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Voice and New Literacies: Student Perceptions of Writing Instruction in a Secondary English Classroom

Cover Page Footnote

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Voice and New Literacies: Student Perceptions of Writing Instruction in a Secondary English Classroom

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“I think the person who writes the paper should be the one who invites to [sic] person to read the paper not the teacher,” Nancy wrote in a student reflection letter, responding to her first experience writing on a course wiki in her ninth-grade English class. Nancy sat quietly in the row by the windows and exhibited anxious behavior about sharing her work with her peers. Nancy’s perspective reflects her need to have control over her writing but writing on the wiki did not affect everyone as it did Nancy. In contrast, Gustavo, an English language learner who struggled with writing, said he liked how his peers could help him with his writing by giving him suggestions in the space of the wiki. While Nancy and Gustavo shared their personal responses about this writing experience, Giovanni reflected on the technical aspect of the writing space: “I liked that we didn’t have to print anything out to turn it in like on Word. It’s nice they can be looked at and graded without having to be printed” (Interview, 2-20-14).

Adolescents ages 12 to 17 actively use technology to communicate with one another and to search for answers to their questions. Considering digital natives and their communication methods, new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) in the context of this article means user dispositions to digital technology that mediates writing. This study explores how the user perceives and harnesses the features of any digital technology that mediates writing with responsive features that allow the writer to receive digital feedback and to participate in distributed knowledge construction, sharing, experimentation, and innovation (see Figure 1).

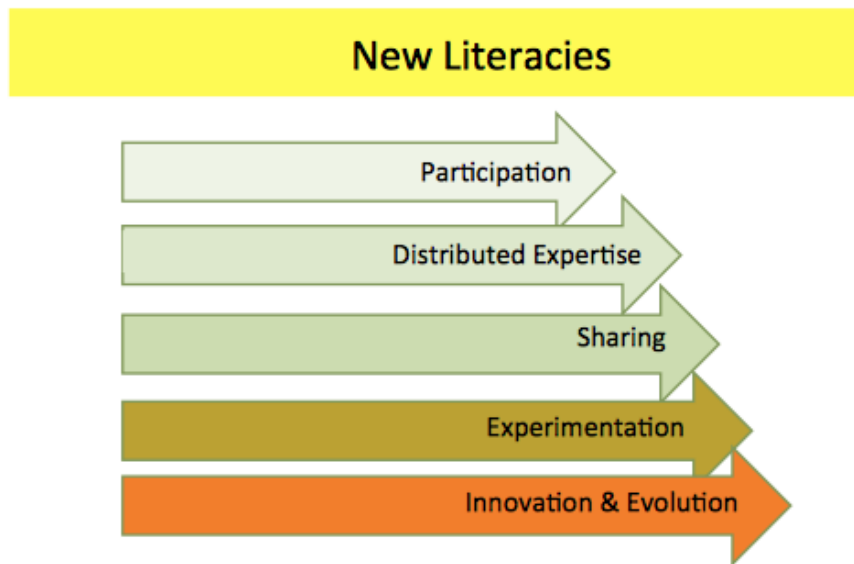


Figure 1. New literacies (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007) encompass the use of mobile devices, including students' personal electronic devices (iPods, iPads, phones) and courseware (blogs, wikis, and cloud storage spaces such as Google Drive, Box, Dropbox, etc. Image by Dredger, for Dredger & Martin, 2011).

Purcell, Buchanan, and Friedrich (2013) surveyed teachers regarding how digital tools affected the teaching, and production of, student writing. Of 2,462 Advanced Placement (AP) and National Writing Project (NWP) teachers interviewed, 96% of those select teachers said that digital tools create a wider and more varied audience, and 79% agreed that digital tools allowed for more student collaboration. Surveys conducted with the Pew Internet and American Life Project revealed adolescents actively write with technology, but this survey also confirmed that adolescents need direction and guidance when crafting digital writing (Hicks & Turner, 2013; Kajder, 2010; Lynch et al., 2019; Purcell et al., 2013). In focus groups, the AP and NWP teachers shared several concerns about writing, including the need to emphasize how to write for different audiences using appropriate “voices” and “registers” (Purcell et al., 2013, p. 2). The teachers rated student writing performance “high” based on organization and structure, but the teachers assessed students as weaker on synthesis in writing, use of tone and style in relation to audience, and construction of a solid argument. Educational researchers (Graham, 2019; Jones, 2009) agree that a learner-focused classroom is important. Students access new literacies through social networking mediums; AP and NWP teachers recognize the influence of new literacies in writing

instruction, and students' perceptions on writing instruction influence the development of writing.

Purpose and Significance of Study

For adolescents' writing to develop, they need to feel competent as writers and be motivated to write. Motivation in the classroom largely depends on students' perceptions of their competence and the amount of autonomy they have with respect to their learning (Deci & Moller, 2005), as well as factors such as perceived usefulness and interest in the content, and positive relationships with teachers and other students (Jones, 2009). In tandem with this focus, Boscolo and Gelati's (2007) research indicates that student motivation to write is affected by the perception of their writing competence. This research on motivation supports the need for teachers to provide positive feedback to student writing, as well as the need for teachers to attend to the development of intrinsic motivation, via a more autonomous versus an overly controlling learning environment.

Twenty-first century teachers are asked to show student growth that is aligned with national and state standards while using discernment in how they choose to increase students', as well as their own, digital literacy capacity (Hicks & Turner, 2013; NGA & CCSS, 2010; Reich, Murnane, & Willet, 2012). Digital literacy involves students' and teachers' ability to effectively manipulate, create, participate, and evaluate using various technologies, and new literacies theory emphasizes the participatory culture that digital technology provides (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). Writing Next (Graham & Perin, 2007) and Applebee and Langer's (2013) research, unveil the need for extended writing opportunities that are not focused on writing on demand in timed situations, but strategies for teaching writing effectively coupled with extended writing opportunities that allow for these skills to be practiced.

The purpose of this study was to understand students' perceptions of instruction when a secondary English teacher incorporated new literacies into a unit where students considered audience when writing a persuasive paper based on a topic under debate in legislature, the Tim Tebow bill. Motivation and learning are discussed in relation to student perceptions of this instruction because student attitudes and adolescent learning has a direct correlation. Based on empirical research (e.g., Jones, 2009; McKenna, Conradi, Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012), attitudinal factors affect reading, and the relationship with the teacher contributes to students' attitude toward reading. Likewise, attitude toward writing and instruction is worthy of noting and findings are presented in alignment with the research question: What are students' perceptions of instruction when one secondary language arts teacher employs new literacies to teach voice in writing?

