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Student Perceptions of Their Engagement With Online Writing as Influenced by Their Teacher's Presence at a Virtual High School: A Mixed Methods Study

Adrienne Harvie

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH ONLINE WRITING
AS INFLUENCED BY THEIR TEACHER'S PRESENCE AT A VIRTUAL HIGH
SCHOOL: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

by

Adrienne Harvie

Bachelor of Arts
Brigham Young University, 2001

Master of Education
Grand Canyon University, 2009

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education in

Curriculum and Instruction

College of Education

University of South Carolina

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Accepted by:

William Morris, Major Professor

Hengtao Tang, Major Professor

Michael Grant, Committee Member

Fatih Ari, Committee Member

Anna Clifford, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my children. May you never be afraid of struggling to achieve your dreams.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many wonderful people who deserve acknowledgement in helping this project reach its fruition. Dr. William Morris and Dr. Hengtao Tang deserve a huge thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to keep going when the going got very rough. Their advice, suggestions, and ideas were an essential part of my journey to completing this degree. Thank you to Dr. Michael Grant, Dr. Fatih Ari, and Dr. Anna Clifford for their guidance and suggestions for improving my research and the presentation of my research.

My family also deserves to be acknowledged for their efforts in encouraging me throughout this journey. My husband, Mike, has patiently endured having an incredibly stressed wife for four years. He has found many ways of being supporting from cooking frozen pizzas for our kids to staying up at night with me while I finished “just one more paragraph” to being my biggest cheerleader through it all. We had two children during this journey, and I can honestly say I would not have a shred of brain capacity left if it wasn’t for him. My children deserve to be acknowledged, as well. They have put up with the hours of me being on my computer completing homework. My little people have been praying for “Mommy’s paper to be done” for so long, it has become a daily habit. My older bonus kids have been troopers helping with tending the little ones. My father-in-law, Ron, is a Microsoft Word guru. My dad, Roger, lent his ear to my ideas and added analysis suggestions and provided an alternate perspective on my research.

ABSTRACT

This convergent mixed-methods action study explored the virtual high school student perception of how their engagement on writing assignments is affected by the presence of their English teacher in an online class. Research questions specifically focused on how teacher presence in the virtual classroom affects student engagement in online writing assignments. Another question asked how students perceive teacher presence in the virtual classroom and the third question examined how students perceived their engagement in online writing assignments is affected by teacher presence.

In this study two English teachers at a virtual high school were mentored by the researcher to increase their teacher presence over a six-week period by sending weekly email with short videos. Prior to the teacher intervention, high school students ($n = 103$) completed a pre-survey that gauged their engagement and how much they noticed and valued five specific teacher actions. At the conclusion of the 6-week intervention period the participating students ($n = 58$) completed a post-survey and open-ended short-answer questions. Five students participated in semi-structured synchronous interviews. Together, these qualitative and quantitative data points were analyzed to determine the effect of teacher actions on student engagement with school.

Overall, student engagement did not change, but students did indicate that they noticed, valued, and appreciated the teacher actions this research project focused on: weekly announcements, short videos, grading feedback, grading rubrics, and live lesson

sessions. Teachers should make every effort to have quality teacher presence in an online classroom, but teacher presence alone does not increase student engagement. The conclusion of this project is that teacher presence, while necessary and important, is not the only factor influencing student engagement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LMS Learning Management System

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

National Context

“Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many”

(National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003, p.11)

Writing instruction needs to improve in K-12 classes and more specifically, in high school classes. Writing instruction in the high school English Language Arts classroom can prepare students for higher education and have a positive influence on students’ future lives (Tierney & Garcia, 2008). Nearly three-quarters of American high school graduates decide to further their education by attending a college or university but being accepted to institutes of higher learning does not ensure that students enter with appropriate writing skills and strategies. Many students leave high school only to end up in remedial writing classes in colleges and universities (National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges, 2003; National Study of Student Engagement, 2016; Patrick, Worthen, Frost, & Truong, 2017). Writing is not only important as students work their way through higher education, but students need to have marketable writing and communication skills to compete in the workforce and qualify for skilled jobs; writing with proficiency and competence is important in today’s work environment (Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003; St. Louis Community College and Workforce Solutions Group, 2017). Learning to write and write

well needs to begin sooner than when students enter college but writing instruction has been neglected in the American school reform movement (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003).

Successful writers have control over domains, discourse and language while maintaining flexibility and the ability to adapt to new writing situations (Crossley, Roscoe, McNamara, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007). Unfortunately, while writing with proficiency and competence is important in today's work environment and is important for participation in the global economy, a mere 27% of 12th graders scored proficient on the 2011 national writing assessment (Crossley, Roscoe & McNamara, 2014; Graham & Perin, 2007; Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; NAEP, 2011; St. Louis Community College and Workforce Solutions Group, 2017). Writing instruction needs improvement if students are to succeed in the workplace after high school (Graham & Perin, 2007). Suggestions for improving writing instruction include knowing what skills students should develop prior to beginning a writing assignment and what skills students need to improve their writing over the course of their educational experience (Graham & Perin, 2007; Soiferman, 2017).

To improve writing, instruction of writing also needs to improve. Explicit instruction of writing strategies has been shown to improve writing outcomes, especially when students have opportunities to observe the strategy, practice the strategy and then evaluate their use of the strategy (Graham, et al., 2016). When teachers work with students from where they are with their writing skills and teach grammar, mechanics and other skills, students improve.

Teaching writing is migrating from paper and pencil to computers in the brick and mortar classroom. The recent push for a 1:1 ratio of student to technological device in the

form of a laptop, tablet or other device has been shown to have a positive impact on writing, if used regularly, in the brick and mortar classroom (Warschauer, 2006). A benefit to having access to laptops in the English Language Arts classroom helped students through the writing process with spelling, grammar, and formatting; editing; and keyboard typing ease (Warschauer, et al., 2010). In the brick and mortar classroom students have the added benefit of writing with a teacher present, which encourages students to stay on task and complete their assignments.

In the virtual environment students must write by themselves without the benefit of an instructor looking over their shoulder to keep them on track, which contributes to lower performance outcomes than in comparable brick-and-mortar schools (Borup, Graham, & Davies, 2013). Instead of having their teacher present during class time, virtual students must rely on asynchronous resources that are provided for them by curriculum writers and their instructor to help them complete their writing assignments (Borup & Stevens, 2017). Although asynchronous instruction is a staple in virtual classes, “online education is a natural fit for today’s teens. High school students have grown up with the Internet, and they use technology to connect with each other and their interests every day” (Connections Academy, n.d.).

Our world has become an electronic world filled with devices and as such, our students today live digital lives (Slaughter, 2009). According to studies done by Project Tomorrow, a top five complaint of students in a brick and mortar classroom about school technology is that students want to be able to use their own mobile devices (Evans, 2018). In Echo Virtual Academy environment, students are permitted to use any electronic device that helps them complete their lessons. Students view technology use a means that helps

receive differentiated instruction (Warschauer, et al., 2010). Furthermore, students want to use technology to prepare them for future careers and want to learn to be self-directed learners (Evans, 2018; Slaughter, 2009). Virtual schools have created a pathway for students to be independent learners since virtual schools started.

Within the United States, 60% of school districts began the 2020-21 school year operating on modified schedules that included virtual learning days (Kamenetz, 2020). For example, some districts sent students to school for two days a week, with students attending the building on alternating days, leaving all students with three days of virtual learning. Other districts had students attend for four days a week, leaving one day for virtual learning. Students and teachers who would not choose to do virtual learning under typical circumstances, are now forced into it, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This unexpected shift away from traditional brick and mortar learning has caused parents to look for alternative schooling for their children. According to Google analytics, from the beginning of the pandemic around March 2020 to the fall of 2020, 43% of parents had actively researched sending their child to an online K-12 school or had already enrolled their students at a virtual school (Frost, 2020). The biggest virtual charter schools in the United States, K12 and Connections Academy, experienced a huge surge after the onslaught of the pandemic. For the 2020-21 school year, K12 reported a 57% increase in enrollment while Connections Academy reported a 41% enrollment increase over the previous school year (Kamentz & Korth, 2020). Other virtual schools around the country also reported large enrollment boosts for the start of the 2020-21 school year (Watson, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred the growth of on-line education to an unprecedented degree, thus increasing the need for data on what students need and expect from teachers in the virtual environment. Teacher presence is a necessary part of the online learning experience for students, making knowing and applying teacher actions that help improve student engagement more important than in previous years.

Virtual schools in the United States began in 1997 when The Florida Virtual School, the first internet-based public high school, was founded with 77 students (Florida Virtual School). In 2017, The National Education Policy Center published a report about virtual schools in the United States in which it was reported that 278,511 students were enrolled in 528 full-time virtual schools across 34 states (Molnar, et al., 2017). That is an increase of over 278,00 students in 20 years. Of the total 278,511 virtual students, 69.5% of them were enrolled in a virtual school operated by an education management organization (EMO), even though EMOs only operated 29.4% of the full-time virtual schools (Molnar, et al., 2017). These EMOs include companies such as K-12 and Connections Academy (Molnar, et al., 2017; Molnar, et al., 2019). Figure 1.1 illustrates the rise in virtual schools since 2000.

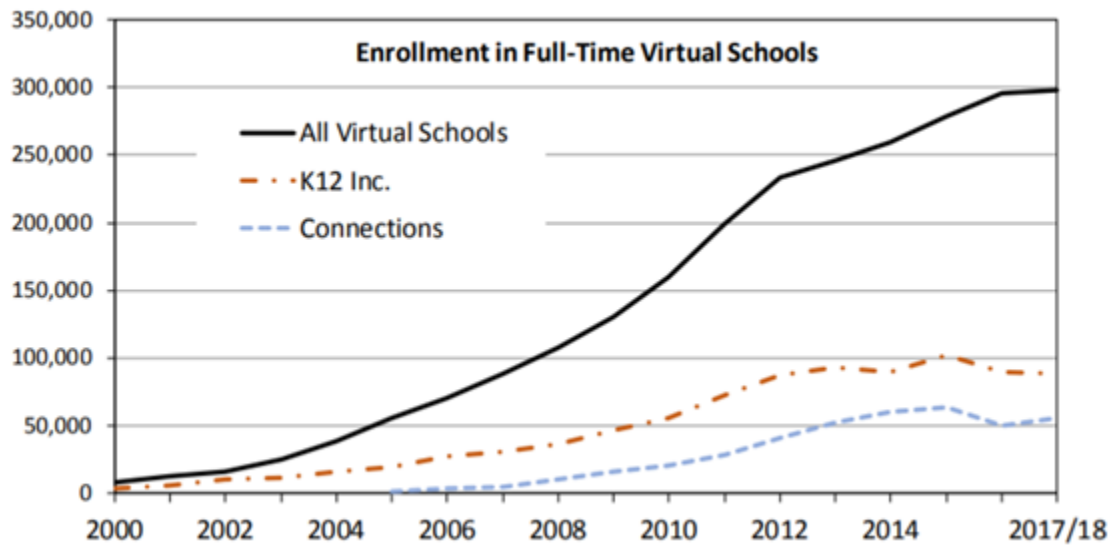


Figure 1.1 *Enrollment in Virtual Schools*

This figure illustrates the climb in virtual school enrollment since 2000 with almost 250,000 additional students in 18 years. This figure also shows that the prominent EMOs of K-12, Inc. and Connections have had steady increases in enrollment during the same time. If the future can be predicted by the rise in enrollment, it is safe to conclude that virtual charter schools are here to stay. Teaching writing in the virtual environment needs improving.

Local Context

Echo Virtual Academy is a fully virtual public charter school that enrolls students from across a Western state. As part of a large corporation that runs virtual schools Echo Virtual Academy is subject to the rules and procedures of a large international corporation, as opposed to belonging to a local school district. In fact, in the state in which the school resides, individual charter schools are regarded as their own school districts and are treated as such by the state, thus placing Echo Virtual Academy in an interesting position in having

to meet corporate, as well, as state requirements for testing, attendance, and all other data points tracked by both.

Students at Echo Virtual Academy come from rural, suburban, and inner-city settings. They choose this charter school for a variety of reasons, including medical issues, social-emotional concerns, the need to get away from bullies or gangs, and participating in activities that require a substantial amount of travel or practice (such as Olympic athletes or belonging to traveling dance troupes). Some students transfer to this school to experiment with the on-line environment hoping for improved school performance. While the reasons for coming to a virtual school vary, all high school students are required to pursue a high school diploma and take grade level courses or credit recovery courses.

Echo Virtual Academy provides students with a fully on-line curriculum written by professional curriculum writers at Pearson, not local teachers. Teachers in this setting act more as facilitators of the curriculum than actual instructors of the curriculum. A teacher's job at this virtual school is to track student data in terms of participation, progress through the course, and successful completion of assignments. Because they do not write the curriculum, teachers are tasked with filling in gaps that might exist between the curriculum and what is required in the state's Common Core Standards. This is accomplished by conducting weekly synchronous live lesson sessions through Adobe Connect and posting additional information on class message boards. The live lesson sessions are not required for students, thus the students who participate do so voluntarily. These sessions are recorded and posted on a class message board allowing students who did not come to have access to the presented information.

Teachers may post any additional information on the message board that they feel will help students perform better on their daily quizzes, unit tests, and all writing assignments. A challenge that teachers face, especially English teachers, is that it is difficult to know the type of information that will be of the most benefit to students, especially when it comes to helping with writing instruction and covering the curriculum gaps surrounding writing. Teachers must use a variety of techniques to increase their presence in the virtual classroom.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

The student perspective is needed to find how virtual teacher presence influences student engagement in writing courses and on writing assignments. In the years leading up to 2014 most of the research on student performance and retention in online schools had been quantitative, which left some complex issues left unstudied “such as the pedagogy, curriculum, or environmental and social factors that might influence students and their learning experiences” (Hasler- Waters, 2014, p. 387). It was suggested that qualitative studies would add to the literature surrounding online students. Since 2014, quantitative studies have been conducted by a group of researchers who have looked at the engagement experiences of students, teachers, and parents within the virtual charter school (Borup, Chambers & Srimson, 2019; Borup, Graham & Drysdale, 2014; Borup & Stevens, 2017; Borup, West, Graham & Davies, 2014; Borup, West, Thomas & Graham, 2014). However, the voices of students in fully online charter schools is a perspective that needs more researching (Boboc, 2015; Hasler-Waters, 2014; Kim, Park, Cozart, & Lee, 2015). “There is little research to describe the virtual. . . student experience, which has resulted in a lack of understanding of the actual instructional model, the nature of the curriculum, and the

type and amount of support employed by these schools” (Molnar, et al., 2019, p. 41). There is also a dearth of research surrounding instructor presence in online environments (Martin, et al., 2018). Additional research is also needed to investigate online writing instruction for general education students (Straub & Velazquez, 2015). As a mixed method research study about teacher presence as it affects student engagement with writing, this study will add to the literature and is needed to help understand student needs in this academic area.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this action research is to investigate how teacher presence in a virtual classroom contributes to student engagement in online writing assignments.

Research Questions

R.Q. 1: In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?

R.Q. 2: How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?

Statement of Research Subjectivities and Positionality

I am the Secondary Literacy Specialist/Interventionist at a fully virtual charter school. Prior to this position, I taught English Language Arts and worked with the English language learner population at this school for three years. Learning how to be a virtual teacher after spending twelve years in a brick and mortar English classroom has been challenging. Learning how to provide appropriate asynchronous and synchronous resources to help students engage with their learning has been challenging, as well. Having completed my master’s degree in an on-line program and completing a doctoral degree in an on-line program, I have the student perspective of how technology enables learning and how much individual effort is required to take advantage of the knowledge being offered.

I feel that technology has an important role in education and that everyone should be able to comfortably use technology to teach and learn. Prior to working in the on-line school environment, I spent years trying to incorporate technology into my High school and Jr high school English Language Arts classrooms by using computer labs and portable computer labs, making my own websites for assignments and information, and trying to engage students through technology during class. One of my biggest challenges at a Title 1 school in the days before smartphones were given to teenagers was that a large percentage of my students were not technically savvy because they did not have access to the internet or internet enabled devices outside of school. Because of their lack of internet enabled devices at home, they did not know how to use the internet for much more than playing video games and watching videos. I had to teach students how to use word processing programs, conduct research and tap into the vast knowledge networks available to them. Now, at the virtual high school, I find that many students do not know how to use the technology at their fingertips to learn independently and effectively. I still teach students how to use word processing programs, conduct research and tap into knowledge networks; the main difference is that students now have multiple devices with which to access the internet. They view using technology as “cheating” and do not fully realize the essentiality of technology in learning.

These perceptions, mixed with beliefs, create the paradigm from which these students operate their lives (Kinash, 2006). Using the interpretivist paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed and discovered through the eyes of participants, will allow me to examine and explore the relationship between the students and the social context in which they live (McQueen, 2002; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Being able to observe

people in their natural habitats, draw conclusions and go in-depth in this exploration is a benefit of subscribing to the interpretivist point of view and allows me to be an insider while performing research (Herr & Anderson, 2005; Thomas, 2010).

As a staff member at the school where my research will take place, I will need to treat myself as an insider who is invested in the success of the research and not as an outsider trying to conduct research. A researcher cannot pretend to be an outsider merely for the sake of the study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As an insider, my knowledge of how the school operates and my relationships with students, faculty, and staff are integral to the success of the research. Including stakeholders at the school as collaborators in the study and then sharing results and conclusions with them will increase the likelihood of a successful research study (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I am also a student in an on-line environment and am an insider from the student context, as well. Insiders through practice can connect and relate to the student experience (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

My values and biases will affect my work as an educational technology researcher because I view the world through the eyes of a middle-class white woman who has always had all the resources and skills needed to be successful in school and in life. I naturally assume that others should also be able to use the resources they have been provided to be successful, and I need to be careful that I don't project these expectations on students who are still learning how to be resilient in the face of challenges. I need to not assume everyone engages with their learning just because I engage with my own learning.

Definition of Terms

Academic Engagement: A student's ability to connect affectively, behaviorally, and cognitively with academic content (Borup, et al. 2020).

Asynchronous Communication: Communication that occurs outside of real time. Emails are an example of asynchronous communication.

Brick and Mortar School: A traditional school that takes place within the walls of a physical building where instruction happens face-to-face.

Engagement: The time a learner is intellectually involved in an activity (Brophy, 1983; Capie & Tobin, 1981), the effort a learner evokes towards a task instead of merely pretending to complete it (Ainley, 2012), or the idea that learners are energized and sustained during an activity (Shunk & Mullen, 2012).

Learning Management System (LMS): The technology platform through which online courses are provided. Within the LMS are all the tools needed to facilitate learning.

Online Learning: Education that occurs primarily through the internet.

Synchronous Communication: Communication that occurs in real-time when people interact with each other in a given time and place (Lim, 2017). Phone calls are an example of communication that happens at the same time.

Virtual school: A school where students receive their course curriculum through the internet (Barbour, 2009; Cavanaugh, Barbour, & Clark, 2009; Clark, 2001).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this action research is to investigate how teacher presence in a virtual classroom contributes to student perceptions about their engagement in online writing assignments. Research questions specifically focus on how teacher presence in the virtual classroom affects student engagement in online writing assignments. Another question asks how students perceive teacher presence in the virtual classroom and the third question how students perceive their engagement in online writing assignments is affected by teacher presence.

The review of the related literature presents the following topics: virtual schools, engagement, the online student, and the online writing and learning environment.

Research for this literature review has been completed using the electronic library databases of *JSTOR*, *ERIC*, *ProQuest*, *Education Source*, and *ProQuest Dissertations*. Search limitations included literature written within the past five years and from peer reviewed journals. Articles older than five years have been included in this literature review if they are relevant to the context of my action research. Search criteria within the library databases included terms such as “secondary writing”, “online student”, “online student engagement,” “virtual school”, “virtual charter school”, “k-12 online school”, “virtual writing”, “online writing”, “student engagement”, “teacher presence”, and “high school student engagement”. While finding and using articles pertaining to the secondary student have been the goal, due to a lack of studies focused on this group, some articles have been

included that studied college students or graduate level students, if I felt the study was applicable to the secondary student. Notes have been added to explain the limitations due to participant level where appropriate. Google Scholar was used to find additional sources using the same search terms. These Google Scholar searches included using a date range of 2012 – 2010 and search limitations of articles from peer reviewed sources. As with the electronic library sources, some articles older than 2012 have been included if the study is applicable to this action research and if the findings apply to the secondary student. Additional resources have been found by utilizing the bibliography pages of articles that I read. This literature review is broken down into sections consisting of 1) Distance and Online Learning, 2) Engagement, 3) the Online Student, and 4) The Online Writing Environment.

Distance and Online Learning

“Online learning is a descendent of distance education” (Caruth & Caruth, 2013, p. 141). Distance learning has a beginning with a Bostonian teacher who sent shorthand lessons via postal mail to students outside of the city in 1728 (Bower & Hardy, 2004). In 1873, Ana Ticknor started the Society to Encourage Study at Home, which provided women homemakers with a self-paced correspondence program delivered by mail (Bower & Hardy, 2004; Caruth & Caruth, 2014; Larreamendy-Jeorns & Leinhart, 2006). This program allowed women who could not attend a college in-person with the opportunity to study in a discipline of their choice: English, history, science, French, German, or art (Caruth & Caruth, 2014; Larreamendy-Jeorns & Leinhart, 2006). The students received a syllabus in the mail and were responsible for completing the assigned readings, writing notes reflecting their learning, submitting their assignments and completed assessments

(Bower & Hardy, 2004). Anna Ticknor recruited well-educated women to be volunteer instructors tasked with looking over the assignments and assessments students submitted through the mail to verify the effectiveness of the written instruction (Caruth & Caruth, 2014). The concept of instruction through correspondence expanded in the 1800s as other individuals formed societies and universities began programs aimed at educating people who might otherwise not be able to participate in higher learning on a campus, such as women, blue collar workers, and farmers (Larreamendy-Jeorns & Leinhardt, 2006).

Technology advancements aided the development of distance learning capabilities. By the 1920s radio became an easier method for communicating with students and almost two hundred radio stations broadcasted distance learning to people across the United States (Bower & Hardy, 2004). In the 1950s television became the new medium for conveying learning to people in their own homes. The 1960s brought satellite technology and the expansion of university sponsored open-enrollment classes. The Internet has further expanded the reach of distance learning. As opposed to the past where distance learning connections between students and instructors were asynchronous, because of the internet, synchronous interactions may now occur between students and instructors (Bower & Hardy, 2004; Li & Irby, 2008). Whether delivered by the postal service or electronic mail or some other means, distance learning provides learners with flexibility in pace, place, and time of learning (Borup & Archambault, 2020).

Virtual Charter Schools

The current distance learning environment where students receive their course curriculum through schools using the internet have been identified as both virtual schools and cyber schools (Barbour, 2009; Cavanaugh, Barbour, & Clark, 2009; Clark, 2001;).

Clark (2001) defined a virtual school as "an educational organization that offers K-12 courses through Internet or Web based methods" (p.1). Cyber schools are defined by Barbour (2009) as "typically full-time programs, usually created through charter school legislation" (p. 14). While "virtual school" and "cyber school" are almost synonymous, the term "virtual school" is the more common term for schools providing distance learning using the internet. Researchers (Clark, 2001; Cavanaugh, et al., 2009; Watson & Murin, 2014) have identified different categories of K-12 schools under the Echo Virtual Academy umbrella such as:

- College- and university- based courses available to high school students through dual or concurrent enrollment
- Full-time online schools, primarily run as charters schools, that serve students across school district lines. These are run by private and for-profit entities.
- District-led virtual schools designed to serve students within a specific school district to supplement the curriculum or provide alternate educational opportunities.
- School within a school where classrooms merge online learning with face-to-face support, also called blended learning.

Virtual charter schools differ from district-based schools because most allow for open enrollment across district lines and operate from within a chartering agency, as opposed to solely within the boundaries of a defined district (Clark, 2001; Gulosino, & Miron, 2017; Hasler, Waters, Barbour, & Menchaca, 2014).

Challenges of Virtual Schools

Since the beginning of distance learning in the United States, there has been a belief that in-person classroom instruction is the standard to emulate. Those in favor of distance education have been expected to demonstrate that distance teaching and distance learning were at least as good as in-person instruction (Larreamendy-Jeorns & Leinhardt, 2006). This mis-conceptualized belief leads people to conclude that virtual schools are not legitimate schools (Archambault, Kennedy, & Freidhoff, 2016; Boboc, 2015; Caruth & Caruth, 2013; Gulosino & Miron, 2017; Harris-Packer & Ségol, 2015;).

. . . after more than a century of . . . distance education, pro and con arguments have changed very little. Most of the concerns about distance education have focused on the limitations inherent in different delivery technologies (e.g., correspondence, radio, television, Internet) as they seek to replicate critical features of classroom instruction (Larreamendy-Jeorns & Leinhardt, 2006, p.579-580)

Reports on virtual charter schools from the early 2000s raised concerns about the lack of accountability, concerns about mismanagement, and little evidence that academic standards could be met as well as in traditional schools (Hasler-Waters, et al., 2014). Although virtual schools have been around since the late 1990s, myths that these schools are nothing more than diploma mills persist in some minds. To combat the perception of illegitimacy, Archambault et al. (2016) recommended that virtual schools keep districts and parents informed of the school offerings and professional development should be provided to administrators, teachers, parents, and students about the benefits and drawbacks of online classes. Some challenges with virtual schools are student readiness, retention, learning outcomes, and graduation rates.

Student readiness. Student readiness for virtual education encompasses the competencies of time management, technical ability, and comfort with online communication (Lee & Figueroa, 2012; Martin et al., 2020). Students who are successful in the virtual learning environment need to learn time management skills, which includes learning to set a schedule and setting achievable goals focused on following the expectations set in each virtual class (Lee & Figueroa, 2012).

Student retention. Roblyer and Davis (2008) discuss the issue in distance learning of having persistently higher dropout rates and higher levels of failure than in traditional classrooms. In a study using Likert scale questions provided to over 4,000 students enrolled in virtual classes, Roblyer and Davis (2008) investigated factors that might predict success or failure in a virtual environment. They found that having a personal computer at home and an assigned class period to work on virtual classes increases a student's odds of being successful, making them less likely to drop-out.

Student learning outcomes. Student learning outcomes are another concern for the virtual charter school. Connected to the issues of legitimacy, learning outcomes are important to validate the educational value of virtual charter schools (Harris-Packer, & Ségol, 2015; Hasler-Waters, et al., 2014; Taylor & McNair, 2018; Waters et al., 2014). Harris-Packer & Segol (2015) found that students in on-line schools did not do better than traditional students on state mandated assessments, but that over time, students in a virtual school can increase their scores and almost score as well as traditional students.

Low graduation rates. Another challenge faced by virtual charter schools is that of low graduation rates. Graduation rates for high schools are based on the "On Time Graduation Rate" calculation established by the government which calculates the number

of students who graduate from high school within four years after beginning 9th grade. Virtual school graduation rates have been stagnant or have declined over the past few years, while at the same time national graduation rates have been improving about 1 percentage point each year (Gulosino & Miron, 2017). Graduation rates are an indicator in many people's minds of the quality or lack of quality of a high school and are a public relation issue for virtual charter schools.

The Online Students in Virtual Charter Schools

Students enroll in virtual charter schools for many reasons, such as flexible schedules and opportunities for student paced learning (Hasler-Waters et al., 2014). Some students leave traditional schools and migrate to virtual charter schools because they want to progress faster than is typically permitted, a positive reason for attending a virtual charter school. Some students want to graduate early and enroll in a virtual charter school to be able to push through classes and move on from high school. On the other hand, flexible schedules and student paced learning offer educational solutions for students with health concerns, like going through chemotherapy or emotional issues, such as social anxiety. Additionally, students who endure bullying also seek out schools free from social pressures and find virtual schools to meet that need. Home-schooled students also participate in Echo Virtual Academy experience but in this environment, parents relinquish most of their curriculum planning duties to Echo Virtual Academy leaving them with the ability to focus on student progress, achievement, and individual student needs (Barbour, 2009).

Even though students leave traditional school environments to escape certain challenges, challenges faced by students within the virtual charter school still exist. These

challenges have led researchers to begin focusing on the K-12 virtual learning environment in recent years.

