

The Role of Caring in First-Year Composition:
An Empirical Study of Mindsets, Dispositions, and Domain Identification

By

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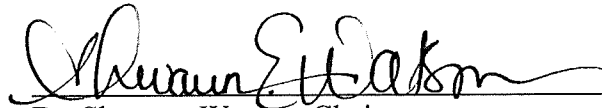
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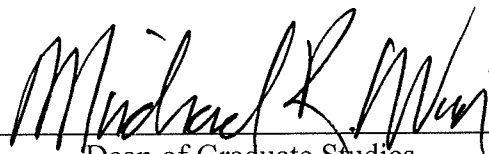


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The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 2015
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This empirical study is an attempt to expand teachers' understanding of the relationship between students' attitudes and performance in the writing classroom. The researcher is particularly interested in how personality and beliefs can influence individuals' readiness for college writing. Applying concepts from educational psychology, the researcher examines how domain identification and caring can potentially be important factors in determining students' preparation and success in higher education. In a survey of more than 200 first-year composition students, caring was measured and analyzed, resulting in a valid Caring Scale. In addition to providing a framework to measure caring, this study also found several correlations between caring, mindsets towards intelligence, and standardized test performance.

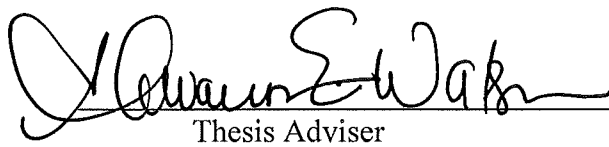
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The Role of Caring in First-Year Composition:

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I. INTRODUCTION

Growth of First-Year Composition

While first-year composition dates back to the early nineteenth century in the United States, its presence in universities became more widespread by the mid-twentieth century. Causes for this growth have been well-documented within composition studies. Some scholars, such as Steve Lamos, point to social and political movements as a catalyst for the expansion of composition departments. The G. I. Bill and the Civil Rights Movement, for example, provided educational opportunities to groups that had previously been excluded from higher education. Other scholars, such as Sharon Crowley (1998), argue that first-year composition developed because of its profitability to English departments. Whatever the reason for its rise within academia, required first-year composition has become a large enterprise for universities. As a result, the staff of many composition programs has grown considerably in recent years (Crowley, 1998, p. 1).

Issues Facing First-Year Composition

Despite the growth of these programs, however, teachers of first-year composition face a variety of challenges today. Institutional support for basic or remedial writing is decreasing in many universities due to debates regarding the efficacy and value of such programs. These cuts in funding often lead to understaffed departments, which have a negative impact on students. In addition, many schools are now questioning whether the

services provided to students by first-year composition and basic writing are coming at the expense of overall academic standards. These programs, as Lamos (2011) notes, now find themselves in a precarious position within colleges and universities (p. 4).

Composition teachers also deal with issues of retention. Student retention rates—which measure the number of first-year students who return to school the following year—are declining for certain groups. Increasing fail rates in first-year composition courses are undoubtedly contributing to this alarming trend. Ironically, these declines in performance may also be caused in part by the classes themselves, as enrollment in a basic writing course often instills feelings of deficiency. Once placed into one of these courses, many students resign themselves to the socially constructed definition of a “basic writer.” As their confidence drops, so too does their motivation to develop as writers. As a result, teachers of these courses face an uphill battle when they attempt to develop their students’ confidence and writing skills.

College Readiness

Another significant obstacle facing teachers is the college readiness of first-year students. College readiness refers to a first-year student’s ability to work effectively in collegiate courses. As educational researcher Geoffrey Maruyama (2012) notes, “the effectiveness of postsecondary education increases when students aspiring to attend college have developed academic skills preparing them to succeed” (p. 252). Preparation is more than just having skills, however. Students planning for higher education also need to develop a suitable state of mind that will enable them to succeed in the new environment. Whether attending a university immediately after high school or entering a

technical college from the workforce, a transition period is inevitable for students. In order to successfully adjust to this new situation, they must be equipped with the necessary attitudes and skills.

Unfortunately, many freshman students face difficulties adapting to college. According to a 2001 study by education researchers Kati Haycock and Sandra Huang, nearly half of American college students are not academically prepared (p. 3). More recently, a 2009 report by the ACT found that only a “dismal” number of tests takers were considered college-ready (Maruyama, p. 252). The same report also states only 1 in 4 test takers could expect to earn at least a C in the four core subject areas (English, math, reading, and science).