Review of Literature

Increasingly, school systems are adopting one-to-one devices, with over half of the schools in the U.S. having this capability (Molnar, 2015). This inclusion of resources for students has implications for empowering them through voice expression and writing instruction.

Voice in writing is multifaceted and educators and scholars wrangle to define voice, help students to understand the role of voice in writing, and fairly assess students as they work to express authentic and appropriate voice in writing (Elbow, 1994 & 2007; Lynch et al., 2019; Jeffery, 2011; Spalding, Wang, Lin, & Hu, 2009, Sperling & Appleman, 2011). To further understand voice and how it is viewed as foundational to writing in the English language arts curriculum in the United States, voice needs to be understood in a digital context, and the components that make up voice in this context should be explored. When voice first became asserted as a critical element of writing, deemed worthy of its focus in the development and evaluation of writing, it was known as an individual's clear expression of self (for a discussion, see Elbow, 1968; Jeffery, 2011; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). In the 30 years since the introduction of voice into the domain of writing development and assessment, controversy of its merit (Beck, 2006; Beck & Jeffery, 2007; Elbow, 2007; Jeffery, 2009, 2011) has ensued. Regardless of debate in professional dialogue within journals, voice remains a feature that is coached and assessed in writing instruction (Culham, 2003, 2006, 2014; Dean, 2015). Not only has voice been deemed a foundational aspect of writing, it has also given birth to the concept of multiple voices that a writer commands to communicate effectively with different audiences (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Lawrence, McNeal, & Yildiz, 2009; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). Forward thinking research regards voice as a priority, because audience consideration is a necessity with new literacies instruction. The inception of new literacies only informs the dynamics of multiple voices as there are more opportunities to write efficiently to wider audiences. In considering voice, the audience needs to be a part of the conversation, because while the individual is expressing voice, the voice adjusts in line with the audience in which the writer intends to communicate.

Research concentrating on assessment of voice makes clear the murkiness of this task. Analysis of state writing assessments (Beck & Jeffery, 2007) and a phenomenological study examining secondary English language arts teachers' perceptions of voice in writing (Jeffrey, 2011) note the paradoxical nature of how voice criteria is delineated by teachers. The criteria wrestle with audience, goals of the writer, self-expression, and attempts of the writer to use academic voice. Despite the complexity, voice has been tied to assessing student writing in state holistic assessments, with over half of the states in the U.S. having voice as a component in their rubrics that were tied to writing assessment and an

accountability program (Jeffery, 2011).

Aside from assessment, a wealth of possibilities for identity construction is made available through modern technologies (Elbow, 2007; Stornaiuolo, Hull, & Nelson, 2009). Voice exists in online identity construction in multiple forms as an author may present or construct a genuine self, a false self, or multiple dimensions of self. Finally, some online authors do not approach the screen with an identity they plan to portray; instead, they create their identity as they write (Elbow, 2007). Unlike 20th century discourse, social networking sites, as well as public blog and vlog sites, offer dynamic opportunities to write for audiences unknown to the composer.

Since the research and theory regarding how to address voice in writing remains on the forefront of literacy discussion, and new literacies affords multiple audiences (Jeffrey, 2011; Lynch et al., 2019; Sperling & Appleman, 2011), there is reason to give voice attention in regard to new literacies and teaching writing. A gap exists in the research at the intersection of digital voice in writing and perceptions of writing instruction (Jeffery, 2011; Purcell et al., 2013; Sperling & Appleman, 2011). Over half of the state writing assessments include voice on the scoring rubric (Jeffery, 2011), the Common Core State Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) encourage voice through attention to audience and purpose, and classroom teachers actively teach and discuss voice in writing instruction (Culham, 2003, 2006, 2014; Dean 2015; Elbow, 2007; Jeffery, 2011; Purcell et al., 2013). Still, little research focuses on voice and writing instruction with adolescents.

When examining any instruction, including writing instruction and the consideration of audience, the role of motivation and learning merits attention. To bridge what is known about instruction and motivation research and theories (see Deci & Moller, 2005; Boscolo & Gelati's, 2007), Jones' MUSIC[®] Model of Academic Motivation (Jones, 2009) and the associated inventory (Jones, 2017) encompasses five key motivational constructs: eMpowerment, Usefulness, Success, Interest, and Caring. The motivational inventory measures these five key constructs derived from research and theory (e.g., Ames, 1992; Bandura, 1986, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991; De Volder & Lens, 1982; Hidi & Renninger, 2006), and consideration of the five constructs from Jones' inventory can assist teachers with engaging students in learning environments. While the ideas in the inventory are not new, combining and creating a means of measuring the constructs from Jones' validated inventory can help teachers understand if students perceive the shift to new literacy environments as a motivational force in the classroom (Jones & Skaggs, 2016; Parkes, Jones, & Wilkins, 2017).

Methods

This single case study allowed me to describe, understand, and explain

an examination of a phenomenon of interest and context which are not clearly understood (Yin, 2009, 2012). In this case, the phenomenon of interest was participants' perceptions when a teacher used new literacies in her instruction to teach voice in writing within a ninth-grade language arts classroom.

Site selection. Using purposive sampling (Patton, 1990) to identify the site, I chose Botkin County Public Schools (pseudonym) for its technology policy. A "Bring Your Own Device" (BYOD) policy had been in place since 2011, while other state schools were in piloting phases of BYOD. Upon closer analysis of several school policies, I learned that there is a significant difference in policy development that protects the student and the school and delineates personal device use. Considering I sought to study perceptions of the use of new literacies, freedom to access online environments in multiple venues, but in a controlled and protective manner, enriched the study's operation. For example, written policy allowed for monitoring students' online activity on student-owned devices: "Middle or high school students who connect to the Internet shall use the school's Wi-Fi system, not through the device's 3G or 4G capabilities" (BCPS school policy, 2014). The new motto for the school division also conveyed an attention to technology, "Always Connected, 100% Charged." In addition, each high school had multipurpose computer labs that were open to students Monday through Thursdays until 5:30 p.m. The research study took place at Rockwater High School (RHS, pseudonym), within Botkin County Public Schools. RHS, a small suburban high school (NCES, 2012), located in the southeastern part of the United States housed Grades 9 through 12, and one middle school served as the sole feeder school. The students operated on a block schedule, with three even/odd, 94-minute blocks taught on alternating days, and a 50-minute fifth period, taught daily. The student population was 1,088 with approximately 64 teachers and a teacher to student ratio of 17:1. Of the students enrolled, 223, or about 20% of the students, qualified for free and reduced lunch (NCES, 2012).

