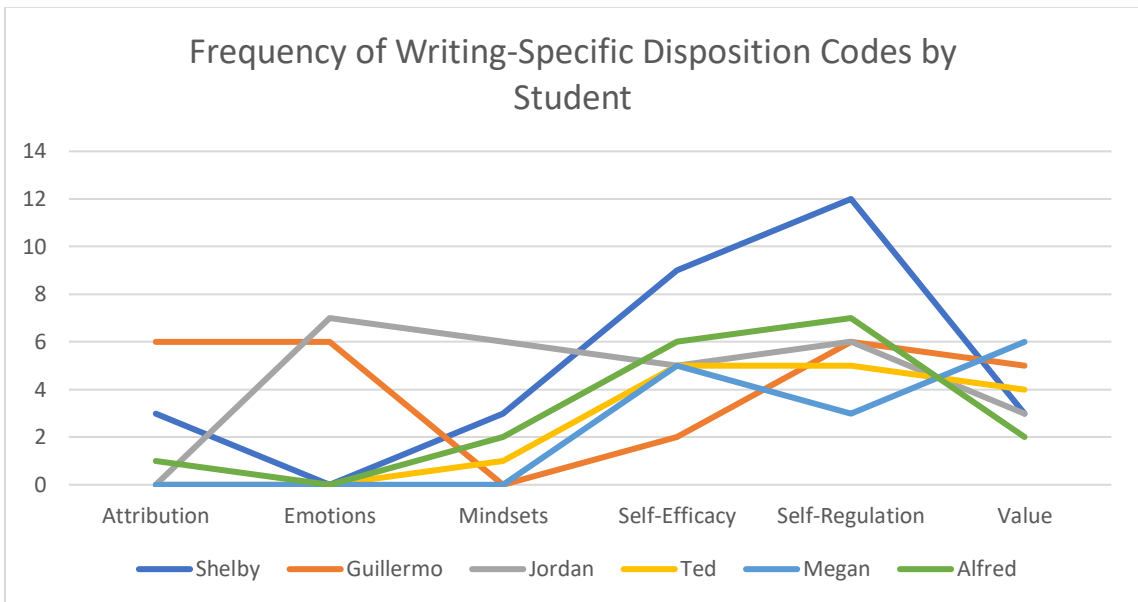
Figure 5. Frequency of writing-specific disposition codes by student.

In what follows, I will first discuss how self-regulation and self-efficacy manifested in the participants' *writing* dispositions. Following these findings, I will discuss the relevance of participants' dispositions towards *learning* in the data.

Writing Dispositions: Self-Regulation

Self-regulation was so common in the data that I subdivided it into nine categories (see Table 8 for the code definitions and examples). For writing-specific dispositions, *time/project management* and *motivation* were the most common across the six participants. Five of the six students also discussed *strategies to achieve goals* as well as *reflected on their choices/strategies*. As presented below and discussed in Chapter 5, self-regulation and self-efficacy were often interdependent in the data. In this section, I forefront self-regulation in the examples provided to demonstrate how self-regulation manifested in the participants' writing dispositions. However, in some examples, self-efficacy and even other dispositions may also be present and noted.

Table 8

Self-Regulation Code Definitions and Examples

Code	Definition	Example	Total Codes	Co-occurrences with Writing
Self-Regulation	Participant discusses and aspect of their self-regulation.	"My study habits have improved." "My grades suffered because I lacked motivation to go to school."	**148**	**39**
Commitments	Student describes their commitments and/or changes in their	"I'm working 10 hours a week" "I plan to take more classes next semester and decrease the	26	1

	commitments (i.e. familial commitments, courses, homework, work, etc.)	number of hours I work my job.”		
Discipline	Student discusses their discipline habits.	“Someone told me to create false deadlines for myself so that I’m getting them done before the deadline, but I didn’t end up doing that. I really should have.” “I’d like to continue having monthly grade checks to help keep me accountable.”	**51**	11
Distractions	Participants discuss what distracts them and how they manage distractions.	“I struggled to stay on top of my homework because I let friends and video games distract me.” “I realize what distracts me a lot and it’s mainly my phone.”	16	2
Managing Social Settings	Participant discusses how they manage aspects of their social life and relationships in the context of school work.	“I’m going to start studying at home with my family around because they will help keep me focused.” “I need to study on campus, with a study group to stay focused.”	**12**	0
Motivation	Participant describes their level of motivation to	“I am motivated when it’s the last minute.”	**64**	**20**

	complete a particular task.	"I know I should go to class, but I just don't want to."		
Pivoting	Student discusses changes they are making/have made/could make to improve self-regulation.	"I want to apply the study habits I learned from my mission to school." "At first I thought my student success class was stupid, but now I think it's really going to pay off."	14	2
Reflection on Choices/Strategies	Participant reflects on the effectiveness of choices they've made or strategies they've implemented.	"I procrastinated until the night before and stayed up all night stressed. But I got it done." "I wish I had chosen more interesting topics to write about the first time I took this class."	**60**	13
Strategies to Achieve Goals	Participant discusses strategies they could implement to achieve a goal or task.	"Maybe I need to meditate." "I plan to better utilize campus resources like tutors and the library."	46	11
Time and Project Management	Student describes how they manage their time and their commitments (homework, writing projects, social lives, etc.).	"I take all online classes to work around my 12-hour shifts." "The most challenging part of college writing is the deadlines. They feel like they just sneak up on you."	**68**	**22**

Note: Bolded numbers indicate that all six participants expressed the code in the data.

As a sub-code of self-regulation, *time and project management* co-occurred most often with *writing*, and will serve as an entry point into the data. It will quickly become apparent that these excerpts also begin to tell the story of *motivation*, *strategies to achieve goals*, and even other disposition categories, like self-efficacy. Time and project management refer to when and how work happens. For some of the participants, the *when* was most difficult. For others, the *when* was the part that they focused on changing and found success. Of course, *how* writing happened was often dictated by *when* it was happening. Therefore, the two primary struggles students faced were procrastination and adjusting to college-level writing expectations.

Procrastination manifested in different ways within this group. Shelby's procrastination style is probably the one most readers conjure when hearing the term. A couple minutes into our first interview, Shelby identified procrastination as her central issue. I asked if anxiety played a role in her procrastination:

> Shelby: No, I don't get anxious about it. It's just, I don't want to do it…It's gotten to be just pure laziness. I admit it.
> Kelsey: Do you feel like that in your other classes and other homework or is it specific to writing?
> Shelby: It's specific to writing. Especially like the longer papers. I just don't want to do them. So I don't. Until like the night before.
> Kelsey: And what's it like the night before when you're at--When you do it?
> Shelby: A long night. And very stressful.
> Kelsey: What do you do to get things going?
> Shelby: I just stay up all night and just get it done because at that point I have to. I don't really have a choice.

After this exchange, she discussed strategies she'd learned, but hadn't implemented, to combat procrastination (i.e. creating false deadlines). In the second interview (conducted via email[15]), I asked Shelby when she's motivated to write. She responded:

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[15] For the second interview, students had the choice to meet face-to-face or to respond to the questions via email.

I am motivated when it's the last minute to do my papers for school. I

procrastinate until the very last possible moment. At that point, I don't have a

choice but to get it done. This causes for some very late nights.

Shelby's relationship to writing is complicated. She "used to be really good in English"

in high school; she took concurrent college credit her senior year so that she could earn

some credits before she graduated. Towards the end of the second course of the first-year

writing (FYW) sequence, Shelby accidentally uploaded the wrong paper. She tells the

rest of the story in her petition to return letter:

By the time I noticed the mistake, the professor decided not to let me resubmit

and fix my mistake. That paper brought my grade from a B to a D. I got frustrated

and in a sense gave up on the class.

This event has stuck with Shelby as a defining moment in her writing education history.

Though she appears to be working on taking responsibility for the mistake, it is clear she

felt wronged by her professor. It may be too much of a stretch to conclude that Shelby's

procrastination is a direct result of this critical disruptive moment as well as other

negative experiences in writing classes, but the data suggests that Shelby's

procrastination is an attempt to avoid writing until she can't ignore it.

To further complicate Shelby's writing self-regulation, there is evidence in her

petition to return letter that she views discipline[16] as a fixed characteristic. She explained

that she attempted to re-take the concurrent enrollment writing class, but online this time.

She said, "I learned I do not have the self-discipline to handle online classes." This

statement indicates that Shelby believes discipline is something people either have or

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[16] While discipline is one of Gallup's 34 Strengths, in this instance, I'm using the term more broadly. Gallup's Strengths will be indicated by being capitalized (i.e. discipline vs. Discipline).

don't, suggesting a fixed mindset about her ability to self-regulate. It is possible that a fixed mindset about her self-regulation may have interfered with her attempting the techniques Academic Standards taught her to combat procrastination. Though not directly in the data, Shelby may have wondered, "why would I spend time trying to strengthen self-discipline if I don't have it?"

Ted, on the other hand, claimed to practice procrastination, but when I pressed for details, it became clear that he was not actually procrastinating in the traditional way like Shelby. In our first interview, Ted expressed that he was anxious about completing the assignments on time despite reassuring Academic Standards in his grade check and petition-to-return letter that getting married and working ¾ time has helped him to prioritize setting aside time for school work. Ted's anxiety about completing projects may have just been that doubting voice in his head reminding him that he'd struggled with completing homework in the past because in our interviews, he reported sticking to his schedule and staying on top of his coursework.

Still, Ted described his pattern as procrastination because he didn't start putting words to paper until a few days before the deadline, as he expressed in our second interview. However, when I pressed him, I learned that there was more happening than simply waiting to begin a few days before the deadline. Consider this exchange:

> Kelsey: Do you find yourself thinking about the paper and what you're going to write beforehand? And then like the actual writing happens in the last few days?
>
> Ted: Yeah, I mean I guess there's a few steps. I'll be thinking about it and then the first time I sit down, it's really just organizing my thoughts and how I actually started the paper, because my biggest problem is getting the paper started…Once I get the paper started it kind of just, I can breeze through it. Just getting that first paragraph and even … starting the second--kind of get in the flow. And so I'll spend probably the first day I start just on the

> first paragraph or second, just kind of getting everything organized to go
> on for the rest of the paper.

Ted's description of his writing process is not weighed down by stress and dread the way Shelby's descriptions were. In this quote, Ted describes a college writer maturing beyond novice. He can identify the steps he takes and when he takes them. Still, he recognizes this process as procrastination because of *when* it occurs—a few days before the deadline. It seems likely that in Ted's transition from "underperforming college student" to "successful college student," he is still learning what constitutes successful college writing habits, because of course Ted is executing the *how* of time and project management relatively well.

There are other examples of participants adjusting to college-level writing successfully. These were typically found as details rather than systematic patterns. For instance, both Megan and Shelby discussed how choosing a topic they cared about made writing for school more engaging. Alfred and Jordan both mentioned that they looked forward to getting feedback from their professor/grader so that they could apply the feedback to their next assignments. Gaining the language to talk about writing processes, learning that thinking and organizing ideas are part of the process, choosing topics that are interesting, and reflecting on past performance to improve future performance are all indicators that the participants in this study have made progress in their development as college writers. However, there were also examples of continued growing pains adjusting to the expectations of college-level writing.

Guillermo, for instance, described difficulty of completing large, multi-layered projects after missing class. Consider this exchange, in which I attempt to clarify what he finds challenging in college-level writing:

Kelsey: …Tell me if I'm understanding this correctly. So the college writing is hard to connect to personally. Is it hard that it builds on, like the assignments build on each other? So it's like if you mess up on that first one or…you choose the wrong subject on that first one, then the whole semester is like shot. Is that part of it?

Guillermo: Yeah. Because like, so I tried to get my attendance good. But like back before this semester, I was missing a lot because like I would go one day and get it. It would not go the next day. I'll come back again another day, and I wouldn't know what we were talking about. So I kind of like lost confidence. And I was like okay, I'm not even going to try right now. And then I want to show up again, and then I'll go again, be even more confused. And I just like, give up eventually, you know?

In other words, because Guillermo has had a difficult time showing up to class consistently, fallen behind, felt confused, discouraged, and frustrated, and lost confidence, he decided it was better to stop trying altogether. Guillermo ended up in a vicious cycle where missing class led to a downward spiral. He went on to say:

It's like, so if it's like shorter things, like with good instructions, like right to the point, it's like I got it, you know? But when it's like big things like, I don't know, I guess try to make it like perfect sometimes.

There are a couple of things to note from this final comment. He expressed that he'd prefer if assignments were short and clear-cut, which may indicate a difficulty understanding more complex assignment guidelines. His final statement about wanting to make assignments perfect also indicates that the more complex the assignment, the harder it is to perfect, and therefore, the more difficult it is to manage.