Engagement

As researchers have begun to focus on younger learners in the secondary environment, an engagement framework was created termed the Adolescent Community of Engagement Framework or ACE Framework by Borup, West, Graham, and Davies (2014). This framework is based on the Community of Inquiry work by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and findings that adolescent learners and their engagement are affected by their connections with others and not purely on what they are doing themselves. Parents, teachers, and peers have been identified as critical influences in a student's academic engagement (Wentzel, 1998). The ACE Framework presents the connection between student engagement and other engagement influencers around them: peers, parents, and teachers (See Figure 2.1)

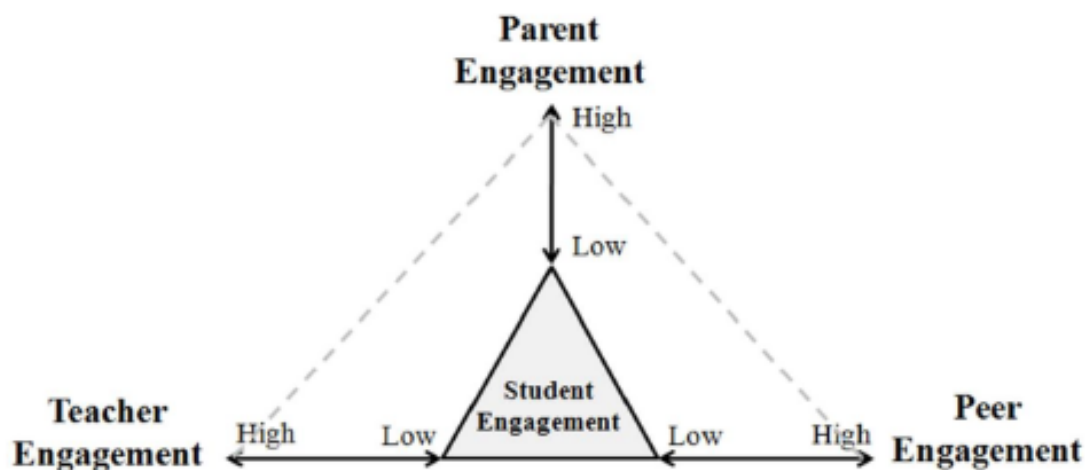


Figure 2.1 *Adolescent Community of Engagement*

Note: Borup, West, Graham, et al. (2014). Used with permission

The term student engagement does not have one definition, despite the term's prevalence (Woodworth, et al., 2015; Lowes & Lin, 2015). Kim, Kim, & Karimi (2012) state that there is a lack of studies related to K-12 student engagement that draw any meaningful conclusions. According to the original Adolescent Community of Engagement (ACE) Framework, student engagement is at the center of the triangle where it expands and contracts based on the interactions with peers, teachers, and parents who make up the outside of the triangle. Borup et al. (2014) believe that full engagement in "learning activities requires affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement" (p. 8). Affective and behavioral engagement applies to a student's interest in a task and their ability to work at it.

Borup, Chambers, and Srimson (2019) used a study by Roblyer, Freeman, Stabler, and Schmeidmiller (2007) to explain that a students' ability to complete an online course seems to have more to do with their motivation, self-direction, and personal responsibility than their capacity to learn course content. This idea can be followed up with a discovery in a study conducted by Wang, Shannon, and Ross (2013), where they concluded that students with more experience taking on-line classes are more familiar with how on-line programs work, leading to better learning strategies and self-regulation, and thus better learning outcomes. Based on these studies, a conclusion that can be drawn is that students in online courses need to develop certain personality traits and should learn skills related directly to virtual learning to be successful.

Engagement is more than a catch phrase in education. Engagement is influenced by contextual factors- home, school, and peers- and how they each contribute support to a student's academic achievement (Wentzel, 1998). Engagement goes beyond motivation;

engagement has to do with students being mindful about their learning (Park et al., 2012). Student engagement is a leading challenge facing teachers whether in traditional or virtual settings (Gill et al., 2015) because “learning begins with student engagement” (Shulman, 2005, p. 38).

Educators strive to find ways in which to demand thinking from students in classroom activities in such a way that they learn. Student engagement in school was a topic of interest for John Dewey when he advocated for learner-centered classrooms where children learn by doing (Williams, 2017). The term engagement has been described as the time a learner is intellectually involved in an educational activity (Brophy, 1983; Capie & Tobin, 1981). Another meaning of engagement is that a student is concerned with the content of the task rather than pretending to complete the activity or working mechanically (Ainley, 2012). A student’s own investment, or behavior, in their education has been considered a key element of engagement, but more recent definitions of engagement include the interrelated components of cognitive and affective engagement (Mandernach, 2015). Engagement also includes the idea that students are “energized, directed, and sustained during learning and other academic activities” (Schunk & Mullen, 2012, p. 220).

Engagement is a construct that is made up of three dimensions: behavioral engagement, affective/emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement (Borup, Graham, West, Archambault & Spring, 2020; Borup et al., 2014; Chapman, 2003; Reschly & Christensen, 2012; Trowler, 2010; Wetzel, 2008). Behavioral engagement is demonstrated by physical behaviors that are necessary to be able to complete learning activities, while cognitive engagement is the mental energy being used (Borup et al., 2020). Another example is that attendance and participation are behaviors, while paying attention is a

cognitive activity. The three constructs are linked together, in such a way that students who are not emotionally engaged in their learning tend to disengage behaviorally and cognitively, as well (Park, et al., 2012). Affective engagement “supports students’ ability to behaviorally and cognitively engage in a course” (Borup et al., 2020, p. 812). The correlation between the three dimensions of student engagement is illustrated in the Academic Communities of Engagement framework (see Figure 2.2) created by (Borup et al., 2020).

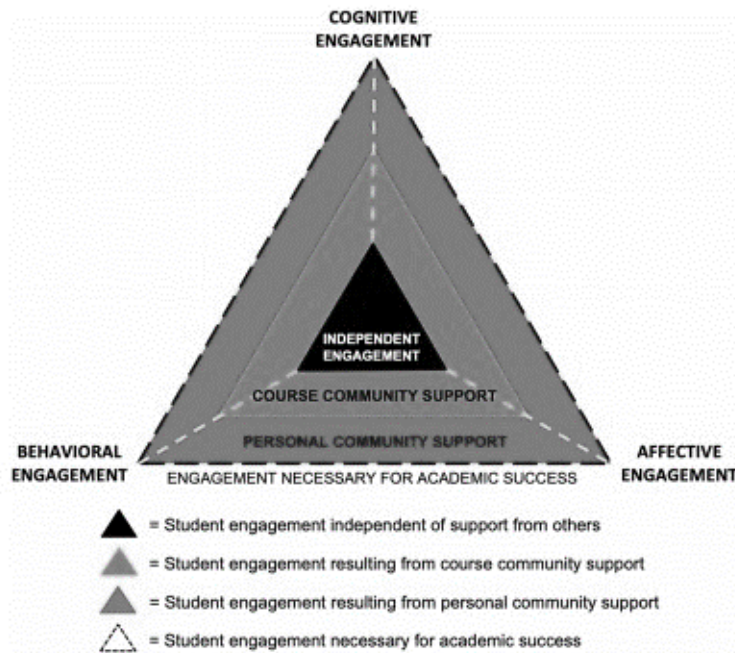


Figure 2.2 *Academic Communities of Engagement*
Borup et al. (2020)

Note. Used with permission. The inner triangle represents a student’s engagement independent of support from others. The engagement resulting from the course community support is represented in the middle triangle, and the engagement resulting from personal community support is represented by the large outside triangle. The goal of the support communities is to help the student increase engagement to the level of engagement necessary for academic success, as represented by the dotted line.

The process of how engagement factors lead to the indicators of student engagement, which lead to learning outcomes is illustrated in Figure 2.3. Learner characteristics combined with personal physical environment, and the course set-up lead to the three indicators of student engagement. Together, affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement present themselves by the outcomes.

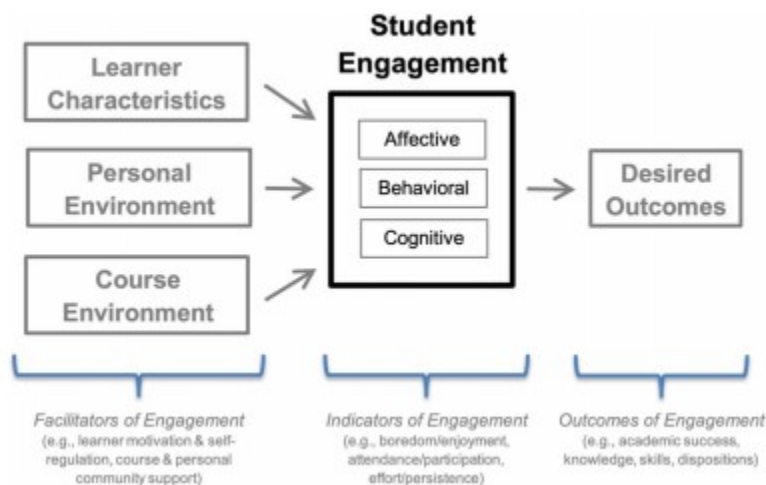


Figure 2.3 *Factors, Indicators and Outcomes of Student Engagement*
Borup, et al. (2020)

Note. Used with permission.

Behavioral Engagement

Behaviors in school are the physical acts students perform within a classroom and they are linked to engagement and disengagement of students. Behavior includes attendance, involvement, and the absence of negative behavior (Towler, 2010).

In 1974, Bronfenbrenner, as mentioned by Marks (2000), theorized that students are more deeply engaged with classwork the more cognitively challenging and complex it is. Newmann (1989) concluded that negative experiences within a school dulls student motivation or even suppresses it completely, which creates a lack of engagement and

lowers academic success. Students who are usually motivated by doing well in school disengage from school activities if they do not believe their actions have value or if they feel negative outcomes may result (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

In a longitudinal study involving 4th and 8th graders, Finn & Zimmer (2012) discovered that academic and social engagement correlated with high school graduation rates. Academic engagement had a stronger connection to high school graduation than social engagement, but both are statistically significant. A conclusion of this study is that high achievement in school likely promotes ongoing engagement and low achievement discourages continuing engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Students who find success academically continue to engage in school to continue their success while students who are not academically successful pull away and disengage with school (Finn, 1993).

There is a link between engagement with school and being able to overcome life's obstacles. Through student effort, attentiveness, lack of boredom, and completing class assignments students can overcome their backgrounds to find academic achievement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Marks, 2000).

To create behavioral engagement in class, students must have meaningful work on which to focus and pay attention. This leads to on-task behavior, such as answering questions, looking or writing on academic materials, looking at the teacher, and/or receiving assistance from a teacher. Engaged students create environments that are conducive to learning and then focus on the task at hand and work to avoid being distracted (Schunk & Mullen, 2012). During class activities, students who engage tend to look at the teacher and the task at hand (Beserra, Nussbaum & Oteo, 2019; Godwin, Seltman, et al., 2016). There is evidence that students can be more engaged in a classroom when working

in a small group setting with fewer distractions from their peers than in a whole group setting (Godwin et al., 2016). This study by Godwin et al. (2016) used a computer adaptive test to assess student learning and they found that the correlation between on task behavior and learning could be disrupted by ineffective instruction. On task behaviors are important but being cognitively engaged with the task at hand is more important (Kim et al., 2015). Being cognitively engaged is an internal process that is hard to judge.

Affective Engagement

Affective and emotional engagement play an important role in the academic performance of adolescents (Park et al., 2012; Schunk & Mullen, 2012). Having affective engagement in a course can positively support behavioral and cognitive engagement (Borup et al., 2020) and this type of engagement can be considered a “starting point for promoting school success” (Roorda et al., 2011, p. 520). Teachers, peers, and parents all play a role in emotional engagement (Betts, 2012; Borup, 2016a) because feeling connected to others promotes feelings of emotional engagement (Reschly & Christensen, 2012).

In a multimethod longitudinal study with high school students from an ethnically diverse school, Park et al. (2015) studied emotional engagement and were able to create a construct of the emotional engagement experience: interest, concentration, and enjoyment. The study discovered that students engaged emotionally when the psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence were met (Park et al., 2015). A study by Oldfield et al. (2019) found that engagement among university students deteriorated to the point where they avoided attending class if students did not like the teacher’s personality, felt isolated from other people, or did not enjoy course content.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement refers to internal behaviors or mental effort a student employs during a learning task (Chapman, 2003). Examples of cognitive behaviors when learning include asking yourself questions, going back over things that weren't understood at first, and including self-regulation and effort (Betts, 2012; Geraci, Palmerini, Cirillo, & McDougald, 2017). In the Fordham Institute survey, involving a national sample of more than two thousand students in grades 10-12, 83-95% of students reported that they wanted to apply themselves in school "by thinking deeply, listening carefully, and completing assignments" (Geraci et al., p. 6). The cognitive tasks imply intrinsic motivation, which is difficult to see.

Successful Student Traits

A trait of successful on-line students is that of being an independent learner. Independent learners are characterized as students with high intrinsic motivation and solid time management, reading, and technology skills (Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Wang, et al., 2013). Kim et al. (2012) describe independent learners as those who are willing to set goals and find their classes enjoyable. Independent learners are typically more successful in the virtual environment because they have learned how to use the LMS, can use the technology, and solve their own problems (Wang et al., 2013). Apart from these skills, having the motivation to do the work once students know how the technology works is key to being successful. In a study focusing on parents with students in Echo Virtual Academy, Curtis and Werth (2015) found that self-motivation is a trait that parents of unsuccessful students wish their children had.

Personal Community

Parents or parental figures are more present in a student's life than the teachers in Echo Virtual Academy and need to interact with students in an instructor type position, as well as be a mentor and supporter (Borup et al., 2014). Parental engagement is just as important as teacher engagement in terms of teaching, mentoring, and encouraging (Borup, 2016b). Parents contribute resources and possess assets that promote learning, such as providing activities and materials that arouse curiosity (Schunk & Mullen, 2012).

In a study by Curtis and Werth (2015), parents at a virtual charter school were interviewed and asked about their experience at the school. All the parents had students that were at the school for different reasons and had been enrolled for differing numbers of years, which affected their responses and interactions with the school. Curtis and Werth (2015) found that the most successful students were those whose parents regularly communicated with the school either through email or phone calls. Parents who realized that the student/teacher ratio was high, and that teacher time was valuable, made better use of the communication tools available to them than parents who did not come to the same realization. Students whose parents did not reach out to teachers and did not respond to communication attempts from teachers tended to fall behind in their course work and in one case, the student dropped out of school (Curtis & Werth, 2015).

Borup et al. (2019) specifically looked at the traits of parents whose children attended a virtual school. In the study, teachers and facilitators at an online school were asked about the roles of parents in the online environment. Prior to the study, the researchers summarized that the role of parents included: organizing and managing the home learning environment, instructing, and facilitating interactions of their students with

the online environment. The study found that teachers and facilitators believed that the more interaction a student had with the online instructors, the less involved was required by a parent. In contrast, the less time a student spent attending virtual lessons and lab, the more necessary the role of a parent proved to be. They also found, like Curtis and Werth (2015) that disengaged parents were often unaware of their student's progress within their online courses.

The role of parents is important to the success of an online student; engaged parents lead to engaged students and disengaged parents are more likely to have disengaged students (Borup, 2016b).

Course Community

Another component of student engagement, according to the ACE Framework, is the course community made up of peer and teacher engagement (Borup et al., 2020). Peer interaction occurs best when students have been allowed to establish a community of inquiry and have established camaraderie prior to working together (Borup et al., 2014). Collectively, students do not usually have enough life experience to help teach one another, but they can motivate one another. Cho and Kim (2015) found that students need help in the form of scaffolding in order to take advantage of peers in an online class and have successful experiences. Peer engagement in a virtual class takes place using discussions, interactions in synchronous video calls, and group projects. Online schools that provide synchronous lessons use tools such as Adobe Connect to provide a classroom space where students can interact together.

Teacher Presence

Teacher presence and effectiveness significantly influence student engagement (Cinches, Russell, Chavez, & Ortiz, 2017). Teacher presence, also called teacher immediacy, is the term connected to teacher engagement in an online learning experience and refers to the interjection of an instructor into an online course (Anderson, Rourke, & Garrison, 2001; Dunlap, Verma, & Johnsonferdi, 2016; Richardson et al., 2015). Garrison et al. (2000) argue that social online interactions and interactions with the content are not enough to ensure effective online learning. Teachers provide the foundation for online classes that fosters student engagement. Teachers in the online environment perform actions unique to their situation given that they do not meet face to face with students. In a study focused on teacher presence in the online environment, Richardson et al. (2015) observed what teachers did and narrowed down teacher actions into five categories: advocating, facilitating, sense making, organizing, and maintaining.

Advocating

As an advocate, teachers are available to students to provide support as needed and also support students on assignments by providing tips for being successful (Richardson et al., 2015). Bolin et al. (2012) report that high levels of instructor interaction typically need to be present for learners to have positive experiences and report course satisfaction. In their study using adults who had taken online courses and had written online courses, Bolin et al. (2012) found that students are happier with their courses if they know the teacher is an active participant and they feel the instructor is aware of what is happening in the course. Wilton (2018) studied high school students in a virtual classroom and looked at non-posting activities in the online classroom, specifically focusing on the discussion boards where the

instructor posted information. The study revealed that all students agreed that revisiting or rereading teacher entries improved their understanding of what to do. Students classified as Moderate Readers/Writers agreed most that rereading teacher entries was important for understanding (Wilton, 2018).

Findings by Klem and Connell (2004) indicate that teacher support is important to student engagement, especially when support includes a caring, well-structured environment with high, yet fair, expectations. Creating a caring environment evolves from communication provided from a teacher to their students. Roorda et al. (2019) performed a meta-analysis where they found that secondary teachers usually feel that their emotional connections are less important for their students than those at the elementary level which causes them to focus more on their instructional practices than on their emotionally supportive role.

Facilitating

Teachers play an active role in the discussions that occur within the class, as a facilitator of online classes (Richardson et al., 2015). In this role teachers provide an example of what discussions should look like and provide students with questions to answer and/or consider.

Sense Making

In the role as sense maker, a teacher helps students make sense of the course content through scaffolding, modeling, and clarifying (Richardson et al., 2015). Teachers provide resources, examples, demonstrations, and any other material that will contribute to a

student's ability to make sense of the course. Teachers can give feedback to contribute to student understanding in a class.

Feedback. Instructor feedback on assignments is a specific form of communication that has a positive effect on student engagement and positive outcomes (Borup et al., 2015; Ice et al., 2019; Saine & West, 2017; Straub & Vazquez, 2015). Data from the NSSE indicates that students learn more when provided with prompt feedback (Kuh, 2003). Kuh (2003) stated that “the more students practice and get feedback on their writing, analyzing, or problem solving, the more adept they become” (p. 25).

In a study using adults, Boling, Hough, Krinsky, and Saleem (2012) discovered that students wanted individualized feedback and felt more connected with their instructor based on the quality of the feedback they received. In a study with preservice teachers, Saine and West (2017) learned that these new teachers were not afraid to use technology to offer feedback, but they were concerned about how students would interpret feedback and that they, the teacher, might be misunderstood. In another study with teachers enrolled in a graduate level education class, researchers looked at the effectiveness of feedback at the micro level, specific feedback on individual paragraphs, and the holistic level, general feedback to a class. The results of this study concluded that micro-level stand-alone written feedback was more effective than stand-alone audio feedback, and that the combination of written and audio feedback was more effective (Ice et al., 2010). Straub and Vazquez (2015) concluded in their study on students with learning disabilities, that students can receive equally effective writing instruction in the online environment if feedback is used well by instructors. If students with learning disabilities can have effective writing

instruction, then this can also apply to the regular education student since good practices for one equal good practice for all (Straub & Vazquez, 2015).

Written feedback allows students to refer to it more easily than trying to remember audio feedback. Overall, researchers found that both audio and written feedback was more effective for general feedback (Ice et al., 2010; Saine & West, 2017). Studies indicate that students in online classes received more holistic feedback than micro feedback. Holistic feedback contains broad, not specific feedback on an assignment, while micro feedback pinpoints specific issues with the assignment. The researchers recommended that teachers provide both types of feedback to be more effective instead of relying on holistic feedback for most of the feedback provided (Ice et al., 2010).

Video Feedback. A study by Borup et al. (2015) analyzed the quality of video and text feedback provided by university instructors and student perceptions of the feedback. The researchers provided the instructors with specific guidance on how to offer personalized feedback to students “(a) address the student by name, (b) highlight positive aspects of the student’s work, and (c) discuss areas that the student would need to correct in order to reach the mastery level explained in the assignment rubric” (Borup et al., 2015, p. 169). The findings in this study indicate that there are advantages and disadvantages to each type of feedback. Text feedback was perceived by students as being easier to access since video feedback often required headphones and students often had to take notes on the video. Teachers commented that text feedback was simpler to give, especially if they could copy and paste comments to save time. Video feedback was perceived as more elaborate than in text and teachers seemed more supportive in the video than in text. Instructors felt they could be more conversational and supportive in video than in text. Conclusions of this

study indicate that video feedback could be more beneficial at the beginning of a class when teachers are trying to establish rapport with students.

Organizing

When a teacher organizes an online class, they provide structure to a class through communication of “general information, expectations/requirements of course assignments, and due dates (Richardson et al., 2015, p. 267-68).

Communication. Teacher presence in the virtual environment has been shown to increase student engagement by using group communication methods of discussion boards, class announcements, group emails, and videos (Borup & Stevens, 2017; Borup, Graham & Drysdale, 2014; Dunlap, et al., 2016; Richardson, et al., 2015). Unlike in the traditional classroom where all communication occurs synchronously, or in real-time, in Echo Virtual Academy environment, communication can occur both synchronously and asynchronously (Barbour, 2009).

Online teachers must decide which communication style will be most effective in any given situation. Studies looking at the communication that occurs between teachers and students indicate that effective communication is the trait teachers need most to be proficient as an online instructor (Archambault & Larson, 2015; Belair, 2012; Borup, Graham, & Velasquez, 2013). Some of the reasons for teachers to communicate with students include monitoring, advocating, facilitating, sense making, and organizing (Boling, et al., 2012; Borup, Graham & Drysdale, 2014; Richardson, et al., 2015).

Communication types vary depending on if a teacher needs to reach a student one-on-one or wants to reach a group of students. One-on-one communication options include email, instant messaging, text messages, phone calls, and video calls (Borup & Stevens,

2017). Of these, synchronous communication includes instant messaging, phone calls, video calls, and possibly text messaging if a back and forth text conversation occurs (Lim, 2017). Asynchronous communication is email and text messaging, if the student does not respond right away. Students can ask questions about course materials, quizzes, or other topics if needed on discussion boards, providing needed communication between them and the teacher (Kim & Cho, 2013).

In a study of high school students in a virtual school, the researchers discovered that students felt teachers were effective if they were accessible throughout the day to answer questions or offer help (Boling et al., 2012). Mismatching communication and purpose can result in a lack of response from students and waste a teacher's time. As reported by Belair (2012) in a study with virtual high school teachers and students, virtual teachers and students seem to prefer written communication; teachers commented that making phone calls to students has a mixed success rate and that personalized emails to students is a more efficient use of time. Texting is also a decent method of communication as teenagers are typically willing to respond to a text message (Belair, 2012).

Use of video. Using video for instruction and feedback purposes is an effective strategy for teachers in Echo Virtual Academy environment (Borup et al., 2014; Di Paolo, Wakefield, Mills, & Baker, 2017; Griffiths & Graham, 2009; Grigoryan, 2017). Using video can increase teacher presence in a class, which as discussed earlier, increases student engagement with an online class. Video also increases student feelings of involvement and connectedness with an instructor (Di Paolo et al., 2017; Watts, 2017).

Kaufman (2015) reviewed a meta-analysis by The United States Department of Education which revealed specific instructional design practices that were associated with

improved student performance. Online courses with interactive elements, such as videos, were found to increase the success rates of online learning performance, when they allowed students to have control of the interactions (Kaufman, 2015; Woodworth et al., 2015). When instructors post videos of educational content and give students permissions to watch them and revisit them, Woodwork et al. (2015), found that there is a positive 0.10 standard deviation effect size in relation to reading improvement compared with students who do not have the same video access.

Ice et al. (2010) reported that students used vocal cues in audio feedback to know that their instructor cared about their learning, which added to their sense of connectedness and involvement. In a mixed method study involving multiple sections of an online computer course, conducted by Borup et al. (2014), high school students received personalized feedback in either a text format or a video format for the first two assignments and had their method of feedback switched for a third and final assignment. Instructors in this study reported that video allowed students to recognize the genuineness of their emotions as conveyed with visual and auditory clues. Another benefit of using video was that it allowed teachers to use humor that might have been lost in purely written communication (Borup et al., 2014). One student reported that they felt more connected to their teachers when video announcements were used because they were able to see the instructor's home or office and get a feeling of who they were outside of school. Video is another tool that teachers can use to connect and communicate with students that promotes positive feelings in students, promotes teacher presence, and can enhance

Maintaining

The role of maintaining course flow is the responsibility of the online teacher. In this role teachers direct students on how to navigate the online course by finding course elements and navigating the learning management system (Richardson et al., 2015). Teachers also “coordinate course aspects and logistics. . . remind students of important course information (e.g., due dates, assignment criteria, etc.) and clarify procedural requirements of the course (Richardson et al., 2015, p. 268).

Student perception of teacher communication

Borup and Stevens (2017) completed a study asking students of a virtual high school for their perspective on teacher practices. In this study students reported that they appreciated having open lines of communication with their teachers, preferably through instant messaging. Students liked having instant responses from teachers instead of having to wait for answers through email or a phone call. The concept of students feeling like their teachers liked them when teachers made an effort to get to know each student and remember things about them is consistent in different studies (Borup & Stevens, 2017; Richardson et al., 2015).

In a separate study among high school students in a virtual school, the researchers discovered that students felt teachers were “good” if they were accessible to students and reported feeling more capable of success if they were connected to their instructors (Boling et al., 2012). A sample of high school students in another study reported that they avoided teacher phone calls and preferred written communication instead, causing the researcher to conclude that for virtual learners, written communication is probably best (Belair, 2012).

Teacher communication provided for individual students or as a group of students increases student engagement in a course.

As teachers convey information, there are good and better methods of doing so. Adding emotion, details, and personal language increases the value of the communication to students whether through writing or speaking (Richardson, et al., 2015).

Teaching Writing in Online Settings

While writing is a common skill taught in all types of schools, the online writing environment comes with its own set of tools available to teachers to facilitate both teaching and learning. Online writing makes use of digital tools that enhance traditional writing instruction. Important concepts for the writing teacher to consider are the need to encourage interactions between students and to create their online course to teach content and literacy skill building (Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 2011).

Teaching Writing

In the brick and mortar classroom, teachers of English Language Arts classes and teachers of other classes spend time teaching students how to write by giving direct instruction on various points of writing. In 2009, Warschauer discussed the use of laptops in the brick and mortar classroom as a means of helping students write better by taking away the challenge of handwriting. This same concept applies in Echo Virtual Academy since students are required to have computers with which to do their schoolwork.

Pre-writing exercises like completing graphic organizers can be done with a computer and a fill-able worksheet. Scaffolding available with a computer includes being able to use word processing software and internet software that employs spell and grammar checks. Once first drafts are written, the ability to edit and share writing with others is made

simpler with computers and internet tools (Warschauer, 2009). Another tool available with a computer is the ability to disseminate writing and share writing with a broader audience than just the teacher. Using blogs and Google apps makes sharing writing easier than was even available in 2009.

Online Tools

In a study using students with learning disabilities in an online writing class, Straub and Velazquez (2015) described the online learning environment as having unique features from face-to-face writing classes. Writing instruction, for example, can be delivered using technology for written communication using Google Docs. Other media can be used to engage students to maximize learning. In the study, four students were chosen because of their learning disabilities and were taught lessons using two specific writing strategies, one for planning and one for writing (Straub & Velazquez, 2015). Even though this study has a small sample size, it demonstrates the effective use of online tools in improving writing outcomes. Students with learning disabilities have different needs from regular education students, but the strategies used to help them can be applied to regular education students.

Effective Practices

Jesson, McNaughton, Rosedale, Zhu, and Cockle, (2018) studied high school students in the writing classroom and found that there is evidence suggesting that in the virtual writing environment a number of practices known to be effective in writing instruction in the traditional classroom can be enhanced through digital pedagogy. The researchers suggested that the increased learning that occurred might be the result of undertaking and completing complex writing tasks. Within the case study, teachers created writing tasks online requiring the creation of multiple texts and activities using synthesis,

comparison, or application of information. These multifaceted tasks improved the writing skills of involved students (Jesson et al., 2018). The researchers also noted increased engagement in writing happened through more writing or through more activities that support writing development, including more peer interaction commenting and using comments on student writing (Jesson et al., 2018).

In another study investigating the usage of digital tools in the high school writing classroom, Howell, Butler, and Reinking (2017) found that instructors were able to integrate the instruction of the argument genre with multimodal formats and have student success with the assignments. A key element to the success of these assignments was the instruction provided by the teacher using mini lessons on digital tool usage, elements of design, elements of argument, etc. The instructor began the argumentative writing intervention by introducing, defining, and providing examples using models of writing (Howell et al., 2017). This article illustrates that teacher actions affect how well students perform on their writing assignments.

Discussion Boards

Discussion boards are a main communication method for teachers and students in the virtual charter school. Discussion boards provide a means for teachers to communicate with students about announcements, assignments, tasks, and anything else that needs to be quickly communicated with students at a broad level. This was discussed earlier in this literature review under the topic of teacher presence. Discussion boards in the online writing environment specifically, provide opportunities for students to interact with each other through posts and responding to each other's posts. Discussions provide a means with which students can use their writing skills and respond to others using writing, thus creating

a double opportunity to increase writing skills. But even students who are not visibly participating in discussions are still actively involved in the literacy activities of reading and rereading (Saine & West, 2017).

According to Kim et al. (2012), studies related to student perceptions of the usefulness of discussions are in short supply and are worth studying more. In a study collecting the opinions of high school students at a virtual school, Kim et al. (2012) discovered that students who like working in groups, have prior positive experiences with on-line learning, and those who set long-term goals find discussions most beneficial (Kim et al., 2012). Discussion boards are a peer interactive experience, which needs to have scaffolding provided by the instructor to help make it successful (Cho & Kim, 2013).

Cho and Tobias (2016) completed a research study asking college sophomores about discussions and if instructors should make them mandatory in an online class. Their research questions asked if using discussions improves student achievement and if students reported higher levels of satisfaction if they used discussions in the course. Cho and Tobias (2016) found that there was a significant difference between student satisfaction of course communication between having a discussion and not having a discussion, which instructor comments making no difference. Group cohesion also improved when discussions were used versus when they were not used.