These conclusions indicate that more attention should be given to the nature of the problem. There are a number reasons—social, emotional, intellectual—why so many freshmen students are unprepared for college. And because unprepared students lack the experience to tackle complex academic challenges, they often begin a downward spiral that ends in withdrawal from college. As researchers Hardin L. K. Coleman and Albert M. Freedman (1996) note, many students who formally withdrew from college had been on academic probation at one point (p. 631). Once on academic probation, many students resign themselves to the belief that they are not capable of performing in higher education. This disturbing trend must be addressed. In order to ensure that students do not become discouraged and withdraw from academics, high school teachers and college professors need to better prepare students for the challenges of higher education.

Addressing College Readiness

Despite an acknowledgement of the problem by many composition scholars, improving college readiness has proven to be difficult. According to Maruyama (2012), “despite widespread agreement about the importance of college readiness, there is less agreement about what constitutes academic college readiness and how to manage it” (p. 252). High school graduation is not seen as a valid indication of readiness for a number of reasons (p. 253). While ACT scores can be a fairly reliable measure of students’ initial preparation for college, there is more to readiness than high test scores. Students must also feel confident in their ability to perform across a variety of academic contexts.

Proficiency in academic writing is vital to giving students that sense of confidence. According to a 2011 report by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and the National Writing Project (NWP), “the ability to write well is basic to student success in college and beyond. Students can become better writers when they have multiple opportunities to write in classes across the curriculum throughout their education—from elementary school through university” (p. 2). As students practice writing in different situations, they gain more experience and confidence in their abilities.

If writing is critically important to success in higher education, then it is crucial that teachers prepare incoming students to meet these new challenges. But what is the best way to realize this goal? Being prepared for college means more than acquiring perfunctory skills and performing well on tests. Students also need to acquire an outlook that enables them to overcome the difficulties they will inevitably encounter in college. Recent research in educational and social psychology has suggested the importance of

these mental outlooks on student success. These approaches may provide a valid framework through which to address college readiness.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dispositions

Dispositions or “habits of mind” are individual personality traits. Because of their individualized nature, dispositions are unique to each person. Psychologists Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann Jr. (2003) find that qualities such as sociability, kindness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness help determine one’s personality (p. 510). Other common dispositions include curiosity, responsibility, persistence, flexibility, and creativity. Dispositions influence not only a person’s personality, but also how the person will react in certain circumstances. For example, someone who demonstrates kindness and responsibility will be more likely to handle conflict successfully than someone who does not express these qualities.

Because of their impact on how individuals perceive and react to situations, dispositions may be useful for examining college readiness. In fact, the aforementioned 2011 Framework highlights the importance of individual dispositions in higher education. Their *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* states that values such as curiosity, engagement, responsibility, and creativity are all “essential for success in college writing” (p. 1). According to the framework, sustained success requires more than “knowing particular facts or completing mandatory readings . . . students who develop these habits of mind approach learning from an active stance” (p. 4). If students are interested in the course material and eager to learn more about the topic, they will have a

better chance of succeeding. They will take responsibility for their role in the class. They will even take creative risks in order to improve the effectiveness of their own work.

Dispositions may also play a role in how knowledge is transferred between classes. In their 2012 article, Dana Driscoll and Jennifer Wells suggest that dispositions could be influential in writing transfer—the process where students take composition skills learned in the past and apply them to situations in the present and future. Dispositions, according to the authors, “are not just something that may impact a learning environment; rather, they are a critical foundation upon which learning is built and potentially transferred” (p. 11). While getting students to gain skills in a writing course is important, getting them to apply those skills in new contexts is essential.

Addressing and Encouraging Dispositions

According to the 2011 *Framework*, composition teachers can promote the development of healthy dispositions through effective class exercises (p. 6). These activities “foster the kind of thinking that lies behind these habits and prepare students for the learning they will experience in college and beyond” (p. 4). In these exercises, students develop both skills and dispositions through exercises in rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and genre knowledge (p. 1).

Despite a growing awareness of the benefits provided by the study of student dispositions, however, there remains a lack of empirical research on the subject within composition studies. How can teachers encourage positive dispositions in the classroom when they do not understand when they form and how they function? In order to realize the goals of the *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* and improve college

readiness, more quantitative studies on student dispositions are needed. Do dispositions have a significant impact on performance and grades? Are certain social or cultural groups more likely to develop particular dispositions? An improved understanding of dispositions would enable teachers to better prepare their students for success in college and in the future.

With an absence of any such data within the field of composition, it is necessary to look to other disciplines in order to gain a better understanding of dispositions. The fields of social and educational psychology offer two valuable concepts through which to understand student dispositions. The study of “mindsets” and “domain identification” can shed light on how dispositions develop and how they influence behavior in the classroom. First, one must understand what mindsets are and how they influence dispositions.