Learning to manage bigger, more complex writing projects is also a challenge Megan, Shelby, and Alfred struggled with, though in slightly different ways. Megan was the only one actively maintaining a writing practice outside of school. She described her love for writing creatively; writing outside of the confinement of an assignment allowed her to follow tangents in her thoughts and explore the lives of the women in her family as

well as their relationships. However, when I asked her what she wished was different about writing for school, she said "I wish I didn't have to do so much of it. As much as I love it, I still hate it at the same time." She expanded on this by pinpointing the challenge of meeting word-length requirements:

> I have 200 more words I need. I can't put that in twice otherwise they'll see it. And I had to reword this, and then they're going to think I'm just repeating myself. So that's, that's a little bit hard--is meeting the quota of words. Um, but if they're like, "write this first page" or "write a page or two pages," that I can do it. But it's 2000 words. Mmkay..."and" is going to be the second word after everything. So that's a bit hard for me. Yeah. I wish I didn't have to do that.

A difficult lesson for many college students, it seems that Megan doesn't understand that word-length requirements are less about how *much* a writer has to say about their subject and more about, among other things, complexity, nuance, depth, and level of detail expected from the writer.

Similarly, both Shelby and Alfred expressed a preference for writing the entire assignment in one sitting. In our second interview (conducted via email), Alfred said, "my motivation is sitting down and getting everything typed out all at once. Then I can go back and make revisions if necessary. I just like to tackle the whole thing." Though Alfred didn't indicate *when* he wrote this first draft, the fact that completing the entire assignment in one sitting is his preference illustrates *how* he manages his writing projects. To clarify, there is nothing wrong or inherently novice about writing an entire draft in one sitting. However, the size and complexity of an assignment as well as the writers' ability to hold all that information in their mind at once may dictate the feasibility of that

strategy. Alfred and Shelby have both taken FYW a couple of times, and are now well-practiced in conceptualizing the multi-layered projects assigned in such courses. Guillermo, on the other hand, may not be able to tackle a similar assignment in one attempt just yet. With time and exposure to different kinds of projects, Alfred's preference may shift to be more context-specific. In other words, the element of college-level writing that Alfred, Shelby, and even Guillermo struggle with here is that different assignments may require a different writing process.

Though Ted appears to be coming to a plateau of growth and change, the others seem to be earlier in their journeys back to good standing. Each of the students in this study are at a different point in their development of self-regulation as a writing disposition. Nearly all participants had examples of both generative and disruptive self-regulation in their data sets.

Writing Dispositions: Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was the second highest disposition to co-occur with writing in the data and, like self-regulation, was coded at least once in each of the participants' data sets. As will be discussed more in Chapter 5, self-regulation and self-efficacy are closely related and often presented as interdependent in the data. Some of the examples described in the previous subsection support this concept. Guillermo, as described above, struggled to attend class and then lost confidence when he returned and didn't understand what was going on. The data also reveal a potential relationship between self-efficacy and mindsets. Though there are certainly overlaps in writing dispositions, in this section I will focus on what high and low self-efficacy looked like in the data. First, I will return to Shelby as she had the most, low writing self-efficacy codes; self-efficacy is an important

part of her experience with Strengths, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Next, I will compare Alfred and Jordan as they had the most, high writing self-efficacy codes.

Though Shelby reported luke-warm confidence in her ability to write once she got started, she did not give many details about parts of writing she felt confident in. For instance, in our first interview, I asked what she finds easy about college writing. She replied, "Once I get started, I can get them done pretty well. It's just starting." This wasn't a surprise after our discussion about her struggles with procrastination. In her second interview (conducted via email), I asked when she feels least confident writing. She said, "I am least confident right before I start the paper, because I don't always know exactly what I want to say or put into my papers. I struggle to keep myself on track and have my papers make sense." In addition to a lack of confidence in her ability to self-regulate writing projects, this quote suggests she also struggles to develop ideas and maintain focus and clarity in her papers. When I asked when she feels most confident writing, she replied, "I feel most confident when the paper is already done, and I just have to turn it in. I am usually confident that I did the best I could and that it is at least a somewhat good quality paper." This response suggests that she does not feel confident during the act of writing; rather, any sense of confidence comes after the task is complete. Her last sentence implies that she is aware of the time constraints she gave herself and at the same time, usually feels she achieved the requirements of the paper within those time constraints. At the risk of veering into discussion, this begs the question, by raising the difficulty of the task through time limitations, does that lower the internal expectations of quality? If so, do these mental gymnastics serve to protect the writer by ensuring that any negative feedback could be explained away by the time constraints and not by the ability

of the writer? There is not enough evidence in this study to answer these questions, but the complexity of Shelby's writing self-efficacy and self-regulation certainly inspire further consideration.

In contrast, Alfred and Jordan both had more instances of high writing self-efficacy codes in their data sets. However, the tone of their self-efficacy stories differ. While Alfred's takes on a quiet enthusiasm, Jordan's is more of an exasperated optimism. For instance, when asked if there was anything exciting about their current writing classes, Alfred described learning about the different perspectives his peers have on their paper topics as well as growing as a writer. Jordan answered the same question: "Honestly, learning how to write an argumentative paper, 'cause I had never had *[sic]* to do that until this class." I followed up that question with, "is there anything about writing for this class that makes you anxious?" and Jordan replied, "I'm actually more anxious to learn from the professor on how to write papers like this. And I'm kind of excited about this upcoming one because it's one of the longest papers I've wrote *[sic]*. I'm like, [smack noise]." Jordan's enthusiasm is coupled with a relentless belief that he can and will grow as a writer.

Alfred also expressed belief in his ability to grow as a writer, but his self-efficacy excerpts offered more detail. For example, as we discussed challenges he faced as a writer (finding relevant research, primarily), he said:

> When I get down to it, when I bust it out, like, it's not really challenging for me because like, I'm already—like, naturally I feel like I'm a good writer…I'm creative and I have good, like, ideas. I'm very imaginative. I used to write short

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stories as a kid and all these things. So like, writing, when it gets down to it isn't

very challenging for me.

Alfred's past experience writing short stories seems to have contributed to his strong

sense of high writing self-efficacy. His high self-efficacy also appears to be interwoven

with a tendency towards a fixed mindset as he expresses that he is a good writer by

nature. When I asked what he found easy about writing for college, Alfred offered even

more details:

I feel like I have a good vocabulary, a good understanding of grammar and

punctuation, which is important in writing a good paper I think. So that's helpful

for me when writing… just having like an open mind. I feel like it's easy for me,

like in writing, and then like being creative and, you know, the brainstorming

process is easy, too, I think, you know? I don't just settle on one idea, I explore

like multiple ideas.

In this quote, Alfred began with more traditionally "later order" concerns (though one

could argue with his business trajectory that a command over grammar, punctuation, and

word choice is a higher order concern) and moved into more traditionally higher order

concerns. Alfred's description of his confidence in writing offers more evidence in his

ability to carry out the tasks than Jordan's moments of high self-efficacy.

Though the participants demonstrated a range of self-efficacy in writing, the

interactions between self-efficacy, self-regulation, mindsets, and other dispositions are

important and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Dispositions Towards Learning

A key finding is that that the number of codes for all dispositions—not just writing dispositions—were quite a bit higher than the number of codes specific to writing dispositions (see Figures 4 and 5). This may indicate a relationship between dispositions in different domains, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Of the more broadly generalized dispositions, self-regulation appeared in the data almost three times as often as other dispositions, making it the most salient disposition for underperforming students returning to school after academic suspension. *Time and Project Management* (68), *Motivation* (64), and *Reflection on Choices/Strategies* (60) were the most common sub codes (see Table 8). This section will briefly illustrate these aspects of participants' dispositions towards *learning*.

Every participant except Megan wrote about *time and project management* in their petition to return letters. They wrote about it in two different ways: what went wrong and what they plan to change—which also accounts for the high number of *reflection on choices/strategies* code. For instance, Alfred discussed spending too much time doing outdoor activities, playing video-games and sports, as well as socializing. He wrote, "I allowed friends and a girlfriend (at the time) to pull me away from class attendance and homework." This kind of discussion was fairly common in the petition letters. These letters typically ended with a description of how they planned to change their approach to school if they were allowed to return. For example, Jordan wrote:

> My plan is to 'study harder' such as (spending more time at the labs, not working more hours than usual, getting more sleep than what I got last semester, as well as taking time from fun activities to study at home).

As these quotes demonstrate, the way students wrote about time and project management were primarily in their overarching habits as students. For instance, Jordan didn't mention specific study strategies in the above quote; rather, he discussed behaviors that support good study habits. This was fairly common in the data. Students did not offer details about how they would approach specific projects, like tests and papers. These descriptions offer insight into participants' development as students, which may influence their development as writers (see Chapter 5).

Time and project management also came up often in the grade checks the Academic Standards Director (ASD) held with students. For example, consider this moment when Ted reflected on his recent change:

> ASD: It's just a matter of getting the work done, isn't it?
> Ted: That's been one of the problems, too. So it's just not—one, I've been to classes—like almost all my classes, and that's been a huge help.
> ASD: I know! People get this idea, ""oh I'm in college, I don't really need to go to class, I'll just read the books, take the test and get an A,"" and it just doesn't work that way.
> Ted: It doesn't. And then another thing is just doing the work. Just the little assignments add up.

In this example, Ted reflected on the impact of consistent attendance and keeping up with smaller assignments. Students must first master going to class and doing homework before they can successfully take on more challenging academic tasks, such as completing multi-step writing assignments.

In my interview with the Academic Standards Director, she warned that "bad habits" are hard to break; it often takes students more than one semester to establish generative self-regulation. Here she is describing the patterns she sees in students' first semester back:

It's mostly the ones that are, I would say, overconfident as in they've failed for three semesters, and then they come back in here, and we review the letter that we send, and tell them all the guidelines in which we want them to adhere to—you know, the tutoring labs…career tests and so forth. And they're all really gung ho. But oftentimes patterns are hard to shift in the first time around; so I work really hard with the students to try and help them that first semester to just get through and create a pattern that they can sustain the next semester and the next semester. So the first semester back can be challenging. There are some that will come in and just ace it and they, you know, they just turned things around and they're fine. But there are plenty who need assistance, and that's where we've added the coach component because they've got really good goals…I know that some of these kids who haven't made it, once they've come back from suspension, just needed a little extra safety net that first semester back so they can create habits that are, that are good and um, habits can't be created instantly.

In other words, for most returning students, the first semester back is about strengthening their self-regulation. Academic Standards offers as much support as each student is willing to accept to help them create and sustain productive and healthy habits. The ASD mentioned that some students need consistent assistance throughout the semester while others do not. The difference can be explained by several variables: type and quality of support system, change in context/circumstances, developmental stage/maturity of the student, etc. Alfred and Ted are good examples of how a change in context may lead to not needing as much support from Academic Standards.

Alfred and Ted are also both examples of what Academic Standards staff sheepishly referred to as the "young and dumb" group. Students who fall into this category are usually in college because their parents expect them to be (and in some cases even did the work of applying and enrolling them in school) and/or because it seemed like what they were supposed to do. In both cases, students did not actively choose to pursue a specific degree for specific reasons. Alfred and Ted both fell in this category prior to reaching academic suspension status, and they both returned after drastic changes in their lives and needed little help from Academic Standards their first semester back.

In Alfred's case, he spent three years away from the University after reaching suspension status. In this time, he worked and completed a mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)—the dominant religion in the area. While on an LDS mission, missionaries are not allowed to listen to music, use the Internet (except to communicate with family), watch TV, etc. Alfred and his companion maintained a regular practice of studying the scriptures daily as well as journaling. Studying in this context took on an entirely different meaning for Alfred in the sense that studying resulted in meaningful outcomes. In our first interview, he described how this change in perspective impacted his conceptualization of studying as an activity:

> We would study for people—how to help them understand what we were teaching them and things like that. And so I think what I learned from that is like when I study, I'm studying for myself, I'm studying for what I need to know rather than just like, you know, the answers to a test or to a quiz. It's like I'm doing this for my actual learning, my actual understanding rather than just getting a good grade, you know? And, like, that's what I learned from my…mission is like you can't just

get, like, good grades on people, you know? It doesn't work that way. Like these are living people, you know?

Alfred's mission taught him the value of studying by giving him the opportunity to impact people's lives through the activity. Alfred was able to abstract that knowledge and transfer it to studying for school, changing his orientation towards learning. Now, he is able to find value in studying and in education. Grades, while important, are not his primary motivation any longer. Rather, "actual learning" is his goal. Therefore, Alfred's change in context resulted in a situation where he didn't need as much support from Academic Standards upon his return to the University.