Data collection. Data collection began January 16, 2014 and ended March 6, 2014. To investigate participants' perceptions of instructional choices that included new literacies to teach voice in writing, I observed class sessions, interviewed the teacher and four selected students, and collected student inventories. The student selection for interview was based on inventories, writing folders, test scores, and teacher observation. On my first visit to the class, I met the students and administered two inventories, the first examining writing and the second examining motivation (Jones, 2017).

I administered the writing inventory I created to get to know the students in the class, and the focus of the inventory was on when, why, and how they write. Specifically, this inventory informed me about what motivated these

students to write, tools they used when writing, and their intended audience from past written works that were meaningful to them. The inventory inquired how much time they spent online and if they had used or had knowledge about wikis, which the teacher was going to introduce in the upcoming unit.

The motivation inventory (Jones, 2017) was given to students twice: on the initial visit and on the final visit. I gave the initial to learn descriptive information about the students, to aid in selecting the four students to interview, and to understand what motivated students in regard to writing instruction. The purpose of giving the inventory following the introduction of new literacies within the unit of instruction was to answer the research question related to students' perceptions of instruction. The initial motivation inventory included questions specific to writing instruction. Following the persuasive unit that incorporates new literacies, the final inventory was modified slightly to include questions specific to writing instruction with new literacies. I gained insight into students' perceptions in regard to writing instruction preferences by calculating the mean for both inventories and examining how the initial and final inventories compared with one another.

The motivation inventory I administered was the middle/high school version of the MUSIC[®] Model of Academic Motivation Inventory (MMAMI) developed by Dr. Brett Jones (Jones, 2017), and it measures five constructs related to the five primary components of the MUSIC[®] Model of Academic Motivation (Jones, 2009). The MUSIC model was recommended in *Wired for Success: Real World Solutions for Transforming Higher Education* (Aldridge & Harvatt, 2014), a book published by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The components in the MUSIC model are derived from research and theory that are critical to student engagement in academic settings, including: *emp*owerment, *use*fulness, *su*ccess, *i*nterest, and *ca*ring. The questions on the motivation inventory have been validated for use with many different types of students (Chittum & Jones, 2017; Jones, Li, & Cruz, 2017; Jones & Skaggs, 2016; Parkes et al., 2017). Students rate 18 items on a 6-point Likert-format scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree). To adapt the inventory for use in writing instruction, I changed the word "science" to "writing" and "class work" was changed to "writing assignments." To ensure trustworthiness, I worked with the designer of the inventory and four ninth graders to conduct a "judgmental review of the items" (Duke & Mallett, 2011, p. 252) prior to administering the inventory. The four ninth-grade students who reviewed the items were not affiliated with the study, and they agreed that the revised inventory items were appropriate. An example item from each scale is provided here: "I have choices in what I am allowed to do for my writing assignments in English class" (empowerment); "In general, writing

assignments in English class are useful to me” (usefulness); “I am confident that I can succeed in writing assignments” (success); “Class writing assignments are interesting to me” (interest); and “My English teacher is willing to assist me if I need help in class” (caring).

I completed 10 formal classroom observations and conducted four semi structured interviews with students selected using a purposive sampling strategy (Levy & Lemeshow, 2008). Student selection for interviewing was based on the following criteria: one high and one average performing writer and two writers who exhibited among the lowest writing ability in the class based first on student perceptions in regards to writing instruction using results of the writing MMAMI and second on eighth-grade statewide writing assessments. As a final determiner, I considered the teacher’s recommendation based on her experience in working with the students on writing during the first semester of the school year and contents of samples from their writing folder.

Participants

Description of the students. This small class of 14 students was heterogeneously grouped and comprised of students of varying writing abilities. The state assessments from eighth grade show their writing performance in an “on demand” setting, with 71% of the students passing (see Table 1).

Table 1

Grade 8 State Writing Scores for Students in the Chosen Class

Performance Level	Males	Females
Pass/Advanced	1	2
Pass/Proficient	7	0
Fail	2	2
Total	10	4

Note. Performance level descriptors are based on these scores: Pass/Advanced = 500-600; Pass/Proficient = 400-499; Fail = 399 or below.

On Visit 1 to the classroom, I distributed the 17-item “Writing Inventory” questionnaire that I created to learn more about the students’ writing and literacy practices, both in and out of school. The 17-item questionnaire consisted of 12 open-ended questions about general topics of interest,

educational writing experiences, and reading and writing preferences. Five of the questions provided answers from which to circle with room for further explanation; these questions centered on technology use. For example, one question asked students to circle types of technology use for composition, another asked about wiki knowledge and purpose, and another included time spent active online.

The time the ninth graders spent actively online varied; they reported an average of about three and a half hours a day. Most of their writing utilized social media; as they used images and words to discuss sports and day-to-day happenings with friends using Snapchat (an application for messaging with photos), texting, Twitter, and Facebook. They gauged their audiences' response using "favorites" on Twitter or "likes" on Facebook. One male student showed his pride in gaining positive responses when he wrote, "I got 10+ favorites on a tweet about the Grammy's last night" (Student writing inventory, Visit 1).

In the area of technology (see Figure 2), the inventories revealed that approximately 79% of the students had created web pages; 50% had used Google documents, written a blog post, and commented on other people's blogs; and about 93% reported they had used presentation software.