Mindsets

The pioneering work of social psychologist Carol Dweck gave researchers a better understanding of the complex relationship between personality and learning. In *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006), Dweck examines implicit theories of intelligence and introduces the term “mindset.” She explains that mindsets are individual beliefs about the origins of ability and intelligence. Mindsets—which deal specifically with intelligence—are different from dispositions, which are various qualities that define one’s personality. Social psychologists Yeager and Walton (2011) add that mindsets or “attributions” are how individuals “explain the causes of events and experiences” (p. 276). Those with a fixed mindset believe that every person is born with a predetermined amount of intelligence that is unchanging. According to Dweck (2010), these people

“believe that talent alone creates success—without effort” (*Mindset Online*). This outlook can be hazardous to continued learning, as individuals may give up easily when initially faced with challenging, unfamiliar tasks. Individuals with a growth mindset, on the other hand, believe that intelligence is variable and largely dependent on effort. They are more likely to succeed through perseverance and determination. According to Dweck (2010), “this view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment” (*Mindset Online*). By seeing their hard work pay off, students become empowered by the realization that academic discourse—and any other subject—can be learned through practice.

Because mindsets can explain an individual’s outlook on intelligence, they provide valuable insight into how students perceive and respond to new situations in the classroom. When struggling with challenging new material, students with fixed mindsets are more likely to give up on the assignment. The complex nature of written academic discourse often leads first-year students to decide that they are incapable of learning its formal conventions. Rather than improve their abilities through practice, those with a fixed mindset believe that they are simply incapable of learning more. They are also likely to develop unfavorable attitudes—negative dispositions—towards the subject. Teachers, then, should promote growth mindsets because they lead to the development of positive dispositions. For example, students who believe that intelligence is malleable will work repeatedly at a task until they improve their abilities. And as they continue to develop a sense of perseverance, these students will apply that positive disposition in new situations.

Promoting Positive Mindsets

Social psychologists have conducted a number of effective intervention strategies that can be implemented by teachers to promote positive mindsets for students. For example, Mueller and Dweck (1998) conducted an experiment where fifth-grade students were given different kinds of praise following an assignment. Members of the first group were praised for their intelligence, thus reinforcing a fixed mindset. The second group received praise that focused on their hard work, thus reinforcing a growth mindset. Both groups then took part in a second assignment. The fixed mindset group performed no better than on the first assignment, completed 30% fewer questions, and asked to answer questions that were simpler (Yeager & Walton, 2011, p. 278). Meanwhile, the growth mindset group performed better than they did on the first assignment, answered more questions, and asked to take on more difficult material. This study shows that by promoting continued effort rather than natural intelligence, teachers can improve their students' motivation to apply themselves in class.

In order to address college composition readiness, teachers need to understand how mindsets influence dispositions. They also need to understand how those dispositions influence situations in the classroom. How do constructive dispositions make students more interested in the subject? Empirical research on this issue is severely lacking, especially within composition studies. However, another concept within psychology can help explain how attitudes affect performance.

Domain Identification and Caring

An individual's set of dispositions will influence whether or not she values certain contexts, such as the classroom. Social psychologists refer to this idea as "domain identification." According to social psychologist Claude Steele (1997), "to sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of its being a part of one's self-definition, a personal identity to which one is self-evaluatively accountable" (p. 613). An individual who identifies with academic writing, for example, sees writing as an integral part of her character. Because she feels as though she belongs in the classroom, she will be motivated to try to perform at a high level. If a student does not value writing and perceives that she does not belong in a particular class, she is unlikely to embrace the setting and apply herself academically. An influential study by Cohen, Steele, and Ross (1999) found that students who received both constructive feedback on an assignment and assurance that they belonged in the class showed greater levels of identification with the class (p. 1302). More importantly, the students who received both feedback and assurance also performed significantly better in the class. Domain identification is therefore necessary for sustained academic achievement.

While not stated explicitly in the scholarly literature, an underlying assumption behind domain identification is caring. Feelings of association, belonging, and responsibility are only possible when an individual cares for the domain. If writing students care about their work, they will be encouraged by an internal drive to expand their skillset and improve how they communicate. It is therefore important that composition teachers gain a better understanding of caring if they hope to address the issue of college composition readiness. But how can this be done? There is very little

conducted research to draw upon for support. In order to promote future research into student perspectives on caring, a reliable, measurable framework is necessary.