Though Ted didn't spend as much time away from school as Alfred, his change in context also resulted in him needing less support from Academic Standards his first semester back. In Ted's case, he got married. Interestingly, Academic Standards staff reported that the young men in their programs who get married almost always experience a dramatic change in academic success. Though some of the specifics vary, this is the pattern that the Academic Standards Counselor I interviewed described:

> ASC: Actually we were playing with some of the data analytics with Civitas that we have and literally one of the predictive factors for students on low academic standing is marital status. Like literally!
> Kelsey: That's wild!
> ASC: It is totally wild, but given some cultural expectations, not surprising because what happens is these boys, they go on a mission, and then their expectation is to come home and get married. So they're focused on that. So they're doing a lot of dating, a lot of, you know, stuff because--
> Kelsey: Oooh. That's distracting.
> ASC: It's distracting, and actually quite literally the other day I met with a student and I said, what happened this semester? It's clearly an anomaly. He goes, that's when I met my wife. And that's actually not unusual.
> Kelsey: Wow!
> ASC: And then they get married and then they're like, "oh, now I have to provide." Or they get married, and they start a family so that need to

provide kind of kicks in, and they go, "to provide the way I want to. I need a degree." So even if school hasn't been important--

Kelsey: Amazing.

ASC: Right?! And then, I can't tell you how many students say, "well my wife's going to keep me on track."…I'm like…that's not her job, but okay. And sometimes when partner comes in with them, I'll look at them, "are you okay with that?" Because sometimes that can be contentious. Like I'm like, I wouldn't want to be the nagging partner to make sure you're on track, but if that's the dynamic that works for them... And I will tell you a lot of times it does.

Kelsey: Interesting.

ASC: It is because we've seen such a consistent change that like when they write in the petition or they come in and they say, "well I've gotten married," we go, "okay, you're going to be okay." Because experience has told us that that actually is true.

Tough Ted did not go on a mission in his time away from the University, he did get married and followed a similar trajectory to the one the ASC described. In our first interview, Ted said, "my wife is really supportive too, so she makes sure I get it done. Even when I'm not doing it, she tells me to go to do it. That's a great help too." Additionally, Ted and his wife plan to reduce the number of hours he works after she completes her aesthetician degree and can take on more of the financial burden for their family. Working less will allow Ted more time to dedicate to school. Ted's quick turn around in academic success followed the pattern Academic Standards has observed in young men who marry. This change in context—coupled with a student success course on how to study—gave Ted the motivation and tools he needed to strengthen his self-regulation and not need Academic Standards as often in his first semester back.

Ted and Alfred demonstrate ways students might develop generative self-regulation while on academic suspension. Their stories illustrate how focusing first on developing successful student dispositions opens the door for growing more generative writing dispositions.

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The data show that a number of elements influenced students' dispositions towards writing. All participants seemed focused on developing strong self-regulation, with varying degrees of success. While this effort was targeted towards becoming more successful in school, more generally, it also influenced participants' self-regulation in writing. At the same time, dispositions like self-efficacy, value, and mindsets presented as interwoven in the data. While this will be expanded on in the discussion in Chapter 5, the interconnectivity of dispositions may indicate that interventions that successfully develop one disposition may have positive influences on other dispositions.

Strengths-Based Mentorship and Writing Dispositions

Results from the second research question—how, if at all, does Academic Standard's strengths-based approach influence the writing dispositions of students returning to school after being suspended for academic reasons?—will be discussed in this section. Though a semester offered a window into the possibility of change in students' writing dispositions based on strengths-based mentorship, it was clearly too short of a time period to observe more conclusive growth. Still, this section will describe Academic Standards' strengths-based mentorship and offer examples of ways it may have contributed to students' writing dispositions.

Academic Standards' approach to helping students through the probation, suspension, and dismissal processes is rooted in unconditional positive regard and positive psychology. I asked the director why she uses a strengths-based approach to this program. Her response is worth quoting at length. She explained:

> I'm actually a really firm believer of this. There's too many people that come in to our office and they've got guilt written all over them because "I can't do this well.

I, you know, I should be able to do this. My sister got a straight A in math." And so it affects their self-esteem, how they feel about themselves when they're constantly reminded of what their failings are…So with my study in the positive psychology theory, it's where I really, I really bought into that whole idea is that we all should start looking at one another as not in the deficit…So using a strengths-based approach is saying, honestly, we know everyone has challenges, but let's focus on your strengths and your talents to get you to the next level of what you want to achieve in life…We know we have challenges, but what we're really trying to do [is] say, let's take those challenges and make them an opportunity. And then if we look at our challenges as an opportunity. We can start to believe in ourselves. We've become more hopeful. Um, we can commit to things that maybe we couldn't commit to before and then this starts to spiral up and then we start to feel really empowered because success starts to come and then those negative feelings start to…disappear.

And then when you have a positive regard of yourself, then you try harder to get things done and in a productive, positive way. And it helps the person, it helps the community that, that person's in. So for me, there's no option. It has to be strengths-based, it has to be driven by "you are a human being that is contributing to society and will contribute in a positive, productive way. It's just we got to get your mind shifted so that [you] can recognize your value. And then once you recognize your value, then all of that up else happens." They feel empowered…But having said that, we can't ignore the challenges because, you know, they have to be dealt with, but we don't need to dwell on them. We just

want to try and manage them in a way that they're solved and then really focus on

where our strengths are and then commit to being successful and commit

to…producing so that the society will value you in whatever you have to offer.

Though this quote came from an interview with me, the same language was used with

every student in their grade checks (to varying degrees). Their approach disarms students,

who often come in expecting an experience akin to "visiting the principal's office," as

Megan stated in her interview with me. By changing the tone from shame, failure, and

disappointment to acceptance, resources, and opportunity, Academic Standards

communicates care and value for the whole person, rather than reducing their value to

their GPA. As the Academic Standards Counselor told me in her interview, "Yes, it's a

strengths approach. It's also just very much human, like, unconditional positive regard."

One of the specific ways in which Academic Standards communicates

unconditional positive regard is by respecting students' agency to choose if they want

help, the kind, and when. In my second interview with the ASD, I worked to better

understand why it appeared as if some students were allowed to opt out of items listed as

required in their conditions to return letter. Here is an excerpt from that conversation:

> ASD: They're usually in here for their two required grade checks and that's it, you
> know, they're on their way. But then there's others that are just, you know,
> checking back and trying to figure things out. And so we try again to let
> that flow so that it's not, so not everything is mandated, you know? Like
> we got to figure it out for this kid. So it's going to look different with
> every single kid that comes in here.
> Kelsey: It sounds like you really respect students' agency.
> ASD: Yes, absolutely…I don't want to tell them how to do anything. I want them
> to critically think about their own life and figure out what they want. And
> you know, and be honest with themselves, to really know what their
> mind—if they're a thinker—or their heart—if they're a feeler—is telling
> them and have the courage to move forward, and when they need help, to
> ask for help. So it's, this is more a process about building them up, you
> know, a sense of self, what am I doing here in this world, how am I going

to contribute to society or to the greater good, what's my purpose? And that's, that's it. You can't answer that in five minutes, you know, that's a process. But we, I think what we're trying to do is light the fire under them so that they can continue that process through their education, well hopefully for the rest of their life, reevaluating, checking, do I need more information? Am I really doing what I want to do? Am I contributing my best? And still the goal for us is just really, literally to open the doors and windows and say, here you are.

This moment illustrates the nuance and depth of Academic Standards' strengths-based mentorship. While Academic Standards offers students resources, accountability, and mentorship, they do not presume that all students who come through their program *need* everything they have to offer. Doing so allows students to maintain their agency, their power, which is fundamental to dispositions like self-regulation and self-efficacy— dispositions that require trust in oneself.

While all participants were exposed to Academic Standards' strengths-based mentorship, half of them experienced it without the addition of Gallup's Strengths program: Ted, Alfred, and Megan. In the previous section, I discussed how Ted and Alfred opted not to use Academic Standards' services as often in their first semester back. This was also true of Megan, whose academic suspension status appeared to be a result of difficult life events that set her back. All three of these students had more instances of generative self-efficacy and self-regulation than disruptive self-efficacy and self-regulation in their dispositions towards writing. That being said, Megan's dataset was considerably lighter than Ted and Alfred's as Megan only met with AS once and with me once. Still, they were the three participants with the least amount of exposure to Academic Standards' services. All three only met with the ASD once during the study, though Ted checked in regularly with an Academic Standards Coach. Additionally, of the

three, Ted was the only one who took a student success class. When asked if he applied anything he had learned from the meetings with the Academic Standards staff, Ted said:

> I think the biggest help for me wasn't necessarily the coach. It was a class that I had to take…I think it was the biggest help because it taught you things like how to deal with procrastination or …how to be successful in college. And so that class, honestly, helped me the most.

For Ted, the positive changes observed in his disposition towards school and towards writing seem to be a combination of the student success class and his new role as a husband. For Alfred and Megan, whose exposure to Academic Standards' services was fairly limited, it is difficult to conclude what role AS had in shaping their dispositions, especially given their different outcomes.

While Alfred moved back into good standing at the end of his first semester back, Megan was dismissed from the University. Staying out of Alfred's way and allowing him to implement what he learned on his mission seemed to work for him. Though AS reached out to Megan a number of times throughout the semester, she chose not to take advantage of their support. Losing a student is certainly not what any University wants, but perhaps being dismissed will help Megan reassess her goals or find a more fitting institution. Either way, the results of AS' strengths-based mentorship are mixed.

Gallup's Strengths Program and Writing Dispositions

Results from the third research question—how, if at all, does Gallup's Strengths program influence the writing dispositions of students returning to school after being suspended for academic reasons?—will be discussed in this section. The three students who engaged with the Strengths program were Shelby, Guillermo, and Jordan.

Unfortunately, Jordan's meetings were not recorded as he often missed scheduled appointments, opting to drop in when he could. This section will describe Shelby's and Guillermo's experiences with the Strengths program as well as relevant elements of their writing dispositions.

The Strengths program—both the formal one taught by Gallup and Academic Standards' version of it—consist of three primary parts: (1) Descriptions of the Strengths philosophy, (2) Affirmation of Strengths, and (3) Application of Strengths. The Strengths philosophy builds on the strengths-based mentorship discussed in the previous section by including a description of the validity of the StrengthsFinder assessment tool. In the first grade-check of the semester, the ASD taught Guillermo and Shelby the basics of the Strengths philosophy and oriented them to the assessment tool. In my interviews with each participant after their first grade-checks, I asked what their impressions of Strengths were so far. While Jordan loved it, the program made both Shelby and Guillermo feel awkward. Consider these excerpts, first from my interview with Shelby and second from my interview with Guillermo:

> Kelsey: Is it a weird thing to think about?
> Shelby: It is.
> Kelsey: Or like, try to name?
> Shelby: It is. It's easier to name weaknesses than it is strengths.
> Kelsey: Interesting. Why do you think that is?
> Shelby: Probably because we all want to see ourselves in more of a negative light
>   and it's hard to focus on the good in ourselves.
>
>
> Kelsey: What's your impression of that program?
> Guillermo: I think it's pointless too. Um, I mean it has a lot of info, but I haven't
>   looked into it and maybe that's why I find it pointless. But I don't know,
>   it's like I don't need that. Like, makes me feel like a kid, you know, like
>   they're like, you got all of these great qualities about you, like you're
>   awesome. Like I was like, um okay. Like I know, like you don't got to tell
>   me like, okay,

Kelsey: does it feel awkward?

Guillermo: It feels awkward, yeah. There's like, I don't know, maybe they think I think I'm dumb or they think I'm dumb or it's like it's like I don't know, I can work on this stuff. I just, my main is *[sic]* I'm lazy I guess so it's like, at my own pace, you know? …But we'll see once I start reading them for real.

Both Shelby and Guillermo expressed feeling awkward talking about their strengths, though for seemingly different reasons. Shelby's comment suggests that focusing on weaknesses is common and preferred by many. Guillermo, on the other hand, feels infantilized by the process and wonders if he is being asked to do this because AS thinks he has low self-esteem or intelligence. Therefore, both Shelby and Guillermo approached Strengths with some skepticism.

In addition to the doubt, another issue interrupted the flow of the program. Participants often experienced difficulty logging into and navigating the Strengths website. Participants' often forgot their log in information or their log in credentials wouldn't work on the ASD's computer/with that specific browser. Beyond these technical issues, students struggled to navigate the different reports and information available on the Strengths website after they completed the assessment. Even Shelby, the participant who engaged the most with the Strengths program, said in her third grade-check, "there's just so many buttons. I wasn't sure which [report] you wanted." Confusion around the assessment and website didn't happen all the time, but I mention it because when it did happen, it slowed the entire process down—potentially delaying or missing entirely opportunities for growth. In Guillermo's second grade-check, for instance, they spent a third of their half hour meeting trying to log into the website. The rest of the meeting wasn't as effective as it could have been because they were unsuccessful and didn't have the specifics of his report to work from.

Despite the confusion, both Guillermo and Shelby moved beyond the Strengths philosophy stage and into the Strengths affirmation stage. However, because of the difficulties accessing the reports, their experiences were a bit different. For instance, in Shelby's meeting, the ASD asked Shelby to read the summary of her first Strength—Adaptability—and "highlight the things that speak to [her] about that particular description." Shelby took time to read and highlight, and then they chatted about the descriptors that resonated with her the most. They continued in this fashion for the other four Strengths—Empathy, WOO (winning others over), Includer, and Relator. Table 9 displays the language Shelby highlighted for each Strengths' description as well as how much she expressed agreement that the Strength described her.