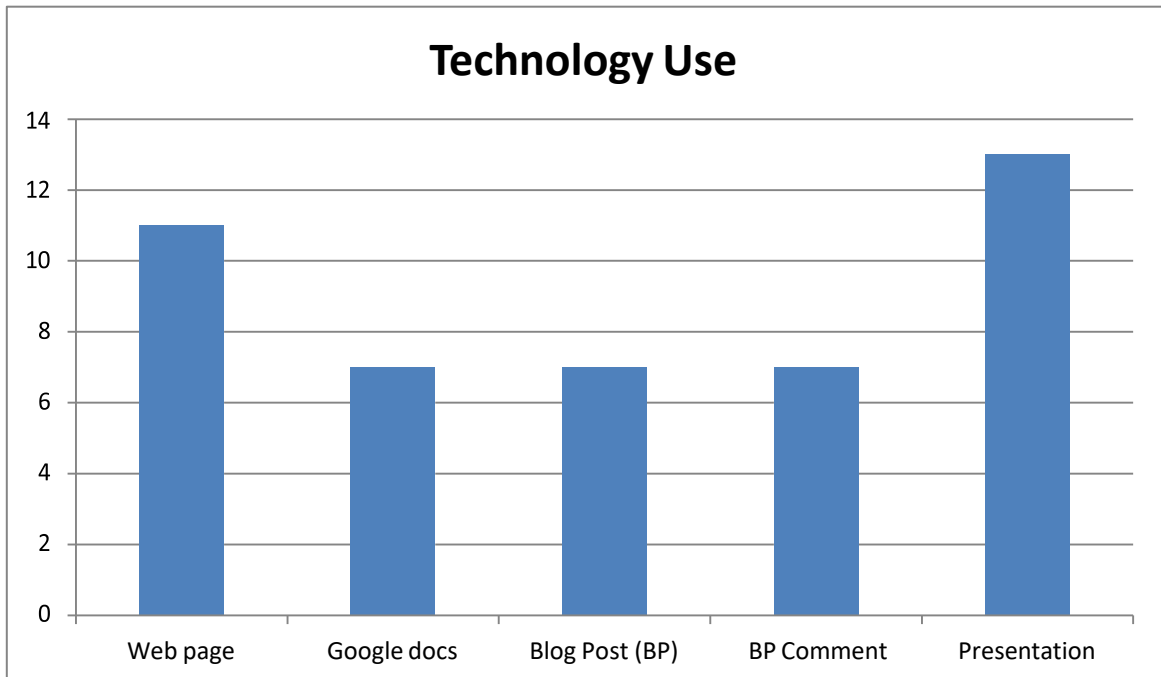


Figure 2. Chart showing technology use of ninth-grade students who participated in the study.

Five of the 14 students knew what a wiki was and claimed to have utilized the

tool, but when asked to state the purpose of the wiki they had previously used, only two responded; one had used a wiki for research on Dubai and one understood the concept of a wiki, but did not answer the question on specific use. Only six of the 14 students responded to the question asking them to describe a wiki in their own words as best as they could (see Figure 3).

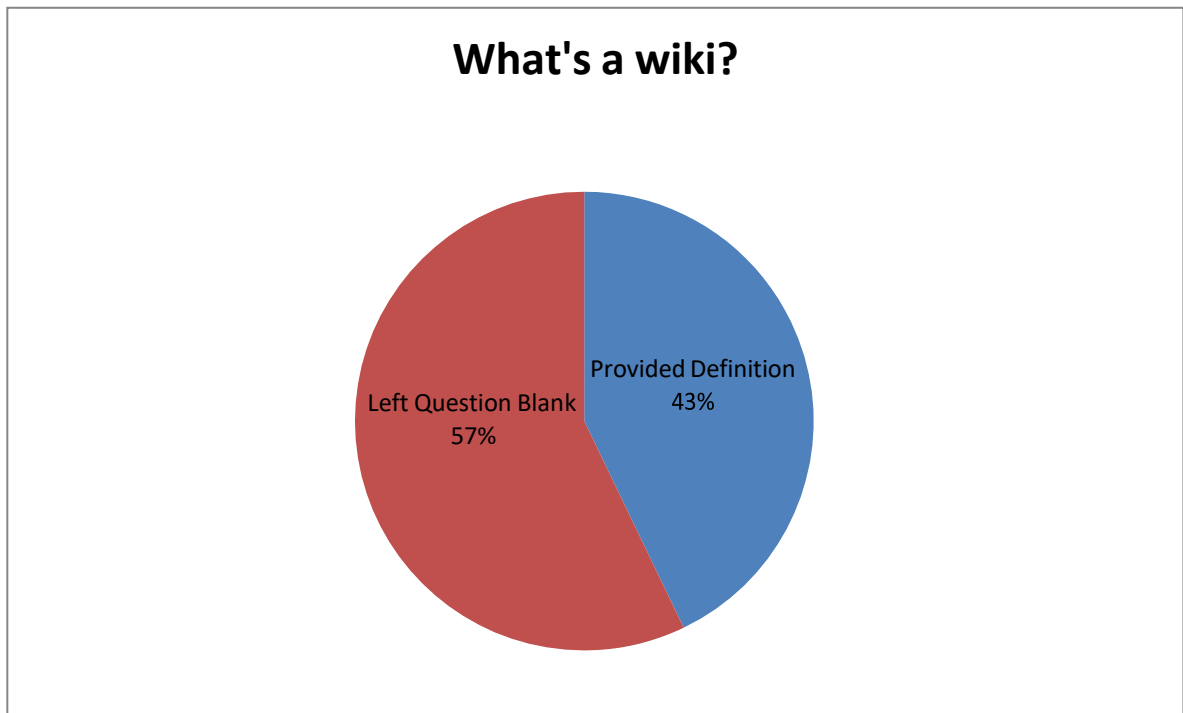


Figure 3. Percentage of students who demonstrated understanding of a wiki on inventory.

The six students who responded described a wiki as:

- it's a website people go on to find information
- it is where people can go and writer there [sic] own stuff but can be changed by others
- online database
- a site of collective info
- helps you with writing skills
- a source of information on a topic (writing inventories, Visit 1)

Findings from this initial writing inventory revealed that, while wikis provide a collaborative space for both consumers and producers, none of the students had produced information on a wiki and few understood the concept of a wiki, though several had consumed information from a wiki.

Description of the teacher. Once I decided that Botkin County Public Schools and specifically, Rockwater High School, would be a viable site to propose for this study, I knew that Ms. Wampler (pseudonym) would be a good fit for three reasons: (a) I had known her professionally since 1993, and trust was established; (b) She expressed, during her participation in the writing academy that I codirected, how behind she felt with technology, and (c) Fear with technology use is real, and I believed established, professional trust with Ms. Wampler would ultimately serve to create a symbiotic, working relationship, benefitting her classroom instruction and the aims of this study.