In a study researching audio vs text-based discussions, Hew and Cheung (2013) investigated a teacher preparation class to determine which discussion type was more effective in promoting participation. One student commented “Audio-based discussions are generally livelier and engaging because there is an unexplainable urge to listen to another person’s voice rather than read his or her words” (p. 371). Students in the study

also reported that a benefit to audio-based discussion is its ability to reduce anxiety for poor typists or students who do not feel they are good writers. Audio-based discussions also motivated students to participate in discussions and allowed participants to feel more connected to other students (Hew & Cheung, 2013). Using audio tools for a discussion can help solve challenges brought by students who are not proficient typists. Teachers need to determine what it is that they are trying to assess: typing ability or thinking (Smith, 2014).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have defined and reviewed virtual charter schools, reasons why students attend them and challenges that face them. Students attend virtual charter schools for many reasons including a desire to escape challenges specifically found at a traditional brick and mortar school, such as bullying, health issues, and emotional issues. Students also attend virtual schools to progress through curriculum faster and have more individual control over their learning. Challenges that virtual charter schools face include low graduation rates, student learning outcomes, and misconceptions about them.

Engagement is a construct made up of behavior, emotion, and cognition. Behavior relates to the physical actions students take to engage with their learning, like staying on task and creating an environment where they can be free from distractions. Emotional engagement occurs when students psychologically feel that their needs have been met. Cognitive engagement involves having self-efficacy and mental determination to pay attention to a task at hand.

Student engagement is at the center of the Adolescent Community of Engagement Framework. This framework is illustrated by a triangle with three outside points indicating peer, parent, and teacher engagement. An inside triangle represents student engagement.

These triangles represent the relationships that improve student engagement. Student engagement is defined for the purposes of this study as positive interaction with curriculum. Students who are independent and are self-motivated and show self-regulation are typically successful in Echo Virtual Academy environment. Peer engagement involves peers working together to motivate one another, but teachers need to provide scaffolding in order to maximize the effects of peer interaction. Parental involvement comes as a parent figure interacts with students as a teacher and mentor. This interaction is of equal importance to the interaction with the instructor due to the parent figure being more present and available than the school instructors.

Teacher engagement consists of quality communication, teacher presence in the course, providing feedback, and using video. Student perceptions of teaching communication is also important to note as students view teacher communication methods differently than teachers. Using video within an online class can improve the relationship between students and teachers by eliminating some miscommunication that can occur when students are only reading teacher comments and feedback. Video allows the teacher to be more personable and connected with students, which improves their perception of the teacher and enhances their engagement with the class.

The online writing environment is different from a traditional writing environment. Students must write in order to communicate with their teachers and peers in discussions or through emails. This natural use of writing facilitates writing, but also creates challenges for students who lack typing proficiency or whose writing skills are not as developed as others'. Within the online writing environment, discussion boards provide a means for students to interact with one another while integrating writing experiences. Student

engagement is made up of many factors and is the focus of this action research. Engagement for the purpose of this study is cognitive engagement with assignments, which looks like students completing assignments by following instructions.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

The purpose of this action research is to investigate how teacher presence in a virtual classroom contributes to student engagement in online writing assignments. Additionally, the following research questions will be used to guide the research study:

R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?

R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?

Research Design

This study used action research (Mertler, 2017) to find out how teacher presence contributes to student engagement with online writing assignments. As a virtual teacher and a mentor for other virtual teachers, the results of this study can improve my practice and the practice of those with whom I work and associate with now and in the future.

Action research is inquiry teachers and administrators use to improve their own quality and effectiveness within the realm of their classroom or school (Mertler, 2017). Action research has at its foundation active participation by people who identify problems and anticipate needs within their workplace and subsequently create a plan for improvement (Adelman, 1993). This specific problem-based focus separates action research from other research techniques by using the situations and people surrounding educators and allowing them to effect change within a limited scope that is both practical and relevant. Action research allowed me to identify an issue I felt was important within

my school: student engagement with writing assignments. With this issue in mind, I designed a research plan to investigate if teacher presence influences the engagement of online students. I chose to focus on teacher presence because it is part of the original Adolescent Community of Engagement Framework that Borup et al. (2014) identified as influences on student engagement and is the only part of the ACE Framework that I could impact from my position in an online school. Since designing my research study, the ACE Framework was revised and became the Academic Communities of Engagement (Borup et al., 2020) discussed earlier. This new framework places teacher presence within the course community, along with peer engagement.

My action research study followed a mixed methods design approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) which provided me with a broader picture of student perceptions of their own engagement than if I were to have used just one method. Mixed methods research is performed by combining data of both a qualitative and a quantitative nature in different phases to understand the research problem and create a broad picture of the phenomena being researched (Cresswell, 2007; Mertler, 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The application of the mixed-methods research process that this study employed began with the collection of quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection, followed by data analysis. This sequence of actions is one suggested by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998). In this study, Likert scaled items were collected in pre and post surveys to determine the relationship between student engagement and teacher presence in the online classroom. These surveys helped determine if increased teacher presence made a difference in the engagement of high school English students. Surveys, according to Cresswell (2013), are used to provide descriptions of attitudes, trends, and opinions for a participant group that

represents a population. In this study, surveys were used to gather data on student perceptions of their overall engagement with their learning, how much specific teachers actions are noticed, valued, and appreciated.

Paired *t*-Tests were used to compare the quantitative data provided by the surveys. A benefit to quantitative research is that it provides concrete data that can be analyzed and presented as direct relationships between elements (Cresswell, 2007). This data provided me with one perspective on the relationship between teachers and students.

Qualitative data was collected in the form of open-ended survey questions and interviews. These instruments were used to gather the student perspective on teacher presence and the students' engagement using their own words. A benefit to qualitative research is that it shows the human side to an issue and can help contextualize the situation and participants for outsiders (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). The quantitative and qualitative data was then analyzed together to determine the connection between student engagement and teacher presence in the virtual classroom. The findings are now able to be used to inform my own virtual teacher practices and help me teach others what actions help engage students.

Setting and Participants

Setting

Snow Virtual School (SVS) is a completely virtual school that uses a proprietary learning management system. This proprietary LMS ensures that student information is kept confidential as access to the program is only available with an assigned log-in. Outside curriculum writers create the curriculum, which means that teachers at SVS do not write their own curriculum nor do they have a say in what the curriculum includes or excludes.

Teachers work from home using a laptop provided by the school. Teachers use an Adobe Connect classroom to conduct synchronous lessons each week. Message Boards can be set up and tailored for the needs of each section the teachers are assigned. An email system that operates only within the confines of the LMS exists where teachers can email individual students or can send a mass email to all the students within a section.

Students work exclusively from home and never attend face-to-face classes. High school students use personally provided internet-enabled devices such as laptops, Chrome books, iPads, and smart phones to log-in to the LMS. Within the LMS each student has a personal log-in that provides them access to the LMS content.

Students are given multiple writing opportunities in the English Language Arts classes each semester within their units of study. Each unit consists of the following writing items: short answer essays on tests and quizzes, a class discussion, and a formal writing assignment. A quiz that contains computer graded multiple choice questions and at least one teacher graded short answer question. One discussion assignment on a class discussion board. One formal essay, called a Portfolio, that has both a rough draft and final draft. At the end of the unit, students have a unit test that contains multiple choice questions and at least three short answer questions and one longer essay question.

Discussions. Each grade completed two discussions within the intervention. Twelfth graders wrote two discussions: Lord Bryon and romantic literature and also discussed examples of the character of Frankenstein's monster in modern media. Figure 3.1 is an example of one of the English 12 discussion prompts.

Identify an example from the media that presents elements of the Frankenstein story. (For instance, you might choose a movie, book, or song that features Shelley's characters.) If possible, provide a link to your example. Briefly discuss your example and address the following questions:

1. What form of media is used (television commercial, website, etc.)?
2. How is the Frankenstein story presented? What aspects are emphasized or downplayed? (For example, many versions present the tale as a horror story and do not portray the monster sympathetically.)
3. How does the tone of your example differ from the tone of Shelley's novel? Consider all of the elements that contribute to tone—not only language, but also images, graphics, video, and audio elements.

Figure 3.1 *English 12 Example Discussion Prompt*

The 11th grade students complete one discussion that was designed to help them review for their unit test (see Figure 3.2).

Think of a question to pose to the classroom discussion board regarding one of the topics below. Your question should be insightful and meaningful; provide your classmates with an opportunity to consider elements of each topic that have yet to be covered in your lessons. You will not receive credit if your question is one that can be answered with “yes” or “no.”

- Comparison of postmodernism to the twenty-first century
- Irony in Updike’s “A&P”
- Satire in Vonnegut’s “Harrison Bergeron”
- Themes expressed by the Beat Generation
- The effects of war on literature

Figure 3.2 *English 11 Example Discussion Prompt*

One challenge with the way discussions are set up is that students can only access the discussion from within the lesson where the discussion is assigned to them. This means that the first student to respond to a prompt has to return to the lesson to respond to other prompts once more students have responded to it. For students who only write their own post or who only respond to others, having to return to the discussion takes some effort. A challenge with grading student work once their initial response has been graded, is that the teacher does not know additional writing has been added unless the student informs them. These challenges can lead to students not doing as well on discussions as they might otherwise do, if the discussion and supplemental posts were easier to access.

In discussions students are graded by writing their own response to the prompt, comments on the posts of two other people in a substantive way and using correct grammar and spelling (see Figure 3.3).

<p><u>Discussions</u></p> <p>One detailed 50-100 word response that addresses the question/material: /4</p> <p>Two detailed 25-50 word replies that advance the discussion : /4</p> <p>Attention to writing conventions (spelling, caps, etc.): /2</p>
--

Figure 3.3 *Discussion Rubric*

Essay Questions on Units Tests. During the innovation period, each grade completed multiple unit tests, each with at least two essay questions. Twelfth graders wrote essays for three open book tests that were made up of at least three essays a piece. These tests did not provide any alternative topics, so each student answered the same essays.

An example of one of the short essays is:

In this unit, you read William Wordsworth's poems "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey", "The World Is Too Much with Us", and "I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud". How are these poems representative of the Romantic Period?

The 11th graders completed two unit tests with each test having one long essay to answer. For each essay, students were able to not only choose a topic, but students were able to choose a focus for the topic using experiences, interpreting or evaluating (see Figure 3.4)

Select one of the prompts below and follow the directions.

Experiencing: Imagine yourself as Elisa, from "The Chrysanthemums," and write an essay describing what your life is like 10 years after this story takes place.

Interpreting: At the end of "The Chrysanthemums," Elisa whispers, "That's a bright direction, There's a glowing there." Write an essay explaining what you think Elisa means by those words. Support your explanation using references from the story.

Evaluating: Elisa's character, in "The Chrysanthemums," expresses a universal longing to reach beyond our circumstances—to be more and do more. Find a character in another story from this unit that shares Elisa's longing. For each character, explain how the author conveys this universal longing and makes the reader empathize with the character. How are the two characters similar and different? With which character do you feel the strongest empathy, and why?

Figure 3.4 *English 11 Sample Test Essay*

Students in English 10 wrote five essays on two different unit tests during the research study. One test had four essays, two short answer questions and two long essays. The other test had one long essay. The long essays required students to choose between three topics, which the short answer questions had to be answered as they were written (see Figure 3.5).

Respond in a well-organized essay, and make sure your answer is written in complete sentences.

Respond to **one** of the questions below. Include at least two supporting details or examples.

A. In “The Literature of the Middle East and South Asia,” Laura Winkiel writes: “These stories help us to understand the complex questions that Middle Easterners and South Asian people ask as they stand at a crossroads of cultural and religious change.” Explain how this statement applies to one of the selections you read. Be sure to include the title of the selection and explain the crossroads that it illustrates.

B. Setting and mood are important elements in many of the stories in this unit. Choose one story and describe some aspects of its setting: where it takes place; what mood is created by the details of weather, place, and time; and how this setting helps to convey the theme of the story.

C. What did you learn about the role of women in the societies described in the reading selections in this unit? Describe how the women cope with the conflicts they encounter.

Note: If you respond to essay (C), you may not choose the similar essay in the Unit X Unit Test.

Figure 3.5 *English 10 Sample Test Essay Question*

In the 9th grade English class, students wrote two long essays total on two different unit tests. One essay permitted students to choose between topics, while the other required everyone to answer the same topic (see Figure 3.6):

What roles are played by the female characters you encountered in this unit?
Describe some of these female characters, their traits, and the roles they played within the selections you read, especially considering that all of those selections had male characters as protagonists.

Figure 3.6 *English 9 Sample Test Essay*

Feedback on test essay questions focused on being correct, clear, supported by details, and used correct writing conventions (see Figure 3.7).

Essays in Tests

Main idea--Clearly stated, relevant, and strongly supported: /8

Textual evidence--Four specific details that make clear reference to the text : /4

Writing conventions--Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are consistently correct: /4

Short Answers in Tests

Answer is correct: /1

Answer is clear: /1

Answer is fully supported by details: /1

Few/No errors in writing conventions: /1

Figure 3.7 *Sample Test Essay Rubric*

Portfolios. During each English class, students write one each of: a research paper, literary analysis, a poem, compare/contrast, expository, and a personal narrative. During the innovation period, each grade completed at least one portfolio essay assignment. The 12th graders wrote a descriptive essay focusing on the traits of the medieval hero, Beowulf.

The 11th graders completed a literary analysis essay focusing on one of the stories they read within the unit and they also wrote a compare and contrast essay. The 10th graders wrote a descriptive portrait about a famous person. They were required to use the state's online research database to find information about a famous person of their choice. They also started a research paper about a Middle Eastern country. Students in English 9 wrote a summary of *The Odyssey* and a persuasive essay focusing on "Romeo and Juliet" as portfolios during the research study.

Student Participants

Participants for this study were high school students in grades 9-12 taking English Language Arts at Echo Virtual Academy. All students taking a semester-long English class were sent an email invitation by their English teacher to participate in the research study as well as a consent form. Parents received an email explanation of the study and a parental assent form. Any student who returned the consent and the assent form and chose to complete the pre-survey became a participant.

All student participants were current students at Echo Virtual Academy. The pre-survey was sent by email to all students in semester long English classes and 103 students responded and completed the survey. Of those 103 students, 56% or 58 students completed the post-survey when invited by email. Of the 58 students who completed both surveys 28% identified as being in the 9th grade; 19% identified as being in the 10th grade; 21% identified as being in the 11th grade; and 32% identified as being in the 12th grade (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 *Grade band distribution of participants (n=58)*

Grade	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
9th Grade	16	28%
10th Grade	11	19%
11th Grade	12	21%
12th Grade	19	32%

Participants also identified themselves by the number of years they have been at Echo Virtual Academy: 38% were first year students; 29% were second year students; 17% were third year students; 9% were fourth year students; and 8% have five or more years at the school (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 *Years at Echo Virtual Academy (n=58)*

Year	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
First year	22	38%
Second year	17	29%
Third year	10	17%
Fourth year	5	9%
Five or more years	4	7%

Participants indicated if they were on-track to graduate using the scale of being on track, not on track, or don't know. The descriptive statistics of the pre- and post-surveys showing participants' grade level and their status regarding whether on track to graduate on time is shown on Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 *On-Track to Graduate from High School*

Grade	On Track		Not on Track		Don't Know	
	Presurvey	Postsurvey	Presurvey	Postsurvey	Presurvey	Postsurvey
9	10	9	1	0	5	6
10	11	8	0	0	0	3
11	8	8	0	0	2	4
12	16	17	1	1	2	1

At the conclusion of the study period, the student participants who completed the pre-survey were emailed the post-survey. Students in the study were identified by their school ID numbers which were provided by the student on both the pre- and post- surveys. These ID numbers were kept on a Google Sheet, which was secured within my individual school Google Drive account, only accessible to me by logging in. This ensured the privacy of the participants.

All students who took the post-survey were answered if they were willing to be interviewed to follow up on their experience with the study. Out of the students who responded “yes”, eight participants were chosen purposively using the maximum variation strategy to represent various perspectives of the participants. Two from each grade was selected to participate in an individual semi-structured interview. Five students voluntarily set-up an appointment using the appointment setting website YouCanBook.Me.

Teacher Participants

The two high school English teachers at the virtual school were involved in this study. One teacher had been at the school for three years and worked with 9th and 10th grade students. The other teacher was new to the on-line environment that school year and

worked with the 11th and 12th graders. These two teachers had contact with 98% of the high school student population.

My role in this research study was the designer of the innovation, which I was able to implement from a mentor, advisory and supervisory position to the English teachers. I helped the teachers create the writing assignment packets which were provided to the high school students and gave them guidance on information to include in the weekly emails and in videos they created. During the innovation period, I met individually with each teacher for 30 minutes each week to discuss their actions and what they had done in relation to their teacher presence. During these meetings I offered support and encouragement to the teachers.

Innovation

The innovation for this study was an increase in teacher presence through the addition of specific teacher actions in online ELA classrooms. Increased teacher presence was seen through weekly announcement emails to students, which included a short video, increased feedback on writing assignments, the use of rubrics on writing assignments, and additional live lesson activities. (Richardson, et al., 2015). This innovation was guided by the premise that teacher presence in the virtual classroom increases the behavioral engagement of students (Richardson, et al., 2015) and that students in a distance or virtual learning environment are more successful when they are provided with a variety of interactions with the content and an instructor (Barbour, 2015; Borup, Graham, et al., 2013; DiPietro, Ferdig, Black & Preston, 2008; Moore, 1998). This innovation was thus created to increase the teacher presence of the English teachers. In the first semester of the school year, teachers reported that they did not have consistent class announcement emails, nor

did they use short videos to supplement lessons or enhance weekly announcements. The innovation for this research project added additional teacher actions to what teachers were already doing to find out if increased teacher presence affects student engagement on writing assignments and if this increased teacher presence is noticed by students.

For the six-week study period two new innovations were , teachers began sending out a weekly announcement email and short asynchronous videos to their online English classes. While the teachers had been using writing rubrics for discussion and test essays, during the innovation the writing directions for the portfolios were expanded to be a packet of information students could view and download. These packets included step by step directions, a graphic organizer, and a rubric specific to the writing assignment. The English teachers were already using live lesson features in the Adobe Connect platform, prior to the introduction of the innovation. This teacher action was included as part of the intervention period to gauge the effectiveness of live lessons on student engagement.

Weekly Announcement Email and Short Videos

Every Monday each of the two English teachers sent each of their course sections an email with an overview of the week's assignments and anything that was due, gave suggestions for completing the assignments, provided the live lesson schedule and topics for the week, gave any other pertinent information, and provided encouragement (see Figure 3.8). These emails also give the students an opportunity to see some of the teacher's personality. Short videos highlighting the information in the email was also included as a mandatory part of the weekly announcement emails. These videos recorded by the teachers were less than 5 minutes long and created with the screen recording program Loom. This

program was chosen because of its simplicity in recording and how easily a video link could be embedded within the email.

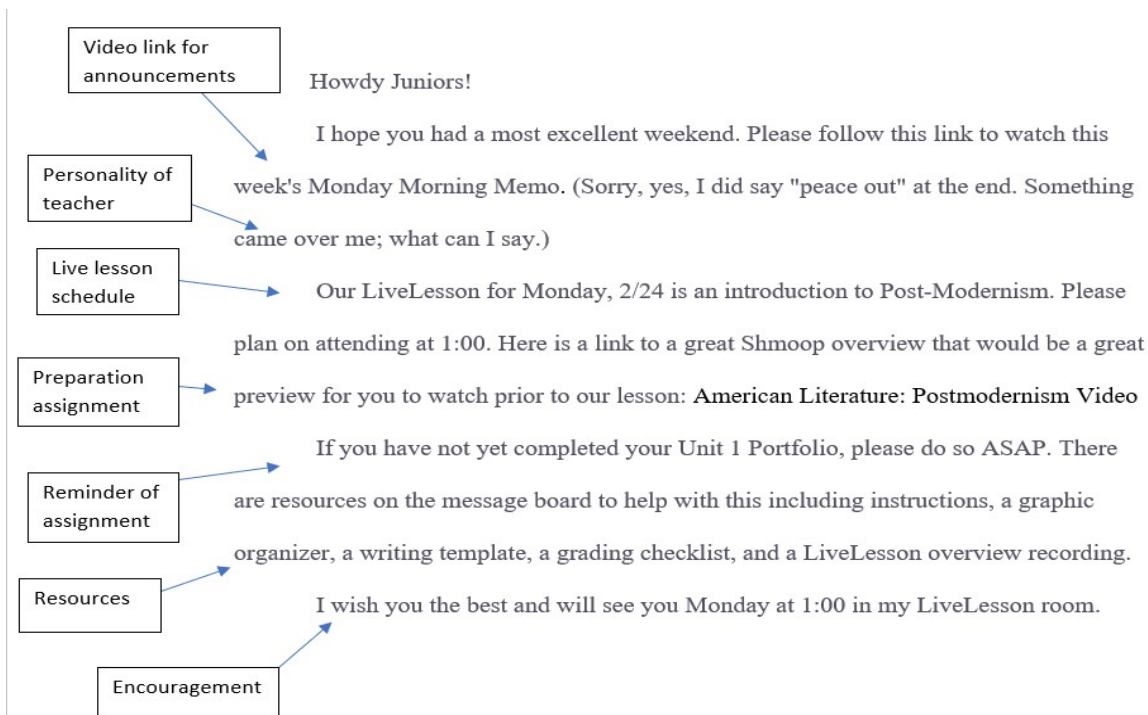


Figure 3.8 *Example Teacher Email to Student*

Additional Videos

Not only were videos created by teachers to be included in the weekly email to students, two other types of videos were created by the teachers, explanation of the writing assignments and recordings from the live lesson sessions. One type of video was made by the teachers to explain writing assignments. The teachers would use Loom to screenshare the portfolio directions as they talked about the directions and explain the wiring process. During this videos, teachers would try to give a complete explanation of the assignment to help students understand what to do. These videos were emailed to students when the class pacing guide indicated students should be working on a particular assignment. These videos were also posted on the class message board for students to refer to when needed.

Another type of video came from the video recording of the weekly live lesson sessions. Each live lesson session was recorded using the internal meeting recording tool in Adobe Connect. These recordings were emailed to students after the live session for the benefit of students who missed the synchronous lesson. These recordings were also posted on the class message board for student reference.

Rubrics and Feedback

Rubrics for each writing assignment were posted on the class message boards that students access from their home page in the LMS. Teachers also reviewed the rubrics in their weekly live lesson sessions which all students were invited to each week. These rubrics were used when teachers graded the writing assignments of discussions, assessment essays, and portfolios. Teachers used the rubrics to offer feedback on the writing assignments and the rubric was included in all feedback comments left on each assignment. As soon as teachers graded an assignment, students and their parents received an email with the grading feedback, including the rubric for each assignment.

Live Lesson Features Used by Teachers

The Adobe Connect program has many features that were designed to enhance student engagement. There is a chat feature where all students can post comments and ask questions. The English teachers used the chat feature to assess student knowledge, see questions students had, and allow students to connect with each other. The short answer pod allowed teachers to ask questions one at a time that students had to answer using sentences. The multiple choice pod permits teachers to ask a multiple choice question. Another feature the teachers used frequently was the screen share option where teachers

could share their screen to play a video, use a PowerPoint, or demonstrate how to use a website.

Data Collection

Data collection methods for the research study consisted of pre- and post- surveys, student open-ended question surveys, and student interviews. Those sources of data provided a full picture of the participant experience from both qualitative and quantitative standpoints (McQueen, 2002; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The main goal of the data collection was to gather truthful responses about how the virtual presence of their teacher affected their engagement. The research questions were supported by these data collection methods as illustrated in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4 *Research Questions and Data Sources*

Research Questions	Data Sources
R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Interviews ● Student Engagement Survey ● Open-ended Questions
R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Student Interviews ● Open-ended Questions

Student Engagement Survey

An adapted student engagement survey based on items from the Engagement Matters Survey (Martin & Bolliger, 2018) and the Dixon Online Student Engagement Scale (Dixon, 2010) was used to gather student thoughts on how engaged they are with

their class assignments and their perceptions of teacher presence. Research questions one and two were answered with the surveys.

The Engagement Matters Survey in Martin & Bolliger (2018) was developed to gauge three types of engagement: learner-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-content. Participants answer Likert-type items indicating how important various instructor actions are using a scale ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). The Engagement Matters Survey (Martin & Bollinger, 2018) has an overall reliability coefficient of .87 as determined by Cronbach's alpha. Due to the focus on students and teachers in this research study, only Likert scale items associated with learner-to-instructor engagement were used on the pre- and post- surveys. These questions focused specifically on learners' perceptions of instructor actions and instructor presence in an online class. The internal consistency coefficient for the dimension of learner-to-instructor engagement is $\alpha = .79$, which is an acceptable score. Five of the ten questions regarding instructor engagement were chosen based on their applicability to the instructor and students at this specific virtual school (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5 *Relationship between survey questions and pre and post survey*

Martin & Bollinger Survey Questions	Questions on the Pre-and Post Survey
11. The instructor refers to students by names in discussion forums	
12. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders	11. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders
13. The instructor creates a forum for students to contact the instructor with questions about the course	
14. The instructor creates a course orientation for students	

Martin & Bollinger Survey Questions

Questions on the Pre-and Post Survey

15. The instructor posts a “due date checklist” at the end of each instructional unit

16. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course

17. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g., text, audio, video, and visuals).

18. The instructor provides students with an opportunity to reflect (e.g. via a journal or surveys)

19. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments

20. The instructor used various features in synchronous sessions to interact with students (e.g.

12. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course

13. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g. text, audio, video, and visuals)

14. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments

15. The instructor uses various features in synchronous sessions (live lessons) to interact with students (e.g. polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat)

Note: Scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important)

To add to the data set, additional questions were written to learn student observations of teacher engagement strategies (*Table 3.6*).

Table 3.5 *Relationship between survey questions and the pre and post-survey*

Martin & Bollinger Survey Questions	Questions on Study Survey
11. The instructor refers to students by names in discussion forums	
12. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders	16. Does your instructor send/post regular announcements or email reminders?

Martin & Bollinger Survey Questions	Questions on Study Survey
13. The instructor creates a forum for students to contact the instructor with questions about the course	
14. The instructor creates a course orientation for students	
15. The instructor posts a “due date checklist” at the end of each instructional unit	
16. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course	17. Does your instructor create short videos to increase instructor presence in the course
17. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g., text, audio, video, and visuals).	18. Does your instructor provide feedback using various modalities (e.g. text, audio, video, and visuals)
18. The instructor provides students with an opportunity to reflect (e.g. via a journal or surveys)	
19. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments	19. Does your instructor post grading rubrics for all assignments
20. The instructor used various features in synchronous sessions to interact with students (e.g., polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat).	20. Does your instructor use various features in synchronous sessions (live lessons) to interact with students (e.g. polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat)

Note: Scale ranging from 1 (very unimportant) to 5 (very important)

The questions on The Dixon Online Student Engagement Scale (Dixon, 2010) focus on student engagement with online classes. Students are asked to describe using a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*very characteristic of me*) how much certain behaviors apply to them. This survey indicated strong reliability with a Cronbach’s alpha score of .95. The engagement categories on this survey are: skills, emotion, participation, and performance. The questions chosen for this research study were used to

determine changes in self-described student characteristics before and after the implementation of increased teacher presence over the six-week innovation period. Ten of the nineteen questions were used for the research study (see Table 3.7). These ten questions were chosen with a focus on behaviors that are typical at Echo Virtual Academy to keep the survey a reasonable length for the audience.

Table 3.6 *Relationship between OES and the pre and post survey questions*

Dixson Online Engagement Scale	Pre- and Post Survey Questions
1. Making sure to study on a regular basis	
2. Putting forth effort	1. Putting forth effort
3. Staying up on the readings	
4. Looking over class notes between getting online to make sure I understand the material	
5. Being organized	2. Being organized
6. Taking good notes over readings, PowerPoints, or video lectures	3. Taking good notes over readings, PowerPoints, or video lectures
7. Listening/reading carefully	4. Listening/reading carefully
8. Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	5. Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life
9. Applying course materials to my life	6. Applying course materials to my life
10. Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	7. Finding ways to make the course interesting to me
11. Really desiring to learn the material	8. Really desiring to learn the material
12. Having fun in online chats, discussions, or via email with the instructor or other students	
<i>Note.</i> Scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me)	

The questions chosen to be on the pre and post surveys also help answer the research question and the overarching question of How important do you feel these teacher actions would be to help you be successful at school?

Open-ended Questions

As part of the pre- and post- surveys, open-ended questions were qualitative in nature that provided a more accurate view of what students think (Mertler, 2017). The open-ended questions were used to collect participant thoughts and beliefs about the virtual presence of their English teacher and how it affected their engagement with their writing assignments.

These short answer questions responded to Research Questions 1, 2, and 3. The short answer questions were designed to gather information about specific actions the English teachers took during the study and collect the opinions of students on these actions. Table 3.8 illustrates the alignment between the short answer questions and the research questions.

Table 3.8 *Alignment Between Research Questions and the Short Answer Questions*

Research question	Short answer essay question
R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Think about your answers marked “it helped” or “very much”. How did these actions help you on your writing assignments? ● Think about your answers marked “not at all” or “not really”. Why did these actions not help you on your writing assignments? ● How does having access to a teacher help you complete your writing assignments?

R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?

- How does having access to a teacher help you complete your writing assignments?
 - What advice would you give an online writing teacher?
-

Student Interviews

Semi-structured student interviews were used to collect student beliefs and gain a deeper understanding of the issues that students faced (Cresswell, 2014; Mack, et. al, 2005). Eight students were invited to be interviewed; ultimately, I interviewed five students in synchronous one-on-one interviews using the Adobe Connect platform. These interviews took approximately 15-20 minutes and were recorded using the Adobe Connect recording tool so they could be transcribed and analyzed. The students and I used the microphones within Adobe Connect due to internet issues that made using video cameras unreliable. The interviews took place the week before the school's spring break and during a week when the COVID-19 pandemic closed all the public schools around the state. The interview with one of the student participants, Melissa, occurred in the afternoon on a day when the area was rocked by an earthquake. Melissa's home was in the city of the epicenter of the earthquake. Her interview was a little shorter than the others because she was distracted by the events of the day. She chose to not reschedule the interview when that option was offered to her.