Table 9

Shelby's Strengths Affirmation

Strengths	Strengths Language Shelby Highlighted	Level of Agreement
Adaptability	"Live in the moment" "Create out of the choices that you make right now" "Don't resent sudden requests or unforeseen detours" "Very flexible"	Agree
Empathy	"Sensing emotion and sharing perspective and anticipating needs and finding the right phrases to express feelings and people are drawn"	Agree
WOO (winning others over)	"Meeting new people" "Enjoying initiating with strangers" "No strangers, only friends you haven't met yet"	Somewhat agree (she said, "less of this one")
Includer	"Wanting to include people and make them feel part of the group and actively avoiding groups that exclude others and casting few judgments"	Strongly agree (ASD said, "That one's a home run?" and SS said, "Yeah!")
Relator	"Pulling you towards people you already know and deriving pleasure and strength from close friends and understanding their feelings, goals, fears, and dreams."	Mostly Agree

In contrast, the ASD did not have Guillermo do this process of reading, highlighting, and discussing in the meeting. Rather, the director described Guillermo's Strengths; she described Competition, "And the competition one is nice, too, because it's kind of fun, you know, even just to compete with yourself. When you look at the world, you're instinctively aware of others' performance and then that'll help you to push yourself a little bit higher." Unlike Shelby's Strengths affirmation process, Guillermo didn't have

the opportunity to reflect or comment on his Strengths. This may have been because of the technology issues that they faced.

Similarly, when it came time to work on thinking of ways they could apply their Strengths, Shelby and Guillermo had different experiences. In the same meeting that they worked on affirming her Strengths, the ASD had Shelby begin the process of applying her Strengths. Systematically, the ASD had Shelby work through each of her Strengths, answering the questions: 1) how might this Strength help me as a teacher (her desired career path)? and 2) how does this Strength help me as a student? To illustrate, consider this example where Shelby makes connections between her Empathy Strength and her future as a teacher as well as her current work as a *writing* student:

> ASD: And empathy, so let's talk about that with relation to your career, first off. So, um, you can sense feelings. How would that help you--
> Shelby: Again, working with kids.
> ASD: Yeah
> Shelby: Kind of, you build those personal connections.
> ASD: Right. And also kids, like you said, if you are more empathetic and you sense something—kids sometimes don't even understand why they're upset, but maybe with being empathetic you can help to guide them through a troubled time because you're maybe a little more understanding of what they're going through. So that could definitely be something that you could use in your career. Um writing, studying how could it help in that area? Do you have any ideas that would help them?
> Shelby: Well, in writing specifically it's easier to tap into the pathos--
> ASD: Aaaaaah.
> Shelby: And get the emotion into papers.
> ASD: Very good point! See and I wouldn't have thought of that because that's not on my top five, does not include empathy. It's there somewhere, but that's a really, that's a good point.

In this example, the ASD models how to apply Empathy to Shelby's future as a teacher. Shelby picks up this lead and surprises the ASD by suggesting that having Empathy may help her to recognize or develop pathos in her papers. The application process, therefore, is collaborative, with both Shelby and the ASD contributing to the brainstorming.

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Guillermo's experience, on the other hand, was less collaborative. Nearly all of the application work was done by the ASD. For example, here she explained how Guillermo might use his Futuristic Strength:

Futuristic is fun too because--that's actually one that I have too--which again can be super helpful because even though you're struggling at the moment, you can see the potential past this moment and see, okay, this could potentially help me next semester. Now that I've struggled through and worked through these problems, I may not be getting as good a grade as I as I want, but next semester I could try it again. You know what I mean? So somebody who's futuristic is always looking at, kind of, what could be the next step forward to make things better...It helps them dream. It helps them keep the vision. It helps him to accomplish the tasks even when they are challenged.

This quote exemplifies the way Guillermo's Strengths application meeting went. The applications were more focused on navigating classes and making decisions. There was less direct focus on his current career path—computer science—perhaps because he expressed uncertainty about that trajectory. Unfortunately, neither Guillermo nor Shelby responded to the end-of-semester follow up email; therefore, it is unknown how they felt about Strengths at the end of the semester. That being said, there is some evidence that Strengths had a positive impact on Shelby's confidence, which I will address further.

Part of the Strengths application process is learning how to develop your Strengths as well as strategically employ them. Shelby was the only participant that received mentorship on these topics specifically, in part because she came prepared with her reports and accurate log in information, allowing them to spend the time on Strengths

mentorship rather than problem-solving technology issues. One concept that the ASD was able to discuss with Shelby is what Gallup calls, the "shadow side" of Strengths. For instance, the shadow side of Adaptability may look like disorganization, lack of focus, or ineffective time management. At one point, Shelby tells the ASD that she struggles with time management. The ASD responded, "Right, which actually relates to Adaptability…it's a good thing if you use it correctly, but then be aware of when it's not being helpful." Expanding on this and applying it to her future as a teacher, the ASD warned:

> There is obviously going to be some need to kind of stay organized and stay focused so that children feel, you know, that they've got, kind of, a set of plans. So for you it may look different how you stay organized than somebody who's, you know, got the more detailed plan. And so just know that that's a little bit of a challenge you might face. It's just working through those situations in which you'd like to be more flexible and sometimes they may require you to be a little more task driven.

These quotes illustrate how Shelby's Strength, Adaptability, may interfere with her developing generative self-regulation. Though Adaptability allows Shelby to shift plans or even priorities quickly, doing so can make it hard to set and complete appropriate goals, focus on long-term projects, and manage her time effectively. The ASD uses Strengths to help Shelby not only understand what she does well, but also to bring awareness to her weaknesses, and offer a toolset for how she can use Strengths to manage her weaknesses.

Another concept that the ASD was able to cover with Shelby was improving interpersonal skills through Strengths awareness. The ASD offered an example of how Shelby might work with someone with Activator (this talent allows the person to easily get started on projects):

> I'll just give you an example, the difference between adaptability and activator. So adaptability, they're really good with going with the flow and if they partner with an activator, then the two of you together can facilitate to get something done because you've got somebody who is like, okay, we're moving on this, we're getting this done. And then you're saying, okay, I'll go along with this, but let's try it this way or let's go this way. So the two of you together kind of reached a higher level because those are both skills that are needed and you bring your set to the table and the activator will bring their [Strengths] to the table and then of course you'll be able to reach those goals together.

By offering examples of how Shelby's Strengths may interact with others' Strengths, the ASD demonstrated not just what Shelby can do with her Strengths but also what she offers a team. Beyond simply thinking of ways Strengths allows Shelby to thrive in her career or in school, these more advanced concepts offer Shelby a model for how to strategically use her Strengths. As Shelby and Guillermo continue grade checks into the Spring 2019 semester, they may both receive more coaching in Strengths development and strategic application.

As mentioned above, neither Shelby nor Guillermo responded to the end-of-semester follow up survey. Therefore, the data do not include how they perceived Strengths after receiving the coaching. That being said, there is some evidence from their

behavior in the meetings with the ASD that suggests Strengths may have had an impact

on Shelby's self-efficacy. Throughout the second grade-check, when they worked on

affirming and applying Shelby's Strengths, Shelby's demeanor transformed. Discussing

her Strengths and how they can help her now and in the future seemed to build her

confidence as well as make her more comfortable with the ASD. For instance, Shelby

talked more after the Strengths discussion. She offered more details about her life and her

perspectives on her classes. Shelby seemed more invested in the conversation and by

extension, the relationship. Moments when she might have simply nodded in agreement

in the past, now she expressed sentiments like, "that will be nice" or "that's not bad."

Another example of Shelby's confidence growing in this meeting came as they wrapped

up. Consider this exchange:

> ASD: …I mean, honestly, that's all we're trying to do is figure out where our talents lie and to be able to use those often and feel successful. And I actually really love your group of talents for a teacher. I think I could see real potential for some—
> Shelby: It seems like every one of the assessments that [I've] taken has just led me closer to being a teacher
> ASD: and that feels really good, doesn't it? When you … get that confirmation—
> Shelby: Yeah, especially because I was struggling with what I wanted to do for awhile and it was kind of like, well teaching is the closest thing to what I want to do, so let's try it.
> ASD: Yeah. No, and so now we we're, you know, we're sure on your career. So now it's just a matter of getting you all the resources and all the help to be in that GPA category of where you are able to go into your major
> Shelby: I'm glad that I'm at least fairly close.

Two things, in particular, stand out about this exchange. Though the ASD was working to

wrap up the meeting, Shelby interrupted her, a behavior she did not display in her first

interview or grade check. Prior to the Strengths discussion, Shelby did not offer more to

the conversation than was necessary. However, at this point, she was feeling confident

enough and invested enough to want to continue the conversation and connect

emotionally. That leads me to the second thing that stood out. Second, in my first interview with Shelby, she expressed that she felt a lot of pressure in her meetings with the ASD. Though she didn't feel judged, she said the pressure of "what if?" was present in those meetings. By "what if?" she meant, "what if my grades aren't good enough?" and "what if I get kicked out?" Despite knowing that her grades were fine, Shelby experienced anxiety before her grade checks, which may explain why she did not open up much in her earlier meetings—she did not want to be any more vulnerable than she already felt. What the above exchange demonstrates is that Shelby felt safe and confident after discussing her Strengths.

While Guillermo opened up in his second grade-check after discussing Strengths with the ASD, this was behavior he also demonstrated with me in our first interview. It is not clear based on his behavior in the meetings how Strengths may have impacted his dispositions. And while it does appear that Strengths contributed to building Shelby's self-efficacy and perhaps even her self-regulation, it is not clear that these moves towards more generative self-efficacy and self-regulation applied directly to writing.

Dispositions Impacting Dispositions

Based on the findings, it seems clear that at this point in their academic careers, students returning from academic suspension and Academic Standards are more focused on developing generative dispositions towards *learning* rather than dispositions specific to one discipline/skill. However, this finding raises the question: to what degree do broader dispositions towards *learning* influence dispositions towards *writing*? While the fourth research question asked, "do individual dispositions influence or impede the growth of other dispositions?" one major finding was that dispositions from one domain

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(learning) influenced dispositions in another domain (writing). This finding will be discussed in this section.

As discussed earlier, the two most prominent *writing* dispositions were self-regulation and self-efficacy, while the most salient *student* disposition was self-regulation. Students who had more generative self-regulation as *students* also tended to have more generative self-regulation and self-efficacy in *writing*. For example, both Ted and Alfred demonstrated generative self-regulation in their study habits, attendance, and in writing for classes. They also displayed higher self-efficacy in writing. Students with more disruptive self-regulation, like Jordan and Guillermo, demonstrated difficulty self-regulating their writing assignments. That being said, Shelby specifically said that her habit of procrastinating writing assignments did not translate to a habit of procrastinating on other kinds of homework assignments. Therefore, more research needs to be done to learn about the relationship between generative *student* dispositions and dispositions towards writing.

More specific to writing dispositions, there was also some evidence of interaction between self-regulation and self-efficacy as well as self-regulation and value. For instance, Shelby's cycle of procrastination seemed connected to her lower self-efficacy in writing, as discussed earlier. In this case, disruptive self-efficacy and a fixed mindset about discipline seemed to have contributed to Shelby's disruptive self-regulation in writing, despite making improvements in motivation by choosing a topic personally meaningful to her

Similarly, Guillermo's experiences demonstrate how a lack of value in the writing assignments, class, or even relationship with the professor could contribute to a lack of

motivation and therefore disruptive self-regulation. Guillermo's effort in his writing and in class is largely influenced by how much he values the relationship with his professor. Two of the classes he took at the time of this study required writing assignments—the introduction to computer science and university student success. The writing for his computer science class asked him to demonstrate an understanding of computer hardware and software. Guillermo explained that his professor "has a grader and [Guillermo] doesn't like the grader. He does not give any feedback." He expanded, "he'll…send things back, like, missing points and he'll just put like something like small, like you did this wrong, try organizing it differently or something like that. And it's like, like what part? You know? Like what the heck, bro?" In contrast, Guillermo described the feedback he received on papers he had written for his university student success class: "She gives a lot of great feedback. I have never had somebody give me this much feedback. Like we will submit like some long stuff, and she'll reply with feedback that's almost as long as what we submitted." It seems that Guillermo interpretted the feedback as investment (or lack thereof) in himself as a student. He expressed that he doesn't care if he lets his computer science grader down, but he does care about his university student success instructor's perception of him: "I don't want to let her down 'cause like, because she will really put down how she feels or whatever about me not putting in my work, and I don't want to disappoint her." These relationships seem to have the power to increase and decrease Guillermo's investment in his writing. When he valued the relationship, he valued the writing, and therefore put forth more effort.