III. METHODS

Current Study

This study is centered on the belief that promoting healthy dispositions is an effective way to develop students' confidence with academic writing. It is an attempt to provide more empirical research on the relationship between students' mindsets, dispositions, and domain identification. Consequently, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a correlation between domain identification and students' mindsets towards intelligence?
2. Can a scale be developed that establishes whether or not students care about writing?
3. Can caring predict students' final grades in first-year composition?

Because caring is a central component of domain identification, this study aims to shed more light on caring. Do growth mindsets encourage writing students to care more about the course? If so, what effect does caring have on their performance?

The primary purpose of the survey is to introduce a valid framework through which caring about writing can be measured. The end result is a "Caring Scale," offering a composite profile of "Carers" and "Non-Carers" in a first-year composition program. This information could be beneficial to teachers for a number of reasons. Knowing whether or not certain students care about the class and material will allow teachers to

adjust their teaching strategies to meet these students' needs. Knowing when and why students stopped caring will enable teachers to introduce individualized interventions at an earlier stage in the education process. And finally, knowing how caring affects students' dispositions will allow teachers to develop stimulating, relevant assignments that promote healthy dispositions.

Survey Development

A 1993 study by Ellen Lavelle was the starting point for this survey. Lavelle's 71-question survey, the Inventory of Processes in College Composition (IPIC), classified student writers into one of five categories based on their attitudes towards the writing process. For this study, I have chosen to focus on one of the five categories:

Elaborationists. These writers, according to Lavelle, are characterized by a "holistic conception of learning/writing" (p. 494). Because they see writing as a search for personal meaning, Elaborationist writers invest themselves in their work and often go beyond the specifications of assignments. Writing is more than a means to earn a good grade; for these students, it is a way to express their feelings. Based on these descriptions, it seems reasonable to represent this domain-identified group as Carers.

I replicated a 2014 survey by researchers at Florida International University that used Lavelle's survey as its basis. Recognizing some limitations of Lavelle's approach, the researchers added four questions regarding student mindsets toward learning and intelligence. I then added 15 additional "caring" questions to the survey, amounting to a total number of 90 items. The new items pertain to whether or not students identify as writers and whether or not they care about writing. The new questions utilize a Likert

scale for answer input (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Three of these questions were used to determine the Caring Scale:

86. I care about writing.

90. I've never cared that much about writing.

91. I used to care about writing, but now I don't.

Depending on their answers to some of the final questions, students were asked two final questions regarding when and why they stopped caring about writing. The entire survey process took students roughly 20 minutes to complete. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) proposal for this project was approved on November 11, 2014. The Federal Wide Assurance number for this study is FWA00001217. The campus identification number for this study is SURALSAW27542014.

Survey Distribution

Survey invitations were sent via email to all first-year composition students at a mid-sized comprehensive regional university in the upper Midwest at the beginning of the Spring 2015 semester. Students were given a timeframe of two weeks before the online survey would close. They could complete the survey at any time within those two weeks. As an incentive to contribute to the study, participating students were entered into a random drawing to win a \$50 gift card to the university's bookstore. A total of 1,009 students received survey invitations; 201 finished and submitted the survey. The response rate was 19%, which, according to researcher Mary Sue MacNealy (1999), is typical of many online surveys (p. 168). This rate provides an acceptable basis from which some conclusions can be drawn.

Collection of Demographic Data

Students' race/ethnicity, gender, language background, socioeconomic status, and composition course grades were collected through their campus identification numbers. This information was used in conjunction with the Caring Scale to look for significant correlations with mindsets and domain identification.

IV. RESULTS

Data Analysis

All survey responses were aggregated and measured using IBM SPSS software. The nine-item Elaborationist scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .70$). The four questions on mindsets demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .83$). The three-item Caring Scale—which categorized students as either Carers or Non-Carers—also demonstrated good internal consistency ($\alpha = .85$). These classifications were analyzed alongside students' demographic information in order to determine any significant relationships.

Data Findings

A number of significant differences were found between Carers and Non-Carers. Compared with Non-Carers ($M = 1.67, SD = .39$), Carers ($M = 1.77, SD = .36$) tended to have a significantly higher growth mindset, $t(196) = -1.96, p = .05$. Carers ($M = 3.83, SD = .45$) displayed more domain identification than Non-Carers ($M = 3.01, SD = .42$), $t(196) = -13.21, p = .001$. Carers ($M = .77, SD = .18$) were also more likely than Non-

Carers ($M = .53$, $SD = .24$) to fall into Lavelle's Elaborationist category, $t(196) = -7.80$, $p = .05$. Both of these findings provide convergent validity for the Caring Scale. Non-first-generation students were more likely to care than not care (58% vs 42%), whereas the opposite was true for first generation students (39% vs 61%), $\chi^2(1) = 4.96$, $p = .026$.