This semi-structured interview focused on research questions 1, 2, and 3 by initially repeating the short answer questions. Follow-up questions were based on responses and other data collected from prior surveys. This interview provided participants with an opportunity to ask questions about the research study. Table 3.9 shows the alignment between the research questions and the interview questions.

Table 3.9 *Alignment between Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research questions	Interview questions
R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?	<p>1.Explain how your engagement with writing changed after the six-week study.</p> <p>a. What teacher actions did you experience this semester?</p> <p>b. What actions did you like? What did you not like?</p> <p>c. What action, if any, helped you do your writing better?</p> <p>3. What did your teacher do, if anything, that made you want to complete your writing assignments?</p> <p>4. What did your English teacher do that had no effect on your desire to complete your assignments?</p>
R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?	<p>2. What did your English teacher do that made you feel supported this semester?</p> <p>5. What do you think about what teachers do in the online school?</p> <p>1.Explain how your engagement with writing changed after the six-week study.</p> <p>a. What teacher actions did you experience this semester?</p> <p>b. What actions did you like? What did you not like?</p> <p>c. What action, if any, helped you do your writing better?</p> <p>6. What are 1-2 suggestions you would like to offer to improve your teacher's presence in your online English class?</p> <p>7. What other comments would you like to make about this experience?</p>

The interview questions were designed to allow students to express their opinions about their teacher's actions during the six-week study. By explaining what they observed and experienced and then being able to offer suggestions about what teachers could improve, I gathered information about how student engagement was affected by teacher actions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in a mixed methods study requires the researcher to take in broad amounts of different types of data and reduce it to generalizable themes (Cresswell, 2014; Mertler, 2017). For qualitative data, I completed an inductive analysis (Cresswell, 2017) of 58 copies of responses to open-ended survey questions and five student interviews. This method allowed me to find instances that support the analysis of the interviews and find applicable themes (Cresswell, 2017; Saldana & Olmesta, 2017). For quantitative data, I conducted paired samples *t*-tests on the data collected from the pre- and post- surveys after checking whether the assumptions were met for the analysis. Together, these data sources answered the two research questions (see Table 3.10). Considering all the qualitative and quantitative data and analyzing it together allowed me to paint a big picture of what is going on with students and their engagement with their writing assignments.

Table 3.10 *Research Questions and Associated Data Sources and Analysis Methods*

Research questions	Data Sources	Analysis methods
R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student Interviews● Student Engagement Survey● Open ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Inductive analysis● Paired samples <i>t</i>-test
R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Student interviews● Student Engagement Survey● Open ended questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Inductive Analysis● Paired samples <i>t</i>-test

Procedures and Timeline

The research timeline proceeded in the following order: Phase 1: Participant Identification, Phase 2: Data Collection, and Phase 3: Data Analysis. The three phases are

described below. Table 3.11 presents a detailed timeline of the procedures within the three phases.

Table 3.11 *Timeline of Participant Identification, Data Collection & Data Analysis*

Phase	Action	Time frame
Phase 1: Participant Identification	1. Email invitations to the students 2. Email explanation to parents 3. Pre-Survey	2 Weeks
Phase 2: Data Collection	1. Teachers increase presence 2. Post-survey 3. Student Interviews	6 Weeks
Phase 3: Data Analysis	1. Transcribe student interviews 2. Email transcribed interviews to students and parents 3. Quantitative analysis	5 Weeks

Phase 1: Participant Identification

Participant identification for this study began in January of 2020. The study was approved by the IRB. Participants for this study were high school students in grades 9-12. All students enrolled in a semester long English class were sent an email invitation to participate in the research study. The consent form was included in the email. Parents of these students also received an email explanation of the study and a parental consent form. I sent emails to all English students on the first day of the spring semester of 2020. Based on the small response due to my email, the two English teachers sent out follow-up emails to their students asking students to participate in the study. These emails contained the exact same information as my email, including the consent form. Any student who chose

to complete the pre-survey became a participant; clicking on the survey link indicated student consent. Overall, 103 students responded to the pre-survey invitation, prior to the official start of the intervention period.

When completing the pre-survey, students provided their school student number which was used as an identifier to make sure the same participants were emailed the post-survey. At the conclusion of the study period, the student participants received an email with the post-survey link and given a week in which to complete it. Post-surveys were provided to all students who took the pre survey. Of the 103 students who participated in the pre-survey, 58 students responded to the post-survey within the three-week period following the intervention.

All 58 participants who took the post-survey were asked if they were willing to complete an interview. Twenty-four students volunteered to be interviewed. Three students said they would be willing to be interviewed if not enough people signed up. Ultimately, eleven participants who volunteered to be interviewed were randomly chosen based on their grade level and years at the online school. To randomly choose the eight participants, I placed each student number with their grade level and years at the school onto a separate Google Sheet, which I then sorted by grade. Students were chosen to get as even a distribution as possible between the four grades and five categories of years in attendance. Six of the eight invited students scheduled a time for an interview and five were ultimately interviewed using the Adobe Connect platform.

Teachers. Two teachers were involved in this study. One teacher, in her fourth year at Echo Virtual Academy, worked with 9th and 10th grade students. The other teacher, who was new to the online environment, worked with 11th and 12th grade students. Both of the

English teachers had taught in the brick-and-mortar environment for over 18 years prior to coming to the virtual environment. I was also involved in the study in an advisory position to the teachers where I helped create content for the teachers to provide to students and offered support throughout the study.

Phase 2: Data Collection

During the data collection phase, all high school students at Snow Virtual School participated in their assigned lessons and assignments as usual. Part of their assigned lessons included writing assignments consisting of short essays on tests and quizzes and two larger essays. English teachers during this phase engaged in activities which increased their teacher presence in their virtual classes. Increased teacher presence was seen through weekly announcement emails to students, which included a short video, increased feedback on writing assignments, the use of rubrics on writing assignments, and additional live lesson activities. (Richardson, et al., 2015). After five weeks of increased teacher presence actions, the 103 students who completed the pre-survey were given a post-survey.

Phase 3: Data Analysis

The data analysis phase of the study took an additional 5 weeks. The interviews were transcribed and then given to the participants and their parents to review. The approved transcripts were analyzed using inductive data analysis. Pre- and post- surveys were compared using a Paired samples *t*-test. Inductive analysis was used to analyze the coded interview data and the *t*-test data (Mertler, 2017)

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In a research study it is important to establish that the study has been completed in a way that outsiders will view it as a rigorous and trustworthy study. This is done by

ensuring that the study is accurate and believable (Mertler, 2017). For this study the following methods were used to verify the validity of the study: rich, thick descriptions, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, negative cases, and an audit trail.

Strength of Anonymous Data. Students knew they could be completely honest and have no repercussions about their comments. Anonymity allows people to be truthful about their opinions. In the online environment the teachers are not as familiar with the personalities or the writing styles of their students to guess who responded in which ways on a survey. For this reason, extra credit was not offered. If extra credit were to be offered, I would have had to tell the English teachers which students participated in the surveys, which could have intimidated the students, causing them to give answers they believed a teacher would want to hear. The data in this study is valid because students gave honest feedback knowing no one was checking on individual comments.

Rich, Thick Description. The qualitative information provided needed rich, thick descriptions to convey the findings and help the readers relate to the situation of the study (Cresswell, 2014; Shenton, 2004). According to Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017), descriptions of the research study must be accurate so “the reader will know exactly how the study was conducted” (p. 120). They also believe that research design labels can never replace complete descriptions of the study (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Descriptions of the participants and the situations in which students were taking their English Language Arts class were fully described to contribute to the reader’s understanding of the study and its relevance. The provided descriptions offer perspectives about the themes drawn from the data and add validity to the overall findings (Cresswell, 2014). Quantitative data was collected from student surveys offered at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Together, the qualitative and quantitative data will combine using a constant comparative mixed methods design.

Triangulation. Triangulation occurs when information collected from different sources is examined and cross-checked. The value of triangulation of data is that themes can be created and justified based on the convergence of data points (Cresswell, 2014). Also, in a mixed methods study, triangulation is used to determine how qualitative and quantitative data converge and allow for a study of the same phenomena within a study (Tashakkori et al., 1998; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). In this research study, quantitative data collected from pre- and post- surveys was analyzed using a Paired *t*-test. Additionally, qualitative information was collected from multiple student participants in the form of open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative and quantitative data collected was triangulated as the viewpoints and experiences are verified against others; this will create a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of the student participants (Shenton, 2004).

Member Checking. Member checking is a technique in which participants are provided with opportunities to review and approve the data and reports that are created from the information they provided (Cresswell, 2014; Mertler, 2017). Students and parents had the opportunity to verify the interview transcripts to ensure their thoughts were accurately portrayed. The information review also allow participants to provide additional information as they see fit (Mertler, 2017). Member checking is important to establishing credibility in a research study. Included a statement here about how you performed member check with your student participants.

Peer Debriefing. At the end of my research project, the written report was subject to peer debriefing and scrutiny by the dissertation committee and peer reviewers. This adds validity to the study as the information provided was questioned and fresh perspectives looked at the data and conclusions (Cresswell, 2014; Shenton, 2004). The added perspectives brought new insights to the research themes and conclusions. Through questioning and discussion, peer debriefing added to the trustworthiness of the research study as I explained and justified research descriptions, decisions, and designs.

Negative Cases. It was expected that within the study there would be students who did not fit within the patterns that will be created up to a certain point in the study (Mertler, 2017). Instead of brushing these opinions aside and ignoring them, I took a deeper look at what information is being presented from them. By accepting that not everything always fits within a pattern I created, I was able to revise my patterns and find ways to incorporate these negative cases until they appropriately fit.

Audit Trail. An audit trail was used to help outsiders and fellow researchers follow the research plan and examine the decisions and conclusions that have been made. Each step of the data analysis process has been explained and illustrated, allowing others to see my thought process.

Plan for Sharing and Communicating Findings

The findings of the research into the high school student experience with engagement in on-line writing were shared using a PowerPoint Presentation with the stakeholders of the research study. The stakeholders include the school administration, the student participants and their parents, and the English teachers who participate in the study.

Additionally, the findings will be shared with the school leadership team and the general school faculty.

The school administration was provided the findings through a scheduled meeting using the Adobe Connect platform. Next, participants and their parents were emailed a video link explaining the findings and results. Within the email, participants and parents will be invited to an optional meeting if they would like more information or have questions they would like to ask. This meeting will be held with the school administration, the school leadership team, the English teachers involved in the study, and any interested faculty and will be scheduled through Adobe Connect. The Adobe Connect platform allowed for easy viewing of PowerPoint Presentations, while permitting meeting participants to ask questions and make comments in real-time using a chat feature or a microphone.

Exposure of the research findings means that protecting the student's personal identifiable information is crucial. Students who participated in the pre- and post- surveys provided their student numbers for SVS, which is only used at the school and has no meaning outside of the LMS. The student number was used to identify the students who volunteered to be interviewed so they could be issued an invitation to participate. The student numbers were used to identify students who took the pre-survey so they could be emailed the post-survey. Once the time frame for collecting the post-survey had passed, the student numbers were replaced with general numbers 1 - 58 that had no meaning other than to pair the data for analysis. No specific student data was collected during the research study.

In the data presentations, students were only referred to using the group identities of grade level and number of years enrolled at the school. Students who took the short

answer surveys are identified by only their grade level. Students who were interviewed were given pseudonyms by which they are identified in all documents created throughout the data collection process. This ensures their privacy. All materials created, distributed, and collected during the research process have been stored within Google Drive and in password protected Excel files on my personal computer. The pre- and post- surveys were provided to students using Google Forms and subsequent data was saved in the secure Google Drive platform.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this action research was to investigate how teacher presence in a virtual classroom contributes to student engagement in online writing assignments. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to answer the following questions:

R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?

R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?

This chapter presents an overview of results based on the analysis of the data collected during a mixed-methods action research study. Two high school English teachers and 58 high school students were the participants in this study. The English teachers presented an innovation during the research period. The student participants were administered a survey before and after the innovation occurred. Eight participants volunteered to be interviewed following the post-survey, but five of them participated in the interview. This chapter includes both my quantitative and qualitative findings. Included in the quantitative findings is a breakdown of pre- and post- survey results of the student engagement survey that I adapted using questions from both the Martin & Bolliger Engagement Matters Survey (2018) and the Dixson Online Student Engagement Scale (2010). The qualitative findings include student responses to short-answer open-ended questions in the pre- and post- surveys and individual student interviews. Inductive analysis

was performed to provide a series of themes accompanied with my interpretations. These findings were converged to help accurately answer the research questions.

Quantitative Findings and Analysis

Quantitative data was collected using a survey created from both the Online Student Engagement Scale (Dixson, 2010) and the Engagement Matters Survey (Martin & Bollinger, 2018) as both a pre- and post-survey for high school student participants. The pre- and post- surveys were made up of three subscales: (1) student engagement, (2) perceived importance and noticed teacher actions, and (3) perceived value of teacher actions. The reports of reliability, inferential statistics, and descriptive statistics for each of the subscales are included below. All analysis of the data was conducted using JASP (Version 0.13.1.0), an open source statistical analysis software program supported by the University of Amsterdam. For the statistical tests, an alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance (Mertler, 2017).

Student Engagement Subscale

Questions 1-10 on the research survey are questions from the Online Student Engagement Survey. On these questions, students were asked to rate how much characteristics of engaged students apply to them using Likert scale questions with a scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*very characteristic of me*).

The overall pre-test reliability determined by Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .79$, indicating that the Student Engagement subscale is reliable. Total item reliability for each question indicates this subscale has internal consistency (see Appendix D). It is noteworthy that removing Item two and Item ten separately would increase the internal consistency of

the subscale. Considering the specific aspects that those two items investigated, these two items could still be included for the subsequent inferential statistical analysis.

On the post-test, the Cronbach's alpha score is $\alpha = .79$, indicating that the scale is reliable (see Appendix D). If item two were to be deleted the internal consistency would increase, but they were included for the subsequent analysis.

Each participant was given a pre-survey engagement score and a post-survey engagement score by adding their responses for each of the ten questions together on the pre survey or the post survey, respectively. All responses were used from all the students. The engagement scores of the pre-survey ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 5.36$) and the engagement scores of the post survey ($M = 36.24$, $SD = 4.91$) show a slight decrease. The descriptive statistics for the overall engagement scores and each question on the pre- and post- surveys are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 *Descriptive Statistics for student engagement questions (n=58)*

Questions	Pre-survey		Post-Survey	
	M	SD	M	SD
Overall Engagement Scale	37.19	5.36	36.24	4.91
1. Putting forth effort	4.31	0.60	4.19	0.71
2. Being organized	3.84	1.1	3.67	1.00
3. Taking good notes over readings, PowerPoints, or video lectures	3.4	0.9	3.31	0.92
4. Listening/reading carefully	4.07	0.81	3.97	0.73
5. Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	3.31	1.00	3.01	1.01
6. Applying course materials to my life	3.10	0.97	2.91	0.96
7. Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	3.50	0.90	3.50	1.03

Questions	Pre-survey		Post-Survey	
8. Really desiring to learn the material	3.55	0.88	3.47	0.98
9. Getting a good grade	4.22	0.73	4.24	0.76
10. Doing well on the tests/quizzes	3.95	0.80	3.95	0.76

Note. Scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 5 (very much like me)

A Shapiro-Wilk normality test was run to determine if the survey score results were normally distributed based on whether a p value is greater than 0.05. The result of $p = 0.97$ determined that the engagement score as normal data without a significant deviation from a normal curve.

A paired sample t-test was conducted to compare the engagement scores of students before the innovation period and after the innovation. The result indicated students were more engaged in the pre-survey ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 5.36$) than they were after the innovation ($M = 36.24$, $SD = 4.91$), $t(57) = -2.3$, $p < 0.05$.

Value of Teacher Actions Subscale

The Value of teacher actions subscale was made up by questions 11-20 on the research survey and consisted of questions from the Engagement Matters Survey. These questions explored much students valued the teacher actions and if they noticed their teachers performing these actions. Participants answered Likert-type items for items 11-15 indicating how important various instructor actions are using a scale ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*). Items 16-20 asked students yes/no/I'm not sure questions asking if they noticed the actions of their teachers.

The overall subscale pre-test reliability determined by Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .743$, indicating that the Teacher Actions subscale is reliable. Total item reliability for each question indicates this subscale has internal consistency (see Appendix D).

A Shapiro-Wilk normality test was run to determine if the survey score results were normal based on a p value greater than 0.05. The result of $p > .05$ concluded that the data set for the value of teacher actions score to be normal data. The paired t -test shows that the overall perception of teacher actions held by students increased between the pre-survey ($M = 0.38, SD = 0.95$) and the post-survey ($M = 0.5, SD = 0.27$), $t(57) = 0.88, p > 0.05$, but the change was not significant.

Items 11-16. The means and standard deviations for items 11 – 15, related to the Teacher Action subscale used on the pre and post survey, are represented on Table 4.2. Students perceived the instructor sent or post announcements or email reminders at a pretty low level ($M = 0.1, SD = 0.79$) on the presurvey and this perception remained low on the postsurvey ($M = 0.09, SD = 0.78$).

Table 4.2 *Descriptive statistics for the value of teacher actions (n=58)*

Questions on the Survey	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey	
	M	SD	M	SD
Overall subscale	0.38	0.95	0.50	0.27
11. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders	0.1	0.79	0.09	0.78
12. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course	0.88	0.96	0.93	0.88
13. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g. text, audio, video, and visuals)	0.01	0.89	0.26	0.79
14. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments	0.21	0.93	0.19	0.98

Questions on the Survey	Pre-Survey		Post-Survey	
15. The instructor uses various features in synchronous sessions (live lessons) to interact with students (e.g. polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat)	0.18	0.9	0.03	0.11

Note. Scale ranging from 1 (*very unimportant*) to 5 (*very important*)

Items 16-20. The items pertaining specifically to students noticing teacher actions are represented had the answer choices of *yes*, *no*, and *I'm not sure*. The frequency of the responses for each item is shown on Table 4.3. More students noticed each teacher action on the post-survey than they did on the presurvey, except for the using features during live lesson sessions, which action reported the same numbers from the pre and post surveys.

Table 4.3 *Frequency of Answer Choices for Noticing Teaching Actions Subscale (n = 58)*

Survey Questions	Pre Survey			Post Survey		
	Yes	No	I'm Not Sure	Yes	No	I'm Not Sure
16. Does your instructor send/post regular announcements or email reminders?	55	0	3	50	3	5
17. Does your instructor create short videos to increase instructor presence in the course	26	9	23	33	9	16
18. Does your instructor provide feedback using various modalities (e.g., text, audio, video, and visuals)	32	11	15	45	3	10
19. Does your instructor post grading rubrics for all assignments	54	0	4	57	0	1
20. Does your instructor use various features in synchronous sessions (live	41	0	17	41	0	17

lessons) to interact with students (e.g., polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat)

Note: Answer choices yes, no, I don't know

Helpfulness of Teacher Actions Subscale

Questions 21.a - 21.e asked students to rank how much each teacher action helped them as they completed writing assignments during the semester. The answer choices on the Likert scale were 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*).

The overall pre-test reliability determined by Cronbach's Alpha was $\alpha = .736$, indicating that this subscale is internally consistent (see Appendix D).

Table 4.4 provides the descriptive statistics for the subscale of Helpfulness of Teacher Actions, as reported by students. The most helpful action as perceived by students was Teacher Feedback ($M = 4.60$) whose scores were between (4) *helpful* and (5) *very helpful*. This teacher action also had the lowest variance of all the teacher actions ($SD = 0.59$). The next most helpful action, as perceived by students was Grading Rubrics ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.94$). The other three teacher actions had means close to one another with great variance. The helpful subscale of Live Lesson Features had the greatest variation ($SD = 1.17$) but had the middle ranking of helpfulness ($M = 3.71$). The least helpful teacher action from the student perspective were the weekly announcements ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.90$).

Table 4.4 *Descriptive Statistics for the Helpfulness of Teacher Actions (n=58)*

Survey Question	M	SD
21.a Weekly Announcements	3.91	0.90
21.b Short Videos	3.50	0.90
21.c Grading Feedback	3.67	1.03
21.d Grading Rubrics	4.60	0.59

Survey Question	M	SD
21.e Live lesson features	4.05	0.94

Note. Scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*)

The student perspective of the helpfulness of the given teacher actions by grade level is seen in Table 4.5. The most helpful teacher action across all grade levels, as perceived by students, is Grading Feedback with every grade level having a mean of over 4.0. The second and third highest rated helpful teacher actions vary by grade level. Ninth graders reported Short Videos ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.40$) and Grading Rubrics ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.49$) as also helpful. Tenth graders reported Grading Rubrics ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.98$) and Weekly Announcements ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.16$) as helpful. Eleventh graders reported Grading Rubrics ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.83$) and Short Videos ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.00$) as helpful. Twelfth graders reported that Live Lesson features ($M = 4.0$, $SD = 0.97$) and Grading Rubrics ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.93$) were the next most helpful teacher actions.

Table 4.5 *Student perceptions by grade (n=58)*

	9th Grade		10th Grade		11th Grade		12th Grade	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
21.a Weekly announcements	3.39	0.76	3.91	1.16	3.42	0.77	3.38	0.89
21.b Short Videos	3.82	1.4	3.75	1.06	3.68	1.00	3.50	0.82
21.c Grading Feedback	4.5	0.49	4.58	0.67	4.63	0.60	4.56	0.63
21.d Grading Rubrics	3.68	1.05	4.3	0.98	4.16	0.83	3.94	0.93
21.e Live lesson features	3.55	1.21	3.75	1.29	3.53	1.26	4.00	0.97

Qualitative Findings & Interpretations

In this study, I collected qualitative data from three sources. These included semi-structured interviews and short answer questions from the pre and post-surveys. Five one-on-one interviews were conducted. Of the 103 total participants of the pre-survey, 58 responded to the post-survey. In order to have consistent results to see the effect of the intervention, the responses of the 58 responding students were pulled from the pre-survey results and analyzed as a group. This section included a description of the qualitative data I collected, the analysis of my qualitative data, themes and interpretations.

Individual Interviews

At the conclusion of the study, five students from across the high school grade bands were interviewed about their experiences with teacher presence and teacher actions (see Table 4.6). These individual interviews each took approximately 20 minute to complete and took place in my Adobe Connect online classroom. The interviews focused on the first research question and were delivered through a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix B). The interviews were open-ended in format, where I prompted the interviewee with a question, listened to their response, and asked follow-up prompts, as needed.

Table 4.6 *Characteristics of interview participants*

Pseudonym	Grade	Number of years at the school
Interviewee #1	9	5
Interviewee #2	12	1
Interviewee #3	12	2

Pseudonym	Grade	Number of years at the school
Interviewee #4	9	1
Interviewee #5	10	2

Transcripts of the interviews were made from the recordings made by recording the interview meeting within Adobe Connect. I listened to each recording multiple times both to transcribe the audio with fidelity, as well as to check the accuracy of each transcription. Updates and formatting changes were made during this process to record the responses of each participant. The beginning of the interview where I welcomed the students, explained the project, and informed the participant of their rights were removed from the transcripts, and the closing remarks were also removed. Each transcription was typed into their own Google Document, which was saved in my personal work Google account. Each transcript was reviewed once again before it was privately emailed to each student participant and their parents for review. Each participant read the email that was sent to them, as indicated by email read receipts, but only two students responded that the transcript was acceptable. I took the lack of response as a sign that the participants and their parents accepted the interview transcript. Coding was performed following these confirmations.

Engagement Survey Short Answer Responses

The pre- and post-survey short answers were collected through Google Forms, which allowed me to view the responses in Google Sheet spreadsheets and then download the spreadsheets to my computer as Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Once all the data had been downloaded into Microsoft Excel, I sorted the sheets for the pre and post-surveys by student number to determine which participants responded to both surveys. The sorting

process showed that of the 103 participants that took the pre-survey, only 58 of those students took the post-survey. On the pre-survey spreadsheet I hid the responses of the students who did not participate on the post-survey, thus enabling me to focus on students with both pre and post-survey answers. Coding of these responses then began.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Participant responses in the interview transcripts, as well as the short answer responses were examined through inductive analysis. Inductive analysis is a data coding process in which the researcher analyzes patterns in data to draw conclusions, concepts, and themes (Cresswell, 2017; Mertler, 2017). An advantage to inductive analysis is that researchers avoid trying to fit the data into a preexisting coding frame, which helps prevent researcher preconceptions (Nowell, 2017). I reviewed the interview transcripts and student responses numerous times to familiarize myself with their contents prior to beginning formalized coding. The interview transcripts and student written responses were then uploaded into the Delve coding web tool.

Two cycles of coding of the data were conducted. Each cycle consisted of multiple rounds of coding. The first cycle of coding used open coding and in vivo coding, then pattern coding was conducted in the second cycle (Mertler, 2017; Saldana, 2016). Table 4.7 shows the total numbers of final codes. These cycles and their rounds will be described in the following sections, followed by a description of how themes were identified.

Table 4.7 *Summary of Qualitative Data Sources*

Types of Qualitative Data Sources	Number	Number of Codes Applied
One-on-one interviews	5	107

Post-survey short answer questions	58	287
Totals	64	394

First Cycle Coding

The first cycle of coding consisted of two rounds of open coding to separate the qualitative data into discrete parts and examine them to find similarities and differences (Saldana, 2016). The interview transcripts and short responses were analyzed phrase by phrase and line by line in this cycle (See Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2). Each of these rounds will be explained below.

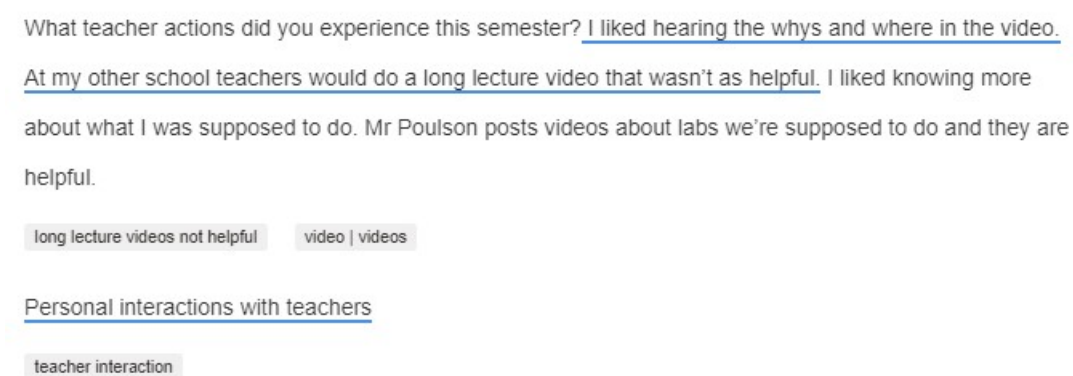


Figure 4.1 *Interview transcript in Delve*

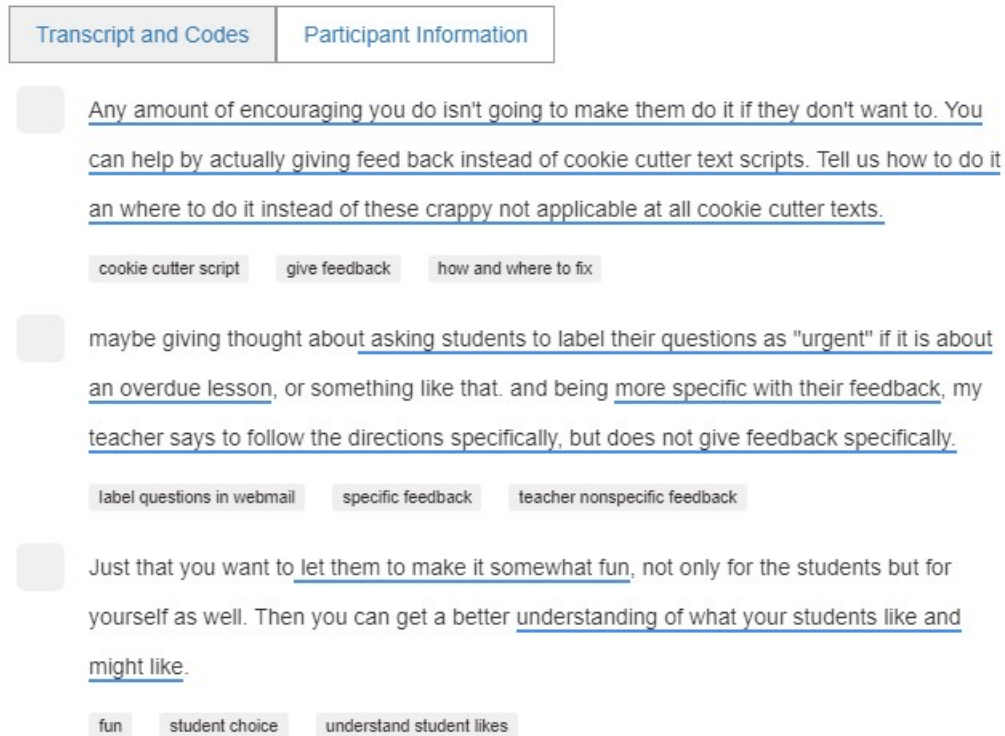


Figure 4.2 *Student Short Response in Delve*

First round of coding. For the first round of coding, I used open coding to capture the main ideas of the student responses in the interviews and short answer responses. Open coding is a coding process in which a researcher parses and organizes similar data (Williams & Moser, 2019). During this first round of open coding, my goal was to ensure each sentence from every short answer survey question and interview transcript had at least one code assigned to it. For example, a response to the question “What advice a student would give an on-line teacher?” stated, “It really helps me when I have some examples of an essay and how it should be set up. Maybe teachers can write up a few short examples explaining the essay and the essay topic.” This response was given the code “teacher examples”. Some sentences had more than one code applied through a coding process

Saldana (2016) called splitting. Splitting is a technique that splits data into small moments using line-by-line coding (Saldana, 2016). For example, Figure 4.3 illustrates how the codes *feedback* and *get to know students* were applied to the first sentence in the student response.