Our history, bound by professional trust that is only built over time, began in 1993, when I began my career as an English teacher at Green Valley High School (pseudonym), which was one of the four high schools within Botkin County. Ms. Wampler and I taught in the same English department for six and a half years and following a move to a newly constructed high school, our rooms were side by side for the last several years. Professionally, we parted ways in 1999 when I left the classroom the day before my first child was born. Two years later, Ms. Wampler also left the classroom to attend to family needs. While my life changes initially moved me out of the high school language arts classroom, I soon entered the adjunct world, serving in the education departments at two liberal arts colleges. In 2011, we were reunited when I recruited her to participate in the first year of the two-week writing academy for teachers that I codirected at one of the local liberal arts colleges. After 10 years away from the profession, she decided to begin interviewing for a teaching position, and she needed recertification points for licensure renewal. The writing academy satisfied some of her licensure needs, and since it was a pilot year, the academy was offered free of charge. The summer she attended the writing academy, Ms. Wampler secured employment at Rockwater High School.

Based on the information gathered from other school divisions and informal discussions with teachers, the classroom selected showed promise for a low-level intervention, with the teacher remaining the primary instructor and me a participant observer. Padgett (2008) warns that the “unwary qualitative researcher may veer too far in either direction—overly familiar or estranged—and thus lose her effectiveness” (p. 184). The professional relationship that was established provided the trust needed to strengthen the study, and so estrangement was not a concern. We taught together in the past; she had a positive experience at the writing academy I co-directed; and in 2013, I recommended the book *Wonder* to her that she adopted for the school division and the county purchased for her as a class set for whole class instruction. Since her return to the classroom, Ms. Wampler had established herself, as she had previously, as a classroom teacher committed to good instruction and respected by the students, the department, and

the administration. Yet, our professional distance over the last 14 years kept us from being overly familiar. I had been consumed with doctoral studies and family life, and our communication, while positive, when it happened, had been minimal. Additionally, the site selection was ideal because the “pedagogical goal of interest” (Reinking & Bradley, 2008, p. 59) had not yet been achieved, and because the site, while not unproblematic, did not appear to be problematic enough to be a detriment to the study (Reinking & Bradley, 2008). “The pedagogical goal of interest” in this case was the incorporation of new literacies with voice and writing instruction.

Ms. Wampler, a 45-year-old White female, taught part time, teaching for a full school day every other day. After a 10-year hiatus from education in order to be with her growing family, easing into the life of grading papers and planning lessons by working part-time seemed the most beneficial for her, and her family’s quality of life. Since the study, Ms. Wampler has moved to full time teaching within the same school and department.

Data Analysis

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) purport that qualitative researchers should employ “interpretive and material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3).

To inform my research regarding motivational constructs in educational psychology, I analyzed the data collected for participants’ perceptions of instruction by relying on guidelines from the designer of the MMAMI (Jones, 2009) who helped me refine the inventory for writing instruction and analyze the data by computing an average score for each of the MUSIC components (i.e., eMpowerment, usefulness, success, interest, caring). The connection between student perceptions of instruction on the topic of audience and voice in writing is important because students who are motivated learn more. I also analyzed the students’ transcripts from the interviews, which were organized by the MUSIC components. To understand students’ perceptions on writing instruction prior to the introduction of new literacies with writing instruction, I compared the computed mean scores from the students’ initial motivation writing inventory and the final inventory.

In light of Duke and Mallett’s (2011) suggestions for consideration when creating “affective literacy instruments” (p. 249-250), the writing inventory that I created was designed to learn about the students’ writing tendencies prior to conducting the research, and was assessed by individual reviews with four ninth-grade students, two males and two females. The students were not affiliated with the study, and adjustments in vocabulary, spacing, and style were made to the writing inventory based upon their feedback. Responses from the students’ writing inventory were transcribed and embedded into the iterative analysis

process. To communicate the interpretations generated from the data, I support the interpretations with quotations, vignettes, and descriptive scenes from experience in the field.

Positionality statement. My life experience shaped the study. Considering new literacies and writing instruction, I positioned myself in regard to this phenomenon by sharing that at the time of this project, I was a middle class, 43-year-old White female. I taught high school English and Photojournalism for 7 years, followed by 13 years of adjunct instruction in English and Education departments at two liberal arts schools. These experiences, coupled with the fact that I was a mother of two teenagers, one of whom was a ninth grader, gave me a keen lens to critically evaluate the authenticity of response, as opposed to the response altered due to the audience (Seidman, 2005).

Role and responsibility delineation. Ms. Wampler expressed both enthusiasm and reservations with technology use in the classroom. The research design kept Ms. Wampler as the primary instructor. I refrained from participating in instruction and assisting students. However, I did help Ms. Wampler if students' learning was being impeded due to technology questions. Her agreement to participate in the research included the following:

- *Three, two-hour planning meetings* which were audio-recorded. Planning Meeting 1 included an initial interview and an orientation to wiki usage, and supporting documents to guide instruction. Planning Meeting 2 consisted of wiki planning, where we discussed how she would like to incorporate the wiki into her persuasive unit. Planning Meeting 3 consisted of creating her course wiki.
- *Time from class*, where I would give students two inventories, to learn about them as learners and writers.

Findings

Major findings included students' perceptions of how the teacher supported the students by making moves to motivate them through the usefulness of the assignment. Students communicated consideration of audience when writing, and they were motivated by the extension of their writing audience (beyond the classroom teacher) with a wiki that included a focus on voice in writing. Students' perceptions of motivation and learning, using the motivation inventory, showed that they "agreed" Ms. Wampler supported them in being successful during the unit of study and that she cared about their well-being as a person and as a student in the course. Overall, students "somewhat disagreed" that they felt *empowered* in the unit, were *interested* in the persuasive unit, and that the information taught was *useful*.

Emergent themes. Findings from the data on student perceptions of

writing instruction, which included field notes from observations and interviews revealed emerging themes of usefulness, caring, and eMpowerment. I will define each of these themes in the context of this research and considering the motivational framework of the MUSIC model (Jones, 2009). The first process of coding employed both deductive and inductive codes. Table 2 shows final codes and sub codes.