While not conclusive, these examples demonstrate a need for more research into how students' dispositions as *students* influence their dispositions as *writers* as well as how value and self-efficacy in writing influence self-regulation of writing.

Conclusion

This chapter has reported the results for the four research questions guiding this exploratory case study. The experiences of six students returning to the University after spending at least one semester on academic suspension demonstrated that underperforming students' dispositions towards learning were more prevalent than their dispositions towards writing. More specifically, self-regulation and self-efficacy were the most salient dispositions influencing learning, broadly, and writing, in particular. Furthermore, the strengths-based mentorship and Gallup's Strengths program used by Academic Standards had varying impacts on the participants. When positive outcomes were observed, they seemed more impactful on students' dispositions towards *learning* than on their dispositions towards *writing*.

Chapter 5 synthesizes the results presented here into three analytic categories in order to situate the findings in existing scholarship. I will also offer implications for writing educators and researchers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was threefold:

1. To examine if and how Gallup's Strengths program impacts underperforming college students' dispositions towards writing;

2. To investigate what constitutes students' dispositions towards writing; and

3. To explore the characteristics of dispositions.

To accomplish these purposes, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Academic Standards use Strengths?

2. What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?

3. Do individual dispositions impact other dispositions?

While the previous chapter organized the findings by the research questions, this chapter's discussion is organized around three analytic categories: (1) Building generative dispositions as a process of self-awareness, creating new habits, and reflecting on their progress.; (2) Influence of students' dispositions towards learning on writing dispositions; (3) Disposition profiles are a complex and dynamic web of individual dispositions (see Table 10).

Table 10

Development of Analytic Categories

Research Question	Findings Statements	Outcome/ Consequence	Analytic Category
1. How does Academic Standards use Strengths?	**Finding 1:** AS' strengths-based mentorship was not utilized fully by each participant. However, when it was utilized, it primarily influenced students' broader dispositions towards learning, which may influence their writing dispositions. **Finding 2:** Gallup's Strengths program was administered differently for each participant. Its influence was therefore varied. However, its effects seemed more influential on students' broader dispositions towards learning, which may influence their writing dispositions.	AS strengths-based mentorship and use of Gallup's Strengths program helped students become more self-aware. Students who utilized the external support seemed to be earlier in the process of self-awareness, building new habits, and reflecting on their progress.	**Category 1:** Building generative dispositions as a process of self-awareness, creating new habits, and reflecting on their progress.
2. What are the writing dispositions of underperforming college students as they return to school after being on academic suspension?	**Finding 3:** Students' most salient writing dispositions were self-regulation and self-efficacy. **Finding 4:** Students' writing dispositions were not as prevalent in the data as their dispositions towards *learning* (the most prevalent of which was self-efficacy).	Students' dispositions towards learning seemed to influence their dispositions towards writing.	**Category 2:** Influence of students' dispositions towards learning on writing dispositions.
3. Do individual dispositions influence or impede the growth of other dispositions?	**Finding 5:** Students' writing dispositions often seemed aligned with their dispositions towards learning. **Finding 6:** Within writing-specific dispositions, there was evidence of self-efficacy, self-regulation, value, and fixed mindsets interacting in both generative and disruptive ways.	Dispositions are nuanced, dynamic, and interact with other dispositions in complex ways.	**Category 3:** Disposition profiles are a complex and dynamic web of individual dispositions.

I synthesized the findings into these three analytic categories using Bloomberg and Volpe's (2012) analytic category development tool (p. 184) represented in Table 10. This tool helps researchers synthesize findings into analytic categories by asking the researcher to consider what the outcomes and/or consequences are of specific findings. Outcomes/consequences are interpretations of the findings based on the researchers' conceptual framework. Outcomes/consequences are then reframed as analytic categories, which guide the discussion. Reframing the outcome as an analytic category abstracts the knowledge learned from the specific study so that it can be theorized and discussed in context with the literature.

In what follows, I use the three analytic categories to guide a discussion that contextualizes this study's findings within existing scholarship and offers insights into how they may influence the field's understanding of writing transfer and transfer-based pedagogy. In Analytic Category 1: Building generative dispositions as a process of self-awareness, creating new habits, and reflecting on their progress, I discuss an emerging pattern of building generative dispositions with or without the use of Strengths. I also consider the conditions in which external supports/interventions may be most impactful in developing students' dispositions. Further exploration of the effectiveness of different external supports and interventions on students' dispositions towards *learning* as well as towards *writing* will offer writing educators better guidance in teaching towards transfer. Through contextualizing this study's findings in existing literature, I offer pedagogical recommendations for instructors teaching pre-core and first-year, writing-intensive courses.

In Analytic Category 2: Influence of students' dispositions towards learning on writing dispositions, I consider the implications of students' dispositions towards *learning* influencing their dispositions towards *writing*. By studying an at-risk (and frankly, hard-to-reach) student population, I gained insight into an earlier developmental stage in college students' writing dispositions. With a better understanding of what influences writing dispositions at these earlier stages, writing educators will be better equipped to design effective transfer-based pedagogy in pre-core writing, first-year writing, and writing-intensive courses as well as in writing tutoring. Transfer researchers can also build on these insights by exploring the nuances of the relationship between students' dispositions towards *learning* and their dispositions towards *writing.*

Similarly, in my discussion of Analytic Category 3: Disposition profiles are a complex and dynamic web of individual dispositions, I consider the ways scholars measure, observe, and research students' dispositions. I argue that it would be productive to think of students' dispositions as disposition profiles. A disposition profile is a tool that summarizes an individual's dispositions by marking their most salient dispositions (i.e. self-efficacy, self-regulation, etc.) in context-specific and/or broadly generalized domains, their tendencies towards disruptive or generative, and any noticeable relationships between dispositions despite their domain. Disposition profiles may also note major events in a students' dispositional development, such as changes in context or critical moments. Conceptualizing students' disposition profiles allows researchers to recognize the context of specific dispositions they may be studying. In other words, disposition profiles allow transfer scholars to see the forest, which provides relevant information even when studying a specific tree.

Together, these three analytic categories synthesize the findings of the current study and extract relevant implications for transfer scholars and writing educators.

Analytic Category 1:

Building Generative Dispositions as a Process of Self-Awareness, Creating New Habits, and Reflecting on their Progress

The first analytic category was developed from the findings for Research Question 1. Though all participants were exposed to some level of Academic Standards' strengths-based mentorship, only three were asked to participate in their use of Gallup's Strengths program. Furthermore, due to technical and timing issues, the administering of Gallup's Strengths program was inconsistent in the data. Still, both Gallup's Strengths program and Academic Standards' strengths-based mentoring seemed to primarily influence students' broader dispositions towards school rather than directly influencing their dispositions towards writing. More specifically, participants in this study[17] appeared to be at some point in the following discursive process:

1. Become more self-aware

2. Create new habits

3. Reflect and change/improve behaviors

There were a number of ways that Academic Standards' program helped suspension students become more self-aware beginning with the petition process. As all students were required to write a letter explaining their journey to suspension and the changes they intended to make, returning students came into the semester with a greater self-awareness than before beginning the suspension process. Academic Standards also

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[17] Not enough data was collected for Jordan or Megan to know enough about their disposition profiles or how their interactions (or lack thereof) with Academic Standards may have influenced them.

offered all students the opportunity to take the Meyer's Briggs assessment and the Strong Interest Inventory to help with career decisions and validate their choice of major. While focused on careers, the results also shed light on what students value. These assessments and the follow up conversations students had with Academic Standards' staff helped them become more self-aware of their purpose for getting a degree, more confident in their course selections, and more in control of their lives. Building self-awareness and self-efficacy are two key components in helping at-risk students become more successful (Bowering, Mills, & Merritt, 2017). This boost in self-efficacy makes it possible for students to move to the second step: creating new habits. Though Academic Standards couldn't articulate why they asked some students to take Gallup's Strengths assessment and nother others (beyond limited funds and a gut feeling about some students needing it), I suspect that the students who were invited to take Gallup's Strengths assessment and engage in Strengths mentoring needed more support to move from step 1 to step 2.

Strengths builds self-awareness by helping students understand their natural talents and how they can develop those into Strengths that help them be successful. The students who took advantage of the support—Shelby and Guillermo—were also the students who seemed to struggle the most with disruptive dispositions. This indicates that they had more psychological knots to tease through before they could accept some of the things they were learning about themselves. For instance, Shelby's career assessment results guided her towards becoming a teacher, but she didn't seem fully invested in that outcome until she and the ASD examined her top five Strengths and applied them to her future as an educator. In this meeting, she observed—with a mix of joy and relief in her voice—that all the assessments affirmed her path to be an educator.

Though Strengths does seem to be a useful tool in building generative dispositions for some students, it comes with some baggage. For instance, students have to be *willing* and curious for the results to be meaningful. Getting students interested can be tricky, as Strengths' fundamental philosophy can make students feel awkward, especially those with low self-esteem and/or low self-efficacy (like the case with Shelby and Guillermo). Beyond valuing the assessment, philosophy, and process—which admittedly sometimes develops later—students have to navigate the technology to take the assessment and sort through the different options for their results. For some reason, making an account and navigating the website proves difficult for students—a result I have experienced in my own use of the program with college students. There is some hope that Gallup is working to make their website more intuitive for users by combining the different iterations of their web-based platform. In the mean time, perhaps if the assessment were conducted together with multiple people there to help troubleshoot, the process would go more smoothly.

After taking the assessment, students have access to a few different reports to help them understand their results. These reports are long, especially by students' standards. Reading through them in a meaningful way often requires active reading and self-reflection skills that students, especially at-risk students, struggle with. Furthermore, students like Shelby and Guillermo may not want to read through the results because acknowledging their Strengths makes them feel awkward; Guillermo also implied that the process made him feel infantilized. These negative feelings towards the program could interfere with students' willingness to engage with their results.

Despite the complicated emotions towards Strengths, Guillermo and Shelby eventually did learn about their Strengths. Once students understand their results, the real work begins. With an understanding of their Strengths, students are poised to do the hard, self-reflective work of assessing how they can strategically leverage their Strengths to accomplish their goals, one way to move into step two: creating new habits. The resources—financial, time, personnel—to successfully guide students through this process in a timely manner can be cumbersome. However, the growth in self-esteem and self-efficacy that was observed in Shelby aligns with other research on the impact of Strengths (Austin, 2006; Christley, 2013). Strengths may be a longer and more involved type of intervention, but there is still evidence that it could be impactful—particularly on self-efficacy and self-regulation. To better study Strengths' impact on at-risk students' dispositions, researchers should plan for a longer data-collection period as one semester was not long enough to observe Strengths' impact on participants' dispositions.

Academic Standards also supported participants as they worked to create new habits, as was the case for both Ted and Alfred. For instance, the student success classes help shift students' mindsets and develop successful study habits. Student success courses have demonstrated positive outcomes, such as improving GPA, learning strategies, persistence, retention, motivation, and decreasing anxiety and procrastination (Bowering, Mills, & Merritt, 2017; Kimbark, Peters, & Richardson, 2017). Ted, especially, felt as though his student success class gave him the tools he needed to change his unsuccessfuly student habits into successful ones. As he embarked on his first semester back after suspension, Ted needed less support from Academic Standards. Rather, he needed time to try out his new habits. Though I wasn't able to observe these interactions,

Ted mentioned checking in with his Academic Coach throughout the semester. His coach seemed to serve as a spotter—there to catch him if he falls, but otherwise not interfering with his work.

The third step, reflecting and chaning/improving habits, was where participants started and where many of them ended at the conclusion of the semester. Each participant chose whether or not they wanted to continue having grade checks with the ASD, regardless of their academic status. While Ted and Alfred chose not to continue, Shelby and Guillermo chose to keep them up into the next semester. Each of these choices shows progress. Ted and Alfred reflected on their changes in habits and found that they were successful. This in turn gave them confidence in their ability to self-regulate as learners (and writers), which resulted in them feeling confident to continue on without the additional support. Shelby and Guillermo both came to recognize that they needed more continued support. Even if they couldn't articulate it, they both seemed to recognize that they were benefitting from the grade check meetings. This self-awareness and willingness to accept that they need help shows a shift in embracing their novice status—to borrow from Sommers and Saltz (2004)—as students. In doing so, Shelby and Guillermo demonstrated a better understanding of the work it will take to be successful students, a perspective that is fundamental to creating new, and successful, habits.