Significant group differences were also found with standardized tests. ACT scores were significantly higher for Carers ($M = 25.14$, $SD = 4.39$) than Non-Carers ($M = 23.61$, $SD = 3.97$), $t(185) = -2.49$, $p = .01$. University of Wisconsin English Placement Test (WEPT) scores were also significantly higher for Carers ($M = 522.58$, $SD = 94.05$) than Non-Carers ($M = 492.31$, $SD = 80.07$), $t(182) = -2.35$, $p = .02$.

There were no significant differences found between caring and final grades in the composition course. Non-Carers ($M = .55$, $SD = .09$) were shown to have grades similar to Carers ($M = .56$, $SD = .70$), $t(187) = -.85$, $p = .40$. Furthermore, no significant correlations were found between caring and demographic information such as sex, race/ethnicity, and income status.

Essay Responses

Non-Carers—those who indicated in the survey that they did not care about writing—were asked two final questions. The first question asked them to indicate when they thought they stopped caring about writing. The final question invited them to reveal why they stopped caring about writing. Based on the 40 free-response replies to this question, four main types of responses were determined: lack of enjoyment, perceived difficulty, unfair grading, and lack of relevance.

Nineteen of the responses, or nearly half, had to do with simply not enjoying writing. Here are some example responses:

- “It stopped being fun.”
- “I don't enjoy writing about things that don't interest me.”
- “I had to do it so much in middle school and high school that it doesn't mean anything special to me anymore.”
- “It became tedious and the topics assigned were boring.”

Nine of the responses focused on the difficulty of writing in school and a perceived lack of support. Here are some example responses:

- “It became incredibly more complex. It became hard. It felt like a competition.”
- “I am not good at putting my thoughts into words.”
- “I found out that I'm no good at it.”
- “There were no resources advertised for us to use in school. Writing assignments were hard to do, especially when the teacher had no time to help us.”

Seven students pointed out how grading had a negative effect on their views of writing.

Here are some example responses:

- “Receiving terrible grades for something that is my own opinion.”
- “Some students receive too much criticism therefore they feel insecure about their final product.”
- “Receiving grades that I find unsatisfying.”
- “No matter how hard I try, I still do poorly.”

Finally, five students indicated that school writing was not relevant to their lives. Here are some example responses:

- “The subject we had to write about did not interest me.”
- “It took too long to write papers that were seemingly meaningless to me.”
- “I feel like I've improved my writing as much as I need to be successful in life.”
- “I just only write when it's in my scientific research.”

V. DISCUSSION

Addressing the Research Questions

The first research question for this study asked whether there was a correlation between domain identification and mindsets towards intelligence. There was indeed a significant relationship between domain identification and students' mindsets. Carers in this study were more likely than Non-Carers to have growth mindsets. This finding indicates that writing students who believe their continued efforts will lead to success have a tendency to embrace the writing classroom.

The second research question for this study asked if a scale could be developed that establishes whether or not students care about writing. According to the results of the survey, a Caring Scale can be used to determine whether first-year composition students identify with writing. Carers were more likely to be Elaborationists and more likely to be domain-identified than Non-Carers. They were also more likely than Non-Carers to have a growth mindset. Carers seem to understand that academic writing, like all other skills, takes sustained effort and persistence to grasp. While they will encounter difficulties along the way, Carers may realize that these struggles are a part of the learning process and not a sign of intellectual deficiency. As a result, they seem to develop positive dispositions to support their academic pursuits.

The third research question for this study asked if the Caring Scale could predict students' final grades in first-year composition. No significant correlations were found between caring and final grades in first-year composition. Because caring is an important part of domain identification, this conclusion challenges past research that linked domain identification and student performance. Much of Steele's research on identity and performance, for example, is based on the idea that domain identification is essential to a student's achievement in class.

One possible explanation for the lack of correlation between caring and final grades in this study is grade inflation. Among students who finished the survey, 82.8% ($N = 159$) received a B or higher in the course. When taking into account the increasing concerns over students' writing competency in upper-level courses, the validity of these grades come into question. Grade inflation is not just a problem at this particular university, however. According to Hansen et al. (2006), grade inflation in college writing is a well-documented fact all around the nation (p. 463).

While no significant correlations were found with final grades, Carers were found to have higher ACT and WEPT scores than Non-Carers. Although speculative, this finding may suggest that Carers are more prepared to enter college composition because they value and feel that they belong in the domain. They seem to have already developed the necessary dispositions to enable success in a collegiate setting.