Table 2: *Codes for Students' Perceptions of Instruction*

Codes	Subcode
Usefulness- perception that the happenings in the class will be of use to the participants in the future.	Efficiency and ease
	Wiki functionality
Caring- perception that the instructor cares if the student succeeds in class and cares for the student as a whole.	Accountability
	Encouragement
eMpowerment- perceptions of control over learning and practice	Protection of Writing
	Choice

Usefulness. *Usefulness* comprised the most common theme in students' combined perception of instruction, with codes emerging from student interviews, reflection letters, and classroom observations. Usefulness, in the context of this study, was when students' perceptions that the class curriculum would be of use to them in the future. Several students shared that they liked the shift away from paper to digital composition. Giovanni, when discussing her experience using the wiki, had this to say: "There'll be a whole lot more typing and technology so I feel like more people will be using technology over writing handwritten letters, so it was really good I think" (Interview, 3/6/14). Giovanni also observed the possibility with the wiki, yet appreciated the structure the teacher provided: "And I like the wiki because there are so many options to use it, but then you have to stay into the guidelines" (Interview, 2-20-14). In this statement Giovanni expresses that she values limited choice, and this is worthy of noting because the composition tools available are exponential with the ability to hyperlink, for example.

Two missing features on the wiki that frustrated the students were the absence of tabbing and spellcheck. Ms. Wampler chose to adapt for tabbing by asking students to leave a space between paragraphs, and Susan, a high performing student in all classes and strong writer, did not like the absence of the tab feature: "Writing on the wiki was easy, but I think we should be able to indent." While I shared that an application could be added for spell check, Ms.

Wampler stated that she liked that there was no spell check, because she thought the students were overly dependent on that feature with word processing. No spell check led to questions about spelling and the computer lab echoed from time to time with: “How do you spell paragraph? How do you spell approve? I think I spelled grammar wrong” (Field notes, 2-18-14).

Caring. *Caring* comprised the second most common theme in participants’ combined perception of instruction within the qualitative data, with the codes emerging from interviews, student reflection letters, and classroom observations. Caring, in the context of this study, was when students perceived that the instructor cared if they succeeded in class and cared for them personally. Within this category, patterns related to “accountability” and “encouragement” emerged.

Accountability. Students earned points for everything they did in Ms. Wampler’s class. From book checks (bringing independent books to class each day) to rough drafts to keeping up with the notes in the vocabulary section of their notebook, students knew that if she asked them to do something, then they were going to get credit for it. Beyond classwork, students could earn points if they brought a playbill in from a musical. Because students understood they would earn or lose points based on Mrs. Wampler’s consistent accountability measures, this motivated students to write. Students were consistently held accountable for homework, participation in class, and behavior. Once, when the day wrapped up a minute early and the students began packing up and lining up at the door, two students inched out into the hallway before the bell rang, and she held them after class with a strong admonition to never leave her classroom again until they were properly dismissed. These two students were the same students who viewed Ms. Wampler as caring for holding them responsible for their actions.

Students associated how Ms. Wampler held them accountable for their work as caring. Gustavo, a second language learner who did not attempt the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) test in fifth grade, and failed it in eighth grade, said that he knew Ms. Wampler cared about his success with the persuasive writing and wiki use “cause she’s always on my back and stuff. And cause she knows I’m piss poor and she wants me to do better. She knows that I can do better. She’s always talking to me about homework and stuff” (Interview, 2/12/14). Gustavo was not the only student who viewed Ms. Wampler’s accountability as caring. Drew, who also had failed the SOLs in both fifth and eighth grades, answered similarly when he said that Ms. Wampler cared a lot about his success in the class and he knew it because of how she held him accountable: “Oh yea, she won’t, she won’t let you half it. I mean, like do a half job on the paper or sumthin [sic]. She’ll go over it and tell you. She’ll make you

rewrite it too” (Student Interview, 2/20/14). And Ms. Wampler echoed this tendency toward consistent accountability by explaining that she makes sure the students do all the work, do not get behind, and if they get lost, then she stops and helps them. She had clear boundaries with respect to expectations for behavior and coursework expectations, and if someone stepped out of bounds, there would be a consequence.

Encouragement. While Ms. Wampler was a teacher who held students accountable, she praised students when they were working hard. Enthusiastic responses to student work were commonplace. During a lesson on voice in writing, she pulled out something positive from each one of the students’ papers when they shared them aloud. After reading John’s first persuasive essay, she made the effort to say to him one-on-one: “I’ll have to tell you, you were swaying me. Nicely done” (Field notes, 2-26-14). Through written reflections and interviews, students shared gratitude for the help that she gave them, noting that she encouraged them to see her outside of class time and that she was available to them during the school’s 10-minute break for extra help.

Empowerment. Empowerment comprised the third most common theme in participants’ combined perception of instruction within the qualitative data, with the codes emerging from the interviews, reflection letters, and classroom observations. Empowerment, in the context of this study, was perceptions of control over learning and practice. Within this category, patterns related to “Protection of Writing” and “Choice” emerged.

Protection of writing. Writing on the wiki made some of the students uncomfortable, which led to them feeling less empowered as they could not control which of the peers in the class opened and read their writing. With this addition to the classroom writing environment, a pattern emerged that resonated with self-protection. The students seemed to want to protect their writing, and they seemed to want to control who read what they wrote. Alex, an average to below average writer, who passed his eighth-grade SOLs, wrote, “I think that you should have to give somebody else *permission* before they are aloud [sic] to read and comment on your paper” (Student Reflection Letter, 2-28-14). Alex was not alone. Nancy struggled with writing and, having failed the eighth-grade writing SOL, she also showed the signs of feeling the most anxious in this writing space. She too communicated the desire to control the sharing of her writing (Student Reflection Letter, 2-28-14). Nancy, a quiet girl, struggled not only with writing, but with many academic tasks. Ms. Wampler talked with her mom about her anxiety with reading and getting in front of the class, so she was not at all surprised by her anxiety with writing on the wiki. Ms. Wampler responded to Nancy by understating things she thought would make her anxious:

She doesn’t feel comfortable doing ANYTHING in front of the kids, but

I just play it off. Cause sometimes you just have to get over things and try it and when you feel like, wow, that wasn't that bad. I keep feeling that maybe she'll gain some confidence (Interview, 2-20-14).