I think feedback really helps and encouraging them with some projects they get to pick a fun topic. Although, I think alos just trying to get to know each student personally will really help the student and teacher both improve in many areas.

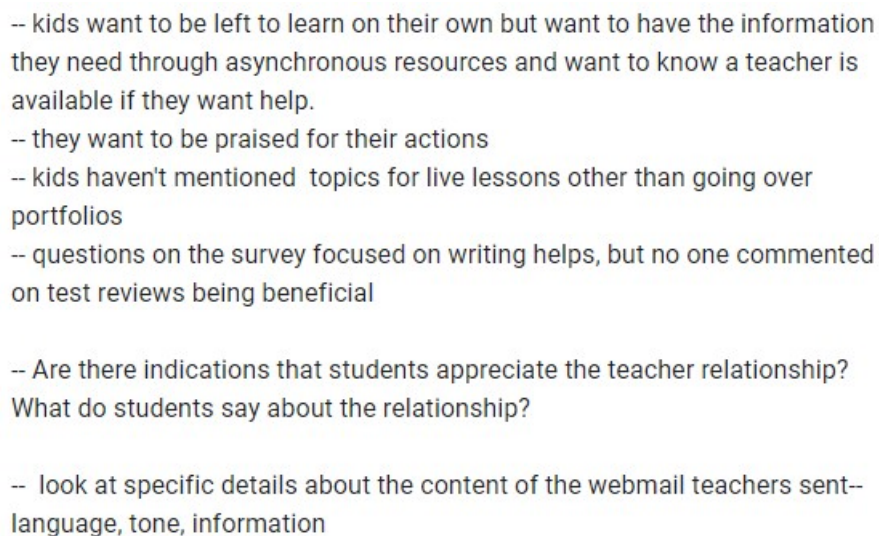
feedback fun get to know students offer encouragement

Figure 4.3 Split coding example in Delve

The first round of open coding resulted in 394 preliminary codes with 107 codes from the interview transcripts and 287 from the short answer responses.

Second round of coding. A second round of open coding was conducted to continue to capture the participant experience. During this second round of coding, I was also able to pare down the codes and delete codes that did not apply to the research questions. Some of the codes that were eliminated included *chemistry teacher*, *history rubric*, and *bad previous experience*. During this round of coding, some codes from Round 1 were combined to reflect the participants' responses more precisely. For example, the codes *teacher cares*, *teachers care*, and *teachers are kind and caring* were combined into one code called *students recognize teachers care*. In another example, the Round 1 codes of *teacher cares*, *teachers care*, *teachers are kind and caring* were grouped together under the broader code of *emotional teacher presence* to align more closely with the second research question.

During the second round of coding, notes about topics of interest and patterns to review in further rounds were kept as memos within Delve, but I also made notes elsewhere (as part of a researcher's journal) whenever "ah-ha" moments occurred (Saldana, 2016, p. 45). Saldana (2016) noted that during the coding process writing memos anything connected to the data occurs to a researcher, they should write a memo to reflect and expound upon the data. For such ah-ha moments, I used Google Keep to record thoughts that I had during the coding and analysis processes of my data (see Figure 4.4). Open coding is, by definition, open and transitional. While working through the first and second rounds of open coding, I attempted to avoid using predetermined concepts and categories, and instead worked to assign codes that reflected the words and thoughts of the participants.



-- kids want to be left to learn on their own but want to have the information they need through asynchronous resources and want to know a teacher is available if they want help.

-- they want to be praised for their actions

-- kids haven't mentioned topics for live lessons other than going over portfolios

-- questions on the survey focused on writing helps, but no one commented on test reviews being beneficial

-- Are there indications that students appreciate the teacher relationship?
What do students say about the relationship?

-- look at specific details about the content of the webmail teachers sent--
language, tone, information

Figure 4.4 Example of analytic memo composed in Google Keep

Second Cycle Coding

The second cycle of coding consisted of one round of pattern coding. Pattern coding takes codes from the first cycle assessing their commonality to assign them patterns

(Saldana, 2016). Due to the large number of codes created during the first cycle of coding, I found it helpful to restructure how I was looking at the created codes, thus I downloaded the codes from Delve into Microsoft Excel to easily see how many codes instances of each code existed. Next, I assigned colors to codes that were similar in intent (see Figure 4.5). For example, the codes related to videos were given the color peach, while the codes related to emails were given orange. I was able to create rough categories by looking at the colors and grouping codes together. I added the number of instances each code was used within each rough category, to identify how frequently the codes were used (see Figure 4.6).

21 >>	communication communication	55
233 >>	understand assignments understand	2
234 >>	understand concepts	1
235 >>	understand grading	2
236 >>	understand student	2
237 >>>	understand student likes	1
238 >>>	understand student needs	3
239 >>>	understand student situation	1
240 >>	understand what can be improved	1
241 >	video videos	4
242 >>	short video	10
243 >>	video helps a little	2
244 >>	video: did not see	1
245 >>	video: didn't help	1
246 >>	videos not useful	1
247 >>	watch weekly video	1
248 >	email emails	12
249 >>	email better than message boards	1

Figure 4.5 *Codes grouped by rough similarities*

codes	# of codes
Creating Resources-- Videos	20
Asking for help	27
Using Rubrics	29
Understanding	30
Attending LiveLessons	31
LiveLessons	31
Sending emails	34
Providing Feedback	37
Students needing teachers	42
Communicating	104
Getting Help	120

Figure 4.6 *Rough patterns and numbers of codes*

Due to wanting to see the codes in a physical format, I printed the codes, cut them into strips and arranged them on the table. This process helps chunk data to explore different ways in which the open codes can be clustered together (Saldana, 2016). At first, I grouped the codes by the colors given to them on the computer: videos, asking for help, using rubrics, understanding, attending live lessons, live lessons, sending emails, providing feedback, students needing teachers, communicating, and getting help. However, by using pattern coding, I was able to refine the groupings (see Figure 4.7). For example, the open codes related to emails, videos, phone calls, live lessons, and text messages created a pattern of communication types.



Figure 4.7.

To help ensure the accuracy of the analysis, I created a table summarizing the connections between the codes, patterns, categories and the themes (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8 *Themes*

Themes	Categories	Patterns	Codes
Students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments	Benefits of teacher feedback	Improve writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do better • What to do • Earn better grade
	Students are more engaged with writing	Motivation to write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivates • Do better
Students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school	How teachers help students	Connection with teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers care • Teachers offer help
		Teachers supporting learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers help student succeed

Themes	Categories	Patterns	Codes
Students appreciated communication with their teachers	Teacher Presence	Teacher provides help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers there to help
	Communication methods to and from teachers	Asynchronous communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emails Videos Text messages
		Synchronous communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone calls Live lessons Talking to teachers
	Communication from teachers is useful	Students rely on communication with teachers to get information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers reply Getting information Ask questions of the teacher

The patterns of *improve writing*, *motivation to write*, and *improve a grade* were combined together. These patterns were combined into the categories *the benefits of teacher feedback* and *students engaged with writing* to encapsulate the meaning more accurately. This category led to the development of the theme that students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments.

After reviewing the interview transcripts, it became evident that students believed their teachers had a role to play in their success at school, which led to the development of another theme. These students talked about being encouraged in their work and in their lives by the interactions they had with their teachers. Reviewing the short answer responses from the survey further supported the ideas of teachers playing a role in the success of

online students. The patterns *connection with teacher*, *teachers supporting learners*, and *teacher provides help* combined to form a category of *how teachers help students*. This category led to the uncovering of the theme that students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school.

The patterns of *asynchronous communication*, *synchronous communication*, and *the student need for communication* were combined into the categories of *communication with teachers*. The theme students appreciated communication with their teachers was uncovered from this categories.

Qualitative Themes and Interpretations

Themes were created from the finalized categories that emerged through the coding and analysis process. The coding process is critical to achieving the goals of a study as each stage of the coding process brings a researcher closer to the culminating themes and meaning (Williams & Moser, 2019). The themes that emerged from the coding process are presented in the following section with quotations from the interview participants and in the writing of the students from their short answer responses on the post-survey. The following themes emerged:

- Students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments.
- Students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school.
- Students appreciated communication with their teachers.

These themes emerged as broad ideas of what students perceive about teacher presence in the virtual classroom experience, as expressed through the interviews and short answer survey questions.

Theme 1: Students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments.

The advantage of including detailed, informative, and personal feedback was shown in the comments made by students in the interviews and in short response answers.. Giving students feedback is an option for the online instructors to exhibit teaching presence and encourage student engagement in the online classroom (Ice et al., 2010). Additionally, feedback can improve the learning experience for students (Li, Wong, Yang, & Bell, 2020). Overwhelmingly, students mentioned “feedback” in their post-survey responses as the most helpful teacher action that they experienced in the on-line environment. Feedback, in this context, refers to comments teachers provide to students about student writing once the writing has been submitted to the teacher. Portfolios receive feedback on rough drafts or the ideas on a graphic organizer as preparation for the completion of a final draft of the assignment. Test essays and discussions receive feedback on the final assessment, as a way of indicating to students what was correct or incorrect about the response or answer. The post-survey question asking students to give advice to an online teacher generated advice about providing quality feedback to students. Given that this question was open for any ideas, the fact that students mentioned feedback as the overwhelming idea indicates that this particular teacher action has value and is important to students.

The benefits of having feedback from a teacher make this teacher action valuable to students as they worked on writing assignments for their English class. Students wrote that feedback from their teacher contributed to their motivation to work on writing assignments. Additionally, students indicated that they used teacher feedback to know what

teachers were looking for and then students used this feedback to improve their writing and their grade.

Know What Teachers Are Looking For. Feedback provided by teachers helps students know what the expectations are for an assignment and help them meet those expectations. Comments left by teachers on a rough draft assignment for the portfolio writing assignments provided guidance for students to know if they had completed the assignment correctly or if there was a gap between what they had done and what the teacher's expectations were for the assignment. Students wrote about their appreciation for grading feedback to know what their teacher wanted:

9th grader #5: Grading feedback lets me know what they want.

9th Grader #9: [Feedback] helped me stay on track and ensure that I
was writing what they were wanting.

10th grader #1: With feedback, I can see what my teacher is wanting
from me personally.

Students noticed and appreciated the writing expectations, so they knew how to be successful. Knowing how to meet expectations on the assignments led students to being able to get a good grade, if they desired and stay on track with class assignments. Good feedback helps teach students, as part of the writing process, and keeps students motivated to keep writing.

Feedback Improved Student Writing. One of the purposes that is accomplished by teachers giving feedback on writing is helping improve the overall writing skills of students. Many of students who participated on the survey did agree that this purpose was accomplished when their teachers took the time to provide helpful feedback on the writing

that was turned in. Allowing feedback to be helpful comes when students recognize that feedback has a purpose, as shown by these quotes:

9th grader #2: Grading feedback shows what you did good [sic] and what you could of [sic] done better.”

9th grader #13: When she tells us we did something wrong in a specific area then we can go back and look at it and say okay I got that part wrong.”

Once students recognize that feedback is helpful, some students, then take the feedback provided to them by their teachers and go back to look at what mistakes were made in order to correct them on a particular assignment or use it as information for assignments in the future. Students who see feedback as a positive and helpful tool see that these teacher comments can help them improve their writing, as illustrated in the following quotes:

10th grader #1: I love to hear positive and negative feedback on my writing assignments because it really helps me improve.

11th grader #8: Say my teacher reads a rough draft and then gives me feedback that tells me it has good things in it but maybe use one word less or try some things. Feedback that is simple but also positive helps me look at my work go back and try my best to improve.

Feedback on Writing Assignments Increased Motivation. When teachers provide feedback on assignments, it can help increase student motivation to continue

working, which increases the engagement of students on their writing. As 11th grader #8 wrote, “I know I have struggled being motivated because some teachers don’t give good feedback. Just a grade.” The comments teachers give to students about what works well in a writing assignment and what needs improving on the assignment provide students with increased motivation to make changes since they know that someone is actually reading their work and cares about it. This is illustrated in the following quote from an interview.

Interviewee #3: When I do a portfolio or a written response, some of them say “good job” or “this is a nice response” and this encourages me to keep doing work, like good work, instead of just turning things in. I know a lot of kids who have a hard time with school and school isn’t their thing. But if teachers are congratulating you and telling you you’re doing a good job they are more encouraged to do work.

For some students, a motivating factor in doing better on writing assignments is because they are motivated by earning good grades. For these students, grading feedback was important because it helped them know what to do to improve their grades. Students who want to improve their grades are willing to make corrections and do better based on the feedback given by a teacher. This is important to some students because a high percentage of the overall English grade is based on writing assignments; improving the writing assignment grades improves the overall English grade. Students commented on the importance of getting feedback to know specifically how to earn a better grade. The connection between doing well on writing and earning better grades is highlighted in these quotes:

- 9th grader #3: Grading feedback tells me what I can fix to improve my grade.
- 12th grader #2: Getting detailed feedback has been very helpful for me because I can see exactly what I need to do to improve my grade if I choose to.
- 12th grader #14: [Feedback] also helps me to reach the expectations and standards to earn a good grade for the assignment specifically.

Writing feedback and its link to motivating students to work on improving their writing and earning better grades has been shown in the comments made by students.

Theme 2: Students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school

Teacher presence at the virtual high school led students to believe they could have academic success. This belief in potential for success is a factor of cognitive engagement which increases when a student has a supportive course community, comprised, in part, of a student's teachers (Borup et al., 2020). The ways in which students described how teacher presence helped them included having a connection with students, being supportive of students, and being available for students.

Having a Connection with Students. The online environment does not easily lend itself to creating connections between teachers and students. The ability of students to work when they want makes it possible for students and teachers to never meet or interact. This virtual situation highlights the need students have for teachers to establish teacher presence in the virtual classroom and create personal connections with their students.

Interviewee #1 commented in her interview that “it’s nice to know teachers care about you as a person.”

11th grader #9: I think also just trying to get to know each student personally will really help the student and teacher both improve in many areas.

Interviewee #2 commented in her interview that she feels more of a connection with her teachers at the virtual school than at the brick and mortar school offered a suggestion to teachers who might be looking for a way to connect to students when she said, “send an email or whatever it is saying, ‘Hey, I’ve noticed you’re struggling to get caught up’ is a good invitation to students.”

Teachers were supportive of student action. Along with having a connection with students, teachers being supportive of student lives is another way in which teacher presence helps students find success in the online environment. An 11th grader, number 1, wrote that having access to a teacher means that, “I have support [from teachers] and I don’t need to fear reaching out for help.

In her interview, Interviewee #5, a senior, commented about her experience of having supportive teachers:

[The teachers] have been checking up on me because I keep falling behind. They weren’t doing that at the beginning of the year. They’re making sure I know where the recorded live lessons are and making sure I know when their office hours are so I can go get help. They are amazing. They should have more teachers like this in public school . . . they actually seem like they care.

Further, Interviewee #5 commented that with the help of her teachers she was “really getting on track and am getting ready to graduate this year.” She also mentioned “My siblings are staying at [Snow Virtual School] because they are getting caught back up here.” These statements imply that because of the teachers, being able to graduate from high school has become a reality for the children in this family. Interviewee #5 illustrates the type of access teachers provided her when as they were checking up on her, making sure she was on track. This student recognized that having access to a teacher increased her opportunity to be successful academically.

In her interview, Interviewee #2 focused on how supportive she feels her teachers are:

Interviewee #2: The teachers at [this school] I feel like are very kind and very caring. They are supportive and they are there to help you. It feels like they are really there to help us succeed. I think that it has been a real blessing for me because in the past school has been a hard thing for me to want to do. But I feel like here I am actually motivated to try and do my best instead of just barely getting by.

Interviewee #2 brought up the idea that with the support of teachers and knowing teachers are available her motivation to do well in school has improved. Other students realize that teachers can positively impact working hard and improving

Interviewee #3: [Teachers] have inspired me to never give up and that no matter how hard the lesson is that I can do it.

Supportive teachers provide a safety net for students to reach out to and rely on when they are struggling with their classes or assignments. Having a teacher

Teachers were available to students. Another aspect of teacher presence helping students is being available for students when they need assistance. A 10th grader #10 wrote, “If students have any questions we can easily reach out to our teacher and get the answers we need in order to be successful.” Students working virtually typically work in solitude without the benefit of having a teacher present while they are learning new concepts, so having access to a teacher and the information they provide in a course is important.

9th grader #1: If we need them [teachers] to explain ore on something then they are there.

10th grader #9: If I am having a lot of trouble, I can ask for help and they will provide.

11th grader #11: If I am confused on anything it helps me having someone I can go to that knows what needs to be done and how I can do it.

12th grader #3: Being able to contact my teachers any time I need help is also really reassuring.

To remedy a situation where students might not recognize their teachers are available for them, 9th grader #7 suggested that teachers “make more short videos about stuff and try to understand a student’s point of view. Teachers know a lot about the subject as apposed [sic] to students who are learning this for the first time.” Online students recognize that having virtual access to a teacher when they need it is helps them be successful in school.

Theme 3: Students appreciated communication with their teachers

This theme described the types of communication students appreciated from their teachers. Previous research has found that communication in online learning is vital to student success (Belair, 2012; Drange & Kargaard, 2017; Krause, et al., 2016; Markova, Glazkova, & Zabrorova, 2017; Robinson, et al., 2017). For this study, communication is being defined as how instructors and students convey information back and forth. Communication helps students know that the teacher is present in the course and can be relied on to provide support (Ko & Rossen, 2017). When communication happens in the way students use it, communication from a teacher becomes invaluable.

Students Need Communication. In this research study, the value of communication between students and their teachers became evident from the comments of students answering the short answer question, “How does having access to a teacher help you on your writing assignments?” One student commented, “It is amazing in most schools we would have to wait till the next day to ask the question on online we have access to ask a question whenever we want.” Another student wrote, “It's like a real classroom, if I need help on something or have a question I can go to them for help just as if I were to raise my hand in a class.” A caveat to this is that at this virtual school, teachers are online during the day from 8am to 4pm, but outside of these hours, a student would have to wait until the following day to receive an answer. The ability to ask a question at any time of the day by email, phone, or text is available and utilized by students.

10th grader #2: Being able to contact my teachers any time I need help is also really reassuring because it helps to know that you don't have to figure it out by yourself.

This student points out that knowing a teacher will answer them is reassuring. From the student perspective, having the ability to communicate with a teacher is a positive aspect of the Echo Virtual Academy experience. Students feel their online teachers are easily accessible and willing to communicate with students to answer questions and give needed help. In an online school, communication between students and teachers occurs both asynchronously and synchronously.

Asynchronous communication. The primary benefit of asynchronous communication is that students can access information at any time, which is the main convenience of online learning (Watts, 2016). At this virtual school, teachers have a variety of methods with which to asynchronously communicate with students. These methods are email and prerecorded videos.

The main method of asynchronous communication is through email. Echo Virtual Academy has an internal email system embedded within the LMS which allows teachers to email an entire class or specific students efficiently. One of the teacher presence actions provided to students during the six week innovation period was a weekly announcement email to an entire class.

Students appreciated the weekly email provided by their English teachers, as evidenced by comments made answering the question of which teacher action helped you with writing assignments.

12th grader #14: The announcement helps because it keeps you informed on what's going on.

11th grader #7: Weekly announcements helped me be able to know where we are because I am a little behind so I could

understand where we are and what we are doing and where we are supposed to be.

With a little humor, an 11th grader #6 commented, “Weekly announcements helped me remember stuff because I have the memory of a goldfish.” During her interview, Interviewee #1 pointed out the importance of teacher communication to establish teacher presence:

Interviewee #1: A lot of the times when teachers aren’t doing emails, it’s really hard to know what’s going on and a student has a hard time opening up to teachers or asking for help because they don’t feel like they’re trying. So, if they’re sending out weekly emails that is showing that they care and they’re trying to help you in the class. Some of the teachers I’ve seen are like “I’ve seen lots of people are confused and they are getting calls or people aren’t turning in this portfolio then they send it out through email.

Researcher: Is the message board helpful for information?

Interviewee #1: Um, sometimes. Things can be in different places, so I like it when they send it out in email.

This interview exchange highlights that having access to information in one place is helpful to students who might get confused by having information spread across different places within the LMS.

As part of the innovation period, teachers created a short video to compliment the weekly announcement email. Interviewee #2 said in her interview that videos help her “understand more about what they are there to help with and helps me to know that they are not robots.” Interviewee #1 said:

I liked hearing the whys and where in the video. At my other school, teachers would do a long lecture video that wasn’t as helpful. I liked knowing more about what I was supposed to do.

This opinion was shared by other students who had access to longer live lesson recordings. One student commented that sitting and watching a 30-45 minute recorded lesson was too long to watch by themselves.

Synchronous communication. Synchronous communication occurs in real-time and allows for immediate interactions between teachers and students. Phone calls and text messages came up in the data as being seen as a beneficial way to communicate effectively and quickly with teachers. In her interview, Interviewee #3 said this about synchronous communication with teachers, “I usually email them. But when I really need help I call them or text them.” Another student, 9th grader #10, commented, “If I have questions, it is nice to be able to talk with her and have a conversation.”

The interview with Interviewee #1 highlights teacher traits that improve a student’s desire to communicate with their teachers:

Interviewee #1: When I call them, a lot of the teachers are really nice and are really friendly, so it’s easier to communicate. A lot of kids have fears, like my brother says, “They’re going to yell at me,” and I say, “They’re

not going to yell at you. They're really helpful." They're really friendly and that's an important thing because if they're not friendly then students aren't going to want to communicate with them.

Interviewee #1's comment brings up the idea that students are traditionally afraid of having to communicate with teachers based on past negative experiences.

Another means of communicating with students is through synchronous live lesson sessions using the Adobe Connect platform. Live lessons are used at the school for communicating instructions about writing assignments, supplementing the curriculum, and giving students opportunities to be together virtually. Some instructors also use the Adobe Connect platform to host one-on-one lessons for students who need individualized assistance. In her interview, Interviewee #4 commented,

At this school we have live lessons in Adobe Connect. Teachers send emails about students if they are behind and they invite you to a group live lesson on the topic or they invite you to come meet one on one.

Student 11th grader #11 commented on the survey,

A few times I've asked for help on something and after she looks into what I'm confused about, she'll talk about it in a live lesson so it can help other students who might be confused about the same thing.

The teacher communication actions are important to helping students know there is someone to rely on when they need help whether synchronously or asynchronously. In general, the communication provided by virtual teachers helped students feel connected with the school, much like they did in a traditional brick and mortar school setting.

Asynchronous communication permitted students to access information they needed, when they needed it, which helped students understand the class better. This communication also helped students understand their teachers were present in the online course, even if they did not see them on a regular basis, or ever. Synchronous communication helped build relationships directly between teachers and students using technology and gave students a means for receiving direct answers to questions.

Summary

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to answer the research questions of this research study. Quantitative data included the participant responses to the pre and post surveys. A paired sample *t*-test indicated that the results for the subscales of student engagement, teacher actions, and helpfulness of teacher actions were significant. The descriptive statistics indicated that student engagement decreased from the beginning to the end of the innovation period, while also indicating that the participants noticed, valued, and appreciated the teacher actions at higher levels at the conclusion of the innovation period than prior to the innovation. Paired sample *t*-tests indicated these changes were significant.

Qualitative data included the participants' ($n = 58$) responses to short answer questions, as well as interviews responses from volunteers ($n = 5$). Inductive analysis resulted in the creation of themes emphasizing the importance of teacher presence in the success of students regarding their writing. The themes that emerged from the study (a) students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments, (b) students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school, and (c) and students appreciated communication with their teachers.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this action research was to investigate how teacher presence in a virtual English Language Arts classroom contributes to high school student engagement in online writing assignments. Quantitative finding indicated a decrease in student engagement, but an increase in the value and appreciation for online teacher presence. Qualitative data revealed four themes (a) students believed teacher presence helped them be successful in school, (b) students believed teacher feedback helped increase their engagement with writing assignments, and (c) students appreciated communication with their teachers. Integrated findings of this study suggest that online high school students' appreciation of and value for virtual teacher presence increases as teachers intentionally expand the types of online actions they use to reach students, even if student motivation decreases during the school year. This chapter will situate the findings of this research study with previous research in the following sections: (1) discussion, (2) recommendations, (3) implications, and (4) limitations.

Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative data were combined to directly address the research questions of this study: (1) In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments? (2) How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes? To examine the larger context and compare this study's results to previous findings

existing literature on student engagement, teacher presence, teaching writing in the online environment was used to guide these quantitative and qualitative findings. In this section, the ways and extent to which teacher presence affects student engagement will be discussed first, followed by descriptions of how students are impacted by teacher presence in the virtual writing class.

R.Q. 1 In what ways and to what extent does increasing teacher presence in the virtual classroom affect student engagement in online writing assignments?

The purpose of this research question was to investigate how students see teacher actions as being directly connected to their personal engagement with writing assignments. Writing is a challenging exercise for many students in any environment, but in the online environment without direct teacher supervision and interaction, writing becomes especially challenging. Teachers at Echo Virtual Academy spend a lot of time preparing clear directions, instructions, rubrics, explanatory videos, synchronous lessons, and phone contacts discussing the portfolio assignments in their courses. This question was written to intentionally focus student attention on which teacher actions from the were valuable to their writing experiences and their engagement with writing.

The overall results of the surveys concerning the effectiveness of teacher actions show that teacher actions did help students on their writing assignments but looking at qualitative data from the short answer questions indicated that students have mixed perceptions of how their engagement is affected by teacher presence in the virtual classroom. The four short answer questions answer this research question: (1) How did teacher actions help you on your writing assignments? (2) Why did some of the actions not help you in your writing? (3) How does having access to a teacher help you complete your

writing assignments? And (4) What advice would you give an online teacher who wants to encourage their students to complete their writing assignments?

The ways in which teacher presence affects student engagement are teachers encourage students on their writing, teachers provide specific help on writing assignments, teachers are available, and teachers encourage personal responsibility for students

Teachers encouraged students on their writing. One grouping of comments not related to the five teacher actions were associated with teachers being encouraging to students:

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|------------------------------|--|
| 11 th grader #1: | I think procrastination is the biggest setback for kids.
I would just keep encouraging and giving kids the resources they need to complete their assignments. |
| 10 th grader #12: | Give compliments like “good job” or “you got this” etc. |
| 9 th grader #8: | Just keep reminding students that they can get help if they need it |

Based on these comments, it is apparent that students see their writing engagement being affected by encouragement from teachers and teacher availability to provide help. Findings by Krei-Blankson et al. (2019) validate the concept that student satisfaction in a course increases with the number of teacher contacts and productive online instructional effort. These factors confirm findings by Havik & Westergard (2019) where they concluded that support from teachers was positively and significantly associated with student emotional engagement. They concluded that students who feel a connection with

teachers have higher affective/emotional engagement, which leads to increased behavioral engagement on schoolwork.

Additional support for the concept of engaged students associating with positive teacher interactions comes from Alcott (2017) who studied the effect of teacher encouragement on student attitudes towards additional schooling in England. One finding from this study is that students who enjoy school are most likely to remember and respond to teacher encouragement than students who are disillusioned with school (Alcott, 2017). This study also found that teachers have a direct impact on student educational outcomes. Teachers should not underestimate their influence on student engagement as they encourage students in the online environment. Students expect their online teachers to be present (Havik & Westergard, 2019).

Teachers provided specific help on writing assignments. When asked how teacher actions helped them on their writing assignments, 11th grader #1 responded, “Getting direct feedback from a professional and knowing how I shall be graded aided in my work.” This student comment summarizes why these teacher actions are important to the online student. If teachers are viewed as professionals, then their opinions on student work are viewed as valuable and are appreciated. Eleventh grader #3 stated: “It helps me to have a teacher who can explain the material and tell me exactly what they are looking for in my writing and what they expect from my assignments.”

Feedback is an important teacher action in any educational setting, but in the realm of virtual education, it plays a bigger role as it helps guide a student’s learning process (Brant, et al., 2020). Student 11th grader #1 summed up feedback by writing, “I love to

hear positive and negative feedback on my writing assignments because it really helps me improve. It shows me my strengths and places I can make my writing better.”

Comments about the helpfulness of rubrics highlight student desires to know what is expected of them. “I like to have a rubric, so I know exactly what is expected of me,” wrote 10th grader #5. Student writing anxiety decreases when students have a clear understanding of teacher writing expectations (Arinda & Ardi, 2020). The benefits to providing students with rubrics increase when teachers review the concepts on the rubrics and teach students how to use a rubric prior to students working independently. Arinda and Ardi (2020) concluded that rubrics without clear writing goals decreased student motivation to complete their writing assignments. This study corroborates students from Echo Virtual Academy who feel rubrics help them know what to do.