In addition to the survey findings, the essay responses of Non-Carers also suggest that caring plays a significant role in how they situate themselves within the writing classroom. More specifically, the responses provide insight into why students stopped

caring. When looking at the four main categories of responses—enjoyment, difficulty, grading, and relevancy—two reasonable conclusions can be drawn:

1. Non-Carers do not find the coursework to be stimulating or engaging.
2. Non-Carers become discouraged when they receive poor grades on difficult assignments.

It is imperative that teachers recognize the beliefs held by Non-Carers and attempt to improve their outlooks. Making classroom content more relevant to first-year students is easier said than done, however. What is exciting to one student may be uninteresting to someone else in the class. A number of nationwide initiatives—such as Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing in the Disciplines, and service learning—have been introduced to provide students with an opportunity to apply themselves in real, meaningful contexts.

Nevertheless, teachers of first-year composition can still take appropriate steps to encourage involvement in class. Allowing students to choose from a variety of topics related to the course theme is one way to promote involvement. Teachers can also allow students to compose in genres outside of the traditional research paper. By encouraging students to investigate issues of personal interest, teachers are putting them in a better position to care about their topic and their class.

Another possible solution to stimulate interest is to employ the belonging intervention strategies proposed by Mueller and Dweck (1998). After having students complete class exercises in writing, teachers can provide them with specific praise directed towards their effort rather than their intelligence. This reinforces a growth mindset in students, which will support their development as writers. These classroom

interventions can help inspire students who feel helpless and discouraged by the perceived difficulty of academic writing.

Opportunities for Further Research

This study provides a tentatively valid framework—the Caring Scale—through which caring can be measured in the writing classroom. High school teachers and college composition professors can administer the Caring Scale to ascertain whether or not students are interested in their course material. With a better understanding of which students care about the class, teachers will be prepared to make the necessary adjustments to improve engagement.

While this study provides new insight into the role of caring in college readiness, however, further research on the subject is needed. More empirical studies at the high school level are especially important, as over three-fourths of Non-Carers in this study reported having stopped caring about writing in high school. In fact, most gave up on the subject in grades 11 and 12. High school teachers need to know more about their students' attitudes if they are to improve their preparation for college. What is making high school students lose interest in writing at this time? Does creating more engaging topics lead to significantly better grades on assignments? What about course grades? Answers to these and other questions will help prepare high school teachers to create thoughtful, meaningful lesson plans that are both challenging and inspiring. If high school teachers administer the Caring Scale to their students, they will have an improved understanding of how their students feel about the subject.

Another important question that remains unanswered is whether Non-Carers can become Carers. A number of recent studies have found that timed intervention strategies can help improve students' feelings of belonging in an academic context (Sherman et al., 2013). While students in this study initially felt excluded from academics due to stereotypes regarding their race, belonging exercises helped to improve performance in school for nearly three years. Can these interventions be used to promote caring as well? If so, then high school and first-year composition teachers can utilize this strategy in order to win back students who have given up on writing.

VI. CONCLUSION

Caring and College Readiness

College readiness, as Maruyama (2012) notes, is an important issue within all of society (p. 259). When high school students fail to prepare for college entrance examinations and then perform poorly, they miss out on opportunities to attend preferred universities. Some are forced to forgo higher education altogether. Lack of preparation in college can be just as troublesome. When unprepared college students face academic difficulties early on, they often become discouraged and start to underperform in their classes. Because they lack the experience to recover from these difficulties, unprepared students often fail out or withdraw from college. Many in this scenario are left with the burden of paying off substantial student debts. Being ready for college is also important to industry and the economy, as higher education typically equips students with the necessary skills for the workforce (Maruyama, 2012, p. 252).

In order to tackle this problem, however, composition teachers must gain a better understanding of their students' attitudes towards writing. The Caring Scale introduced in this study can help teachers better understand their students. By learning more about caring and domain identification, teachers can adjust their approaches to make lessons more meaningful to students. If high school composition teachers can determine when and why some of their students have stopped caring about writing, they can make the necessary adjustments so that future students will remain interested in the class. And if these students continue to identify as writers when they transition to college, they will have a better chance at succeeding in college and beyond.

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Appendices

A. Survey of Student Dispositions Towards Writing

Q1 Do you want to be entered into a drawing to win a gift card to the University Bookstore at UWEC?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To Click to write the question text

Q2 Please enter your UW-Eau Claire student ID number. (Note: this information is used only to confirm your completion of the survey and eligibility in the drawing)

Q3 Are you 18 years or older?