When it came time to write the second essay, Ms. Wampler alleviated Nancy's questions and stress by announcing to the class that the next essay was not going to be on the wiki. She said she did this on purpose so that Nancy would not have to spend her energy worrying about it. "I KNEW she would be worrying about it over the weekend. Like, 'here we go again.' So, I wanted to make sure I pointed that [second persuasive essay would not be typed on wiki] out" (Interview, 2-20-14). Nancy was not the only student who wanted to protect her writing. Gustavo, who also struggled with writing yet stated that he enjoyed the help of his peers with feedback on the wiki, did not like the fact that someone could come in and alter his writing: "I didn't like how anyone could make changes to your papers, though" (Student Reflection Letter, 2-28-14). Even though the students knew that every user was tracked with each stroke of the key, and no students violated the teacher's rules for wiki use, many of the students wanted to protect their writing and seemed to mistrust the writing space and users.

While Ms. Wampler thought this more public space of writing allowed for the voice to emerge, she shared that there were some issues with it, because for some of the students the comfort was not there. This discomfort altered their voice in writing: "When they know that their peers are reading it, and they have no control over which peers, it's accessible to all the peers, the comfort level disappears. It's like havin a strange voice" (Interview, 2-20-14). However, by the end of the unit, Ms. Wampler said that it was an even split in how the students seemed to feel about using the wiki, with half of them excited about using something new and half of them apprehensive. She stated the shy students were the ones who were apprehensive, which did not come as a surprise to her.

Choice. While the writing instruction was carefully organized and the students were guided step by step through the process, this did not bode well for all students. Luke, who said he did not see English as an interesting subject, did not feel like he had enough freedom of choice with the writing assignments. He did not like that he had to write five paragraphs for the persuasive essay involving the Tim Tebow law, and thought he should be free to develop it into however many paragraphs he wanted. Another student, Giovanni, who was not a sports enthusiast, found it difficult to write in response to the Tim Tebow law:

Cause like the Tim Tebow law really includes people that are good with sports and I mean, I'm not into sports anymore so like it was kinda hard for me, because I'm not a part of any of the teams so I mean, I don't have much of an opinion on it. I mean, persuasive writing is pretty neat, it's just that some of the topics are harder than others. (Interview, 2-20-

14)

Here, lack of choice in structure and topic seemed to restrict students’ voice in writing. Next, I share participants’ perception using the motivational survey.

MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation Inventory. On Visit 1 and Visit 10, I distributed the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation Writing Inventory (MMAMI) to further understand students’ perceptions. On Visit 1, the inventory directed students to focus on their current English class and English teacher. On Visit 10, the inventory directed them to focus on the persuasive unit and the use of the wiki during the unit, which they had just completed. The survey included questions concerning their eMpowerment, usefulness, success, interest, and caring in the course. The one student who opted out was entered as 0 in the summative excel spreadsheet that was used for calculating averages of motivation questions. A total of 14 students’ responses were used from this first inventory.

The results (see Table 3) from the inventory that was given on Visit 1 reflect questions that were about their current English class and English teacher.

Table 3

*MMAMI Results for Ninth Grade English Class Prior to Unit on Persuasion and Covering First Semester. N = 13. *The Sum Reflects a Likert Scale from 1-6.*

RESULTS	eMpowerment	Usefulness	Success	Interest (situational)	Caring
# OF ITEMS	4	3	4	3	4
AVERAGE	3.56	3.64	5.04	3.03	5.60

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly agree

On Visit 10, the MUSIC motivational survey was again distributed, and the results (see Table 4) reflect the answers based on their current persuasive writing, wiki use, and English teacher.

Table 4

MMAMI Results for Ninth Grade English Class Following the Unit on Persuasion that Incorporated a Wiki and Covering Jan. 27 until February 28. N = 14. The Sum Reflects a Likert Scale from 1-6.

FINAL RESULTS	eMpowerment	Usefulness	Success	Interest (situational)	Caring
# OF ITEMS	4	3	4	3	4
AVERAGE	3.88	3.76	4.95	3.31	5.27

Note: 1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Somewhat disagree; 4 = Somewhat agree; 5 = Agree; 6 = Strongly agree

When comparing Table 3 and Table 4, the motivational findings were similar, so the new literacies did not do anything to motivate students.

The students' perceptions of empowerment rose by 0.32 during the persuasive unit as compared to their English class in general. Overall, students "somewhat disagreed" that they felt empowered in the course. In *usefulness*, the students' average scores increased 0.12 from the beginning of the unit to the end, but students "somewhat disagreed" that the information taught was useful. Comparing the students' response averages in their perception of being supported in *success* at the start of the unit to their response at the end of the unit, the average student score fell by 0.09. Overall though, the students "agreed" she supported them in being successful. *Situational interest* increased for students by 0.28 from the beginning of the unit to the end, with students "somewhat disagreeing" that they were interested. Finally, *Caring*, the overall course average shows that students "agree" the instructor cared about their well-being as a person and as a student in the course, but a drop was reflected in the caring score by 0.33 from the beginning of the unit to the end.

Discussion

New Literacies theoretical framework (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; see Figure

1) and the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation (Jones, 2009; see Figure 5) guided this research study.

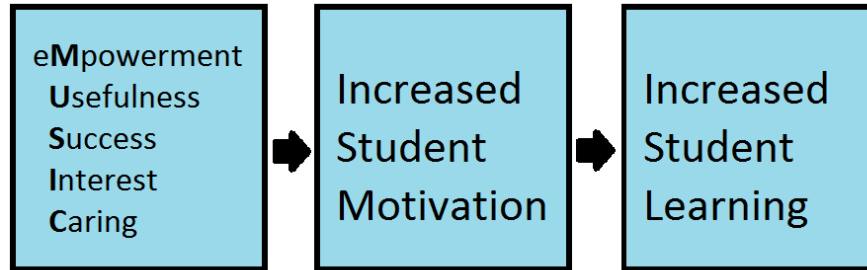


Figure 4. MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation

Participants' perceptions of instruction were gathered using the MUSIC Model of Academic Motivation Inventory (Jones, 2017). Overall, students "somewhat disagreed" they felt empowered in the unit. Several opportunities for choice were available to students during the persuasive unit, and perhaps this was not the case during the first semester. Perhaps the teacher needed to communicate areas of choice and freedom for students to provide their input that the students did not see.