Some students, however, do not feel rubrics are useful. The opposite side of rubrics being helpful is discussed by 10th graders #11 who said, “Grading rubrics are not very useful because most of the time they don’t outline what is needed in the essay. Instead, they are focused on grammar, spelling, and flow which I don’t personally find very helpful.” Student 9th grader #12 wrote, “Usually grading rubrics don’t help much because the requirements are already stated elsewhere.” This statement alludes to teacher created resources that have been provided through other means, such as directions, live lessons, and modification notes added to specific lessons within the curriculum.

Teachers were available. On-line students want their virtual teachers to be available when help is needed and wanted. Teacher availability, especially throughout a student’s journey, has an impact on retention and academic success (Stone, 2017). Ninth grader #9 advised that teachers should “try to be more available to students that need more

help with their assignments.” This comment is interesting given that teachers at Snow Virtual Academy are technically available during regular working hours daily and can take phone calls, answer text messages, and respond to emails during this time. Being “available” might mean something more akin to having regular office hours in a virtual classroom, like Adobe Connect, where teachers are available specifically for synchronous contacts and students can drop-in for assistance. Having regular office hours can provide academic stability to students in the virtual classroom (Borup & Stevens, 2016).

Holding office hours is not a panacea for reaching all students, but they can be another method for teachers to demonstrate to students that they are available, willing, and ready to offer help to students. Office hours can “add value to predominantly asynchronous courses, when used intentionally, with thought and care” (Lowenthal, Dunlap, & Snelson, 2017, p. 188). Office hours at Snow Virtual Academy are times when teachers have their Adobe Connect classrooms open at set times during the week where students can come in to talk with the teacher using microphones or use the chat feature and not actually talk to the teacher. These times vary teacher by teacher but are listed on student calendars and are included in the signature lines of the teachers, as well.

A 10th grader #3 suggested to teachers:

just tell me that you are there to help and ask me if I need help once in a while to make sure I am getting the help I need. . . sometimes I don’t ask for help because I have really bad social anxiety. . . just show that you are there for us.

The idea of teachers “being available” to this student seems to imply that teachers are contacting them and reaching out to them, instead of a student looking to contact a

teacher. Being in the online environment with limited social interactions may reduce some social anxiety for some students, but the anxiety decreases their desire for helpful synchronous contacts with their online instructors.

Teachers should infuse creativity into writing assignments. Making writing fun can be challenging for teachers when there are state standards and specific writing skills that need to be met. However, rethinking how to approach writing with students could make it more enjoyable (McPherson & Lemon, 2018). Even though McPherson & Lemon (2018) work in higher education, they present how to use curiosity and personal interests to make writing more enjoyable and even, fun. They also discuss ideas about how working collaboratively with others who share similar interests or passions can capitalize on other people's strengths and make the writing process more enjoyable.

Another grouping of comments from students across the grade bands advises teachers to add more creativity, fun, and choice to writing assignments.

11th grader #10: Encourage creativity! Leave room for some imagination!

10th grader #7: You want to let them make it somewhat fun, not only for the students but for yourself as well. Then you can get a better understanding of what your students like and might like.

Interviewee #2: Just try to make it a little fun, we like to add some fun things into the projects.

Another method to use that can increase the fun factor in writing is to include elements of gamification. The value of gamification comes from the idea that it covers the

“bitterness of something that is important, yet undesirable, with the sweetness of something that is not important yet desirable” (Daniel-Wariya, 2017, p. 3). Adding elements of gamification to writing can incorporate competition, challenge, achievement, and success that can engage students and encourage them to make additional effort to earn points and improve their standing on a leader-board.

11th grader #2: Encourage students with some projects where they get to pick a fun topic.

12th grader #1: Make the writing assignments interesting and let the students make up their own prompts for the writing assignments (ex: students may write about the daily life for them in Medieval Ages, students may write about a comparison between Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet, etc).

Providing students with writing choices based on their interests has been shown to increase student motivation (Miller & Meece, 1999; Zumbrunn et al., 2017).

Teachers encouraged student personal responsibility. Taking personal responsibility for their learning is another way for students to demonstrate engagement in school settings (Carpenter & Pease, 2013). “The short videos, feedback, and general standards help me to see what my teacher is wanting from me personally, I am free to revise and check my work on my own and with an instructor.” This comment from 11th grader #3 implies personal responsibility, in conjunction with teacher actions, to improve their writing. While the focus of this study was on teacher presence, teacher presence only serves a purpose if students do something with the support being provided by

teachers to their students. Personal responsibility and academic engagement are inseparably connected.

Some of the students who participated in the post-survey wrote about how they could improve their writing using the feedback and support of the teacher. The students who wrote comments about how they can improve their grade or writing believe their teachers serve a purpose are more likely to pay attention to their teachers. The following student comments on the post-survey indicate a level of personal responsibility once they receive feedback from their teacher. Italics has been added to highlight the phrases showing personal responsibility.

12th Grader #14: Getting detailed grading feedback has been very helpful for me because I can see exactly what I need to do to improve my grade *if I choose to*.

11th Grader #9: These features helped me to know exactly *what I need to do* to get a good grade. It also *helps me to reach the expectations* and standards to earn a good grade for the assignment specifically.

10th Grader #2: Knowing how I did on an assignment can help me improve on the next. Grading rubrics help me to *know what I can do* to get the best grade.

9th Grader #13: I love to hear positive and negative feedback on my writing assignments because it really *helps me improve*. It shows me my strengths and places *I can make my writing better*.

Students who take personal responsibility for their learning are more successful, especially in the virtual classroom where students are required to be more self-directed and take initiative to improve (Lee & Figueroa, 2012). Students who participated on this study were engaged as the study began, with an average engagement score of 37/50, which implies they take initiative on their assignments and be willing to be self-reflective. As Carpenter & Pease (2013) wrote, “academic performance is not simply a matter of raw talent; students’ intelligence and skills are mediated by their beliefs and emotions about the academic task at hand” (p. 45-46). The students who participated on the survey and offered the above comments show self-reflection on their practice as writers in a class by willing to take feedback and do something with it. The comments from these students also indicated they felt they had control over their learning.

The extent of increasing teacher presence. In addition to looking for the ways in which teacher presence affects student engagement with writing, this research question was written with a hopeful expectation that the data would show that student engagement increased when teacher presence increased. There was also a hopeful expectation that the added effect of asking students to pay particular attention to the actions of their English teachers, would cause students to notice their teachers’ efforts, and help engage them. This part of the research question was answered using quantitative data to determine if teacher presence influences student engagement. The extent to which teacher presence affects student engagement is indicated by comparing the student engagement scores from the pre-survey to the post-survey. The ways in which teacher presence affects engagement is based on the subscales of valuing teacher actions and noticing teacher actions. Overall, there was a perceived value by the students of teacher actions, which increased during the

intervention, but the increased teacher actions did not translate into overall student engagement for the students who participated in both surveys.

While teacher support is important to student engagement, the actions of teachers are merely one factor influencing student engagement (Havik & Westergård, 2020; Klem & Connell, 2004; Quin, 2017). Klem & Connell (2004) discovered that the combination of teacher support, along with a focus on learning and high expectations, leads to improved levels of engagement and achievement. My research study only focused on teacher actions and teacher presence (teacher support), without providing additional guidance to students to increase academic achievement.

Looking at those students who took both the presurvey and the postsurvey, even though the engagement scores for students decreased, their attention to the teacher actions increased from the pre survey to the post survey. Figure 5.1 illustrates the difference between students noticing teacher actions from the presurvey to the postsurvey. The number of “yes” responses increased from 209 to 221, while the number of “no” responses decreased from 81 to 69.

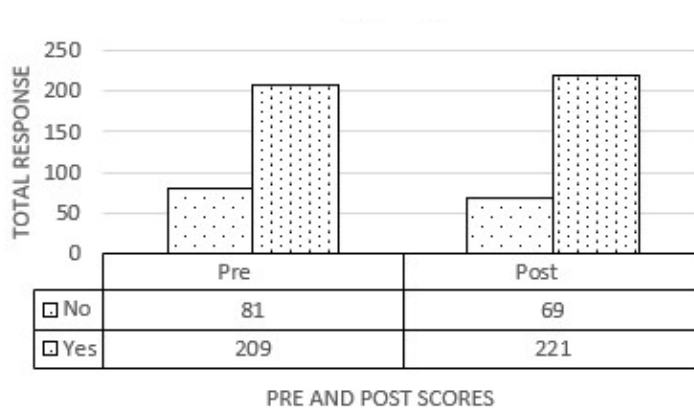


Figure 5.1 *Students Noticing Teacher Actions*

Even though students noticed the teacher's actions, they did not translate into a significant increase in student engagement for the students who completed both surveys. The visual shows that students were already engaged prior to the intervention. The categories of “describes me” and “somewhat describes me” increased by a small margin from the presurvey to the postsurvey (see Figure 5.2).

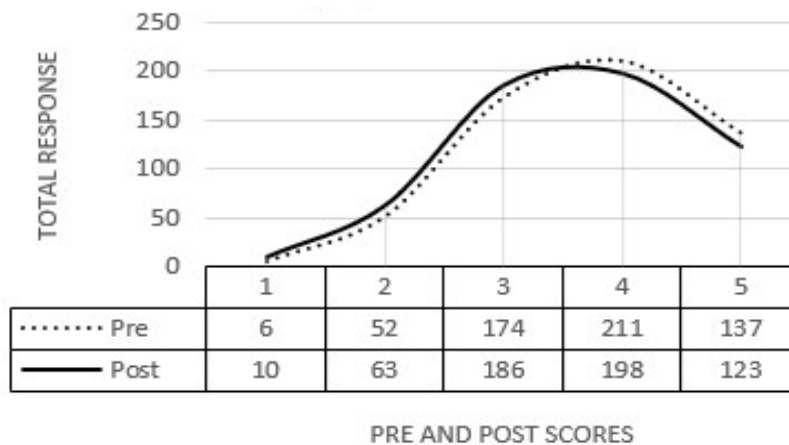


Figure 5.2 *Engagement Scores*

In a meta-analysis of 189 different studies examining the influence of teacher-student relationships, Roorda et al. (2019) found affective teacher-student relationships were important as they exerted both an indirect effect on engagement, as well as a direct effect on students’ achievement. They also found that negative teacher-student relationships have a stronger association on engagement than the association between positive teacher-student relationships. “This might indicate a cumulative effect in which negative relationships and disengagement strengthen each other over time” (Roorda et al., 2019, p. 252). In this research study, some negative aspects of engagement appeared in the form of disengaged students, negative perceptions of teacher actions, and learning differences.

Disengaged Students. Looking at disengagement adds additional insight into student engagement and what might have been the results if all students who participated in the pre-survey also participated in the post-survey. Dissecting the subscales for the students who did not participate in the post survey helps flesh out the view of student engagement at Echo Virtual Academy. Comparing the initial engagement scores for those who participated on both surveys with those who only participated in the pre-survey yields interesting comparisons. The initial engagement scores for students ($n = 58$) who participated on both surveys ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 5.36$) is higher than the student engagement scores of the students ($n = 46$) who only participated in the pre-survey ($M = 31.7$, $SD = 7.41$). Students who are less engaged in school are less likely to voluntarily participate in activities that do not directly impact their lives, so it is not surprising the less engaged students did not follow through with completing the post-survey.

Even though these students were less engaged than the other students, they valued teacher actions at the same level ($M = 20.13$) as their more engaged peers ($M = 20.38$). This data demonstrates that teacher presence is noticeable but does not always translate into engagement. The teacher actions added during the intervention were weekly announcements and short videos, the other teacher actions were already in place to some degree before the intervention took place. This group of students did notice the on-going teacher actions, even though their engagement scores were lower than those of the other group.

These results support Yang & Bear (2018) who studied the strength of teacher–student relationships and student engagement across grade levels. They reported that the older students get the more their emotional connection to teachers decreases and their

emotional connection to peers increases. At the same time, teacher-student relationships involving cognitive-behavioral engagement strengthens as students age, with high school teachers having more of an influence on students as they look for supportive adults who are not their parents (Yang & Bear, 2018). In the virtual environment, however, developing a relationship with a teacher can be more challenging given the decreased synchronous interactions between teachers and students. Fewer opportunities lower the possibility of a student increasing their behavioral engagement due to a teacher-student relationship. With lower emotional engagement with teachers and fewer opportunities to cognitively engage with teachers, students who find themselves in the virtual environment are less likely to be influenced by virtual teacher presence and reap benefits associated with it.

In the online environment teachers only have progress data, attendance data, and grades to determine if students are active in the course since the visual clues from brick and mortar classrooms are absent. Students who appear less engaged in a classroom might receive additional teacher support if teachers believe that more attention will increase student engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004). When online teachers provide resources to students, students who are prone to being less engaged have to learn how to access and use them, which they may or may not do. This data supports findings by Klem & Connell (2004) which suggests that disaffected students might receive the same levels of support from classroom teachers, as engaged students. Because the group of less engaged students did not complete the post-survey in my research study, there is no data on how much they appreciated the teacher actions after the intervention period or if their engagement scores might have increased afterwards.

Negative perceptions. Negative perceptions about teacher actions appeared on the post-survey with 18/58 of the students making comments indicating they felt the teacher actions were not helpful. The negative data is split between both teachers, signifying that whatever the differences existed between the two teachers and their teacher presence, did not make a significant difference in the student perspective of them. 9th and 12th grade students supplied eleven of the negative comments with 10th and 11th graders making up the other seven. When students hold negative perceptions of teachers, they are less likely to develop positive student-teacher relationships, which can decrease academic engagement (Gasser, Grutter, Buholzer Wettstein, 2018). 9th graders and 12th graders might be less interested in developing a relationship with their teachers due to being new at the high school level or being ready to leave high school. A 12th grade student, #1, believed that the teacher actions were “nuisances,” while 12th grader #13 wrote that the teacher actions “were not really all that important and did not affect how the assignments were being done.” Both of these seniors were on track to graduate and both had engagement scores higher than the average score. A freshman, 9th grader #4 wrote, “I don’t know if it really does help me personally.”

From the perspective of a first year student at the school and 10th grader #9, teacher actions are not important “because they need to exist in the first place. If no action is taken, then I can’t tell you if it helped or not.” This student had an engagement score of 36/50 on the post-survey, a decrease from 37/50 on the pre-survey, which is the average engagement score of all the students. This student indicated that they were on track for graduation on the pre-survey but did not know if they were on-track for graduation on the post-survey.

Also, being a first year virtual student, they might not have been familiar with the actions teachers take to support students and locations of the tools that teachers use.

Live lessons are synchronous lessons scheduled on the same day and at the same time each week. Each teacher has a specific hour block in which to present their synchronous lesson and due to the need for the high school to not overlap lesson times between all the content and grade areas, teachers do not have much control over when these lessons are scheduled. An 11th grader, number 11, considered live lesson features to be the only teacher action that they did not find useful. Their comment was, “I just wasn’t able to go to live lessons.” Due to scheduling, it is possible that students might not be able to attend the synchronous meeting. Online students sometimes choose the virtual environment for scheduling flexibility and have other interests outside of the school day. For this reason, teachers record their live lessons and post the recordings on their message board for students to access at their convenience.

A senior student, 12th grader #4, also commented on live lessons saying, “There are live lessons, but they are an hour long and hard to navigate through to find the information that you are looking for and really need.” The wording of this comment, especially the phrase, “hard to navigate through,” indicates this student was referring to video recordings of the live lessons that were posted on the teacher’s discussion boards. This complaint of not being able to find the information they wanted could be remedied by the teacher editing the recording and adding bookmarks to allow students to find the section for the specific information they are looking for. This would not take too much time for the teacher but could save a student considerable time. Having easy-to-navigate live lesson recordings

might make students more interested in reviewing them and might make the recordings a more valuable resource for students.

One of the interventions the English teachers in this research study focused on was adding short videos to their weekly announcements to make the email more interesting and explanatory. Only two students noted that this teacher action was not important to them, a 9th grader and a 12th grader. “Short videos don't really help me that much,” reflected 9th grader #1 who appreciated the other teacher actions. The same 12th grader, number 3, who did not like the live lesson recordings said, “My teacher never creates short videos to watch,” a sentiment that indicates this student was not paying attention to the emails sent every week and clearly did not consider the live lesson recordings to be videos. The short videos teachers created were posted on the message boards and sent in email, but this student didn't notice them. If students do not read their email and do not make a habit of looking at the class message board, they will miss important information and opportunities to learn from the resources their teachers are creating.

Learning differences. An interesting perspective shows up from two 11th grade students who commented that they did not need teacher actions because of how they learn. One student, 11th grader #7, wrote they did not need teacher support because they are a “hands on worker and prefer things that are there physically.” The other student, 11th grader #1 said, “I learn in a weird way and some things just don't help me.” These attitudes towards teacher actions as a reflection of learning styles does not hold up with research. Using learning styles as a way of explaining learning differences has been negated (An & Carr, 2017; Pashler, et al., 2008; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012). Growing evidence suggests that people hold faulty beliefs about how they learn, which can lead “people to manage their

own learning and teach others in non-optimal ways” (Pashler, et al., 2008, p. 117). Teaching to specific learning styles can stymie development and can result in poor student achievement (An & Carr, 2017).

Instead of being concerned about reaching individual student learning styles, teachers should develop optimal curriculum tailored to the course being taught (Pashler, et al., 2012). Developing effective and coherent ways to present content, such as using diagrams and words in “mutually reinforcing ways,” will benefit all students (Rohrer & Pashler, 2012, p. 35). Additionally, instead of focusing on learning strengths and weaknesses, teachers can also help students develop a growth mindset, transition thinking from concrete to abstract, and provide multiple sensory experiences to improve learning (An & Carr, 2017).

R.Q. 2 How do students describe teacher presence in virtual writing classes?

This research question stemmed from a desire to know how students viewed the actions teachers typically take in Echo Virtual Academy. Teacher presence has been shown to not only increase student engagement in online classes, but also improve learner outcomes and increase learner satisfaction with an online class (Anderson, et al., 2001; Dickinson, 2017; Dixon, 2010; Li, et al., 2018). The idea to specifically look at the teacher action aspect of the online student experience came from research done by Borup, et al. (2013, 2014, 2017) and the original ACE Framework (Borup, et al., 2014). The Martin & Bollinger (2018) Engagement Matters survey’s breakdown of contexts in which students engage with the online learning environment was also pivotal in supplying this research study with validated information about typical instructor activities that are viewed by students as being engagement-increasing. The Dixon Student Engagement Survey (2010)

provided the specific teacher actions to target in this research study: weekly announcements, feedback, rubrics, live lesson features, and short videos.

Teachers at Echo Virtual Academy spend hours trying to connect with students and provide them with resources, information, and support to help their students be successful in their courses. In my role as a teacher supervisor, I wanted to know which actions students felt benefitted them the most to help teachers increase their online presence and spend their time more productively. I also wanted to know to what extent teacher presence is perceived by students. Dickinson (2017) found that students claim, “to be most satisfied with an online course when staff and student contact was encouraged, students felt welcomed to the course, and instructors had an established online presence” (p.3). The qualitative results from this study data support Dickinson’s (2017) findings.

While statistical data did not show student engagement increased during the innovation period, students did improve their perceptions of teacher actions. Qualitative data implies that students both value and notice teacher actions. Students perceived teacher actions as being most beneficial to them in this order: receiving feedback, having a grading rubric, using live lesson features, providing short videos, and emailing weekly announcements. In the surveys the number of students who commented with “very much” for how they value teacher actions increased over the duration of the intervention. Given that there was not much room for change Figure 5.3 illustrates how much students noticed teacher actions from pre and post the intervention while Figure 5.4 illustrates how much students valued teacher actions.

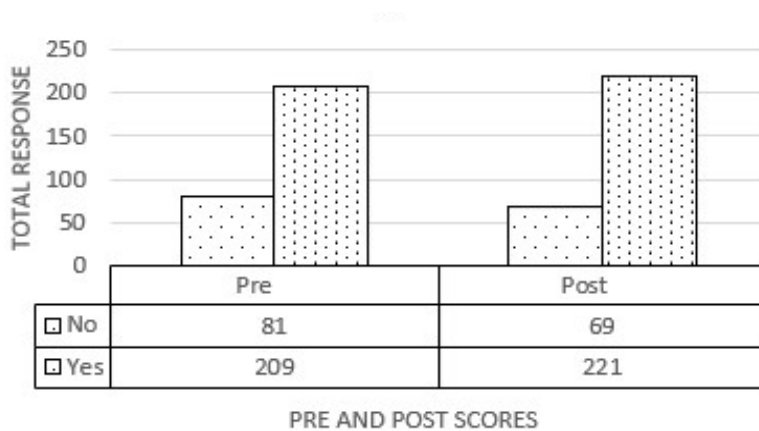


Figure 5.3 *Students Noticing Teacher Actions*

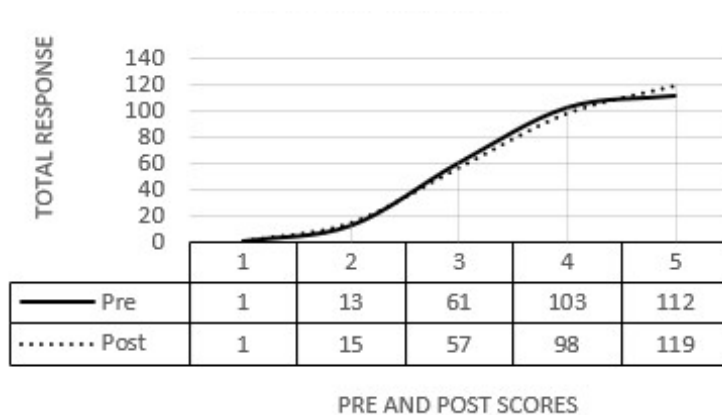


Figure 5.4 *Students Valuing Teaching Actions*

Two methods in which students perceived teacher presence in the online classroom are categorized by communication to and from the teacher and a connection felt with the teacher.

Communication. Student success and engagement in the online learning environment requires student willingness to connect and communicate through electronic communication, like email and other asynchronous and synchronous methods (Martin, Stamper, & Flowers, 2020). The type and quality of communication between teachers and

students is an important element in the quality of virtual schools (Harms, Niederhauser, Davis, Roblyer, & Gilbert, 2006; Lowry, Roberts, Romano, Cheney, & Hightower, 2006) and is a factor associated with virtual school success (Moore & Kearlsey, 1996). Success in Echo Virtual Academy ultimately comes from student engagement and student success. Communication between teachers and students in virtual education has been determined to be vital to student success (Belair, 2012; Dennen, Darabi, & Smith, 2007; Ferdig, Cavanaugh, DiPietro, Black, & Dawson, 2009; Stone & Springer, 2019; Watson, 2007; Weiner, 2003). One-on-one communication methods help facilitate good relationships between teachers and students (Borup & Stevens, 2017; Stone & Springer, 2019).

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| 12th grader #2: | I would like my teacher to offer me help and make contact with me asking if I need any help. I want the teachers to put in the time to understand my situation. |
| 11th grader #13: | Being able to contact my teachers any time I need help is also really reassuring because it helps to know that you don't have to figure it out by yourself.” |
| 12th grader #5: | You can email or call them and they can tell you what to do and it can really help. |

Communication types are limited by what communication avenues are approved by Echo Virtual Academy. For example, some schools have instant messaging abilities within their learning management system (Borup, Graham & Velasquez, 2013), but this virtual school does not. This school only used the internal email system and phone calls/text messages to whatever phone number parents permitted to be listed within the LMS. Communication methods that students reported as helping them feel connected to teachers

included the list of all approved communication methods at the school, namely phone calls, text messages, email, and individual live lesson sessions.

Phone calls and text messages. The use of phone numbers for communication was the most used and student preferred method of communication. When asked about the types of communication that connected her to her teachers, Interviewee #3 commented in her interview, “I got some emails, and some phone calls and some text messages.”

Researcher: What did you prefer?

Interviewee #3: I think the phone call.

Researcher: What did you like about the phone call?

Interviewee #3: I feel like more messages can go through and the message can actually go through if you’re using your voice to talk to them instead of just texting.

This feeling from Interviewee #3 that the phone call was the best method of communication contradicts the findings of Belair (2012) who found that teachers and students preferred written communication because students do not always answer phone calls and do not always return voicemails. From the teacher’s perspective in the Belair (2012) study, the rate of return of spending time making phone calls versus how many students return phone calls can be low, but once contact is made, the phone call is an effective synchronous method of communicating with students. Student comments in this study support the benefits of the phone call contact. The student comments on the survey indicated that they find value in using phone calls with teachers, as shown with the following quotes:

- 10th grader #8: When I really need help I call them or text them.
- 11th grader #10: Sometimes if I am unable to answer emails my teachers will sometimes call me and make sure that I am ok.
- 12th grader #2: When I call them, a lot of the teachers are really nice and are really friendly, so it's easier to communicate.

Email. Rapport with online students can happen through email, but teachers need to be cognizant of their tone since it is easy for emails and other written communication to come off as impersonal or even cold (Boling, et al., 2012). This study supports these findings. In her interview, Interviewee #5 said:

Some of them put encouraging things in their emails like 'Let's finish this strong' or 'If you need help, I'm here.' You can also tell in their emails, their personality. Not everyone will have the same writing style, but they try to put their personality in it so it's more approachable.

The Dickinson (2017) study focused specifically on the tone in emails and found that when positive comments and encouragement were included in emails to students, students responded with appreciation and had higher grades than when the tone in emails was more formal and impersonal. This finding is supported by this research study. Interviewee #2 said that receiving emails from her teachers motivates her "to try harder and know that if I am stuck they are there to help me." Interviewee #1 had similar sentiments in her interview when she said, "A lot of the times when teachers aren't doing

emails, it's really hard to know what's going on and a student has a hard time opening up to teachers or asking for help because they don't feel like they're trying."

Stone & Springer (2019) researched the impact of online teachers responding quickly to student emails. This study found students felt that faster email responses equated to more virtually present instructors who were more available for answering questions than instructors who were slower to answer. In this study, instructors reached out by email to students who were falling behind on lessons or who were failing. These asynchronous contacts helped many of these struggling students to get "back on track with their studies" (Stone & Springer, 2019, p. 164). In Interviewee #3's interview, she supported the idea of email communication to struggling students being helpful, when she said, "Teachers send email about students if they are behind and they invite you to a group live lesson on the topic or they invite you to come meeting one on one."

A specific type of email is the weekly announcement email. Sending announcements weekly helps students know they are not alone, and that the instructor is available (Martin, Wang, & Sadaf, 2018). Interviewee #1 commented in her interview that teachers "sending out weekly emails shows that they care and they're trying to help you in the class," commented Interviewee #1.

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|-----------------------------|---|
| 10 th grader #2: | Weekly announcements helped keep me reminded of what was coming up. |
| 11 th grader #9: | The announcements helped because they keep you informed on what's going on. |
| Interviewee #3: | They let me understand more about what we are going to be working on that week. |

Students receive daily emails from the school and their other teachers. The sheer amount of school communication students receive is another limitation to my study. Because of the communication fatigue factor, students might not have paid attention to the intervention of the weekly email from their English teachers because they were also receiving emails from all their other teachers about similar topics, live lessons, essays, etc. Student 9th grader #1 wrote, “There are too many weekly announcements that don't even apply to me. Such as college and career and stuff. If I signed up for it, it'd be fine. But I'm not signed up therefore why do I get 1-2 emails about it every day?” Tenth grader #13 wrote, “Weekly announcements depends, for some its useful, others not so much.”

An illustration of students not responding to emails happened during this study. An email was sent to the 96 students who completed the pre-survey at the beginning of a week inviting them to participate in the post-survey. Of those, 46 students opened their email within two days of it being sent, according to “read receipts” I received. A follow--up email was sent two days later to encourage students to take the post-survey by a given date. In total, 84 emails were opened, but only 58 students responded on the post-survey. I received “read receipts” on emails sent to students for two months following when the emails were sent. This illustrates one of the very issues I was trying to identify in the study; do students pay attention to their teachers? Students do not read email in a timely manner. Some students did not open their email and never saw the invitation to participate in the post-survey.

Individual live lessons. Another means of communicating with students is through individual conferences within an internet-based meeting platform. At this school, teachers often use the Adobe Connect platform as a meeting room for students to meet with them

for individual tutoring. As 11th grader # 3, commented, teachers “can ask the student to have a one on one live lesson with them, so that they can better understand where the student is and what they need help with.” In her interview, Interviewee #2 said, “[Teachers] probably have hundreds of students but they take the time out of their day to tell one individual student, ‘Hey these are my office hours, if you need help, go in at this time.’” This individual live lesson session, or web-based conferencing, mentioned by Interviewee #2 is beginning to be mentioned in the literature more often as a useful tool for communicating with students (Eisenbach & Greathouse, 2020; Kalaivani, 2020).

Feedback. The means of communication that students in this study perceived as the most important was feedback on their assignments. The qualitative data showed that feedback was coded 69 times from answers on the post-survey indicating that feedback was important to students for their success in the class. Stone & Springer (2019) state that by “providing prompt feedback on students’ contributions and assessment tasks, students are assured that their lecturer is ‘present’” (p. 149). Online instructors who offer timely feedback often have higher rates of student satisfaction in their courses than those who do not take advantage of this element of online teacher presence (Dickinson, 2017). Having clear communication about teacher expectations on assignments was a common idea brought up by students on the post-survey, as illustrated by this comment written by 10th grader #12, “it really helps getting real-time feedback as to what they’re looking for when they’re grading assignments.”

The quantitative data also indicated that instructor feedback was noticed and appreciated (Figure 5.5). The indicators improved from the presurvey to the postsurvey. Figure 5.6 shows how the degree to which students valued feedback.