Yes (1)

No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

(Note: Questions 4-74 are from Lavelle's [1993] IPIC survey.
Questions 4-74 are True/False.)

Q4 When writing an essay, I stick to the rules.

Q5 I set aside specific time to do written assignments.

Q6 I re-examine and restate my thoughts in revision.

Q7 If the assignment calls for 1000 words, I try to write just about that many.

Q8 I use a lot of definitions and examples to make things clear.

Q9 Writing makes me feel good.

Q10 I closely examine what the essay calls for.

Q11 Revision is a one time process at the end.

Q12 There is one best way to write a written assignment.

Q13 I try to entertain, inform, or impress my audience.

Q14 I tend to give a lot of description and detail.

Q15 I keep my theme or topic clearly in mind as I write.

Q16 When writing an essay or paper, I just write out what I would say if I were talking.

Q17 The question dictates the type of essay called for.

Q18 I can write a term paper.

Q19 Originality in writing is highly important.

Q20 I worry about how much time my essay or paper will take.

Q21 My writing 'just happens' with little planning or preparation.

Q22 Revision is the process of finding the shape of my writing.

Q23 Writing an essay or paper is always a slow process.

Q24 Writing is symbolic.

Q25 Writing reminds me of other things that I do.

Q26 An essay is primarily a sequence of ideas, an orderly arrangement.

Q27 It's important to me to like what I've written.

Q28 Studying grammar and punctuation would greatly improve my writing.

Q29 I visualize what I'm writing about.

Q30 My prewriting notes are always a mess.

Q31 I put a lot of myself in my writing.

Q32 I can usually find one main sentence that tells the theme of my essay.

Q33 I never think about how I go about writing.

Q34 I plan out my writing and stick to this plan.

Q35 The most important thing in writing is observing the rule of grammar, punctuation, and organization.

Q36 I compare and contrast ideas to make my writing clear.

Q37 I use written assignments as learning experiences.

Q38 Revision is making minor alterations--just touching things up and rewording.

Q39 In my writing, I use some ideas to support other, larger ideas.

Q40 Having my writing evaluated scares me.

Q41 When writing a paper, I often get ideas for other papers.

Q42 I like to work in small groups to discuss ideas or to do revision in writing.

Q43 I imagine the reaction that my readers might have to my paper.

Q44 When I begin to write, I have only a vague idea of how my essay will come out.

Q45 I often use analogy and metaphor in my writing.

Q46 I complete each sentence and revise it before going on to the next.

Q47 I cue the reader by giving a hint of what's to come.

Q48 My writing rarely expresses what I really think.

Q49 Writing an essay or paper is making a new meaning.

Q50 I am my own audience.

Q51 Writing helps me organize information in my mind.

Q52 At times, my writing has given me deep personal satisfaction.

Q53 The main reason for writing an essay or paper is to get a good grade on it.

Q54 When given an assignment calling for an argument or viewpoint, I immediately know which side I'll take.

Q55 I plan, write, and advise all at the same time.

Q56 I can write simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Q57 I sometimes get sudden inspirations in writing.

Q58 My essay or paper often goes beyond the specifications of the assignment.

Q59 I expect good grades on essays or papers.

Q60 The reason for writing an essay really doesn't matter to me.

Q61 Writing is like a journey.

Q62 I usually write several paragraphs before rereading.

Q63 The teacher is the most important audience.

Q64 I like written assignments to be well-specified with details included.

Q65 I start with a fairly detailed outline.

Q66 I do well on essay tests.

Q67 I often think about my essay when I'm not writing (e.g., late at night).

Q68 My intention in writing papers or essays is just to answer the question.

Q69 I write 'just off the top of my head' and then go back and rework the whole thing.

Q70 Often my first draft is my finished product.

Q71 I need special encouragement to do my best writing.

Q72 I think about how I come across in my writing.

Q73 I can't revise my own writing because I can't see my own mistakes.

Q74 I often do written assignments at the last minute and still get a good grade.

(Note: Questions 75-78 are from the Florida International University [2014] survey on mindsets.)

Q75 Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.

Q76 You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.

Q77 No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.

Q78 You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

(Note: Questions 79-93 are items I added to the base survey that focus on caring. Questions 79-90 use a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Strong Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree)

Q79 Writing is important to me.

Q80 My writing ability is central to my identity as a student.

Q81 I like to write in/for school.

Q82 I like to write outside of school.

Q83 I view myself as a good writer.

Q84 It bothers me when I receive a poor grade on my writing.

Q85 It bothers me when I receive negative feedback on my writing.

(Note: Question 86 is one of three questions that determine the Caring Scale.)