In *usefulness*; students "somewhat disagreed" that the information taught was useful. Since this course dealt with reading, writing, and oral skills, and the students had not experienced how these skills apply to work and life after high school, maybe what the teacher and students deemed as "useful" is too different. Perhaps this data shows that she understood the usefulness of the information but was not able to get "buy in" from the students.

Students "agreed" she supported them in being successful. This change may have been attributed to the use of innovative technology and the teacher's time spent introducing them to the new tools. Communication regarding assessment, an indicator for supporting students in success, seemed clear, which may be another reason for students feeling supported.

Interest in the persuasive unit was rated lower, with students "somewhat disagreeing" that they were interested in the unit. I suspect the modern technology, as well as a new project and person in the room, may have affected student *interest* in the content presented. The students' emergence in understanding of public policy and power in writing may reflect this lower score.

The overall course average shows that the students “agreed” the instructor cared about their well-being as a person and as a student in the course. There was a drop in the caring score from the beginning of the unit to the end, and this may be attributed to the technology use, which in turn, led to less interaction with the teacher.

Based on the results of the MMAMI, perceptions of the persuasive unit with wiki usage were like those of the English class in general. Motivational findings displayed in Table 3 and Table 4, show that new literacies did not do anything to motivate students. This may have been due to a learning environment that leaned more towards a controlled environment than an autonomous one, which aligns with Deci & Moller’s (2005) finding related to building intrinsic motivation and Jones’ (2009) construct in the MUSIC model that addresses eMPowerment. Since students “somewhat” disagreed” they were empowered both times they were surveyed, with a slight increase during the persuasive unit with wiki usage, perhaps an increase in autonomy in the learning environment would positively affect students’ perceptions of *interest* and possibly *usefulness*.

Conclusion

While writing up this research, I took a break to go on a bike ride with my 13-year-old son. He had expressed interest in doing a local sprint triathlon, and since I had done one several years prior, I decided to support him by helping him understand the importance of training. I was his first audience in this endeavor, but his larger audience would emerge on race day. This venture is not unlike writing, with the training being composing drafts and the race being the final written piece. So, on the morning of our first bike ride, he said, “I know exactly where we’re going.” I listened to his suggested route, and then told him that we were going to go on a route I had planned, because his course included a hill that was too steep for me for the first ride and I wanted to follow him. He looked a little frustrated and said, “Okay, then will you give me the route, because I don’t want you to hold me back.” Of course, I gave him the route. As we started, I caught glimpses of him on distant hills, and before long, he was gone. I was proud of him for pushing his limits, satisfied, because I was following behind, and pleased because I allowed him the needed freedom. Students in Ms. Wampler’s class did much the same. They followed her route; she guided their writing with the formula she provided, and some of the students pushed their limits. They pushed their limits by carefully crafting leads which included personal vignettes to hook the reader. They pushed their limits by including solid arguments that did not arise in class discussions. They pushed their limits by sculpting and positioning their counterclaim in just the right place in the conclusion. If students took a wrong turn, Ms. Wampler guided them, through conferencing, back on course. If they left out the

counterclaim, much like my son may forget to pump up his bike tires, she reminded them of the importance of this inclusion of counterclaims in persuasion.

Fortunately, when Ms. Wampler assigned the next persuasive essay, she provided the students with the choice of topic. Unfortunately, there was no choice in text structure and organization, and this habit of teaching formulaic writing is perpetuated year after year in schools, leaving students ill prepared to be innovative in writing. This reminds me of when my mother told me the most important life lesson she ever learned. I remember her sitting at her computer, family photos on shelves above her, talking with her hands about this revelation: “It sounds so simple, but it was huge for me, when I finally realized that there are so many ways to get from point A to point B.”

I almost fell into the same restraining structure that Ms. Wampler and many teachers, myself included, fall into in the classroom with Patrick and biking, because I know all the routes it would take to get my son prepared to be successful for race day. I know what route we could move to for each bike ride, as our length in rides increase. I know the formula for his success, and I can take him the way I know to get him where he needs to be in his training. However, looking back at my own first triathlon, part of the joy was the empowerment of creating new routes. Part of the struggle was in creating routes. Part of the learning was in creating routes. Replace each of these last words with writing, and it’s all the same. I found a book (much like a mentor text) and followed preplanned routes and modified them as I saw fit. My son wanted to choose the bike route, and I want him to use his creative mind to map these bike routes out.

However, the first time, I wanted to guide the process to help him be successful, which limited his empowerment. I explained to him the usefulness of what made the bike route I chose appropriate for our purpose of training. As soon as my body was used to the bike again and I could manage to somewhat follow him, I gave him more empowerment by allowing him to choose the routes, even tackle some of the hills that he may need to walk his bike up. We talked beforehand about the routes in relation to the purpose of our training.

With writing, we need to do the same. Students deserve the freedom to write to someone other than the teacher, which aligns with Jones (2009) MUSIC model and the construct of *eMpowerment*. Students need and wish to be gradually led from guided practice to innovation. This progression can happen quickly, with some students needing more support than others:

1. Students write with dependent practice where the teacher guides the students through one possible text structure.
2. Students analyze and map other text structures in mentor texts (Bernabei, 2007; Culham, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007; Heard, 2013).
3. Students independently practice inventing text structures (Bernabei,

2007; Martin 2014).

Bernabei's (2007) chapter entitled "The School Essay: Tracking Movement of the Mind" supports teachers in how to help students move from following the teacher's text structure to mapping out the text structures in mentor texts, to creation and innovation in writing with structure. This innovation has everything to do with voice, because when students have the freedom to choose the topic, audience, and purpose for writing, then they care; they become stakeholders in the writing, and it is then that their voice can emerge.

New literacies allow for increased audience, so that students have more opportunities to write for authentic purposes, which motivates students through making the work *Useful* and speaks to areas of *Interest*. Students deserve opportunities to be supported by their peers, if they choose, when writing for authentic purposes, and this aligns to the motivation and the MUSIC model construct of *Success*. Students deserve freedom of text structure, so that their voices can emerge naturally and meet the purposes of text, which motivates students through the construct of *eMpowerment*. All the while, students deserve and need the teacher to provide structure to support them with composition before and during the writing process. Aligned with the MUSIC model of motivation, this shows that the teacher *Cares*. They deserve a well-equipped bike, the right route for the training, and the permission to take detours as needed.

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