The question remains, what does all this mean for writing educators? In the remainder of this section, I will offer implications for educators on campuses utilizing Gallup's Strengths program as well as educators on campuses without a formal Strengths program. For those working in context that has an established, or is in the process of establishing, a formal version of Gallup's Strengths program, there are many

opportunities to build on it's momentum if one chooses to do so. To be clear, engaging with a formal Strengths program likely won't directly impact writing curriculum. Rather, engaging with Strengths equips writing educators with another tool to build rapport with students and help them create more successful learner habits. To begin, first learn the language. If possible, try to attend a training to help facilitate learning the language and program. A live training can be especially beneficial as one is able to hear from other participants about how their Strengths manifest for them, giving one exposure to how Strengths can translate into actions. Once comfortable with the language and familiar with the (suggested) curriculum, writing educators can use the language of Strengths to engage students. This could look like guided free-writes helping them build self-awareness, one-on-one meetings in which educators help students brainstorm writing strategies that will work with their Strengths, or even using Strengths as a tool to negotiate breaking up a group project.

Of course, writing educators do not need Gallup's Strengths program to facilitate the self-awareness—new habits—reflect and change/improve behavior process. For instance, elements of student success courses could be embedded in other courses, including first-year writing (FYW). In Bowering, Mills, and Merritt (2017), the course assessment included self-assessment and reflection activities to raise metacognition and awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as learners. FYW courses already incorporate reflection on one's writing process, but this strategy could be expanded to include reflection on one's *learning* process. After all, students will likely struggle to enact the writing process if they do not have the underlying self-regulation skills to support the writing process.

Another technique FYW could adopt from student success courses is the practice of setting learning goals to increase students' taking responsibility for their learning. In FYW, students could set short-term goals associated with each assignment. These goals could be formulated based on feedback from the professor, their peers, and/or their own evaluation of their writing; they could be specific to the writing process or the writing itself. Students' goals might look like these:

- Write three versions of the introduction to experiment with different introduction techniques.

- Set aside time to work on my writing assignment 3 times/week for at least 1 hour at a time. Free write at the beginning and end of each session for at least 2 minutes.

- Write 2-sentence summaries for each of my sources as I read them.

Students could then reflect on their progress towards their goal in a short letter to their professor when they turn in their assignment. Techniques like these could easily be worked into most FYW curriculae.

Though the current study did not include observations of the student success courses, future research could investigate such courses for more opportunities to learn techniques to build generative dispositions in students. Alternatively, FYW courses could be linked with student success courses so that cohorts of students take the two at the same time and the instructors collaborate to facilitate transfer between their lessons. Another possibility would be to create a FYW course with a learning strategy theme, where all assignments ask students to explore some aspect of their own learning strategies, dispositions, etc. Students could interact with the literature on dispositions and learning

strategies through a combination of readings, TED talks, and presentations from guest speakers (tutors, supplemental instruction leaders, past students, campus resources, etc.). Just like learning the language of Strengths can be a powerful tool, learning the language of dispositions can empower students to name their current habits/thought patterns and make changes. Along the same lines, I recommend that writing educators take time to evaluate their own dispositions towards writing and learning, and how their dispositions changed throughout their education. Raising our own self-awareness gives us the power to make that knowledge transparent to students, thus modeling the hard work on reflection and self-improvement.

Whether the course was themed or not, including an activity that makes students aware of campus resources, is a technique Academic Standards has used with success. Though it may not be as impactful as other options, facilitating students' becoming familiar with campus resources could have indirect—yet important—impacts on students' development of generative dispositions. In my final interview with the Academic Standards Director, she explained that it doesn't matter if students choose to utilize the service they have recommended. The important thing is that they checked it out. Many composition instructors already do this with visits from librarians, which is a resource that clearly connects to writing education. However, what if we're overlooking the impact that other campus resources may have on students' dispositions towards writing? What if an interview with a career counselor could help build value in writing? What if a visit to the ombudsman office or counseling center connects students with a counselor who can help them unpack and overcome negative critical moments in their writing education? And what if a meeting with a peer financial advisor lowers students'

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anxiety by teaching them tools to manage their finances while in school, thus giving them the mental space to tackle a writing assignment?

These are just a few examples of the ways writing educators could help students build self-awareness, create new habits, and reflect on them. There are surely dozens more I have not included here—all of which should be examined in future research. Despite the method, it's important for educators to remember that progress through these three steps looks different for everyone, can be slow, and may be invisible. In other words, educators should be patient if evidence of change is not immediate. They should maintain unconditional positive regard towards students and assume that they are all capable of growth.

Analytic Category 2:

Influence of Students' Dispositions Towards Learning on Writing Dispositions

While the second research question sought to understand the salient writing dispositions for underperforming college students returning to school after sitting a semester out due to reaching academic suspension, the aim of the third research question was to learn more about the characteristics of dispositions themselves. The findings for these two questions overlapped. The most salient dispositions in the data were not writing-specific; rather, they were students' dispositions towards *learning*, more broadly. This is likely because the participating students were focused on being better *students* so that they could move back into good standing. Even if the participating students valued learning to write, developing as a writer was not their priority their first semester back. For instance, Ted and Alfred both expressed value for developing their writing skills. However, their primary goal this semester was to earn above a 2.0 by implementing

successful-student habits. They simply had to prioritize their goals and focus on their top priority. Scholarship on advising underperforming students struggling with deciding on a major recommend that advisors first "help students deal with academic deificits before emphasizing major exploration" (Gordan, 2007, p. 109). Gordan (2007) goes on to emphasize "learning how to be a successful student is where initial energies must be concentrated" (p. 109). Though most of the participants in this study were not actively deciding on a major during the data collection period, they were all at different points in the process Gordan (2007) described. Gordan's (2007) advice demonstrates that for underachieving college students, the first priority is becoming a successful student.

Given the research on self-regulation in underperforming college students (Cazan, 2012; Dörrenbächer & Perels, 2016; Ley & Young, 1998), it is not surprising that self-regulation was the most salient disposition in participating students' dispositions towards learning. Ley and Young (1998) found that evaluating students' self-regulation could predict their status as either underprepared or regular admission. Their findings suggest that developing students may particularly struggle with consistently utilizing self-regulated learning strategies, like setting false deadlines or attending class on a regular basis. Ley and Young's (2008) results demonstrate two findings that align with the findings of the current study: 1) poor or developing self-regulation is a prominent factor in underachieving college students, and 2) even when they are aware of self-regulated learning strategies, underperforming college students struggle to use these strategies consistently. Developing self-regulation requires attending to multiple interrelated factors, including: goal orientation, interests, self-efficacy, outcome expectancy, future time perspective, task values, volition, instrinsic motivation, causal attributions, goal

setting and self-reactions, social motivation, gender identity, cultural identity, and metacognition (Ley & Young, 1998; Zimmerman and Schunk, 2008). If several of these factors are compromised, it is no wonder the road to successful self-regulated learning is long and uneven.

In the case of the participants in this study, their struggles with self-regulation primarily manifested in difficulty managing time and projects, mustering motivation to complete homework or attend class, and maintaining the discipline necessary to do the work required for their courses. Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) would likely argue that these specific factors fall under motivation and volition, primarily. They describe the difference between the two: "*motivation* refers to the predecisional processes leading to one's choice of goals whereas volition refers to postdecisional processes dealing with the implementation of strategies and attainment of one's goals" (p. 14, original emphasis). The students in the current study all shared the motivation of getting back to good standing, however their volition differed.

Some participants also had to contend with cultural expectations that influenced the self-regulation strategies. McInerney (2008) argued that cultural identities can influence students' motivation. This certainly seemed to be the case for several of the students the Academic Standards program serves, given the high population of students in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—the dominant religion where the University is located. While not a homogeneous group by any means, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have relatively high expectations of their young adults. For example, young adults are often expected to:

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1. Prioritize going on and paying for a mission—must be 19 years old and serve 18-24 months;

2. Find a partner, get married, and start a family; and

3. Be financially self-sufficient while in college.

Because students must wait to go on a mission until they turn 19, many students at the University would start taking classes while they waited to receive their calling. This practice makes it difficult for such students to focus on their classes, which serve the longer-term goal of earning their degree and not their shorter-term goal of going on a mission. Missions can also be disruptive if parents choose to enroll their adult children in college classes immediately upon their return from their mission, as the Academic Standards Counselor said is quite common. The expectations that young adults find a partner, get married, and start a family—all of which often happen in a matter of months—add distractions, stress, and responsibilities to students' lives. Of course being financially independent from their parents as well means most University students work at least 30 hours/week, if not more. The common expectation that young adults can achieve all of these things while going to school (and staying healthy) can warp a young adult's sense of realistic goals and time management.

The Academic Standards Counselor shared an anecdote that illustrates the parental pressure many students experience. She showed a student a time-blocking activity to teach them how to schedule in study time and discussed a realistic course-load given their other commitments. The student was so relieved by this technique because it proved they weren't *lazy* or *stupid*—they simply did not have enough time to accomplish all of the things expected of them. The student enthusiastically asked, "can I take this

home to show my mom?!"—revealing that they were experiencing pressure and perhaps even guilt from their mom for struggling to fit all their commitments into the week. This anecdote demonstrates that an apparent lack of strategies or volition may actually be a problem in the goals. Zimmerman (2008) outlined seven advantageous properties of goals:

1. Specificity of goals

2. Proximity of goals

3. Hierarchical organization of short- and long-term goals

4. Congruence or lack of conflict among one's goals

5. Difficult or challenging goals

6. Self-set or assigned origins of goals

7. Conscious quality of goals

8. Focus of goals on learning processes or performance outcomes (p. 270).

For the student in the anecdote, and for others contending with cultural and familial expectations, they may struggle because there is conflict among their goals and/or because they feel they have not set the goals they are working towards themselves. Without strong self-regulation and with the influence of demanding cultural expectations, students may struggle to judge what is a reasonable amount of commitments and how long certain tasks will take, let alone if what they have signed up for is actually what they want to be doing.

Though there was evidence of a lot of work yet to be done, the participants in the current study also showed signs of positive growth in their self-regulation. The participants who experienced more success during the course of the research employed

significant changes in their self-regulation strategies. Similarly, the participants who continued to struggle still improved their self-regulated learning, just in more incremental ways. For example, Guillermo and Shelby both asked to continue meeting with Academic Standards beyond the requirements because they recognized the accountability and support was helping them. Though one could argue that they were continuing to rely on external motivators, Newman (2008) argued that demonstrating help-seeking behavior is an important step in academic success. Similarly, it seems as though mastering self-regulated learning more broadly may be an essential step in students developing the foundation for generative dispositions towards writing.

Why might it be necessary to develop generative dispositions towards *learning* prior to developing generative dispositions towards *writing*? When transfer scholars write about dispositions towards writing, we are almost *always* referring to writing for academic purposes and in academic contexts. In the few studies that explore writing outside of academic purposes and contexts, researchers nearly always discover that students do not transfer writing knowledge in or out of the academic context (Baird & Dilger, 2017; Rosinski, 2016). It's as if undergraduate students have a mental block between school and everything else. This explains why students need to have generative dispositions towards learning in the context of formal education as a precursor to generative dispositions towards learning *writing* (or math, or history, etc.) in the context of formal education. For many students, writing is inherently a school-based activity. It is homework. It is a type of test. To consistently complete school-based activities successfully, it seems likely that students need generative dispositions, broadly generalized *and* context-specific.

Therefore, it is unsurprising that self-regulation was also the most salient writing-specific disposition in this study's participants. Though Wells (2011) researched a higher-achieving group of students, she had similar findings. Wells studied their transition from high school to college and also found they struggled with self-regulation in reading and writing. It could be that when students transition into a successful college student, whether that be immediately from high school or after being on academic suspension, establishing generative self-regulation (as learners and in specific domains) is a key part of the process.

The relationship between self-regulation and self-efficacy seemed to be closer for most participants in the domain of writing. This may be because students often expressed confidence or lack of confidence in their ability to self-regulate completing writing assignments (Guillermo's struggles with attending class, Shelby's lack of confidence in her ability to avoid procrastination, Ted's confidence in his ability to avoid procrastination, etc.). These findings are consistent with self-regulation and self-efficacy research. Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) stated "students who are high in self-efficacy use more effective self-regulatory strategies" (p. 11). In this case, they were speaking of dispositions towards learning, more broadly, as well as dispositions towards learning math. Zimmerman and Bandura (1994) found a similar relationship between self-efficacy and self-regulation in writing development. Similarly, Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani (2008) reported on two studies that found that self-efficacy and self-regulation can predict negative procrastination tendencies. This would explain the differences observed in the current study between Shelby (self-identified procrastinator with poor self-efficacy and poor self-regulation in writing) and Ted (preplanned papers in his head and started

them a few days before the deadline, improved self-regulation practices, and higher self-efficacy in writing). The close relationship between self-efficacy and self-regulation in writing development have important implications for writing pedagogy.

Given the connections between students' dispositions towards *learning* and dispositions towards *writing*, writing educators and their students may benefit from writing pedagogy that explicitly helps students develop as *learners* and as *writers*. The 2011 *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* is one example of such an endeavor. While the habits of mind are certainly a positive framework to influence writing pedagogy, critiques such as Gross and Alexander's (2016) demonstrate the need for more concrete strategies for developing efficacious students through our writing pedagogy. Randi and Corno (2005) offer a number of useful strategies that writing instructors could employ:

1. **Cognitive apprenticeship**: instructor models how one might *think* through a task, such as completing a rhetorical analysis. This modeling is followed up by coaching as students attempt to do it on their own. The process is scaffolded so that students receive more direct support at the beginning of the process and move towards independence.