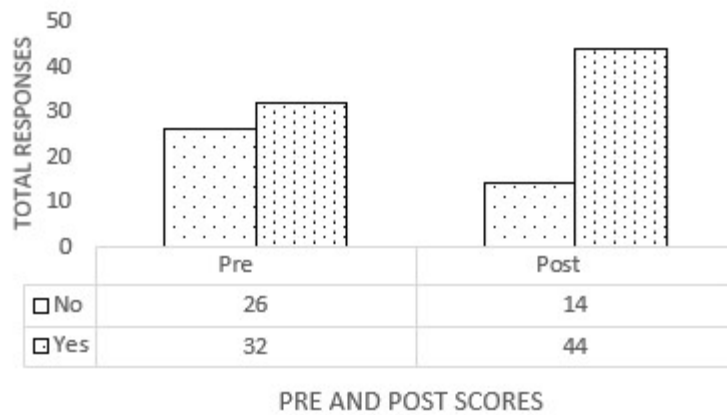


Figure 5.5 *Students noticing teacher feedback*

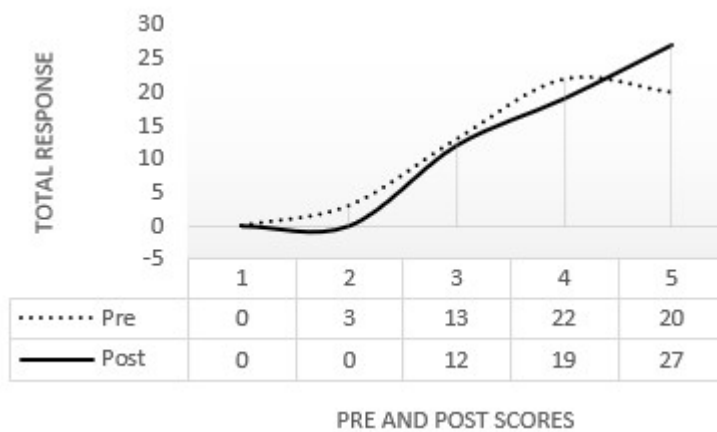


Figure 5 .6 *How much students value teacher feedback*

The quantitative data is supported by qualitative data provided on the pre-survey and post-survey. There were some differences between student perceptions of feedback between the presurvey and the postsurvey (Figure 5.3). The overall appreciation of feedback increased between the surveys with an increased number indicating they “very much” appreciate the feedback they were provided on the post-survey compared to the pre-survey.

In addition to feedback, teachers should try all methods of communication available to them to find what works for individual students so that students notice when teachers are trying to communicate with them.

Connection. “Students don’t just want an expert; they want *their instructor*. When students feel like they know you and have a connection with you, they are more likely to seek you out when they need additional assistance” (Manderach, 2009, p. 2). A connection between a teacher and student increases student engagement (Brandt, Barth, Merritt, & Hale, 2020).

Interviewee #2 gave this advice to teachers about how to connect with students:

To connect to students- send a email or whatever it is saying ‘Hey, I’ve noticed you’re struggling to get caught up’ is a good invitation to students and letting them know that the teachers are available and they are inviting me to get help.

Students and instructors must have cooperation and collaboration to increase online student engagement (Dixson, 2017). Together, cooperation and collaboration result in connections. Interviewee #4 commented on the importance of having a connection with her teachers: “It motivates me to try harder and it lets me know that if I am stuck they are there to help me.”

Implications

The purpose of this action research was to determine how and to what extent teacher actions affect student engagement and student perceptions of their engagement. While there were some limitations, as will be discussed below, this research study indicated some positive student perceptions connected to teacher actions. The implications of this study

are greater now than they might have been in previous years given the new context in which education is being delivered to students. With the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, the nation's brick and mortar schools suddenly shuttered to help curb the spread of the Coronavirus. Online schooling exploded. Almost overnight, 84% of students in the United States began receiving virtual instruction (Frost, 2020). Many traditionally brick and mortar teachers unexpectedly found themselves teaching virtually without any warning or extensive training.

Within the United States, 60% of school districts began the 2020-21 school year operating on modified schedules that included virtual learning days (Kamenetz, 2020). For example, some districts sent students to school for two days a week, with students attending the building on alternating days, leaving all students with three days of virtual learning. Other districts had students attend for four days a week, leaving one day for virtual learning. Students and teachers who would not choose to do virtual learning under typical circumstances, are now forced into it, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This unexpected shift away from traditional brick and mortar learning has caused parents to look for alternative schooling for their children. According to Google analytics, from the beginning of the pandemic around March 2020 to the fall of 2020, 43% of parents had actively researched sending their child to an online K-12 school or had already enrolled their students at a virtual school (Frost, 2020). The biggest virtual charter schools in the United States, K12 and Connections Academy, experienced a huge surge after the onslaught of the pandemic. For the 2020-21 school year, K12 reported a 57% increase in enrollment while Connections Academy reported a 41% enrollment increase over the previous school year (Kamentz & Korth, 2020). Other virtual schools around the country

also reported large enrollment boosts for the start of the 2020-21 school year (Watson, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred the growth of on-line education to an unprecedented degree, thus increasing the need for data on what students need and expect from teachers in the virtual environment. Teacher presence is a necessary part of the online learning experience for students, making knowing and applying teacher actions that help improve student engagement more important than in previous years.

Three types of implications have emerged from this study. Personal implications, implication for professional practice, and implications for future research. Each of these implications are discussed below.

Personal Implications

When I started planning this research study I was working as an English teacher at this virtual school, yet when I conducted this research study, I was working in a leadership role at the school as the supervisor for the English teachers and had become a literacy interventionist for secondary students. Mertler (2017) describes action research as “a process that improves education, in general, by incorporating change” (p. 17). I feel that this process changed me and my perspective of what I can do and how I can help other educators. As a literacy interventionist, I needed to identify and work with students whose reading and other literacy skills are below grade level. Due to my increased experience with planning and conducting a research study, I have found that my job has become easier. Instead of simply assigning interventions and collecting random data that may or may not be useful in the future, I am now designing a more formal research process through which I gather and analyze data. I have automatically begun writing research questions to guide

my intervention process and I am more intentional about collecting baseline data from each student that will help answer the research questions. My ability to analyze data, both qualitative and quantitative, have increased over the course of conducting this first action research project, and is helping my effectiveness in my job.

In my role as a teacher supervisor at Echo Virtual Academy, I helped train and guide teachers in the virtual environment; I needed to know best practices to help teachers be the best virtual teachers they can be. This study demonstrates that teacher actions have an impact on students and that students perceive their teachers as being important to the learning process. Writing the literature review for this study also helped me pay more attention to the research that has been done and is being done focusing specifically on teacher presence and teacher actions in the online environment. I was able to share what I have been learning about best practices with my downline and have seen these teachers increase their teacher presence and support their students more effectively.

Recommendations

Because of this research study, I have developed recommendations for teachers and virtual school to increase their influence on student's engagement. The recommendations for teachers are 1) be intentional about the timing of increasing teacher presence, 2) increase viable communication methods with students, 3) teachers should spend time developing emotional connections with students, and 4) teachers should improve the course community of their class.

Teacher Recommendations

Be Intentional about the Timing of Increasing Teacher Presence.

Students who are engaged with their learning and their writing need additional

teacher presence at critical points during the school year. Teachers should be aware of their learning designs and patterns of student engagement during the year and use this information to intentionally increase their presence (Nguyen, Huptych, & Rienties, 2018). Students who are motivated to do well in school will notice teacher efforts to increase presence in the course through feedback and supplemental materials, for example, and might take the extra attention as a signal to maintain their engagement when they might otherwise decrease their efforts. Students who are not as self-motivated as their peers will also benefit from the increased teacher presence.

Increase Direct Communication with Students. Students want communication from their teachers, and they expect to receive helpful information from them. But students are also used to instant gratification when it comes to wanting answers. Google, Siri, and Alexa have spoiled them. If teachers could use instant messaging tools or similar technologies to increase viable communication (Drange & Kargaard, 2017). Students want to receive information from their teachers, but the method needs to fit the way students are accustomed to getting information. Tools such as Remind, WhatsApp, or TalkingPoints are secure internet applications that can easily send communication between students and teachers using cellphone. Apps such as this can provide an easy to access forum where students and teachers can easily communicate.

Spend Time Developing Connections with Students. Teachers should spend time developing emotional connections with students. Teachers need to acknowledge the impact of the emotional relationships they have with students and work on improving individual relationships with students (Roorda et al., 2019). Even though secondary students require more cognitive attachment to teachers to increase engagement, having an emotional

connection facilitates the cognitive (Yang & Bear, 2018). Early intervention is needed when negative teacher–student relationships are forming to prevent a cascading effect of negative relationships in the future (Roorda et al., 2019). Improving communication, as recommended previously, goes a long way towards increasing emotional connections. Teachers can also build rapport with students when they are in synchronous communication with students by asking them questions and remembering details students have previously shared.

Improve the Course Community. The course community in a school includes teachers and peers (Borup et al., 2020). This recommendation is combined with the previous recommendations of improving communication and developing emotional connections with students. The teacher relationship is one aspect of student engagement. Teachers can also work on helping students make connections with their peers within a class. Using class discussion boards effectively can allow students to cognitively engage with their peers asynchronously. Teachers can also provide time during synchronous lessons for student attendees to chat with one another, whether with text or using video cameras. Having planned office hours to give students a reliable means for meeting up with their teacher and peers; this interaction can help build connections between students and teachers, as well as students and their peers (Lowenthal et al., 2017). In addition to office hours, holding planned virtual activities where teachers and students can show faces and

interact synchronously while doing something enjoyable together, would help build these connections.

School Recommendations

Keep Teacher Course Loads to a Reasonable Size. A recommendation for virtual schools is to keep the student load of teachers at a reasonable size so teachers have time to work on their outreach to students through effective communication methods. Stone & Springer (2019) found that large class sizes and insufficient time can impede interaction and communication between instructors and students. They emphasize that keeping class sizes at realistic numbers enhances the ability of teachers to create a more effective online community of students. Specific numbers mentioned in the Stone & Springer (2019) study say that teachers should have fewer than 300 students and class sizes of around 30 are ideal. For Echo Virtual Academy, it would be beneficial to allow teachers to have fewer total students and consider having additional, smaller sections of classes so that students can learn who is in their class and have more meaningful interactions with their classmates.

Develop Personal Communities. While schools are not responsible for the personal communities of students, they can help encourage students to develop positive relationships in their personal lives. Personal communities include friends and family that surround a student (Borup et al., 2020). Virtual schools can provide training to parents and other adults connected to student learning to help them assist in organizing and managing home learning environments and assisting with content questions and other needs that may

arise. (Borup et al., 2019; Borup, et al., 2017). Schools could also make available school personnel with the specific job of helping parents navigate their roles.

Implications for Future Research

This was my first action research study, which has taught me much about designing research, collecting data, and analyzing results. While this study yielded interesting results, being able to continue this study would elucidate further data that would be beneficial to virtual schools and online teachers. Additional research focusing on individual aspects of this study would clarify the findings. I would do another round of research.

Second Cycle Changes

A future research cycle of action research could improve the quality and quantity of reported data. Including more student participants in the study would improve the reliability of the data. For example, in my study only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the high school population participated, but by having half (or more) of the student in the high school as participants would greatly enhance the reliability of the results. Including additional teachers in the study would also increase the variety of the teacher actions that students experience and would show the impact of teachers to a greater extent than this small study.

Measure Student Engagement Across the School Year. Collecting regular quantitative data by looking at student motivation across the school year to discover the differences between student motivation at the beginning of a semester, during a semester, and at the end of a semester would yield more accurate data than only looking at a six week time period. Students typically have good intentions at the beginning of the semester to do better and try harder, but this enthusiasm seems to wane as time goes on. This research would collect student attitudes about their engagement at regular intervals throughout the

school year to see how student engagement and interest ebbs and flows. Surveys are one method of gathering student perceptions during the school year. Surveys also demonstrate that the instructor cares about improving the overall educational experience of students (Clifford, 2020).

Another aspect to student engagement is pulling data from school records to verify the information collected from students. Comparing student reported engagement data with attendance records, class completion, grades, grade point average, and attendance at synchronous lessons would provide valuable insights into how directly student engagement ebbs and flows across the school year.

Measure Teacher Actions Across the School Year. Based on the quantitative data collected from student engagement, adding additional quantitative data about the effectiveness of teacher actions would help measure the impact. This research would improve upon the idea that students see instructors as being connected to the online educational experience, additional second cycle research could include a focus on how teacher actions impact student engagement throughout the school year. Combined with the student engagement surveys and school data, a more direct connection between teacher actions and student engagement could be made. Learning how or if teacher actions have more of an impact on student engagement throughout the year would provide good insight into what teacher actions could be enhanced at certain times of the year to have the greatest impact.

Measure the Effectiveness of Communication Tools. Another aspect of this study would be to research how, when, and to what extent high school students respond to and place value on emails and other communication tools. In Echo Virtual Academy

environment communication is necessary and vital for teachers to pass on information to students, but current methods do not seem to be as effective as they could be. Gathering more qualitative data specifically focusing on how teachers and schools could use communication tools more effectively to benefit students would provide valuable information to teachers and schools.

Continuing the Study

Because this study was conducted at only one virtual school, being able to expand the study to additional schools within the same school system, or at other virtual schools, would enhance the validity of the collected data. Researching schools within the same virtual school system could validate the experience of students at the school used for my research study. Having a greater student population from different areas would improve the validity of the data.

Expanding the research setting to additional schools could also provide insight into the effect learning management systems have on online classes and by extension, on student engagement. This research would require investigating student engagement across different learning management systems to learn if increased teacher presence is more effective because of the format of the courses. Different schools employ different tools and some tools are used in different ways, which could provide additional insight into what students notice, value, and appreciate. I think comparing and contrasting student engagement data from different sources would further improve virtual teacher practice in a broader and more helpful manner.

Limitations

By virtue of the fact that this school is on-line, the participants do not actually know their teachers, having never met in person and rarely see their teachers synchronously. In a brick and mortar setting, it is easier to encourage participation on a survey specifically about a certain classroom. For example, if I were in a classroom with my own classes, I would have developed relationships with them by January of the school year and would have had rapport with the students that would possibly led to greater participation. In this virtual environment, students do not have that same degree of rapport with their teachers, which oftentimes leads to fewer students willing to do “something extra” for a teacher they are less familiar with.

If I were to do this again, I would have a school leader send out the invitations for participate in the survey, due to administrators having greater name recognition and authority than I. This could have improved the response rate.

The representative sample is weak due to the poor response rate and limited number of students who participated in the study. This is the reality of working with online high school students. To exacerbate this situation, I was not the teacher of any of the participants, and I had to rely on help from the English teachers to encourage students to participate in the study. Given this, the results do not encompass as broad a range of students as would have been possible had I been the students’ teacher and known to the participants. Also, because students were not sitting in a classroom with a specific task of completing a survey, this survey was most likely viewed as more optional, thus limiting the participants.

Another limitation relates to the short answer questions on the post-survey. These questions were very targeted towards learning how students felt about specific teacher

actions, which led to shorter answers than if the questions had been less targeted. Having students comment on specific actions kept them from expanding on their thoughts about the topic. Ironically, the focus of the research study on how well teachers' actions affect student behavior is a limitation of this study because students had to pay attention to teacher actions, in this case, emails, to even know about the study. Using the read receipt feature of the email system, I knew when any participant read their email inviting them to take the post-survey and I received read receipts up to three months after the original email was sent, well past the conclusion of the study. This demonstrates that there are students who do not pay attention to teacher actions due to the fact that they do not read emails that are sent to them.

There are many variables that are outside of my litmus of control in the virtual environment. In a brick and mortar setting, it is simple to ask students to reflect on their experience within one classroom. In the virtual environment, all subjects are learned in the same manner, which leads to the conclusion that students have a harder time differentiating between their subjects in the virtual environment than in the brick and mortar classroom. For example, one student on the post-survey commented, "In my History class she made a rubric explaining it very detailed which in the end helped a lot more than having to guess." This student was specifically asked to talk about their experience with English but chose to talk about their history teacher instead. Another student answered the question of how having access to a teacher helps them with, "It helps because they reply fairly quick[sic]. Especially my Chemistry teacher. She replies and grades assignments seemingly instantly after turned in."

Closing Thoughts

Teacher presence is one aspect of the student engagement puzzle that schools and teachers can intentionally address to increase successful student outcomes. “In courses where the instructor appears to be present, student satisfaction or ratings of the quality of learning experience is more likely to be high” (Kyei-Blakson, Ntuli, & Donnelly, 2019, p. 60). This research study focused on determining if student engagement was affected by five specific research based teacher actions identified by Dixson (2017): weekly emails, short videos, live lesson features, grading feedback, and grading rubrics. High school students were provided with an opportunity to take a pre-survey before experiencing a teacher intervention of increasing weekly announcement emails with a short video. After the six-week intervention period, students who took the pre-survey were invited to take the post-survey. The three research questions were answered based on the responses of the students who participated in the two surveys and the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the surveys. Overall, student engagement decreased, but not at a statistically significant amount, based on self-reported student engagement scores. Data also showed that students valued, noticed, and appreciated the teacher actions they were exposed to.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Pre-Survey

The Online Student Engagement Scale

Thank you for taking this survey! This should take less than 10 minutes to complete.
Engagement is defined as how much attention interest, and curiosity a student gives to their learning.

* Required

What is your student number? *

Your answer

Please find your UCA student ID number by clicking on your Gradebook. It is the number in parenthesis after your name

HOME | PLANNER | VIRTUAL LIBRARY | MORE ▾

Full Transcript | High School Transcript

User Grade Book for Marcie Demo (ID 224367)

Show me active ▾ sections Go ?

What grade are you in? *

- ☐ 9th
- ☐ 10th
- ☐ 11th
- ☐ 12th

Are you on track to graduate on time?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

How many years have you been a student at Utah Connections Academy? *

- ☐ This is my first year
- ☐ This is my second (2nd) year
- ☐ This is my third (3rd) year
- ☐ This is my fourth (4th) year
- ☐ I have been here for 5+ years

Please read the following 10 statements and decide how well they describe you. Characteristic means describes. Please be honest!

How well do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you? *

	not at all like me	not really like me	somewhat like me	characteristic of me	very much like me
1. Putting forth effort	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Being organized	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Taking good notes over readings, PowerPoints, or video lectures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Listening/reading carefully	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How well do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you? *

	not at all like me	not really like me	somewhat like me	like me	very much like me
6. Applying course materials to my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Finding ways
to make the
course
interesting

☐☐☐☐☐

8. Really
desiring to
learn the
material

☐☐☐☐☐

9. Getting a
good grade

☐☐☐☐☐

10. Doing well
on the
tests/quizzes

☐☐☐☐☐

**For the following questions, how important do you feel the teacher actions
would be to help you be successful at school?**

This is not asking if your teacher does the action. Please think about if the teacher action would be helpful to you, or not.

11. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders *

1

2

3

4

5

very unimportant

☐☐☐☐☐

very important

12. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the
course *

1

2

3

4

5

very unimportant

☐☐☐☐☐

very important

13. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g. text, audio, video, and visuals) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

14. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

15. The instructor uses various features in synchronous sessions (LiveLessons) to interact with students (e.g. polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

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What do you notice?

For the following questions, please answer about your English teacher. Please be honest. If you don't know, please choose "I'm not sure".

16. Does your English teacher send/post regular announcements or email reminders? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

17. Does your English teacher create short videos? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

18. Does your English teacher provide feedback in various modalities (text, audio or video)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

18. Does your English teacher provide feedback in various modalities (text, audio or video)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

19. Does your English teacher post grading rubrics? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

20. Does your English teacher use various features in LiveLessons? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

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Post-Survey

Section 1 of 3

The Online Student Engagement Scale

Thank you for taking this second survey! This should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Engagement is defined as how much attention interest, and curiosity a student gives to their learning.

What is your UCA Student ID Number? *

Short answer text

...

Please read the following 10 statements and decide how well they describe you. Characteristic means describes. Please be honest!

Description (optional)

How well do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you? *

not at all like me not really like me somewhat like ... characteristic o... very much like ...

- | | not at all like me | not really like me | somewhat like ... | characteristic o... | very much like ... |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Putting forth ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Being organi... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Taking good ... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Listening/rea... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Finding ways... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

How well do the following behaviors, thoughts, and feelings describe you? *

not at all like me not really like me somewhat like ... like me very much like ...

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6. Applying cou... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Finding ways... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. Finding ways to make the course interesting

☐☐☐☐☐

8. Really desiring to learn the material

☐☐☐☐☐

9. Getting a good grade

☐☐☐☐☐

10. Doing well on the tests/quizzes

☐☐☐☐☐

For the following questions, how important do you feel the teacher actions would be to help you be successful at school?

This is not asking if your teacher does the action. Please think about if the teacher action would be helpful to you, or not.

11. The instructor sends/posts regular announcements or email reminders *

1

2

3

4

5

very unimportant

☐☐☐☐☐

very important

12. The instructor creates short videos to increase instructor presence in the course *

1

2

3

4

5

very unimportant

☐☐☐☐☐

very important

13. The instructor provides feedback using various modalities (e.g. text, audio, video, and visuals) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

14. The instructor posts grading rubrics for all assignments *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

15. The instructor uses various features in synchronous sessions (LiveLessons) to interact with students (e.g. polls, emoticons, whiteboard, text, or audio and video chat) *

	1	2	3	4	5	
very unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	very important

After section 1 Continue to next section



What do you notice?



For the following questions, please answer about your English teacher. Please be honest. If you don't know, please choose "I'm not sure".

16. Does your English teacher send/post regular announcements or email reminders? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

17. Does your English teacher create short videos? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure

How are you affected by teacher actions?



For the following questions: Think about how teacher actions have affected you as you worked on your writing assignments (test essays, discussions, and portfolios) this semester.

21. How much did each teacher action help you as you completed writing assignments (test essays, discussions, and portfolios) this semester? *

	not at all	not really	a little	it helped	very much
Weekly announ...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short videos	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grading feedba...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grading rubrics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LiveLesson feat...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

☐ I'm not sure

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Explain how your engagement with writing change after the six-week study.
 - a. What teacher actions did you experience this semester?
 - b. What actions did you like? What did you not like?
 - c. What action, if any, helped you do your writing better?
2. What did your English teacher do that made you feel supported this semester?
3. What did your English teacher do, if anything, that made you want to complete your writing assignments?
4. What did your English teacher do that had no effect on your desire to complete your assignments?
5. What do you think about what teachers do in the online school?
6. What are 1-2 suggestions you would like to offer to improve your teacher's presence in your online English class?
7. What other comments would you like to make about this experience?

APPENDIX B

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY

Invitation Letter

Dear Invitee,

My name is Mrs. Harvie and I am currently the Secondary Literacy Specialist here at Snow Virtual School. Like you, I am an online student! I am studying at The University of South Carolina working on a doctorate degree (Ed.D.) in Curriculum & Instruction focused on Instructional Technology.

I need your help! I am completing a research study about how teacher's online presence affects student engagement with writing assignments, and I need your opinions!

Participating in the study means that you will take two surveys that should each take less than 15 minutes to complete. You will take one survey now and another survey in March. In between the two surveys, your English teacher will be trying some new teacher actions.

I want to compare the answers on your first survey with the answers on the second survey to see if the teacher actions change your answers. The questions on the surveys will ask you how you feel about writing assignments, how long you spend working on assignments, and how you feel about interactions with your English teacher.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time. The surveys are completely anonymous, which means that you will not be asked to provide your name or other identifying information.

If you would like to participate in the study, please read the Informed Consent letter below. To begin the study, click the survey link at the end of the email.

Thank you for your time and participation

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adrienne Harvie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Adrienne" and last name "Harvie" clearly distinguishable.

Adrienne Harvie, M.Ed.

Doctoral Student, University of South Carolina

Letter of Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study about how a teacher's presence affects student engagement with writing assignments. The researcher is inviting 100 high school students at Snow Virtual School to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Adrienne Harvie, who is a doctoral student at The University of South Carolina.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to study how a teacher's online presence affects student engagement with writing assignments.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study:

- You will be asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire that includes three questions that will take approximately one minute to complete.
- You will be asked to complete a survey ranking your thoughts on how much certain activities engage you

Here are some sample questions:

1. I am engaged by LiveLessons
2. I feel supported by my English teacher
3. How often have you completed a draft of a portfolio before turning in the final draft?

Voluntary Nature of the Study

This study is completely voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. Additionally, this study is anonymous. Your teachers will not know if you did nor did not participate in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later and not complete the second survey.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as fatigue, and stress. Being in this study will not pose any risks to your safety or wellbeing. The benefits of the study include voicing your thoughts about your writing assignments and your interactions with your English teacher. This study aims to provide research related to the student perspective of engagement with their writing assignments.

Payment

This study is completely voluntary; there will be no reimbursement or payment for time.

Privacy

Any information you provide will be kept anonymous. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything other details about you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by password protection. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions

If you have questions now or later, you may contact the researcher, Adrienne Harvie, via aharvie@email.sc.edu. You can ask any questions you have before you begin the survey.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By clicking the link below, I understand and agree to the terms described above.

By clicking the link to the survey, I agree to participate in the study.

Link to Survey:

APPENDIX C

PORTFOLIO DESCRIPTIONS AND RUBRICS

9th Grade Portfolios

ODYSSEY SUMMARY

For this assignment, you will write a one-paragraph **summary** about one of the selections you read during this unit. Selections include *The Odyssey* or *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Make sure to include at least 2–3 vocabulary words from this unit in your Summary draft.

Prewriting Tips

Follow these steps as part of your prewriting for this assignment.

Brainstorm

Think about the following guidelines for a one-paragraph composition to help you brainstorm ideas for your summary:

- Make your main idea clear.
- Develop your main idea fully.
- Provide a strong ending.

Regardless of what you choose to write about, take time to narrow down the main points of your selection.

Sentence Purpose

Powerful writing is only as good as the ideas it conveys. Use the following tips on varying sentence types to create a more concise summary:

1. A clear **topic sentence** can help convey your ideas. The topic sentence can come at the beginning, middle, or end of a paragraph. Although its placement may vary, its purpose is always the same. A topic sentence states the main idea or argument of a paragraph.

Functions of a topic sentence include the following:

- state the main idea
- focuses the limited subject on one main point that can be adequately covered in the paragraph

- is more general than the sentences that develop it
2. The **supporting sentences**, which form the body of the paragraph, answer the questions raised by the topic sentence. Supporting sentences explain the topic sentence and provide specific details, facts, examples, incidents, or reasons.
3. A **concluding sentence** recalls the main idea and adds a strong ending to a paragraph. They are often called *clinchers*.

Organize Ideas

Your summary will include a beginning, middle and an ending. How you organize the body of your paper will depend on your subject. Follow these tips:

- **Beginning**—The beginning should engage the reader and point the way.
- **Middle**—The middle develops the idea with abundant details.
- **Ending**—The ending draws together the ideas and feels like a good stopping point.

Drafting, Revising, and Editing

Draft

- Your draft will be much stronger if you take time to plan it out rather than rushing through it the night before it's due.
- Take the time to make your draft the best it can be before you turn it in to your teacher. It doesn't have to be perfect, but it should demonstrate that you have put time and effort into the assignment. Do your best to write a good rough draft now—that will help you produce a *great* final draft later on.
- Make sure your supporting sentences help answer the question or idea presented in your topic sentence.

Revise and Edit

- Think carefully about your teacher's feedback as you revise. You may also want to share your draft with a friend, a family member, or another adult for additional feedback. You may not choose to apply every suggestion, but give each suggestion some thought.
- Your final draft should reflect both **revision** and **editing**. When you **revise**, you address major issues in the content, clarity, or organization of your draft. When you **edit**, you fix errors, smooth out awkward spots, and polish your writing.

ROMEO AND JULIET PERSUASIVE ESSAY

Objective: Write a persuasive essay and support your point of view about a topic related to Romeo and Juliet.

Choose ONE of the following prompts from which you will choose a side and defend your opinion with support from the text.

Prompt Choices

- The main characters of the play are Romeo and Juliet. Which character changes the most and how does that affect the outcome of the play? Support your answer with the text.
-
- The prince declares at the end of the play that some people will be pardoned and others will be punished. Who is at fault for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet? Choose the character that you think is most responsible for the deaths of these lovers. Support your answer with the text.
- Many people question how “true” Romeo’s love for Juliet really is because of his infatuation with Rosaline at the start of the play. Do you think Romeo truly loves Juliet? Why or why not? Use examples from the play to support your answer.
- Some people believe Romeo and Juliet is more of a romance than a tragedy. Persuade your audience on whether you believe the play is more of a romantic story or a tragic story. Use examples from the play to support your answer.
- The penalty of death goes unused throughout the play. Not until the suicides of the final act does the feud end. Is the threat of death a good deterrent in preventing acts of violence? Support your answer with the text.
- Of the following list: Romeo, Juliet, Tybalt, Mercutio, Friar Laurence, or the Nurse, who is the most memorable character of the play Support your answer with the text.



Prewriting for Romeo and Juliet

This graphic organizer is your rough draft portfolio. Only turn in this completed chart for the rough draft!