Q86 I care about writing.

(Note: If Strongly Agree or Agree are selected on Question 86, the survey skips to the end.)

Q87 I would care more about writing if I were better at it.

Q88 Writing in school made me care less about writing.

Q89 Feedback from teachers made me care less about writing.

(Note: Question 90 is one of three questions that determine the Caring Scale.)

Q90 I've never cared that much about writing.

(Note: If Strongly Agree or Agree are selected on Question 90, the survey skips to the end.)

(Note: Question 91 is one of three questions that determine the Caring Scale.)

Q91 I used to care about writing, but now I don't.

(Note: If Strongly Agree or Agree are selected on Question 91, the survey displays Questions 92 and 93.)

Q92 I stopped caring about writing in...

- Kindergarten - 2nd Grade (1)
- 3rd Grade - 5th Grade (2)
- 6th Grade - 8th Grade (3)
- 9th Grade - 10th Grade (4)
- 11th Grade - 12th Grade (5)

Q93 Why do you think you stopped caring about writing?

B. Tables

1. Characteristics of Carers and Non-Carers

		Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
<u>Growth Mindset</u>	Non-Carers	99	1.6717	.37055	.03724
	Carers	99	1.7727	.35372	.03555
<u>Domain ID</u>	Non-Carers	99	3.0115	.42052	.04226
	Carers	100	3.8256	.44853	.04485
<u>ACT</u>	Non-Carers	92	23.61	3.972	.414
	Carers	95	25.14	4.390	.450
<u>WEPT</u>	Non-Carers	91	492.31	80.070	8.394
	Carers	93	522.58	94.050	9.753
<u>Grade</u>	Non-Carers	93	.5469	.09061	.00940
	Carers	96	.5572	.07418	.00757
<u>Domain ID</u>	Men	44	3.3610	.63994	.09647
	Women	157	3.4410	.58402	.04661

2. Domain Identification Among Various Categories

		Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
<u>Sex</u>	Male	44	3.3610	.63994	.09647
	Female	157	3.4410	.58402	.04661
<u>First Gen</u>	No	91	3.4811	.62801	.06583
	Yes	57	3.3501	.58657	.07769
<u>Low Income</u>	No	109	3.4164	.62126	.05951
	Yes	39	3.4704	.59817	.09578
<u>Student of Color</u>	No	177	3.4123	.60377	.04538
	Yes	20	3.5228	.51647	.11549

3. Growth Mindsets Among Various Categories

		Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
<u>Sex</u>	Male	44	1.6818	.38641	.05825
	Female	156	1.7324	.35934	.02877
<u>First Gen</u>	No	90	1.6833	.38182	.04025
	Yes	57	1.7675	.34673	.04593
<u>Low Income</u>	No	108	1.6968	.36979	.03558
	Yes	39	1.7692	.36896	.05908
<u>Student of Color</u>	No	176	1.7131	.37519	.02828
	Yes	20	1.7750	.26779	.05988

4. Correlations Between Major Variables

		Domain ID	Growth Mindset	ACT	WEPT	Course Taken	Grade
Domain ID	Pearson Correlation	1	.251**	.199**	.222**	.047	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.006	.002	.514	.334
	N	201	200	188	185	192	192
Growth Mindset	Pearson Correlation	.251**	1	-.013	-.050	.039	.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.858	.499	.590	.666
	N	200	200	187	184	191	191
ACT	Pearson Correlation	.199**	-.013	1	.823**	.381**	.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.858		.000	.000	.334
	N	188	187	188	180	181	181
WEPT	Pearson Correlation	.222**	-.050	.823**	1	.590**	.049
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.499	.000		.000	.513
	N	185	184	180	185	177	177
Course Taken	Pearson Correlation	.047	.039	.381**	.590**	1	.043
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.514	.590	.000	.000		.556
	N	192	191	181	177	192	192
Grade	Pearson Correlation	.070	.031	.072	.049	.043	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.334	.666	.334	.513	.556	
	N	192	191	181	177	192	192

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5. Final Grades

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
.00	2	1.0	1.0	1.0
1.00	1	.5	.5	1.6
1.67	3	1.5	1.6	3.1
2.00	2	1.0	1.0	4.2
2.33	3	1.5	1.6	5.7
Valid 2.67	5	2.5	2.6	8.3
3.00	17	8.5	8.9	17.2
3.33	20	10.0	10.4	27.6
3.67	48	23.9	25.0	52.6
4.00	91	45.3	47.4	100.0
Total	192	95.5	100.0	
Missing System	9	4.5		
Total	201	100.0		