2. **Strategy instruction**: Students are provided with "thinking guides" that utilize words and images (as well as instructor explanations) to communicate particular strategies. Randi and Corno (2005) exemplified this technique with reading strategies, though it could be used in other contexts. Importantly, students discuss when, where, and how they might employ the strategies. After having an opportunity to try out them out, students are guided through a

reflective discussion of how they used the strategies and how they might use them to tackle reading in other classes.

3. **Narrative Analysis:** This technique uses stories to help teach students how to recognize self-regulated learning behaviors as well as become more aware of their own self-regulation. Students are presented with a guide to specific self-regulated learning strategies. They are then asked to analyze a narrative through the lens of self-regulation. The narrative could be anything: a movie or tv show, a podcast, a short story, a novel, an essay, etc. Instructors could potentially connect this activity in with a campus common reader, thus increasing the impact of the activity.

Some instructors, no doubt, are already employing some of these strategies. It is always useful to reflect on the effectiveness of current techniques, though. For instance, Fritzsche, Young, and Hickson (2003) found that when students received feedback on their writing before turning it in for a grade, they were less likely to procrastinate. This suggests that instructors who build feedback into the assignment development—as many do—may be helping students avoid procrastination. Though Fritzsche, Young, and Hickson (2003) did not examine the quality of feedback, I imagine that students would find some feedback more motivating than others. I'm reminded of the differences Guillermo felt between receiving feedback from his student success professor and his computer science TA. Reflecting on our feedback practices and setting specific goals for improvement could have an impact on students' self-regulation. Fortunately, research on effective response to students' writing is growing (see *The Journal of Response*, for instance).

Beyond classroom instructors, peer writing tutors and writing fellows have a unique opportunity influence students' dispositions as both learners and writers. Writing center research and training materials emphasize tutors' ability to increase students' confidence in writing (Bromley, Northway, & Schonberg, 2016; Hawkins, 2008; Lape, 2008; Lawson, 2015), but what if tutors are doing more than that? Tutors have the opportunity to increase students' self-awareness by asking key questions and by modeling successful learner behavior. For instance, one task that writing tutors do often is help students figure out how to talk with their professors, how to ask for clarification on feedback, and/or how to ask for an extension. Students may feel stuck or scared in the face of these options, but tutors can show them how to perform these essential communicative tasks. This coaching and, even, modeling process raises students' self-awareness that they are unfamiliar with a skill that successful students use and helps them create new habits of communicating with professors.

Writing centers could also focus more on helping students develop successful learning habits, a practice other academic support programs like Supplemental Instruction have long offered. Workshops, tutorials, and resources could all be infused with learning strategies. Writing centers like New College of Florida's Writing Resource Center also offer structured writing groups that provide a space for students to write in community while also introducing and practicing successful learner/writer habits. No doubt there are endless ways for peer writing tutors to be involved in helping students learn successful learning habits.

Towards the beginning of this section, I discussed the possibility that underachieving students may be more focused on being a successful *student* than

maximizing their writing potential in our classrooms. For composition instructors, the reality that students may have the desire to learn and grow as writers but aren't able to serve that goal completely during the time they're studying with us due to competing priorities is disappointing. And yet, accepting that reality allows composition instructors the opportunity to make writing education more valuable to students. For instance, students may appreciate a writing class that explicitly offers training in self-regulated learning. An investment in developing generative dispositions towards learning could indirectly build generative dispositions towards writing.

Of course, more research is needed to determine the boundaries of the relationship between dispositions towards learning and dispositions influencing specific contexts, such as writing. For instance, it may be possible that students reach a point where they plateau in their development of generative dispositions towards learning and are able to shift their focus to developing generative dispositions towards specific contexts, such as writing. It may also be possible that students must first experience a broader shift in context or mindset—as observed with Ted and Alfred in this study—before they are able to develop generative dispositions, broadly generalized or context-specific. Driscoll and Powell's (2019) forthcoming case study of two graduate students demonstrates that in some cases, and in Alice's case, a fixed mindset towards writing could overshadow broader generative dispositions such as motivation and self-efficacy in one's ability to complete a certain specialization. Future studies could examine the relationship between students' dispositions towards learning and dispositions at different points in students' academic careers or towards other disciplines, such as math. We also need more studies like Driscoll and Powell's (2019) that track students' dispositions over time.

Understanding the relationship between students' broader dispositions towards school and their specific dispositions towards writing could have a significant impact on our understanding of how transfer functions and how educators could intervene to help students develop generative dispositions. For instance, writing educators may be focused on teaching the writing process—which one could argue is a form of teaching generative self-regulation in writing—when it might be more fruitful to focus on helping students with more basic tasks such as time-blocking and conjuring motivation or discipline when they don't feel like writing. While this study identified the likelihood of a relationship between broader dispositions towards learning and dispositions towards writing, future research will be better able to determine the boundaries, characteristics, and nature of the relationship.

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Analytic Category 3:

Disposition Profiles are a Complex and Dynamic Web of Individual Dispositions

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The final analytic category was developed out of the findings to Research Question 3. The writing dispositions of participants were highly influenced by their broader dispositions as students *and* the dispositions specific to writing were complex and interconnected. Baird and Dilger (2017) observed dispositions interacting within their participants; however, based on the findings of the current study, I suspect that students' dispositions do more than interact. I believe they are a complicated and interconnected psychological matrix, which can be represented in a disposition profile. A disposition profile is a tool that summarizes an individual's dispositions by marking their most salient dispositions (i.e. self-efficacy, self-regulation, etc.) in context-specific and/or broadly generalized domains, their tendencies towards disruptive or generative, and any

noticeable relationships between dispositions despite their domain. Disposition profiles may also note major events in a students' dispositional development, such as changes in context or critical moments. In this section, I return to the cases of Shelby and Guillermo to illustrate the complexities of relationships among different dispositions influencing their dispositions towards writing. A discussion of the implications of these findings follows.

As presented in Chapter 4, Shelby has a complicated history with writing education. She experienced a critical moment in which she made a mistake, wasn't allowed to correct it, and it cost her her grade. I believe that this critical moment casts a shadow on her disposition profile. In that critical moment, I suspect Shelby rewrote her internal narrative about herself. No longer did she believe she was a "good writer." Now, she was a student who had failed a writing class. To add insult to injury, her next attempt at a writing class was conducted online (perhaps to put distance between herself and her professor so that she was protected from future humiliation?) and she failed to stay on top of the coursework. Shelby added "not disciplined" to her internal list of characteristics. Now she was a student who had failed multiple writing classes—she was a "bad writer." If it isn't clear by now, I suspect that Shelby tends towards a fixed mindset when it comes to writing and being a (disciplined) student. Because of her tendency towards a fixed mindset, Shelby's failures had a more negative impact on her dispositions than they might have if she had more of a growth mindset.

More specifically, Shelby's tendency towards a fixed mindset interacts with her self-regulation and self-efficacy. For instance, Shelby seemed resigned to the fact that she was a procrastinator and just had to live with that flaw. If she believes she doesn't "have"

discipline, then why would she try implementing the time management strategies that Academic Standards taught her? It would be a waste of time to try to implement strategies that people who "have" discipline use. I suspect that her procrastination was fueled by disruptive self-regulation, low self-efficacy, and a tendency towards fixed mindset. Though they didn't measure mindsets, Shelby's patterns align with Klassen, Krawchuk, and Rajani's (2008) findings.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, Shelby felt confident only after the paper was finished; she felt she had done the best she could. Though she doesn't say it directly, it is implied that she felt she did the best she could in the time she spent on it the night before. By limiting the amount of time she had to work on the paper, forcing herself into a "make-it-work" moment, Shelby may be raising the difficulty of the task in order to lower her internal expectations of quality. Lower expectations and waiting until the night before the deadline shifts the kind of pressure she experiences from debilitating anxiety to motivation, which enables her to get the writing done. There are likely many reasons for procrastination, but the possibility that students with low self-efficacy in writing procrastinate in an attempt to feel more confident about the final product offers writing educators a specific issue to address.

Guillermo also experienced a mix of disruptive self-regulation and self-efficacy in writing. Rather than procrastination, though, Guillermo's struggles began at the point of attending class on a regular basis. As presented in Chapter 4, Guillermo found himself in a vicious cycle where he missed class, didn't make it up, got behind, didn't understand what was going on when he attended class again, lost confidence and felt discouraged, got frustrated, blamed the type of assignment or instructor, and gave up. The solution

seems simple enough—Guillermo needed to make up the classes he missed or not miss any more class. I don't think Guillermo realized that missing class meant he was making it harder for himself. It's not clear why he didn't attempt to learn what he had missed, though I have a few ideas. I believe it is likely that Guillermo was intimidated to talk to the instructor. He may have felt guilty for missing class and didn't want to feel more shame from an authority figure. He also prided himself on being respectful to his teachers and may have felt that asking for "special" help to make up what he missed because he didn't feel like attending class would have been disrespectful. It is also possible that he simply didn't know it was possible or expected of him to make up what he missed. As a first-generation college student with brothers and sisters who have failed out of college, Guillermo did not seem to talk to his family about school (especially his challenges). Despite the reason, Guillermo's disruptive self-regulation caused him to lose confidence he couldn't spare. Rather than engage with the negative emotions, Guillermo protected himself by stepping away from the challenge.

Guillermo's low self-efficacy in writing may also have been affected by a critical moment and fixed mindset like Shelby. Guillermo remembers his high school counselor telling him he was the type of person that "started things and didn't finish them." This description, which Guillermo internalized, suggests Guillermo has a tendency towards a fixed mindset about his ability to choose appropriate goals and see them through to completion. Therefore, any time he encounters a challenge that requires him to push through a boring part of a goal, there is a voice in his head telling him that it is *in his character* to give up at this point. Despite the possible shame giving up may bring him, this voice makes disengaging an inevitability. This complicated web of disruptive self-

regulation, low self-efficacy, and a tendency towards a fixed mindset is an overwhelming psychological puzzle for any student to navigate.

This conclusion that learners' dispositions are a complex psychological matrix aligns with scholarship in human development, self-regulated learning, and writing transfer research. In their "study of a study," Driscoll et al. (2017) acknowledge that one of the reasons dispositions were difficult to code is because they were often intertwined in participants' interview answers, suggesting a potential relationship. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also observed that people have "a cluster of intercorrelated personality characteristics including honesty, modesty, perseverance, and nonaggression" (p. 102). Though Bronfenbrenner's (1979) personality characteristics expand beyond what I have defined as dispositions in this study, he includes perseverance as an example, which is related to concepts such as grit and self-regulation that I would categorize as dispositions. It may be that dispositions, as defined in this study, would be conceived as one kind of intercorrelated cluster of personality characteristics by Bronfenbrenner. Either way, Bronfenbrenner (1979) also recognized a relationship between development characteristics.

More specifically in research on dispositions, Zimmerman and Schunk (2008) identified 13 motivational sources that influence self-regulated learning, including self-efficacy. While self-efficacy in one's ability to self-regulate is the most common relationship identified in the literature (i.e., Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994), more research needs to be done on the specific relationship between self-efficacy in *writing* and self-regulated one's writing. As mentioned previously, Baird and Dilger (2017) also found evidence of students' dispositions interacting. In one of their cases, a brief positive

change in self-efficacy and ease were not sustained because of another, more powerful

disruptive disposition. They suggested that "relationships between dispositions can

overpower change" (Baird & Dilger, 2017, p. 707). The findings of the current study also

suggest that relationships between dispositions are strong. For the students in this study

who demonstrated sustained positive changes, the "interventions" they experienced were

life-changing (Alfred's mission and Ted's marriage, for instance). This does not mean

that the only way to develop generative dispositions is through a dramatic life change.

The following section will discuss positive changes in dispositions through exposure to

the strengths-based interventions observed in the current study. More research is certainly

needed to better understand the matrix of dispositions that influence students' writing

dispositions as well as the effectiveness of different interventions.

As research on dispositions towards writing continues, I recommend scholars

utilize disposition profiles as a tool to contextualize the specific disposition(s) they are

interested in observing. Being aware of the entire matrix of students' dispositions will

likely yield different insights into what is going on than only measuring or observing one

disposition without context. While this suggestion may make for more burdensome

methodologies and may increase the difficulties Driscoll et al. (2017) outlined in their

meta-study on studying dispositions, it also has the potential to address some of the

problems they experienced. For instance, Driscoll et al. (2017) shared an excerpt of data

from a student's final reflection to illustrate the numerous difficulties coders experienced.