<p>Introduction</p> <p>Topic: _____</p> <p>Hook: _____ (attention grabber)</p> <p>Tie your hook to your topic: _____</p> <p>(In your written essay, give a brief summary of relevant parts of the play here)</p> <p>REMEMBER: A thesis is a statement explaining what you will be proving in your paper.</p> <p>Thesis: Write a tentative thesis statement for the prompt of your choice.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>Body Paragraph 1</p> <p>What is the first example you are going to include to prove your thesis?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>What quote are you going to use to prove your idea/example? (Act _____, Scene _____, Line _____)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How does this quote prove your thesis?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>Transition</p> <p>Body Paragraph 2</p> <p>What is the second example you are going to include to prove your thesis?</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>What quote are you going to use to prove your idea/example? (Act _____, Scene _____, Line _____)</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>How does this quote prove your thesis?</p>

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Transition</p> <p>Body Paragraph 3</p> <p>What is the next example you are going to include to prove your thesis?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>What quote are you going to use to prove your idea/example? (Act _____, Scene _____, Line _____)</p> <hr/> <hr/>
<p>How does this quote prove your thesis?</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Transition</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>Restate (reword) your thesis:</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>Summarize (reword) the main ideas of your paper</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>What lingering idea do you want your reader to keep thinking about once they have finished reading your paper? Your paper should end with an idea that connects to the real world- something beyond simply Romeo and Juliet.</p> <hr/> <hr/>

The graphic organizer will be turned in for the rough draft portfolio.

For the final draft, turn each box into its own paragraph. Remember, each body paragraph needs to include at least one quote from the play!

For quotations, follow these guidelines:

"It is East and Juliet is the sun," (Act II, Scene II, Line 3).

1. Any words directly from the text should be in quotation marks.
2. There must be a comma after the quote, inside the quotation marks.

3. Act, Scene, and Line information should follow in parenthesis.
4. The period should follow the closed parenthesis.

Write your essay using the MLA format on the next page!

Adapted from: <https://english9hock2012.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/rj-persuasive-topics-and-prewriting-alternative-assignment.pdf>

Name

Class Name

Teacher

Date

Check my Work Link:

Title

Start your essay here

10th Grade Portfolios

Descriptive Portrait Portfolio

- For this portfolio, you will describe a famous person of interest to you by completing some research using a specific resource.
- **FOR THE DRAFT, YOU ARE TURNING IN MY GRAPHIC ORGANIZER, NOT AN ESSAY!**
- To start:
 - Go to [state research database]
 - User name: [user name]
 - Password: [password]
- Follow these steps to find a person to learn about:
 - Gale Reference Collection High School
 - Gale In Context- Biography
 - Scroll down to see categories OR type their name in the search bar.
 - Choose a person of interest to you
 - Click on Read More for more biographical information
 - Read about their lives
 - Make sure to copy the Source Citation at the bottom of the page to include on a Works Cited page at the end of your paper
 - Look in the ON THIS PAGE box for more information you can click through
 - Find pictures so you can describe their physical appearance
 - Find a news article to describe something they've done
 - Watch a video to describe how they act
 - Listen to a sound clip to describe how they speak
- Collect everything about your person in the graphic organizer provided.
 - As you collect information, make sure to find the source citation to add to your Works Cited page. Copy and paste the information found in the Source Citation boxes on the graphic organizer.
 - **You are REQUIRED to have at least 3 sources.**

Graphic Organizer for the draft

- Complete my graphic organizer by taking notes and **turn that in as your rough draft.** Name your file: lastname_firstname_Descriptive
- Put all the information you find into your own words. **DO NOT COPY WORD FOR WORD FROM THE SOURCES. THAT IS PLAGIARISM.**
- **DO NOT TURN IN AN ESSAY FOR THE DRAFT. IT WILL BE RESET AND YOU WILL HAVE TO DO THE ASSIGNMENT AGAIN.**

Essay for the final portfolio

- For your final draft, write up your notes as actual paragraphs. You will have to add your own information to make your paragraphs be at least 4-8 sentences long. I have included an outline you can use to help you with your essay, but the graphic organizer should be enough.
- Works Cited
 - This is on a separate page AFTER the essay. It should not be on the same page with any of the essay
 - Copy and paste the Source Citation information from your sources.
 - Put the sources into alphabetical order based on the first letter of the citation. In the example below, the first letter is K.
 - Your citations will look like this:

"Ken Jeong." Gale Biography Online Collection, Gale, 2010. Gale In Context: Biography,
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1650007310/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=c07b3f5a>. Accessed 30 Oct. 2019.

Essay Outline – Fill in the outline if you would like. **You are not turning this in.** The graphic organizer should be enough for organizing your thoughts, but some students like to use outlines as well, which is why I have provided it.

1. Introduction to your person
 1. Basic facts about them- why they are famous
 1. (Do this paragraph after you complete notes for 2-5)

(Transition sentence to next paragraph)

2. Background
 - a. Name
 - b. Age
 - c. Birthplace
 - d. Occupation(s)
 - e. Other interesting facts about them

(Transition sentence to next paragraph)

3. Physical description
 - a. What do they look like, sound like, act like?
 - b. Be specific and use good descriptive words

(Transition sentence to next paragraph)

4. Fame
 - a. What did they do to become famous
 - b. What do they do now or what were they doing for most of their life

(Transition sentence to next paragraph)

5. Why you like them

(Transition sentence to next paragraph)

6. Conclusion

a. Restate facts about the person: why they are famous, what they do, why you like them

Descriptive Portrait Graphic Organizer - Famous Person

Paragraph 1--Introduction	
Start with an attention grabbing beginning: (This is called a hook. A hook can be a quote, strong sensory detail, short anecdote, etc.).	
Introduce your topic: Provide the basic facts about your person. Why are they famous?	
End with a strong thesis statement: What is the main goal of your description? What is the overall impression you wish to convey? Write a one sentence statement of purpose.	
Source Citation:	

Paragraph 2 (Body)	Paragraph 3 (Body)	Paragraph 4 (Body)
Write a topic sentence for the person's background:	Write a topic sentence for why the person is famous.	Write a topic sentence for why you like them.
<p>Give descriptive supports for the person's background (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name: Age: Birthplace: Occupation: Physical description: 	<p>Give three or more well-chosen descriptive supports for why the person is famous (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What did the person do to become famous? What has the person done most of his/her life? What is the person doing now? 	<p>Give three or more well-chosen descriptive supports for why you like them (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">
Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):	Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):	Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):
Source Citation:	Source Citation:	Source Citation:

***You are required to have at least 3 different sources.**

Paragraph 5--Conclusion	
Restate the overall thesis: (Remind the reader of your primary purpose and the overall impression of your person).	
Summarize your supports: (Write 1-3 sentences reviewing your body paragraphs.)	
Write a closing statement: (Leave the reader with a strong, descriptive impression.)	

THIS IS ALL YOU ARE HANDING IN FOR THE DRAFT. NO ESSAY.

Descriptive Portrait Graphic Organizer - Famous Person - Maya Angelou

Paragraph 1--Introduction	
Start with an attention grabbing beginning: (This is called a hook. A hook can be a quote, strong sensory detail, short anecdote, etc.).	Maya Angelou "is a true example of a persevering spirit and her legacy lives on today." (States News Service)
Introduce your topic: Provide the basic facts about your person. Why are they famous?	Maya Angleou was a famous American writer who wrote stories, books and poems. She was given the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011 by President Barack Obama.
End with a strong thesis statement: What is the main goal of your description? What is the overall impression you wish to convey? Write a one sentence statement of purpose.	Maya Angleou impacted not only the written world, but also the lives of many people, black and white alike.
Source Citation: "Maya Angelou." <i>Contemporary Black Biography</i> , vol. 15, Gale, 1997. <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i> , link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1606000787/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=0cdad2f7 . Accessed 17 Feb. 2021. "SEN. ANGELA WALTON MOSLEY HONORS MAYA ANGELOU DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH." <i>States News Service</i> , 5 Feb. 2021, p. NA. <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i> , link.gale.com/apps/doc/A650866698/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=b41ee202 . Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.	

Paragraph 2 (Body)	Paragraph 3 (Body)	Paragraph 4 (Body)
Write a topic sentence for the person's background:	Write a topic sentence for why the person is famous.	Write a topic sentence for why you like them.
Give descriptive supports for the person's background (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: Maya Angelou • Age: Born April 4, 1928; died May 28, 2014; 86 • Birthplace: St. Louis, MO • Occupation: Author, poet, playwright, professional stage and screen producer, 	Give three or more well-chosen descriptive supports for why the person is famous (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did the person do to become famous? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ She wrote many poems, stories and books. ○ <i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> 	Give three or more well-chosen descriptive supports for why you like them (sensory details, descriptive examples, etc.): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • •

<p>director, performer, and singer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical description: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black American Has a beautiful smile When she was older, she had somewhat poofy gray/black hair. She had style. She was classy. 	<p>(book and a film)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Letter to My Daughter</i> <i>How to Make an American Quilt</i> (film) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What has the person done most of his/her life? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> She has mostly been a writer. What is the person doing now? She has died. 	
Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):	Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):	Write a concluding sentence (Explain the significance of your supports.):
<p>Source Citation: "Maya Angelou." <i>Gale Biography Online Collection</i>, Gale, 2014. <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i>, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CCCXQU075842909/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=62f39cf3. Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.</p> <p>"Maya Angelou." <i>Contemporary Black Biography</i>, vol. 15, Gale, 1997. <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i>, link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1606000787/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=0cdad2f7. Accessed 26 Jan. 2021.</p>	<p>Source Citation: "Maya Angelou." <i>Contemporary Theatre, Film and Television</i>, vol. 86, Gale, 2008. <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i>, link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1609024125/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=69cd3a14. Accessed 26 Jan. 2021.</p>	<p>Source Citation: Fox, Margalit. "Maya Angelou, Lyrical Witness to the Jim Crow South, Dies." <i>New York Times</i>, 29 May 2014, p. A1(L). <i>Gale In Context: Biography</i>, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A369504690/BIC?u=onlinelibrary&sid=BIC&xid=0635e290. Accessed 17 Feb. 2021.</p>

***You are required to have at least 3 different sources.**

Paragraph 5--Conclusion	
Restate the overall thesis: (Remind the reader of your primary purpose and the overall impression of your person).	Through her writing, Maya Angleou was able to impact the lives of many people.
Summarize your supports: (Write 1-3 sentences reviewing your body paragraphs.)	She was an amazing

Write a closing statement: (Leave the reader with a strong, descriptive impression.)	Maya Angelou was truly amazing, “one of the brightest lights of our time -- a brilliant writer, a fierce friend and a truly phenomenal woman.” (Fox)
---	---

THIS IS ALL YOU ARE HANDING IN FOR THE DRAFT. NO ESSAY.

Descriptive Portrait Portfolio Rubric

Introduction	Yes	Kind of	No
Does the paragraph begin with a complete “quick summary”?			
Does the first paragraph end with a thesis statement that strongly and clearly states your focus on either plot, character, setting, or theme?			
Body Paragraphs			
Does your first body paragraph (second paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your first main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your first idea?			
Does your second body paragraph (third paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your second main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your second idea?			
Does your third body paragraph (fourth paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your third main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your second idea?			
Conclusion			
Does the last paragraph begin with a restatement of your thesis and end with a strong final impression and briefly review the ideas in your body paragraphs?			
General			
Is the paper free of errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization and/or does it show evidence of revision between the rough in final drafts?			
Has a <u>CheckMyWork</u> report been included?			
Is your paper formatted according to <u>MLA standards</u> ?			

11th Grade Portfolios

Literary Analysis Essay--

Click here for a video overview of this assignment: [link]

For this assignment, you will be writing a five paragraph literary analysis essay. When you analyze something, you simply examine it in terms of its individual parts or pieces.

Before you begin:

- Your analysis needs to be based on one of the short stories from Unit 1. Choices are:
 - “In Another Country” by Ernest Hemingway
 - “The Chrysanthemums” by John Steinbeck
 - “The Black Ball” by Ralph Ellison
 - “Why, You Reckon?” by Langston Hughes
- Reread the story and make sure you are very familiar with it. It might help to listen to the story as well. Recordings are HERE.

Getting Started:

Step 1: Choose ONE element of fiction on which to analyze your short story. Use the guiding questions in each element to create the body paragraphs in your essay.

Element of Fiction + Guiding Questions (Choose 1 Element to focus on in your essay.)
<p><u>Plot</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What are the basic events of the plot?➤ What is the conflict in the story?➤ What is the climax of the story and what leads to it?➤ What is the resolution and does it seem probable?
<p><u>Character</u> (Recommended if you are new to literature analysis.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Who are the different characters in the story and how does the author introduce them?➤ What does the author tell you directly or indirectly about this character?➤ How does this character react to the conflict and why does he or she react this way?➤ Do his/her words and actions match the rest of his/her character?➤ How does the character change over the course of the narrative?

<p><u>Setting</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How does the setting impact the plot? ➤ How would the plot be different if the setting changed? ➤ How does the setting impact the characters? ➤ How does the setting impact the theme?
<p><u>Theme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What is the theme? ➤ How does the author introduce the theme? ➤ How does the theme develop over the course of the narrative?

Step 2: Make a Plan. Using the graphic organizer on the next two pages, plan out your analysis. You will need to include textual evidence in each body paragraph of your essay, which will be direct or indirect quotes from the story.

Graphic Organizer

Paragraph Instructions/Requirements	Your Outline/Brainstorming
<p>Introduction Paragraph</p> <p>1. Write a short summary of the piece of literature you are criticizing. (The author, <u>author's name</u>, wrote a/an <u>genre</u> titled <u>title of story</u> which took place <u>setting: where and when</u>. In the <u>genre</u>, the main character/s, <u>character/s name/s</u> are faced with <u>Problem or Main Event in the Plot = What did the character/s do? What happened?</u>)</p> <p>2. Write a connecting sentence that ties your summary to your thesis.</p> <p>3. End with your thesis; a clear, strong statement of the focus of your literary analysis. You should either analyze the story's plot, characters, setting, or theme</p>	

<p>Main Topic Paragraph 1</p> <p>1. Write a topic sentence that states your first point, which should be based on one of the guiding questions from page 1. (<i>The characters in this story are, ____ and ____; the author introduces them in different ways.</i>)</p> <p>2. Write several supporting sentences that provide EVIDENCE for your point. Evidence comes from the text and should include direct and indirect quotes, as well as analysis. For your analysis, say how each quote supports your thesis.</p>	
<p>Main Topic Paragraph 2</p> <p>1. Write a topic sentence that states your second main point, which should be based on one of the guiding questions from page 1. (<i>The character ____ responds to the conflict by...</i>)</p> <p>2. Write several supporting sentences that provide EVIDENCE for your reason. Evidence comes from the text and should include direct and indirect quotes, as well as analysis. For your analysis, say how each quote supports your thesis.</p>	
<p>Main Topic Paragraph 3</p> <p>1. Write a topic sentence that states your third main point, which should be based on one of the guiding questions from page 1. (<i>By the end of the story, this character has/has not changed because...</i>)</p> <p>2. Write several supporting sentences that provide EVIDENCE for your point. Evidence comes from the text and should include</p>	

<p>direct and indirect quotes, as well as analysis. For your analysis, say how each quote supports your thesis.</p>	
<p>Conclusion Paragraph</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write a sentence that restates your thesis. Put your claim in different words. 2. Write a sentence or two that reminds readers of your main points. 3. End with a final strong sentence. 	

Finishing up: Use the pre-formatted template on the next page when writing your essay to assure it is in correct MLA format. As with all English portfolio assignments, a CheckMyWork link is required with your final draft. (Review this document for instructions on CheckMyWork).

Your Name

Teacher Name

Class Name

Date

CheckMyWorkLink:

Title

Literary Analysis Grading Checklist

Directions: Use this guide to assess (check) your own essay by checking the appropriate box. This is the document that will be used to grade your essay.

Yes=2 points, Kind of=1 point, No=0 points

Introduction	Yes	Kind of	No
Does the paragraph begin with a complete “quick summary”?			
Does the first paragraph end with a thesis statement that strongly and clearly states your focus on either plot, character, setting, or theme?			
Body Paragraphs			
Does your first body paragraph (second paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your first main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your first idea?			
Does your second body paragraph (third paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your second main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your second idea?			
Does your third body paragraph (fourth paragraph in the essay) start with a topic sentence that clearly states your third main idea?			
Did you provide at least two pieces evidence from the text to support your second idea?			
Conclusion			
Does the last paragraph begin with a restatement of your thesis and end with a strong final impression and briefly review the ideas in your body paragraphs?			
General			
Is the paper free of errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization and/or does it show evidence of revision between the rough in final drafts?			
Has a <u>CheckMyWork</u> report been included?			
Is your paper formatted according to <u>MLA standards</u> ?			

English 12 Portfolios

Research Paper

Victorian Era Preview Research Based Expository Essay

Click on or copy/paste this link for a video overview of this assignment: [link]
<u>Purpose (This page—Page 1)</u>
The purpose of this assignment is to create a research based expository essay to build background for our upcoming unit, the Victorian Era (1832-1901).
<u>Topics (Page 2)</u>
For your main topic, you will select a famous British author who wrote during the Victorian Era. You will also include, as a sub topic, general information about this time period of British history and literature.
<u>Essay Requirements (Page 3)</u>
Your essay must be a minimum of five paragraphs (introduction, 3 informational paragraphs, and conclusion), must include in-text citations, and must include a works-cited page.
<u>Research Requirements (Page 4)</u>
Your essay must include at least FIVE quality research resources that are referenced in your paper. Do your research through <u>Utah's Online Library</u> . See page 4 for more information. (A text written by your author may be used as one of your resources. You may also use your British Literature textbook as a resource.)
<u>Outline/Graphic Organizer (Page 5-6)</u>
I have included a graphic organizer that I HIGHLY recommend you use to outline your paper. If you would rather create a traditional outline, that is also acceptable. However, one or the other must be turned in along with your rough draft.
<u>MLA Formatting (Page 7, 10-11 Template)</u>
MLA formatting is a must on this assignments. If you use the included template for your paper, you should be fine. <u>The Purdue OWL</u> is considered the premier source for all formatting/citation information.
<u>Citations: In-Text and Works Cited Page (Page 8-9)</u>
Each time you reference your research, you must include a correct <u>in-text citation</u> . All sources referenced must also be present on your <u>works cited page</u> .
<u>Grading Checklist (Page 12)</u>
Your essay will be graded on the attached checklist. You should absolutely self-assess your paper before submitting it and make necessary changes.

Topics

For this expository research paper, you will

1. Give some general background information on the Victorian Era
 - Discuss the background of the Victorian Era including (but not limited to): important events or developments that occurred, social expectations of the people during this time, and negative aspects of the era.
2. Select an author from the era (list below).
 - Choose ONE author from this list:
 - **Charlotte Bronte**
 - **Emily Bronte**
 - **Charles Dickens**
 - **Robert Louis Stevenson**
 - **George Eliot**
 - **Thomas Hardy**
 - **Oscar Wilde**
3. Give a brief biography of that author.
 - Do some research on your author's life. Your inquiry could include, but is not limited to the following questions: Where are they from? What was their lifestyle? What did they write about? What were the influences in their lives?
4. Summarize/explain a major literary work of the author and discuss its connection to the Victorian Era.
 - Provide a brief summary of the text and explain it. Discuss how it fits in with the literature of the Victorian Era.
 - You do not necessarily need to read the literary work in its entirety. Reading a good summary on a website such as Shmoop (and citing it properly) should be sufficient for this introductory assignment.

Essay Requirements

- You must choose from the topics listed on page two of this document.
- You must include at least **FIVE** quality research sources in your essay.
 - These must be referenced and cited in-text.
 - They must also be included on your works cited page.
 - Use Gale Reference Collection through Utah's Online Library for your research.
- Your essay must include at least five paragraphs (unless modified per IEP or 504)
 - Introduction: One paragraph that provides background and includes a clear thesis statement.
 - Three "explanation" paragraphs that include researched support for your thesis.
 - Conclusion: One paragraph that summarizes exposition.
- Your essay must follow correct MLA format. (See page nine)
- When turning in the first draft of your essay, you must also submit an outline or completed graphic organizer.
- A CheckMyWork report is REQUIRED with your final draft submission.
- Modifications and accommodations can be made for students with IEP or 504 plans. Please contact Mrs. Jorgensen to make these arrangements.

Research Requirements/Sources

When researching your topic, use Gale Reference Collection through Utah's Online Library. This is a free and amazing resource for all Utah students. You can watch a video overview of the Online Library.

URL: [link]

Click on **K-12 Schools**

Click on **login**

Log-in Name: [user name]

Log-in Password: [password]

Click on **Gale Reference Collection High School (The World Book Online Encyclopedia would also be a good source for this assignment.)**

Continue on to these sections:

Gale In Context: High School is the most general research area, perfect for learning about the Victorian Era and the major written works of your author.

Gale In Context: Biography is where you should learn about your author's life

Why Should You Use Gale Reference Collection?

In addition to amazing search, browse, and explore features, research in Gale is better and easier than just Googling something for the following reasons and more:

- All resources are full text, academically sound and curated for quality.
- You can login to Gale and save your research or download your research, email it to yourself, or send it to your Google Drive or OneDrive account easily.
- Gale resources can all be highlighted and annotated.
- Sources can be listened to or translated into the language of your choice.
- You can easily generate a citation using MLA, APA, or Chicago style. Export the citation into a variety of tools, or simply copy and paste it into your bibliography.

If you do not use Gale for your research, be prepared to defend your sources. In general, the following are unacceptable for academic research: blogs, commercial websites, online encyclopedias (e.g., Wikipedia), general online dictionaries, local newspapers, YouTube. Acceptable sources include the following: Scholarly/ Peer Reviewed Journals (American Journal of Sociology), Professional/ Trade Journals (Science News), Commentary/ Opinion Journals (Mother Jones), Popular Magazines (Newsweek), Newspapers (New York Times).

Graphic Organizer/Informal Outline

Required Information	Your informal outline
<p>Introduction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open with a hook. A hook is a sentence that will hook your reader's attention. It can be an anecdote, a surprising fact, or a question. 2. Write a transition sentence that relates the issue to your hook. 3. Summarize the issue, keeping the informational needs of your reader in mind. 4. End with your thesis; a clear, strong statement outlining the topics you will cover in your paper. 	
<p>Victorian Era Paragraph</p> <p>Write a topic sentence that introduces the Victorian Era.</p> <p>Write several supporting sentences that tell about this era:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> important events or developments that occurred social expectations of the people during this time, negative aspects of the era, etc. <p>Make sure to either paraphrase (put in your own words) your research or use direct quotations, i.e., use the author's exact words, enclosed in parentheses. Whether paraphrasing or directly quoting, include an</p>	

in-text citation every time you use an idea that didn't come from your own brain.	
<p>Author Background Paragraph</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write a topic sentence that introduces the author you have selected. 2. Write several supporting sentences that give information about your author. (Where are they from? What was their lifestyle? What did they write about? What were the influences in their lives?) 	
<p>Literary Work Summary/Explanation Paragraph</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write a topic sentence that introduces the literary work you will discuss. 2. Write several supporting sentences about the literary work. (Summary and explanation of a literary work, why it is important, how it has held up over time, etc.) 	
<p>Conclusion Paragraph</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write a sentence that restates your thesis. Put your purpose in different words. 2. Write a sentence or two that reminds readers of your main points. 3. End with a final strong sentence that relates to your hook. 	

MLA Formatting Basics

- View a sample/instructional MLA formatted first page [HERE](#).
- Double-space the text of your paper and use a legible font (e.g. Times New Roman). Whatever font you choose, MLA recommends that the regular and italics type styles contrast enough that they are each distinct from one another. The font size should be 12 pt.
- Set the margins of your document to 1 inch on all sides.
- Indent the first line of each paragraph one half-inch from the left margin. MLA recommends that you use the “Tab” key as opposed to pushing the space bar five times.
- Create a header that numbers all pages consecutively in the upper right-hand corner, one-half inch from the top and flush with the right margin.
- Do not make a title page for your paper unless specifically requested. (NOT REQUESTED)
- In the upper left-hand corner of the first page, list your name, your instructor's name, the course, and the date. Again, be sure to use double-spaced text.
- Double space again and center the title. Do not underline, italicize, or place your title in quotation marks. Write the title in Title Case (standard capitalization), not in all capital letters.
- Double space between the title and the first line of the text.

For questions on correct formatting, almost all English teachers recommend the Purdue Online Writing Lab (Purdue Owl)

Links:

Purdue OWL:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

MLA Guide:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html

MLA General Format:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html

MLA/In-Text Citations

For a complete overview on in-text citations, see:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_in_text_citations_the_basics.html

Shmoop Video on Correct MLA Citations Can be Viewed [link].

Using In-text Citation

Include an in-text citation when you refer to, summarize, paraphrase, or quote from another source. For every in-text citation in your paper, there must be a corresponding entry on your works cited page.

General Guidelines

In MLA style the author's name can be included either in the narrative text of your paper, or in parentheses following the reference to the source. If a page number is available, include it as well.

Examples

Author's name part of narrative:

Gass and Varonis found that the most important element in comprehending non-native speech is familiarity with the topic (163).

Author's name in parentheses:

One study found that the most important element in comprehending non-native speech is familiarity with the topic (Gass and Varonis 163).

Direct quote:

One study found that “the listener's familiarity with the topic of discourse greatly facilitates the interpretation of the entire message” (Gass and Varonis 85).

Citing Web Pages In Text

Cite web pages in text as you would any other source, using the author if known. **If the author is not known, use the title** as the in-text citation.

MLA/Works Cited Page

Shmoop Video on Correct MLA Citations Can be Viewed [link].

For a complete overview on the works-cited page, see:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_works_cited_page_basic_format.html

There are many resources available that will help create your Works Cited page. Two reputable ones are:

- <http://www.citationmachine.net/>
- <http://www.easybib.com/>

Microsoft Word also has a citation feature available under the *References* ribbon.

You can view a sample/instructional Works Cited page [HERE](#):

Basics on formatting the Works Cited page are as follows:

- Begin your Works Cited page on a separate page at the end of your research paper. It should have the same one-inch margins and last name, page number header as the rest of your paper.
- Label the page Works Cited (do not italicize the words Works Cited or put them in quotation marks) and center the words Works Cited at the top of the page.
 - Only the title should be centered. The citation entries themselves should be aligned with the left margin.
- Double space all citations, but do not skip spaces between entries.
- Indent the second and subsequent lines of citations by 0.5 inches to create a hanging indent.
- List page numbers of sources efficiently, when needed. If you refer to a journal article that appeared on pages 225 through 250, list the page numbers on your Works Cited page as pp. 225-250. If the excerpt spans multiple pages, use “pp.” Note that MLA style uses a hyphen in a span of pages.
- If you're citing an article or a publication that was originally issued in print form but that you retrieved from an online database, you should type the online database name in italics. You do not need to provide subscription information in addition to the database name.

Your Name

Teacher name

Class name

Day Month Year

CheckMyWork Link:

Title

Body of paper

Research Paper Checklist

Introduction	yes	Kind of	no
Does the first sentence grab the reader's attention?			
Does the first paragraph provide background on your topic?			
Does the first paragraph include a thesis statement that strongly and clearly states your purpose?			
Body Paragraphs			
Does your first body paragraph (second paragraph in the essay) clearly explain important elements of the Victorian Era			
Did you provide at least two pieces of research based evidence in this paragraph?			
Does your second body paragraph (third paragraph in the essay) clearly discuss the life of a major Victorian Era author?			
Did you provide at least two pieces of research based evidence in this paragraph?			
Does your third body paragraph (fourth paragraph in the essay) clearly discuss a major work of the author you selected?			
Did you provide at least two pieces of research based evidence in this paragraph?			
Conclusion			
Does the last paragraph remind readers of the main points of the essay, without going into too much detail?			
Is the conclusion free of new information?			
Does the last sentence leave the reader with a strong final impression?			
Research			
Are at least 5 resources that are appropriate for academic research used?			
Is information from your research either paraphrased (put in your own words) or placed in parenthesis as a direct quote?			
Does each resource referenced in the main text of the paper include an in-text citation?			
Does each resource referenced in the main text appear in the works cited page?			
MLA Formatting			
Are the headings formatted correctly?			
Are in-text citations formatted correctly?			
Is the works cited page formatted correctly?			
Is the paper double spaced?			
General			
Does the paper show evidence of revision between the rough and final draft?			
Is the paper free of type-errors, errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization? (Are red/blue underlines all corrected?)			
Has the paper been proofread carefully for sentence fluency, correct grammar, verb-tense consistency, and other <u>conventions</u> elements?			
Has a <u>CheckMyWork</u> report been included?			

APPENDIX D

RELIABILITY TESTS

Table D.1 *Pre-Survey Student Engagement Scale Reliability (n=58)*

Item Number	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Pre 1	0.59	0.77
Pre 2	0.28	0.80
Pre 3	0.54	0.77
Pre 4	0.44	0.79
Pre 5	0.63	0.75
Pre 6	0.52	0.77
Pre 7	0.44	0.78
Pre 8	0.60	0.76
Pre 9	0.48	0.76
Pre 10	0.25	0.80

Table D.2 *Post-Survey Student Engagement Scale Reliability (n=58)*

Item Number	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Post 1	0.39	0.71
Post 2	0.17	0.75
Post 3	0.37	0.71
Post 4	0.46	0.70

Item Number	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Post 5	0.53	0.69
Post 6	0.43	0.70
Post 7	0.38	0.71
Post 8	0.58	0.68
Post 9	0.36	0.71
Post 10	0.31	0.72

Table D.3 *Teacher Action Subscale Reliability*

Pre-Survey Item	Corrected item- total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
11- Announcements	0.39	0.63
12- short videos	0.37	0.64
13- feedback	0.47	0.61
14- rubrics	0.33	0.64
15- live lesson features	0.55	0.59
16- announcements	0.21	0.66
17- short videos	0.19	0.66
18- feedback	0.37	0.64
19- rubrics	0.16	0.67
20- live lesson features	0.22	0.66

Table D.4 *Helpfulness of Teacher Actions*

Survey Item	Corrected item- total correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
21a- announcements	0.56	0.67
21b- short videos	0.56	0.67
21 c- grading feedback	0.39	0.73
21d- rubrics	0.49	0.69
21e- live lesson features	0.54	0.68