Coders had to consider time and contradictions in the text as well as reconcile the

student's perception of themselves with the coder's interpretation. Driscoll et al. (2017)

concluded, "in the end, the coder avoided the complex issues surrounding self-efficacy

and only coded for generative value. This single segment leads one down a rabbit hole 'reading into' layers of meaning" (Trouble Brewing section, para. 3). Disposition profiles allow researchers to lean into complexities and read "into the layers of meaning." Compared to other concepts related to writing transfer, "dispositions entail not only such conceptual complexity but also cultural, psychological, and temporal complexities" (The Story Begins section, para. 3). Though disposition profiles may require coders to be well-versed in literature on dispositions, they may also allow space for researchers to explore these areas of complexity.

Conclusion

Though difficult at times, researching dispositions within an at-risk student population provided insight into the early stages of development of dispositions towards writing. There is still more to learn from this population. Longer data-collection periods than a single semester would teach us more, as growth at this stage is slow and nuanced. Still, having a greater understanding of how dispositions towards writing develop alongside (or out of, or in-spite-of) dispositions towards learning will help transfer scholars and writing educators better design transfer-based writing education. Furthermore, learning not only from at-risk students, but from the campus services that work most closely with them, can help us better teach students with a range of preparation.

Students' dispositions towards writing remain important factors in fostering effective writing transfer. The current study demonstrated the importance of students' broader dispositions towards *learning* on students' dispositions towards *writing*. Those teaching first-year writing, pre-core writing, and other writing-intensive courses should

consider the ways their pedagogy and classroom practices could grow to include

development of not just the writer, but the *learner* as well.

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Appendix A

Academic Standards Informed Consent Form

My name is Kelsey Hixson-Bowles. In addition to my role as Writing Center Coordinator at UVU, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Composition and TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am currently conducting my dissertation on the impact of strengths-based interventions on students' writing education. You are invited to participate in the study. The following information is provided to you so you can make an informed decision to participate or not. You are eligible to participate because you meet the criteria: (1) You are at least 18 years old and (2) you meet one-on-one with students returning to UVU from academic suspension in your role in the Academic Standards office.

Purpose and Benefits of this Study:
The current study seeks to understand how Academic Standards' strengths-based approach impacts returning students' dispositions towards writing. Upon completion of this study, I expect to gain a better understanding of how a strengths-based intervention impacts students' dispositions towards writing, as well as the composition and characteristics of writing dispositions themselves. Ultimately, the results of this study will inform writing educators about the ways in which they may be able to better facilitate writing education through the development of generative dispositions.

Your Involvement in this Study:
By completing the consent form, you agree to:
- Grant me permission to audio record your monthly meetings with returning students in the Spring 2018 and Fall 2018 semesters.
- Participate in monthly face-to-face interviews with me for about 30-40 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded. Note, you will be asked not to use the names of faculty or staff during interviews.
- Upload paperwork participating students have completed for Academic Standards to a secure folder in UVUBox.

Potential Risks:
No risk beyond the minimal risks of daily living will be involved.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to choose if you want to participate in this study or not. Participation or non-participation will neither affect your professional status nor your relationship with UVU. You can withdraw from the study at any point during the process simply by notifying me or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Dana Driscoll, that you are no longer participating and your data will be removed from the analysis. The physical data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office on campus. The digital data collected will be protected by password. When the study is finished, the results may be presented at conferences and/or published in academic journals. No identifying information will be used in these venues, and all

names will be replaced with pseudonyms. The information collected in this study will only be used for academic purposes.

By signing in the box below, you give your consent to participate in this study.

_____   __ / __ / ____

Thank you for your consideration and assistance with this study. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Kelsey Hixson-Bowles, the lead researcher.

Lead Researcher: Kelsey Hixson-Bowles
                  Doctoral Student
                  Department of English, Composition & TESOL
                  Indiana University of Pennsylvania

                  Writing Center Coordinator
                  Utah Valley University
                  801-863-5482
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Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Dana Driscoll
                  Professor
                  Department of English, Composition & TESOL
                  724-357-2274
                  ddriscol@iup.edu

This project has been approved by the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects (phone: 724-357-7730).

Appendix B

Student Informed Consent Form

My name is Kelsey Hixson-Bowles. In addition to my role as Writing Center Coordinator at UVU, I am a doctoral student in the Department of Composition and TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I am currently conducting my dissertation on the impact of strengths-based interventions on students' writing education. You are invited to participate in the study. The following information is provided to you so you can make an informed decision to participate or not. You are eligible to participate because you meet the criteria: (1) You are at least 18 years old, (2) you are in your first semester of returning to UVU after being on academic suspension, and (3) you are currently enrolled in an English course for the Spring 2018 semester.

Purpose and Benefits of this Study:
The current study seeks to understand how Academic Standards' strengths-based approach impacts returning students' dispositions towards writing. Upon completion of this study, I expect to gain a better understanding of how a strengths-based intervention impacts students' dispositions towards writing, as well as the composition and characteristics of writing dispositions themselves. Ultimately, the results of this study will inform writing educators about the ways in which they may be able to better facilitate writing education through the development of generative dispositions.

Your Involvement in this Study:
By completing the consent form, you agree to:
- Grant me permission to audio record your monthly meetings with Jan and/or Kristen
- Participate in monthly interviews with me either face-to-face for about 30-40 minutes or via email. Interviews will be audio recorded.
- Upload your writing assignments to a secure folder only you and I have access to.
- Grant the Academic Standards office permission to share any paperwork you have completed for them with me.

Potential Risks:
No risk beyond the minimal risks of daily living will be involved.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to choose if you want to participate in this study or not. Participation or non-participation will neither affect your academic status nor your relationship with UVU. Furthermore, participation or non-participation will have no impact on your ability or ease to utilize UVU's Writing Center services. You can withdraw from the study at any point during the process simply by notifying me or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Dana Driscoll, that you are no longer participating and your data will be removed from the analysis. The physical data collected will be kept in a locked file cabinet in a locked office on campus. The digital data collected will be protected by password. When the study is finished, the results may be presented at conferences and/or published in academic journals. No identifying

information will be used in these venues, and all names will be replaced with pseudonyms. The information collected in this study will only be used for academic purposes.

By signing in the box below, you give your consent to participate in this study.

X_____Date_____

Thank you for your consideration and assistance

Appendix C

Academic Standards Staff Semi-Structured Interview Script Sample

First interview with Academic Standards Counselor and Academic Standards Director

Script: Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study! In today's interview, I'd like to talk about your experiences with each participant as well as your perspective on how Strengths helps students returning from academic suspension. I have a few specific questions to help guide us.

1. What's the common trajectory students experience before they get to the point of returning from academic suspension?
2. Is there a pattern in students who end up on academic suspension?
3. What are the typical challenges students face when they return from academic suspension?
4. Did you work with these students? (list participants)
5. What do you remember about them?
   a. For each participant, what do you see as their greatest strengths?
   b. For each participant, what do you see as the greatest road block to their success?
6. Why approach this work with a strengths-based mindset?
7. What does Gallup's Strengths program offer students?
8. What do you think students' perceptions of Strengths is?
9. If you had unlimited resources, would you offer Strengths to all students? Or does it work best with certain students?
   a. How do you choose which students to assign Strengths to?
10. Is there anything else about the topics we've talked about today that you'd like to discuss?

Second interview with Academic Standards Director
1. Policy clarifications:
   a. The semester they were suspended:
      i. It looks like summer counted as the semester away for many of the participants, even if they didn't normally take summer classes.
      ii. Also sometimes they are allowed to take an SLSS class
      iii. These results seem to reflect the Academic Standards' attitude towards suspension: as a growth opportunity over punitive action. What do you see as the value of making an exception and what do you see as the value of holding strictly to the policies?
   b. Petitions to return:
      i. Does the committee ever deny petitions to return? If so, what are the circumstances that would result in denial?
   c. Requirements:
      i. How does the committee decide what requirements to assign returning students?

ii.Similarly, it seems as though some students did not complete the requirements listed on conditions to return and yet they were allowed to return. How do you decide when to let some requirements slide?

iii.Do you ever say, "you didn't complete your career assessments and coaching, so you can't enroll this semester?"

iv.When we spoke last, you described the model you're transitioning into where you are the primary person doing grade checks and making decisions related to the policies and the counselors focus on the coaching part. First of all, do I have that correct? Second, there were a few cases this semester where participating students didn't meet with you but had a hold removed by a coach/counselor. Is that what you're moving away from? Why/why not?

2. Tell me about the growth you've seen in the participants since we last met.
   a. Ted
   b. Megan
   c. Alfred
   d. Jordan
   e. Guillermo
   f. Shelby

3. At this point, are you concerned about any of the participants? If so, who and tell me a bit about your concerns. Based on my observations so far, I've noticed that time management, motivation, engagement

4. may be a relevant disposition for several participants. Does this align with your observations?

5. Do you see a difference in progress between the students participating in Strengths and the students not participating in Strengths? (Broadly and specifically)
   a. Not Strengths:
      i.Ted
      ii.Megan
      iii.Alfred
   b. Strengths:
      i.Jordan
      ii.Guillermo
      iii.Shelby

6. Is there anything else on your mind about these topics and/or participants?

Appendix D

Student Semi-Structured Interview Sample

Please note: Interview questions may vary depending on the content of the observations and previous interviews. The following is an outline of the expected interview scripts for September, October, and December. I have not included the November and post-semester interview scripts as I anticipate they will be heavily shaped by the data collected in the first three months.

September Student Interview Script
Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! I'm looking forward to getting to know you better throughout this semester. In today's interview, I hope to begin to get to know you, learn about your past experiences in education, and specifically in writing courses, learn a bit about your expectations for this semester, and chat a little bit about your latest meeting with Jan/Kristen.
Before I begin, do you have any questions for me?
1. Tell me a little bit about your academic journey so far.
2. What writing courses have you taken so far, either here at UVU, at other colleges, and/or in high school?
3. What were these courses like?
   a. Potential follow ups:
      i. What did you find challenging about them, if anything?
      ii. What did you learn from them, if anything?
      iii. What kinds of assignments did you have to write?
      iv. What were the instructors like?
      v. Did you like the way they taught? Why/why not?
4. Tell me about the writing class you're in now.
   a. Potential follow ups:
      i. What is the instructor like?
      ii. What kinds of assignments have you been working on/will you be working on?
      iii. Is there anything about the course that excites you?
      iv. Is there anything about the course that you're anxious about?
5. Tell me about your first meeting with Jan/Kristen in Academic Standards.
   a. Potential follow ups:
      i. What did you learn from that meeting, if anything?
      ii. Is there anything you wish had gone differently in the meeting?
6. *If participating in Strengths:* What were your impressions of your Strengths results?
   a. Do you think knowing your Strengths will help you with your school work this semester? If so, how?
7. Is there anything else on your mind about the topics we've covered today?

Closing script: Thank you for your time today. I want you to know that my door is always open to you. If you'd like to talk about anything related to this study, your writing

class, or anything else, I'm here to help support you. You can call, email, or just drop by my office. *Give students your card and the $10 gift card to the bookstore.*

October Student Interview Script
Script: Good to see you again! During today's interview, I hope to learn how your writing class and writing assignments are going, what you're learning (if anything) in your meetings with Jan/Kristen, and what you see as your strengths and weaknesses as a student and specifically, a student of writing.
1. What have you been writing in your class recently?
    a. Tell me about the assignment descriptions.
    b. Tell me about how you approach writing assignment and your writing process.
2. Have you received any feedback from your professor on your writing yet? If so, tell me about that experience.
    a. What was the assignment?
    b. How did you feel you did on it?
    c. What were you most proud of?
    d. What do you wish you could have done differently?
3. Is there anything else about your writing class that you want to talk about?
4. Tell me about your last meeting with Jan/Kristen.
    a. What, if anything, did you learn in that meeting?
5. What are your strengths as a student?
6. What are your weaknesses as a student?
7. How do these strengths and weaknesses play out in your writing class?
8. Is there anything else on your mind about the topics we've covered today?

Closing script: Thank you for your time today! Next month, I'm giving everyone the option of either meeting face-to-face for the interview or conducting it via email. You don't have to decide now, but watch for my email.

December Student Interview Script
Script: Welcome! Today's interview will be similar to our last interview. My goal is to learn about your experiences in your writing class since we last spoke as well as learn how, if at all, your work with Jan/Kristen might be helping you in your classes.
1. Catch me up, how did your last paper go?
    a. Tell me about how you wrote it.
    b. What did your instructor say about it?
    c. Are you please with how you did? If so, what worked that you might be able to replicate in the future? If not, what might you do differently in the future?
2. What are you working on now for your writing class?
3. Is there anything else about your writing class that you want to talk about?
4. In your last meeting with Jan/Kristen, I noticed you talked about [ex. Strategies for time management, applying Strengths to your academic life, etc.]. Did you find this idea useful?
    a. If so, how have you applied it?

       b. If not, why not?

5. *I anticipate asking a couple of questions directly related to the observations.*

6. It's hard to believe, but there's just over a month left of this semester. What are your hopes for this last month?